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Toni Morrison's *Home*: A Portrayal of the 1950s for African Americans

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Abstract

This final degree dissertation focuses on the depiction of the 1950s in the United States portrayed in the novel *Home*, published by Toni Morrison in 2012. The paper provides a comparison and contrast between two different societies, the white population, of which there is more information about, and the black population, which is not always mentioned in mainstream history books. The main aim of this project is to analyze some of the events that took place at that moment and demonstrate that actually there were two distinct societies, and therefore, two different ways of seeing the same nation.

To reach the key point of my dissertation I have worked on different historical approaches to the period of the 1950s; I have also read some articles about the novel and watched some interview videos of Toni Morrison where she explains the main issues of her novel *Home*. My dissertation is divided into four parts; after the introduction, I offer a general introduction of the topic, where I talk about the socio-cultural context of the 1950s. Then the author, Toni Morrison, is introduced, as well as her novel and its structure. This section is followed by a thorough analysis of the text, in which the topics of discrimination, segregation, racism, medical experimentations and gender relation have been analyzed. Finally, I have made a reflection on the idea of “home” in the novel, what Morrison wanted to portray with it and why she could have chosen this title for the book.

In the conclusion, I go over the most important events that took place in the period of the 1950s, in order to complete my approach to that other part of American society. I have tried to demonstrate that, for Toni Morrison, the 1950s were not those glorious years for everybody, as some people had more opportunities than others, and in this case African American people were the ones who suffered racism and segregation.

Keywords: African Americans; 1950s; racism; segregation; Toni Morrison

1. Introduction

In my final degree dissertation, I have studied the most important aspects of the 1950s in the United States of America. Many historians have described this period as one where an "affluent society," dominated the nation, something that Toni Morrison has questioned. She has argued this idea in her novel *Home*, published in 2012, and my paper is focused on this book, where I have presented various topics of that period that are mentioned in the novel and I have provided some examples to reinforce the idea that she wanted to portray.

I have always felt attracted to this kind of themes that have to do with racism and its consequences for the African American population. That is why I decided to choose this topic for my dissertation after exposing it to my tutor. Since the very beginning of these four years degree, I have been very interested in race issues, and I have always known what I wanted to do at the end of the degree: to investigate more about this topic and to write about it. Moreover, in the last year, we studied the author Toni Morrison, who is a well-known writer; I liked her book, *Song of Solomon*, so much, that I decided to choose one of her narratives for my final paper, because her books are focused on racial and discrimination issues. Also, I found interesting to do my research on one of her latest novels, because not so many people have made an investigation on it yet. However, I have made my best to find information or reviews about the novel.

The aim of this study is to present another vision of the 1950s; I have analyzed the image of poverty, racial discrimination, and the image of the suffering of those people who went to the Korean War and its consequences. I have made the comparison between the affluent society that was considered to be only for whites and the segregated society that was considered to be for black people. The US was a nation totally divided in the same period, where people of different skin color were not treated as equals. In order to do this, *Home* has been analyzed using historical records that emphasize all the events presented in the story, supporting the idea that the 50s were not the same for everyone.

This dissertation is structured in four parts, the two main sections are divided into sub-sections and then, they are followed by the conclusion and the list of works cited. After the introduction, it deals with the socio-historical context of the novel, focusing on the 1950s. It is divided in two parts, the first part deals with the situation the white population was enjoying

at that time, and the second part deals with the situation of the black population, who were suffering segregation. Here it is explained how the 1950s affected differently white people and black people, and this is reinforced by some relevant examples that took place in the history of the United States.

The second main part is divided into six sections where I have briefly introduced the author of the book, Toni Morrison, pointing out the most important aspects of her life and her notorious novels. I have also talked about the novel *Home*, the one that I have worked on, and the way she has structured it. In addition, I have talked about one of her most important approaches when she writes a novel, the workings of “memory.” Following this, the other five sections are concentrated in the analysis of the novel; firstly I have analyzed segregation and racism in the book, where it is portrayed some of the most important problems that African Americans had in the 50s, just because of their skin color. Secondly, it is studied how the people who went to war suffered mental problems, for all the pain that they endured during those years. Thirdly, I have also analyzed how the novel presents the medical experimentations that took place at that time and even before, something terrible that white doctors used to do with people who were considered inferiors to them, in this case Afro-Americans. In the fourth section I have talked about gender relations in *Home*, how not only discrimination by means of race is present in the novel, but also discrimination by means of gender. And I conclude this analysis of the book reflecting about the idea of “home,” considering what Toni Morrison wanted to show with this significant title and its meaning.

Finally, the last parts of my dissertation are the conclusion and the list of works cited. In the conclusion, I reinforce the idea that I wanted to achieve with this project, that is to present the other side of the 1950s, in which I have gathered the most important ideas of the sections that I have previously mentioned. I have tried to demonstrate that, for Toni Morrison, the idea of an affluent society associated to the 1950s should be revised, and that is what she does in her novel: to show that some people had more opportunities than others, and in this case African American people were the ones who suffered racism and segregation.

2. The USA in the 1950s: An Affluent Society?

The United States of America has become one of the most important countries in the world, especially after the Second World War (1939-1945). Its notorious victory in the war has placed the nation as the major global power. This point is argued by Howard Zinn who states, “The war not only put the United States in a position to dominate much of the world; it created conditions for effective control at home” (425). At the beginning, American people had to face the postwar crisis, but little by little American society was growing economically and evolving. Harry S. Truman (1945-1953), by the time the president of the United States of America, created a number of domestic programs, which benefited the population; this was called the “Fair Deal”. According to G.D. Moss, “The Fair Deal included controlling prices, improving civil rights, expanding public housing, raising the minimum wage, expanding Social Security” (328). Some of the measures of the Fair Deal are also explained by Alan Brinkley in his book, *The Unfinished Nation*: “Congress raised the legal minimum wage from 40 cents to 75 cents an hour. It approved an important expansion of the Social Security system, increasing benefits by 75 percent and extending them to 10 million additional people” (770). These kinds of helpful changes and some others made the 1950s in America an affluent society. But, as I will show in the following section, these changes were more helpful for some people and less helpful for others.

