EMPOWERING THE DISPOSSESSED:

A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF

TONI MORRISON'S *HOME*

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> Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery.
>
> Toni Morrison, *Home*

> Postcolonialism, with its fundamental sympathies for the subaltern, for the peasantry, for the poor, for outcasts of all kinds, eschews the high culture of the elite and espouses subaltern cultures and knowledges which have historically been considered to be of little value but which it regards as rich repositories of culture and counter-knowledge.
>
> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Short Introduction*

Introduction: A Reading of *Home* from a Postcolonial Perspective

In the 1970's, when she started writing, Toni Morrison referred to herself as "a black woman novelist" in an attempt "to refuse to be given status of honorary white male writer" (Swain). She wanted to break away from any comparative relationship with the patriarchal Western canon that often considered the works of women and ethnic writers to be regional, or merely as good as mainstream texts, but not quite the same thing. At that moment, Morrison thought it was necessary once and for all to disengage herself from white male categorizations and just write from a black female perspective. Lately, she has gone as far as to reject being pigeonholed as an "African-American writer" and when asked under what category we should place her, she has argued that she prefers to be called "an American Writer" in an effort to avoid any preconceived expectations about her work (Colbert). From *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Sula* (1973) to *Beloved* (1987) to *Home* (2012), her most recent novel, Morrison has constantly tried to shrug off that

constraining white male gaze that wanted to assimilate her into its Western aesthetics. Her novels are about real black people, so to speak, and we, as readers, are invited into their world to witness the experience of being black in America.

We may wonder, like Amy Hungerford does in her analysis of *The Bluest Eye*, why Morrison would, in 1970, choose to write a novel instead of a tract, a song or a sermon. Although the reasons might be innumerable, Hungerford believes it is because the novel "hold[s] the human within it" and therefore provides the adequate medium where the voices of the oppressed can be heard. Traditionally African Americans, especially women, have not had the opportunity to tell their stories, so becoming a novelist gave Morrison the opportunity to allot justice to these unprivileged subjects by putting them at the forefront of the literary scene, uncovering their lives from the neglect of historical accounts. The second reason that may have prompted Morrison to start writing fiction, according to Hungerford, is "to push the boundaries of what's credible," a narrative strategy that allowed the author to place "the abject in front of" us in an art form. In *The Bluest Eye*, for example, we have Pecola Breedlove, an ugly duckling in search of blue eyes, whom everybody abuses and rejects, and for whom the only possible way out is fantasy and madness. The third reason for which Morrison may have chosen the novel is "to generate sympathy" in the reader for terrible individuals who may have committed the most horrendous crimes (Hungerford). This is the case of Guitar Baines in *Song of Solomon* (1977), or Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, both "[d]angerously free character[s]" (*The Bluest Eye* 159); while the former follows the eye for an eye principle to avenge the victims of white violent racism, the latter drinks heavily, hits his wife and ends up raping his own daughter. Nevertheless, if you understand their vulnerability and the humiliations they have

had to endure, Morrison has said, "you do not strike an x through them [simply] because they are dangerous" (Díaz).

These three reasons that, according to Hungerford, made Morrison become a writer instead of a preacher, a sociologist or an anthropologist, can be spotted throughout her oeuvre, including in *Home*, which signifies their utmost importance in her eyes. Pecola Breedlove, for instance, has many similarities with Cee Money, one of the main characters in *Home*, since both of them are abused in their childhood, rejected by the community and influenced by the discourse of the white conception of beauty. Like Cholly Breedlove, Frank Money is another "dangerously free" character who also makes bad choices, including killing innocent people, but in spite of that he is granted the opportunity to right his wrongs through a privileged space in the text, that of the first-person voice. To give those who have historically been relegated to the margins of society a chance to speak out is therefore one of the key endeavors Morrison attempts in writing *Home* and, as I will contend throughout this essay, also a crucial mission of postcolonial literature.

Set in the early fifties in a segregated American society, Toni Morrison's *Home* offers a fictionalized account of how colonial discourse—which is synonymous with white supremacy—enforces its power and always tries to mold the colonized subject so that he/she can be easily exploited. It is also the recreation of a set of characters in constant alertness to prevent these discourses from taking control of their minds. Among these vigilant individuals we find reverends such as John Locke in Seattle or countrywomen like Miss Ethel Fordhand in Lotus, Georgia, whose living experience has given them alternative tools to avoid the evils of racism. Nonetheless, some young characters like Frank and Cee Money,

the protagonist siblings, fall prey to these powerful narratives that create in them a lifelong trauma which they will have to learn to mitigate as they accumulate vital wisdom. It is important to mention that it is not only their youth that makes them vulnerable to colonialist forces, but also the fact that they are poor, black and from the southern countryside.

Young Frank is a war veteran from Korea who suffers from amnesia, hallucinations and flashbacks, all clear indications of a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Thomas 10). Once discharged from Fort Lawton in Seattle, he finds himself wandering aimlessly in the streets of this northern city, abusing alcohol and sleeping outdoors like a homeless person. Actually, he is postponing looking for a job or finding an apartment to live in, that is, engaging in activities that would help him remake his life as a civilian. According to Thomas's definition of PTSD, this "avoidance behavior" is another symptom of Frank's mental disease (10). It is Lily, a shrewd young woman Frank will spend some months with in Seattle, who temporarily helps him cope with his maladies. The help is only temporary because Lily's independence, resourcefulness and commitment to the future clash with Frank's indifference and absence of plans, so the moment he receives a letter from a woman called Sarah that tells him to rush to rescue his sister Cee from death's door, the relationship with Lily dissolves as a matter of course.

Frank's trip in search of his sister across the neocolonial state which segregated America represents is a reversal of the Great Migration that took "more than 1 million African-Americans" from the rural Deep South to the main cities in the North "between 1916 and 1930" (Alexander and Rucker 787). The personal confrontations with the racist, violent reality of the 1950s as well as the help and role-modeling Frank receives from different African-American mentor figures

make it possible for him to learn how to be the type of man that could redeem his haunted soul. The innovative narrative structure of *Home*, where a metafictional dialogue between a scribe—the omniscient voice—and Frank's first-person testimony of past events is established, aids in the veteran's maturation process. Furthermore, this narrative space that Frank is granted will allow him to redress his crimes and find some kind of healing from his trauma as the novel progresses. "I have to say something to you right now," he confesses to the scribe towards the end; "I shot the Korean girl in her face" (*Home* 133). As a matter of fact, scholars of trauma fiction such as Evelyn J. Schreiber have argued that verbalization of the distressing nightmares in an environment where one is nurtured and loved is of key importance to come to terms with trauma (106). This narrative room that Morrison reserves for her character, then, works like a psychiatrist's couch where Frank can set his repressed phantoms free without having to resort to further violence. It is also the ideal free space for the voice of the disadvantaged to be heard without being mediated. Moreover, just as many postmodernist and postcolonial writers aim to do, Frank's words help to symbolically debunk the omniscient narrative authority of the scribe.

While *Home* allows the underprivileged to express their voices, the larger white society the novel also fictionalizes does not. The United States, at the time the novel takes place, was still a highly segregated country in which Jim Crow laws were fully in operation. Even though the enforcement of these laws questions Frank's as well as other black men's humanness, we should not forget that the colonization of black women's bodies and minds was even more severe. In Cee's case, for instance, her grandmother will silence her voice, the protection of her brother will curtail her movements, her husband will turn out to be a pimp, more

interested in her assets than in her company, and her body will end up being maimed by a racist doctor experimenting with eugenics. In a dead-like state provoked by continuous bleeding, she will reach a postcolonial community of country female interveners that will decolonize her mind and emancipate her "self" or personhood. With the help of these mentors-interveners, then, both Frank and Cee rejoin Lotus—the once despised community of their childhood—in which some wound-healing future is now possible. This alternative respectful community mirrors in some respect other postcolonial communities whose goal is to empower "the poor, the dispossessed, and the disadvantaged [...] within a broad framework of democratic egalitarianism" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 113). As part of the community, its participants help and nurture each other as a way to overcome societal racism, sexism, and capitalism. Furthermore, by "refus[ing] to impose alienating Western ways of thinking" (113), as Young asserts, they also help to reclaim the loss of cultural identity that a colonialist state exercises.

As mentioned above, Morrison's novels invite us to witness the experience of being black in America. In fact, much postcolonial literature is about the stories of those who were once deprived of their lands, their culture or their religion by the forces of the subjugating Empire. After the section of his book on postcolonialism entitled "Imagining the Nation: Forging Tradition and History," John McLeod invites the reader to create a timeline with "events of 'national importance'" for one's nation in the last three hundred years (72). If we analyze the history of African Americans, we see how this stretch of time from 1714 to 2014 has been marked by suffering, inequality and oppression. Slavery—a practice that subjected African Americans to many inhuman perversities for centuries—is undoubtedly one of the most horrendous things that whites have subjected blacks

to. “As nameless chattels,” Manning Marable highlights, slaves were “raped, whipped, sold on the auction block [and forced to work] in the hot fields of endless cotton rows from dawn to dreary dusk” (6). Abraham Lincoln’s issue of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 was indeed a moment of celebration for this racial group, since it resulted in freedom from bondage and, consequently, in the acquisition of some civil rights such as education, “citizenship with equal protection under the law, and male suffrage” (Darden 12). These rights, however, would legally be taken away in the South by the institution of the so-called Jim Crow laws. “Jim Crow,” Alexander and Rucker have argued, “was [a] social practice of racial segregation, most prevalent from 1880s to the 1960s, that robbed African Americans of their basic civil and civic rights and assaulted black people’s humanity” (828). As it can be seen in *Home*, these segregationist laws often accompanied medical experimentation, police brutality, property dispossession and many other cruel acts. To get a sense of the atrocities perpetrated we can scrutinize Marable’s statistics regarding conditions during the onset of these laws; this historian states that “[b]etween 1882 and 1903, 2,060 blacks were lynched in the United States. Some of the black victims were children and pregnant women; many were burned alive at the stake; others were castrated with axes or knives, blinded with hot pokers, or decapitated” (9).[1]

Even though Frank’s reenacted memories take us back to the 1930s when he was a four-year-old child, *Home* is set for the most part in the 1950s, about a year or two after the Korean War (1950-53). Morrison has complained that the period is encrusted in the American mindset as an idealized time, due in part to TV

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[1] This historical data has its parallels in Morrison’s novel in the story of Crawford, a man who, as retaliation for having refused to vacate his house, is “beaten to death with pipes and rifle butts” and has his eyes “carved out” (*Home* 10).

shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* or movie starlets like Doris Day: typical Hollywood fluff that often portrayed a prosperous culture where everybody was merry, had money and an occupation (Bollen). As a matter of fact, history books label this era "The Affluent Society" and focus on the fact that there were "[g]ood wages, full employment, and generous veteran's benefits" (Allitt 38). Morrison, however, understands this type of Westernized historical accounts as the Empire's "effort to clean up everything" (Bollen), especially the darkest examples of violence, segregation or medical experimentation that accompanied the era. She has said that she wrote her novel in part to see "what was really going on" underneath this discursive veil of good intentions (Bollen), which is why *Home* highlights three embarrassing episodes that are often, in Morrison's opinion, hidden "from the narrative of the country": McCarthyism, the Korean War and Jim Crow (Bollen). Of the three, McCarthyism is, even though its persecutory paranoia hovers in the novel's atmosphere, the one which Morrison simply deals with in passing. McCarthyism (1950-54) receives its name from Senator Joseph McCarthy and consisted of a "campaign against alleged communists in the US government and other institutions" such as Hollywood or the theatre (Stevenson and Lindberg). McCarthyism often resulted in the blacklisting of many intellectuals such as Ray Stone, who was an educator, a jazz musician and a counter-attacker of the "neo-Nazi Aryan Nations that had taken root in the country" (Maben). In the novel, Stone is Lily's boss and ends up arrested by "two government men in snap-brim hats" and his theatre is "shut down" for simply, the text seems to imply, having meetings with "intense argument" (*Home* 72). With time, the accusations made against these dangerous "reds" were disproved and their supposed affiliation to the Communist Party was shown to be unfounded. The portrayal of McCarthyist

persecution in *Home* suggests the censorship that has historically curtailed the free expression of ideas, a censorship that ironically went against the unalienable rights protected by the 1st Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, that is, the people's "freedom of speech, or of the press, or peaceably to assemble" (Hart 492).

Continuing with her effort to signal what was "fake about" the 1950s (Bollen), Morrison has complained about the lack of recognition the Korean War has suffered in historical accounts of the period.[2] The Korean War, Morrison has argued, "was called a 'police action' then—never a war—even though 53,000 soldiers died" (Bollen). Such lack of recognition is identified in the fictional text when we read that some World War II veterans "knew about Korea but not understanding what it was about didn't give it the respect—the seriousness—Frank thought it deserved" (*Home* 136). The seriousness of the conflict, however, is made very clear in the PTSD Frank suffers from, and in the fact that all his comrades are killed in horrendous situations: Stuff's arm is blasted, "Red [is] pulverized" and Mike's body ends being "meat [for] black birds, aggressive as bombers" (98-99). Besides arguing whether this particular war has received enough respect or not, Morrison also highlights that the soldiers that fought in Korea constituted the first integrated US army. In *Home*, the occasion per se seems to be equally miserable for black and for white soldiers. It is even suggested that the military, as an institution, did not treat soldiers "so bad [and] the discharge doctors [were] thoughtful and kind" (18). The issue arises when the soldiers return to the United States and the society "treat[s] [them] like dogs" (18). The novel, notwithstanding, directs the readers' attention primarily at the exclusion and

[2] See also Bollen or Minzesheimer.

alienation black soldiers experienced upon their return from Korea—a fact that connects with the imperious racism of the Jim Crow times—and the danger they were subjected to. Frank's mysterious internment in a mental hospital as well as Cee's confinement in Dr. Beau's clinic echo the dark history of medical experimentation on African Americans. As Harriet A. Washington evidences in her book *Medical Apartheid*, "[g]roups of vulnerable blacks, including children, soldiers and prisoners, have been consistently targeted" for multifarious scientific experiments from proving the effects of syphilis in untreated patients to non-consensual sterilizations (385).[3]

These three historical factors from the 1950s that Morrison scrutinizes in *Home*—the McCarthy trials, the Korean War and Jim Crow—were, according to the author, "the seeds that produced the '60s and '70s" (Bollen). These two decades witnessed the Civil Rights Movement—often named "Second Reconstruction"—an era of great African-American activism that would bring about the legal eradication of racial segregation by 1965. However, the abolition of the Jim Crow laws did not mean equality for African Americans from then on. Theoretically they were equal under the law, but in practice opportunities between whites and blacks were—and would be for a long time—far from symmetrical as the abysmal disparities of wealth showed. Even nowadays, five decades after the Civil Rights movement, drastic comparisons showing financial and other inequalities can still be made between the two populations. These discrepancies

[3] The controversial research of the effects of syphilis in untreated patients is known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. This study "was conducted from 1932-1972 in Macon County, Alabama, [in] a desire to prove that syphilis had different effects on African Americans than on whites." Under racist assumptions, the former were thought to catch the disease for being "unkempt, unsanitary, and libidinous" (Alexander and Rucker 1066). Similarly, Washington signals how, "fed by the myth of the lazy, hyperfertile welfare mother," the performance of forced sterilizations in African-American women was a routine during many decades of the twentieth century (203).

bear witness to a persistent, segregationist society where the path up the ladder of prosperity is consistently blocked to some. In his historical study of Black America from 1945 to 1990, Marable evidences "the continuing burden of race, class and gender inequality within contemporary American society, illustrating that the distance which separates blacks [...] from full human equality and social justice still exists, regardless of the passage of civil rights laws abolishing racial segregation" (x). Critics such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. talk about the two nations of Black America, that is, the well-to-do and the still not so affluent population; while the former enjoys the pleasures of middle-class America, the latter continues to suffer from escalating scarcity and neglect. "One of five black men in their twenties," Gates contends in *America beyond the Color Line*, "is in prison, or in provision, or parole. 69% of all black children are raised in a single parent household. The average lifespan for an African American man is 59. Only 45% of black adults are working in any given week. These statistics call to mind a third world country, not a neighborhood in America." Similarly, Michelle Alexander talks about a new Jim Crow and reveals disturbing data like the number of African Americans in prisons today being greater than the number of slaves in 1850 (qtd. in Aretha 103). To conclude this three-hundred-year overview of black experience in America it is worth recalling Houston A. Baker Jr.'s words when he says that "[w]hat all African Americans share […] is the 'obdurate economics of slavery,'" that is, a continuous social deprivation (qtd. in Leitch 2225).

After all these historical struggles that African Americans, particularly women, have endured, it was not unexpected that a great body of work written from a black female perspective would arise after the Civil Rights Movement. Among many others, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969),

Gayl Jones *Corregidora* (1975) or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) have been regarded as serious literary achievements worthy of being included in the American canon. Similarly, Toni Morrison has been praised as "the preeminent American novelist, [...] winner of the Nobel Prize in 1993 and author of three of the most accomplished fictions of our century: *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*" (Weinstein 133) and her works have been studied from multiple perspectives due to their significance. Michael Ryan, for instance, makes a psychoanalytic reading of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), but also provides suggestions for, among others, Marxist, historicist or ethnic studies readings of the same novel. Encompassing her work up to 2003, *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia* suggests several scholarly approaches to Morrison as well, including ecocritical, pedagogical and, interestingly, postcolonial. In spite of this reference, it is not often the case that her novels are approached from this critical perspective, in part, the encyclopedia suggests, due to "the developing history of America as Britain's predecessor as the new Empire" (Beaulieu 29). The entry goes on to assert how not even one percent of publications in postcolonial studies is dedicated to African American literature and less than a mere 10 percent to American Literature in general.

