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Sommaire

"Women's 'Safe Spaces' and the Codes of Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*"

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Abstract

This paper examines the tie between masculinity and gender-based violence in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and suggests that certain types of masculinity not only imperil women's "safe-spaces" but also legitimate femicide. Following Raewyn Connell's and James Messerschmidt's work on "hegemonic masculinity'' and its recent reformulation by Messerschmidt, the paper contends that Morrison's *Paradise* revolves around two mutually exclusive types of masculinity. On the one hand, the novel contests and challenges "dominating masculinity" or "hegemonic masculinity" that reinforces gender inequality and condones femicide against women. On the other, it promotes "positive" and "redemptive" masculinity that fosters gender equality, women's security and empowerment. While hegemonic masculinities stifle women's creativity, inspiration, nurturing roles, and their cultural and spiritual ethos, "redemptive" and "positive" masculinities in contrast, showcase these qualities because they are dialogic, power-sharing, life-giving, and not life-threatening or lethal. Positive masculinities give a glimpse of the author's idealized, egalitarian, and peaceful community.

Keywords: femicide, women's safe space, hegemonic masculinity, positive masculinity, Toni Morrison, *Paradise*.

Introduction

Masculinity is one of the most heated debates in contemporary critical theories and gender studies. The concept is credited with opening up and expanding the analysis of men and masculinities within the gender order as well as providing an alternative to manhood and manliness which were widely used before (Connell, et.al, 2005 :5). The different debates have also rendered visible masculinity, the universal "invisible gender," as well as unmasking its normative, neutral and privileged status (Skimmell, 2005: 6). It is noteworthy to mention that gender studies have primarily

granted visibility to women whose rallying cry for the recognition of gender as a social construction perpetuating their oppression and marginalization has traversed the different waves of feminist scholarships. The new trends are undergirded by the inclusion of intersectionality in parsing out gender categories as well as accounting for the tensions within local and global interactions of gender (Armegol, 2014: xi).

If the debates have been raging in the domain of social sciences, the representation of men and what it means to be a man in a given society, have also pervaded literature and literary criticism of the past years. African American women writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor and bell hooks have delved into the issue of black masculinity with an unabated zeal and passion. As far as Morrison is concerned, her intervention in the debate has sparked a storm of comments and criticism. According to Mar Galego, Morrison's intervention in the black masculinity debates has been marked by her critique of patriarchal masculinity – "the genocidal threat that endangers black male life" (hooks, 2004: xii) – and its negative impacts on black families and communities, but she has also presented "alternative masculinities" or "diverse embodiments of what it actually means to be a Black man nowadays" (Galego, 2009-2010:50).

Andrew Read relevantly remarks that Morison's representation of black masculinity in *Paradise* is innovative and controversial as she lambasts Western notion of patriarchy while exposing the violence of black patriarchal masculinity which preys upon vulnerable women. (Read, 2005:527). However, Read asserts that she has succeeded in debunking the myth that posits that black masculinity suffers from a dysfunctional familial setting dominated by matriarchs who threaten men's power. In this regards, he considers *Paradise* a direct response to the Moynihan Report[1] (Read, 2005:527) which held black women responsible for the emasculation of black men.

More importantly, *Paradise* seems to draw a close link between domineering forms of masculinity and gender-based violence. It implies that women's "safe spaces" (Collins, 2000), their security, and wellbeing are likely to be imperiled as long as "dangerous" masculinity is let on the loose. Basing our analysis on Messerschmidt's discussion of the link between hegemonic masculinity and femicide, this paper argues that Toni Morrison's *Paradise* revolves around two

[1] The Moynihan report is one of the most controversial text ever elaborated about a minority ethnic groups. It has sparked lot of debates which are still raging on in many disciplines. It has been revised recently by Gregory Acs et. al"The Moynihan Report Revised". Gregory Acs with Kenneth Braswell, Elaine Sorensen, and Margery Austin Turner, June 2013

mutually exclusive types of masculinity. On the one hand, the novel contests and challenges "dominating masculinity" that reinforces gender inequality and condones femicide against women. On the other, it extols the virtues of "positive" and "redemptive" masculinities which foster gender equality, women's security, and empowerment. While domineering masculinities stifle women's creativity, inspiration, and nurturing roles, positive masculinities enhance these qualities because they are dialogic, power-sharing, life-giving, and not life-threatening or lethal. Positive masculinities give a glimpse of the author's idealized, egalitarian, and peaceful community.