2.1. White Population in the 1950s

Throughout the 1950s, American white people underwent some changes in their lives. These changes were good, except the one that happened at the beginning of 1950: the outbreak of Korean War (1950-1953) with the participation of many American men. Truman ordered many men to go and fight on the side of South Korea, and also to fight the communism that existed in North Korea with the presence of the Soviet Union, so that communism would not spread in the south. This war brought many new jobs for American soldiers, nurses, etc. because Truman needed many soldiers to fight for his ideals in Asia. The U.S. Army expanded to 3.6 million men, six times its size when the Korean War began (Moss 313). And not only that, but also “It lasted three years and involved over 3 million U.S. military personnel” (Moss 315). Therefore, on the one hand, it was good for Americans because they had new jobs, new opportunities and after the war the veterans had their pay, but on the other hand it brought misery and trauma, as many people died or were injured. As Moss points out

in his book, “About 54,000 Americans died in Korea, and other 150,000 were wounded. [...] Returning Korean veterans melted into society to become part of the 1950s 'silent generation” (315).

After the Korean War, a new president took command of the United States government. He was the Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), who broke up with several years of democratic government and established a more conservative one. He changed the way the economy worked at that time and introduced a new trading system, which benefited white Americans. He gave more authority and rights to the private companies than to the public ones, he chose to have more private firms on his side and do a system of Laissez faire, free market. This contributed to the growth of the economy after the Korean War. As Brinkley has stated, “Between 1945 and 1960, the gross national product grew by 260 percent, from \$200 billion to over \$500 billion” (786). The industries expanded their commerce and began to be one of the basic pillars of the American population’s economy. According to Moss, “Median wages in manufacturing industries rose 60 percent, and median family income rose from \$3,000 to \$5,700 during that same period” (334). Because of this, the standards of living of white middle classes were better than before, now they could spend more money on what they wanted.

Following the situation that we have mentioned above, families decided to have more children. Before this period, they could not have so many children because they did not have the way of raising them in a comfortable environment, as the Second World War was not the ideal moment to have children because there was want of the basic goods. Consequently, after the war and in the 50s the so-called “baby boom” started. Now that people had more money and a better way of life, they made the decision of having more kids. This helped the growth of the economy because if they had more people in the country they would have more demand, because there would be more consumers. If we consider figures, they are significant: “The American population grew from 153 million in 1950 to 179 million in 1969. In 1957, 4,3 million births were recorded, the highest one-year total in American history” (Moss 334), and we can also say that because there were more people in the country, more schools and institutions were needed, and they constructed them in the new suburban communities. Furthermore, this new generation also helped the housing industry. Two of the most important changes for white working class families in this American affluent society can be summarized in the following points:

Firstly, people were able to buy a house in the suburbs, an individual one, bigger than the one they had before and with much better accommodations, and in a better place next to the cities where they worked. Accordingly, one of the reasons why they moved from their place of birth or the cities was because the suburbs were better houses closer to the cities and they did not have to live in a continuous pollution. Another reason why they bought houses in the suburbs is because they could raise all the children that they had with more security and in what they thought was a private place because they did not want black people around them like in the cities. In fact, the places that were left by whites in the cities became “ghettos” for African Americans. On account of this, we have to say that the suburban areas were the perfect areas for white middle class; Brinkley emphasizes this idea when he says, “Another factor motivating white Americans to move to the suburbs was race. Most suburbs were restricted to white inhabitants -both because relatively few African Americans could afford to live in them and because formal and informal barriers kept even prosperous blacks out of all but a few” (795, 796).

The second point was the raise of the automobile industry; in fact, “the manufacture of automobiles remained the most important U.S. industry during the 1950s. New car and truck sales averaged 7 million units annually during that decade” (Moss 335). Many people now had to buy cars because they had to move from the suburbs to their place of work in the city, and not only that, but also white women used the car to go to the shopping centers and do their stuff as more independent women. We can also say that they used their cars to spend their summer vacations to go somewhere else in the country, as now they could move further with it, and not like they did before. From the economic point of view, these two important changes helped this society to grow rapidly.

Other examples of how the white people in the 50s had a better lifestyle and their economy was growing constantly are the development of antibacterial drugs, the discovery of the Penicillin and the development of vaccines which helped to protect people from both bacterial and viral diseases (Brinkley 789). Then, we must talk about the major development in electronic technology, and the most important one is the development of the color television in New Jersey. Besides, we have the computer technology, which for the first time in the 50s began to have commercial functions (Brinkley 791).

To sum up, we can say that the 50s were glorious years for American population, mostly for white people. Due to the growth of their salaries they could buy more things and become more consumerist, as well as they could also have a better life. As Brinkley has said: “At the center of middle-class culture in the 1950s was a growing absorption with consumer goods as a result of increased prosperity” (795).

2.2 African American Population in the 1950s

In the same early years of the 1950s, the Truman administration tried to give more rights to African American people with the recommendation that “there be a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, that Congress pass laws against lynching and to stop voting discrimination, and suggested new laws to end racial discrimination in jobs” (Zinn 449). We can see a first step in the progress in their intentions for equality in search of a united nation, but not all the following presidents had the same intentions. As Franklin and Moss, Jr have stated, “The report, ‘To Secure These Rights’, strongly denounced the denial of civil rights to some Americans, and it called for a positive program to strengthen civil rights including ‘the elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life’” (506).

The Truman government also gave more opportunities to black people to have jobs and also to work for the state. For example, during the Korean War, the same way they did during the Second World War but in a more extended way, African American people and white people could fight together for the sake of the United States and capitalism against communism. According to Franklin and Moss Jr, between May and August 1951 the extent of integration in Korea jumped from 9 percent to 30 percent of troops in the field. A special army report declared that the integration of blacks had resulted in an overall gain for the army. At long last, black Americans had become a vital and integral part of the military pool of the nation (507). Furthermore, African Americans in the early 50s also had some rights that tried to integrate them into the society; for instance, they could have a public house: “In 1950, for example, there were 177 local housing projects open to families of all races and creed; in addition, nine states and eight cities forbade discrimination or segregation in public housing” (Franklin and Moss, Jr 507). The reaction of white people to this new status for black people was not very positive. They did not want black people to have the same opportunities that they had. White people started to kill black people, lynching them or threatening them.

Franklin and Moss Jr have accounted how, “On the job, white workers frequently threatened to quit if black were employed or upgraded”; besides, “African Americans who sought to improve their own status were frequently singled out for attack” (511).

We can say that everything was not so good for all African Americans, the Truman government tried to change these issues but just few people benefited from it. There was still poverty, and much more in the southern states, where many rural Americans, such as sharecroppers or tenant farmers, mostly blacks, “continued to live at or below subsistence levels [...] in part because of the development of synthetic fibers that reduced demand for cotton. In fact two-thirds of the cotton acreage went out of production between 1930 and 1960” (Brinkley 803). Due to this, the consequence was that many black people had to move from their rural places to the cities where they had to live in “ghettos,” in a continuous poverty because the laws against discrimination were not all implemented. According to Brinkley, “More than 3 million black men and women moved from the South to northern cities between 1940 and 1960” (804).