It is only in approaches to *Beloved*, a novel that many agree to be Morrison's masterpiece and consequently the one which has received the most analytical interest, that I have found postcolonialism applied specifically to a Morrison text. In the introduction of his book of essays *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha, for instance, treats *Beloved* as a prototype of the postcolonial condition. He points at the complexity of the concept of home for the slave community and the necessity to recover all those voices which were lost in

the Middle Passage. Mary Jane Suero-Elliott, in turn, has written an essay entitled "Postcolonial Experience in a Domestic Context" (2000), which understands the United States as a colonialist country since it held and supported slavery for centuries. For this scholar, *Beloved* recreates a community of free slaves that represents a decolonized community. While their freedom comes from the fact that they are no longer forced to work in a slave plantation and consequently their bodies can now roam free, their minds however are far from being unaffected; they are, on the contrary, still influenced by what Morrison herself has called "the master narrative," that is to say, the inferiority complex the people of color internalize under the pressure of a racist, white society. Using a comparative approach across continents, Sam Durrant has also studied *Beloved* from a postcolonial perspective. In his book *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2004), Durrant contrasts Toni Morrison's text with the works of J. M. Coetzee and Wilson Harris, both born in former British colonies—South Africa and Guyana, respectively—and often associated with postcolonial studies. Durrant accurately observes how the three authors provide common thematic lines such as the necessary remembrance the oppressed individual has to go through in order to find ground for emancipation. Following a postmodernist line of research, though, the critic concludes that these texts are acts of mourning without closure because they respond "to the same unresolvable tension between mourning and melancholia, between the need to come to terms with the past and the need never to forget" (77). This assertion echoes *Beloved*'s relevant line "It is not a story to pass on" (260), which refers to the fact that we have a moral obligation to look at the past of colonial exploitation to try to find some sort of liberating future.

Although in a historical rather than literary context, the racial politics of South Africa during the 20th century has also prompted many comparative studies with the American South. Worth recalling are George M. Fredrickson's groundbreaking work *White Supremacy* (1981), its sequel *Black Liberation* (1995), and John W. Cell's *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (1982). Both historians find many similarities in the ways Southern Blacks and Cape Coloreds were subjugated, segregated and disfranchised by the white race. Besides prevalent lines for comparative analyses, it is also true that black leaders from both parts of the Atlantic have always looked at each other for inspiration in their own private struggle to fight oppression.

When referring to the plight of minorities such as African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans and others, Alan Wald talks of "internal colonialism." The US government treatment of these ethnic groups, this professor argues, resembles that of the Empire to its colonies. In his essay "The Culture of 'Internal Colonialism:' A Marxist Perspective" (1981), Wald puts these minorities from the US together with other subjugated people around the planet by using Lenin's differentiation of two types of nationalism: "the nationalism of an oppressor group [and] the nationalism of an oppressed group"; while the former rules, the latter is deprived of its land, its language, and its culture (19). Similarly, in "The New Empire in the 'New South': Jim Crow in the Global Frontier of High Imperialism and Decolonization" (2009), Gary Helm Darden treats the segregationist laws operating in the American South as one form of colonial imperialism and associates them with the time European imperialism's control over its colonies was as its highest. In doing this, Darden reveals a new way of understanding racial relations in the history of the United States, since the systems of oppressive control

executed by the European empires do not look very dissimilar to American home policy.

Perhaps the critic who has stated most clearly the necessity to expand the field of postcolonialism to make possible the inclusion of texts by American writers of color is Deborah L. Madsen in "Beyond the Commonwealth: Post-Colonialism and American Literature" (1999). In this first essay of a collection she edits, Madsen shows us that "postcolonial" is a label that does more justice to these writers than "ethnic American" because their literatures, like those of indigenous peoples from other continents, confront the danger of being erased by the dominant white culture. Likewise, Karen Piper, an essayist in this same collection, suggests that a postcolonial reading of minority literatures can create a space where the voices of these individuals can be heard. The sneaky term "multiculturalism," on the other hand, does not necessarily allow room for the expression of difference, even though it signals at the diversity of peoples living in the United States. Piper borrows Homi Bhabha's ideas on discursive ambivalence and hybridity to provide a form of subversion for these minorities.

Because so little postcolonial scholarship has historically been dedicated to African-American literature, it is not surprising that a recent novel such as *Home* has not yet received any specific postcolonial treatment. Notwithstanding, the essays that have been published on Morrison's latest novel look at issues such as uprootedness, healing or belonging, which not only resonate throughout her works in particular and ethnic American literatures in general, but are also predominant in the texts of many postcolonial authors. It is worth noticing, therefore, the overlapping of thematic preoccupations that often occurs between postcolonial and African-American literatures. After all, both literatures are often concerned with

the language question, the cultural clash, the racial divide or the evils of colonialism/slavery (Elices-Agudo 73). The authors themselves are usually resistant to be encapsulated under one particular field or another, and purposely tend to play with hybridity, ambiguity, blurring or in-betweenness, concepts that defy the fixity and the clear-cut boundaries the Western literary canon aims at.

In "The Keys to the House of Healing: Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2013), Susana Vega-González identifies "home," "love" and "nature" as the keys for recovery and empowerment of the self in a historical context—as it was exemplified above—where racism and dispossession were customary. She analyzes the often contradictory concept of "home" in all its variants as it applies to Morrison's eponymous novel: "orphanhood," "homelessness," "belonging" and "community." Under an atmosphere of ubiquitous misfortune, the African Americans recreated in *Home* are "presented as utterly uprooted but [paradoxically] also trying to (re)create a home" (201). This academic also deals with the loaded symbolism of the text where flowers, gardens, trees, and animals (all elements of nature) often point at West African rites that aid in the healing process.

It might have been simply coincidental, or maybe due to a recent publication on the issues of race, trauma and home in the novels of Toni Morrison by Evelyn J. Schreiber, but two of the latest studies of *Home* coincide in understanding the novel as an example of "trauma fiction." In "Re-membering the Forgotten War: Memory, History, and the Body in Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2012), Maxine L. Montgomery traces in the novel an effort to reveal the buried history of trauma and suffering many African Americans endured during the Jim Crow era. Wounded bodies, whether from sexual abuse, dislocation or familial breach,

Montgomery argues, permeate not only this novel, but also Morrison's entire canon. In order to find the healing for those wounds, the injured individuals have to go back to the site of trauma in their memory to reclaim the body, in order to "*re*member what was once *dis*remembered" (331); in other words, they need to collect the fragmented parts of their selves in order to become whole again in a realm of possibility. Montgomery's essay highlights the diverse ways that there are to remember and praises *Home*'s experimental structure as a way to recreate "the collective and personal struggle" to deal with the past (322).

In a similar vein, Aitor Ibarrola's essay on *Home* entitled "The Challenges of Recovering from Individual and Cultural Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Home*" addresses Morrison's representation of traumatic individuals by repetition and indirection. This critic understands the text as hopeful and optimistic because it makes individual recovery from trauma possible: however, he warns us against taking brisk conclusions since cultural trauma is not easily mitigated and incompletion and reawakening usually follow. Mentioned in passing, Ibarrola suggests a postcolonial reading of Morrison's novels because, as he well notes, they often deal with the "enslaving discourses" that maintain "(unequal) relations" between the black and the white cultures (112). Later, following Herrero and Baelo-Allué's ideas, Ibarrola links postcolonial and trauma fictions due to the close attention they both pay to the "historical and social contexts" as a way to locate the origin of trauma (121). The Middle Passage, slavery, the Great Depression or Jim Crow laws are undoubtedly repositories of trauma for all African Americans and, as argued by Wald and Darden, they are not vastly different from other episodes of collective trauma that happened as a consequence

of British colonization, South Africa's apartheid or land usurpation from indigenous peoples.

Collective trauma is made personal at the site of the body. We have seen how African Americans have historically endured many violations that were often perpetrated on the body and that Morrison has fictionalized throughout her oeuvre to help us remember their pain. The parents of Dorcas Manfred in *Jazz* (1992), for instance, die violently as a consequence of the East St. Louis riots in 1917 (Beaulieu 158); Emmett Till's brutal death and the racist bombing of a Birmingham church is a subject of conversation in Tommy's Barbershop in *Song of Solomon* (88); Beloved is a symbolic reenactment of the "[s]ixty million and more" slaves, as the novel's epigraph highlights, who suffered the Middle Passage and once in American soil had their "legs, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue" busted (*Beloved* 81).[4]

Despite all these trespassings on the body, we should not forget that the subjugation of the mind was also imperative for the successful conquest of peoples of color by white supremacists. The dominant discourse of colonialism understood these individuals as less than human, objectified them and justified their exploitation and exclusion from the benefits that other privileged groups enjoyed.

[4] A racially triggered conflict over jobs, the East St. Louis riots was series of violent confrontations between blacks and whites. The bombing of the Birmingham church took the lives of Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Addie Mae Collins. For a comprehensive study of the event, Spike Lee's documentary *4 Little Girls* (1998) is worth watching. Emmett Till (1941-55) was a 14-year-old Chicago native who was lynched, tied to a cotton gin fan and drowned in Mississippi for having supposedly whistled at a white woman. Famously, his mother decided to hold an open casket for the whole world to see what they had done to her son. The event provoked ample press coverage and "helped galvanize the modern Civil Rights movement" (Alexander and Rucker 1054). Beaulieu has observed that there are "specific events [that] reappear throughout [Morrison's works]," among them "Black migration from South to North, the Depression, and the murder of Emmett Till" (154). Morrison wrote a play entitled *Dreaming Emmett* in 1986. Symbolically, *Home* protagonist Frank's last name, Money, is eponymous to the Mississippi town where Emmett Till was murdered.

One of the main goals of colonialism, Elices-Agudo contends, is "to turn the colony into a [...] *tabula rasa*" that the Empire can reinvent (31, original emphasis). The Empire, therefore, implants its discourse in the groups it colonizes and forms them into its image. As a consequence, postcolonial literatures and the voices it raises are a natural counterpoint to long-standing periods of torture and enslavement.

I agree with scholars like Deborah Madsen or Karen Piper who argue in favor of a postcolonial approach to Ethnic American Literatures and believe that a postcolonial approach to Toni Morrison can be very fruitful indeed. As I will argue as this essay develops, *Home* shows the postmodern questioning of history and mistrust of metanarratives that characterizes postcolonial literatures. The novel's goal is to show a fresh perspective about American life in the 1950s from the point of view of those who were once consigned to its edges. The postcolonial quality of *Home* comes from the creation of a sisterhood of intervening advisors—a sense of home—where the voices of those that the segregationist culture of the time tried to engulf can finally be heard. In addition, there are many other recurrent preoccupations within the field of postcolonial studies that also resonate in Morrison's text: the problem of landlessness that the Moneys suffer, for instance, or the pervasive stereotyping and the double subjugation that women like Cee endure. In *Postcolonialism. A Very Short Introduction* (2003), Robert Young, a prominent figure in postcolonial studies, clearly defines what the term stands for:

> Postcolonialism stands for the right to basic amenities—security, sanitation, health care, food, and education—for all peoples of the earth, young, adult, and aged; women and men. It champions the cause [of] those groups marginalized according to gender or ethnicity. [...] The sympathies and interests of postcolonialism are [...] focused on those at the margins of society, those whose cultural identity has been dislocated or left uncertain by the forces of global capitalism. [...] At all times, postcolonialism stands for a transformational politics, for a politics dedicated to the removal of

> inequality—from [...] the class, ethnic, and other social hierarchies [...] to the gendered hierarchies that operate at every level of social and cultural relations. [...] Its eyes, ears, and mouth are those of the Ethiopian woman farmer, not the diplomat or the CEO. (113-114)

All things considered, *Home* calls for a postcolonial reading since it resists Western discourse and all its ramifications: colonialism, racism, sexism, capitalism—which Ibarrola calls "enslaving discourses" (112). Even though this violent form of oppression was flourishing unrestrained throughout the United States in the 1950s, there have been accounts of people who tried to veil its hurtful truths and project an artificial image of success and good intentions. Chapter 1 of this thesis will precisely borrow from the theories on power/knowledge of Michel Foucault to expose the pervasive surveillance that characterizes these discourses in modern societies. An analysis of Edward Said's *Orientalism*—which interestingly applies the French postmodernist's beliefs to the colonial context—will follow to help us understand the mechanisms utilized by the powerful colonizers to turn the Other into a diametrically different image of themselves, both false and stereotypical, but that nevertheless gives grounds to the Other's consequent subjugation. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's ideas on the female Subaltern, we will witness how women have historically borne the brunt of colonial injustices to the point that their voices were never heard. The poverty that often accompanies both the Other and the Subaltern is also scrutinized in this chapter in an effort to challenge the capitalist, middle-class ethos that makes its victims individualistic and greedy. Finally, we will see how the forces exerted by all these excluding discourses create not only wounds of war, race, class and sex in the colonized individuals that cause a deep trauma, but also feelings of self-hatred that alienate those individuals from the community and as a consequence cause them to lose their idea of "home."

Besides denouncing the injustices committed against African Americans in the US, we will see in chapter 2 of my essay how the novel also offers a series of strategies that help counteract the aforementioned alienating forces. The innovative narrative structure of *Home* provides a privileged space to both give voice to those whose stories were usually neglected in historical accounts and thwart the authoritarian forms of narration symbolized in the omniscient narrator of the realistic novel. Hayden White's analysis of history as a made-up artifact and Homi Bhabha's ideas on the ambivalence of colonial discourses are key to understanding Morrison's political agenda of contesting bigoted, white patriarchal historiography and show alternative perspectives that are more valuable. *Home* also shows how mimic men and women, as studied in Bhabha's work, are forms of resistance too because they destabilize colonialism with its own tools. In this case, they mold the English language in such a way that it sheds its colonial impositions while simultaneously serving as a means of expression for African-American folklore and traditions. At the end of the novel, the creation of a community of nurturing and loving female mentors that respects difference and aims at empowering the disadvantaged—the poor, African-American peasants, war veterans, women and children—benefits the protagonist siblings as they face the trauma in their lives. Such a welcoming ambiance also makes possible a recuperation of the idea of "home" as a new fluid space that is recreated on alien soil and is always looking back to Africa. In essence, the postcolonial postulates of *Home* are a natural response to the abiding period of segregation and racism that black Americans endured in the United States during the Jim Crow era. Contestation of received ideas, therefore, is a way of coming to terms with past trauma since it offers the possibility of a better future to black Americans and the use of non-canonical ways

of expression, such as the vivid vernacular, the non-linearity of tales or the lack of closure within them, provide a sense of worth that colonial forces cannot destroy.

Chapter 1: Hard Times—Colonial Stereotypes, Patriarchy and Destitution

A postcolonial analysis usually involves the unveiling of the mechanisms that the Empire uses to exert its domination. Among these mechanisms, different postcolonial scholars have pointed out the role that the social sciences, such as anthropology, history or literature, play in the creation of a Westernized discourse to account for the peoples that are being colonized. It is a discourse that often does not match reality, but which, on the contrary, is interestedly constructed and full of stereotypes that aspire to turn the colonized individual into the antithesis of the colonizer and consequently subjugate him/her. Postcolonialism has usually turned to the ideas of poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault to understand how those subjugating mechanisms operate. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and other works, Foucault clearly exemplifies how the exertion of power, or what he called power/knowledge, is embedded in the various human sciences. He believes modern societies to be prisonlike—"carceral"—capable of total surveillance and total control like "a panopticon" (*Discipline and Punish* 204). The French philosopher contends that the different public institutions—hospitals, prisons or schools—aim at "categoriz[ing] the individual [and] impos[ing] a law of truth on him; [they are] a form of power that makes individuals subjects" ("Subject and Power" 331). Therefore, experts such as doctors, teachers or judges will bring to bear "the regime of knowledge" (331), that is, the binary identification of "the mad [versus] the sane [subject], the sick [as opposed to] the healthy, the criminals [vis-à-vis] the 'good boys'" (326). These experts will create, for instance, madness as a category of knowledge to take control of the people they define as mad and place

them in asylums or prisons that work towards "the accumulation and useful administration of men" (*Discipline and Punish* 303).

The following lines from *Home* exemplify the creation of vagrancy as a way to categorize individuals who are not productive for the society, a category that will justify their posterior incarceration:

> 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 away without clear purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict "purposefulness" and standing still could prompt a complaint of "loitering." (9, original emphasis)

As appreciated in this quote, Foucault's ideas about power/knowledge hover over Morrison's text, especially in regards to Frank's confinement in a "crazy ward," as the veteran calls it (14). Chapter two starts with Frank sedated and cuffed in this mysterious hospital where they apparently "sell dead bodies" (12). The reasons for his detention are not clear, though. Due to his combat-fatigued condition, Frank may have been simply "weeping before trees—apologizing to them for acts he had never committed" (15). "They must have thought you was dangerous," argues the reverend who helps Franks after his escape (13). With "they," Reverend Locke undoubtedly refers to the discourse of experts that Foucault talks about; that is, police officers and doctors with the power/knowledge to control the individual, categorize him as "dangerous," put him away because he does not fit their definition of citizenry or even eradicate him, as the sale of "dead bodies" may indicate. Frank's vagrancy and the threat it supposes to society connect excellently with Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's ideas about nomadism. These French philosophers claim that "the nomad is the person who most effectively resists the controlling institutions of the state [...] [since] those whose life involves a

permanent state of migrancy [pose] a serious threat that requires heavy-handed intervention, stabilization, and control" (qtd. in Young, *Postcolonialism* 52-53).

