

Chapter 13

Gender and Sexuality in Toni Morrison's *Home*

Anita Devi Ahanthem
Kumbi College, India

ABSTRACT

*Before venturing into the term “gender,” the biological differentiation of male and female as “sex” is inevitable. Moreover, if “sex” is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, then “gender” is the social elaboration of biological sex. Hence, gender gradually builds on biological sex, but it exaggerates biological difference, and it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant. For reference, in a heterosexual society, “masculine men” are seen as sexually dominant, active, and initiating whereas “feminine women” are sexually passive, receptive, and submissive. In this chapter, the author has taken up Toni Morrison’s novel *Home* in order to discuss the dynamics of “gender” and “sexuality” based on “race,” as it gives false perception of self, identity, and trauma. It will also analyze how women of any race are always the victims of violence associated with male sexuality.*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the author has analyzed the two main characters namely Frank Money and his sister, Ycidra (or as they used to call her ‘Cee’) of Toni Morrison’s novel *Home* (2012). In the broad sense, the discussion and study is focused upon the treatment of the key concepts of “gender” and “sexuality” along with the panoramic view of “race” as well. The novel, in general, is a story about the most painful experiences of black people; and in particular, Frank Money and Cee (the brother-sister duo). It

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consists of “the war between Korea and the United States, medical experiments on some poor people for genetic investigations, violence against children and women specially, the black American women and brutality in the history of race in America” (Soleimani and Zarrinjooee, 2014, pp. 497). Furthermore, the novel has important themes of uprooting, homecoming and ownership. There are many instances that portray how “race” can become a factor of dehumanizing and exploitation of African American people irrespective of gender and class in interest of the Whites.

According to Anne Whitehead, “*Home* ... can be read as “trauma fiction,” which focuses on recovering African Americans’ daunting history from the blacks’ point of view” (Siboueka and Ahlem, 2016, pp. 33-34). On the one hand, Morrison has portrayed the social complexities and the negative side that African Americans experienced such as – racism, racial abuse, female issues and medical experimentations – unlike the ideal image of the 1950s America. On the other hand, there is the depiction of psychological trauma of the Great Depression and Vietnam War experienced by the black people and black soldiers analyzing their traumatic experiences. In other words, the author vividly experiences those terrible events as well as recovers from them along with the characters of the novel. Judith Lewis Herman, the psychiatrist, has opined in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992):

To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both within human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature. To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. [...] The study of war trauma becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men in war (p. 34).

Therefore, the concept “Psycho-traumatic” includes both psyche and traumatic experiences i.e. psychological trauma. And based on this experience of trauma by Frank and Cee, the author has discussed further the treatment of “gender” and “sexuality” in the novel analytically.

BACKGROUND

The terms “gender” and “sex” are often used interchangeably; but these terms define different concepts and are not interchangeable. Before we venture into the term “gender,” the biological differentiation of male and female as “sex” is inevitable. According to Lindsey, the term “sex” refers to the biological, hormonal, and chromosomal differences that determine if a person is male or female. Further, there is reference of the term “gender” for “meanings that societies and individuals ascribe to male and female categories” (Copenhaver, 2002, pp. 16-17). In case of

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