They also had more problems, since when president Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) took charge of the United States, the rights of African Americans declined markedly; Willi Paul Adams has pointed out in his book, *Los Estados Unidos de América* that “Eisenhower se negó a seguir el ejemplo de Truman y a actuar enérgicamente como presidente para solucionar el problema racial” and he has also stated that Eisenhower “no estaba en absoluto convencido de que las leyes pudieran modificar las actitudes y los prejuicios de los hombres” (361). In this period, whites still did not want black people in their schools, in the same restaurants, and also in the same seats on the buses, everything had to be separate from blacks, so white people were fighting against desegregation. We can see a huge resistance to this improvement of black people in one of the most important anti-black groups, that took its name from the most important group that fought for the rights of black people, the NAACP: this one was the National Association for the Advancement of White People, with national headquarters in Washington, D.C. This organization became discredited in 1954; however, we have to mention another anti-black group that was more effective in this period, this one was the White Citizens’ Councils, which a leading white Mississippi editor called the “Uptown Ku Klux Klans” (Franklin and Moss, Jr 512, 513). Up to this point, we

cannot forget to mention the case of Emmett Till¹, an African American teenager who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955, when he was only 14 years old, because he flirted with a white woman when he went to see his uncle in Mississippi. He travelled by himself from Chicago to Mississippi and then he met Carolyn Bryant, the white girl. When her husband discovered it, he tortured Till and then he shot him.

In the case of education, we can notice a huge gap between blacks and whites. Since 1896, the Supreme Court issued the *Plessy Decision* through which all schools were “separate but equal.” This means that all the institutions had to have the same opportunities and education for black people and for white people but in different schools, different classrooms and areas. Brinkley emphasizes this idea by saying that; “Plessy v. Ferguson decision [...] could provide African Americans with separate facilities as long the facilities were equal to those of whites” (805). Now, in the 50s, with the pressure of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) the Court had to change its own law. As Howard Zinn has pointed out in his book, “In 1954, the Court finally struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine that it had defended since the 1890s” (450). The new law was a result of the *Brown Decision*, and its main tenets can be summarized as follows:

The *Brown* decision unequivocally declared the segregation of public schools on the basis of race unconstitutional. The justice argued that school segregation inflicted unacceptable damage on those it affected, regardless of the relative quality of the separate schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren explained the unanimous opinion of his colleagues: “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” (Brinkley 805)

A year later, the Court announced the *Brown II* “to provide rules for implementing the 1954 order. It ruled that communities had to work to desegregate their schools ‘with all deliberate speed’” (Brinkley 805). But we can see that this decision was difficult to be successful because even in 1965, “ten years after the ‘all deliberate speed’ guideline, more than 75 percent of the schools districts in the South remained segregated” (Zinn 450).

In the case of the public services, like buses and restaurants this new decision helped the people to fight for their rights, and created new civil rights movements. We have one of the

¹ For more information on the case of Emmett Till, see *Emmett Till Biography*: <http://www.biography.com/people/emmett-till-507515>

most important reactions against discrimination in 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, with the case of Rosa Parks, an African-American who refused to sit in the back of the bus where black people were obliged to sit, the police arrested her and several movements started to take place in the States. One of the most important leaders of these movements against racism and discrimination was Martin Luther King who contributed with all his might in the struggle for the civil rights that are exposed in the United States Declaration of Independence, 1776.

In order to have a general idea about this second part, we have to say that people started to gain more rights as a result of these movements. One of the achievements was that “In 1955 the Interstate Commerce Commission decreed that all racial segregation on interstate trains and buses must end by January 10, 1956. The decree also applied to waiting rooms in railways and bus terminals” (Franklin and Moss, Jr 509). The 50s and the 60s were decades where many rebellions took place in the States and especially in the south, where African Americans protested for their rights and for a better future for them. However, even though they achieved very important rights and some integration in the society, nowadays they are still having some discrimination problems.

3. Toni Morrison's Home: A Portrayal of the 1950s for African Americans

3.1 Toni Morrison and her novel *Home*

The works by Toni Morrison have their own power, what she does in her novels is to write thinking about the real past. She tries to engage people making them think about questions of history, memory and trauma; as Jill Matus has stated, “If the African American writer’s responsibility is to assume the task of recovering the ‘presence and heartbeat of the black people’ in America, her novels take that task of recovery seriously, involving a reconstruction, revisioning and revisiting of the past” (2). She is a famous American novelist and professor who was born in 1931, at the beginning of the Great Depression, in Ohio. She is the only living American Nobel Prize for Literature; when she received the prize in 1993 she was the 8th woman, and also the first black woman, who had received it at the time.

She is the author of eleven novels to date; the most famous one is *Beloved* (1987), which has won many awards such as the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Her two latest novels in her carrier are *Home* (2012) and *God Help the Child* (2015). In addition, she has worked on literary criticism, social criticism, lyrics for musicals and operas, and we must add that she is very influential in many fields beyond literature. Moreover, each of her novels delves into a particular era, or sometimes a particular decade; as an example of this we have our novel, *Home*, of which she stated in an interview for *Interview Magazine* that she wanted to write a novel about the 1950s, which she designated “My Time.” She has also stated about the novel, “I was generally interested in talking the fluff and the veil and the flowers away from the ‘50s. Was that what it was really like? I thought. I mean, that was my time. I’m 81. So that was when I was a young, aggressive girl” (Bollen 2012). She wanted to talk about this because she thinks that there has been so much historical amnesia with respect to that era, particularly with regard to how difficult things were for African Americans.

She has also been consistently dedicated to the working of “memory,” how people remember and what they remember, and what gets incorporated into the official history. According to Justine Tally and Adrienne L. Seward, when they talked about the title of their book *Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning*, this “connotes Morrison’s concern with the role of memory (and disremembering) in coming to terms with the difficult and violent past of African Americans in the United States. Memories are themselves, as she has so effectively

shown us, meaningful” (16). In Morrison’s *Home*, we can find since the very beginning the concept of memory in which the male protagonist is trapped. The book starts in a mental hospital where this man is; he is always remembering his past, what he did when he was young and what he did in the Korean War. His memories are not so good; the only good memories are the ones that come when he is next to a girl as for example his ex-girlfriend and his sister. And also when he talks about his friends before they died in the war. In her review of *Home*, Sarah Churchwell criticizes the way Morrison developed the story by saying, “*Home* barely begins before it ends; just when the reader expects the story to kick in to gear, as Frank arrives back in Georgia and finds Cee, Morrison seems to lose interest.” I agree with Churchwell's opinion about the novel; it is very short and the reader might want to read more about how the protagonist achieves his goals and what he does to relieve his pain and his trauma with more detail.