Besides fictionalizing an instance of control by society's omnipresent systems of surveillance, the previous scene makes clear use of irony to counteract the power of the authoritarian gaze. The irony resides in the fact that the individual, Frank, may not be dangerous at all, as his childlike weeping-before-trees suggests, but sick, alienated, shell-shocked and much in need of counselling, nurture and love—medicines that these systems of control do not provide. On the contrary, these institutions of dominance have historically aided in the dislocation of the cultural identity of many ethnic groups. But how does colonialism dislocate a culture? In the case of African-Americans it goes back to their forced removal from their native lands in Africa and subsequent enslavement in America. Once on American soil, the new ideology of the colonizer/slave master had to be implanted perforce in their minds. To accomplish this, the slaves were forbidden to speak their indigenous languages or practice their ancestral customs. Often using religion, pictorial art, history, literature and other socio-cultural constructs as a backup, the colonizer presented a distorted image of the colonized individual and turned him/her into the Other (Elices-Agudo 36).

In his pioneering book *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said developed the concept of Otherness in depth. Although his main focus was on Western representations of Northern Africa and the Middle East "in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (McLeod 39), his ideas can be extrapolated to study other ethnicities, geographies and historical moments. The racist ideas operating in the US during the 1950s and before, regarding the oppression of the African-American minority, could be understood as being part of what Said calls

"Orientalist discourse." The "Orient" (or the East) has been constructed by the "Occident" (or the West) as its opposite image through a series of objectifying and dehumanizing stereotypes. Consequently, if the West is believed to be rational, for instance, the East is irrational, savage, and in need of enlightenment. It might be argued that Morrison's idea of the "master narrative," defined as "whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else," is a similar concept to both Said's Orientalism and Foucault's power/knowledge (Moyers). Western society praises whiteness—as does Orientalism. White is constructed as pure whereas black is impure, blue eyes are beautiful but black eyes are ugly, and so on. Consequently, those who have the latter qualities believe themselves to be lower in status and often have self-loathing thoughts, for they have internalized Orientalist discourse

In *Home*, the reaction of Dr. Beau when he faces Frank is deeply illustrative in this respect. Prompted by the letter he receives when he is in Seattle, Frank goes to Atlanta to save his sister from the claws of this Nazi-like doctor who, as we will learn later, has been experimenting with her body and, as a result, has left her womb permanently damaged. At the precise moment when the two men confront one another, we read: "The doctor raised the gun and pointed it at what in his fear ought to have been *flaring nostrils, foaming lips, and the red-rimmed eyes of a savage*" (111, my emphasis). To Dr. Beau—"a heavyweight Confederate" (62) and supporter of slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacy and eugenics—African Americans like Frank are simply savages. The text, though, plays with Dr. Beau's expectations in an effort to disregard his "white gaze" and says that "[i]nstead [of a savage, the doctor] saw the quiet, even serene, face of a

man" (111).[5] With this assertion, Morrison reverses the preconceived stereotypical ideas of the colonizer; while Dr. Beau's thoughts render Frank as a degenerate species, animal in essence, nonhuman after all, the omniscient narrator counteracts them by returning to Frank his human selfhood.[6]

For white supremacists in the United States, black people, no matter what they did, were savages; and that savagery entailed danger. Many public servants like the police, doctors or lawyers, who were supposed to serve, cure or defend others in a neutral, disinterested way, in reality did not. On the contrary, white men and women were prejudiced and looked at the black person as devious, potentially criminal, guilty of wrongdoing, even before he/she had done anything unlawful. As we saw above, Frank's reason to be locked up in a sanitarium is precisely the uncertainty and instability he provokes in the white culture. Ironically, Reverend Locke tells him that if he had been "just sick they'd [have] never let him in" (*Home* 13). The Reverend's words echo the perils the racist culture of the 1950s posed for African Americans. If the police saw an African American with blood "running down [his] face" (13) on the street in the 1950s, they would not ask how

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[5] In an interview granted to Ariel Leve for *The Telegraph* in 2012, Morrison says that she always makes sure to "take away the gaze of the white male." Recently, she did this in her rewriting of Shakespeare's *Othello* when she called the play *Desdemona* (2012) in an effort to grant this female character a renewed vitality. Morrison argues that the only way she was able to do this was by getting rid of Iago. By "white male gaze"—she calls it "master narrative" in other occasions—she means the way white culture understands the black one. As Said would aver, white culture constructs "black" culture through a series of stereotypes that do not correspond with reality. Unlike African American male writers who usually confront the white oppressor, Morrison says that she doesn't "want to spend her energy refuting that gaze." For more details about the "white gaze" see Moyers, Díaz or Brodsky.

[6] In the same interview granted to Ariel Leve in 2012, Morrison tries to explain why she had called Bill Clinton "America's first black president" once. In relation to Clinton's sex scandal with Monica Lewinsky, Morrison thought that the American society was treating him "like a black person on the street—already guilty, already a perp." Morrison suggests that there is no room for innocence in the public imagination whenever some wrongdoing is associated with a person of color since, from the very beginning, he/she is already bad, a troublemaker or a criminal. This is why Morrison does not criticize her characters' actions; she simply portrays them as they are, without making judgments, and always trying to provide them with redemptive moments that show their positive side.

he was feeling and try to offer medical assistance to stop the hemorrhage. On the contrary, the well-being of that individual would have been completely ignored. He would have ended "bound and sedated" (13), like Frank is, believing he had committed a crime of some sort, or simply that he constituted a public danger. Jerome, a boy made to fight his own father to death for the entertainment of a white audience, would have had the same luck. "If the sheriff had seen him dripping in blood, he'd be in prison this very day" (139), says a man who helped with collecting some clothes for the boy. Similarly, eight-year-old Thomas, the boy who allows Frank to sleep in his bed when he is in Chicago, was shot in the arm by a "redneck rookie" simply for pointing a cap pistol at the police (31). While a shocked Frank argues that one "can't just shoot a kid" (31), Thomas's father, Billy, opens a window to the grim urban reality African Americans have to endure: "Cops shoot at anything they want. This here's a mob city" (31). Later, Frank and Billy themselves will be victims of an unjustified random search by a police patrol—an incident to which Morrison will add complexity by suggesting the corrupt nature of the police officers, who go as far as to steal from two poor men; "one ha[s] his switchblade confiscated, the other a dollar bill" (36).

Edwin Black has argued that during the first decades of the 20th century, certain Americans were categorized as "unfit" by the state because of their class, race or intellect. His comprehensive research in *War Against the Weak* (2003) reveals how the governmental "labelers" were in truth practitioners of eugenics against the labeled individuals: blacks, Jews, Mexicans, Native Americans, alcoholics and the mentally handicapped, amongst others. In order to preserve what these eugenicists labeled the "Nordic ideal," the "unfit" individuals "were forcibly sterilized [and/or] wrongly committed to mental institutions" (39). Ending

up in a mental institution, as Frank does, was customary for blacks since, among other reasons, they were thought to be not just "dangerous," but sexual perverts, beasts and cannibals as well. These words from eugenicist Robert Reid Rentoul are illustrative in this respect: "The Negro is seldom content with sexual intercourse with the white woman, but culminates his sexual *furor* by killing the woman, sometimes taking out her womb and eating it. [...] [A]nd [what] if [the US] would sterilize this mentally afflicted creature instead of torturing him?" (qtd. in Black 210, original emphasis).[7]

Besides thinking of African Americans as dangerous savages, the dominant white culture often belittled them with supposedly innocent remarks such as "boy" and "girl." In the workplace, Lily, Frank's girlfriend, is called "girl" by the actresses "as in 'Where's the girl?' or, 'Say, girl, where's my jar of Pond's?'" (*Home* 71). The term "girl" is far from innocent or unintentional and carries pejorative hidden meanings that intend to turn Lily both into a child and a servant, thus not worthy of respect or consideration.[8] In the case of men, Stuart Hall goes as

[7] Without being as direct and appalling as Rentoul's words, stereotypical views on African Americans are still in place nowadays; they might be more subtle and wear a veil of pretend righteousness, but they are harmful and enraging nonetheless. For the past few weeks, the killing of an unarmed black young man at the hands of a recently-acquitted white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, has been a prevalent story in mass media and has resurrected concerns over racism. Various opinion polls showed how blacks often see themselves harassed, targeted and singled out for stops by a predominantly white police force, "even though they aren't doing anything wrong" (Von-Drehle and Altman 27). Kareem Abdul-Jabbar argues that today's race relations in the United States are not as much a matter of racism, but "class warfare." He goes on to complain that "to many in America being a person of color is synonymous with being poor, and being poor is synonymous with being a criminal" (qtd. in Von-Drehle and Altman 29). Similarly, Wahneema Lubiano has said that in the United States nowadays "[p]overty has a black face—not in reality, but in the public imagination. Crime has a black face—again, not in reality, but in the public imagination" (vii).

[8] In 1920, thirty or so years before Lily is called "girl" in the workplace, Helene Wright, Nel's mother in *Sula*, suffers a similar act of belittlement. This time Morrison is more overt about the harm perpetrated when an African-American woman was called "gal" by a white conductor in a segregated train. "So soon," the text tells us. "So soon. She hadn't even begun the trip back [...] and already she had been called 'gal.' All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being flawed gathered in her stomach and made her

far as to interpret this act of infantilization that puts the black man's masculinity at stake as a symbol of castration (262). This symbolic castration emerges as a response to the fantasies of whites who see black men as libidinous individuals and it echoes Morrison's previous work, especially Sula's ironic words to Jude, her friend Nel's husband: "White men love you. They spend so much time worrying about your penis they forget their own. The only thing they want to do is cut off a nigger's privates" (*Sula* 103). Frank is not called "boy" specifically in *Home*, but everyday downgrading acts—such as the police random search or being forbidden from urinating in a public bathroom, sitting at the front of a bus or sleeping in a nice hotel—create some sort of mental trauma that may explain his uncontrollable violent response when he beats a man up in Chattanooga. Suggestively, the man in question is a pimp who is watching how his girls "beat each other in the dirt" (111). In an animalistic type of ritual that reminds us of cock fights, the man "shove[s] his chest" into Frank's. The veteran, also acting like a cock that is threatened, hits the man and immediately "leap[s] on the prone body and [begins] to punch his face" (101). Hall explains this "'macho,' aggressive-masculine" behaviour in black men as a reaction against being "[t]reated as 'childish,'" which, at the same time, "confirm[s] the fantasy amongst whites of their ungovernab[ility]" (263). For Hall, as well as others that we will see in chapter 2, this process of stereotyping is ambivalent, since the colonial discourse has a "double-sided nature" that constantly pulls in opposite directions (263).

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hands tremble" (20). Helene may be "an impressive woman, [may have] won all social battles with presence and conviction" among those with whom she shares the same race, but against a white man all "her [previous] authority" turns to nothing and the self-loathing sentiment of being "flawed" appears (18). Besides, she knows whiteness is the norm in Jim Crow territory—they are heading to New Orleans—and if she confronts it, the consequences can be much harder than the embarrassment suffered from racist name-calling.

In Orientalist discourse, the stereotypical role of the temptress is usually played by the woman of color who, according to Said, is "penetrated and possessed" by the industrious Western travelers (211). What complicates things further in *Home* is that temptation comes in the form of a child, "[a] wee little girl" (134) and the man being tempted is an African American. In Korea, Frank tells us in his first-person narrative space that "the hard part" is not battle or orders, but "waiting, [the] [h]ours and hours [that] pass while you [are alone on] guard duty" (93). In those moments of solitude, Frank is visited by a rickety native girl scavenging his trash who, after igniting the soldier's sexual appetite with a hand on his "crotch" and the words "yum-yum," is shot by him (95). Frank's response seems automatic, but, at the same time, it is both ambiguous and undoubtedly connected to an effort towards "recuperating some degree of power over the condition of powerlessness" he has suffered in the hands of a racist society in the United States (Mercer and Julien, qtd. in Hall 262). I argue that Frank's response is ambiguous because he is, at the same time, the colonizer/victimizer (an American soldier fighting to contain the spread of Communism) and the colonized/victim (an inhabitant of the margins of a segregated society).

As Said would argue, sexual exploitation of women in the colonies has often been justified by this inevitable urge the colonizer feels when confronting the exotic female. Contrary to what is common in colonial discourses, Frank's sexual arousal does not lead him to sexually violating the Korean girl, but to an overwhelming psychic state of repulsion for taking "him down to a place [he] didn't know was in" him that, as I have already said, triggers Frank's execution of the Korean girl (134). The repulsion he feels towards himself due to the encounter with the Asian girl is inextricably linked to the role his sister and him endure as

objects of racism in Lotus, their hometown, which is symbolically located at the heart of the Deep South. Besides suffering from internal colonialism and the psychopathic whims of a eugenicist, Cee is a “manyfold” victim who puts up with neglectful parents who continuously show razor-like affection (53), a mean grandmother who “pour[s] water instead of milk over” her breakfast (44) and an uncaring husband who “marr[ies] her for an automobile” (49). Notwithstanding that, I would argue that it is a flashing incident his sister suffers during her childhood which prompts Frank to kill the Korean girl. At some point of his first-person intrusions into the omniscient narration, he warns a potential offender with these words: “If they […] touched [Cee] I would kill” (104). In his self-appointed role as protector of Cee, and after having failed to save his comrades from dying, Frank sees himself for a moment in a quite different position—that of potential perpetrator of sexual exploitation in children—and he cannot stand it. It is as if the traumatic event of witnessing his sister being flashed by a pervert when they were kids had triggered an unconscious defense mechanism of some sort. Unfortunately, the response turns catastrophic and beyond redemption for the time being.

Frank’s violent response adds a new dimension to his character. On the one hand, we despise him for being a brutal murderer for, besides the Korean girl, he kills women, children, and an “old one-legged man” (21). On the other, Morrison makes us sympathize with this sexual abuser, killer and drunk by purposely adding little touches of philanthropy to his character.[9] He, for example, notices the virtues of those Korean parents who would “die to defend their children” and despises the “corrupt ones” who sell their daughters to be sexually abused (95-96). All his life,

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[9] Similarly, Amy Hungerford also argues how part of Toni Morrison’s project in *The Bluest Eye* is to make us sympathize with Cholly Breedlove, “a drunk who has no verbal capacities who rapes his own daughter.”

he cares for his sister. He cares to the point of returning to the most hated Jim Crow South for rescuing her from the evil doctor. He even buries the body of another unknown victim of the cruel, bigoted society, which helps him connect ultimately with the community, like those "fleeing neighbors" who came back from their forced exile from Bandera County, Texas, to bury the "beaten-to-death" body of Crawford close to his beloved magnolia tree (10). Furthermore, Frank is the returning shell-shocked veteran who suffers from nightmares, is haunted by ghosts and almost turns color-blind. Besides being a clear symptom of his PTSD, his color-blindness is a symbol of his inability to see beyond violence; that is, he confronts the Orientalist discourse/master narrative that belittles him, instead of ignoring it, like he will learn to do later on. Upon his return from Korea and even in his childhood, as the beating he provides to his sister's flasher evidences, he is possessed with an "evil mind-set" (120) that perpetuates a circle of violence due to "the danger [he] face[s] and the danger" he is (Díaz). Among the dangers he faces are his eviction from Bandera County, his confinement in the unscrupulous hospital through surreptitious means or the humiliation of being treated as a second class citizen in public facilities and by public civil servants like the police. Among the ways he becomes a danger are all the vicious fights he gets involved in and the indiscriminate killing of civilians in Korea, including the little girl.[10]

Frank's temptation by the Korean girl signals, then, to another stereotype of the Orient regarding women. Whilst the West is masculinized: courageous, strong, heroic—for instance, the US army—"[t]he East as a whole is 'feminised,' deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting"

[10] Susana Vega-González understands the episode of the shot girl as a sign of the lack of love Frank suffers from. She sees Frank and Cee as symbolic orphans. In this critic's view, Frank's problem is that he transforms his unloved, oppressed self into "hankering after love in a distorted way" (209).

(McLeod 45). Critics like Peterson and Rutherford argue that "colonialism celebrates male achievement in a series of male-oriented myths such as 'mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries'" (qtd. in McLeod 175). If we take into consideration Peterson and Rutherford's assertion, then, *Home* is a postcolonial novel because its main character is anything but heroic. Frank himself requests the omniscient narrator to portray him like this: "Don't paint me as some enthusiastic hero. I had to go but I dreaded it" (84).

