



Black Women's Revolt in the Struggle for Freedom: An Exploration of Toni Morrison's Selected Novels

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ABSTRACT

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This research work is about black women's contribution in the struggle for black freedom in America as dramatized in Toni Morrison's works. Drawing from the New Historicism, the psychological and sociological approaches which allow to enlighten a literary text within its socio-historical dimension, it purports to highlight strategies of revolt settled by black female characters against social injustices and discrimination in order to integrate the American society. The exploration of the selected narratives evidences the manifestations of black women's struggle for black freedom; a revolt related to the history of America with abolitionists like Harriet Tubman called by 'black Moses,' Harriet Jacobs, Rosa Park to quote only some. Being the most vulnerable for ages in the practice of slavery, black women revolted and involved themselves into concrete actions to claim not only their identity as black people but also the right to be considered human beings as white people in the American soil. To get rid of the white system of slavery, black women inner motivation of revolt has been expressed by the psychological awake allowing them to act for their identity and freedom. This study finally shows not only the involvement of black women in the struggle for black freedom, but also the black women power in conflict regulation testimonies of which are substantial in the history of America.

KEYWORDS:

Black women, revolt, freedom, discrimination, strategies, consciousness-raising.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of slavery on the American soil and the difficulty free black people have to integrate the American society where they are still maintained under the white domination, has pushed them to stop and think about their situation struggling against this evil instruction. In realizing what their position in the American society was like, black women particularly started fighting for its improvement. Hartman's subject-object theory (Saidiya: 1997, 2) clearly delineates the psychological rationality behind the relationship between oppression, resistance and revolt to change the situation from being 'object' to become 'subject'. From this Hartman's theory, black women are seen in the position to revolt changing their condition from being

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considered as slaves to be measured as human beings equal to white people on the American soil.

For ages, considered as the weak sex or second zone citizens, women are in the contrary said to be capable to solve problems or to "have long exercised influence behind the scenes" (<https://www.oprah.com/money/8-ways-of-looking>) ... These heroines were finding some courageous and admirable solutions in difficult situations in the society for common interest which is for the present case the black freedom because, *as far back as the 19th century, African American women fought for civil rights. They resisted slavery. They spoke out against racism.*" (<https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/>).

This is what some black women have done when we referred to the history of America. Harriet Jacobs, for example, has published a book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in which she testifies her own experience talking about her

life as a slave and how she gained freedom for herself and for her children. Jacobs contributed to the genre of slave narrative by using the techniques of sentimental novels "to address

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race and gender issues." She explores the struggles and sexual abuse that female slaves faced as well as their efforts to practice motherhood and protect their children when their children might be sold away. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)

Through this book, Harriet Jacobs made "*direct appeals to their humanity to expand their knowledge and influence, their thoughts*" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>) wanting things to change improving mainly black women's condition in the way they are treated on the American soil by condemning slavery as an institution. The history also reveals that the black woman Elizabeth Jennings rode the streetcar of her choice as it is illustrated:

On Sunday, July 16th, 1854, a young black schoolteacher named Elizabeth Jennings was running late. She was heading to the First Colored American Congregational Church, where she was the organist, and needed to catch the Third Avenue streetcar. Although slavery had been abolished there since 1827, New York City was heavily segregated. The conductor of the arriving streetcar told Jennings to wait for the next which "had [her] people in it." She declared she "had no people." This second car was too full for her to board, so she got on the first, and refused to leave. ([Allison C. Meier, https://daily.jstor.org/](https://daily.jstor.org/))

This powerful action done by Elizabeth Jennings in an early civil rights protest refusing publically the white law of maintaining racial segregation in transport telling her '*to wait for the next streetcar which had her people in it*' led to desegregating public transportation in New York City. The reaction of the black woman Elizabeth Jennings declaring that she '*had no people*' was to tell white people that blacks have the rights on the American soil and they have to change their mental software and consider black people equal to them.

