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Ideology and theRepresentation of Black Male Characters inSelected African American Literary Texts: Bontemps's *Black Thunder;* Wright's *Black Boy*; Walker's *The ThirdLife of Grange Copeland* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

A DISSERTATIONSUBMITTED TO THE ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN AFRICAN AND DIASPORAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH.

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Abigail and our two little angels: Believe and Beloved, who as the loved ones have been my source of inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the enactment of black masculinities as represented across time in *Black Thunder*, *Black Boy*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Song of Solomon*. Two theoretical frameworks have been used, namely Black Marxism and Connell's masculinity theory. Male writers' portrayal of black male characters has been analysed using both Black Marxism and Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity. However, femalewriters' representations of black males do not show elements of radicalism that can be linked to Black Marxism. What has been established is that ways of being a 'man' and how masculinities are negotiated differ according to history, race, age, culture among other variables. Coupled with ideology, various representations of black males are shown in the selected four African American literary texts. Given that the concept of masculinity has been explored from slavery to the post emancipation era, it has been noted that each different epoch has its own forms of masculinity. Claims of location are also responsible for spawning different masculine identities. Black masculinities exercised in the American Deep South are not necessarily the same as those performed in the North. Interestingly, African American female writers have also had their say on black masculinities, in their various representations of the American male of African descent. These female writers have their different areas of convergence and divergence with male writers in their representation of black masculinities. The black male has been portrayed exercising violent and hyper sexual masculinities. The degree of black men's misogyny highlighted in the two texts by female writers is unparalleled in *Black Thunder* and *Black Boy*. Such phenomena attest to the underlying imprints of ideology in the depiction of the African American male characters.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the background of the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, significance of the study, justification of the study, limitations of the study,theoretical framework, research design and methods and chapter layout. Literature review and author biographies are alsogiven in this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

The emergence of different brands of feminism date backing to the Enlightenment period and its discourse on human equality is largely responsible for the raging debate on black family relations, with different views emerging on who fares better in the American scheme of things between black males and black females. According to Bloom (1999)

> feminism posed a challenge to traditional male domination, and with it came an extensive debate about what it means to be male or female and to what extent should people conform to strict roles assigned to their gender(p.132).

In the American context, black female writers felt that male writers were not exploring the experiences of black women at the hands of both white and black patriarchy. Where black writers see their marginalization by Jim Crow laws, black women coined 'Jane Crow' laws to emphasise the gendered nature of racial discrimination. The debate on black male – female relations has cut across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and literature. So much has been published about the black male characters, but all the same, understanding of them continues to be limited. Feminist writers and critics like Simone de Beauvoir(1949) set out to deconstruct patriarchy and tried to promote a female culture. This radical feminist stance of the mid-20th century also influenced African American female writers in their representation of male characters, though they did not employ the full gamut of white feminist writers. In fact, writers like Hurston, Walker and Morrison advance the cause of the black woman without necessarily forgetting the culture and context within which they are writing. However, the most important point is whether from a womanist or Africana womanist perspective, African American female writers continue to zero in on the plight of black women at the hands of their black male counterparts. This foregrounding of women's

concerns influenced critics like Connell (1995) to venture into the studyof masculinities. The study of masculinities exposed that men are gendered beings.Given that representation is a matter of giving concrete form to ideological concepts, the researcher focuses on the ideologies that underpin the representation of male characters inAfrican American literature.

In African American literary discourse there is a tendency to represent the black families as monolithic yet there are many types of black families. Often times, writers make absolute claims about the world and American males of African descent. In most works of art we note deterministic propositions, reductive notions and representation of the African American male character.It is generally assumed that black women are victims and black males are the victimisers, and thisbasically is how ideology operates.

Ideology tends to naturalise things (Althusser1971) and we note this in repeated images of black males in African American literature, which end up as banal truths. Myths are created and reinforced through images, which are products of representation. It is the mainstay of this research to explore different representations of African American male characters. The research is informed by the need to account for the various images of black males from the time the enslaved Africans landed in the Americas. According to Said(1978), all representation because they are representations are ideological. In this regard, different world views that inform the representation of African American male characters are examined. The representation of black male characters has affected black families, especially on how black men and women relate to each other. It is the mainstay of this research to try and put into perspective how ideologies influence the delineation of different male characters in African American literature.

The research looks at the question of the limitations and liberties black males face on their encounter with the world as African American males and how this impacts on their representation. Men as a group are misrepresented thanks to ideology.Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) contend that the individual status and position of those we group together and call 'women' and of those, we call 'men' vary greatly. There is diversity and difference between men and women as well as among men. Complex realities of African American male experiences and how these shape the images we find in African American literary discourse is also the concern of the study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most black families in America have problems, which partly stem from black male and black female relations. The way males relate among themselves has also been largely ignored as focus has been on how patriarchy oppresses women. Since gender relations do not only exist between men and women, the manner in which males relate among themselves is to be explored. Men and women fail to locate each other within their respective social, historical, political and cultural contexts. It is this problem of failing to take cognisance of the foregoing which informs the study. The study tries to focus on how literary works to be studied mediate the images of African male characters, of course in most instances focusing on how black males relate among themselves and with their female counterparts. It seems there has been not much good said about the African American male characters in general for too long. Much attention has been on how black females suffer at the hands of their male counterparts, without making a subterranean level analysis of the root causes. So much has been written on the representation of female characters in literary works in general and African American literature in particular. There has been not much focus on black male characters, and this is based on the notion that they fare much better than their female counterparts. Granny's famous speech in Hurston's (1937)*Their Eyes were Watching God*that the black American woman is the mule of the world seems to enjoy authority, and the researcher seeks to interrogate the validity or otherwise of such a proposition. In America, racism is a social, political and economic system aimed at guaranteeing white control and political security from the perceived African American male threat. As such, the system descends heavily and with impunity on the imagined threat. Researches on the experiences and representations of the black Americans in African American literature have been carried out, but not much attempt has been made to unravel the ideological underpinnings that influence these representations of the male character in particular.

The main thrust of the study is to highlight the various waysin which black male characters in African American literature are represented. The unwrapping of the ideology that influences the depictions, is meant to dig deep to the bottom of things and expose what informs such representations. It is important to note that the reasons for such representations are far from being simple, but are rather complex as captured by the various images of the African American males depicted in African American literary discourse.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The main aim of the study is to examine the interplay between ideology and the representation of American males of African descent. Exposing how African American male characters are depicted defining their black manhood or masculinity in African American literary discourse is the other aim of this study.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Literature on African Americans is voluminous. The objective of this dissertation is not to reproduce this literature. It is to discuss briefly the representation of black male characters and examine the ideological bias that embroiders images of the African American males. The study seeks to examine the concrete specificity of individual gendered experiences, and how this connects to and is different from the experiences of others as is captured in the representation of American males of African descent. By the end of the research study the researcher should be able to:

➢ Highlight the different images of African American male characters in African American literature.

➢ Show whether the representation of African American male characters in American literature is a subversion or confirmation of dominant racist stereotypes.

➢ Highlight the interplay between ideology and the representation of black male characters.

➢ Provide a comparative approach to the study of African American literature in different epochs, from slavery up tothe post emancipation era.

➢ Assist students of AfricanAmerican literature by providing a combination of theories that can be used to analyse African American literature.

1.5 Limitationof the Study

The research will focus on four literary texts, which by any standard are not representative enough of the vast literature by African American writers. The major constraint that the

researcher faces is the unavailability of some critical and literary texts on American literature, which forces the researcher to dwell on the texts that are readily available. The researcher is of course cognisant of the limitation of drawing a general conclusion, but these texts highlight the major issues that concern this research. In fact the texts chosen for the study capture the breadth and depth ofAfrican American male experience and express the historical, social and psychological dimensions of life in the context of capitalism, slavery and racism in the American society.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The research seeks to add a subsection to the study of American literature by focusing on an area that is often generalised and not given much attention and analysis. How African American male characters as artistic creations typify essential features of their encounter with the ravages of history is assessed.

It is also a step further analysis of the representation of black males in the context of history and literature. It is hoped the research will provoke further discussions on the images of African American males in African American literature. The study also seeks to illuminate some of the ways in which ideology operates as it influences writers' representation of black male characters.

Theoretically, it is hoped the study can usefully contribute to the knowledge in literary theory in general, theories of masculinities in particular. For the next researcher, it can be used as a reference when researching on masculinities and the representation of black male characters in African American literature. The research can also be useful to those interested in studying Black Marxism as a literary theory in relation to the images of male characters in African American literary texts.

1.7 Justification of the Study

This study is a dip-stick analysis of the interplay between ideology and the representation of black males in African American literary discourse. Of late, the trend has been to focus on males as a category, as if they were a homogenous entity. A paradigm shift in this study is that the representation of individual African American male characters is examined from the standpoint of ideology. Each individual reacts differently to social, economic and or political situations, hence the need to focus on ideology and the representation of American males of African descent not as a single entity, but a heterogeneous lot.

1.8 Literature Review

This segment focuses on the concept of ideology and its interface with representation. In the same vein the ravages and cruelties of the institution of slavery and its legacy are also looked at.

According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004 : 76), " ideology can be defined as the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." They further argue that the imaginary relationship is often portrayed by the effects of ideology as if it were the only possible reality. Ideology seeks to justify things by portraying them as entirely natural. Althusser (1971) points to the subtle way ideology operates as it is a means of representing reality where the act of representing is obscured. In this way, representations create an ideologically based reality.

Hall's (1997) theories of representation: the intentional and constructionist approaches to be more specific, do highlight the role of ideology in representations. The intentional approach emphasizes that words mean what the author intends them to mean, while the constructionist approach underlines that representations are mere constructions. It can thus be noted that representation is a political issue (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Representation reinforces ideology as it is entrenched in the consciousness of subsequent generations. Moreover, representations affect attitudes and behaviour.

It is through ideology that representations of reality are mediated. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) question the claim that any image could take up a position of ideological neutrality. They further contend that :

> the issue is not only about dominant ideology, but there are also oppositional ideologies like Black Marxism and feminism in all its brands, which seek to change people's consciousness, by replacing dominant version of the 'real' conditions of existence with their own (p.77).

Needless to say there is a strong umbilical cord between ideology and representations of black male characters in African American literary discourse. O' Reilly (2001) argues that representations are constructs in the sense that they are based on ideas and perceptions which can have little to do with a genuine understanding of the characters being described. He further contends that a subject is produced rather than reflected in representations. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) also concur that

no representation is ever neutral; writing is not a mirror which reflects the world, but a means through which it is constructed. Representation is linked to bias, stereotyping and the influence of discourse (p.145).

What is central in the concept of representation is the fact that apart from reflecting the social world, representations from literary imagination contribute to its shape, and are central to modern individual reflexivity. Representations are often re-appropriated by ordinary people.

Stereotyping is the representation of an individual in terms of the prejudices of the observer. In this kind of representation the individual is seen as simplified type rather than a complex human being (O'Reilly 2001). According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) the effects of stereotyping can mean rather than treating people as individuals, " we treat them as artificial persons, which means an extension of the category we have constructed" (p. 139). There are many visceral stereotypes and images of black males in America. Some of these representations are readily available and conveyed to the public in literary discourse. Collins (2005) notes that the images of black male include "the over-sexed ladies' men, the absentee father, or most damaging the violent black as drug dealing criminal and gangster thug" (p.204). She argues that such stereotypical images of one dimensional characters influence personal opinions, ideas and racial attitudes. Collins (2005) does not go further to examine the interplay between ideology and these representational images. Barret (1991) concludes that ideology is always about the process of misrepresentation.

The research focuses on whether black American writers have been able to transcend and subvert the stereotypes that obtain in the dominant ideology of white racists. In representation of images, Muchemwa (2000) highlights the danger of ideological promiscuity which leads to the shaping of characters in line with dominant stereotypes and ideology. This results in the fossilization of black males in stereotypes that stifle their development as characters.

During slavery, the African American male characters were mainly viewed by their slave masters as the mythological children of Sisyphus destined to suffer meekly the vagaries of history. The African American male was usually presented as the , "dormant, childish, merry-soul and submissive Negro" (Leak 2005: 67). Their representation were of symbolic caricatures rather than fully developed characters in themselves. Such representations were written from the centre of those who wanted to perpetuate the subjugation of the African American male. The images were meant to undermine the black male's belief in his capacity to struggle successfully in championing his destiny (Ngugi 1993). It was only later that the

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agency of the enslaved African American male, in shaping his destiny has been mediated in African American literature. However this revisionist approach to the representation of black men did not mainstream gender. Much of the narrative forms of African American literature valorise the exploits of black men in challenging the oppressive system of slavery. How this impacted on gender relations in the black American families, black men and black women relations is of interest to the researcher.

How enslaved black males struggled to determine their destiny is also captured by Williams (1944). He notes that the most dynamic and powerful force in the colonies was the slave himself. According to him this agency on the part of the slaves is largely ignored, "as if slaves when they became instruments of production, passed for men only in the catalogue" (p.202). Williams (1944) further points out that the slave responded to coercion and punishment with indolence, sabotage and revolt. The slave was usually

> as idle as possible. That was his usual form of resistance – passive. The docility of
> the Negro slave is a myth. Not merely as stupid as his master thought him and later
> historians have pictured him, the slave was alert to his surroundings and keenly
> interested in discussions about his fate (Williams 1944: 202).

The frequency and intensity of slave revolts after 1800 reflect the growing tensions and that slaves were not prepared to wait for freedom to come to them as a result of the goodwill of their masters. Williams (1944) notes that

> the revolts consisted of the drivers, tradesmen, and other most sensible slaves on
> the estates that is not the field hands but the slaves that were comfortably treated.
> The slave knew his strength, and wanted to assert his freedom (p.204).

A closer examination of William's (1944) reflection of the revolts betrays how gendered they were. He writes of the slave as if he was only male, when it is well documented that both black males and females were enslaved.

Slavery kind of ruptured the binary of gender relations between males and females. According to Golden (2005) slavery required mixing of gender roles as both males and females picked cotton and also worked in the master's house. Slavery promoted an idea of independence in both black men and women that blurred the lines between gender roles. However when the civil war began, only black males were allowed to serve in the army. To sustain black male absence, women had to fill the more masculine roles within the household.

This rendered women independence and a great deal of masculinity. Golden (2005) contends that :

> the dominant discourse that white culture operated in was still highly sexist; blacks understood that in order to accomplish certain goals, such as political and cultural equality in the eyes of the whites, Blacks were going to operate within those cultural norms (p.229).

The above scenario according to Golden (2005) meant Black women had to take a backseat to Black men for the betterment of Black people as awhole. He suggests that blacks are lost in an attempt to conform to the dominant gender ideology in America when their history as black people represent a struggle and fight for equality, essentially denouncing gender roles.

Much as scholars agree that slavery was equally a horrendous experience for both black males and females, some maintain that the circumstances of enslavement were different. Merida (2007) argues that fieldwork was divided along gender lines with more physically demanding tasks like ploughing assigned to men, while women hoed. This in a way is viewed as the beginning of gendered differences between enslaved black men and women. Merida (2007) opines that such differences influence the portrayal of black males in African American literature.

Slavery had a devastating and long lasting effect on black families. Du Bois (1903) argues that there was negative conditioning of blacks reinforced by the slave masters through harsh treatment, and brutal reprisal for seeking any form of knowledge for themselves or the world at large. Men were stripped of any form of pride and or self – respect, by being humiliated in front of their families for any attempt at seeking justice. Women were often taken from their husbands and raped at their owners' discretion which further diminished the male's sense of self-worth (Du Bois 1903). He also notes that one of the damaging effects of slavery and oppression to blacks was the psychological problem of self-loathing.