The feminization of the East, or by analogy the African-American population, is better exemplified in the scientist/specimen type of relationship that Dr. Beau and Cee maintain. Dr. Beau symbolizes the white colonizer who, despite all his power, is afraid of the blackness that Cee, like an alien, unexplored land, represents. This black territory can stand for repressed feelings, illicit sexuality or the fall inherited from Christianity. That is why Dr. Beau feels an obsessive, fetish-like necessity to colonize her patients' bodies, which is symbolized in his overwhelming interest "in wombs in general, [or the construction of] instruments to see farther and farther into them, [like his improvement of] the speculum" (113). In "The Spectacle of the Other" (1997) Stuart Hall mentions that "whites often fantasized about […] the lascivious, over-sexed character of black women" (262). This fantasy, Hall contends, "projects a fear […] to civilization itself" (262). In Dr. Beau's case, civilization is closely associated with the maintenance of the traditional values of the Old South. After all he is "a heavyweight Confederate" whose grandfather "was killed in some famous battle" during the Civil War (62). One of the doctor's biggest fears is, without a doubt, miscegenation: seeing the pure blood of the master race degenerate by mixing it with the impure blood of the colored was simply inadmissible. This anxiety makes him wound the reproductive

organs of black girls, or to put it in other words, he performs forced sterilizations on them.[11]

Like a firm believer in eugenics, as his crowded library indicates with books that support the racist views of white supremacists, such as *Out of the Night* (1941), *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), *Heredity, Race and Society* (1946), Dr. Beau dreads interbreeding. That might be the reason why he "occasionally perform[s] abortions on society ladies" (112). In a style that recalls Ernest Hemingway's iceberg theory—Morrison herself has said that in *Home* she wanted to "write less to make it more" (Brown)—many sentences do not show everything that they convey and therefore, I will argue, the performance of "abortions on society ladies" is loaded with many underlying themes. Since the terminations are performed by a eugenicist, Morrison suggests that these society ladies are white, but their impregnators were black, and if the white supremacist discourse establishes that the races are to be kept unmixed, an abortion is needed. If that is the case, how would a rich woman end up impregnated by a black man? One, albeit probably uncommon, way this could happen is rape. In fact, a prevailing stereotype prior to the Civil Rights Movement would project black men as "rapists." "Alleged rape", Winthrop D. Jordan asserts, "was the principal 'justification' advanced to the lynching of black men" (qtd. in Hall 262). A second reason for the induced abortions would be connected with the fact that these white women, imbued with "the primal fantasy of the big black penis," would have been enjoying illicit sex with black men, trying the "excessive sexual appetites and

[11] Dr. Beau is undoubtedly in partnership with Schoolteacher, *Beloved*'s great antagonist. Arnold Weinstein sees in Melville's Benito Cereno and in the "complacent racism" in Twain's novels or the "virulent" one in Faulkner, "the lineage from which Schoolteacher comes [from]." This scholar argues that Schoolteacher is a "19th century rationalist [who] believes in the essential inferiority, the essential non-humanity of black people" (169-170).

prowess" of these creatures (Hall 262). In either case, a bogus conservative southern society which praises the purity of the white race will not permit the unveiling of such a scandal, that is to say, the impregnation of a white woman by a black man, and consequently abortions are hidden, but justified.[12]

While Dr. Beau thinks of Cee as an object of sexual experimentation, his wife sees her as "feeble-minded," to use a term Edwin Black uses in his book on eugenics. Mrs. Scott conducts a job interview in which the powerful/powerless positions are well marked and that old mindset "You're nothing and I'm something" comes out (*4 Little Girls*). The old Southern social status provided by her wealth and her conjugal attachment to the scientist makes Mrs. Scott condescending, especially towards poor black girls. That is why she asks Cee, for instance, whether she can count or read, a question Mrs. Scott would not ask a "society lady" counterpart. At that time, a common cliché in supremacist discourse was that the African American lacked the intelligence of a white person. This unfounded supposition, often propagated in newspapers and magazines, where belittling images of blacks as coons or pickaninnies flourished (Gates and Yacovone 161-172), allowed whites to preserve the absolute supremacy in all aspects of society. To prevent the negro from voting and gaining political power, absurd literacy tests would be conducted with questions such as "how many bubbles are in a soap bar?" or "how many seeds are in a watermelon?" (Alexander and Rucker 870). That is the reason why Mrs. Scott would not waste her energies explaining who Dr. Frankenstein is to Cee, for she already assumes that Cee has

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[12] All this fear and anxiety about the black man is mocked more overtly by Morrison in *Sula* when the eponymous main character has the following opinions about white women: "They chase you all to every corner of the earth, feel for you under every bed. I knew a white woman wouldn't leave the house after 6 o'clock for fear one of you would snatch her. Now ain't that love? They think rape soon's they see you, and if they don't get the rape they looking for, they scream it anyway just so the search won't be in vain" (103).

not read any classics of English literature. Besides being condescending, Mrs. Scott's words signal at yet another stereotype. She asks Cee if in God's Congregation they "jump around" (59) because the colonizer always believes the cultural traditions of the colonized are characterized by their bizarre nature. Mrs. Scott's isolation of the celebratory "jumping" activity of God's Congregation, a stereotype often associated with Native Americans too, aims at discrediting and disregarding as inferior the religious practices of African Americans in contrast with the solemn, quiet respect associated to Western rituals.

Regarding the real nature of colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha's ideas in his innovative book of essays entitled *The Location of Culture* are of key importance. The racial stereotypes of which Orientalism is made of, Bhabha argues, help the colonizer fix the Other in a secure place. This, however, is not an easy task, since fixity of apprehension of knowledge in a people is almost impossible. In fact, it can never be accomplished because those stereotypes will always slip and hence they "must be *frequently repeated* in an anxious, imperfect attempt to secure the colonised subject in the discourse of colonialism" (53, original emphasis). In *Home*, we sense this anxious repetition in the continuous bombardment of critiques that Cee endures from many characters, including herself. Lenore believes Cee's birth to be indecent, omen of immorality and looseness (44). Growing up, the mean grandmother will constantly exaggerate this episode and highlight the squalid background of the girl's family (45). Later, when she returns to her mother's funeral, Cee will still hear insults from Lenore, such as "[t]hief, fool, hussy" (50). Even years later, right before Lenore suffers a stroke that leaves her unable to make herself understood, the old woman still thinks that there must be "a medical word for [Cee's] awkwardness, for a memory so short" (88).

The discourse of colonialism is not something isolated to a single individual, though. On the contrary, it is pervasive and entrenched in society at large; an affirmation that echoes Bhabha's indebtedness to the Foucauldian theories of power/knowledge.[13] From Cee's family and friends to the workplace, from her own race to the dominant one, and from the exterior to the interior of her mind, everybody seems to assist in the stereotypical characterization of this girl. Her brother Frank believes her to be "a shadow" (103)—a weak individual who needs his masculine protection. Her friend Thelma, finding her unable to adjust to city life, calls her "a country fool" (50). Cee not only "agree[s] with Thelma about her foolishness," right after Prince has abandoned her (50), but also with similar comments made several times in the novel by herself and others. "If she hadn't been so ignorant," the omniscient narrator says when Cee elopes with Prince, "living in a [...] not-even-a-town place […] she would have known better" (47). "How small, how useless was her schooling," we read when Cee is perusing the titles of the eugenics books in Dr. Beau's library (65). And even during her healing process from the wounds perpetrated by Dr. Beau at the end of the novel, the text says: "As usual she blamed being dumb on her lack of schooling" (128). Cee's omnipresent self-downgrading is another example of that anxious repetition that is needed to try to anchor the colonialist stereotypes; at the same time, it is also proof that this can never be fully achieved.

As exemplified above, the discourse of Orientalism/master narrative has historically created a falsified image of the colonized. In this view, while Dr. Beau

[13] Besides Foucault, postcolonial critics such as Robert Young have identified Freud's psychoanalytic concepts such as fetishism in Bhabha's work (*White Mythologies* 144). There is surveillance of the colonized individuals, but there is also threat and fantasy as we saw in regards to Cee's blackness and Dr. Beau; this exemplifies the ambivalence Bhabha finds in colonial discourse.

would be believed to be a restrained, enlightened scientist, Frank would be represented as a brute with an uncontrollable sexual appetite. Similarly, the image projected of the society ladies Dr. Beau practices abortions on is pure, unstained, immaculate. Cee, on the other hand, is dirty, lascivious, exotic, all characteristics that entail a danger to the white supremacist society. Nevertheless, the anxiety suffered by the colonizer to maintain his/her power over the Other makes him/her vulnerable and ultimately evidences a power in the colonized individual.

Much postcolonial literature has certainly been written to unveil the demeaning stereotypes that characterize colonial discourses but, as is the case with feminism, it also revises the established patriarchal standards of conduct that these discourses convey. A society that is controlled both by the white gaze and patriarchy would subject women of color to a twofold, or even threefold subjugation, like it would be the case for black girls. This simultaneous double/triple colonization of women takes us to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's ideas on the subaltern, as developed in her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). The Indian philosopher understands subalterns, a term borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, as those who "did not comprise the colonial elite," but that nonetheless fought to win independence from the Empire (McLeod 109). The subaltern have historically been oppressed by colonialism and she wonders if the voices of these individuals can be rescued from the annals of history. Even though the subaltern are formed by both men and women, her attention is placed on women because the abuse they endure is twice as great. After posing the question of whether those female voices can be heard at all, Spivak reaches the conclusion that they cannot. Subaltern women are not granted this privilege, as Robert Young contends, in part because they are "assigned no

position of enunciation" since their subject position is shifted to an object position and as a consequence, everybody speaks for them and they cannot speak for themselves (*White Mythologies* 164).

After looking at Spivak's ideas, it could be argued that Morrison's works have always made an effort to give a voice to the female subaltern. By often providing the perspective of the poor black girl, a new world opens up which helps the author to question what has so often been ignored or silenced. The two discourses—colonialism and patriarchy—hinder the agency and the autonomy of women of color since, on one hand, they are black and therefore, excluded from society; on the other, they are seen as weak individuals that need the male, or the elder, to look after them, as if they were defenseless beings, unable to survive without men. Morrison has written extensively about young women who suffer from this double, even triple oppression. That is the case of Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, for example—a pariah that is rejected and reprimanded by the whole community, even the ghosts of her own creation.[14] Likewise, Cee Money is subjected, as I examined above, not only to the racist experiments of a white supremacist, but also to patriarchal surveillance by the members of her own community. Cee—a name significantly close to "she" as a symbol of universal womanhood—is therefore the character who best embodies the notion of the female subaltern in *Home*, especially as a child. Besides having Frank always "at

[14] In *Sula*, a young Nell comes to understand the vulnerability of being black and a woman after witnessing her mother, Helene, turn to "custard" in the colored car full of black men "with a hatred for her mother" (22). The custard motif is connected to Helene's light complexion and her bourgeois manners—both symbols of power—which are despised by the poorer, darker black passengers with "broad flat nose[s] [and] generous lips" (18). Nevertheless, in supremacist scenarios, such as when one is reprimanded for having simply walked through the white car of a segregated train, attributes of light skin or middle class—vain efforts to emulate the white aesthetics—show the softness, the powerlessness they are really made of, and make the character crumble because she is, after all, black.

hand to take care of and protect" her (48), Cee is "[w]atched, watched, watched by every grown-up from sunrise to sunset and ordered about by not only Lenore but every adult in town" (47). This "overwatching" causes Cee to never properly learn to think for herself, or, as she complains, it makes her "slow to develop [her] own brain muscle" (48). Moreover, having other people make decisions about her life prevents her from expressing her desires.[15] Interestingly, Lenore, Cee's step-grandmother, is compared to a "wicked witch," whereas Frank and Cee are "some forgotten Hansel and Gretel [who navigate] the silence and tr[y] to imagine a future" (53). As the quote suggests, Cee dwells in "the silence" that characterizes Spivak's subaltern since her voice is not allowed to be heard. She, too, internalizes those colonial and patriarchal discourses embodied in Lenore and believes herself to be weak, unable to stand up to others and learn how to avoid "the slaughter that went on in the world" (143), and by slaughter the text implies all the racist brutality black individuals like Cee endure.

If we compare Cee with her brother Frank, who is four years older, the differences between what the community expects from a female and a male are conspicuous.[16] All that overprotection Cee has to put up with seems to be absent in

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[15] Besides Pecola Breedlove, Cee resembles Frieda and Claudia MacTeer in *The Bluest Eye*. Like Cee, these girls are dispossessed due to their race, gender, class and age. Like Cee too, adults cannot comprehend their true desires which, in the case of Claudia, are not brand-new white dolls that her mother buys for her, but to "sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with [her] lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for [her] alone" (22). While everybody seems to have accepted the standards of the white world, Claudia does everything she can to despise the detractors; that is why, among other things, she "dissects and dismembers the dolls" (Beaulieu 195).

[16] In a similar fashion, Milkman is allowed to roam the streets with his friend Guitar in *Song of Solomon*. His sisters Lena and First Corinthians, however, are not as lucky since their father, Macon Dead II, "parade[s] [them] like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate[s] [them] like whores in Babylon" (216). This line clearly speaks about the oppression of women in a patriarchal environment where they will be put on display for other men to "see [them], envy [them] in white stockings, ribbons, and gloves" (216), but the moment a trespass is made, like when a lower class boy gets closer to Corinthians, her father grabs her and pushes her into the car. "First he displayed us," Lena remembers

Frank's case. While she is expected to stay in the house, learn the skills of a domestic servant—"sew," sweep, "weed [the] garden," and be subservient—"don't you talk back to me" (47)—Frank can enjoy "a little quick sex without love every now and then […], marbles, fishing, baseball, and shooting rabbits" (84). He has more freedom of movement and, most importantly, he can leave the so-much-hated Lotus whenever he pleases and without the company of a chaperone. Cee, on the other hand, will need to be married in order to leave town; that is, she needs a male figure to do things that males can do by themselves. That is why marriage, its legitimacy, and the freedoms that are kept from women until they have been blessed with it, are revisited and ironized in *Home*. Following her colonial and patriarchal convictions, it is Lenore who does not allow Cee to be with Prince unless they are legal, "[w]hatever legal meant," says the omniscient narrator right after. This ironic remark about the meaning of "legal" serves to deconstruct all the solemnity associated with matrimony in the Christian tradition. After all, as the novel signals, it simply consists of being blessed by a reverend and "writ[ing] [the newlyweds'] names in a huge book" (48), a set of rituals that do not interfere with the emotions of the lovers. Once they are legal, Cee and Prince can sleep together and do "the great thing people warned about or giggled about" (48), a thing of which Cee thinks "not [to be] so much painful as dull" (48). The narrative voice makes use of irony one more time to dismantle all the expectancy that is often associated with the first time a woman has sexual intercourse with a man.

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sadly, "then he splayed us" (216). Macon Dead II, like Lenore, is a greedy man who owns good houses and fat bank accounts like the white men he envies. Nevertheless, unlike his sister Pilate's rickety house, which is full of laughter and dancing, Macon's Dead II's capitalist kingdom lacks love, nurture and sustenance, like the artificial flowers his daughters make come to symbolize.

In Cee's case, we see how patriarchal discourse creates in her the unjustified idea that women need men to be safe. Lenore's Christian discourse, too, concurs with this thought and makes marriage mandatory whenever a man and a woman want to live together. It also understands copulation to only be a means necessary to produce offspring and not to be recreational or enjoyable, especially for women. Morrison's postcolonial, feminist ideas make her think otherwise and represent women as strong individuals who defy these mandates. That is why we have characters like Lily, who lives alone, engages in an unconstrained relationship with Frank and would not hesitate to use contraceptive measures like "douche bags" if needed (21); or Mrs. K., a widow who delights in having casual sex with teenagers without becoming a prostitute, since she, as the omniscient narrator makes sure to highlight, does not "solicit or charge" (90). If that was the case—that is to say, if Mrs. K. was selling her body out of necessity to get food or help her pay the rent—the Christian community could understand it; but the woman has her own source of income as a hairdresser, apparently a popular and buoyant one at that, as the fact that "nobody style[s] hair better" suggests (90). Therefore, Mrs. K. understands sex as nothing but pleasure and following this ethos she "occasionally satisfie[s] herself [...] when her appetite sharpen[s]" (90). As the owner of her own body, she assumes it is her right to do as she pleases with her sexuality and is ready to confront whatever Christian or patriarchal discourse tells her otherwise, so "[w]hen Reverend Alsop [goes] to see her and caution[s] her not to entertain local teenagers," she throws a symbolic "cup of hot coffee on his shirt" (90).[17]

[17] Mrs. K. reminds us of Hannah Peace, and even of her daughter Sula Peace, in *Sula*: they are also women who enjoy sex without restrictions. Strong female characters like Sula are not made or influenced by anything or anybody, they are the agents of their own

Many postcolonial and feminist books and movies counteract the passivity that patriarchy has customarily associated with women. In them, roles such as the faithful pleasing wife are often replaced with healthy independent women who take control of their own sexuality. Nola Darling, the protagonist of Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), summarizes her story with these words:

> He wanted a wife, that mythic old-fashioned girl next door. But it's more than that. It's about control. My body, my mind. Who was gonna own it? Them or me? I am not a one-man woman. So there you have it from a number of people who all claim to know what makes Nola Darling tick. I think they might know parts of me.

In *Home*, Frank's girlfriend Lillian Florence Jones, Lily, who was named after her grandmother—"a tougher lady never lived" her father reminds her (80)—is clearly one of those independent women. Interestingly, Morrison switches stereotypical traditional gender roles and endows Frank with idleness, indifference and "no goals at all" (76), whereas Lily is active, self-reliant and ambitious. The former is clearly wounded, affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and also by an emasculation induced from the belittlement that the larger, bigoted society subjugates him to. Contrariwise, the latter, though also subjected to various acts of shackling, such as when the white actresses call her girl (71), or when she is not allowed to buy a house (73), is a self-empowered black woman who does not submit easily. That is why, when Frank leaves to look for his sister, Lily feels "a shiver of freedom, of earned solitude, of choosing the wall she want[s] to break through, minus the burden of shouldering a tilted man. Unobstructed and undistracted, she [now can] get serious and develop a plan to match her ambition and succeed" (80). Not only are colonialist discourses then seen as roadblocks in

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discourse. Upon her return to Medallion, Sula reminds her grandmother Eva: "I want to make myself"; "Whatever's burning in me is mine!"; "[My life]'s mine to throw" (92-93); all these statements point at her total liberation.

the self-realization of free black women, but their men too, and this is clearly seen with old ladies like Miss Ethel. This adult woman and her group of community partners have already gone through similar subjugating situations with their husbands, uncles or brothers. Now, amid the experience accumulated through the years, they know how to control the male gaze. Frank, for instance, will be "blocked from visiting [his sister's] sickroom" under the belief that "his maleness would worsen [Cee's] condition" (119).