1.Imperiling women's 'safe spaces': femicide and Hegemonic Masculinity

Patricia Hill Collins (2000:101) defines women's "safe spaces" as those locations where women resist objectification as the Other and where they can shape new selves and examine the issues that concern them. These safe spaces constitute safety nets as well as a potent shield against domination and misrepresentation as they enable self-definition and empowerment. Homes have been historically regarded as women's safe spaces. A home is "often situated as the site of calm, security and comfort" (Davies, 1994, 2003: 48). In the African American context, home places have been historical sites for resisting racist domination and oppression (bell hooks,1990 :44). The yearning for a homeplace has been constant through out the history of African Americans in the US. This task has been assigned to women since society has ascribed to them the roles of caregivers and caretakers. In this perspective, bell hooks notes:

> Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shacks), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world" (hooks, 1990:42).

However, homes have lost this political status, laments bell hooks, when they have been turned into patriarchal strongholds where men and women abuse one another for not conforming to sexist norms. bell hooks attributes this shift in

the perception of home places to the adoption of white bourgeois family values in which home is a politically neutral place not a subversive locus where women teach and raise political consciousness (hooks, 1990:47). The outcome has been the marginalization of uneducated Black women who used to play a vital role in the political education of Black children and whose nurturing and empowering roles are seriously undermined by contemporary struggle movements which imitate white suprematist norms. (hooks, 1990:47). Consequently, bell hooks calls for the restoration of the hitherto subversive function of home since the latter has been historically conceived as a safe haven where Black women could provide services as well as soothe the wounds inflicted by racism. (hooks,1990, 42).

Nevertheless, it may seem problematic to think of homeplaces as 'safe places' for Black women since the bulk of abuse and violence against them also take place in the same domestic spaces which they have constructed as nests of peace and security. Whether it is in the slave huts or in the segregate ghettoes or luxury houses, the threat on Black women's lives has loomed large and constant over the years. Morrison's trilogy *(Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*) as well as *The Bluest Eye* adumbrate the emergence of stifling and toxic domestic places for Black women. Besides, Patricia Collins points out that women's spaces can constitute a threat to those who aim at controlling women or feel that they have been excluded from their lives (Collins, 2000: 102). In this regard, the angry nine men who attack the Convent women were undoubtedly overwhelmed by such a fear. The novel opens with a cold-blooded murder scene:

> They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other…..They are nine, over the twice the number of the women they are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses, alone with clean, handsome guns (p.3).

This cold-hearted execution of unarmed women sets the stage for a broader scheme to rid the all-black town of Ruby of the Convent women, who, according to Lone Dupres, are not simply "locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a convent but a coven" (p.276). The Convent is indeed created as a safe space where women bond and empower each other under the guidance of Consolata Sosa, a Cadomblé guru (Meyers, 2014) who teaches them what they are hungry for (262).

Interestingly, the Convent is a female safe haven, "permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters" (177). It is also a healing space and a tabernacle. The women who find shelter in this free gynaeceum are driven by the same sense of insecurity, fear and lack of freedom. Consolata reports that their "voices told the same tale: disorder, deception and, what Sister Roberta warned the Indian girls against, drift. The three d's that paved the road to perdition, and the greater of these was drift" (221-22). If the Oven is, as Yvette Christansë assumes, "Ruby's social and psychic hearth" and its "most sacred space" (Christianse, 2013:13) because it symbolizes the power of the founding fathers. It is also a *sui generis* masculine space that may be assimilated to the Greek *andron.* While the Convent is not only its anthesis, but it is also a modern gynaeceum, a female safe space p*er excellence* which is located outside the boundaries of that *andron.*

Morrison confesses in an interview with Claudia Tate that women should act as both "ship and safe harbor" (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994:161)). The Convent provides this safe harbor to the people of Ruby. They welcome strangers and wayfarers, take care of the old and the sick, and above all, produce and sell "barbecue sauce, good bread and the hottest peppers in the world" (11). Mavis, Gigi, Bellie Delia and Pallas who find shelter in this safe haven suffer from some form of trauma. In order to heal these desperate house wives and empower them to face their harrowing lives, Consolata Sosa introduces them to drawing and "loud dreaming." She told them: "of a place where white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color plums swam alongside children.(…) Of scented cathedrals made of gold where gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation (…). Of snakes aroused by poetry and bells. (….) Of a woman named Piedade, who sang but never said a word" (264). Thanks to her lessons and unbridled imagination, the Convent women "were no longer haunted, or hunted either" (266).

Nonetheless, the second assertion that they were not hunted "would be proven wrong"(266) as the narrative voice implies. The defenseless women have become preys, hunted by nine angry men of Ruby because they have trespassed the domineering masculine codes by living among themselves and by "trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them" (303). This crime is nothing but a femicide, which is defined as a "misogynist killing of women" and a particular form of sexual violence (Radford and Russell, 1992:3). As for (Messerschmidt, 2017:71), femicide is "the intentional killing of girls and women by boys and men because the victims are girls and women." Besides, he identifies two kinds of femicide: "intimate partner femicides" and "so-called honor femicides."