Undoubtedly, Harriet Tubman, the famous or the best known of all the female abolitionists called by 'General Tubman' and the 'Moses of her people,' in her strategies had powerfully challenged the white evil practice of racial system. She had the courage and success in guiding fugitive slaves from South to the North using the underground railways as the way to have access to freedom. ([https://www.libertarianism-org/columns/black-women-abolitionists-fight-freedom-19th century](https://www.libertarianism-org/columns/black-women-abolitionists-fight-freedom-19th-century)). The perilous strategy chosen by the black woman Harriet Tubman can be seen as a strong heart cry to put an end on the system of slavery.

As a feminist writer and a black descendant, Toni Morrison's contribution in the improvement of black women's situation in the United States by breaking the silence, is noticed through her novels. Through her literary

representation, Toni Morrison exposes the plight of black people on the American soil and claims not only their liberation but also their recognition as black people and as Americans equal to white people.

Thus, this research work about Black women revolt in the struggle for freedom purports to examine the way Toni Morrison fictionalizes aspects of black women's revolt within novels under scrutiny. The main question is stated as follows: How does Toni Morrison contextualize the manifestations of black women's revolt in her novels?

Through Toni Morrison's novels, black female characters are seen to undertake some strategies and actions of rebellion not only for their freedom but mainly for their recognition as Americans having the same rights as whites.

In reference to the history of America, the New Historicism will help to understand fiction with the light of some historical facts. The psychological approach will highlight the inner motivation of black women to be actors in the struggle for Black freedom. The sociological approach will help appreciate the nature of relationships between blacks and whites and the way the American society was ruled.

Toni Morrison's ability to dramatize black women's revolt will be demonstrated in two parts in the way they are organized to break the American racist system through the defensive and offensive revolt.

I- BLACK WOMEN'S DEFENSIVE REVOLT

The adjective 'defensive' is, according to the online Cambridge Dictionary word of the year 2023, defined as "*intended to protect against attack or harm.*" Considering the racial system imposed to black people in America, they intended to protect themselves against attacks and harms from white people as the way to claim not only their rights as Americans but also unity between blacks and whites. It can be explained by the fact that they are also participants in the building of what is known today by the United States of America.

In Toni Morrison novels, black female characters are seen on the position to protect themselves against attacks and harms as a strategy to struggle against racism. In other words, they are acting in order to protect themselves and show how capable they are for social triumphs. It is indeed in this context that in *Love*, through the black female character of Junior who, face with racial discrimination, being unsecured and threatened, finds the exit by leaving Settlement as a way to express defensively her revolt:

In silence Junior watched her toes swell, redden, turn blue, then black, then marble, then merge. The crayons were gone and the hand that once held them now clutched a knife ready for Vosh or an uncle or anyone stopping her from committing the settlement version of

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crime: Leaving, getting out. Clean away from people who chased her down, ran over her foot, lied about it, called her lucky, and who preferred the company of a snake to a girl. In one year she was gone. (Love, p. 59)

What is described as a defensive revolt is this attitude of Junior, a black female character who decides not to speak or voice out all forms of discrimination she witnesses. Consequently, one reads that Junior goes away from the Settlement because people no longer want her around them. The narrator argues that she cleans "*away people who chased her down, ran over her foot lied about it, and who preferred the company of a snake to a girl.*"

In fact, the story is about the exchange of Christmas gifts between the black girl Junior and the white boy Peter Paul Fortas. This fraternal act of exchanging Christmas gifts is seen as a betrayal in Junior's world because people want the cotton-mouth snake given to a white boy as a gift returned to its rightful home (Settlement). Settlement in fact, is the place of black people or the kingdom of blacks and the cotton-mouth snake belonging to black people not to white people. So, it cannot cross the border of the Settlement area. (Love, p. 57)

But, despite this evil atmosphere of hatred between Blacks and Whites, the little black girl Junior, in her strategy to have a united America, breaks barriers of hatred or discrimination by creating an innocent and fast friendship atmosphere. This inner conviction of making the way towards unity within Americans in America leads the little black girl Junior forwards to refusing to whip up hatred as notices Carmen Gillespie (2008: 96):

One Christmas, Junior gives Peter a young cottonmouth snake. He gives Junior a box of crayons. The gifts cause a great deal of consternation among the adults in Junior's world. Junior's miscreant uncles, demand, for no apparent reason that she gets the snake back from her friend. Junior refuses to do so and runs away from her uncles.