In consonance with Spivak's ideas about the inability to speak, we have seen how both colonial and patriarchal discourses have represented women as inferior beings, which consequently hindered their female agency and silenced their voices. Scholars such as Bart Moore-Gilbert think otherwise and criticize Spivak for treating the subaltern not as individuals, but "as an effect of discourse," a way of thinking that leaves the "critic" —and as we might add, writer—"in an impossible position, unable to do anything positive on behalf or in support of the subaltern as female" (qtd. in McLeod 196). Morrison seems to not subscribe to Spivak's opinions either and believes that the subaltern can and must speak. We have seen above how Cee—a victim of sexual perverts, the medical industry, soulless grandmothers and overprotective brothers—is the most subjugated character in the novel, the real subaltern. Exemplifying that remedial effort that characterizes Morrison by often depicting her female characters as strong figures who fight the status quo, Cee will also have a chance to have her individuality empowered by a community of country women and become the agent of her own discourse, a discourse neither colonialism, nor patriarchy, nor capitalism is going to silence:

> "What we need with a cold box? I know how to can and anything else I need I go outside and pick, gather, or kill it. Besides, who cooks up in here, me or you?"
>
> Frank laughed. This Cee was not the girl who trembled at the slightest touch of the real and vicious world. Nor was she the not-even-fifteen-year-old who would run off with the first boy who asked her. And she was not the household help who believed whatever happened to her while drugged was a good idea, good because a white coat said so. (127-128)

While Frank's words suggest that the trauma of racism, medical experimentation and patriarchy that Cee endured with Dr. Beau is healing, Cee points at the trauma a neglectful, capitalist system constantly inflicts on the poor. Morrison's intention when writing *Home* is as much to reflect upon race and gender as it is to unveil class issues. The abyss between what Henry Louis Gates Jr. has labeled the "two nations of black America" was not as prominent in the 1950s as it is nowadays (Cross and Gates, *Two Nations*); from an insignificant 3 percent in 1968 to a 12 percent in 2012, "the black Middle class has seen growth, [but] many people in America's black underclass remain mired in poverty, trapped in segregated [...] communities" (Gates and Yacovone 237).[18] Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, the middle class was much smaller and there was a spirit of comradeship and mutual help among the African Community, as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 showed. That spirit may have been lost. Today many black intellectuals such as Gates or Morrison worry—as Martin

[18] In the past few years, since Barack Obama became the first black U.S. president in 2008, many African Americans have questioned how this class divide and lack of opportunities for the poor black people can "go on with a black man occupying the Oval Office [and] whether the president [is] doing enough to solve the structural problems afflicting" this unprivileged population (Gates and Yacovone 267). Even though the election of an African-American man as president has been seen as a sign of progress towards "mov[ing] beyond race and its codependent, racism" (263), the reality is that African Americans face many obstacles such a "racial caste system" that still pervades American society and institutions. Take the treatment of convicts after incarceration, for instance (266). "[A] criminal freed from prison," civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander has argued, "has scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a freed slave or a black person living 'free' in Mississippi during the height of Jim Crow" (qtd. in Gates and Yacovone 266).

Luther King, Jr. and many activists did back in the 1960s—about how the chasm between classes has split the African-American community into two very different worlds and they advocate for intervening and embracing one another as a possible solution.

Morrison fictionalizes these disparate African-American worlds in *Home* and warns us of the ills the discourse of capitalism brings to the surface in human nature. The characters that are driven by money, especially Lenore and her first husband, are portrayed as greedy and often find dissatisfaction and isolation. They are in utter contrast with mentoring characters such as Ethel Fordham, Maylene Stone, Hanna Rayburn or Clover Reid, the group of women who inhabit the nurturing community Cee joins at the end of the novel. Despite being part of the African-American minority, Lenore is the best example in the novel for showing how a superior economic status makes the individual look down on people from the lower classes and consider other individuals as inferior and despicable, including Salem, the man she marries, and his family. Contrary to her first husband who was "energetic," "a good Christian" and "a moneymaker" (86), Salem is "uninspiring, [...] mute about everything except his meals, [interested simply in] playing cards or chess" (52-53). While the former is praised for having assimilated both the contemporary capitalist ethos and the old Puritan ideal, that is, "sacrifice, hard work, religiousness and leadership" (Elices-Agudo 47), the latter is disparaged for being, we may argue, "anti-capitalist." Salem lacks ambition, embraces a niche of not intervening in anybody's affairs and enjoys life as it comes through food and entertainment. According to the framework of Orientalist discourse, Lenore's first husband represents the industriousness of the West, while Salem is, to borrow McLeod's words, "deemed insufficiently 'manly'" (45).

Having surrendered to capitalist discourse, money is the only thing that matters to Lenore. She takes after Macon Dead, II, Milkman's father in *Song of Solomon*, "a slumlord [...] rul[ing] tyrannically over poor, working-class African Americans" (Beaulieu 94). Both characters are symbolically portrayed as individualistic, mean, greedy, manipulative and uncaring, much closer to a white exploitative landowner than to their generous (although poor) community members with whom they share the same ethnicity.[19] Lenore only welcomes her grandchildren to her house if she "need[s] them for chores" (52) and employs Jackie, a twelve-year-old child, as a maid for a meager quarter a day; "[G]old [is] always the only thing on Lenore's mind. She ha[s] it, love[s] it, and th[inks] it put[s] her above everybody else" (125). The illusory superiority endowed by her capital drives Lenore to despise others to absurd levels. While she thinks of herself a respectable woman, for instance, she considers Mrs. K., the local widow who enjoys casual sex with teenagers like Frank and his mates, to be loose, disgraceful, a woman "Lenore [does] not go across the road to say 'Good morning,' let alone sit in the abomination of her kitchen" (90). The object of her greatest scorn, though, is her own granddaughter, Cee, whom she hates based on the uncontrollable circumstances of the girl's birth because Lenore believes that "[d]ecent women [have to deliver] babies at home, in a bed attended to by good Christian women, [while] [b]eing born on the street—or the gutter, as she usually put[s] it—[is] prelude to a sinful, worthless life" (44). It is worth noticing from Lenore's credo how Western ideals are associated with decency, goodness and

[19] When asked why 45% of blacks are poor nowadays, Eldridge Cleaver, former Black Panther, says: "Our black middle class [individuals] [...], following an assimilationist ethic, [...] have become white and [...] have adopted all the worst features of America in terms of not caring about the other people. So that the black bourgeoisie is as corrupt and immoral as the white bourgeoisie" (Cross and Gates, *Leaving Cleaver*).

holiness, whereas dirtiness, sin and worthlessness dwell within the ways of poor or "loose" black women.

Riches do not seem to be the key to true satisfaction; a "fat savings account" may soothe Lenore (91), but all her disdain of others makes her "a profoundly unhappy person" (90). To persist in believing her superiority upon others makes Lenore solitary, selfish, psychologically unhealthy and—like Macon Dead II in *Song of Solomon*, a man estranged from both his family and his sister Pilate—she ultimately "ha[s] to be content with the company of the person she prize[s] most of all—herself" (92). All this mental turbulence provokes in her a minor stroke, an event the women from the community interpret as divine punishment for her inability to show love and appreciation: "[T]hey didn't even have to say out loud what they understood to be true: that the Lord Works in Mysterious Ways His Wonders to Perform" (92). As a woman from the affluent middle class, capitalist discourse is undoubtedly embodied in Lenore.

Interestingly, the power of this discourse is portrayed as far reaching, diffused across every aspect of society, and influencing the lives and minds not only of those who belong to the middle class, but also the underclass, as it is the case of Cee and Frank Money. The text constantly highlights the prevalence of money in society with instances such as how Frank faces the pains of not having any, how he moves across the country driven by it and how often he encounters people who either help him monetarily or rob him of it. The unknown Samaritan "stuff[s] a couple of dollar bills in Frank's jacket pocket" (107), Reverend Maynard provides him with "two ten-dollar bills" (22) and he gets "eight dollar bills and a wash of coins" (17) from Reverend Locke. The difference between all these characters and Lenore is that they give the money away and understand it as

a necessity to go through life: buying a train ticket, food at a counter, accommodation in a hotel, a pair of shoes or a wallet. Lenore, on the other hand, exhibits a sick adoration for it; she hates losing even the smallest quantity of it and her only joy is in seeing it accumulating. In similar terms, Cee's relationship with money points at the constant dissatisfaction an individual feels about wages, which always seem to run short for life's necessities: "rent […], soap, underwear, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, another dress, shoes, stockings, jacket, sanitary napkins" (55). This dissatisfaction makes her believe "more work [or] a second job or a better one" is the solution (55). Symbolically, in the same fashion that Lenore suffers a stroke, this illusory pursuit of happiness will mean Cee's downfall since in her second job she will encounter the doctor who will exploit her body and maim her for life. It seems then that the capitalist discourse controls the minds of young African-American generations too, a control that will be counteracted later when Cee meets the female mentors who teach her to distinguish right from wrong.

The novel also shows that capitalism and its abusive nature are not something new to the black masses, since certain peoples—such as older generations of the Moneys—have had to work "sixteen hours" (52), "from before sunrise until dark" (43), "in fields [they] didn't own, couldn't own, and wouldn't own if [they] had any other choice" (84). With these words, Frank is pointing at the landlessness problem black Americans, and many other colonized individuals, have faced throughout history.[20] As slaves, African Americans were forced to

[20] In "Space and Land"—chapter 3 of his book on postcolonialism—Robert Young talks about the issue of landlessness that is "faced every day by ordinary people" (45). Historically, he affirms, settlers all around the world have driven "off those who had traditionally lived on that land" (45), a sad reality that both Mexicans and Native Americans suffered in the United States. These merciless examples of destitution bring

work in somebody else's plantation and after the Emancipation, they were promised "forty acres and the mule" as compensation for their labor as bondsmen, which was an agreement never truly fulfilled (Alexander and Rucker 773-774). This is best exemplified in *Sula*'s beginning with a tale of exploitation which Morrison does not hesitate in calling a "nigger joke" (4). Here we witness how a slave is misled by a "good white farmer [to choose] the hilly land [over the fertile one], where planting [is] backbreaking" (4-5). On many occasions, too, black Americans had to give up their houses, businesses and land, because even though they had de jure rights over their property, it was not always the case that they had de facto rights. They would not get any legal support from either the government or the police and whenever white supremacists "with or without badges but always with guns" felt like (*Home* 9), they would coerce blacks to leave their abodes and those who did not comply would be brutally murdered. This is what happens to both Lenore's husband, who was shot for not getting "the hell out" of his gas station (86), and Crawford, Frank's neighbor in Texas, who is struck violently to his death with the butts of guns and tied to his yard's magnolia tree for public contemplation (10), a vicious practice reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, even whenever they had earned enough money to buy a house—as is Lily's case in the early 1950s—they were denied that right with racist regulations such as this: "No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay or Asiatic race excepting only employees in domestic service" (73).

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into action counteractive movements such as *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil which give some hope to these colonized peoples since they aim to provide land to the landless.

Besides property rights issues, Robert Young contends that postcolonialism also "stands for the right to basic amenities—security, sanitation, health care, food, and education—for all peoples of the earth, young, adult, and aged; women and men" (*Postcolonialism* 113). If postcolonialism stands for all those rights, it is because colonialism denied them to the peoples it colonized. In the 1950s, for instance, US segregationist constitutional policies, such as the euphemistic "separate but equal," kept African Americans isolated and unable to access quality education (Hope-Franklin and Moss 238); that is why Cee is constantly resentful of the lack of educational opportunities the "no-count, not-even-a-town" Lotus offers (47). The separate and, in fact, "unequal" status quo operating in the South at the time is pointed out in this excerpt:

> Jeffrey had sidewalks, running water, stores, a post office, a bank and a school. Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just fifty or so houses and two churches, one of which churchwomen used for teaching reading and arithmetic. Cee thought it would have been better if there were more books to read—not just *Aesop's Fables* and a book of Bible passages for young people—and much much better if she had been permitted to attend the school in Jeffrey. (46-47)

White supremacy, as I have argued above, sustained itself by keeping African Americans ignorant, far away from public facilities and continually threatening their lives. Access to healthcare—a right that many believe, as Young does, should be universal—seems to be a recurrent motif in many of Morrison's other works. In her texts we often see poor black individuals who have been injured either intentionally, like Sethe Sugg's lynching (*Beloved* 15), or accidentally, like Pauline Breedlove's piercing of her foot with a rusty nail (*The Bluest Eye* 110-111), or Guitar's father getting "sliced up in a sawmill" (*Song of Solomon* 61). In all these cases, blacks always seem to be denied proper medical assistance by their white owners or by the white institutions they resort to. In *Song*

of Solomon, the black Americans living in No Doctor Street, for instance, are not allowed to give birth inside No Mercy Hospital (4-5). In *Home*, too, the lack of medical care is ubiquitous throughout the novel and it affects many of the characters. For example, Maylene Stone, one of the women who help cure Cee, has only "one working eye" because when a wood chip pierced it, "[n]o doctor was available or summoned" (123). Similarly, while Lenore has to endure "a long, perilous wait" at the hospital before her stroke is finally treated (92), Frank would have never been allowed in the hospital solely due to some illness (13).

The previous paragraphs exemplify that there has not only been a "class divide *within* the African American community itself," as exemplified in the relationship between Lenore and the other members of Lotus, but also a "racialized, [unjust] divide within the country" (Gates and Yacovone 236). Robert Young believes postcolonialism to stand for resistance against "all oppressive conditions that have developed solely for the interests of corporate capitalism" (*Postcolonialism* 113). It might be argued, then, that the American medical industry is undoubtedly driven by capital and profit and its historical denial of healthcare to poor African Americans is a crime that needs to be remembered, as Morrison's recurrent portrayal of its negligence hints at.

Empowerment against capitalism or the medical industry and other enslaving discourses such as Orientalism will be offered to Cee and Frank at the end of their journeys inside the alternative community of country women, a motif that reinforces *Home*'s postcoloniality. But before we reach that point, it is important to look at how the colonized individual sometimes paradoxically aids the same discourses that oppress him/her with feelings of self-loathing and complicity. I argued before that Foucault's model of modern society, the panopticon, was one

of constant surveillance in which different institutions applied a power/knowledge that categorized the individual as a way to control him/her. Foucault also believed that the individual is somehow an accomplice of the power system because he/she internalizes the discourse of experts such as governors, anthropologists and linguists. If a literacy interventionist, for example, tells a father that his son has a reading disability, the father will start to believe that his son is different—a boy with special needs, a child who requires an Individualized Education Program. In fact, the student will be categorized by the educative system as "special ed" and put into a subgroup for whom general education no longer sustains since he/she needs remediation strategies. Such labels, Foucault would argue, constitute "the power of [...] administration over the [...] people" and consequently, feminism, deconstruction, queer theory or postcolonialism, would be "forms of resistance against different forms of power" ("Subject and Power" 329).

In *Home*, the character that most conspicuously shows that she has internalized the discourse of colonial experts is Cee Money. The youngster believes Lotus to be "the backwoods" (48), that is, retrograde, backward, "a no-count [...] place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do" (47). She soon gets infatuated with city "women in high heels and gorgeous hats" (49), with the "beautiful, quiet neighborhood" Dr. Beau lives in (58) and with his house whose living room, Cee believes, is "more beautiful than a movie theater" (59). Both Mrs Scott, who reminds Cee of "the queen of something who belonged in the movies" (60), and her husband—a dedicated, charitable philanthropist who helps "poor people, [especially] women and girls" (64)—are immediately adored. At this moment, Cee only sees external appearances and not the true racist intentions of the doctor, so ironically she even wants to "find time to read about and understand

'eugenics,'" the science that will damage her ability to reproduce (65). The view of a world so different to her own makes Cee both want to please her employers and try to emulate them. Finding "pride in cleaning for and taking care of a white family" is not new in Morrison, though, since it actually takes us back to Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* (Beaulieu 74). Both Cee and Pauline fall prey to what Morrison calls "the master narrative," that is to say, the white male ideology which dictates "the whole notion of what is ugliness, what is worthlessness, what is contempt" (Moyers). In the case of these two women, they have absorbed their love for high-heeled shoes through the movies, as Mrs. Scott's resemblance to a queen from the celluloid suggests. When a poor black woman like Cee or Pauline—the latter is ironically lame—desires high-heeled shoes, the master narrative is operating, since those shoes are nothing but instruments of patriarchal oppression, constraint and imposition. This type of shoes is not used for comfort, but for decoration and the enjoyment of males; one more token in the objectification of women. Any of these "ideals of romantic love and physical beauty," Morrison warns us, "are [simply] lies foisted on women" (qtd. in Ryan 114).

Surrender to the master narrative makes happiness ephemeral though and soon, as the pain Cee feels from wearing high-heeled shoes symbolizes (*Home* 58), the harsh reality surfaces. The African-American female realizes that she cannot become a true member of that magnificent and splendid white world and as a consequence a terrible feeling of self-loathing arises.[21] I argued before that Mrs.