(Messerschmidt, 2017:75) posits that "intimate partner femicides usually occur when the man concludes that he is losing his power to dominate and control what he sees as his possession". Thus, such a crime happens when a woman decides to divorce, or live by herself or with another man, the abandoned male partner may kill her because his leitmotiv becomes : "if I can't have her, no one can" (Dobash and Debase quoted by Messerschmidt, 2017:76).

As far as the "so-called honor femicide" is concerned, it occurs when a male family member believes that "the female has allegedly brought gendered dishonor upon the family" (Messerschmidt, 2017: 77). For instance, when a woman refuses to endorse an arranged marriage or is sexually assaulted; when she is believed to transgress the dress code or normative values of femininity; if she engages in a lesbian relationship or simply seeks divorce from an abusive husband, men resort to violence to reinstate their control over the female bodies, thereby restoring the so-called community honor (Messerschmidt, 2017:77). What is interesting in Messerschmidt's analysis is that both forms of femicides are likely to take place in the framework of hegemonic masculinity, a concept used by Raewyn Connell to explain men's power and privilege over women and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1987:186). Ever since, the concept has been used and reformulated by various gender specialists such as (Messerschmidt&Connell, 2005: Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; 2015; Messerschmidt, 2010; 2017).

In his recent reconceptualization of the term, Messerschmidt delineates hegemonic masculinities as: "Those masculinities constructed locally, regionally, and globally, that legitimate an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities, and that hegemonic masculinities must be culturally ascendant to provide a rationale for social action through consent and compliance" (Messerschmidt, 2017: 75). His conception of hegemonic masculinity comes within the framework of Antonio Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" theory and state legitimation in which the idea of the consent of the ruled is primordial. This cultural ascendancy functions in a way that the rulers impose their rules on social life and the subordinates give them their spontaneous consent and endorse the dominant models (Lears, 1985:568). Set between the late 19th century and mid 20th century American history, *Paradise* dramatises African American men's endorsement of white patriarchal values and underlying hegemonic masculinities. Although, as Read artfully articulates, the novel does not represent black masculinity as negative and fixed, it nevertheless represents it as a "discursive construct" which is continually shaped and reshaped by African American cultural

experiences and hegemonic American ideologies of manhood which the Old Fathers of Ruby and their descendants have espoused (Read, 2005:528).

More, the novel highlights the plight of women who bear the full brunt of patriarchal violence and traumatized history. As a landmark novel of American literary history, *Paradise* also plays on the ambivalent conception of home as both a safe space for women, a site of resistance against dehumanization, and white supremacy values as well as a patriarchal mansion where women are victimized and disempowered. In this regard, black feminist standpoint articulated by (hooks, 1990; 2004) and Collins (2000) constitutes an interesting critical lens through which the issue of Black masculinity can be analyzed. Black feminist criticism is informed by an intersectional approach to gender construction. In *Paradise*, Morrison also displays how black masculinity is constructed at the intersections of race, gender, and class and how these interlocking factors permeate the attitudes of the old Fathers of Ruby and their descendants toward women. The only desirable and available forms of masculinity they espouse is the white patriarchal masculinity which is informed by a hegemonic bent.

Moreover, in response to critiques of their theory of hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou, 2001; Beasley, 2008)[2], Messerschmidt reformulates it by proposing three types of masculinity: "dominant," "dominating," and "positive." While "dominant" masculinity may not be hegemonic and refers to "most celebrated, common or current form of masculinity in a particular setting, "dominating" masculinity, for its part, not only shores up unequal relationships between men and women, but it also controls femininity and other forms of masculinity because it expresses itself through "commanding and controlling particular interactions, exercising power and control over people and events: "calling the shots" and "running the show" (Messerschmidt, 2017:75) .

What is captivating and noteworthy in Messerschmidt's analysis is that, he establishes a close link between hegemonic masculinity, and gender-based violence like femicides, although, Connell warns that "it is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony" (Connell, 2005:77). However, she too acknowledges that "violence often underpins or supports this authority" (Connell, 2005:77). Thus, (Messerschmidt, 2010:621) postulates that

[2] For instance, Christine Beasley argues that it is necessary to rethink the term of hegemonic masculinity for the sake of producing "a more nuanced understanding of privileged legitimating conceptions of manhood, and of relations between different masculinities in the global/national nexus" (Beasley, 2008:86).