Scholars like Du Bois (1903) have argued that slavery resulted in disorganization and instability in black families. Recent studies have shown that economic disadvantages faced by black males are responsible for destabilization of the African American family.Conditions of extreme poverty militate against functioning African American families. Inadequate employment opportunities for black males have encouraged marital instability among blacks. Many writers have explored this in their representation of black males. However much as the

economic explanations cannot be ruled out, they have to be more subtle than the simple thesis that female –headed households are a result of economic stress.

Another common practice that had a damaging effect on the psyche of the black American male was selective breeding of the biggest and strongest slaves. Although profitable for the slave owner, the practice devastated the slave family structure. It was a methodology that reinforced the idea that slaves were " little more than human livestock to be used and abused at their owners' whim" (Farley 1995 : 254). He argues that this selective breeding psychologically influenced black male slaves to believe that familial relationships were of little value.

Family unit was put in disarray during the era of slavery when slaves were being sold. This is captured in Douglass's (1849) slave narrative. His proposition is that when the marriage institution " is abolished, concubinage, adultery and incest abound" (p. xii). He argues that any denial of such effects of slavery is meant to discredit the shocking tales of slave holding cruelty. The selling of slaves is in a way attributed to the existence of fatherless homes among black communities. Douglass (1849) notes that slavery completely disrupted the notion of the black family because family members could be sold away from one another at any time. He further shows how mothers could be torn away from infants and husbands could be sold away from their wives without warning. This in a way created a weak and fatherless family. The matrifocal family became typical of African American families both during and after emancipation and has been perpetuated generationally to the present time(Staples 1982).

In a big way there was disruption and disorientation, to which African American families were subjected to during the era of slavery. Continual separation of family members denied the slaves the ability to function as family members. The nature of slavery made all slave marriages insecure.Stevenson (1995)notes that fathers had no authority over their children and the parental role of the slave men was greatly diminished.He further posits that matrifocality was a fundamental characteristic of most slave families, and that condition has been noted in black families throughout generations (p. 57).This has been used to generalise on the causes of the disintegration of African American families and the representation of the American father of African descent as absent or in the process of deserting his family.

Moynihan (1965) blames what he sees as the disintegration of poor, urban black families squarely on slavery. He argues that " slavery developed a fatherless matrifocal pattern within black families"(p.34). Men, he claims did not learn roles of providing and protecting their

families. Moynihan (1965) insists that this shortcoming has been passed down through generations.Gutman (1976) argues that soon after emancipation most families of former slaves had two parents. He further contends that to blame family disruption on slavery would be to " underestimate the adaptive capacities of the enslaved and those born to them and their children" (p.65).

Gutman (1976) notes that in some ways African American families very much resembled other families who lived under vastly different circumstances. He further highlights that some African American husbands and wives loved each other, while others did not get along. The question of ideology comes in when a particular writer sees it fit to harp on the negative about the African American male in representation of one.

Although most scholars agree that slavery put African American men at a racial disadvantage, which has taken them over a century to fight, and they still have not completely overcome this disadvantage, it would be too reductionist to attribute all representations of black males to the legacy of slavery. It is this researcher's humble submission that human beings and indeed all living creatures exist in process. From one year, or century rather to the next they transform or become different from their previous state. This gives credence to the fact that apart from slavery there are other factors that impact on how black males exercise their masculinities and of course the way they are represented in literary discourse. Much as explaining a human being or culture requires at least some historical perspective there is need to look at the ideology that influences certain behaviours and representations of a people.

The iron chains of slavery have been replaced with economic bondage, suppression and oppression in America. Brutal enslavement of African Americans and theoretical emancipation was followed by oppression and discrimination. Du Bois (1903) suggests that after slaves had been freed, mental conditioning experienced in captivity was reinforced by the social practices. He mentions segregation, Jim Crow laws, lynching and other acts of violence against the black men who sought to elevate their status, as forces that maintained a sense of anxiety and paranoia experienced by blacks during slavery. In this way slavery left an indelible impact on the African Americans. Slavery in itself was a power relationship between the slave owners and the enslaved people. The naming of the slave by the slave master disempowered and unmanned the black male slave. This bestialization and ownership of human beings fostered an inferiority complex on the oppressed.

Most works on African American males reflect their dominance on and oppression of their female counterparts. There is little attempt at showing that there are inequalities and differences not only between genders, but within genders. Pilcher and Whelehan(2004) note that differences are based on class, race and age. How ideology influences the representation of various masculinities is not explored by Pilcher and Whelehan (2004).

Douglass (1849) opines that much as African Americans have endured the privations, sufferings, load and horrors of slavery they were never degraded in the scale of humanity as they remained enslaved people of African descent. According to him, nothing was left undone to:

> cripple the enslaved people's intellect, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of a most frightful bondage under which they have been groaning for centuries (p. 6).

Washington (1901) represents the black male as purposeless and lazy as he has a negative attitude towards manual work. He further insists that the black man does not need the vote until he is refined and reformed of his 'savagery and barbarism.' Looking at Washington's (1901) representation of African American male characters it appears apparent that he is writing from the centre of those sidelining black Americans. The image of the black males as shiftless, unreliable and careless with money ignore the vast majority of them who are industrious, thrifty and moral (Du Bois 1903).Ngugi (1993) notes that a good number of writers has been trained and cultured into drawing pictures of the world in harmony with the needs of racist whites. However, a body of critical opinion suggests that representation of black males by Washington (1901) falls under the dominant stereotypes of the white racists.

Such dominant stereotypes had a psychological impact on Americans of African descent as they suffered from a sub-conscious inferiority. Du Bois (1903) argues that all positive reinforcements such as black history and accomplishments were replaced with a reinforced and repetitive doctrine of black inferiority. He goes further to contend that feelings of inferiority have been passed down from generation to generation years after the abolishment of slavery. Du Bois (1903) also suggests that

> feelings of inadequacy and low self image generate a low regard for those who look like you, creates an environment of envy, distrust, disloyalty and hatred within black communities (p.231).

This can be used to explain the representation of black males in African American literary discourse, but the major flaw of such an analysis is that it fails to acknowledge how social agents can challenge their ascribed positions and identities in complex ways. Perhaps most important of all is that much as African Americans have been victims of capitalism, slavery and racism, individuals do not assume fixed positions in inevitable hierarchies of violence and oppression, but transform and produce forms of contestation. It is therefore the main thrust of this study to explore the representation of black males, looking at the various ways they have been subjugated and have responded to discover viable modes of existence or new identities.

Commenting on the psychological toll brought about by slavery and racism Du Bois (1903) notes the aspect of double consciousness. He posits:

> One ever feels his two-ness,---an American, a Negro; two souls , two thoughts , two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 194).

The psychological stress of the black males partly explains the images of them represented in African American literary discourse. However, the psychological dimension per se cannot account for the various representation of American males of African descent.

In the beginning of the 1960s, there was growing concern about the so –called " blackmatriarchy" and the perception that black women had too much control and power in their families (Cazenave 1983). The popular belief was that there was social castration of the black men and black women were alleged to be participating in the process of keeping the black men down. The pattern of many households being headed by women is what has been coined black matriarchy. In the 1970s, it was assumed that black men and black women should come together, present a united front in dealing with the racial oppression. Representations of black males are consequently shaped in line with obtaining discourses.

Barrel (2010) notes that " throughout American history, black men, teenagers and boys have been depicted as buffoons, criminals, over-sexed animal like creatures who lust after white women" (p.97). This brute image of the black male was born in Europe after Europeans first set their eyes on some African men who supposedly possessed huge sexual organs. What Barrel (2010) ignores is the causal vis-a vis correlation aspect of this representation of American males of African descent. What influences a certain image to be created and other

related images thereof is very important. The ideologies that influence representations of black males need to be examined. In his ground-breaking text, *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature*, Leak (2005) identifies long held myths and stereotypes that persist in the work of black writers. Noted was intellectual inferiority, criminality, sexual prowess and homosexual emasculation as some of the myths and stereotypes associated with black men. The work shows a psychological preoccupation with the black men. The researcher strongly feels that there is more than the psychological dimension that influences the images of black male characters we get in African American literature. There is therefore the need to unravel the complex, controversial and contradictory representation of the African American males in literary works. Leak (2005) concentrates on the literary construction of black masculinity mostly by male writers. The researcher seeks to make a comparative analysis of the images of black male characters represented by both male and female writers.

Chandler (2007) argues that black men in America behave the way they do because of the training they get from parents. In fact he is of the conviction that masculinities are actually communicated to black men, who subsequently perform them. What Chandler (2007) does not capture is the influence of history, in the shaping of black masculinities in America. He further suggests that the black males in America continually negotiate between their organic selves and the assimilationist they are expected to embody as African American. This echoes Du Bois' concept of double consciousness.

For black males, gendered performances are learned as a result of the messages they receive from parents and parental figures (Chandler 2007). According to Butler it is through certain acts that one is defined as belonging to a particular gender category. Her constructionist view of gender looks at individuals as practising various psychologically prescribed roles dictated by society. Women and men are considered as constructions or representations achieved through discourse, performance and repetition rather than being real entities. Chandler (2007) further argues that black masculinities have often been characterised as "displays of pathological or oppositional behaviour, with white male behaviour as normal". He grapples with the questions: Who and what taught Black males how to perform masculinities. Chandler (2007) does not problematise the aspect of representation vis a vis ideology.

According to Klages (2006) in America:

slavery and racism produced a hegemonic white culture which enforced its systems and values on the non-white population, and that non-white population both obeyed and resisted those systems and values (p.150).

What the foregoing points to is that the subordinated reacted to and resisted that domination by racist whites. In spite of the oppression, the enslaved people managed to resist and survive the rigours of bondage in numerous ways.

Enslaved black people did everything that they could to sabotage the chattel slavery system, which was a source of their oppression. According to James (1963)

In addition to violent rebellions and uprisings they [slaves] resisted their oppressive situation in a variety of smaller, often underhand ways also. For instance, the enslaved African Americans : often did as little work as possible; deliberately produced shoddy work; deliberately lost and damaged working tools; feigned illness; inflicted injuries on themselves; ran away from plantations; even committed suicide to deprive the enslavers of their labour and sometimes poisoned their enslavers (p. 16).

These and other forms of apparently passive resistance eroded both the quality andquantity of production on the plantations. This is highly linked to the concept of Black Marxism which emphasises that resistance to slavery by African Americans was largely informed by the realisation that they were not enjoying the fruits of their labour. Resistance itself could be overt or covert depending on the situation on ground.

The enslaved Africans and their descendants' well –documented responses varied from open violence to collaboration with the exploitative system. Slavery as an institution over relied on violence and coercion and this intrinsically led to resistance from the enslaved blacks. However there were other enslaved people who submitted humbly to the excesses of their masters in a bid to avoid violence. The gendered nature of these responses has not been given much attention in African American literary discourse.

Looking at the American system and how it shapes black masculinity, Farley (1995) suggests that there are a lot of negative stereotypes of blacks assigned to them by whites. These stereotypical images include murderers, thieves, robbers, rapists, adulterers among others. According to him, to reproduce such ideologies of the dominant society is not a viable strategy, but rather counter-productive. He looks at the cultural characteristics of black

families that inform black masculinities. Absence of childhood as a " specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle and early initiation into sex, all lead to a strong predisposition towards single parenthood " (Farley 1995: 75). He further argues that statistics, show above average rates of divorce, separation, and unwed motherhood in the black community. This has resulted in above average proportion of single- parent, female household families.

The images of African American males in literary discourse are largely negative. Such images are mischievous and misleading only when stated as true of a whole community, when they are in reality true only of certain classes in the community.hooks (1992) comments that

> opening a magazine or a book, turning on a television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy. Those images may be constructed by white people who have not divested of racism, or by people of colour or black people who may see the world through the lens of white supremacy (p.1).

The representation of black males tends to homogenise the identity of American males of African descent. Collins (2005) notes that there is gross under representation of the positive aspects of black males. There is need therefore to unravel what informs such representation.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities and Black Marxism,are to be used toanalyse the portrayal of black male characters in the four selected texts. Masculinity is defined as a set of qualities, characteristics or roles generally considered appropriate for a man. Since the research is mainly concerned with exploring the representation of black male characters, it is inevitable to include how they relate to their female counterparts. Given that these representations impact on how black families carry out their everyday life activities, the suitability of thetheory of masculinities, becomes self evident. Gender permeates every facet of life, hence the need to examine the representations of male African American characters using the theory mentioned above. What society believes a real man should act like affects significantly the images of male characters we have in literary discourse.

Connell (2001:7) argues that

masculinities cannot be understood only as discourse, since gender relations are also constituted in, and also shape non-discursive practices such as labour, violence, sexuality, childcare and so on.

In light of the above the gender power relations in black families and communities,depicted in the selected literary texts are examined as these inform how black male characters are portrayed. The focus therefore is on the intersection of masculinities, ideology and the representation of American males of African descent.

Connell (1995) labels the traditional male roles and privileges hegemonic masculinity. From Connell's (1995) study of masculinities, it emerges that constructs of masculinities vary across historical and cultural contexts. Important to take note of is that concepts of masculinity are constantly subject to change and thus, argues Connell (1995), it is more appropriate to talk of masculinities than of single masculinity. By way of definition, masculinity is a set of qualities, characteristics or roles generally considered typical of, or appropriate to, a man (Connell 1995). Masculinity and men are often confused. While the former is socially constructed, the later refers to the biological. Chandler (2007) is of the considered view that there is no monolithic notion of black masculinity as there are many manifestations of the concept.

Hierarchies according to Connell (1995) are demarcated levels of masculinities which are equated to physical composition when men are young, the acquisition of wealth and women when men age. Ways of being a man and cultural representations of or about men vary both between societies and between different groups of men within any one given society (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Masculinities are generally understood as a form of power relation between men and women and among men. Connell (1995) argues that masculinities occupy a higher ranking than femininity in the gender hierarchy.

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is the culturally dominant ideal of masculinity and is centredaround, authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and paid work. The next level is called complicit masculinity, where most men fall under, then subordinated masculinities and femininities respectively occupy the lower rungs of the hierarchy. For Connell (1995), "masculinities is a concept that names patterns of gender practice, not just groups of people''(p.17). Since masculinities are basically linked to meaning culturally ascribed to men they are malleable and subject to ideological shaping. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) gender oppresses all individuals and men also

need liberation from masculinities. Therefore, there is need not to limit one's gaze to male-female relations, but also focus on how men relate among themselves.

Gender discussions stress ideologically inflected differences (Muponde and Muchemwa 2007). They are of the conviction that scholarship and research on gender studies is currently focussed on one sex and gender. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) further suggest that " dominant gender discourses often fail to provide men with alternative symbols of masculinities other than superiority and the necessity of control" (p.148). Most representations of black men subscribe to the normative ideas of masculinity, which view men as workers and breadwinners and women as nurturers. However studies on masculinities have shown their plurality and cultural specifity. Cleaver in Muponde (2007) notes that in

> defining manhood, many studies have highlighted the centrality of heterosexual
> activity and the breadwinner's role as a popular definitive feature of what it means
> to be a man in many societies (p.9).