One can see how people's preference of a cottonmouth snake to a girl shows the degree of the hatred between Blacks and Whites. The fact of exchanging gifts with a white boy, Junior is hurt by her uncles and does not return to school, thus ending the friendship that had blossomed between her and Peter Paul. (Gillespie: 2008, 127) Through this reaction by the little black girl Junior, Toni Morrison lets readers understand how the new society or the younger generation is tired with the older generation's barbarity believing in an old-fashioned system that do not promote unity.

This reciprocal hatred between Blacks and Whites in America is what Margaret Walker stigmatizes in *Jubilee* (1966:53), when two white men Grimes and Bob want to kill a nigger not only because he killed their dog, but mainly

because the killer of a dog that belongs to Whites is a nigger or Black:

[Grimes and Bob] concluded the dog was poisoned, that somebody had fed him powdered glass that cut his insides to pieces. Such a good watch dog had evidently witnessed the smokehouse incident. Angered beyond telling Grimes said if I could only find the nigger that done it, I'd kill him.

This passage shows the extent to which a dog, a dog belonging to Whites, is given more consideration than a nigger. In other words, an animal has more value than a human being with a black skin. Here, one understands that for the White, the dog in the case of Walker and the gift of cottonmouth snake in the case of Junior are more important than a slave or a free black girl.

In addition, being on a weak position, black women, represented by the little girl Junior, decide to remain silent. It is a way to show their indignation to the wrong view over them when creating some strategies in order to abolish or put an end this feeling of 'hatred' or 'discrimination' between Blacks and Whites.

Thus, the word "silence" in the passage above, conveys a strong message; an expression of self-justifying revolution. For, as a little girl, it is an occasion to tell old blacks and whites to stop and change the mental software from hatred to love as a way to consider one another as human beings, as equal. The fact of remaining silent is, for the little black girl Junior, the way to weaken her oppressors finding the exit by "leaving" and "getting out" from the settlement.

It is important to note that Blacks are not accepted as full American citizens because they did not go to America with a human identity, but with a slave status relegating them at the bottom of the American society. They did not only fight collectively, but also individually by using different strategies. Thus, apart from "silence," Junior takes flight by running away to show her revolted mood as Carmen Gillespie (2008:125) writes:

They (Peter Paul Fortas and Junior) also share the experience of exclusion and alienation from their peers. When the two exchange Christmas presents-crayons for her, a snake for him-she gets in trouble at school and at home and runs away from the Settlement. (...). As a result, Junior's foot is left lame. She successfully and permanently run away at 11.

Fleeing is an act of rebellion which does not hurt anyone, but at last frees the one who experiences racism. This is to say that escaping is both, a way to fight for freedom and to revolt against an unfair treatment. It is a peaceful rebellion that leads to appeasement because in the strategy of black women, unity cannot be found in 'violence' like Moses' law "*an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*" (Matthew:5: 38) but in 'love'

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like Jesus Christ who says: "If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too." (Luke: 6: 29). It is in the same vision that Martin Luther King was fighting for true freedom for Black people in America using the non-violence strategy based on 'love' and confirmed it by saying: "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." (online: Brainyquote) It was in the mid-1950s, he led the Civil Rights Movement in the United States through peaceful demonstrations.

In *Paradise*, Toni Morrison, in her literary representation, shows another case of Black women defensive revolt where Black women characters are seen in the defensive position in order to rebel against White people's practice of killing and ill-treating Blacks during the assault of the convent. In fact, the story around this fictitious sequence from the novel talks about the assault that occurs when nine men attack women at the convent as the narrator describes:

They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses, along with clean, handsome guns. (*Paradise*, p. 3)

In inserting the group of men attacking women, Toni Morrison brings back the reader to the history of African Americans after freedom proclamation when, unfortunately, Whites' groups like Ku Klux Klan were attacking Blacks in order to crush out the political aspirations of the Negroes as Washington, Booker (1996:39) illustrates it:

Like the "patrollers", the "ku klux klan" operated almost wholly at night. They were, however, more cruel than the "patrollers". Their objects, in the main, were to crush out the political aspirations of the Negroes, but they did not confine themselves to this, because schoolhouses as well as churches were burned by them, and many innocent persons were made to suffer.