"Violence is a way to do masculinity." This new development of masculinity studies is very pertinent to our reading of Morrison's *Paradise*. Dubbed as the last volume of Morrison's "love and hate" trilogy, *Paradises* probes into the issue of black masculinity and its excessive grip on femininities and other masculinities. Interestingly, the narrative is credited with exploring "the relationship between myth and history" and how it undergirds the politics of exclusion that characterizes America as a paradise and a quest for a paradise within America (Gauthier, 2005 :397). For Lucille P. Fultz, *Paradise* is a reminder addressed to African Americans about what should be their loyalties and duties after gaining freedom. It warns Black leaders to be cautious about imitating unchecked Western values of patriarchy which lead to women's oppression (Fultz, 2012:24).

Consequently, the novel can be read as a critique of the Ruby's patriarchs' adoption of white hegemonic masculinities. In this regard, the assault against the defenseless women of the Convent can be analyzed within the framework of what Messerschmidt refers to as "honor femicide" which is deeply entrenched in the code of hegemonic masculinity that legitimates violence against women if they fail to comply with the expectations of the "family honor" or "community honor". It is worth mentioning that Ruby was built as a safe haven for its inhabitants, a cohesive community, and an earthly paradise which contrasts deeply with " Out There", a no-man's land,

> Where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your very person could be annulled; where congregations carried arms to church and ropes coiled to every saddle. Out There where every cluster of white men looked like a posse, being alone was being dead. But lessons had been learned and relearned in the last three generations about how to protect a town" (16).

The men of Ruby were adamant in upholding their domination by keeping strangers and white people at bay because "the generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too" (217). Inside the town, they were the masters of their destinies and their people. But outside the boundary of Ruby, they become like Sweet Home's slaves, who, "One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke" (*Beloved*, 147-148).

Ruby, like its predecessor town, Haven, was build around a story of control and exclusions. The founding fathers passed on their descendants the shame of the rejection they call "Disallowing'' (194), and "everything anybody wanted to know

about the citizens of Haven of Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (189). The diarchy of Ruby made of the twins, who are ironically the town's business and religious authorities as illustrated by their names (Deacon and Steward Morgan), control everything. And "neither one put up with what he couldn't control." (278). Besides, Ruby, according to Billie Delia, is "a backward no place ruled by men whose power to control was out of control and who had the nerve to say who could live and who not and where; who had seen in lively, free, unarmed females the mutiny of the mares and so got rid of them." (308). Because of their powerful memories, the twins become also the embodiments and custodians of the town's moral values and hegemonic codes of masculinity. As Lone Dupress deftly remarks, the leadership of Ruby was twinned (275). And it was the twins who led the attack of the Convent.

It goes without saying that the twins have seen in the Convent women a threat that unsettles their hegemony for they can neither control nor dominate them. In their mind, the Convent harbors "the devil's bedroom, bathroom, and his nasty playpen" (17). Therefore, it should be destroyed by all costs, along with its inhabitants. They were bent on doing whatever necessary "that nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town with the pain" (5). The nine most powerful men of Ruby take it as their manly responsibility to restore their control over the Convent by eliminating the "unchaste," independent, and unruly women who are held responsible for a series of unusual occurrences in the town:

> Rumors had been whispered for more than a year. Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymooners. Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day…. the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women (11).

This syllogism sets the stage for the so-called honor femicide perpetrated cold-heartedly by the patriarchs of Ruby. This attack against innocent and defenseless women permits these men to reinstate their waning hegemonic power and save their manhood and dignity. Allegations of homosexuality, witchcraft, infanticide, abortion, and sexual depravity of the Covent women pervade the arguments legitimating the femicide. It was said that "They don't need men and they don't need God. …They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families. We can't have it, you all. Can't have it at all" (276).

These allegations, presented as the main reasons for the assault are nothing but sanctimonious and disingenuous claims that hide the real motives of the attackers. Lone Dupress who overhears their macabre plot, understands more than anyone, their silent motives and hidden incentives which have nothing to do with safeguarding their families or restoring its honor. Each of the nine men hides a secret impotence, a certain weakness in his masculinity. Each dreads losing some power, privilege or becoming an object of ridicule in his family and community at large. The Convent women are turned to scapegoats whose massacre will restore their manhood, their hegemony and their battered ego and dignity. Like Pecola Breedlove who becomes the receptacle of her friends' contempt, shame, and nightmare as well as their safety net toward redemption, the Convent women become the repositories and living witnesses of the nine men's moral frailty, impotence, and shame. The twins have more reasons than anyone to rid the town of Consolata and her students. Deacon's Morgan's pride, hubris, and inability to control the body and mind of Consolata, his former mistress, might justify his motives to oust her:

> She{Lone] knew about his {Deacon} long ago relationship with Consolata. But she could not have fathomed his personal shame or understood how important it was to erase the shame and the kind of woman he believed was its source. An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed; a beautiful woman, golden-skinned, outside woman with moss-green eyes that tried to trap a man, close him up in a cellar room with liquor to enfeeble him so that they could do carnal things, unnatural things in the dark." (279-80).