[21] Besides self-loathing, in the case of Pauline Breedlove aggressiveness also emerges, as is exemplified in the scolding she gives her own daughter, Pecola, for having knocked a blueberry pie onto the floor in her employer's house: "Crazy fool," Pauline calls her. "[M]y floor, mess … look what you [...] my floor, my floor … my floor" (*The Bluest Eye* 108-109). Actually, the pie Pecola drops lacks importance; what really matters to Pauline

Scott is a condescending supremacist who sees in Cee a feeble-minded brute not worthy of her respect, but what is even more interesting for critical examination is that the African-American girl concurs with that insidious white gaze: “She had agreed with the label,” the omniscient narrator reminds us, “and believed herself worthless” (129). As a disadvantaged player in all these encounters with people of power (Mrs. Scott, Dr. Beau, Prince, Lenore), the poor country black girl starts building a fragmented body out of what in her colonized mind are shortcomings. She hates herself for the undignified way she was born and for the deficient education, excessive dependency and countrified manners a segregated southern town like Lotus provides; all of which are polar opposites of the aspects of the solemn white world she reveres. This self-hatred is similar to that experienced by other colonized individuals that have gone through an encounter with the white oppressing discourse. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon, born in Martinique, remembers the rage and the intense dislike he felt for himself in France when a child in the street pointed at him and said: “Look, a Negro!” (109). “Those in such situations,” contends Robert Young, “come to internalize this view of themselves, to see themselves as different, ‘other,’ lesser” (*Postcolonialism* 21). It is in these situations, then, that the self-destructive thoughts become apparent and make the colonized subject an accomplice in his/her own subjugation.

Besides being inflicted by another community (like when the racist Jim Crow laws victimized the African-American population) or by one’s self (as would be the case when a black American succumbs to self-hatred), oppression can also

is the floor she cleans since having it stained damages her ego of the “perfect servant” on the eyes of the whites. In her book about trauma in the novels of Toni Morrison, Schreiber theorizes this behavior from a psychological perspective and mentions that “white intrusion on [the] ego” is a traumatic event that turns the individual aggressive (69).

be used by subjugated communities within and against each other; for instance, women sometimes abuse other women or a minority might mistreat another one. This idea takes us back to Lily's job in the theatre where, as I pointed above, the actresses refer to her with the derogatory term "girl," whereas, the text remarks, the actors call "her by her name" (71). Morrison is suggesting here that white women were often complicit of black women's marginalisation despite the fact that they, in turn, were marginalized by a patriarchal society. As a matter of fact, the author realized this complicity in the sixties when feminists became very articulate and marched or wrote essays to fight for women's rights. Morrison found all this interesting, but hypocritical in the end because, despite "having these huge meetings about feminism and the power of women, [...] they [were] leaving all their black maids at home" (Díaz). In postcolonial studies, this connivance in Western feminism, its patronizing attitude and the difficulties of entering its discourse have often been criticized by Third World sisters. Scholars like Helen Carby have pointed out how, following an Orientalist ethos, "Western feminism [has] represent[ed] the social practices of other 'races' as backwards and barbarous, from which black [...] women need[ed] rescuing" (qtd. in McLeod 181). Similarly, Spivak has argued that Julia Kristeva's work on Chinese women appropriates them "to serve the self-centred ends of 'First World' feminists," a practice that she does not fear to call "inbuilt colonialism" (qtd. in McLeod 186).

Apart from women being complicit in other women's subjugation, the novel signals at how an African American can disregard other colonized peoples and, as a result, help with the stereotyping of his own race. The English language, as we will see later, is full of racist terms such as "coon" or "nigger" to refer to a black American person, so when Frank thinks that "there [are] not enough dead

gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him" (98)—offensive expressions to refer to people from Vietnam, Korea or China—we are given another example of the master narrative influencing its power upon him; a master narrative, and herein lies the irony again, that degrades Frank as a second grade citizen. Moreover, this anecdote shows how Frank has unconsciously internalized the derogatory discourse of white culture and has had his mind colonized. Complicity with the colonizer is perhaps more ambiguous when Frank puts the innocent Korean girl to death (134) since, on one hand, African Americans were being victims of a form of internal colonialism not dissimilar from other imperialist regimes, while on the other, as part of the military, blacks alongside with whites were subjugating other ethnic groups around the world (Koreans in the 1950s and in later decades Vietnamese, Afghans or Iraqis) as well as in the US (Native Americans). Historians such as Manning Marable have pointed out this contradiction with regards to the role that African-American cavalry soldiers played in the late nineteenth century. "Buffalo Soldiers," he argues, "'paradoxically helped bring the white man's law and order to the frontier,' and in doing so, aided the process of destroying Indian civilization" (36).

The aforementioned issues of race, gender, class and complicity—that is to say, the way Orientalist discourse constructs a distorted, stereotypical image of the Other to subjugate him/her, the double oppression women are subjected to in a colonial realm or how capitalism extorts the lower classes—create a feeling of uprootedness in the African-American subject that for certain individuals can be terribly self-destructive. In her homonymous essay entitled "Home" Morrison has said that "matters of home are priorities in [her] work" (4); however, as Vega-González has pointed out, that idea of home is portrayed as "contradictory, [a]

paradox" (202). Utterly alienated characters like Frank or Cee are constantly looking for a home, a safe haven to be nurtured in, but this idea seems evasive for most of the novel, or temporary at best, and ultimately unreachable. This connects to the notion of America as a made up country of people who, with the exception of Native Americans, are from somewhere else. If to that idea one adds the segregation, forced evacuations and the lack of opportunities that black Americans and other minorities have suffered in the last centuries at the hands of white supremacists, we end up with individuals full of discrepant thoughts of being at home and simultaneously homeless.

In postcolonial studies, this contradictory idea of place and its counterpart displacement is encompassed in the concept of diaspora. Even though this term is often associated with fiction writers from once colonized countries who live in London—that is the case of Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi or Grace Nichols—it has also been applied to African-American writers. In fact, it is not rare to hear Dominican-American authors such as Junot Díaz refer to themselves, and to others such as Toni Morrison, as living "in the diaspora" (Díaz). In diaspora, Gina Wisker asserts, the colonized individual suffers from "a permanent displacement, always travelling and never fully feeling as though you have arrived" (92). Throughout history, African Americans have felt displaced from their "homes," as I have already said, because the racist Western ideology operating in the American territory continuously ignored, silenced and degraded them. If we focus on Frank as a way of illustration, we see how at age four he was whimsically forced to leave Bandera County, Texas; his childhood was marked not only by the ostracism he faced from his step-grandmother, but also the neglect of his parents and society at large; once a teenager, unable to stand the long neglected Lotus anymore, he leaves

it behind and joins the army. Later, upon his return from Korea, Lotus is no longer a place of reference because neither his homeboys—all killed in the war—nor his sister are there any more; as a consequence, once discharged from military service, he begins to wander through the unwelcoming Jim Crow landscape of the 1950s without a place to call home.

Wisker's contention about the concept of diaspora finds an echo in *Home* from the very beginning: "Whose house is this? / [...] Say, who owns this house? / It's not mine. I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter, / [with] wide [...] arms open for me. / This house is strange. / [...] Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?" (1). This poem points at that already-mentioned, contradictory feeling suffered by African Americans of belonging, and at the same time not belonging, to two places at the same time. Their roots are in Africa, but now they live across the Atlantic, so they experience alienation: "this house is strange," while concurrently America is their house since "its lock fit[s] [their] key." As we will see in the next chapter, this sensation of being out of place, of having lost one's home, has made black American writers re-create new spaces which they can call home in America, while, as Robin Cohen explains, "acknowledg[ing] that 'the old country'—a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore—always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions" (qtd. in McLeod, 207). Language, religion, custom and folklore are precisely the alternative arms Morrison wants her characters to use in order to refute the oppressing colonial discourse instead of having to turn to direct confrontation. The use of these ancestral tools will provide them with empowerment, self-esteem, opportunities and the possibility of some sort of redemption.

Chapter 2: Rewriting the Past to Change the Future

Postcolonialism has invested its efforts in rewriting history and, by doing so, has challenged the previously uncontested accounts of past events as rendered by a Western, male ideology. This historical reinterpretation by the former subjects of imperialist forces shows the vacuums that colonial history contains. As we saw in the introduction, this is precisely Toni Morrison's goal in many of her works; *The Bluest Eye* shows that black "wasn't always beautiful" as it was in the sixties (Morrison, "Motivation for Writing"); *Beloved* retells the trauma of slavery from the perspectives of the slaves; *Jazz* has none of the glitter or ostentation of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's fictional accounts of the Jazz Age, but, instead, it has all the pain of the Great Migration: that mass exodus of sick-and-tired-with-Jim-Crow-laws African Americans to the North in search of a better future. Following this committed endeavour to unveil long-forgotten facts, in *Home*, Morrison "wanted to rip the scab off that period, [...] all [the] nostalgia, [the notion] [t]hat it was all comfortable and happy and everyone had a job," and instead, describe the "violent racism, [...] McCarthy [and] this horrible war we didn't call a war, where 58,000 people died" (Minzesheimer). "History," Winston Churchill once said, "is written by the victors." During the decades of racial segregation in the United States South, the victors were without doubt the white elite. Morrison and many other black minds feel compelled to change this status quo, and that is why they pose new questions, show new perspectives and beget new historical truths. Their goal is to recover a black consciousness that is missing in history books and come up with a realm that frees the spirit, even though the trauma may still persist.

As it is often studied in manuals on postcolonialism, Morrison's undertaking is comparable to that of the subaltern studies scholars. These

intellectuals, Spivak among them, are interested in unearthing the lost voices of the subaltern in texts from the colonial period. The subaltern were often erased from the national memory as if only the efforts of the elite counted and theirs never existed. Ranajit Guha calls this "elite historiography," that is, a type of writing history where "subaltern voices remain silenced" (132). It is important to know, though, that the story of the elite "can never provide the complete narrative of the nation," that is, there are also minorities, as in the case of African Americans in the United States, who also have something to say (qtd. in McLeod 132).

Denunciations of the lack of historical objectivity abound in postcolonial theory as it can be observed in Nell I. Painter's comparative essay on Jim Crow and the Shoah. This historian argues that many American history books deal with slavery as if it was "incidental, not central, to the American past" and the depiction of racism as "a fundamental constituent of American and southern society" is rarely present in scholarly articles (309). Southern society was deeply racist for many decades after slavery was no longer legal, and the same has been said of the Northern states. Reverend Locke's words in the novel precisely remind Frank of this fact: "[Y]ou been in a desegregated army and maybe you think up North is way different from down South. Don't believe it and don't count on it" (19). Even though Korea was the first armed conflict in which American black soldiers fought along with white ones—Morrison herself thinks of it as "a level of success" (Crom)—the United States was still deeply segregated throughout. For African Americans travelling across the country, like Frank does, it was dangerous because they had to watch where they were going to sleep, eat or relieve themselves, since they "could be picked up for nothing, as [...] vagrant[s]" (Crom). Racism, therefore, Painter reminds us, is a truth that "needs to be faced and admitted," if a

new harmonious future is going to be constructed (309). Similarly, Erykah Badu, an African American musician, points at the nature of the inherited history and the necessity to retell it from other new, personal perspectives that will rebuke the imperious Western white narratives:

> There is a lot of rebuilding in order and that has to come from [...] writ[ing] and document[ing] our history. [...] It's really not about black and white. It is about the story. And if we are going to tell the story, let's tell the story right. That's why as black people we have to tell our own stories, we have to document our history. When we allow somebody else to document our history, the history becomes twisted. We get written out. (*Black Power Mixtape*)

Not to be written out is clearly Morrison's goal. *Home*, as we will see below, borrows from feminist, postmodern and postcolonial language theories as a way to destabilize traditional ways of portraying African Americans, especially women, and provides them with a space where they can be safe, free and heard. The discourse of the great master narratives such as history, colonialism, racism, patriarchy or capitalism has been traditionally thought to be fixed, linear and whole. However, postmodern historians such as Hayden White or postcolonial philosophers such as Homi Bhabha think otherwise. For the former, historiography is like a literary artifact: constructed, fictitious, selective, full of gaps (1709-29). For the latter, colonialist discourse is like a textual brawl: ambivalent, repetitious, elusive, excessive, anxious (85-86).

Home does certainly agree with those tenets and will often question the omniscient voice's ability to render the story, or posit two contradictory versions of the same scene that highlight the linguistic nature of historical accounts. Lenore's discourse, clearly constructed of capitalist, patriarchal and colonial arguments, is exemplar to see how some of those destabilizing linguistic ideas that postcolonialism employs work in the novel. I argued before that Lenore always

thought of Cee, even when she was a toddler, to be indecent, sinful and worthless—accusations that the grandmother based on circumstances that escaped the girl's grasp. Lenore, for instance, takes it "as a very bad sign for Cee's future that she was born on the road," a fate that the old woman thinks to be even worse than that of "prostitutes" who, unable to give birth in their houses for fear of family repudiation, go "to hospitals when they [get] pregnant, [but] at least they ha[ve] a roof overhead when their baby" comes (44). It is important to notice here that, despite all the aplomb of Lenore's words, her rendering of facts does not match Frank's. From his privileged first-person point of view, Frank has told us before that Cee was "delivered on a mattress in Reverend Bailey's church basement" (40). A mattress in a church seems a quite more respectable setting than Lenore's most emphasized "gutter," and in fact Cee may have been looked after by "Christian women" (44), a detail that the step-grandmother believes to be a prerequisite for one's holiness and good reputation. Both Lenore's asymmetrical oppositions and untruthful fabrications are actually part of the nature of Orientalist discourse. Following Said's tenets, McLeod argues that Orientalism is "man-made, [...] a Western fantasy, [...] a *fabricated* construct, [a] "contrived 'reality' [that] does not exist outside of the representations made about it by Westerners" (41, original emphasis). Taking Said's words into consideration, we may argue that Lenore is, above all, lying, building a stereotypical colonialist discourse based on Christian indoctrination that justifies the harsh punishment she has wreaked on the colonized Cee.

Besides the ideas that the text challenges, how one arranges the novel is undoubtedly one of the best weapons an author has at his/her disposal to counteract received historical assumptions. This novel, as well as Morrison's entire oeuvre, is

an effort to lend a voice to those who have been historically relegated to the margins and in doing so, it provides new nonconformist knowledge to compensate for the classic, often stereotypical, colonial narratives. As I said before, the novel is structured in such a way that the traditional, omniscient narrator and Frank's first person voice take turns to tell his story in alternative chapters. The reader is made aware of this original metafictional game from the very onset, in fact. It is as if Frank was watching the actual writer of the novel/Morrison over her shoulder at all times and gave her information about his life. "Since you're set on telling my story," he tells her, "whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this" (5). In the second of such monologues—for Frank does not receive an actual response—the veteran questions the narrator's ability to describe: "You don't know what heat is. [...] You can't come up with words to catch it" (41). In such narrative occasions he also spins another version of a traumatic event he wants to hide—the shooting of the Korean girl—and later redresses his lie by confessing that he committed the crime. This, as I argued in the introduction, permits Frank to somewhat mitigate his trauma by verbalizing repressed memories. Interestingly, he will even rebut the omniscient narrator with these words:

> Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would turn around when [his wife and him] 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. (69)

Similar to when the reader finds about Lenore's and Frank's divergent versions of Cee's birthday, though in a more overt way, here we are presented with two contradictory narrative accounts. Who is telling the truth: Frank or the omniscient narrator? In the postmodern world in which Morrison writes, the truth may be the

least interesting thing to pursue. “Texts rarely embody just one view,” McLeod argues; “Often they will bring into play several different ways of seeing without always deciding which is the true or most appropriate one. […] [T]exts are mobile and often contradictory affairs, positing several opinions rather than just one” (51).

And not only that, Frank’s words also point at the unreliable nature of historical accounts, since depending on who submits the facts, one type of story or another can be possible. This is precisely what Morrison’s agenda seems to be for this novel when she said that she wanted to “rip the scab off that period” (Minzesheimer) or see “what was really going on” (Bollen) since while some look back at the early 1950s as a nostalgic, cheerful era with job opportunities for all, Morrison sees it populated with anti-communist persecution, callous and institutionalized racism, and war. This fluctuating quality of the past has taken academics like Hayden White to compare history with literature and realize that, due to the verbal nature of both, they are not very different. In his essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” (1985), Hayden contends that, due to the fact that historians deal with language, they necessarily have to use the same rhetorical techniques—point of view, characterization, metaphor, synecdoche, irony—that a fiction writer would. Consequently, the same historical occurrence can end up being expressed differently depending on who wrote it. “For example,” he argues, “no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place. For in history what is tragic from one perspective is comic from another” (1715, original emphasis). In *Home*, then, a wife’s public rescue of her husband can be interpreted through two opposing points of view. On one hand, the omniscient narrator believes that the

man will turn aggressive and beat his wife up as a response to his belittlement and intolerable humiliation. Frank, on the other hand, thinks that the man is proud of what his wife did and he will not beat her, but love her even more for it. Morrison seems to be suggesting that we should suspect the veracity of metanarratives such as history, which can not only suppress or subordinate events, as White states, but can even go as far as to lie to us and consequently mislead us in our conception of the past.

If Hayden White highlights the fictionality of historical discourse, Homi Bhabha, in his cornerstone work *The Location of Culture* (1994), signals how the "stereotypical representations" carried on in colonial discourses are not fixed entities, but "complex, ambivalent, contradictory, [...] as anxious as they are assertive" (70). As it was previously presented, we may argue that Lenore's stereotypical denial of Cee's virtues is quite steady and secure. However, if we pay attention to Bhabha's ideas, we can see that her objective is never fully accomplished because the discourse of colonialism is like a tug of war: "produc[ing] the colonized [subject] at once [as] an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (70-71). So, Lenore constructs the "Other," that is, the "lesser" members of the community—especially Cee, Mrs. K. or Salem—as the polar opposite of her own self-image; thus, positioning them at a distance from her, outside the colonizer's realm. If Cee and Mrs. K. are disgraceful hussies, she is a decent Christian; if Salem is lazy and "uninspiring," her first husband was industrious and hard-working. And yet, in an attempt to eradicate their "Otherness," Lenore tries to palliate the fear provoked in herself by Cee's or Mrs. K.'s indecency, making the former marry Prince and acknowledging to the latter her unsurpassed hairstyling skills. The formality of marriage and the reputation of

a well-done job allow these ostracized women to move inside the West's boundaries and lessen the distance between the Us/Others dichotomy. This, Bhabha would argue, creates ambivalence, repeating a constant bouncing from one side of the spectrum to the other (decent like us/indecent like them, lawful/unlawful, inside/outside) and consequently making the colonised subject unstable, hard to grasp, moving perpetually back and forth from "recognition [to] disavowal" (70).