The above quotation serves to illustrate how masculinity is constructed in a given culture. Scholars who pioneered the study of gender as a social construction overturned the assumption that gender roles are an essential, relatively fixed part of human nature. In African American literary discourse there is much focus on race without explicitly addressing gender. However in literary works there are many patterns such as exaggerated links to crime, violence and irresponsible fatherhood, which are more relevant to black males than females. This indeed attests to the importance of looking at the representation of the enslaved Africans males and their descendents using the theory of masculinities.

To do justice to the texts to be analysed, Black Marxism is also used to examine the representation of African American males. Robinson (1983) contends that Black Marxism takes on board the notion of blacks in America as agents of change and resistance. More so, the theory emphasises the links between black radicalism and traditions of Africa, and the unique experiences of blacks on Western continents. Even though the development of Black Marxism can be traced back to the historical racial oppression that existed in America since the time of slavery it became more pronounced in the early 20th century (Dawson 2001). Black Marxism emerged as African Americansrealised that the social and economic inequalities they encounter are a fundamental part of the larger system of capitalism. Given that this research is focusing on the representation of African American males, the prefix to

American in this context, makes it imperative to also use Black Marxism in analysing the selected texts. Black Marxism as a theory is used in this study to analyse how masculinities function in the context of capitalism, slavery and racism. Focus is mainly on the transformative acts of black males' struggle against subjugation and oppression.

Black Marxism looks at how oppression created black radicalism. In fact radicalism, is the " only possible road for black liberation in a country where blacks were badly outnumbered, thus rendering any nationalistic political solution problematic " (Dawson 2001 : 177). True to Williams' (1944) spot on observation that capitalism led to slavery and later racism, economic discrimination was in large part the cause of the race problem. Efforts of all exploited to overthrow the oppressors is part of black Marxism. According to Robinson (2000) Black Marxism can be traced back to historical racial oppression that existed in the United States since the time of slavery. Oppression that had been placed upon African Americans culminated in movements towards radicalism in the early 1920s. How such radical ideologies informed representations of black male images during this period is of importance to this study.

Dawson (2001) is of the opinion that such radical ideologies as Marxism were embraced by African Americans in their attempt to acquire basic freedoms accorded to fellow men in the American Constitution. Black Marxism speaks volumes about the hypocrisy of a system created under the veil of democracy. As a movement, Black Marxism "has its roots in the history and culture which developed out of African American's resistance first to slavery and decades of economic, political and social subordination that followed the defeat of what Du Bois called Black Reconstruction" (Dawson 2001 : 173). In a nutshell Black radicalism was born out of the blacks' realisation that economic advancement of whites was a product of black male exclusion and economicsuper exploitation.

Black Marxism shows how issues of race and oppression inherent in the social, political and economic systems of African Americans have been fused with the ideologies of Marxism. Dawson (2001) concurs with Williams (1944) that for African Americans the social and economic inequalities that are encountered are a fundamental part of a large system of capitalism. The research also looks at capitalism as an economic ideology and how it informs the representation of African American male characters. According to Robin and Robinson (2000) capitalism is the principal reason for the failure of society to effectively improve the social and economic status of the African American community as a whole. It would be

relevant to remember how the 40 acres and a mule promised to freed slaves to use as their first steps on the economic ladder remained a pie in the air. The promise did not materialise mainly due to the capitalist nature of the American society. In a profit- oriented society, there is no room for such good will and fellow feeling. It is therefore important to look at how black males are represented as they grapple with a society that is capitalist and racist at one and the same time. Black Marxism is about writers whose creative impulses are propelled by radical opposition to the white –black relationship in America.

1.10 Research Methods

Given that the study focuses on literary texts, the research method to be used is qualitative as detailed statistics are not applicable to literary works. Data that is presented, interpreted and analysedfrom the four literary texts selected for the study is basically given in descriptive form.The analysis is based on deductive reasoning, that is from the general to the specific when looking at ideology and the representation of different male characters. Four literary texts that focus on different historical epochs are selected, interpreted and presented comprehensively because of wider context from which it is drawn. Qualitative research method has also been chosen for its flexibility in terms of methods of datacollection.The research method has a weakness of making it difficult to generalise findings to other situations because of contextual restrictions. However as has already been intimated, the selected texts do cover a lot that is within the scope of this study.

1.11Research design

Since the research focuses on literary studies, the researcher makes use of literary theories, criticism and history. This involves engaging selected literary works directly and describing them with an emphasis on analysis and judgement. Historical information pertaining to the conditions of the African American male in America and literary theories are important tools in understanding the representation of black males in literary works.

1.12Sources of Data

In this study, the researcher focuses on ideology and the representation of African American male characters in selected African American texts. Data is collected from *Black Thunder*by Bontemps (1936); Wright's (1945) text,*Black Boy*; Walker's (1970) novel,*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977). The texts selected cannot be representative enough of how African American men are represented, but they go a long way

in trying to represent these characters at different historical signposts. An attempt was made to balance the texts by male and female writers for a balanced analysis.

1.13 Data Collection

The data is collected through several steps. It starts from reading to get a comprehensive understanding of the novel's contents. After reading, the researcher selects the data relating to the problem to be researched and finally types all the data collected and selected from the novel. In data collection, the researcher makes use of an inter-disciplinary approach, where information from history, anthropology and literature on the African American male is to be used to explain the different representations of American males of African descent. Literature that deals with the life of African American male as he landed in the Americas is collected and analysed in this study particularly zeroing in on how that has impacted on the images of black males in the United States.

1.14 Data Analysis

After collecting the data, analysis of this data using two literary theories :masculinities Connell (1995) and Robinson's (1983) Black Marxism is presented. Data collected from the four literary texts within the scope of this study is reviewed, identifying the pages related to ideology and the representation of black male characters. After analysing the interplay between ideology and representation of black males, the researcher draws a conclusion, making suggestions pertaining to the all important issue of representation.

1.15 Author Biographies

This section gives brief biographical information about Arna Bontemps, Richard Wright, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison who are all accomplished African American writers, whose different texts are examined in this study.

Arna W. Bontemps (1902- 1973)

Bontemps was born in Alexandria, Louisiana. He later took up a teaching post in Harlem at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1926 and 1927, he won prizes in poetry competitions with other black poets. According to Folkways (1990), he is considered one of the few authors who shaped the influential movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. In 1931, he published *God Sends Sunday,* worked together with Langston Hughes in 1932 and 1949 to co-edit a poetry anthology. Some of the works he authored includea short story,

'*ASummer's Tragedy*', *Black Thunder: Gabriel's Revolt: Virginia 1800,*published in 1936 and Sad-faced Boy (1937). Bontemps has written quite a number of novels, children's books and poems. His novels feature black characters.

Richard Wright (1908-1960)

The writer was born to an illiterate sharecropper father and his mother was a schoolteacher in Mississippi. He was abandoned by his father at age five. Together with his brother, Richard had a stint at an orphanage. He had interest in creative writing from a very young age.In1927, he left the South for Chicago where he joined the Communist party in 1932. He published *Uncle Tom's Children (* 1938), *Native Son* (1940) and his autobiography, *Black Boy* came in 1945. Realising he could not stand the racism in America he permanently moved to France and settled in Paris, where there were other writers like James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison (Butler 1995). In 1953 he published *The Outsider*, followed by others that were not well received. Wright travelled extensively to Africa, Asia and Spain. According to Trotman (1988) Wright developed an interest in anti-colonial movements and spent some time in Ghana. He died of dysentery in 1960.

Alice Walker(1944)

Walker was born in 1944 to poor sharecropper parents in Georgia. She is the youngest of eight children. Walker was involved with the Civil Rights Movement. She married and divorced a white man. In 1968, she published *Once*, a book of poetry. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* was to come out in 1970. *Meridian*, her second novel was published in 1976, while the widely known *Colour Purple* was published in 1982. She has other fictional and non-fictional works to her name. Her works deal with African American experience and its effects on the black community. According to Wade –Gayler (1990) her feminist outlook owes to her having been born in a family where boys could run around, while girls were pinned to household duties.

Toni Morrison

Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her parents moved there hoping to raise their children in an environment friendlier to blacks. The Wofford household was steeped in oral traditions of southern African American communities. She was called Morrison after being married to Harold Morrison, who later divorced her. The songs and stories of her childhood influenced her later works. As she grew up, she was to

experience racial discrimination. Her first novel, The Bluest Eye (1970), was followed by Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby(1981), Beloved (1987) and Paradise (1998). Morrison has also written non-fictional works.

1.16 ChapterLayout

Chapter 1   :Introduction

Chapter 2:Emasculation and Efforts to Reclaim Manhood in *Black Thunder*

Chapter 3 :   Black Maleness and its Interaction with Capitalismand Racism

in*Black Boy*

Chapter 4 :Womanist Representation of Black Males in *The Third Life of*

Grange Copeland

Chapter 5:Subversion or Confirmation of Dominant Stereotypical Male

Images in *Song of Solomon*?

Chapter 6:Conclusion

Chapter 2

Emasculation and Efforts to ReclaimManhood in *Black Thunder*

Belonging to another human being brought unique constrictions, disruptions, frustrations and pain to the African American male. Black males suffered literal and metaphorical castration at the hands of their slave masters. The custom and nature of slavery did not allow black males authority to protect themselves and their families. Slave masters undermined the dignity of the African American male by disciplining him in front of women and children, among other degrading practices. In this way the manhood of the American male of African descent was greatly diminished if not completely erased. It is the aim of this chapter to examine how black men negotiate their way as they attempt to restore their manhood in the context of the malignant impact of slavery.

In order to be able to fully explore the representation of black males in *Black Thunder*, it is necessary to give an overview of the historical context within which the novel was written. Bontemps is among the literary stalwarts of the Harlem Renaissance era. The period was marked by an avalanche of literary works focussing on black culture and pride. Bontemps even won prizes for penning poems that celebrated black history and experience. The experience and exploits of black people were fore grounded in literary works written during the Harlem Renaissance. When *Black Thunder* was written, slavery had long been abolished in 1865, but Black people in America continued to be treated as inferior to whites. From the end of slavery African Americans have struggled to attain their rights as citizens in the United States.The end of physical bondage did not bring the promised land that many blacks envisioned. White supremacy was violently restored, for instance through the Jim Crow laws and the wanton lynching of the black male by the Ku Klux Klan. Bontemps had to rewrite history so as to remind white racists that a repeat of Gabriel's revolt would occur if they continue to mistreat and abuse black Americans. Much as the work depicts a multiplicity of masculinities, Bontemps seems to point to his own'ideal' type ofmasculinity and heroism.

The text *Black Thunder* focuses on the ways in which black maleness has interacted with the history of slavery. Gender is a prevalent factor in nearly all relations. How this is represented in texts particularly looking at black male characters is of paramount importance. In the text slave masters' masculinities are constructed in relation to black men. The dominant position of the white men emasculates and subordinates the black male. According to Connell (1995) masculinities intersect with race, class and age.Bontemps (1936) explores how black men

were rendered less of men by slavery and their strenuous efforts to reclaim their lost manhood. Slavery as a system robbed the African American man of his manhood by dehumanising and debasing him to the level of a beast of burden. The details of how slavery dehumanised the African American male need not detain us here, for they are better treated elsewhere in this dissertation. However, suffice to say that black males were subjected to all forms of oppression during slavery.*Black Thunder* captures a miscellany of black men's responses to the institution of slavery, highlighting the divergence of opinions on the part of the marginalised and dehumanised black men. The novel is multiple layered as it navigates from history, race, class, age to gender as these impact on the representation of black male characters. As a writer, Bontempswrites from the centre of those struggling against segregation and discrimination.

Alook at the institution of slavery shows that white slave masters had economic and socio-political power and were dominant and 'hegemonic' with the help of 'complicit' white men over groups of 'marginalised' and 'subordinated' groups of both black maleand femaleslaves.Issues of slavery, race, class and gender define relations of power and are very critical to the representation of African American male characters. Slavery ruthlessly entrenched the inferiority of the black man to the white slave master. What we note in Gabriel's insurrection is an attempt by the subjugated, the obscured and humiliated to demand their right to recognition and an admission of their rightful place as men in America. Existence for the enslaved African American man was a living nightmare. The challenge that the black male is presented grappling with is of turning from victimhood to becoming agents of their own destinies. The use of unpaid labour to produce wealth lay at the heart of slavery in America. Black Marxism or black American radicalism was informed by this exploitation.

The paradox of the institution of slavery is that it developed side- by –side with institutions that spoke of the dignity of man, and the protection of the rights of the individual. More so at the core of the institutions that grew alongside slavery was power and control which was kept from the slave at all cost. The attempt at revolting therefore represents the oppressed's "journey from slave hood to manhood" (Booker 2000: 40).

Bontemps shows that the exploits of Toussaint L' Overture did not go unobserved by slaves in the United States, especially in Virginia as they circulated a letter from him imploring them to unite and unshackle their chains of bondage. In *Black Thunder*, Bontemps shows what legacy the age of French Revolution brought to the slaves of Richmond. Gabriel's

awakening and enlightenment to freedom starts and grows from his many trips to Richmond as Mr Prosser's carriage driver.He eavesdrops on the conversation of M. Cruezot and Alexander Biddenhurst, whose discourses are often coloured with phrases of equality and liberty. Bontemps therefore captures the global influence of the revolution as slaves in Virginia were not immune to what was happening across the sea. The insurgents in Virginia passed around a letter from Toussaint L'Overture, whose import was:

> My name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken to avenge your wrongs. It is
> my desire that liberty and equality shall reign. I am striving to this end. Come and
> unite with us, brothers, and combat with us for the same cause (p.655).

The contents of   letter articulate manly expectations, desire to be free and struggle for equality. As enshrined in both the French and American constitution, all men have inalienable rights to life, liberty and equality, which the African American male also strives to enjoy. The execution of the revolt was a way of articulating the discourse of masculinity. Bontemps is equivocal about the justice of Gabriel's cause and the necessity of violence by black males to gain freedom.Connell (1995) notes that theviolence of minority men is the rebellion of masculinities which are marginalised by hegemonic masculinities.The gendered implication of Toussaint L'Overture'sletteras it exhorts 'brothers' to unite, cannot be missed even by the most naive reader.

Interesting to observe is that *Black Thunder* was published in 1936 –a period marked by black anger fuelled by the failure of the American society to grant equality between the African American and white men.Philosophers like Rousseau and Voltaire influenced the FrenchRevolution stressing that "Man is born freebut always in chains". In 1789, the French Revolutionbrokeout championing: The Declaration of the Rights of Man which held in high esteem the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.Looking at the privileging of the Rights of Man, the gendered implications of the constitution and how it sidelined women cannot be overemphasized.What is therefore noted in Bontemps (1936) is the privileging of the masculine ideology as black women agency is negated. The writer represents black male characters who are striving to attain "self-conscious manhood" if one may use Du Bois's (1903) words. However the primacy given to black male agency overshadows black women's activism to end racism and oppression in America.Revoltstherefore   function as sites of the re-articulation of other sites ofmasculinity.

The emphasis on the attainment of manhood in the black male's quest for equality in America has seen Bontemps also stressing the role played by these men in trying to bring to fruition their dream. The American ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were not compatible with the practice of chattel slavery. The climate of revolution made the institution of slavery unacceptable in the minds of many black Americans. Connell (1995) views violence as a male institution, which usually functions between men, for instance wars or revolts. Considering the foregoing readers cannot miss the gendered nature of the revolt in *Black Thunder.*

 In the text women have been confined to the twilight zone in terms of representation and activism to end oppression. Juba, Gabriel's lover is presented as a woman of a nervous disposition as she cautions him, " The police will get you for just thinking like that" (p.30).The protest group by Gabriel has only one woman and Bontemps' representation of history here overshadows efforts done by women like Isabella "Sojourner" Truth and Harriet Tubman, who actively participated towards Black emancipation. The woman indeed is shown as a mere accessory in a landscape that is dominated by men. This omission or rather relegation of women to the margins of the text suit the ideological agenda of the writer as he uses the discourse of revolt as remasculinization of the African American male character. The revolt is dressed in male robes and given a male face.