The femicide of the Convent women and its underlying motives illustrate perfectly Messerschmidt's assertion that when a woman steps outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity, men turn to so-called "honor" femicide to regain control and reproduce hegemonic masculinity within the family and the community. In such settings, the hegemonic masculinity has been challenged through the behavior of the "offending" woman and the femicide at once restores that hegemonic masculinity and thus gender inequality" (Messerschmidt, 2017:77). In *Paradise*, the Convent women are the "offenders" who trample upon the "codes of honor" of responsible and respectable men: Firstly, by refusing to be mere chattels trapped in subservient relationships, and secondly, by living among themselves without men. Thus, the femicide aims at reinstating men's authority, respectability, and hegemony as well as curbing any future proclivity for rebellion. Femicides, therefore, serve as a signal, a warning as well as a nemesis to rebellious women. The Convent women have subversive powers and knowledge which unsettle Ruby men's hegemony and their control of the female bodies, their productive, and reproductive power.

Consequently, they plot to sacrifice them on the altar of racial purity, morality, and honorability while hiding their real motives that are to uphold their codes of hegemonic masculinity.

2. Extolling Positive Masculinity: a linchpin for women's empowerment and social justice

It is undeniable that Morrison's fiction has been shaped and given impetus by the debates over masculinity, even though, "American men have come to think of themselves as genderless" (Kimmel, 2005:6). Like Morrison, Alice Walker has been chided for contributing to perpetuate the negative images of black masculinity. Regarding *Color Purple*, bell hooks writes that critics have failed to see "the transformation of Mister — he moves from being a brutal male chauvinist to a compassionate caring person — Walker's shift in representation was rarely acknowledged" (hooks, 1990:68-69).

It goes without saying that Walker's narrative development and shift regarding the characterization of Mister was "completely overshadowed by Steven Spielberg's cinematic interpretation of the novel which induces the audience to forget Walker's position. In the film version of the novel, Spielberg did not choose to graphically portray Mister's transformation. Instead he highlights "images that readily resembled existing races stereotypes depicting black masculinity as threatening and dangerous" (hooks, 1990: 69). Bell hooks' feeling is that such cinematic choice made by Spielberg is neither accidental nor coincidental as it bespeaks of his own politics of blackness which is bent on transforming "Walker's text (which was not anti-black male, which did not portray black male as if they are not complex individuals) into one-dimensional frame where black males were depicted in a conventional, stereotypically racist Hollywood manner" (hooks, 1990, 69).

The representation of black masculinity is therefore a politically charged issue particularly in the American context where race is still very sensitive. Nonetheless, black masculinity constitutes one of the most dominant themes of Toni Morrison's fiction. Her narratives are infused with images of Black men and questions like: what is a man? What price do men bargain in their path to manhood? What is at stake when they feel threatened or excluded ? what is the fate of the womenfolk, partners, spouses and daughters whom they are responsible for? These questions encapsulate the bottom line of Toni Morrison' s reflections on and commitment to anesthetize —

without romanticizing — black masculinities that are wrestling to unpack and come to terms with the legacy of white patriarchal masculinity values. That is why she finds "contemporary hostility to men" bothersome" (Koenen, in Taylor-Guthie, 1994:73).

Morrison also argues that, black men get more pressure from the external world than black women because "they have an enormous responsibility to be *men*" (Childress in Taylor-Guthrie, 1994:7), thus, she assigns women the responsibility to protect men and carve out a niche for them to perform their "male rituals, "male rites", whether it's drunkenness, arrogance, violence, or running away. It is a certain kind of fraudulent freedom" (Ruas, Taylor-Guthrie, 1994: 114). Morrison seems lenient with certain negatives attitudes of black men. More, she encourages women to condone those attitudes and make room for men to be men, even if the price of that masculinity is 'arrogance' or 'violence'. This illustrates Morrison's own ambivalent and complex relationship with Black masculinities. Her position prompts Susan Neal Mayberry to assert that her tales on "black men are too painful to pass on", but they "are equally too important to pass on" (Mayberry, 2007:298). Cholly Breedlove in the *Bluest Eye* and Joe Trace in *Jazz*, to name bu a few, remind us of the sexual violence and criminality often associated with Black masculinity. The issue has become highly controversial in Black women's literature to the extent that bell hooks correctly puts it that,

> When women get together and talk about men, the news is almost always bad news. If the topic gets specific and the focus is on black men the news is even worse. Despite all the advances in civil rights in our nation, feminist movement, sexual liberation, when the spotlight is on black males the message is usually that they have managed to stay stuck, that as a group they have not evolved with the times. (bell hooks, 2004: vii).