After having been the target of oppression and discrimination by the "apparatus of power," objectified and constructed as "a population of degenerate" individuals through stereotypes (Bhabha 70), what tactic(s) can the Other use to resist the discourse of colonialism? Bhabha's concept of mimicry, understood as the colonizer's desire to recognize the Other "*as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*," might be a solution (85, original emphasis). The concept refers to the tendency of the colonized people to mimic the colonizer. However, they never attain the same status by doing so; there is always a difference between the two: they become almost white, but not quite. We have seen some examples of these mimic men and women already with respect to what Morrison calls the master narrative. In *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, Pecola Breedlove adores Shirley Temple and wishes to have eyes as blue, skin as pink and hair as blonde as the white culture icon. Her mother, Pauline, especially vulnerable to the messages conveyed by white culture, also "fall[s] victim to [its] conception of beauty" and tries to look like "white movie starlets" (Beaulieu 74). In *Home*, we have already mentioned that Cee Money wears "white high-heeled shoes" for her work interview with Dr. Beau (58) as a way to "set herself apart," as journalist Lesly McDowell puts it. Morrison's use of the epithet "white" is not coincidental

here, since she is signaling that Cee tries to emulate white culture in an illusory attempt to leave her black race behind. This, as Bhabha would argue, is never possible since "to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (87, original emphasis). While in the former the conformist follower is getting molded by the Empire's powers, the latter is a privilege only granted to those who were born in England. This attempt at emulation, as it is often seen in African-American culture, not only brings contempt from whites, but also from blacks. Seen as an act of betrayal to the race, these black women are considered inauthentic and worthless of consideration; that is precisely why Helene Wright's affected manners receive "bubbling [...] hatred" from the black men in the train bound for New Orleans (*Sula* 22).

While copying white culture has often been analyzed as African-American victimhood,[22] Bhabha understands it as resistance. He suggests that by resembling the colonizer, the colonised subjects "both mock and 'menace' them" (Wisker 192). One of the most common ways to resemble the colonizer is without doubt to speak like them. The English language, adopted as the lingua franca by former colonies, is often the focus of much controversy in postcolonial theory and the writers who use it for their literary enterprise always look at it with mixed feelings. As Morrison herself says in "Home," the eponymous article published in *The House that Race Built*, "language both liberated and imprisoned me" (3). Kenyan writer and literary critic Ngugi Wa Thiong'o sees in English the repressive

[22] As noted before, Pauline Breedlove's encyclopedia entry in Beaulieu's book suggests that her "lack of acceptance of herself leads her to fall victim to the white world's conception of beauty" (74). Similarly, black action movies from the 1970s such as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasss Song, Shaft* or *Superfly* have been labeled as "blaxploitation" films. These movies attempted to reverse the negative stereotypes that African Americans were often associated with: "poor, childish, subservient." There starred "bad-ass black men, with attitude," much like white action figures such as Dirty Harry. However, instead of subverting the clichés, they ended up "trapped in its stereotypical 'other'" (Hall 272).

mechanisms of the Empire and advocates for expressing oneself in local, native tongues.[23] For Thiong'o it is possible to do that, but what language, among the many used in West Africa, could the descendants of former slaves choose to use in the United States? For them there are no available alternatives to English. The problem for these black writers remains, as Houston A. Baker, Jr. would argue, is "how to use the language of the dominant white culture to express the different realities of African-American life" (Leitch 2224). Baker relies on the "vernacular" as "the dialect of the marginalized, the unheard"; a language that is "popular as well as local," often part of the oral tradition, and away from the institutions of power such as schools, the media or the government (2225). "Jokes, folktales, and traditional songs," he contends, "are good examples of anonymous, popular art forms" (2225). This list of the different genres that the vernacular encompasses is consistent with the one provided by Gates and McKay in the *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*, which includes "church songs, blues, tall tales, work songs, games, jokes, dozens, and rap songs" (1).

As a black American deeply rooted in folklore, Morrison makes use of these "popular art forms" in all her works to perpetuate the African-American artistic tradition but also to welcome "her ideal reader," that interestingly is an "illiterate reader," that is, a "reader not stocked up already with the imaginative inventory of the Western canon, a reader who instead has some sense of an oral

[23] Besides the racist nature of English, exemplified with irony in Benjamin Zephaniah's poem "White Comedy," where the poet changes the word "black" for "white" in expressions that carry negative associations (blackmailed, blackwitch, black magic, black lies, black sheep, etc.), women have also identified a sexist component in the language. In Jeanne Perrault and Sylvia Vace's *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, Emma LaRoche maintains: "To a Native woman, English is like an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away. […] [S]avage, primitive, pagan [are] epithets that have been pejoratively used to *specifically* indicate the ranking of Indian peoples as inferior to Europeans, thus to perpetuate their dehumanization" (qtd. in McLeod 125, original emphasis).

tradition" (Hungerford). Gospel, spirituals, traditional songs or quotes from the Bible often reverberate symbolically throughout her narrative. In *Home*, folktales such as "Hansel and Gretel" or "The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs" are used metaphorically to describe the neglect children endure in the household or to point out the impracticality and senselessness of some characters' choices. "Remember that story about the goose and the golden eggs?," Miss Ethel asks Cee, "How the farmer took the eggs and how greed made him stupid enough to kill the goose? I always thought a dead goose could make at least one good meal. But gold? Shoot" (125). Susana Vega-González traces many West African cultural beliefs and rites in Morrison's text as well and signals, for instance, the symbolic importance of trees, quilt-making or burials in African traditions: traditions that have been perpetuated in the United States by the black American community.

Besides the aforementioned vernacular modes of expression, African-American music seems to be of paramount importance to Morrison. In *Song of Solomon* "one of the central threads of the story is a song" (Beaulieu 227) and she has even written a novel, *Jazz*, which "becomes the textual manifestation of the music after which it is named" by emulating the rhythms, the pace and the combo (182). Morrison has said that she understands music as a way of hearing the "voice of African Americans," which in turn is a combination of standard and colloquial English and the so called black English woven together that helped subvert the Master and provided freedom and joy at times when blacks were silenced publicly (Morrison, "French Students"). If we look closer at how this is made manifest in *Home*, we can see how music serves Morrison by conveying a political agenda to counteract the colonialist endeavors of the Empire. "The musicians," the omniscient narrator tells us, "understood [...] that Truman's bomb changed

everything and only scat and bebop could say how" (*Home* 108). The atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, like many other episodes of mass extermination, such as slavery, Native American removals or the Nazi Holocaust, inflicted a great trauma on a whole nation of people; a trauma that, as we have already seen in the case of African Americans, still persists. Tragedies, in fact, and the necessity to talk about them, takes us to another characteristic of African-American music: the "healing [it provides to] Black people" (Beaulieu 225). Before Frank hears scat and bebop, he has been assaulted and robbed; nevertheless the "scat [...] cheer[s] [him] up" (*Home* 109). Similarly, the blues lyrics "[w]hen I lost my baby, I almost lost my mind" provide Cee (54)—who symbolically is "broken down, down into her separate parts" (54)—some tonic to endure the trauma of not only being abandoned by her husband, but also of being unable to go back to Lotus because of the segregation that characterizes the hamlet, plus the meanness of her wicked step-grandmother. Symbolically too, upon Frank's return to his hometown, the women welcome him home with the spiritual "[t]ake me to the water. Take me to the water. Take me to the water. To be baptized" (117).

In a similar vein, *Home* makes use of irony and humor and since it helps to counteract the so called master narrative, it also has a political and healing power. "Humor," Morrison has said, "is agency. It is power. [...] [H]umor is important under duress" (Crom). Nevertheless, Hungerford says that "where we see something funny [in Morrison], it's always with a tinge of darkness." The conversation some customers have about their unprivileged experiences in the South at a diner in Chicago is a good example of language used with irony and humor in a traditional African-American way:

> Up and down the counter there was laughter, loud and knowing. Some began to compete with stories of their own deprived life in the thirties.

> Me and my brother slept in a freight car for a month.
> [...]
> You ever sleep in a coop the chickens wouldn't enter?
> Aw, man, shut up. We lived in a [*sic*] ice house.
> Where was the ice?
> We ate it.
> Get out!
> I slept on so many floors, first time I saw a bed I thought it was a coffin. (*Home* 28-29)[24]

This vigorous, dynamic conversation in which each speaker tries to outdo the other resembles vernacular forms of expression such as tall tales—most memorably represented in the works of Zora Neale Hurston—or the dozens, that is, "the exchange of insults engaged in as a game or ritual among black Americans" (Stevenson and Lindberg). In connection with the healing power of language, Ralph Ellison once said that the vernacular was "humanity's 'triumph over chaos'" (Gates and McKay 2). The novel's exchange of exaggerated remarks aims precisely at humanizing a harsh episode of racism and poverty—the Depression—with dignity, endurance and humor. The fact that these diners boast and laugh about their deprived lives connects with Bhabha's concept of "sly civility" (93-101). Like mimicry, Bhabha's sly civility is another way to resist colonial power while living inside the parameters of its authority. Sly civility, as Bhabha understands it, is not an attempt to overthrow the system, it is more "a way of

[24] Another example worth remembering of irony to counteract food shortage is found in Railroad Tommy's remarks to young Guitar in *Song of Solomon*. Instead of highlighting all the awful things they had to eat during the Depression—ice, dandelions, hog guts, feet, necks, all offal—like the diners in Chicago do (*Home* 29), Railroad Tommy concentrates on all the delights that African Americans like Guitar would never eat: "no pheasant buried in coconut leaves for twenty days. [...] And no Rothschild '29 or even Beaujolais to go with it. [...] And *no* baked Alaska" (*Song of Solomon* 60, original emphasis). Hungerford says that irony in Morrison is to be found in "the specific local language of the characters" and signals at how humorous it is to hear Mrs. MacTeer complain for hours about the three quarts of milk that Pecola has drunk. This is one more example of dark irony because while Mrs. MacTeer thinks Pecola drank the milk "out of greediness," the text reveals a sadder reality: she did it because she is so "fond of the Shirley Temple cup [that she takes] every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley's face" (*The Bluest Eye* 23).

living, […] of keeping one's sense of humor within the existing structure of power, while giving the man a hard time" (Fry). Besides enduring what it wrought, there was little these African Americans could do to change the status quo of the Depression: a vicious Ku Klux Klan, high prices in rent, lack of decent housing and scarcity of food; however, they could take it humorously and downplay it. Since scarcity is painful by definition, laughing about it contradicts its purpose and makes it possible to undermine the state of affairs. A racist white culture would not know what to do with self-confident, cheerful individuals, instead of scared, submissive ones they could exploit at their will.

What Morrison does with the white man's language, then, is appropriate it and adapt it for her own literary intentions as a woman of color. In a similar fashion, many characters will appropriate the Bible to serve their own marginal context. While the Bible was once "used to condemn indigenous African religious practices and was often cited to legitimate the presence" of the colonizer, in a postcolonial context it becomes "the weapon of the oppressed" (McLeod 95). Symbolically, the Bible serves Lily's father to empower her daughter and encourage her to fight despite racist obstacles: "Gather up your loins, daughter. You named Lillian Florence Jones after my mother. [...] Find your talent and drive it" (80).[25] A remark from Sarah's biblical story is chosen by Miss Ethel to aid Cee with coming to terms with the trauma of her infertility: "Your womb can't never

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[25] Lily's father is misquoting the expression "gird (up) one's loins" which means to "prepare and strengthen oneself for what is to come" (Stevenson and Lindberg). As we will see later exemplified by Miss Lenore and her group of countrywomen, Lily's father is a mentor figure in clear opposition to Cee's step-grandmother and parents. He wants Lily to be resilient to adversity since he knows her ethnicity and gender are going to be obstacles in a racist, patriarchal society. This famous quote comes from the Bible where it appears several times: "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover" (*The Holy Bible*. Exod. 12:11); "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" (Luke 12:35); "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

bear fruit" (128). A third example can be heard in Billy's words which help him outlive police brutality: "Hold on there, Mr. Police Guy. Don't hurt the least of mine. He who harms the least of mine disturbs the tranquility of my mind" (31).[26]

In addition to direct quotes from the Bible, its teachings also help Morrison with characterization. Christian symbolism and imagery therefore permeate the pages of *Home*: The man who helps Frank after he was attacked by a group of gangsters, for instance, is called the Samaritan (107). The image of the sweet bay tree with its spreading arms resembles a Christ figure on the cross and at the same time, in a scene full of symbolism, the base of the tree becomes the burial ground for a victim of racism and its trunk, the support for his epitaph "Here Stands a Man" (145). The word "stand" is highly representative since it suggests metaphorically that the deceased is still standing, therefore not dead. On the contrary, he is, like the tree itself, "[h]urt down the middle / But alive and well" (147). We know Jesus Christ as a man who, like many African Americans during slavery or segregation, was mocked, despised, tortured and eventually killed. Nonetheless, his death is celebrated as a triumph, not a defeat; it was also the event

[26] Billy's situation is worth examining in detail because it illustrates the way Toni Morrison's understanding of how to disregard "the white gaze," or what Alice Walker sees as "gettin' the man out of your eye," work (qtd. in Fry). Here is how the scene develops. First, Billy explains to Frank what happened to his son's arm: Thomas was shot by a "redneck rookie" because he "thought his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops" (31)—a reason, it seems, that should not concern the life of an eleven-year-old at all. Second, he explains that "[t]he bad arm kept him off the streets and in the classroom," an outcome that Frank understands as a favor granted by the cop (31). Billy, on the other hand, does not take this to be a favor and in response, quotes the Bible passage regarding not hurting those who are close to Jesus. Frank's way of interpreting the incident as a gift from the police is an example of "the white gaze," since Frank is seeing the incident through the eyes of the larger white society. Anybody would agree with Billy that to pursue an education is better than being in the streets, the streets foreshadowing a life of crime. However, only white culture or those under its influence, that is, those whose mind has been colonized, would condone the misconduct of a white police officer in terms of doing a favor to a black boy seen as a potential delinquent.

responsible for his resurrection on the third day, besides serving to atone the sins of humanity.

This particular victim of racism fictionalized in *Home* was condemned to figure—and soon be forgotten—in the annals of Jim Crow as just one unit to be added to the number of lynching casualties. Interestingly, Morrison leaves the identity of the interred body open to interpretation so that, in the same way that Beloved is not just the ghost of Sethe's daughter in Morrison's eponymous novel, but also represents all those slaves who perished in the Atlantic slave trade—the "Sixty million and more" of her dedication—this dead man could be any of the casualties of segregation and racism in the US, not just African Americans. He could be Jerome's father, forced to fight his son in a duel "to the death" (*Home* 138), but he could also be the body of the enigmatic ghost that haunts Frank upon his return from Korea and who reappears during the burial at the end of the novel. The fact that he "grins" when Frank is about to bury the bones suggests that this victim of the Zoot Suit Riots—as his clothes signal—has found long-deserved peace and recognition at last.[27] Talking about the dedication in *Beloved*, Henderson signals how Morrison "sets out to give voice to 'the disremembered and unaccounted for'" (qtd. in Montgomery 325). We could say the same of *Home* since both Jerome's father or this mysterious ghost are the "unaccounted for," Spivak's subaltern or Buñuel's "los olvidados," embodiments of hidden stories that Morrison unveils to attack history as that white, male, canonical monster that swallowed many of the voices she rescues in this novel. Therefore, Morrison's

[27] The Zoot Suit Riots were a series of riots in Los Angeles, California, during World War II. Racist servicemen stationed there hunted Mexican-American neighborhoods "clutching pipes, bats, and other rough weapons" looking for zoot suiters, that is, "young men whose colorful choice of wardrobe had somehow made them walking and talking symbols of juvenile delinquency and immorality to many white Angelenos" (Hillstrom 3).

agenda with this particular scene is twofold. Not only does she want to save the sufferers of racism from historical oblivion and put them in front for reexamination as she does—for instance when she mentions the drop of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima—but also to reverse one of the commonest stereotypes associated with blacks, that is, their inhumanity. Furthermore, providing this man—who was murdered, carried hastily in a wheelbarrow, pulled from it, thrown into a hole, covered with dirt with his foot still quivering (4)—with a proper second burial helps Frank make amends for his past wrongdoing in Korea and rejoin his sister in their community, in an effort to move forward and beyond trauma, as the healing "welcome breeze," "the fat cherry-red sun" and the wild-in-the-glow "olive-green leaves" of the sweet bay tree seem to foretell (145).[28]

As I stated in the timeline of events of national importance for African Americans in the introduction of this thesis, their last three hundred years have been marked with suffering, oppression, racism. Furthermore, the African-American minority has been the target of colonialist, capitalist and patriarchal discourses that distorted their minds in a way that made them believe that they were inferior, lazy, violent, even deserving of the subjugation the colonizer was perpetrating on them. After having seen both Frank and Cee Money being prey to such systems of control, what may follow next? What can be done once the Empire is routed? Or, in the case of the reality depicted in *Home*, what can be done while the Empire is still there? To try to provide an answer to these difficult questions is what most postcolonial literature is about, besides being a theme that continues to be very much open for exploration.