In her novel *Home*, Toni Morrison tells the story of a black veteran who had recently returned from the Korean War (1950-1953), the main protagonist, Frank Money. After the war, once back in the United States he received a letter, which said that, his beloved sister, Cee, was in danger and could die at any moment in the hands of a white doctor because he was practicing medical experimentations with her. He started his journey from a hospital in Seattle all the way to Georgia where his sister Cee was, and where they were born. On his way home, Frank has to face his own struggles with his past and the traumatic experiences in the war, and at the same time that he discovers that nothing has changed in the 1950s in the United States: violence, discrimination and segregation are still present. He has to deal with many of the racial and segregation problems on his way home. He also has to deal with the concept of "home," as he does not feel Lotus (Georgia) as his home.

The structure that Morrison uses in her book *Home* is very simple but at the same time it has much to talk about. It is a very short novel with seventeen chapters; Morrison separates these chapters in an experimental way. We have two narrators in the novel, in first instance, we have Frank Money, the protagonist who speaks in first person, and he is the one who opens the book. Frank narrates his own story, his own memories and he also argues with the other narrator, who speaks in the third person. They have different points of view about reality; they see the same story in a different way, one in a more positive way and the other one in a more negative way. This would be the case of Frank Money; “*Don’t paint me as*

some enthusiastic here. I had to go but I dreaded it" (84). When he speaks the passages are italicized, so that the reader can clearly see who the one who speaks is.

The second narrator tells the story in third person; readers do not get to know who is the one who is speaking, but it seems to know the whole story perfectly; however, something is missing in this narrator's passages, as Frank says, "Describe that if you know how" (41). As we can see, they both have different opinions when they are talking about the same thing. These passages are written with normal typography and they are much longer, different from the italics used when Frank is speaking. Thereby, the chapters are interspersed, one is written by Frank and the following one by the other narrator. The book starts with Frank Money speaking and it ends with him too.

3.2 Segregation and Racism

The topics of segregation and racism are implicit in the novel and they are present as key elements that surround the whole story and help to develop it. Since the very beginning we can see how racism surrounds the African American characters. In those years, lynching black people was common; this lynching action had not started in the twentieth-century, but long before. White foremen used to treat their black workers badly and treat them as slaves. They were hung, burnt or tortured. According to Franklin and Moss Jr, "One of the rapidly growing elements in the population was the slave. In 1790 there were less than 700,000 slaves. By 1830 there were more than 2 million" (139). In the twentieth-century we can still find lynching episodes as for example the one that happened with Emmett Till, the boy who was brutally murdered by a white person in 1955. In *Home* we can see how a group of white people tortured a black man and buried the body, "We saw them pull a body from a wheelbarrow and throw it into a hole already waiting [...] when she saw that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her body began to shake" (4). The protagonist of the novel and his sister watched this scene with fear, and he remembered that moment of his childhood.

Another example of lynching in *Home* is when the narrator is talking about the time when a lot of African Americans had to move from their native town, from their houses, to another place in the years of the Great Depression. Whites gave them twenty-four hours to leave their houses or they would "die" (10). So, the narrator explains how a "man named

Crawford sat on his porch steps and refused to vacate. [...] Just after dawn at the twenty-four hour he was beaten to death [...] Mr. Crawford's eyes had been carved out" (10). As it is suggested in the novel, this lynching could have been done by the Ku Klux Klan: "Yet, in spite of the treats from men, both hooded and not" (10). Furthermore, we can see that when Frank is talking to Billy at Bookers, a bar only for black people, they start talking about their memories, back in 1938, where the waitress of the bar told him; "we hid in an abandoned house for half a year" and Frank asked her, "Hid from what? White sheets?" (28); she answers that they were not hiding from the white sheets, but from "the rent man" to which Frank tells her that it is the "Same thing" (28). With these examples we can see that the lynching episodes on African Americans are present in the novel and not only in the nineteenth century, but also in the twentieth century.

Following this line, Billy, a black man who helps Frank in his way home, introduces his son, Thomas, and his wife to Frank; Frank could see that Thomas had no right hand, and he asked why, and Billy answered; "Drive-by cop,' he said. 'He had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk pointing it. Some redneck rookie thought his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops'" (31). This action in the novel takes place at the beginning of the 1950s, when the child was 8 years old and now he is 11, after the return of Frank from the Korean War. Lynching or the ill treatment of black people by white people was something common in the history of the United States, and this is exposed in the novel: "Cops shoot anything they want. This here's a mob city" (31).

Racism does not always end in lynching but this does not mean it is not harmful to the sufferer, in this case the African Americans. Segregation was the consequence of the racist ideas that white people had. In the 50s, the government of Truman tried to put an end to this racial issue, but the government could not eradicate it completely, and one of the most important examples was the one that happened in Alabama, Montgomery, in 1955 in which Rosa Parks "explained why she refused to obey the Montgomery law providing for segregation on city buses, why she decided to sit down in the 'white' section of the bus" (Zinn 450):

Well, in the first place, I had been working all day on the job. I was quite tired after spending a full day working. I handle and work on clothing that white people wear. That didn't come in my mind but this is what I wanted to know: when and how would we ever determine our rights as human beings... It just happened that the driver made a demand and I just didn't feel like obeying his demand. He called a policeman and I was arrested and placed to jail... (Zinn 451)

The other remarkable example of segregation by means of racism is the one that happened at the Negro College in Greensboro, North Carolina, where a group of people decided to sit down at the Woolworth's lunch counter where only whites could sit to eat. White people got angry and started the revolts against blacks. Sit-ins were spread all over the southern states, and in Atlanta a black woman called Ruby D. Smith did the same in a restaurant and she explained; "I went through the food line in the restaurant at the State Capitol with six students, but when we got to the cashier she wouldn't take our money...The Lieutenant-Governor came down and told us to leave. We didn't and went to the country jail" (qtd. in Zinn 452). Segregation is seen throughout the novel *Home*, as for instance when the Reverend Locke told Frank Money, "'You'll be grateful for every bite since you won't be able to sit down at any bus stop counter. Listen here, you from Georgia and you have 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. Custom is just as real as law and can be just a dangerous'" (18-19). Here, we can see that even people in the North had the same prejudices and they did not want black people around.