Consequently, the bulk of Morrison's fiction and non fictional works are infused with compelling discussions and descriptions of men and their relationships to women. Intimate partner femicide pervades *Jazz*, connecting it more closely to *Paradise* than *Beloved*, the first volume of the trilogy. For Henry Lestroy, " a son is what a man do," and to be a black man amounts to "draw one's manhood up" (*Jazz*, 301-2). *A Mercy*, published in 2008, can be regarded as the next volume of a teratology. Like *Beloved, A Mercy* is deeply steeped in the history of slavery trade and the beginning of the American plantation chattel slavery. In the novel, Jacob Vaark, blinded by his disproportionate ambition to build a mansion, states that "what a man leaves behind is what a man is", while for his wife Rebekka, "a man is only his reputation" (114).

Masculinity also lies at the heart of *The Bluest Eye* which probes into the depth of Cholly's "dangerous freedom" whose code of masculinity becomes an anathema and a hubris causing his downfall. The problem with Cholly Breedlove is that he "was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. Free to take a job, free to leave it" (*The Bluest Eye*, 172). Cholly's dangerous masculinity was lethal and not nurturing because he was free to choose whatever path he wants to follow. Yet, Morrison's warns that "the man is not free to choose his responsibility. He is only responsible for what somebody has handed him. It's the women who keep it going, keep the children someplace safe" (Ruas, in Taylor-Guthrie, 1994:114). Cholly's attitude illustrates Messerschmidt postulate that "men do crime to do masculinity." The enactment of crime becomes a way for men to "do gender" (Messerschmidt, 2010: 621). However, Cholly's attitude can be justified by his internalization of years of racist and class oppression which result from slavery and Jim Crow laws. Violence against women and girls becomes an alternative to assert himself and become a 'real man' since he was humiliated by White men who question his manhood.

Paradise, for the most part, challenges the misogynistic impulse and negative attitudes that are often attached to black masculinity. The novel particularly questions the hegemonic bent which is dangerous and life-threatening, because it is "constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities" (Connell, 1987:186). As Patricia Collins notes, "the significance of the hegemonic domain of power lies in its ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies (Collins, 2002:286). The nine men of Ruby manipulate the history of Ruby, its Oven's message and symbols as well as its people's consciousness, thereby, driving them to excuse their gruesome acts. As Patricia Best rightfully observes, the founding fathers of Ruby have sealed a deal of purity and immortality and presented it as a command of God while,

> That was their purity. That was their holiness. That was the deal Zechariah had made during his humming prayer. It wasn't God's brow to be feared. It was his own…. They ran everything, controlled everything….. Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For immortality" (217).

Besides, in *Paradise*, Morrison not only calls for a dismantling of hegemonic masculinity, but she also chides the reader to believe that all men are privileged by drawing attention to the racial and class underpinnings of black masculinities in

America. She seems to share Gloria Anzaldùa's warning that, "lumping the males who deviate from the general norm with man, the oppressor, is a gross social injustice" (Anzaldùa, 1999:106). Therefore, Morrison cautions the reader about lumping all men in the hegemonic category. For instance, the twins wield power not only on women, but also on other men, particularly the youth, by muzzling their voices. As Misner observes, "they think they have outfoxed the Whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them. And when the maimed children asked for help, they look elsewhere for the cause.(305-306). Thus, the novel beckons an intersectional reading that paves the way for an in-depth analysis of black masculinities. It urges men not to conform to narrow definitions of masculinity which might be lethal not only to women, but to themselves (Messner, 2000:6).

Furthermore, the narrative extols the virtues of "positive masculinities" defined as "those masculinities (locally, regionally, and globally) that contribute to legitimating egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities"(Messerschmidt, 2017:75). Reverend Misner and the young generation incarnate positive masculinities. They strive to challenge the dominating masculinity of the eight-rock by protecting women and empowering them to perform their rituals and ethos. In addition, they foster comradeship between men and women, dialogues, and gender equality. Positive masculinities come within the ambit of a global rallying cry for gender justice. SAFAID which publishes issues on men and HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa, makes a clarion call for "transformative" and progressive masculinities in their fight against the pandemic of HIV:

> It is important for men to feel masculine, but the definition of masculinity should change. Men should learn to take responsibility for their own lives and to share responsibility with their partners for each other and their children. Negative aspects of masculinity, such as violence, should be rejected in favour of positive aspects, such as care and responsibility.(quoted in Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:16).