All these evil strategies against Blacks were to break the African culture and to prevent not only Blacks' uprisings and runaways, but also the spreading of the Black history from a group to another in the American soil. It is during the assault of the convent when one of black women decide to revolt defensively by running away instead of rendering Whites' violence by Blacks' violence:

Behind him a woman aims a butcher knife and plunges it so deep in the shoulder bone she can't remove it for a second strike. She leaves it there and escapes into the yard with the other two, scattering fowl as they go. (*Paradise*, p. 286)

Being in the self-defense position, instead of returning evil with evil while fighting against death, the woman character, in the worry of living in the united America where Blacks and

Whites are considered at the same level, decides to run away. By showing "silence" and "running away" as forms of struggle for freedom, the author helps the reader to discover the details of the struggle which were almost forgotten and neglected by both, historians and writers. Accordingly, Henry Louis Gates (1993: IX) writes:

Toni Morrison may well be the most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African American literature. Indeed, her signal accomplishment as a writer is that she has managed uncannily, to invent her own mode of literary presentation.

This way, Toni Morrison shows how black women have challenged not only discrimination, ill-treatment, or hatred, but have also told their oppressors that they are human beings and they have to enjoy equal rights with Whites. It means that Blacks and Whites are different by color but are the same in blood and shape.

The insertion of the defensive revolt is to show black women's strategies to call the Whites' consciousness on the mankind and Americanness of all black people living in the United States. It is also to show Toni Morrison's pride to be Black by proving black women's intelligence in the struggle for freedom and peace in America. Black women's intelligence is expressed by the maturity which is beyond the white's savagery of the racial system downgrading black people not only as slaves, but also as outcast of America. So, the rationale behind the black women's intelligence of revolting defensively in front of white's aggressiveness is that: People must understand not to judge someone by the color of skin, but by the content of character to follow the vision of Martin Luther King in his speech "I have a dream."

In this connection, one understands that the author wants to bring all inhabitants in the American soil and in the whole world to understand the dimension of "love" and to love one another regardless his or her race and differences.

In the same token, in front of the racist violence of Ruby city in *Paradise*, black women characters (Mavis, Soane, Connie, Gigi, Seneca, ...) are compelled to run away to the convent to stop being victims of racial discrimination as the narrator explains:

They were a third of the way into "Precious Lord, take my hand," (...) but her boarders did. Mavis drove the Cadillac, with Gigi and Seneca in the back and a somebody new in the passenger seat. None of them was dressed for a wedding. They piled out of the car looking like go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings. (*Paradise*, p.156)

This above passage illustrates the misery to be a black woman during these harsh times in the history of America. The

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description of their departure from Ruby to the convent when the narrator dramatizes in these words: "*None of them was dressed for a wedding. They piled out of the car looking like go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings,*" shows the degree of their suffering leaving a place without having a look on themselves. They were obliged to leave Ruby to avoid rendering violence with violence but rather showing love to hope for a peaceful America where blacks and whites will live together sharing the same rights.

Other characters like May, Christine and Junior in Toni Morrison's novel entitled *Love*, also being victims of ill-treatment in the Cooney's, decide to run away in order to escape hardships imposed to black people:

Since the atmosphere May described seemed so dank and small-town-y, Christine lingered. After two nights not quite on the street (a bus station didn't count), after being turned away from the YWCA, she moved into a Phillis Wheatley House. The country, so joyful and pleased with itself when she'd left it, was frightened now by red threats and blacklists. (*Love*, p.162)

It is to say that, 'silence' and 'running away' are seen as one of strategies used by black women, in a feminist way, to fight against racism and to make a way towards a peaceful America where blacks are considered at the same level as whites.

Another form of revolt is contextualized in *Paradise* through Arnette who, confronted with racism and gender problems, challenges them by attending school which is a sign of her integration in a racist country like the United States of America. Her plan to reach her goal is described when she speaks frankly to her lover K.D. as it written in the following passage: "*I'm going to Langston in September and I don't want to be pregnant or to abort or get married or feel bad by myself or face my family.*" (*Paradise*, p. 54)

Despite the fact that she is pregnant, she gathers all means to realize her dream and succeeds in attending school as Carmen Gillespie (2008:141) explains:

Arnette is supposed to leave Ruby to attend college, but her plans go awry when at 14 she becomes pregnant with K.D. Arnette attempts unsuccessfully to abort her pregnancy. In desperation and despondency about the pregnancy, she wanders out to the Convent where she gives birth prematurely to a baby. Because of her abuse of her unborn child and her refusal to care for it after its birth, the child dies shortly after she abandons it at the Convent. Arnette does attend college.