On his way home, Frank had to sit at the back of the train, in the last seats, following the instructions of the Reverend Locke. In Portland, Frank met another Reverend whose name was Jessie Maynard, this one gave Frank some helpful information about the places where he should go in his journey, and how he had to behave, according to Green's travelers' book (22). *The Negro Travelers Green Book* was a travel guide series published from 1936 to 1964 until the Civil Rights Act was passed by Victor H. Green. As Maria Goodavage has pointed out, this book "welcomed blacks during a time when segregation and Jim Crow Laws often made travel difficult -and sometimes dangerous. *The Green Book* became very popular, with 15,000 copies sold per edition in its heyday. It was a necessary part of road trips for many families." Besides, Goodavage also mentions that Wendell P. Alstom commented that "*The Green Book*, with its list of hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and various other services can most certainly help to solve your travel problems, [...] To save

the travelers of his race as many difficulties and embarrassments as possible.” One more time, we can see that segregation was at its highest point when the story takes place; Frank had to use the instructions of the book if he wanted to have a safe trip to Georgia. Also, in his way home, in Chevron station, he wanted to go to the bathroom and he found that a “sign on the door stopped him” (23). This is another instance of segregation in the 50s in the United States.

Racism is also seen in the moment when Frank’s girlfriend, Lily, wanted to buy a house; she had money because she had worked a lot to get it. She worked as a seamstress in a theater and then she worked as a dry cleaner at Wang’s Heavenly Palace, “she had added enough to what her parents left her to leave the rooming house and put down payment on a house of her own” (72). But at the moment when she wanted to buy a house for her own the woman at the agency told her that she could not buy any house, and she did not tell her that it was due to her skin color but she told her that there were some “restrictions” (73). And she pointed out an underlined passage that says: “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). In this example we can observe that not only African Americans were discriminated but any person of different race than white people.

In *Interview Magazine*, Toni Morrison explained that she decided to write about the 50s because she thinks that it was a decade in which “somebody was hiding something- and by somebody, I mean the narrative of the country, which was so aggressively happy. Postwar, everybody was making money, and the comedies were wonderful... And I kept thinking that kind of insistence, there is something fake about it. So I began to think about what it was like for me, my perception at that time.” But Churchwell’s review of the novel for *The Guardian* holds another point of view about Toni Morrison’s writing: “Generational legacies, hauntings, ghosts, and the persistent effects of racism and sexism are Morrison's enduring themes: they are big ones. But her novels about them are getting smaller, in every sense; she seems to be losing patience with her own stories.” Again, Churchwell seems to imply that Toni Morrison seems to be more tired of writing with her last novels, and that is why her books are very short and it looks as if she does not want to focus on all of the details.

3.3 Korean War and its Consequences

The African American Frank Money, the protagonist of *Home*, has been in the Korean War (1950-1953), and at the time the story is told he has spent a whole year in Fort Lawton², Seattle, where “he disembarked” (15) as a veteran. That year he met a girl called Lily who was in love with him, but Lily got tired of his behavior, his attitude towards life and she also felt that he did not share his dreams with her. Frank Money, at the same time, was going through a very bad moment; his traumatic experiences in the war had affected him in many ways. Like many other war veterans, he was suffering what is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); he had to face many problems at the war such as killing people, or seeing his dear friends dying. Toni Morrison has confessed, in *Interview Magazine*, her feelings about the 50s: “Then I thought about what was really going on. What was really going on was the Korean War. It was called a ‘police action’ then—never a war—even though 53,000 soldiers died.” Morrison is really concerned about those people who went to the war and who nobody remembers. That is why she wanted to portray Frank Money as an African American veteran who suffers and feels traumatized by his days in the war.

In the Korean War, as I have already mentioned, black soldiers and white soldiers could be together, with this I mean that the army was a desegregated institution, where blacks and whites were fighting for the same purpose. Howard Zinn has remarked how “Action on the race question was needed, not just to calm a black population at home emboldened by war promises, frustrated by the basic sameness of their condition. It was needed to present to the world a United States that could counter the continuous Communist thrust at the most flagrant failure of America society- the race question” (448). So, here we can see how this change was not only for a moral reason but also for an ideological reason; as Zinn has stated, “discrimination was costly to the country, wasteful of its talent” (449). In *Home*, Morrison supports this idea when the Reverend Locke says; “An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better” (18).

² Fort Lawton was a United States Army post; it was one of the most important ports of embarkation of soldiers and it was equipped with anti-aircraft missiles and radar in the 1950s. For more information on Fort Lawton, see: <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/historic-preservation/historic-districts/fort-lawton>

At the beginning of the novel, we find Frank Money in a mental hospital in Fort Lawton, he did not know the hospital, he did not even know what he was doing there and why they got him into that place, “Other than that B-29 roar, exactly what he was doing to attract police attention was long gone. He couldn’t explain it to himself, let alone to a gentle couple offering help. If he wasn’t in a fight was he peeing on the sidewalk? [...] ‘I must have been acting up’” (14-15). At the “crazy ward” (14), he was faking a state of a “semi-coma, like playing dead facedown in a muddy battlefield” (7) because he did not want more morphine in his body, he wanted to scape from there. He did not remember anything about why he was there, but he was full of pain, “everything reminded him of something loaded with pain” (8). He remembers his past in the war with “his homeboys”(8), which is really painful for him because he has lost them and he had not been able to help keep them alive. Another thing that keeps him in continuous restlessness and anxiety is the letter that he has received from a woman called Sarah about his sister, the person whom he loves the most: “Come fast. She be dead if you tarry” (8). All these facts made Frank lose control of his own being and to be uncomformable with himself.