[28] Vega-González understands this scene as an instance of "soaring up on to the spiritual dimension [where consequently] [t]he limits of life and death are […] blurred" (215).

Many feminist works of literature, contends Michael Ryan, "offer images of women forming supportive communities or relationships that can enable either the struggle to make a post-patriarchal world or the attempt to survive within patriarchy" (114). We will see these women fictionalized in *Home* in Miss Ethel and her intervening companions who endured in spite of their double dispossession:

> [women] never, ever, ever, surrendered, and they did not blow anything up, and they did not shoot anybody. It was something else that carried them. [...] The consequence of that refusal to surrender under the worst of possible circumstances and to triumph as well as to defy by simply not going into that cauldron of anger and evil. They stayed away from it. (Morrison, "French Students")

Men, on the other hand, have shown a more self-destructive or violent attitude to life as Morrison illustrates with Frank's indiscriminate killings of civilians in Korea or the vicious beating he inflicts on the pimp in Chattanooga to avenge the death of his homeys. This connects to Morrison's understanding of "black male writers [since they] write about what's important to them or their lives, and what is important to them is the oppressor, the white man, because he's the one making life complicated" (Bollen). She notices in these writers the presence of what she calls the gaze of the white male, as if—like what happened to the authors of abolitionist slave narratives like Frederick Douglass who needed the approval of whites—they were justifying their work to that oppressing view. In a conversation with Junot Díaz, Morrison mentions the example of the title *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison and she wonders: "Invisible to whom? Certainly not to me" (Díaz). When she was investigating what men are really like for *Song of Solomon* since she was going to write this novel from a man's point of view, she realized that "black women never do that," that is, confront the master's gaze; so she decided to take the gaze out of her literary world and in a moment of epiphany felt

that "it was freedom! You could think anything, go anywhere, imagine anything" (Bollen, original emphasis).

I would also like to argue that, as much as *Home* takes us back to the past, sixty years ago, it also takes us to the present. "Your role in part is to take history and tell us what is says to us today," Toni Morrison was prompted in an interview. Morrison agreed and said that "the past is about the present. It's not just over. I think it was Faulkner who said 'the past is not even past.' It's right here. And if we don't clarify, understand, give a point of view how can we deal with what is going on now. It's always this brand new invented life. It comes out of the past that we have" (Rose). I suggest that *Home* takes us to the present because Miss Ethel and her supportive group of women seem to provide a humble solution to the evils that surround many black neighborhoods such as Chicago's South Side today; this solution is in accordance with what other members of the African-American community, both scholars and not, believe.

Chicago's South Side—Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues in "Streets of Heaven," the fourth part of his book *America behind the Color Line. Dialogues with African Americans* (2004)—has become infamous for its high rate of criminality, drug abuse, poverty, defeatism and despair. When prompted to provide a solution to this problem, many of the interviewees suggest that these communities need a hierarchy of support: mentors, activists, people who show and teach and give certain avenues. Elaine Rhodes, for instance, is a community activist from the South Side who "started teaching baton twirling to young black girls," the Twirling Elainers (Gates, *America behind* 339). Her "goal was to instill discipline and generate pride within a group much more likely than not to be single parents and poor" (339). She points at American psychiatrist William Glasser's

words and asserts that "love, fun, power, freedom, and belonging [are] the basic things people need in life" (339). She continues saying that "[p]eople need to feel that someone loves them and that they belong. I make other people feel that way" (339). Morrison herself said in an interview with Bill Moyers in 1990 that she admires, respects and loves "these black people in the inner city who are intervening" and as an illustration, she refers to "black professional men who went every lunch hour to the playgrounds in Chicago's South Side to talk to those children. Not to be authoritarian, but just to get to know them, without the bureaucracy, without the agencies, to simply become an agency" (Moyers). Similarly, the Violence Interrupters Program in Chicago provides "conflict mediations, safe havens, mentoring, alternatives to violence, and more" to youngsters who often find in violent retaliation the only solution to their grievances (*The Interrupters*).

Similar to those aforementioned urban South Siders, Miss Ethel and the other community women know that life is tough, but also that despite hardship, one has to "gather up [one's] loins" (*Home* 80), "stay awake" to prevent misery from entering one's self (122) and not rest on feelings of self-pity, whining or frailty. They teach their mentees that one has to intervene, provide solutions, love, nurture, share with one another and "do some good in the world" (126). As examples of true citizenry, as Morrison herself qualifies them in an interview (Crom), these women are in total opposition to characters like Lenore who are a representation of colonial power and, as the following quote points at, they possess a great power of influence:

> Branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated "gutter child" by Lenore, the only one whose opinion mattered to her parents, exactly like what Miss Ethel said, [Cee] had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless. Ida never said, "You my child. I dote on you. You wasn't born in no gutter.

> You born into my arms. Come on over here and let me give you a hug." If not her mother, somebody somewhere should have said those words and meant them. (*Home* 128-129)

Miss Ethel and the other women, in their role of interveners, will not say such words to Cee either, because they do not cuddle or tolerate self-absorbed unhappiness, they are tangible forms of what Morrison has called "mean love" ("French Students"). Nevertheless, as the "solid place, the wholesome place" they represent in the African-American community ("French Students"), they heal and take care of Cee, so the girl can empower herself and stop being influenced by the subjugating discourses of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. "You free," Miss Ethel tells Cee. "Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery" (*Home* 126). Interestingly, Lenore has by now suffered a stroke that has provoked in her a "speech difficulty" (137), a fact which symbolizes that Lenore's Westernized discourse is not going to affect Cee as long as she stays in a neighborhood of mentoring citizens who may not caress her, but are not going to hurt her either.

Miss Ethel's community of female interveners/activists/mentors is similar to movements of resistance that have formed around the world in countries like India, Brazil or Kenya. Often lead by women, these movements are "organized at grassroots level," Robert Young contends, and are "dedicated to the ending of inequality and injustice" and "the recognition of the principle of cultural, social, and ecological diversity" (108). Morrison points at the diversity of Miss Ethel's companions with these words: "[E]ach of her nurses was markedly different from the others in looks, dress, manner of speech, food and medical preferences" (123).

Contrary to the segregationist ethos that ran rampant in the greater society in the 1950s, in this postcolonial community difference does not entail discord, exclusion is absent and they are "generous to strangers," even to those "running from the law" (46). It is, like the title of the book signals, "home": a safe place, a nurturing place, a place where nobody is going "to degrade or destroy you" (118).

In their effort to eradicate injustices, these postcolonial communities of women make sure they do not reverse the colonial and patriarchal stereotypes that have been subjugating them. We saw before how Lenore, with her list of colonizing attitudes, oppressed poor women and children. She is an embodiment of the discourses of control Foucault talks about. However, Miss Ethel and the other women are "nothing like Lenore" (123), that is, they do not subjugate anybody, not even those who subjugate them. On the contrary, they bring Lenore "plates of food, [sweep] the floors, [wash] her linen" (92). Similarly, Frank, a patriarchal figure, is not despised either. Men are not rejected, but, interestingly, they are not allowed to interfere with the female world in fear that their maleness could ruin it (119). They are believed to have an "evil mind-set" (120), that is, a propensity to control.[29] If these women are to keep their freedom intact, their individuality, their agency, men can be around, but not too close. An empowered Cee may need Frank for company, but not for stifling protection, and as a result, Cee "want[s] to be the person who would never again need rescue" (129).

Female postcolonial communities of women can be understood as ecofeminist, in part due to the bonds of mutual nurturance they establish between women, nature and culture. These movements often establish cooperatives that

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[29] Similarly, Robert Young argues that men from Indian local economies "had been ideologically colonized by the short-term commercial values of the market place, trying to take control of nature just as patriarchy tries to control women" (*Postcolonialism* 102).

sustain local economies and respect both the human being and the environment. Ecofeminism is precisely "the critical approach that examines the relationship between feminism and ecology" (García-Lorenzo 302) and "see[s] aggression against the Earth as a parallel to male aggression against women" (Guerin et al. 141). In *Home*, the quilting center in Miss Ethel's house is very suggestive in this respect since, like a Third World small cooperative, it aims at fighting corporate capitalism from below. Instead of buying new blankets, they make their own, a practice that resembles one of the ways Mahatma Gandhi used to fight for India's independence. This gives the unemployed Cee, who just got out from a terrible situation, something useful to do and the profits made from quilt-making will help pay the electricity and water bills of the siblings' rented house (127).[30] Furthermore, like sculpting, painting or writing, quilting is a creative endeavor: it is food for the soul, a gateway to free the spirit. Besides, it represents Cee's healing process from a deeply traumatic past since that depressing, broken-body state she felt before (54) is now whole, a "newly steady self, confident, cheerful and occupied" (135).

Along with making their own blankets the way their mothers taught them (122), these women operate through traditional methods of producing and consuming that make them prototypes of sustainable ecologies that minimize human impact on the planet. In the houses of the women who cure Cee "[t]here [is] no excess in their gardens because they [share] everything. There [is] no trash or

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[30] The interrupters point at the lack of jobs and opportunities for poor, black youngsters as a big problem. "Once you get out of prison, you can't find a job, you get discouraged, 'Should I go back to doing the shit I used to do?'" (*The Interrupters*). While not having a job creates a feeling of despair in the individual, having one creates pride and hope for the future. "I got a job," says one these youngsters. "All I used to hear: 'You're a class x felon. You can't do nothing.' I'm doing something" (*The Interrupters*). Similarly, quilt-making may not seem like a great job, but for Cee it is and that is why she is eager for her first quilt to turn "out to be [some] good" so it can be selected by Miss Johnson and be "market[ed] [...] to tourists" (127).

garbage in their homes because they ha[ve] a use for everything" (123). As if a symbiotic connection was established between the female and the natural worlds, Robert Young contends that this kind of "women [possess] repositories of intimate knowledge […] of the medicinal and nutritional value of a wide variety of plants" (102). It is an "unauthorized knowledge," Young further maintains, that "empowers a politics of resistance" (106). Women like Miss Ethel show scorn for the medical industry and their prescriptive curative methods; as exemplified in Cee, they know male doctors have always exploited the bodies of African-American women, treating them like guinea pigs, or as they put it, "slop jar[s]," "mule[s]," "priv[ies]" or "trash" (122). That is why when it comes to healing a person they will not use any drug, but natural medicines such as "calamus root" (119) or "the blazing sun" (124), i.e., the fundamental constituents of the world (earth, water, air and fire).

Miss Ethel and her mentees—Cee among them—constitute a type of black womanhood that is fluid and uncontained. It is a mixture of what Morrison has called the Old World Black woman and the New World black woman. If the former is a neighborhood woman who can "cook and sew and nurture and manage," the latter is a "very independent, very fierce, artist[ic]" woman (Moyers). Disliking "those either/or scenarios," Morrison believes that these two types of women need each other and that the in-betweenness that develops constitutes "an ideal space for African-American women to inhabit" (Moyers). That is why Lily, for instance, inherits "sewing skills" from her mother (an Old World black woman), but unlike other members of her generation, she does not reject them (*Home* 71). The young woman does not succumb to either Western ideals of consumerism or to feminist ones which may think sewing to be a stereotypical

occupation relegated to women by patriarchy (New World black woman). She is a mixture of both strands of womanhood and uses these sewing skills to create original "bridal veil[s] [and] linen tablecloth[s]" which one day may turn her into a "costume designer" (78). Cee, too, is a compound of both traditional and modern black feminine worlds; while from the first she has learned the old art of quilt-making, the second teaches her that sewing can be an activity that allows for creative expression and can be used to gain some financial independence. Furthermore, she also knows how to pick, gather and can: a domestic art that resists market-oriented practices, such as using a refrigerator to preserve food (127). She is also the ultimate mentor, in the sense that, once she is healed from her trauma, she now has the responsibility to heal others. Symbolically, she is going to provide nurture, company and advice to her brother as the last words of the novel suggest: "Come on, brother. Let's go home" (147).[31]

The resoluteness of the last line "Come on, brother. Let's go home" takes us back full circle to the uncertainty of the first lines of the novel: "Whose house is this? / It's not mine." "Home" could consequently be interpreted as an ambivalent term that pulls in opposite directions; on the one hand, it is a place one has already arrived at and therefore has become a possibility, while on the other it is still the place one is looking for, that is, an impossibility. This impossibility is in consonance with Morrison's definition of "home" as an "idea [...] fraught with yearning, [...] a romantic place, [...] a kind of utopia, just out of reach" (Crom).

[31] If there is a mentor figure par excellence in Morrison's oeuvre that is without doubt Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, in *Beloved*. In a memorable speech that has been labeled as "self-emancipation [or] autogenesis" (Weinstein 148), the old priestess encourages other ex slaves to love their flesh, their hands, their eyes, their heart, because "[y]onder, [that is, in the slave plantation], they do not love [it]. They despise it. [...] [T]hey flay it, [...] use, tie, bind, chop off and leave [it] empty" (82). These words remind us somehow of the ones that Miss Ethel uses with Cee, since both aim at empowering with nurturing love those who were once terribly damaged by white culture.

The concept of "home," then, seems inconclusive and ungraspable; however, Gina Wisker suggests that since these diasporic, colonized subjects "liv[e] somehow out of place in a new culture, [they] mak[e] their own versions of it, their own version of self, while still retaining versions of the home culture" (92). This assertion is perfectly applicable to *Home* as a novel, written in English in America, which is also extremely aware of African-American artistic qualities—its traditions, its folklore and its vernacular—that tie it back to the African roots of its characters. Similarly, the "home" that Lily and Cee are going to build is an embodiment of that mixture of black womanhood Morrison talks about: it is full of aspirations in the modern world of creative competition, while at the same time it still carries an ancestral knowledge of needlework that has been passed on from one generation to the other.

Even though the concept of "home," we may say, effaces and slips fixity due to its unreachable condition, Lotus still represents the mental state "one acquire[s] when [one is] in a place where [one is] safe [...] and people will help" each other (Crom). In the last line of the novel, Cee might be telling Frank to go to the milieu "of sanctuary, belonging and identity" Lotus has developed into (Beaulieu 161); in fact, a healed Cee has told Miss Ethel before that she is "going nowhere [because here] is where [she] belong[s]" (126). Moreover, "home," Morrison has said, "is where the memory of the self dwells. Whether those memories spawn or shrivel determines who [you] are and determines what [you] may become" (qtd. in Schreiber 160). Undoubtedly Frank's traumatic memories of the first burial of the victim of racism or of his buddies being killed have been recurrent throughout the novel, as have been certain healing recollections of Cee as a feeble girl who needed his protection, of her first word being "Fwank" or of "her

baby teeth, [...] his lucky marbles and [a] broken watch [he] found on the riverbank" (35). Nevertheless, it might be argued that while the haunted memories ignited by his PTSD shrivel as he comes to the end of his journey, the good memories associated with his sister spawn. The shriveling of the former is pointed at in the novel when Frank approaches Lotus since "he'd had [...] no ghosts or nightmares for two days" (106) and also at the end, when he does not see the man in the zoot suit that used to haunt him. The spawning of the latter, that is, of the appeasing memories, is going to be found in the embracing colorful flowers of Lotus gardens, its music and its smells (117-118), and in Frank's parents' house where he is not only going to find his sister's actual milk teeth, the marbles or the watch, but also her version of "Mama's fry-pan bread" (126). The smell of our mothers' cooking, the teeth we lost or the toys we played with when we were children are undoubtedly symbols of rootedness and belonging because home is also "a place reflective of yearnings and memories" aiding in the healing of trauma (Beaulieu 163).

Conclusion: Ointment for the Wounds

Distinguished by gender, the alleviation of the wounds inflicted by colonialism entails a combination of things. For Cee Money, it means having her mind decolonized and her agency empowered with nurturing words in a home-like space, where she feels safe and welcomed. It also involves the provision of old and new curative strategies by the female members of the community that Cee has to develop to help herself and others. Furthermore, it includes learning how to live with the trauma of having had her womb mutilated and with the ghost of the unborn child who will, in its turn, materialize. For Frank Money, healing requires him to work through his PTSD-induced nightmares in the privileged narrative space he is endowed with and to ultimately redress his crime. It consequently results in the redemptive act of understanding that manhood does not necessarily equate with brutality, since one can always be a man and feel smart and dignified without resorting to violence. All of the above seem to point towards getting that permanent cure, the one "beyond human power," Miss Ethel talks about (124). Notwithstanding, a permanent cure for black Americans—like the concept of "home"—may simply be a chimera that is never fully achieved since the wounds of trauma always run the risk of reopening in the characters' memories or in the hands of capricious colonizers.

> The sun, having sucked away the blue from the sky, loitered there in a white heaven, menacing Lotus, torturing its landscape, but failing, failing, constantly failing to silence it: children still laughed, ran, shouted their games; women sang in their backyards while pinning wet sheets on clotheslines. (117)

In either case, these words ring full of hope and help summarize what seem to be Morrison's intentions in writing *Home*. The torturing sun, as the symbol of white supremacy, has been oppressing individuals with a different skin color for

centuries, both in the United States and abroad. Supremacists used physical force, threats, segregationist laws and stereotypical language to subjugate these peoples; however, in the end, they were unsuccessful in deadening the laughter of their vernacular or the rhythms of their music. No matter how big the Empire becomes, there will always be individuals that challenge its discourse of control and unveil its true intentions, as postcolonial writers, in their united efforts to raise the voices of the dispossessed, strive to do. *Home* is therefore possibility. *Home* is coming to terms. *Home* is ointment for the wounds.

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