Arnette's act of abandoning her baby just after birth to go to school shows her willingness to integrate the American society through education. Here, Toni Morrison brings the

reader to understand not only the defensive revolt for black women's integration in the American society, but also the dimension that Blacks are thoroughly justified in placing the power to control their future and their liberation in their own hands rather the court or the judicial system.

As the matter of fact, the female character Arnette values integration more than her baby she kept for nine months in her belly. Her attempt to abort this pregnancy is a way to protect her child from enduring hardships his or her parents have been enduring with their status of non-free or free people. She aims first of all at fighting for her liberty in order to prepare a better tomorrow for her future children.

In this connection, the black woman character Sula in Toni Morrison's novel entitled *Sula* imposes a difficult task on herself just like Arnette in *Paradise*. The black woman character Sula tries to be both an African and an American and she attempts to move from one world into another. This can be justified by the fact that during her adolescence, Sula realizes that she would be more satisfied if she had more opportunity to live a worthwhile life according to her own will. Sula finds her power not within her community, but in her rebellion against it. Once she insists while talking to her grandmother Eva, "*I want to make myself.*" (*Sula*, p. 92) Sula wants to resist the system of segregation. She desires to go away and try something different from the way she has lived until then in the town: She escapes to college, submerges herself in the city life. (*Sula* Cover)

Apart from escape, the author also represents infanticide as a method of revolting defensively against the racial system. This is what is exactly described through the black woman character Sethe in *Beloved*, who refuses to go back to slavery with her children. For her, the truth is simple: She would not let her children be slaves, so she put them where she thought they would be safe, on the other side of this life. (Gillespie: 2008, 24-25)

The story around the black woman character Sethe is deep in the way that she killed her own children to avoid them be future victims of racism or slavery. In fact, the black woman character Sethe is represented in the novel as a slave who is victim of all ill-treatments of all kinds and has decided as a woman to escape in order to free herself, to live in freedom. Unfortunately, she was caught and brought back to slavery. In front of White's aggressiveness, she expresses her disappointment defending herself in a particular way: killing her own daughters as the way not only to prevent them from slavery, but also to condemn slavery and racism in America. The reaction of the black woman character Sethe can be seen as one of strategies to stop slavery and free future generation by killing children so that white won't have Blacks or black women to enslave. This can be explained by the fact that, during slavery, black women were considered as a capital in slave supplying by giving birth to future slaves in the image

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of Frederic Douglass whose mother was a slave and was himself a slave.

It is important to underline that the practice of slavery that puts Blacks to occupy the inferior position in the United States was just praised by Whites who took profit from it, but condemned by all black Americans who were the most victims of this inhuman system.

In analyzing Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, Benjamin Evayoulou (2009: 33) alludes to this aspect of slavery that uses black women's children as manpower when he writes: "*The novel opens on a scene that recalls that during slavery black women represented a capital for the slave owner, as they gave birth to the master's property.*"

Face with the challenge between her status as a slave and the future of her daughters, Sethe revolts defensively to protect her children by killing them. She believes that if she kills them, their oppressors will no longer have the possibility to ill-treat them. Killing her own children is for Sethe a way to prevent them from the white man's injustice and all forms of victimization. For, they will go where there is peace and where they will not be judged by the color of skin because God is "love" and his love endures forever. (Good News Bible: 2002, 634) It is in this context that Beloved is killed, with Denver as the next target.

Another case of defensive revolt is expressed by a sacrifice face with the racial practice of selling slaves. One remembers that during slavery, masters had the power, all rights and ruled everything according to their will while slaves were unable to protect themselves and their own children because they had no right and had to obey to their masters.