As a writer chooses what to write or not to write, the aspect of authorial ideology comes in as he represents the black men as the sole agency of black emancipation. What can be noted therefore is the almost total exclusion of the notions of struggle on the part of women, with so much emphasis on the part played by men as individuals who believe in resistance and opposition to slavery. Given that one cannot fully discuss masculinities without mentioning how they relate to femininities, draws one to comment on the conspicuous absence of militant women as if to suggest they are lethargic beings empty of the spirit to fight. There is apparently no attempt at bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in the fight against slavery. The novel is indeed preoccupied with representing history from the male perspective.

That a text like *Black Thunder* lays the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement, which was highly gendered anyway, shows how the masculine ideology peripherised women experience. During the Civil Rights Movement, in his "I have a Dream" speech Martin Luther King Junior argued that the constitution and the Declaration of Independence had provisions for

man's unalienable right to life, liberty inter alia. Since the black man was not enjoying the rights, he had to fight and attain manhood hence the obscurity of women efforts in Bontemps's text. Gabriel sums it up when he intones that

> A man has got a right to have freedom in the place where he is born. He has got to
> want all his kinsfolk free like himself (p.210).

The whole endeavour of black emancipation is given a masculine face from Bontemps' representation of his African American male characters. Authorial ideology is all about the philosophy behind a writer's work and for Bontemps, this has coloured his representation of black Americanmales big time. In fact the text has centralised black men in the struggle against slavery while sidelining women. Bontemps even uses masculine-stained language when he harps on the rights of man.

Just like the colonised men in Africa, Gabriel and other enslaved African American men are, "overpowered but not tamed; treated as inferior but not convinced of their inferiority" (Fanon1963: 53).To free themselves from the shackles of slavery, Gabriel and his fellows haverealised that violence is the answer. Since violence perpetuates the institution of slavery, it is only through violent means that an end to the system can be brought about in Fanonian logic. Gabriel is represented as a black man capable of organising and executing resistance to the excesses of slavery. This is an attempt by Bontemps (1936) at releasing the African American men's history from shrouds of racialist wrappings from which it had been buried for a long time. Instead of representing the enslaved African Americans as the stereotypical, passive, stupid and docile men, Bontemps (1936) depicts them as strategists eager to navigate their way out of the oppressive system. In fact the insurrection is a powerful statement in itself about the enslaved men's refusal to be oppressed under the institution of slavery. It is a way of reclaiming their manhood that the dehumanising treatment had robbed them. Some of the insurgents show a determination to escape the prison created by their circumstances as enslaved men.

The foregoing attempts at restoration of lost manhood, point to the problematic concept of masculinities. From the above discussion, Gabriel and his group of protesters' quest highlights that masculinity is not biological, but rather a set of qualities socially accepted for a man (Connell 1995). Given that under slavery hegemonic masculinity was a preserve of the slave masters, the subjugated black men are seen making endeavours to regain lost manhood, which has seen them being feminised by the white man and woman as well. Philosophically,

the attempt by Gabriel and his fellow men to resist slavery shows that the African American men did not take passively the blows of history. More so, emphasized is the fact that the oppressed African American male was able to develop a critical awareness and will power to fight against subjugation.

For Gabriel and other black men of his ilk, they would rather die resisting than live on bent knees in a world which they cannot define for themselves on their own terms, if one may draw an analogy with Ngugi's (1993) analysis of Okonkwo in *Things FallApart*. Gabriel and his fellows are infused with revolutionary zeal, which shows "the possibility of redemption arising from the energy of the oppressed" (Ngugi1993:6). Instead of being whipped into humble subservience to violence and oppression by the callous killing of Old Bundy, Gabriel's energy for protest and self affirmation is actually rejuvenated. The oppressed African American man is represented as someone who has realised that no amount of gentleness can efface the marks of the white slave master's violence except violence itself (Fanon1963). Despite the divisive pressures of the system of slavery, Gabriel and his fellows are able to come together to organise and plan a revolt. The struggle is to bring an end to the horrible and despicable institution of slavery.

A look at characters like Pharaoh and Ben who betray the revolt shows that Bontemps (1936) is representing credible and complex people who are going through some real life problems. The dramatic somersaulting of the two characters above points to the fact that the novel does not seek to romanticize the revolt. Ben feels he has betrayed his master, Moseley Sheppard and he confesses. By virtue of his being a house slave, Ben feels he is closer to his slave master than other black slaves. This abundantly underscores identity crisis as Ben vacillates his allegiance between black and white men. When Pharaoh declares that "for a penny , I'd stay at home," Ben also responds "me too" (p.97). This marks their renege on the insurrection cause. In a way this shows that ideology leads to a situation of a slave who takes it that to be a slave is the normal human condition. It can be argued that the two black male characters have been castrated by slavery.Such characters have physical bodies of men, but minds of eunuchs, if one may be allowed to borrow Muchemwa's (2001: 45) words in his analysis of Chisaga in Hove's *Bones*. The body therefore cannot validate an individual's masculinity. In other words, not all men are masculine.

 On the other hand, Pharaoh sells the plot for the mere fact that he has failed to be its commander. Being at the helm of the conspiracy is also a mark of masculinity, and Pharaoh's

failure to lead it makes him a turncoat. Masculinities and their proclivity to auto- destruction are depicted in the character of Pharaoh, needless to say the name is a biblical allusion to the Egyptian leader who exudes toxic masculinities. However, given the invisibility of the enslaved black man in the American scheme of things, Bontemps' Pharaoh can be understood as a black man who wanted to use the revolt as means of emerging from obscurity to prominence. Slavery affected the enslaved people physically, economically, emotionally and psychologically hence the different responses various people proffered.A closer scrutiny of Gabriel and Pharaoh shows conflicts pertaining to hierarchy of power. However, the point to emphasize here is that what Pharaoh does undermines the potential for collaboration or collective effort by black males to dislodge their oppressors.

The various representations of the black men in the novel are an attempt at subverting stereotypes which prevented one from distinguishing the individual from the group.Macrae in Pilcher and Whelehan (2004 :) view stereotype as the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group. Far from being meek, docile and subservient, the enslaved African American male is shown as militant and self- assertive as demonstrated by Gabriel. He shows a genuine effort to break the shackles of slavery, which has seen the enslaved people being given animal like treatment.Indeed Black Marxism can be traced back to the racial oppression that existed during slavery. Black radicalism is shown being born out of the suffering of the black people at the hands of their profit- oriented slave masters.There is a genuine attempt by Gabriel to force the pace of history, determining its direction, changing himself and his circumstances. For the black males, the revolt gives them an opportunity to express their indignation with subjugation under slavery which they view as a source of endless embarrassment. The enslaved black male has been victimised by the institution of slavery, but refused to be crushed.

Old Bundy is given a victim face following the cold blood murder by his master. In an act that shows the vulnerability of the black male during slavery, Old Bundy is beaten to death by Thomas Prosser. However important to observe is that his death invites the allegiance of the likes of Ben who earlier showed no conviction to challenge the status quo. As the story unfolds Bontemps (1936) treats readers to a twist of perspective as Ben reneges on his oath of allegiance to the revolt. Ben's self –doubts are cracks through which the reader can see deep into the soul of the black folk, dogged by double consciousness (Du Bois 1903).A closer examination of the portrayal of Ben shows the collaborationist tendencies and ideological promiscuity of the subjugated.

Ben has thoroughly imbibed the ideology of slavery. His reaction shows psychological exhaustion, which leads him to have no qualms about informing against fellow black slaves. He has been subjected to the psychological violence of the white supremacist ideology. By all standards, Ben's action of betrayal can be considered effeminate - typical Uncle Tom mentality.Slavery mentality plants serious doubts in him about the moral rightness of the revolt.Ngugi (1993) notes that such doubts make possibilities of triumph or victory to be seen as remote, ridiculous dreams and make victims associate with that which debilitates (p.70). This image of Ben is the common imagery of the black male as subservient, and is in tandem with representationsby racist whites and those confirming such stereotypes. However Bontemps does not constrict the images of black males to such narrow representation. Bontemps does not only use race tohomogenise and define the black males as he shows that there are different segments of black males whose perceptions of reality are equally different.Ben's betrayal also suggests lack of a collective vision of the revolt by the black males. To Ben, dreams of autonomy appear distant, if not beyond realization.

The contrast between the representation of old Ben and Gabriel in terms of their resolve to overthrow their oppressor reminds one of Wright's '*Uncle Tom's Children*.' The young generation is depicted throwing all caution to the wind, confronting the debilitating system, while the old generation of Uncle Toms submit humbly to the absurdities and humiliation of the system. The Uncle Tom figure represents slaves whose instant reaction to white authority is submission to avoid violence. In contrast, the young generation of vengeance is confrontational as is represented by Gabriel. Masculinity as a concept is highly influenced by age. The old generation of Ben with its virility waning, is also depicted as a morale sapped lot that would rather support the existing oppression than envisage a struggle for equality.The physical description of Ben attests to the above assertion. His

> Hands felt scaly and cold to himself. They were so thin and brittle that he
> imagined they were the hands of a skeleton (p.10).

The foregoing serves to highlight that Bontemps has also used age as socially discriminating aspect in his construction of black masculinity.

Old Bundy's funeral gives Gabriel an opportunity to strengthen his resolve to revolt and plans made show his nuanced awareness of conflict. Frantz Fanon in his classical text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968), shows in no uncertain terms that the slave master with his brutality and violence has shown the enslaved African American male figure the way he

should take if he is to be free. Slavery was based on violence and enforced through violence and could therefore not be brought down without at least a threat.Violence according to Connell (1995) is a part of the system of domination, but it is also a sign of the system's weakness, for it would not have to resort to violence if its legitimacy was not questionable. There is indeed development of consciousness as Gabriel and friends realise that freedom can only be brought by violence. Just like colonialism, slavery, "is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence"(Fanon 1968: 61).Bontemps highlights the excesses of the slave masters as the roots of the black males' revolt against oppression.

The massive hangings after the capture of the group of protesters shows that the system is so desperate and so insecure that it will not take any prisoners. Violence and death are the only reliable allies of slavery. The flight and imprisonment of fellow whites who are non-natives to the area graphically shows how Gabriel's insurrection shook the slave masters to their nerves so much that they could not trust even their shadow. Whites were fearfully paranoid about the potential of slave resistance. Bontemps presents a refreshing image of the black slaves as he bursts the myth of black masculinity associated with ignorance and docility. What is actually witnessed is the collective will of the enslaved black men in refusal to break under so many years of torture and ruthless oppression by whites. Gabriel and his fellows' attempt to take Richmond was their first step towards their freedom and emancipation. Their determination to resist exploitation, oppression and other forms of enslavement is vividly captured by Bontemps (1936).According to Dawson (2001) it is oppression that created a system of black Marxism.

Bontemps seeks to portray traditions of resistance from the dominated Black men in America. It was the Black men that the institution of slavery had to break first, but throughout history the dominated have always resisted.Ngugi (1993) notes that despite the slave trade and slavery bringing about mass relocation of people as well as economic, political, cultural and psychological violence, people always resisted.Accordingto James (1963) wherever there were African American people there was resistance to chattel slavery system. He further intimates that there were literally hundreds of plantation uprisings andconspiracies throughout America. The mere fact that the dominated resist albeit in different ways, casts in doubt Bontemps' representation of African American males as the sole agency of resistance to slavery. A people's refusal to work out their destiny within the confines of slavery drawn by the slave masters can take various subtle forms that resist hegemonic control. Negro

spirituals are a good example of this form of resistance and in Bontemps' thinking resistance has to be in the form of a revolt largely executed by men.His conception of heroism has been restricted to open revolt by black males against slavery and racism.

Black men, like Gabriel are shown challenging the ascribed roles of being the proverbial drawers of water and hewers of wood. Read from a Black Marxist perspective the failed revolt by Gabriel shows that the slaves of African descendants realised the exploitative nature of the institution of slavery responsible for their pathetic existence. Capitalism as a cash nexus economy is highly linked to the excesses of the institution of slavery as shown by the murder of old Bundy, whom the slave master considers more of a liability than an assert. Prosser views Bundy as a " worthless old scavenger" (p.12). For Bontemps, the enslaved black male's suffering at the hands of the slave masters is the springboard for revolt against enslavement. The writer goes beyond stating the oppression and dehumanisation of the black male, as this suffering is transformed into a battle cry to dislodge the system.

There appears to be some hackneyed intention to reclaim the lost African American manhood which forced Bontemps to harp on the militaristic male gender role, which informs Gabriel's revolt. Much as the text draws its context from history its oversight of the role played by women in its quest to represent men as the champions of emancipation falls short in giving artistic creations that typify experiences during this particular phase in history. There are problems indeed when representations seem to be heavily coloured with authorial ideology and are at odds with anthropological, sociological and historical evidence.The representation of different black male characters like Gabriel, Ben and Pharaoh with different character traits reflects individuality as they react differently to space and time. Although he focuses on African American history, Bontemps is much more fascinated by men's attempts to liberate themselves. The question is : How does Bontemps represent black males and what are the ideological imprints on these representations?

The conspicuous absence of women agency in the resistance and radicalism against slavery presented by Bontemps unmasks his masculine ideology. The ideological bias of a text refers to the political and social beliefs that colours and informs it.Onthe role of women, Beckles (1993) notes that they

> Werenot only found in the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement, but were
> central to the production of anti-slavery ideologies. ---women were critical for the

forging of resistance strategies and an anti-slavery consciousness which rests at the

core of the enslaved [African American] communities' survivalist culture (p.74).

Thefundamentally important contributions of the black woman to the liberation of the black people have been deliberately disregarded and sidelined. The elimination of the role played by the black woman is a method specifically designed to give more prominence to the African American male slave.

The desire to create more space for the black male character whose very existence under slavery is a mockery to his manhood in *Black Thunder* sacrifices the historical significance of black women on the altar of the writer's patriarchal ideology.Given that power, control and authority – all traditional definitions of masculinity have been historically denied to the black men since slavery, it is not a wild proposition to suggest that Bontemps saw it incumbent upon himself to represent the black man, Gabriel to be precise as an embodiment of all that the black man was thought to lack during the time. Instead of the black man being represented as wholly physically, and by implication in the law of binary opposition, white man as cerebral, Bontemps presents the conspirators as intellectually endowed as they make careful planning of the revolt.The representation of Gabriel and his determined fellow insurgents challenges the very foundations of the myth that bolstered the view that the African American slave was passive. Representations therefore produce ideological realities.

Gabriel as a house slave, whose role was far removed from the toiling and moiling associated with plantation work is equipped with vision, agency and choice denied his fellow field slaves showing how issues of class affect gender. His philosophy is quite different from the mentality of the field slave numbed by the rigors of plantation life. This reminds one of Douglass's (1849) observation that

> whenever my condition improved, instead of it increasing contentment, it only
> increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom.
> I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless
> one (p.103).