Misner in *Paradise* embodies also those qualities of "care and responsibility." In their groundbreaking book, titled, *Redemptive Masculinities,* Erza Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma define redemptive masculinities as "those masculinities that are life-giving in a world reeling from the effects of violence and the Aids pandemic"(2012:1). In *Paradise*, Misner displays this redemptive quality of masculinity that is not life-threatening, but life-giving, caring and nurturing. He detests violence against women and encourages the youth to speak out. Misner

"despises males who hit women" (62). He disapproves of K. D's behavior who is "servile to his uncles; brutal with females" (62). It goes without saying that Misner and the Patriarchs of Ruby are not of the same generation. Neither do they share the same conception of love and religion nor do they agree on the meaning of politics and commitment. For Reverend Pulliam, love is "a diploma conferring certain privileges" (141). But for Misner, love is nothing but "unmotivated respect" (146). While the eight-rock shares some "primitive instinct for protection" (305) and shuns politics, Misner strongly believes that "a community with no politics is doomed to pop like Georgia fat wood" (213). Misner preaches a theology of liberation embedded in a resistant militancy geared toward the empowerment of the black communities and the attainment of social justice.

More importantly, Misner does not endorse the patriarchs' overpowering grip on women nor their conspicuous materialism. In this regard, they are wary of him because "A man like that could encourage strong behavior; side with a teenage girl… A man like that, willing to throw money away, could give customers ideas" (56). As a revolutionary militant, he acts as a magnet, "tempting the young to step outside the wall, outside the town limits, shepherding them, forcing them to transgress, to think of themselves as civil warriors." (145). Unlike the men of Ruby who content themselves with past achievements, Misner's revolutionary struggle is oriented toward improving the present and envisioning a better future. He teaches the youth that "they did not not have to beg for respect; it was already in them, and they needed only to display it " (209). His notion of manhood is summed up by Steward Morgan as "backtalk, name changes — as if word magic had anything to do with the courage it took to be a man" (95). Misner's masculinity is predicated on a discourse of liberation, sharing, and empowerment. It makes rooms for discussion, contention, and compromise. It is all-inclusive and non dominating as it is geared toward social justice. He has lofty goals for his community and is determined to combat anyone who aims to sidestep his basic tenets.

As a matter fact, he is the only man to side with the youth who decide to reformulate the motto of the Oven from the commanding tone: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" to "Be the Furrow of His Brow." He supports their initiatives and reminds the patriarchs that because the youth respect the Oven and know its value, and they "want to give it a new life" (86). For Deacon Morgan, the "Oven already has a history", and "it doesn't need" anybody "to fix it" (86). He concludes that "nobody, is going to change the Oven or call it something strange. Nobody is going to mess with a thing our grandfathers built." (85-86). But the youth, encouraged by Misner, embrace an inclusive motto, reformulated as: "We are the Furrow of His

Brow" (298). Positive masculinities encourage dialogism, rather than, monologism and despotism.

Like Morrison's previous novels, *Paradise* plays on binary oppositions and inversions. In this regard, Susan Mayberry contends that it not only "inverts the power of blackness as well as the power of men," but it also sheds light on an androgynous and multicolored Convent world with a black and white male presence at the backdrop. Besides, "the negative male characters fall into opposing binary radicals, either extremely disrespectful to or overly protective toward females" (Mayberry, 2009:225). Finally, she considers the novel an "inversion of its creator's original handiwork" where "*The Bluest Eye* has become the *blackest eye (*Mayberry, 2009:223). In this framework, Misner, Destry and Roy represent positive and progressive masculinities that are respectful to femininity and other masculinities. They are the paragons of positive masculinities that can save femininity from being a prey, a universal victim of man's oppression. They provide safety to women and enhance their nurturing roles.

Unlike dominating masculinities which stifle women's creativity, freedom and nurturing qualities by preventing them to carry out their roles as both "ship and safe harbor," positive masculinities are care-giving and nurturing. They make room for women to perform their "ancient properties" (Charles Ruas in Taylor-Guthrie, 1994:104) which express a certain quality of nurturing. Consolata and Lone Dupres possess some knowledge that is deeply embedded in the ancient properties which were parts and parcels of the "civilization of black people, which was underneath the white civilizations" (Ruas in Taylor-Guthrie, 1994:105). Consolata teaches her flock spiritual values necessary for their psychic balance and well-being. She introduces them to the language of self-love and self-worth, values that are crucial for their healing and empowerment.