In *A Mercy*, the character Florens's mother who is a slave of the Portuguese slave owner D'Ortega, is victim of permanent rape and have a role of providing children for the man power in fields. She has been chosen to be given to Jacob Vaark the slave owner and farmer in the place of the dept. In effect, having a baby boy still at breast, Florens's mother revolts defensively by daring to say "no" to the decision of the new master Jacob and gives her daughter. It is a way to revolt against not only the selling of slaves but mainly the fact of being again a prey for rape for another master and giving children for the man power when she says that "*Take the girl, (...), my daughter, (...). Me. Me.*" (*A Mercy*, 7).

The fact of challenging her master's intention, Florens's mother makes an act of revolt not only against slavery, but also against the racial system because slavery is the seed of racism in America.

Apart from escape, infanticide, and sacrifice as strategies used by black women to revolt defensively against the racial system, the author also contextualizes the use of weapons to show how black women were sometimes protecting themselves against their oppressors. In front of the white's violence against blacks, black women particularly

were obliged to protect themselves as it is shown in this passage: "*Black women were armed; black women were dangerous and the less money they had the deadlier the weapon they chose.*" (*Jazz*, p. 77)

As can be seen, in reference to the American history, it is revealed that, face with the racist violence, black women were obliged to revolt defensively by holding fire arms that was forbidden to Blacks. This historical aspect is what Margaret Walker (1966: 271) enlightens when she writes:

But they were literary some old laws that had restricted the movements of slaves and free Negroes before the war. Negroes were still forbidden to own fire arms and to be seen on city streets at night after nine o'clock or they could be arrested for vagrancy and loitering.

Being tired of white women's supremacy and willing to live in an egalitarian America, black women resort to fire arms to claim their American citizenship. In so doing, they demonstrate how capable they are for social accomplishments.

In *Jazz*, the character Violet defends verbally herself by demonstrating that she does not have the intention to steal the white baby but rather, she expresses a human act of love by keeping safely the white baby found alone in the street, as she says:

Would I leave my bag, with the stuff I make my living with if I was stealing your baby? You think I'm crazy?" (...) "In fact, I would have taken everything. Buggy too, if that's what I was doing." (*Jazz*, p. 21)

Violet defensively revolts by blaming the group of Whites around her trying to humiliate her over false acquisition. Instead, she warns them when she says: "*Last time I do anybody a favor on this block. Watch your own damn babies!*" (*Jazz*, p. 22) It is also to say that, the black female character Violet has shown love against white's hatred or union against division as the way to tell the white people to change their mind and get out from their racism zone and consider blacks as human beings at the same level like whites.

From the forgoing, one easily infers that Morrison uses infanticide, sacrifice, escape, weapons, and verbal revolt as conceptual tools which have helped her to reconstruct the black American women's history in their involvement to struggle not only for Blacks' freedom, but also for their integration in the American society in the feminist way. Yet, Radka Nosková (2011: 23) for example, in observing black women's strategies in their way of acting in order to revolt against slavery or the aggressiveness of the American racial system comes to the conclusion: "*Although it may seem that they are only rebellious individuals, there is a deeper meaning in their conduct.*" This is to say that, the conditions that prompted these black women to fashion their own podium twenty years ago, have continued to generate new

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defensive imperatives. Beside the defensive revolt, Toni Morrison inserts the offensive revolt that we are going to analyze in the coming section.

II- BLACK WOMEN'S OFFENSIVE REVOLT

While multiplying strategies to revolt defensively against the American racial system, black women think of taking strong actions by fighting or attacking Whites who dare stand up against their rights. Toni Morrison, who is struggling for change in the way of treating and considering black people, inserts the offensive revolt as a way to show how much black women particularly disapprove racism.

Among novels under scrutiny, Toni Morrison clearly proves the offensive revolt in *Jazz* through the black female character Violet by the way the language is used or expressed. This is what Toni Morrison reveals in an interview with Thomas Leclair (2000:373) when saying: "*The language, only the language. The language must be careful and must appear effortless. It must not sweat. It must suggest and be provocative at the same time.*"

In fact, at the beginning of the novel, Violet is a fifty years-old resident of Harlem and is said to be a freelance hairdresser. Being face with the betrayal of love, the abandonment, and all prejudices against the black skin, Violet plans an offensive revolt during the funeral at the church with the knife by stabbing Dorcas' corpse who when alive, had attracted her beloved husband.