The little freedom the slaves had led to a yearning for total emancipation as is shown by Gabriel who is a coachman. His dignity is not even undermined when he is called a dog. This highlights his radical disposition that is largely informed by his privileged position compared to his other enslaved African Americans.Gabriel had many trips to Richmond where he came in contact with the discourse of liberation. His natural yearning to be free is reinforced by the

ideas of Enlightenment. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington (1901) also mentions how the postman who was also enslaved brought news about emancipation to field slaves. It seems logical to highlight that class among other social hierarchies of discrimination account for the different representations of African American males in literary discourse.

The defiant spirit of Gabriel as he speaks shows his intent to define and defend the oppressed people's interests. His is a fight against being underdogs of history and the way others collaborate with the slave masters demonstrates how different people reacted to the violence spawned by the emasculating effects of capitalism, slavery and racism. Bontemps portrays how black masculinities function in the context of slavery. When labelled mad dogs by the prosecutor, Gabriel replies on behalf of his colleagues that " we are tired of being slaves" (p.281). This is a bold refusal to accept someone's definition of their lives as African American males define themselves, as they want the world to see them. Bontemps explores what it means to be black and male in the face of dehumanising circumstances. The reference to the slaves as dogs by the prosecutor, points to how devalued their life was by the institution of slavery. That overemphasis on the black male subject demonstrates the fused nature of the relationship between ideology and the representation of black male characters.

A closer examination reveals that Gabriel and his fellows have the energy to determine history and improve their lot in life. They are shown attempting to subvert the gospel of subservience and conformity that the institution of slavery preaches. Mingo, the freed slave gives the revolt a religious background as he reads about the children of Israel being delivered from Egypt and David slaying Goliath. This empowers the enslaved black men as they listen to stories of oppressed people who triumphed over circumstances through the strength of their will and spirit.Mingo sees history as intricately associated with the will of man, the desire to liberate the will to act freely, not the charity of chance. William (1944) observes that "the planters went to great length to justify slavery by scriptural quotations and the Negro slave took the same scriptures and adapted them to his own purposes" (p.202). Religion in this case is shown as a liberating force as it is used to gear up the psyche of the enslaved Africans to fight.Instead of being used to encourage submission the bible is read to strengthen people's resolve to revolt – to enact liberating violence.

Mingo, being literate is able to inspire the enslaved people to revolt as he quotes religious scriptures. Intellectuality is located at the core of black masculinity as represented by Mingo. He tries to enrich the black men's struggle on their march to liberty. In a way this shows the

parallel connection between literacy and freedom common during slavery as is shown in Douglass and Equiano's slave narratives. Douglass (1849) quotes his slave master saying,

> "If you teach that nigger [in reference to Douglass] how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would be forever unfit him to be a slave. He would be at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master " (p. 49).

Education and literacy is thus highly linked to emancipation. The power of the intellect is a power needed by the enslaved people in order to free themselves from mental and physical chains of slavery. Coleman (2005 : 51) notes that "slavery acts as a psychological capsule that only literacy can penetrate". This in a way accounts for Mingo being a free black man and not a slave owing to his intellectual masculinity. Gabriel and friends are making attempts at moving from being objects of history to subjects of history. They are no longer mere victims, marginalised by history, but human beings who have been transformed by their acts to regain their manhood.

Demonstrating his manhood and defiance when asked if he had anything to say, Gabriel replies, " let the rope talk suh--- the rope please you suhlet it talk " (p. 283). The theme of self-assertion is highlighted by Gabriel's speech. Looking at the depiction of Gabriel, it can be noted that Bontemps is dealing with the representation of this black male on a heroic scale. Readers are presented with a 'man' better than he is in everyday life. Gabriel's resolve and determination is unparalleled. While Bontempsis recapturing the slave revolt of 1800, he is also subverting racial myth and stereotype of the black American as ignorant and incapable of organising a revolt. Writing about other slave revolts in 1823, William (1944) notes that they were "so carefully and secretly planned that they took planters unawares" (p.205). The enslaved African American men is shown gaining the physical as well as the cerebral space as is depicted by the meticulous planning of the conspirators.*During*slavery whites prevented their slaves from learning to read and write, so the potential for them to communicate was severely limited.Literacy itself is central to being masculine in the American context. Gabriel is able to circumvent this problem as he manages to organise enslaved to revolt despite his illiteracy.

At another level, Bontemps's portrayal of African American men planning the revolt can be looked at as a mask for the historical pain suffered by the African American men under the institution of slavery. In a way the revolt becomes a masculine metaphor of some kind. During slavery the African American males were invisible, except when perceived as

revolting and out of the slave masters' hegemonic control. The revolt is gendered as it exhibits patterns of difference between men and women, as it is associated with the behaviour of men. Literary discourse also shapes the way African American men perceive themselves, especially given the centuries they suffered under the yoke of slavery. This construction of black males of integrity like Gabriel kind of massages the African American males' egos, given that slavery represented the black male as non-men. The family and responsibility for the provision of food were the provinces of the white male slave master, who exuded hegemonic masculinity. The emasculated black male represented marginalised or subordinated masculinity.

Gabriel's revolt is the herald of the impending disaster, the danger signal of a more bitter time for whites when oppressed blacks will rise against their oppressor. Bontemps's (1936) goal was to represent black revolutionary potential based on the strong male character, Gabriel. The fact that Gabriel's ascendency to the leadership of the slaves is achieved when he beats Ditcher, a feared huge slave driver in a combat shows black masculinity constructed around the macho image. Bontemps seems to subscribe to the notion that a 'real' man must have the power and ability to negotiate violence, dealing it out and surviving it. Gabriel gains more prominence than his brothers who have been beaten by Ditcher emphasizing the centrality of physical strength as a prerequisite of black masculinity.The black male's strength and stature appear essential in the construction of black masculinity. Gabriel isdescribed as six feet in height and assertive in manner.The physical description of the protagonist makes it clear that Gabriel's strength also denotes manhood and strong will power.

Bontemps (1936) warns of the danger that will befall the American society as a result of the poverty and racial oppression of blacks. The metaphor of the revolution is a representation of black masculinity. Black males represent black people in general from the way they are represented by Bontemps (1936). They represent the normative as their struggle for freedom is by implication the struggle for the rights of the enslaved black population: males and females included.Scholars like Magee (1995), however question

> Why is the fugitive slave, the fiery orator, the political activist, the abolitionist
> always represented as a black man. How does the heroic image of the black
> woman get suppressed in a culture that depended on her heroism for survival?

> What we have to recognise is that the creation of the fiction of tradition is a matter
> of power, not justice and that power has always been in the hands of men (p.68).

The answer to the foregoing lies in authorial ideology. The prominence given to male urgency is thus questioned as it is only meant to over shadow the contribution by black women to the fight for freedom while elevating the masculine status of the black male.

As a work of historical fiction, *Black Thunder* explores the ravages and cruelties of the institution of slavery and goes on to romanticise the male figure of Gabriel. The story line is based on the story of a slave insurrection that failed. Raising revolutionary themes, Bontemps revisits the 1800 Virginia Revolt. With vividness and intensity, Gabriel's unparalleled courage and drive to become a truly freeman is captured. His life contains heroism from the point of view of masculine tradition. *Black Thunder* can be looked at as a male- centred narrative. Bontemps depicts a slave society in which liberation is gendered. However it appears the under representation of femininity in a way is linked to the failure of the revolt. A genuine liberation cannot be possible when another section of the affected people is largely ignored. There is no wholeness in Bontemps's slave community. According to Jill (2007) the language of American manhood was and continues to be, dominated by the idea that men have a right to exercise violence in protection of their homes, families and communities.

The 1800 slave revolt organised by Gabriel Prosser captures history that reveals that the plantation order was unstable and under threat of collapse long before the Civil War. It is actually an assertion that black male Southerners have been actively influencing the course of Southern history. Jill (2007) notes that as part of the Harlem Renaissance, *Black Thunder* is a fairly lonely call for resistance and militancy. Bontemps calls for fire and wants his African American readers to be inspired by the history of resistance in their efforts to gain equality in America. As a metaphor of manhood and revolution, *Black Thunder* shows group expression and self determination of the humiliated and oppressed African American males. Much as Gabriel's insurgents fail to execute their granddesign, they highlight the revolutionary potential of the African American male. It goes without saying that the revolt was an attempt at restoration of the black male's dignity.

The fate of Pharaoh who turns informant and Ben who also exposes the plot speaks volumes about what Bontemps says about black manhood. Pharaoh loses his mind, while old Ben survives a mysterious attack, which he uneasily endures. Bontemps shows his criticism of male characters who fail to foster the collective struggle to emancipate themselves, to show a

determination towards freedom like that shown by Gabriel. He mergeshis dream of freedom with concrete action aimed at taking Richmond as a first step to freedom. The concept of freedom is the principal motif in the text.Masculinity is linked to freedom in all its facets.

Bontemps's voice is vibrant in celebrating and evaluating black history. He focuses intensely on the black men's efforts to recover lost manhood, eroded dignity and recreate history. Copious literature shows how the institution of slavery wrestled the black male's manhood away from him. Aptly, the revolt is imaged as 'black thunder', to threaten away the emasculation, humiliation and denigration suffered by black males under slavery.Gabriel and his insurgents make efforts to shake off the unmanning impact of slavery that wants to see them forever pitiable victims of circumstances. The revolt however is exclusive and loses that embracive touch as it sidelines black women. It appears as Bontemps has imposed his own vision of life on history. He negates the historical significance of black women's struggles to end slavery. Black women are made conspicuous by their invisibility in *Black Thunder*.

In the text, we note a stubborn insistence on the male gender category and its resistance to oppression and subjugation. Bontemps sees the revolt as a redeeming revolutionary action that would result in the rediscovery of black manhood. Ironically, virtually all sources of inspiration for Gabriel and his insurgents do have a gender bias of some sort. To begin with, the French Revolution had its declaration of the rights of 'man'. In the American constitution drafted at its independence the equality of 'man' was highlighted and is quoted by Gabriel when he is about to be hanged. Furthermore, the letter by Toussaint L'Overture implores 'brothers' and not sisters to come together to do away with oppression. As if that is not enough, the scriptures read by Mingo about the children of Israel in Egypt and David's killing of Goliath all point to the vanguard position taken by men in struggles for emancipation.Such inspirations for the revolt account for the masculine-stained representation of Gabriel and his fellow insurgents.

Bontempsseems to suggest that only black males engaged in militant action designed to promote justice and end slavery and its associated ills. This has given the impression that African American females were impotent in the process of their liberation**.**The male being isportrayed as eager to struggle to survive in a bleak situation. Black masculinity is constructed around fighting against racial oppression. Bontemps discovered a link between slave revolts and the revolutionary social and political goals of the 1930s, that espoused the

egalitarian philosophy and activism of the French Revolution. Black Marxism is linked to black masculinity as it espouses radicalism to hegemonic white control.

As the text ends, the reader is left with the question: if violent resistance works to inspire, or made the white slave masters paranoid in the past is such a strategy effective in the face of the racism and the oppression of the black men after emancipation? Bontemps seeks to show the whites what the black men is capable of doing if he is continually oppressed and discriminated against in racist America.However the failure of the revolt suggests that genuine liberation should be inclusive of all the oppressed, black men and women. With a bit of some forced imagery and symbolism, Bontemps is able to transform history into fiction celebrating masculine heroism. This shows the apparent masculine perspective from which he examines the 1800 Virginia slave revolt, as he places men at the centre of events.

Instead of the revolt being aimed to liberate oppressed humanity, it is limited to one sex – the male sex. Bontemps wants to portray a picture of a black male - directed community although readers are privileged with the knowledge that the black male suffered physical and metaphorical castration during the era of slavery.Through the depiction of Gabriel we note the writer's hyper valorisation of the black male. Bontemps' lauding of strength, courage and masculinity also help explain the portrayal of Gabriel Prosser. He is delineated as an icon of manliness and what constitutes masculinity.He undervalues women's contribution to the fight for freedom from exploitation during slavery, where the massive wealth derived from their labour was channelled elsewhere.In this way black Marxism ceases to give primacy to class struggle as the single, most important axis around which the oppressed fight, but rather a racial struggle against exploitation.

Black men who are enslaved are presented with an innate desire to be free from oppression. Gabriel and his fellow insurgents are determined to give their lives, if need be, in pursuit of freedom. However, it is important to recognise that slavery alienated the enslaved from the profit of their labour and the economic context within which the African American male rose up and revolted against the institution cannot be overemphasized. This black radicalism against a system that exploits them is what Robinson (1983) refers to as black Marxism. It has its roots in the slave trade and the super exploitation of the enslaved African on the plantation. Africans resisted being captured, transported in slave ships and also on landing in America, numerous efforts to emancipate themselves were noted. All these efforts to liberate themselves by Africans and their descendents is black Marxism. Rodney (1972) has argued

that the slave trade was abolished because the plantations had become ungovernable due to the resistance of the slaves to oppression.

The representation of the insurgents makes the reader feel that Bontemps is proclaiming the possibility of black male dignity in a situation of widespread suffering, humiliation and oppression. The dark vision of pain is not allowed to totally exclude the possibility of a flicker of light that illuminates black male dignity through a revolt. To show their pathetic existence, " negroes hoeing in another field, raised their heads, their faces wrenched with agony" (p.14) as they see Bundy being beaten to death. The helpless slaves represent marginalised, subordinated forms of masculinity that result in their agony and despair.On the other hand,Gabriel challenges such prescribed masculinity. He becomes resolved to avenge the murder of a fellow slave. He shows respect for radicalism and his outrage at the ill-treatment of black slaves, hence the revolutionary stance against oppression he takes. Gabriel symbolises the capacity to resist and endure with his humanity intact even when he is called a dog by the prosecutor. At the core of manhood is pride, which is of colossal importance to black males who are willing to risk anything for, even their lives. During slavery black men are portrayed as invisible except when they are shown threatening, challenging and dangerous to the institution of slavery. Their masculinity could only be constructed around their efforts to dislodge the evil institution.

Chapter 3

Black Maleness and its Interaction with Capitalism and Racism in *Black Boy*

The representation of African American males as they negotiate their precarious position of being black and male at one and the same time, is the main thrust of this chapter. Of interest to note, is how the writer re-present the African American male as he struggles with the everyday problem of racism, which is ingrained in the DNA of America. The hyphenated 're-present' reflects that the process is neither neutral nor innocent as it is value laden. Hall (1997) observes that representations are mere constructions. Capitalism and its bedfellow, racism are depicted torturing, beating, maiming and even killing any semblance of pride and any measure of genuine manhood out of some of the American males of African descent in *Black Boy*.

How black males are represented needs to be considered against a background of a complex history of slavery, its aftermath and other political and socio- economic forces in America. These in particular have shaped and moulded the way the American male of African descent has been portrayed in literary discourse. Some representations are necessarily a reflection of the enduring legacy of slavery, while others highlight different ideologies at play, in as far as moulding them is concerned.

The novel is set in the American Deep South and shows the problem of being a black male and his struggle to survive in a racially compartmentalised society. If readers think that they know that racism as an ideology is evil, Wright (1945) shows the racist machinery in operation. He exposes how it works and what it does to the African American male character. The book gives a harrowing account of what it is like to grow up in racist America especially for African American males. Wright focuses on the racial contradictions in America. With vividness and intensity, he depicts the compartmentalised life in America. Suspiciously viewed as harbouring fantasies to bed the white woman, the system does everything in its power to emasculate the black male. For the black males there is despair, despondency and hopelessness. The process for the black male character to improve himself in racist America is littered with spanners, bottlenecks and obstacles designed and well calculated to frustrate him. He is sometimes depicted as emotionally charged living in a Manichean society where Jim Crow laws put the blacks in their "rightful place".