During the first year after going back to the United States, he felt a little quieter with himself, without feeling much of the war ghosts that had been haunting him and tormenting him continually. This relaxed mood was thanks to the figure of his partner Lily, but in the recent months his traumatic memories came back and tortured him again. These struggles affected his mind, he did not remember well the things that had happened to him but, “What he did remember was that as soon as Lily shut the door behind him, in spite of the seriousness of his mission his anxiety became unmanageable. He bought a few shots to steady himself for the long trip. When he left the bar, anxiety did leave but so did sanity. Back was the free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else’s fault” (15). Here, we can see that he does not feel well in any place, he feels dislocated, because he has been tormenting himself for something that he had done in Korea, and also because he has lost his friends, Mike and Stuff. But not only that but also now he has to face a new battlefield, his "mission" (15). Rescuing his sister becomes for him something restless and uncomfortable because he must return to Lotus, the place of his childhood which he hates deeply, “he didn’t want to go home without his ‘homeboys.’ He was far too alive to stand before Mike’s folks or Stuff’s. His easy breath and unscathed self would be an insult to them” (15). Here we can see how he tries to

stop the memories of his friends by not facing reality and confronting his own fears becomes a difficult task.

In one of the chapters in which Frank is narrating his own story, he says: *“Lotus, Georgia, is the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield. At least on the field there is a goal [...] In Lotus [...] there was no future. [...] There was no goal other than breathing, nothing to win [...] If not for my two friends I would have suffocated by the time I was twelve”* (83). He can only see his way to freedom when he thinks of his friends alive, of his childhood or when he thinks about his sister, in those times when he was always taking care of her. He also has his arguments with the narrator, and we can see that they both have different ideas about himself, about Money. Frank states, *“Only my sister in trouble could force me to even think about going in that direction. Don’t paint me as some enthusiastic here. I had to go but I dreaded it”* (84). As Tally and Seward have pointed out, “Frank dismisses the narrator’s ability to grasp his state, connecting the moral, emotional, visceral and material in the lines: *‘You don’t know what heat is until you cross the border from Texas to Louisiana in the summer. You can’t come up with words that catch it. Trees give up. Turtles cook in their shells. Describe that if you know how’*” (195).

One more example of how war has affected his mind is when he argues with the narrator about the conditions that he and the others had to suffer in a place like that: *“Korea. You can’t imagine it because you weren’t there. You can’t describe the bleak landscape because you never saw it. First let me tell you about the cold, [...] Korea cold hurts [...] Battle is scary, yeah, but it’s alive. Orders, gut-quickening, covering buddies, killing- clear, no deep thinking needed. [...] Worst of all is the solitary guard duty”* (93). Here we can see how his post-traumatic stress disorder comes from his experience in the war; in fact, the most important reason for his trauma comes from something horrible that he did during his solitary guards. There was a Korean girl who was always seeking for food on their trash, and Frank felt attracted to her, sexually abused the girl, and finally killed her. The way he narrates his atrocious action is very shocking for the reader. One day, the girl *“smiles, reaches for the soldier’s crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? [...] he blows her away”* (95). At this point in the story Frank has not said that that guard was himself and that this was what was torturing him, because he did not want to face the reality. He also said, still implying that it was not him who had abused the girl: *“I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill. Yum-yum”* (96). It is at the end of the book when

Frank confesses that he is guilty for the murder of the Korean girl, who had nothing to do with him and the war:

*I have to tell you the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me, I hid it from you because I hid it from me. I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame. [...]
I shot the Korean girl in her face.
I am the one she touched.
I am the one who saw her smile.
I am the one she said "Yum-yum" to.
I am the one she aroused.
A child. A wee little girl. (133)*

This terrible confession seems to have alleviated his trauma, and this happened because he just wanted to keep what had happened in the war as a secret. All this time he had felt miserable when he remembered his actions and he did not feel as a man: "*How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me? How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there? [...]* What type of man is that? And what type of man thinks he can ever in life pay the price of that orange?" (134). In her article for *The Guardian*, Churchwell has stated her disagreement of the end of the novel: "Frank's post-traumatic stress disorder disappears as easily, effecting one of the least satisfying 'redemptions' I can remember – and like most Americans, I am a sucker for redemption stories." As I commented above, it seems too easy to be relieved of the pain and trauma that Frank has suffered in the way it is presented in the novel. It is difficult to believe that just confessing his mistakes everything bad seems to disappear. In my opinion, as Churchwell says, something is missing in the novel: you cannot be cured of a trauma like the one he had during the war so easily.

3.4 Medical Experimentation

In the history of Europe we have heard about many events of experimentation with humans, we could find rates of these events since the beginning of the twentieth-century, even before. However, one of the most important moments when these experimentations took place was during the Second World War (1939-1945), as was the case in Auschwitz concentration camp with Doctor and SS physician Josef Mengele, nicknamed "The Angel Of Death." This doctor with other Nazi doctors did medical experimentations with the prisoners, women, and children during the Holocaust. Mengele committed many atrocities with the living bodies of

people as for example with children, who were exposed to surgeries performances without anesthesia. According to *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, “Mengele performed a broad range of agonizing and often lethal experiments with Jewish and Roman (“Gypsy”) twins, most of them children.” And not only that, but also he had become interested in utilizing twins for medical research through the German eugenicist von Verschuer, famous for experimenting with identical and fraternal twins “in order to trace the genetic origins of various diseases.” We can notice that the “white doctor,” Mengele, wanted to create the perfect white human being; therefore he had to use those people who were considered as inferiors to them like the Jewish and the Gypsy people. We could find a similarity between the actions of this doctor in the Second World War and the atrocities that were happening as well in the United States in the 50s and in the years before. In those years, white doctors also used to do experiments with those people who were considered inferior to them: in this case they were African Americans. As Brinkley has pointed out, “New scholarly theories argued that the introduction of immigrants into America society was diluting the purity of the nation’s racial stock. The spurious ‘science’ of eugenics spread the belief that human inequalities were hereditary and that immigration was contributing to the multiplication of the unfit” (575).

In the article by Karen Norrgard, “Human Testing, the Eugenics Movement, and IRBs” is stated that “according to a circa 1927 publication released by the ERO, the goal of eugenics was ‘to improve the natural, physical, mental, and temperamental qualities of the human family.’ And she gave some other explanations about the issue:

Regrettably, this sentiment manifested itself in a widespread effort to prevent individuals who were considered to be “unfit” from having children. Eugenics researchers believed that by studying large human families in which a certain undesirable trait appeared, they could demonstrate a genetic pattern of inheritance for the trait, and such findings would justify policies aimed at removing the related genes from the population. Unfortunately, such policies often included involuntary sterilization or institutionalization.