As a result, the author confirms Violet's plan by specifying that she has been looking for the knife for a month. (*Jazz*, p. 90) Violet who is described by the narrator as a skinny and still good-looking woman at the age of fifty, is troubled by the fact that her beloved husband Joe Trace, has abandoned her for a teenage light skin young girl Dorcas.

As women are closed to beauty and knowing that black women are said to be ugly, evil, and not attractive because of their black skin, the black woman character Violet is haunted by a strong desire to meet Dorcas. The meeting is not a friendly one but the meeting to evaluate the extent to which the teenage Dorcas is more beautiful than her for she succeeds in charming her beloved Joe Trace.

In this connection, when the light skin young girl Dorcas dies, Violet decides to revolt offensively or to make her revenge by attacking to Dorcas's corpse at the funeral with a knife (*Jazz*, p.13). This is what the narrator explains in these words: "*When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church.*" (*Jazz*, p. 3)

The stigmatization toward the image of the black woman which is said to be ugly and not attractive pushes Violet, a black woman of fifty years old, to forget the sacred moment of funeral where families are in pain of having lost one of theirs. For, one knows that it is during those moments that people come to sympathize with the bereaved family as

the Bible says: "*weep with those who weep.*" (Romans 12: 15) Unfortunately, Violet does not go to the funeral to weep with those who weep, but to take vengeance against the person who is the cause of her abandonment by cutting the dead face of Dorcas.

It is important to underline that Violet does not cut another part of the body but only the "face." The face is one of the most attractive parts for women and Violet selected Dorcas face that has attracted Joe Trace her husband. It is important to underline that, this attitude of revolting offensively is encouraged by the revolted civil rights Activist Malcom-X (1963: 29) who told them that "*you can waste somebody if he attacks you.*" By encouraging his black fellows to respond to violence by violence, Malcom-X goes against the philosophy of non-violence espoused by Martin Luther King which required Blacks to love their enemies.

By considering the case of Violet, one understands that Violet longs for that kind of love that her husband Joe Trace expresses for Dorcas and pushes her to a peculiar act of trying to stab Dorcas's body during the girl's open casket funeral. This attack that the author considers as an offensive revolt is a manner to create an aggressive atmosphere between the oppressed and the oppressors. One can talk about Moses's law "a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye." It is also the way to kill, to finish with the myth of beauty, of light skin, and of long hair or prejudices. This myth around beauty honors the white woman beauty which is considered as a standard one by hiding the black beauty and does not permit the black woman to feel worthy and beautiful.

In order to break silence in front of the racial system practice of raping black women, and to help black women to survive in the patriarchal white American society, Toni Morrison inserts a sequence of black women offensive revolt against sexual violence through the character Junior. In front of the sweet talk of the white Administrator of the Correctional School by whispering such as: "*Nice hair,*" "*Take it,*" "*Good girl,*" "*Sweet tits,*" "*Why not?*" (*Love*, p. 116), the black girl Junior offensively revolts by pushing the Administrator off of the balcony as the narrator explains:

The exit Conference started out great. The Administrator, relaxed and talkative, described his hopes for Correctional, for her. He strolled to the sliding doors that opened onto a small balcony, invited her to join him and admire the grand trees surrounding. Perched on the railing, he suggested she do the same, congratulating her, reminding her to keep in touch. He was there for her. Smiling, he told her she might want to get a haircut before she left. "Such beautiful hair, wild." He touched it, patting her head fondly, at first and then, drawing closer, pressed it. Hard. Junior dropped to her knees, and while the Administrator's hands were busy

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unbolting, hers went to the back of his knees, upending him over the railing. He fell one story. Only one. (*Love*, p. 117)

Through this long quotation, one understands that the black girl Junior has to defend herself against violently imposed sex. While she is at a Correctional institution, an Administrator tries to force her to perform oral sex. Junior offensively gets revenge by pushing the man off of the balcony. (Gillespie: 2008, 116) The reaction of Junior can be seen as a way to tell oppressors to stop dishonoring black women sexually because, killing the Administrator was not on Junior's mind-stopping him was. (*Love*, p. 116). In inserting this part of Junior's offensive revolt against sexual violence, Toni Morrison, in a feminist eye, manages to repair the image of the black woman in order to achieve the balance of equality in the American society.