A great many laws were passed to limit opportunities for black men in major aspects of life like employment and education. The inferior education system condemns the blacks to inferior status in their own country. For the black man he is expected to perform masculine responsibilities like providing food for the family, but his inferior education militates against his efforts to find a handsomely paying job. Abandonment of the family by a father unable to meet his masculine responsibilities is the ultimate result. After Richard's father deserted the family, mother and son went asking for money. Laughing, the father replied, " Iain't got nothing"(p. 29). That Richard's father had no money cannot be refuted as it can be corroborated by his lack of education which saw him being a poor sharecropper in Mississippi. The father is looked upon as the provider despite the disenabling circumstances, while the black mother takes a backseat position in as far as providing for the family is concerned.Family abandonment is a legacy of the institution of slavery which thrived on broken African American families. Economic and social struggles are stereotypical for black American males.

A strongly bound family unit that was discouraged by the institution of slavery is of vital importance not only for the healthy upbringing of children, but also for the prosperity of community and society.The broken families are a result of the psychic wounds of slavery. The greatest obstacle for black men to overcome is the legacy of slavery (Booker 2000).There is no African American father worth the name in most representations of the black men. Richard's father can be viewed as an epitome of hyper masculinity associated with violence and biological siring that does not have moral and social legitimacy (Muponde and Muchemwa 2007). The absence of Richard's father and Solomon in *Song of Solomon*, literally and metaphorically, is about the retreat of the male body from sites of visuality and authority (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007).

We note a hyperbolised and grotesque image of an irresponsible father in*Black Boy* through the depiction of Richard's father. Richard comments:

> I stared at him (his father) with awe as he gulped his beer from a tin bucket, as he
> ate long and heavily, sighed, belched, closed his eyes to nod on a stuffed belly. He
> was quite fat and his bloated stomach always lapped over his belly. He was always
> a stranger to me, always somehow alien and remote (p. 7).

The caricature image of a father given by Wright (1945) by implication points to the self-centred nature of American capitalist relations. For Richard to describe at length the eating

habits and fatness of his father, going by the system of binary opposition points to other family members including the protagonist being emaciated.In a capitalist and racist society, where the black American father is finding it increasingly difficult to provide for his family, the response is to focus on the'self' ignoring kith and kin. Being a victim of capitalism, the system demands Richard's father's last atom of strength even at night. During the day, he demands the kids not to make noise when he will be resting, a demand that renders him unpopular with the kids and makes him to belabelled cruel. We note how capitalism and racism as bedfellows define relations of power, and also affects black family relations. The father is portrayed as callous yet he is a victim of the aforementioned mutually accommodating ideologies.

Wright (1945) captures with unambiguous clarity the abandonment of the family by Richard's father and its consequences. Richard observes that " it had never occurred to me that his absence would mean there would be no food---[and] as the days slid past the image of my father became associated with pangs of hunger " (p. 12). Metaphorically, Richard hungers for masculinity as he will attempt to mature, and to obtain jobs to support the family.According to Connell (1995) being able to provide for the family is one traditional defining characteristic of masculinity. Abandonment of the family by fathers is one coping mechanism of masculinity in crisis. Figuratively, the absence of African American fathers is associated with " men that have not been allowed to perform their masculinities as they conceive them " (Muponde and Muchemwa 2007: xxi). The situation in racist America is disenabling the black father to provide for his family and as such he falls in the bracket of subordinated masculinity.

 As has been intimated, abandonment of the family can also be looked at as a replay of plantation life during slavery which made a family unit untenable. There was a deliberate disruption of the black family under slavery as a calculated move to fragment resistance to oppression. The family is the basic unit of a community and it was made dysfunctional by the institution of slavery. Dividing, weakening and scattering resistance was the main reason for the disruption of black families. Slavery was discarded yes, but not without living its footprints on the psyche of African American families (Douglass 1849). In this way the historic exploitation of the African American males explains some of the ways in which they perform their masculinities.

The representation of African American males who abandon their families can also be understood at another level. In America it is only those children that 'do not have fathers' that are eligible for social welfare assistance. According to Farley (1995: 84) "welfare laws encourage the break -up of husband-wife families by denying benefits to poor mothers if an adult male is present in the household". For this reason, it would be highly inappropriate to represent the black male as if he were independent of the social forces acting on him. The absence of Richard's father saw his children being accepted at an orphanage. Having failed to provide for the family as is prescribed by the traditional principles of masculinity, the male figure disappears to pave way for welfare assistance to the family. In the case of Richard, the disappearance of the father leads the family to suffer what may be termed social eclipse, as the mother mixes her role as mother and father at one and the same time.

Despite their low socio- economic status, society continues to expect black males to support their families, or at least be the primary source of support. However most of the men in black communities are either imprisoned or unemployed. This is highly associated with unprecedented divorce rates. Maggie's second husband abandons her in the same manner Richard's father abandons his family. Masculinity and what is expected of men in society is largely to blame for the black men's escapism. Indeed poverty prevents and disrupts marriages as can be seen in Richard's family. Women and children wait for the adult black male to provide for them and this is a tall order for the black American male. However what appears problematic is the writer's focus on a single parent household, ignoring a stubborn fact that married-couple families remain common among African Americans. Farley (1995) makes a powerful statement that "for single parent households to be associated with blacks only is a mistake as single parent families are more among whites than among any other group in America" (p.45). Much as asymmetrical families can be seen as a legacy of slavery there can be other causes. Smith (1996) contends that:

> Until the mid 20th century, the vast majority of black families were two- parent families. High incidence of single parenthood developed after African Americans began to urbanise on a large scale and consequently encountered the concentrated poverty of inner city ghettos (p.79).

The above scenario is observed by Richard later in his life, when he sums everything up:

my father was a black peasant who had gone to the city seeking life, but had failed in the city; a black peasant whose life had been hopelessly snarled in the city; and who had at last fled the city--- (p.29).

Richard's father becomes a poor sharecropper. White prejudice prevented many blacks from acquiring even small tracts of land. As a result, many black males became wage labourers or sharecroppers. Sharecropping reminds one of the hypocrisy of the whites, who promised freed slaves forty acres and a mule to start life anew. Commenting on the sharecropping system, Du Bois (1903) notes that " the slave went free; stood for a brief moment in the sun and then moved again towards slavery" (p.286). In this regard it can be noted that the abandonment of families by black males is not something inherent but a response to socio-economic challenges, which have weakened their ability to act as leaders of traditional families. For the African American male, racism and marginalisation haunts him from cradle to the grave squeezing all possibilities out of his poor life. In fact racism tramples on the black man's masculinity.

African American males are also represented as alcoholics. The drinking habits of Richard's father and the black men Richard acquaints himself with when he wanders away from his mother's workplace, portray them as if their very lives depend on alcohol. The early hours that the black men are seen drunk points to the high unemployment among black males. For them being sober and having nothing to do is as bad as being drunk and having nothing to do. People have long turned to alcohol to celebrate life's pleasures and dull its pains. The latter is true of the African American male character. Richard at six is turned into an alcoholic as he finds himself at a liquor saloon.Drinking has a numbing effect on the black males' sense of conscious existence. The black males spend their energy in drinking and womanising. This in a way shows how males react when they find themselves in disempowering social, economic and political situations.

After emancipation, African Americans were no longer formally considered the physical property of the enslavers (James 1963). However the enslavement of the African American male continues in different guises. Ownership of the African American male's labour for very little wages, gave him the illusion of freedom. More subtle ways of controlling the African American male were devised. Race was used by whites as one of the basic criteria to classify people in the power structure in the American society. This had far reaching implications on the representations of the black males as is noted in *Black Boy*.

Given their history of marginalisation, it can be noted that enslaved black men and their posterity generally had difficulties in adjusting and integrating into the racist American society.In America most African American males are travelling in a cul de sac, a dead end street, where criminality is the ultimate end. Richard observes: "I knew that a black neighbour of mine was stealing bags of grain from a wholesale where he worked. And I knew that the very nature of black and white relations bred this constant thievery " (p. 175). The system aroused in the black American a proclivity to criminality. Contemplating stealing, Richard reasons :

> the temptation to venture into crime was too strong.I knew that if I were caught I
> would go to the chain gang. But was not my life already a kind of chain gang?
> What really did I have to lose? (p. 179).

Given that the blacks got an inferior education which condemned masses of them to the status of third class citizens in America, most of them turned to criminality. That the black male's opportunities in major aspects of life, education and employment were limited is made more graphic and dramatic in *Black Boy*. America is presented as a country in which the most fortunate African American males can only be floor scrubbers, dish washers, trench diggers among other menial jobs.

Much as the white dominant ideology wants to show criminality as caused by the laziness of black males who would rather steal than work, writers like Wright (1945) blame the system for frustrating the hopes and wishes of young blacks thereby encouraging them to indulge in desperate acts of crime. The American society confronts the black male with only a dead end alley of poverty and crime.Wright (1945) subverts the myth of black male indolence as he shows the segregatory nature of the American system.

Violence on the perceived weaker other gives "the perpetrator an illusion of being more powerful than he really is"(Fanon 1963: 67). The representation of black males provides a lens through which to view masculine coping mechanisms in the face of racism and marginalisation. Richard makes an insightful observation that

> I had seen many Negroes solve the problem of being black by transferring their
> hatred of themselves to others with black skin and fighting them (p.222).

Some law-abiding black men like Hoskins are represented as victims of an American society that is pregnant with violence.Hoskins is killed by the Ku Klux Klan, a white racist social,

economic and political group aimed at guaranteeing white control and security from the perceived black threat. It is inevitable that historical details intrude into literary texts.The Ku Klux Klan was established to control African Americans through violence. Feeling stiff competition from black males, poor whites became violent. They were eager to reverse the little gains the black male had achieved. This shows the fragility of black male economic progress and white male antagonism towards such progress.The existing power relations in this case show the whites exercising hegemonic masculinity to subordinate the African American male. Violence therefore becomes important in gender politics among men of different races in this scenario(Connell 1995). The black male's dignity is even assaulted at death as Hoskins's kith and kin are not allowed to bury him. In a way the black male body is positioned as inferior by a hegemonic society.

Racism and violence are intricately fused into one. Wright (1945) uses the victim image of Hoskins to show the destructive consequences of the racist ideology and the horror and cruelty of the racial killing. Individual blacks were not only subjected to the psychological white supremacist ideology, but physical violence was also committed by whites. They had to do everything possible to maintain their privileged position at the expense of the black men, who represent subordinated masculinity.

Violence in the black communities and among black males is also depicted as engineered by racist whites. Golden (2005) posits that practices such as battle royals, in which groups of slaves were pitted against each other for no apparent reason except to satisfy bets between slave owners, on which group would win were common during slavery. Years after the abolition of slavery, we see a replay of this when the fight between Richard and Harrison is arranged by whites who want to see blacks at each other's throat. Olin, a white man wants to see Richard and Harrison kill each other, fortunately it does not go that far as the two end up embroiled in an ugly boxing match, much to the amusement of a white audience. This is a microcosmic image of the bigger picture of the root causes of violence among black males. Blacks are indoctrinated to distrust each other. Indeed a hierarchy of violence can be noted as Richard's father feels the pinch of the system, vents his frustration on Richard who eventually descends on the cat. According to Connell (1995) control and domination are the hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity. In the case of a disempowered African American male, desperate efforts are made to rubber stamp authority even in precisely the wrong things.

Concerning the black male character and violence, the street is Richard's first cruel 'classroom'. On the streets, Richard's fight with other boys depicts the African American males as violent. His mother teaches him how to defend himself on the streets. Interesting to note is that it is not girls who fight on the streets, but boys. The street culture takes readers through the violent world of black masculinity. Indeed the street and its violence is depicted as a site for growing up reserved for black male children only. Black communities have lived on a daily diet of violence. At school, on the streets and at home Richard experiences raw violence.In brief, such kind of experience in itself threatens childhood innocence.The author shows how aggressiveness rules, and violence becomes key to power and identity as Richard's ability to defend himself earns him respect and admiration from peers. This is linked to the idea of how black masculinity is constructed.

Black males are also represented as characters who exude hyper masculinity, as sex maniacs to be more specific. Richard remembers listening to men boasting of their sexual exploits. Farley (1995) posits that :

> Among poor boys and men, sexual conquest (which is valued to some extent among males of all social classes) can be one of the few ways they have to attain a feeling of accomplishment, given that most opportunities for legitimate achievement are blocked (p.79).

The sexual prowess of the black male character is a trope in African American literary discourse. However, this mere physical view of the African American male even in creative works points to his mental shortcomings. Whites propagated and perpetuated the image of black hyper masculinity. This was done to justify the wanton lynching of the black men as he is always suspected of harbouring fantasies of sleeping with a white woman. In *Black Boy,* a cartoon caption in a newspaper sold by Richard reads:

> The only dream of a nigger is to be president and sleep with white women! Americans do you want this in our fair land ?Organise and save white womanhood (p.114).

Hutchinson (1996) argues that such images attest to white male anxieties about the threat of the black male having access to white women. He further contends that this caricature image has been the thing that excuses white oppression and stimulates the fear that motivates it. Black males were thus represented as lecherous by racist whites as can be noted when Bob is

shot allegedly " for fooling with a white prostitute" (p.150). The threat of Bob's fate hung over every black male in the South and this depicts how deadly the politics of sex was in racist America. The black male could not protect a black woman from a white man's sexual advances, while it was a criminal offense for a black man to entertain thoughts of sleeping with a white woman.The fear of all black males becomes the rallying point for controlling all black people. In this regard the black male is represented as powerless in the politics of sex in America in comparison to the white male and female . In the face of the two, the black male is emasculated.

More disturbing is this representation of the African American male from racial bigotry, which depicts him as an over-sexed brute. Collins (2005:115) argues that from the white racists perspective, "if a black man were attracted to a white woman, it was not because she was a symbol of power or an ideal of the oppressor, but rather because of the black male's innate animalism."

 Such sophistry was used as the basis for the lynching of hundreds of black males, suspected of "fooling around with white women". The argument is, much as African American writers also portray black males as hyper –sexualised, they kind of over rely upon stereotypes when creating black male characters. Needless to say this rewriting of myths and stereotypes is at most a way of subverting them, but the point still remains that the representations rely on dominant stereotypes, that were created to enable whites to subordinate and marginalise black men.

The myth of the amoral sexual prowess of the black men is created and reinforced through representation. Such images of the black male as libidinous were actually promoted by the American society. In *Black Boy*, most topics of " positive knowledge or manly self-assertion were tabooed subjects and accepted topics were sex and religion" (p.202). How the topics shaped the mentality of the African American male needs no genius to tell. Sex and alcohol were the other viable coping mechanisms for the marginalised black males as Richard intones, " I could, of course, forget what I had read, thrust the whites out of my mind, forget them and find release from anxiety and longing in sex and alcohol" (p.222).In the text we are also presented with images of boys who are uncouth and unrefined in their language. On his return from school on the very first day, Richard scribbles obscenities on walls. At a liquor outlet where he strays when his mother is working, revellers who are mainly males pay Richard, at age six to shout out obscenities and they laugh their lungs out. When his

grandmother is bathing him, again Richard utters unprintable words. The representation of black males in a way shows that black masculinity is constructed around amoral sex. Black masculinity is also performed through a mouth fused with vulgar words and an air of toughness.