Conversely, Lone Dupress who knows "what neither memory nor history can say or record: the "trick" of life and its "reason" (272) has been discarded by Ruby women and men like rubbish. She confesses:

> Nobody wanted her craft….in spite of her never-fail reputation (which was to say she never lost a mother, as Fairy once had), they refused her their stolen bellies, their shrieks and grabbing hands….No matter she taught them how to comb their breast to set the milk flowing; what to do with the afterbirth; what direction the knife under the mattress should point" (270-271).

Lone and Consolata possess also a mysterious gift. While Lone calls it "stepping-in", Consolata refers to it as "seeing-in" because "the gift was in 'sight." Something God made free to anyone who wanted to develop it" (247). This gift is part of the "discredited knowledge" of black people. Ruby men look down on Lone and discredit her and the craft she represents. As for Consolata, she is killed because she reincarnates the ancient properties of women as well as their subversive power. Like Lone, she does not comply with what Connell refers to as "emphasized femininity"[3], rather, she displays hidden and marginalized forms of femininity that are found mostly in rebellious women, prostitutes, madwomen, witches, etc. (Connell, 1987:187-88). Although *Paradise* problematizes home as a safe space for Black women, women from the margins and fringes of the society like Lone and Consolata struggle to make it a locus of resistance and empowerment for women. They have become marginals, but they use that marginality as a site of resistance. As Bell Hooks has pointed out : "there is a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structure and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance, as a location of radical openness and possibility and as a counter-hegemonic cultural practice" (bell hooks, 1990: 22). This chosen marginality is, according to bell hooks, a counter-hegemonic cultural practice. Thus, only a feminist counter-hegemonic practice can enable women to forge home as a site of resistance and a safe space.

Another thing about Reverend Misner is that "He was very close to being too handsome for a preacher. Not just his face and head, but his body, extremely well made, called up admiring attention from practically everyday. A serious man, he took his obvious beauty as a brake on sloth — it forced him to deal carefully with his congregations, to take nothing for granted: not the adoration of the women or the envy of the men" (58). Through Misner, one can get a glimpse of Morrison's idealized and alternative forms of masculinities. He is neither a zealot nor an uncommitted man. He always knows how to strike a balance between his responsibility for the weak, his duty as a religious man to guide his flock toward the path of righteousness, and his political activism. This novel also encapsulates Morrison's taste for utopia[4] and balanced gender relationships. Her utopian

[3] R.W. Connell calls "emphasized femininity" the "pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support" of the time" (Connell, 1987:187). It is the most desired and advertised form of femininity promoted by the mass media culture. Emphasized femininity can be regarded as the most desired type of femininity.

[4] Mark Tabone considers *Paradise* a work of utopia as well as "Morrison's self-professed rethinking" of the genre and its conventions "(Tabone, 2016:607)

community is based on comradeship between men and women, like the bond that exists between Misner and Anna. Such a bond exists in *Song of Solomon* (Bird and Milkman), and in *Beloved* (Paul D and Sethe; Sixo and his partner whom she refers to as the friend of her mind). Even though romance has its own share of glamour and charm, Morrison's style seems to veer toward the beauty of harmonious, cohesive community where power will be shared and not vested in one single hand.

Conclusion

Paradise exemplifies Morrison's yearning for a utopian community where racial and gender hierarchy will be abolished. Her refusal to reveal the identity of the white girl that has been shot first and the resurrection of the bodies of the Covent women illustrate her strategy to dismantle racial and gender hegemony. Misner, like a general, instills in the youth a sense of self-confidence and self-worth. In doing so, he empowers them to build a paradise not based on the exclusion and the demonization of the Other, but rather, the one that connects people and gather them around a community of values. He teaches them the positive values of masculinity grounded on the respect and protection of femininity and other masculinities.The miraculous reappearance of the Convent women constitutes a nemesis against dangerous masculinity and a triumph of liberated masculinity and femininity from the grip of patriarchy. This possibility is rendered through the metaphor of "a door" and a "window" which Anna and Misner have seen at the Convent. These apertures symbolize escape routes for victimized women into the timeless fantasy of the imagination. *Paradise* underscores Morrison's assertion that her novel should be "beautiful and political." It comes within the realm of resistance literature which according to Barbara Harlow, rests on the "political as the power to change the world" (Harlow, 1987:130). Misner, as the vehicle and symbol of this change, uses politics to dismantle hegemonic masculinity and reinstate gender justice while the Convent women refuse to let their safe spaces becoming patriarchal dominions. They vest home with a political function, making it a site of resistance, female bonding, and empowerment.

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