To provide a comprehensive perspective, a compelling reading, Toni Morrison mentions an offensive revolt from the history of African Americans of 1955 in Alabama as she explains: "*As early as 1955, when a teenager's bashed-up body proved how seriously whites took sass, and sensing disorder when word of an Alabama boycott spread.*" (*Love*, p. 81)

Toni Morrison refers to the year 1955 to contextualize Blacks' experience of racism and victimization in the United States of America. This year, associated with the State of Alabama, shows the historical dimension of this novel, because like in *Love*, the history reveals that there was in Alabama, exactly in 1955, social tensions between Whites and Blacks in the struggle against racism or racial segregation for blacks' integration in the American society. It is in the same way as one can read how it started with Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat to a white man as the historian Clayborne Carson (1999: 50) explains:

On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to move when she was asked to get up and move back by the bus operator. Mrs. Parks was sitting in the first seat in the unreserved section. All of the seats were taken, and if Mrs. Parks had followed the command of the bus operator she would have stood up and given up her seat for a male white passenger, who had just boarded the bus. In a quiet, calm, dignified manner, so characteristic of the radiant personality of Mrs. Parks, she refused to move. The result was her arrest.

This passage shows the relationship existing between history and fiction in Morrison's novels, because like Morrison, the historian Carson also shows defensive and offensive revolt through words like "quiet, calm, and Parks's refusal" to give up her seat to a white man. Furthermore, just after Rosa Parks's arrest, many social movements had been occurring as a way to force the white man to change his evil view over

Blacks, as Martin Luther King, quoted by Carson (1999: 53), argues: "*I came to see that what we were really doing was withdrawing our cooperation from an evil system.*"

In her mission to raise the history of black people as lived experience, and in "*the multi-faceted creations that emerge from the intense and productive pressure of Morrison's expansive imagination*" to borrow Carmen Gillespie's words (2008: xi), Toni Morrison succeeds in inserting the Alabama boycott which is an act of offensive revolt in order to render her text more convincing. The Alabama boycott is the result of black people's offensive revolt against racial segregation by giving more privilege to white people in a separated atmosphere. Through the reaction of the black woman Rosa Park by refusing to give up her seat to a white man, one understands Blacks' commitment to break the separation between Blacks and Whites. It is the way to claim an egalitarian society by telling the White man that Blacks are equal to Whites and deserve all rights of American citizens' regardless inferior or superior race.

If the offensive revolt of Alabama boycott that has allowed an aggressive contact with the oppressor to shape the way to the improvement of the black situation in America, the offensive revolt of Violet however, allows the black woman Violet to reconquer her beloved Joe Trace, as Carmen Gillespie (2008: 88) asserts:

Eventually, he [Joe Trace] and Violet reconcile and grow close again. At the end of the novel, he is working at a speakeasy so he can spread his days with Violet. The two have an older, more settled love that can sustain them and that helps to heal the wounds of the past and their unfulfilled and impossible longings.

Here, one can understand that, through the story of Violet and Joe Trace, the author evidences not only the black women's victimization and rejection because of the color of their skin, but also their revolt against the racial system and Blacks' total integration in the American society.

CONCLUSION

This research paper about black women's revolt in the struggle for freedom has been an attempt to show how the author has reconstructed the African American women's experience and their revolt against the racial system in America, both, defensively and offensively. The manifestations of the black women's defensive revolt have been demonstrated through cases of escape, the infanticide done by Sethe who killed her daughter Beloved, weapons holding, sacrifice, and Violet's verbal defense who has been accused to be a kidnaper. New Historicism, the psychological and sociological approaches, we have also evidenced the author's ability to contextualize the offensive revolt of black women not only through the attack of Violet to Dorcas's corpse, but also with the author's insertion of the Alabama

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boycott of 1955. (*Love*, p. 81) This is to say that, the defensive and offensive revolts have been used by black women as weapons to fight back the racial system. This study finally shows not only the involvement of black women in the struggle for black freedom, but also the black women power in conflict regulation testimonies of which are substantial in the history of America.

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