There is an over aching obsession with "manly self assertion", which shows the gendered nature of the freedom that male African Americans wanted. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004 : 59), " something is gendered when its character is either masculine or feminine, or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender." Richard eloquently highlights that what he mainly wanted was to live as a 'man.' He fights to maintain a sense of masculinity. His Uncle Tom wants to beat him as he finds Richard's voice too masculine for his age. It can be indeed noted that Richard takes a long road to manhood as he is viewed as a boy by the racists whites, despite his efforts to reach up for manhood. Richard is his own man, as he provides his own meals, clothes and sends money to his mother.

Images of black males as criminals and prisoners are given in the text. There is disproportional representation of black males in American prisons. Looking at a gang of chained prisoners, Richard questions why there are so many black men and no whites who are prisoners. The answer to this question is by no means simple. Farley (1995) intimates that :

> Many black males have responded to unemployment by turning to crime or drugs.
> In many instances young inner city black males can make more money in an
> illegal activity than any legal activities (p.84).

The above situation heightens the black males' propensity to criminality. Farley (1995) further argues that since

> the African American males are also subject to hedonistic, pleasure seeking
> tendencies of modern America, but lack legitimate means to pursue these
> pleasures, they resort to criminality to make ends meet (p.113).

To say the black males are inherently criminals as is thought by racist whites would be a negation of the social forces that act upon the black males. As has already been intimated earlier for the black males, theirs are masculinities in crisis. Coping strategies vary to the extent of encompassing self- annihilating mechanisms such as violence and criminality. Ideology makes it appear common sense that criminality is a function of the wicked

individuals rather than the unfair racist system which wants to falsely cleanse itself of exploiting black males who then resort to crime for survival. Professor Matthews, Maggie's second husband hit a woman, left her unconscious and set the house on fire after taking her money.All this points to crime, which in the text is a preserve of black males. Black masculinity is represented as closely linked to criminality.

At another level the disproportionately high numbers of black male prisoners compared to whites as is observed by Richard points to the role of the criminal justice system in controlling black males. The American criminal justice system as an institution is gendered as it exudes hegemonic masculinity over the marginalised and subordinated black male. It is no exaggeration to say black males get more punitive penalties than their white counterparts and this accounts for large numbers of black male prisoners. Apart from the role of poverty and joblessness in raising crime rates among black males, a racist judicial system has seen them being incarcerated. Looking at the chained prisoners Richard asks , " why are there so many black men wearing stripes---why don't the white men wear stripes " (p.49). The chain gangs symbolize the mass incarceration of black males. Owing to a biased justice system, a number of black males are behind bars. Imprisonment becomes a rite of passage for many black males. Du Bois (1903) notes that

> there are more African American men on probation, parole, or in prison today than were slaves in 1850. It is not a crisis of crime. It is a crisis of people left behind economically, politically and socially(p.135).

Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity, which places western societies' emphasis on the ability of men to support their families as one defining aspect of masculinity explains the over representation of the black males as criminal.The American society equates masculinity with wealth, but African American males have been traditionally locked out of the economic opportunity structure.Illegitimate means are therefore employed by African American males who try to conform to the American standards of masculinity. Collins (2005) argues:

> In a society where black men face threats to their economic well being, are disproportionately incarcerated and lack access to quality education, any vision of masculinity that suggests that to be a man is to be financially successful puts a great number of black males at odds (p.245).

In this regard western societies' conception of masculinities largely accounts for the black males' over involvement in the criminal system.

Representation affects how people deal with the represented. The racist depiction of every black male as a potential criminal has affected attitudes of those who deal with him. When Richard was searched by the police he comments " they searched my pockets and packages. They seemed dissatisfied when they could find nothing incriminating " (p.159). Looking for a job, Richard is first asked by a white lady if he were a thief. This criminal stereotype of the African American male has been used by black writers though sometimes to depict the effects of economic marginalization. Smith (1996) observes that

> despite the high crime rates, most black men are law- abiding citizens, yet they are
> often harassed by police, tailed by shop employees and denied jobs because of the
> criminal image (p.65).

Apart from that, representation of a people affects how they view themselves, their values and their relationship to the entire universe (Ngugi 1993: 55).

In the text, images of black male figures who are militant are also shown. Wright (1945) was influenced by Black Marxism in representing characters who do not submit to the demands of the white slave masters. Richard's grandfather ran away from his slave master. Militantly resentful of slavery, " he joined the Union Army to kill southern whites" (p.123). The grandfather is a victim of dual forces – slavery and racism. It is his militant radicalism that can be read from a black Marxist perspective. The African American's struggle and resistance to oppression is at the heart of Black Marxism. Wright (1945) shows Richard as a character emotionally charged ready to implode in the face of his white oppressors. He comments:

> I had struggled to contain my seething anger. I had fought. And it was mere
> accident that I had never killed----. But in what other ways had the South allowed
> me to be natural, to be real, to be myself, except in rejection, rebellion and
> aggression (p.227).

The representation of Richard shows that some black males effected a kind of defensive-survivalist demeanour, " because of the perceived tension that suggests it is a black male against the world" (Leak 2005: 121). What seems to account for Richard's confrontational disposition is a kind of radical innocence, an inviolable spirit in him which refuses to be overwhelmed by the brutal forces associated with capitalism and racism in America.

Richard shows anger and frustration with the system, which denies him a chance to learn vital skills for self-improvement and helps to ensure that ignorance made him more willing to submit to the indignities of segregation. He comments "I had no hope whatever of being a professional man" (p. 222). An uneducated black male is severely handicapped to be gainfully employed. His frustration borders on nihilism, which Farley (1995) defines as" a sense of psychological depression and social despair" (p.113). He further highlights that the consequences of this nihilism include "detachment from others, a self destructive disposition and a mean spirited outlook" (p.113). This is largely caused by the fact that the black males were the last to be given a job, the lowest paid and the first to be fired. It seems deprivation and denial are the hallmarks characteristic of the life of black males in America. Richard strikes against prescribed and circumscribed roles given him by the white world. His confrontational approach is influenced by Black Marxism. Richard represents a total flaunting of the American society's prescribed roles for black males. He begins to find Communism appealing especially with its emphasis on protecting the oppressed and fight against capitalism.

A closer look at the images of black males represented in *Black Boy* also highlights that some are bootlickers of the whites as they acquiesce to the oppressive system. Wright shows that to different black males the Uncle Tom syndrome manifests itself in many guises and disguises. Shorty for instance, debases himself to the lowest level when he tells the white man, " You can kick me for a quarter"(p.180). In this case the issue of dignity is out of question as the instinct to survive reigns supreme. For money Shorty makes a fool of himself. On the other hand the principal's insistence that Richard changes his speech and anxiety over whether the speech has already been shown to whites points to the principal's subservience to the whites. Uncle Tom also is of the same opinion with the principal, as he insists on accepting roles mapped out for the black males by the whites. It is servility that Uncle Tom and those of his ilk have devised as a strategy for survival. This shows the 'ideological state apparatuses' (Althusser 1971) at work as represented by the school, home and church where Granny implores Richard to receive Christ. All these work together to inculcate the gospel of subservience preached by the whites' racist ideology. In fact the "ideological state apparatuses" are there to reinforce the marginalisation of black masculinities by hegemonic white masculinity.

The way black males relate among themselves is also shown as largely influenced by age. Uncle Tom wants to dominate young Richard and even wants to beat him for the tone of his

voice which the uncle finds rather self assertive.Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) notes that "one of the benefits that oppression confers upon the oppressors is that even the most humble among them is made to feel superior" (p.64). Uncle Tom who is among the most mediocre of black men feels himself a demigod compared to young Richard he wants to oppress. The venom of Uncle Tom is directed against his young fellow victim Richard. According to Connell (1995: 19) "a key type of subordinated masculinity is the domination over young men". Everyone on the hierarchy of violence is in the comfort zone of being superior to someone or somethingbelow.Inthe case of young Richard violence is acted on weaker creatures such as the helpless cat. In gender discourse, the aspect of age is also a defining characteristic as it influences relations of power.The violence that Richard suffers at home is in actual fact a harbinger of life in a threatening white society that is hostile to the black male.

Shorty also represents other versions of Uncle Tom as he will do anything for white folks including being kicked and humiliated for money. Given that Uncle Tom is survival oriented, the philosophy is simply that the African American malecan only survive through submission. Fascinating to observe is Shorty's desire to view his humiliating stance as something normal. He subscribes to a culture of submission advocated by Washington (1901).By and large, Uncle Tom mentality glorifies passivity as a dignified philosophical position. This can be out of naked personal fear or being brainwashed by the oppressor. Shorty's actions in the presence of whites highlight the ideological impact of racist discourse on some African American males. His actions depict marginalised masculinity.

White racist ideology has entrenched representations of the black male as lazy. This has seen some blacks accepting this as the gospel truth. The image of the black male as indolent, goodfor nothing was reinforced by whites to mask the skewed state of affairs that discriminates against the black male. When he could not save enough money to go North, Shorty blames everything on his laziness. He intones, " I'm lazy. I like to sleep too goddamn much" (p. 225).What Shorty considers to be the reason for his low achievement in life shows that some black males internalise biases and stereotypes and then through their words and actions reinforce and perpetuate such distorted images. Such negative view of oneself is promoted by the whites as is noted when Richard observes, " when I was just slow in performing some duty, I was called a lazy black sonofabitch" (p. 161). Images of the black male as lazy are just there to justify the exploitative nature of the racist and capitalist American society. These images are mere masks, which try to obscure blatant racism and capitalism and their effects on the lives of African American males. The images are linked to

the culture of poverty which explains life circumstances on individual characteristics such as laziness. Barrel (2010) is of the conviction that the idle black male is not the 'true face' of poverty in America though it is a dominant one.

Richard is presented as a character of an inquisitive disposition. He asks questions about his family and race's relationship with history. Many writers have shown characters who grapple with the question of identity, but what is problematic is that these characters are mostly male. Women are presented as if they are at peace with their past, while males are restless and want to change the status quo. In Harley's(1976)*Roots,*the protagonist is endowed with a sharp remembrance of the past, a trait that is indeed largely a preserve of men in African American literary discourse. This in a way links the construction of black masculinity to a sense of cultural heritage, or family history. Richard's curious disposition is coupled with his passion for reading. Literacy in African American literary discourse is linked to freedom and manhood. As he reads the books open up his world and possibilities as he notes, " in buoying me up, reading also cast me down, made me see what was possible, what I had missed"(p.251).Richard epitomises intellectual masculinity.

Looking at the representation of African Americans in *Black Boy*, it is not overstretching to assert that the black males are portrayed as the disposable sex. Hoskins is killed by racists whites for running a flourishing liquor business. Bob is shot for allegedly sleeping with a white prostitute. This indeed confirms Douglass' (1849) comment that " it was a common saying, even among little white boys, that it was worth a half cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half cent to bury one " (p.22). Much as the comment was about what obtained during slavery, the representation of black males years after emancipation shows how the African American male's life was still devalued. According to Du Bois (1903) the lynching of black males who dared to be brave and ambitious crushed dark hued youth and encouraged them to show servility, lewdness and apathy. This has indeed influenced the depiction of characters like Shorty who willingly submit to humiliation, portraying marginalised masculinity.

It is important to note that most black males, especially those employed by whites, are acting out their identity. The performativity of identity can be discerned when Wright (1945 : 68) comments, " A negro learns to gauge precisely what reaction the alien person facing him desires, andhe produces it withalarmingalertness."Butler's(1990) concept of performativity inquires into the construction of identities as they are caused by performative actions. This kind of performativebehaviour reminds one of Spivak's (1995) concept of strategic

essentialism, where individuals live up to certain stereotypes which in one way or another benefits them. According to Spivak (1995) there is an effort made by the subaltern to maintain coherence by setting up false oppositions between the supposed centre and equally fictive margin.Summarising the black males' strategic essentialism as the grinning buffoon, Richard says, "pretending to conform to the laws of the whites, grinning, bowing, they let their fingers stick to what they could touch"(p. 175). So the black male tries to conform to the racist description of him as a fool, yet this is a strategy to mask his other clever ways of dealing with the system.Shorty is ready to act the clown, but is an intelligent black boy who has understood what society demands from him. He trades his dignity and manhood for money.

Leak (2005) notes that

> the notion of performing racial position takes on a heightened meaning for African American males because this performance is bound up by race, class and gender identity"(p.98).

He further contends that fear of being considered racially inauthentic, as well as anxiety to conform to stereotypes places the African American in a delicate position. Griggs, in *Black Boy* is more than willing to laugh and be cheerful in public where there are white people. The black male therefore changes attitude in the presence of whites.Hetries to show Richard how to behave in the presence of white people so that he does not make them angry. Subordinated masculinity is thus shown giving way to white hegemonic masculinity. Precisely this is Richard's problem of failing to act out identity.

Wright (1945) makes a statement about educated black males who have cut off links with the common black male. In a way this shows the weakness of Du Bois's (1903) idea of the talented tenth. African American males are not a homogeneous entity as issues of class and age also affect how they relate. Richard observes, " I knew that there were Negro doctors, lawyers, newspaper men, but I never saw any of them" (p.222). An interesting question can be where are they? It is not a wild proposition to suggest they have assimilated into the dominant white culture.

Masculinity is shown influencing young boys to seek employment as highlighted by Richard and his school mates. They fend for themselves at a tender age, a situation that is not common among girls of their age. We are presented with young Richard selling

newspapersamong other odd jobs to bring some money for the family. The text succinctly captures the ceaseless struggles that that a young black male faces when growing up in racist America. Male children are robbed of their childhood and innocence as they are ushered into the world of employment at a very young age. This reinforces society's concept of masculinity, which makes it incumbent upon male children to be responsible for their up keep. Central in the text is the aspect of pervasive racism and how it affects the growth of Richard and his peers as they struggle to respond and come to terms with a violent environment. As male characters it goes without saying that the way they respond is different from that of their female counterparts as is expected by their society. This underlines the vulnerability of the black malechildas is even shown when Richard at age four plays with fire and ends up burning down the family house. Richard fails in finding manhood to emulate in his father. He therefore has own ideas about his own masculinity based on wanting to be as littlelike his father as possible.

The idea of manhood is pervasive in African American literary discourse as can be noted when young black boys make efforts to work and live like 'real' men. This reminds one of what Bigger's mother says to him in *Native Son*. She comments "We wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you" (p. 35). Independence, responsibility and freedom are some characteristics traditionally associated with manhood in America. From the comments of Bigger's mother it can be noted that femininities though subordinated by masculinities push black males to the deep end as these men try to act masculine for their own good as well as the good of their fellow women. Most blacks equate masculinity with white men, yet most of the time many blacks lack access to that masculine ideal. The title of the text *Black Boy* is ironic as the story unfolds and covers a time period extending far beyond stages in life when males are considered to be boys. This in a way shows that in America, much as the black male could attain physical adulthood, he still remained a perpetual minor in the eyes of racist whites. The writer thus draws the reader's attention to the narrator's slow development into manhood under the debilitating black and white communities. By implication, the word 'boy' points to the incapability of the black male to grow into a 'real' men. Furthermore the prefixing of the word 'boy' with 'black'indicates that Richard's childhood and growth is inseparable from the blatant racism in America.What boggles young Richard's mind is that a black boy is beaten by a white man for no reason, and this highlights the power balance between white hegemonic masculinity and black subordinated masculinity. As is intimated in the text, black and white people never touched

each other except in violence. This violence is unleashed on black marginalised masculinity by white hegemonic masculinity.