In the novel *Home* we can see some examples of these medical experimentations that took place in the 50s with Afro-American people. White doctors used to put into practice these social experiments with black people, those who white society did not want. That is why they did not want them to have more children. In one of her video interviews for Google, Toni

Morrison has said that she wanted to portray the other side of the 1950s, not only the post war, where people had more money and they “bought a lot of houses, and nice comfortable American Dream stuff” (1:27 min), but also “what was underneath there” (1:35 min) as for example the Korean War. She has also said that there has been “a lot of medical experimentation on helpless people, prisoners, army people” (2:31 min), and she mentions the case of what occurred with LSD during the Vietnam War: “LSD has been used on soldiers during the Vietnam War to see what effects it could have” (2:48 min). Therefore, in *Home*, she wanted to deal with those abuses of authority on helpless persons and army people, all African Americans.

Morrison wanted to portray this other side of American society and she used two relevant examples to support this idea, one of them at the mental hospital, and the other at Dr. Scott's house, who experiments with Frank's sister, Cee. Thus, at the beginning of the story, Frank escaped from the mental hospital and went to Reverend Locke's house, who told him about the hospital: “You lucky, Mr. Money. They sell a lot of bodies out of there. ‘ [...] ‘To the medical school. ‘ [...] ‘Doctors need to work on the dead poor so they can help the live rich’” (12). Here, we can see how the hospital for soldiers in Seattle was a hospital where they used to take the bodies of the soldiers; in this case the Afro- American soldiers, and do experimentations with them. The other example in the novel takes place when Cee, Frank's sister, went to work for a doctor called Beauregard Scott, as “a helper” (58). The doctor's wife explained to her that “He is more than a doctor, he is a scientist and conducts very important experimentations. His inventions help people” (60). Furthermore, Dr. Scott also has two daughters that have Cephalitis, “big heads” (63), and this problem made him decide to do some experimentation on people: “I guess that's why he invents things -he wants to help other folks” (63). However, he used Cee to do some experiments with her body and she almost died because of this; this is the reason why Frank wanted to go back to Georgia and rescue his sister: “Her boss back in Atlanta had done something- what, he didn't know- to her body and she was fighting a fever that wouldn't go down” (119).

Morrison points out that Sarah, the girl who worked in the Doctor's house, “knew he gave shots, had his patients drink medicines. He made up himself, and occasionally performed abortions on society ladies. [...] He got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them. Improving the speculum.” (113). Obviously, when Sarah saw that she sent a letter to Frank, the only relative that “Cee had an

address for” (113). With these two examples Morrison has brought up some other aspects of the American society in the 1950s, something that many historians have not talked about. Medical experimentations on African Americans are a clear example of racism and that is why Morrison wanted to portray them in her novel as a denunciation of those abuses.

3.5 Gender Relations in *Home*

I think it is interesting to talk about the different relationships between men and women in the novel *Home*, as Toni Morrison portrays the difference that exists between the characters in the story and how is the relationship among them. First of all, we find the relationship between Frank Money and his sister, Cee. Frank has always taken care of his sister since they were children, because their parents had to work a lot to have some money to survive: “Mama and Pap worked from before sunrise until dark” (43). So, since they moved to Lotus, Georgia from Texas, he has been always with her: “*I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my own bone because, as a bother four years older, I thought I could handle it*” (4). There is a very strong feeling of protection, Frank does not want his sister to suffer and never lets her grow as an independent woman; they are presented “like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel” (53). He also wanted to retrieve his sense of manliness, which he had lost: “Frank had not been brave before. He had simply done what he was told and what was necessary” (98); he no longer knew where he was, when he was a child he felt he had a mission in life that was to take care of his sister. That is why when he received the letter he felt that he had to go and save her life. This is what Frank Money says in one of his confessions about his feelings for his sister, and also about how he felt himself:

She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger. Guarding her, finding a way through tall grass and out if that place, not being afraid of anything—snakes or wild old men. I wonder if succeeding at that was the buried seed of all the rest. In my little-boy heart I felt heroic and I knew that if they found us or touched her I would kill. (104)

In this passage, we can see how Frank felt strong when he was younger, now, he does not feel brave or deserving anymore. He wants to have that feeling back, the feeling of someone who is worthy. Now, because of everything he has done during the war, he is ashamed with himself. Coming back to his sister, she never felt independent as a woman because she had always been with her brother and after he left to war, she was with Prince, a guy who never

loved her. When she recovered, Ethel, a woman from her town who was taking care of her, told her, “I seen how you tagged along with your bother. When he left you ran off with that waste of the Lord’s air and time. Now you back home. [...] Don’t tell me you going to let Lenore decide again who you are?” (125). She was telling her that she had to be an independent woman and not to be dependent on others, as Frank, Prince or even her grandmother Lenore.

The role of women is very important in this story because it tells you that women have to be free and not slaves or dependent on men. Morrison seems to be saying that women have to follow their own way, and even though it is difficult they have to try:

“[...]You free. 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. Somewhere inside you is that free person I’m talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world.” (126).

In this example, Ethel the woman who takes care of Cee after what happened with Dr. Scott, was telling her that she had to be an independent woman, something that was new for her because nobody had let her do what she really wanted. She always was under the protection of her bother or her grandmother, Lenore. Ethel tries to make her understand that she is a free person that has to follow her own way in life.

Chauvinism is also present in this story; in its original meaning, chauvinism is considered as an exaggerated patriotism and aggressive belief of superiority and magnificence. In 1935, Clifford Odets was the first person who used the term ‘male chauvinism’, a fact that permitted this idea to be known all around the world. Toni Morrison introduces this idea in *Home* by means of male-characters’ behaviours. It is easily observed the immoral and the unreasonable way in which men treat women, an unjustified maltreatment that men use to satisfy their sense of authority as well as a way of representing how women were under male power. This is the case of Cee's boyfriend and, more clearly, of Dr. Scott. Morrison creates female characters who struggle in a cruel world, having no courage to fight against their fate, women who are so accustomed to that cruelty that they cannot imagine a new or different life; but she also creates characters like Ethel, who encourages Cee to be independent.

We can see a clear example of Cee's lack of independence with the character of Prince, her husband, who just wanted her because she had her grandmother's car: "she learned that Principal had married her for an automobile" (49). He did not care about her and she treated her badly. It is because of her relationship with Prince that Cee realizes that the security of her brother's protection had not been so positive for her, as she had not developed as an independent person: "she thought, of having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you- you are slow to develop your own brain muscle. Besides Prince loved himself so deeply, so completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction" (48). Frank's chauvinism is also presented in the novel; when he is on the train back home, and he sees a couple fighting because the woman wanted to protect her husband, as he had some problems with other people. Frank's thoughts reflect a sexist attitude: "The abused couple whispered to each other, she softly, pleadingly, he with urgency. He will beat her when they get home, thought Frank. And who wouldn't? It's one thing to be publicly humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue- rescue! – him" (26). Toni Morrison shows with these examples that there were still really big differences between men and women, and they were not seen as equal.

To conclude, we must say that not only black women were treated as inferior, but also black men were treated differently compared to white men. They did not have the same assurances of living life as well as whites. In her interview for the *Interview Magazine*, Morrison talks about how even today white police do not care if they kill black kids but they do if that kid is white: "It's like my character Frank Money in *Home*. I just took it for granted that the police would search him on the street." She gives this example from her novel that exposes these differences that people suffer due to racism.

3.6 The idea of *Home* in the novel

It is generally considered that the term "home" is wherever we feel we belong: to a place, to another person or to a passing moment. Home is in a sense, acceptance and relatedness: community and connection wherever we are. Throughout the novel the idea of home is present since the very beginning, as Frank Money wanted to go back to that place that should be his home, even though he did not feel that. When he was younger he wanted to escape from that place called Lotus, he did not like it and said that there was not anything to do in

that small town. He could not have a future there, “Lotus was suffocating, killing him and his two best friends” (35). Because of this, they decided to join the army, so they could have a better future. But after the war, he realized that he was not well good in any place, he did not feel at home anywhere but with Lily, and it was not because he needed a home, it was because he loved her. The first time he saw her, he said; *“I must have looked the fool, but I didn’t feel like one. I felt like I’d come home. Finally. I’d been wandering. Not totally homeless, but close”* (68). He is feeling this way because when he came back from the war, he did not feel the United States as his home either, because there was still discrimination about his skin color and racism. He could not find a formal job and the only thing he had was his pay from the war. He was always drinking and spending his money on drinks. When he met Lily, it was a kind of salvation for him, *“You are dead wrong if you think I was scouting for a home with a bowl of sex in it. I wasn’t: Something about her floored me, made me want to be good enough for her”* (69). But his trauma came back again when he decided to go to Georgia and rescue his sister.

The sense of belonging is also present in the novel, we can see how Frank is always fighting with himself because he dislikes the place where he was born and he also feels that he is not well accepted anywhere. It is almost the same what happened with his sister, Cee did not want to stay in Lotus either. That is why she got married with Prince, she wanted a better life for her but she did not succeed, then she also was afraid of return to her birthplace, until both Frank and Cee realized that Lotus was always a good place for them, a real home, where they could feel love and serenity, after all they had been through. Morrison in her interview for the channel PBS, has said that she wanted to end the book with a sense of hope, she also did not want to talk about colors until the end of the book when Frank “gets home, and then those cotton fields are pink” (9:27 min), and everything is more colorful, “so the reader feels that confident safety of home” (9:36 min).

Besides, Toni Morrison also talks about the idea of home in an interview for Google, where she says that when she wrote the book she wanted Lotus “to be welcoming, and for him [Frank] it’s a safe place, and that’s what home is; nobody is out to get you at home” (19:03 min). She also explains in this video that for Americans the idea of home is very important, very special and she was hoping the readers to have a feeling of home when Frank arrives to Lotus: “Everybody don’t [sic] like you in your home, some people really dislike you in your home, but no one is gonna hurt you, everybody is gonna help you, whether they like

you or not, and that's the safety, spiritual and physical safety, of home" (20:12 min). Morrison wants to give a positive idea of the concept of Lotus as a home, emphasizing that in that place where you have the feel of a home, everybody is going to offer you help when you need it, even when your experience in other parts of the nation has not been so positive.

4. Conclusion

Throughout my dissertation, I have researched and reflected on what Toni Morrison wanted to show with this novel. Even though the novel only has seventeen chapters, and it could seem short, she perfectly presents her ideas and feelings about the life in the 1950s. She was concerned with how the 1950s were seen by most of the people, in contrast with how she saw that period of her life where she was a student. As I said, the 50s were glorious years where the economy went up and most of the white population benefited from it. In this affluent society there was a rise of salaries, there were new houses in the suburbs, new cars for the richest, new technologies could be used at home such as the TV, there were new investigations in medicines and the cures for some diseases were discovered. However, Morrison also wanted to show the other side of the country, the one that not so many historians talk about: how the Korean War and other social problems affected African Americans at that time.

The 1950s were not the same for everybody, some people had more opportunities than others, and it was not an affluent society for all. For instance, Morrison denounces in her novel the medical experimentations that were taking place in the United States at that time with black people. What I have done is to demonstrate that these events that she mentions in her novel happened in real life, how white people used black people, who were considered inferior by them, to do so experimentations with their bodies. The terrible idea of eugenics, a method which some white doctors thought that could improve the human race, to create a perfect human being, affected African Americans, as is the case of Cee in the novel. Racism took place not only in the medical experimentations but also in daily life; Morrison wanted to reinforce this idea with some examples of discrimination to black people or the segregation laws.

Then, we must add the great problem that caused the Korean War to the soldiers. Some came up with more money, as may be the case of whites and others with less money, but the major problem is how they came back to the United States, with a mental trauma for the consequences of war, the pain and suffering of what they had done or seen there. Morrison perfectly portrays the mental problems that any soldier could have after a war with the protagonist, Frank Money. At the same time, I have emphasized how black people went to fight at the war just because the United States needed them but it does not mean that they

were treated as equals, the authorities established a desegregated army but their rights were not the same, neither in the war nor in the country.

Furthermore, the gender relations between the characters are also portrayed in the novel. Morrison shows how at that time, women were treated as inferior to men and they were less independent. Morrison wanted to demonstrate that women are free to do what they want, that is why she took Cee as an example of a dependent woman, who at the end of the story realizes that she is free and can do whatever she wants. Morrison also presents the idea of chauvinism in the story, with the characters of Dr. Scott, Cee's boyfriend, or Frank, who did not behave well with women, and only wanted to show their power or their authority on women.

In my opinion, Morrison achieved what she wanted with this novel, which is to show that the 1950s were not the same for white and black people in the United States. In my research, using the bibliography about the 1950s, I have proved the same idea: no matter how hard African Americans were fighting for their rights, at the end everything still remained the same. After this period there were many protest movements that helped African Americans to get what they deserved; the Civil Rights movements that took place in the following years showed how many people black, and also white, people went to the streets to fight for an equal society. This project has helped me to understand this historical period in a better way, I have always liked African American history and literature, and I have enjoyed reading and analyzing this novel by a great African American woman author.

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