Wright tries to render a refreshing image of a black male in the character of the narrator. Unlike the stereotypical black American thought of as lacking ambition by whites, Richard is a black boy who has ambition, desire and curiosity to discover the nature of black – white relations. The celebration of the intelligence of the black male is noted when Richard is depicted learning things like counting and reading without much assistance. This highlights the potential locked in the black male child, whom the white society neglects and discriminates against. The author seems much aware of whites' stereotypes that de-emphasize black male's intellectual faculties. One is made to recall Douglass (1849) highlighting the point that whites denied African Americans access to education on the pretext that it would spoil even the 'best nigger.'According to white supremacist ideology, the black male is bedeviled with cerebral shortcomings, a point refuted by Wright(1945) as he portrays the protagonist's intellectual masculinity.

Homosocialbehaviour is also depicted as a characteristic of black masculinity. Being among peers or a gangster is common among African American males. Richard notes that

> It was degrading to play with girls and in our talk we relegated them to a remote island of life. We had somehow caught the spirit of the role of our sex and we flocked together for common moral schooling. We spoke boastfully in bass voices, we used the word nigger to prove the tough fibre of our feelings; we spouted profanity as a sign of our coming manhood; we pretended callousness toward the injunctions of our parents; and we strove to convince one another that our decisions stemmed from ourselves and ourselves alone. Yet we frantically concealed how dependent we were upon one another (p.91).

This homosocialbehaviour of black males highlights the power of black male bonding. It can be noted that this is also located at the centre of black masculinity. Belonging to a gang or peer group is one of the prescriptions of masculinity in the black community.

In his representation of black male characters, Wright (1945) shows that there are material, historical, cultural and political forces that shape and constrict their life chances in America. These black males' identities have been shaped within a social sphere that is grounded in racism and as such their delineation highlights this very critical element. The anti-black male bias of the racist American society is graphically captured in the text. The images of the

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black males show in no uncertain terms that they are historical legacies of slavery and Jim Crow laws. Above all Wright (1945) underlines the fact that racism informs virtually all aspects of black male life in the American deep South.Racism creates boundaries that define and confine black males in the American society. The black male is depicted as suffering from orchestrated entrapment in all spheres of life. He is rendered socially, economically and politically immobile, as can be noted in Richard's struggles.

As a *bildungsroman*, the novel traces the growing up of a black male in a racist environment. Richard's consciousness evolves as he grows to perceive the various forms of violence that traumatise the African American male. What the writer relentlessly insists upon is that there is "a racist virus in the American blood stream" (Moynihan 1965: 46). It is this virus that has caused stunted growth and militated against the development of the black boy into a 'man.' Richard lives with a heavy burden of being black and a male. This is shown as an enormous inconvenience since he is inevitably branded with the tag of being a social, economic and political misfit.The black males are made to appear as permanent under-castes, in a country where they cannot access descent housing and are screened out of employment. It is only upon their realisation that their lives are going nowhere that black males are enticed into criminality. This confirms Gilmore's (1990) assertion that "becoming a man is problematic" (p.56). As he grows, it dawns on Richard that " there existed men against whom he is powerless, men who can violate his life at will"(p86). The presence of white hegemonic masculinity vis a vis black subordinated masculinity is shown.

The black male's life is depicted as always crippled by a sense of insecurity. This accounts for the text's unflinching description of Richard's fears in the South and his desire to go North. This state of fright- flightcharacterises a number of black male characters' lives in African American literary discourse.Such existence demonstrates a deprived sense of security and freedom, brought about by racism in America. Richard is poor, young, black and male, characteristics which intersect to become an embodiment of subordinated masculinity in white racist America.

The black male's life in America represents a mangled existence.Examining the representation of black males, readers are made to see and feel the fear, pain and hate racism generates in the African American male. The black male is kept in virtual bondage through the Jim Crow laws and is presented confronting povertyand despair. Racism is shown as a power relation which emphasizes the biological structural and hierarchical differences

between the dominant white male and the subordinated black men, if not 'boy'. This situation for the black male is further compounded by capitalism, which makes his economic advances hit a brickwall.The novel thus explores the physical and psychological defensive strategies employed by black males in a Jim Crowed environment.

Given that in the American society, masculinity is made up of components of behaviour and performance linked to power, money and sexuality, many black males are placed on a collision course with white social institutions as they try to exercise their masculinity(Staples 1982).The black male is marginalised by the hegemonic American system. Majors and Billson (1992) argue that " being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated-rendered impotent in the economic, political and social arenas that whites have historically dominated" (p.1). Richard is denied chance to learn any meaningful trade in life by the system.

The author shows black masculine identity and how it is negotiated in response to racism and capitalism. Black males are represented subordinated to more powerful white males.Although slavery seems a distant memory it is very hard for black males to establish space and masculine status in America.As the chapter focused on black maleness and its interaction with capitalism and racism, it dealt with issues of masculinity, race, work and poverty of black males in America. It showed the precarious position of black masculinity that is laden with racial tensions. Being black and male is depicted as an awful burden in racist America, as white hegemonic masculinity does not see blacks males beyond their race.Readers are taken through the physical and psychological steps Richard takes in his struggle to become a man. The text provides a graphic representation of blackmarginalised or subordinated masculinity in relation to hegemonic white masculinity, supported by capitalism and racism.

Chapter 4

Womanist Representation of Black Males in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

The chapter explores how black males enact masculinities and how they relate to other males and females. From a womanist viewpoint, it is the masculine control over women's bodies through sexuality or male violence perpetrated on women among other factors that oppresses black women. Walker's representation of black male characters in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*shows that she is advancing womanist ideological interests.Womanism or other variants are all ideologies. This womanist perspective leads the researcher to explore the implication of authorship and authorial ideology in the representation of African American males. As a woman writer it can be realised that she is keen to try her black male characters in her womanist court of prejudices and ideological bias.

Before delving into Walker's representation of black males and the ideology behind her work of art, it is perhapsimportant to highlight her life experiences that had a profound impact in her world view as an author. Bradley (1984) notes in "*Novelist Alice Walker Telling the Black Woman's Story"* thatWalker's brother, Curtis accidentally shot eight - year old Walker with a gun that left her scarred. Her image of black males was shattered after the incident. Most significantly the accident injured her eye, that which an individual uses to perceive the surroundings. With the scarredeye, Walker began to see the negative aspects of African American men. Bradley (1984) further posits that Walker blamed her father for his poverty that kept her from receiving adequate medical care. As a result, her father failed to give male models she could respect. Her father and brother unfortunately, became poor examples of black masculinity.

Walker's text focuses on issues of race relations, gender and domestic violence and sexuality. Of special significance to this study is the representation of black males as they relate among themselves and with their female counterparts. Racism is shown as an ideology that constrains the lives and identities of African American men. In *The Third Life of GrangeCopeland*, a look at the representation of the black male characters shows how claims of location shape identity. Ashcroft (2001: 15) makes a powerful statement that to occupy a place is also a statement of identity. Living in an environment that is equally debilitating, Grange and Brownfield only feel powerful when they lash out at someone beneath them. It is only through Walker's vision and firm belief in the possibility of an individual's rebirth that some characters escape total destruction.

In the text, the images lean heavily on individual males as abusive of their wives and children, alcoholics, absent fathers and criminals. Such narrow or limited representation of black male characters symbolise the narrow path of the black male's success in racist America. In her exploration of black masculinities, Walker focuses on hyper-sexuality, violence, misogyny as extreme versions of stereotypical black male qualities. Looking at Grange and Brownfield, it can be noted that each quality is used to caricature and stereotype black males. Wade-Gayler (1990) makes a powerful statement when he notes that in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, which is "ostensibly about a man and his son, it is women and how they are treated that colours everything"(p.303). This implies that the representations of black males in the text have awomanistflavour. Gwin (2002)notes that

> Walker's writing has turned upon the axis of black women's lives and her insistence is that black men despite their own victimization, must take responsibility for their treatment of black women (p.204).

The image of an absent father is a leitmotif in African American literature. This presents a crisis of unprecedented magnitude in the black community. Golden (2005) argues that " father absence is the bane of the black communities, predisposing its children to school failure, criminal behaviour, economic hardships and to an intergenerational repetition of the grim cycle"(p.208). The absence of fathers and their stabilising influence makes the boys vulnerable. Just like his irresponsible father who journeys North, abandoning his family, Brownfield follows his footsteps. Generally, it appears fatherless boys become ineligible to be husbands and the situation is self – perpetuating (Collins 2005).

The idea of masculinity as characterised by the ability to providefor andprotect the family is highlighted by Rossel's wish to marry Walter Terrell, "the richest black man in the county" (p.190). Later in life protective masculinity is shown at the funeral of her father, when Rossel" seemed devoted to her husband, for she leaned within the protection of his arms with the abandoned dependency of a child" (p.192). The black male is thus shown 'imprisoning' the black woman in his arms. Walker shows in no uncertain terms that patriarchy makes women helplessly dependent on men for survival.Rossel remains an over – protected item without power in a male controlled world.The position of Rossel gives credence to Connell's(1995) observation that hegemonic masculinity containsstrategies such as " openings towards domesticity" (p.35). Walker makes it appear as if all the miseries and ravages of history are concentrated on the black woman, and the black male compounds

them. To show that authorial ideology plays a crucial role in the representation of black males, Hutchinson(1996) notes that " the image of the malevolent black male is based on durable and time resistant myths, half-truths and lies"(p.78).

Examining Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity it is apparent that a man is measured in part by his ability to take care of himself and his family. Grange's family abandonment manifests that indeed when a man feels he cannot provide for those he is responsible for, his sense of self worth is significantly lowered, and he simply walks away. Golden (2005) opines:

> many men in lower socioeconomic conditions are too busy struggling to obtain bare essentials for survival, to take notice of the suffering of many around them (p.56).

In a bid to show how the oppressive and exploitative share-cropping system affected the black male economically and emotionally, Walker appears as if she is buying into the white racist stereotypes. A closer examination of the grotesque image of Grange in his "first and second life", as well as that of Brownfield shows how black males embraced negative stereotypes as a form of resistance to the lack of power that they feel they have to change their lives. Such hopelessness leads to destructive tendencies by black males who realise their masculinity is in crisis.

Much as society expects Grange to be there for his family through thick and thin he finds the atmosphere in the South stifling and had to abandon kith and kin for what he thought was his own good. The myth of freedom in the North was irresistible for Grange. As a poor sharecropper, Grange is apparently a slave of the white landowners. Owing to his failure to support family as is expected of a man, Grange runs away to the North to start a new life. The flow of resources towards and away from black males is important for understanding the situation of the black male in America (Hutchinson 1996: 87). Grange is thus a soul entrapped in poverty, exploitation and racism and responds in self defeating ways as he hates himself and his family. To show Grange's emotional detachment from his child on the day he abandoned the family, the narrator notes

> Brownfield saw him reach down to touch him. He saw his hand stop, just before it reached his cheek---He saw his father's hand drawback, without touching him. He saw him turn sharply and leave the room (p.25).

Grange has been rendered cold and distant to his son by the system. He even acknowledges that white people hated him and his reciprocity of the hatred extended to his hatred of himself and his family. This causes the disruption of the basic unit of the black community – the family.

There is criminalization of theblack male's actions. Walker views African American males through the prism of womanist lens. Women are given victim faces to invite pity, while men are portrayed as perpetrators of violence. However the writer fails to take cognisance of the fact that in order to prevail you cannot be a victim. Sexual rapacity becomes the prerogative of black males as if affirming the racist stereotype of the hyper sexual African American. The man is cast into his stereotyped roles of murderer, preying on defenceless women. Coetzee's protagonist Dawn in *Dusklands* is of the considered view that:

> The answer to a myth of force is not necessarily counterforce, for if the myth predicts counterforce, counterforce reinforces the myth. The science of mythography teaches us that a subtler counter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of a new myth (1974: 24-5).

Walker's representation of black males plays into the racist stereotypes propagated by whites. Black male characters are developed to follow a linear programme that will see them suiting authorial ideology. The black males are not seen evolving from the stereotypes of ages to develop their own selfhood. Most female writers' representation of black male characters hardly breaks new ground as tropes are common in the context of African American literary discourse. Brownfield is stereotypically represented as a menace of society. He beats and eventually kills Mem. Muchemwa and Muponda (2007) affirm that:

> feelings of insecurity make men prone to over compensation for what they perceive to be weaknesses by enacting aggressive posturing (p.149).

They go further to contend that for individual males who suffer from inferiority complex, " pain and pleasure become important vistas in constructing relationships with self and other" (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007: 148). The pain is reflected when Brownfield beats Memand the pleasure is shown by the depraved sexual encounters he has.In an interview Hurston (1981) comments on black male inadequacy and its effects on them and their feeling of inferiority:

have you ever been tied in close contact with a person who had a strong sense of inferiority? I have, and its hell. They carry it like a raw sore on the end of an index figure. You go along thinking well of them and doing what you can to make them happy and suddenly you are brought up short with accusations of looking down on them (p.5).

The foregoing quotation underscores the fact that black males lash out black women when they feel inferior or humiliated by their experiences with white people. Brownfield gloats over the physical deterioration of his wife and in this way, Walker is linking black masculinity with abuse and callousness. He is portrayed surveying Mem

with sly interest the bleaching of every crease on her bulging stomach. Waiting. She could not hold out against him with nausea, aching feet and teeth, swollen legs, bursting veins and head; or the grim and dizzy reality of her trapped self and her children's despair. He could bring her back to lowness she had not even guessed at before (p.101).

Brownfield chooses to use Mem's most basic female qualities against her – he keeps her pregnant. Davis (2006: 38) posits that " Mem's body literally becomes the text onto which Brownfield can write his frustration and declare his masculinity." Black men's control of women's bodies is presented as a key means of subordination. Indeed bodies matter in power relations.

With his bruised ego, Brownfield is given an illusion of power through oppressing his wife and children and he directs their path to destruction. He has a corrosive effect on their lives.Mem once a plump beautiful woman turns into a skinny ugly hag at the hands of the abusive Brownfield. He is an epitome of patriarchy which presides over the bringing of women's lives to a very low state of existence. Brownfield beatsMem because it makes him "feel good about himself" (p.55).Mem is assaulted both within and without, as she is emotionally and physically abused by Brownfield.Mem stands up to her tormentor and retorts, "and just think how many times I done got my head beat by you just so you could feel a little bit like a man" (p.94). What is shown here is that men become masculine not because its inherent in them, but women make them so by being submissive.

A graphic picture of how black males are responsible for the low state of existence of their female counterparts is captured when young, intoxicated Josie lies in the living room, with

her father standing over her and she is surrounded by a semi-circle of men who have all paid her father to have sex with her. The semi-circle of men is jointly responsible for Josie's bulging stomach.Insatiable desire and libido are a measure of manhood in terms of the capacity for penetrative sex, which is linked to dominance and control of the woman. The incident takes black male sexual prowess to more vicious levels, and is considered a mark of prescribed masculinity. Readers are presented with dominative masculinity of black men.The kind of sex that is depraved of love is reminiscent of the era of slavery where sexual gratification took precedence over sexual satisfaction. The manner in which the father commercialises her daughter is also a historical legacy of slavery. Given that its now the post slavery era when the text is written, Walker seems to drive the point home that both patriarchy and racism are oppressive power structures. Both thrive on the creation of a category of the black female asOther.

Not only is Brownfield depicted as physically abusive, but also verbally. Often times he refers to Mem as an old mule. The bestial image of course needs not be over emphasized. To make Mem feel useless, Brownfield hurls abuse, telling her " Youain't just ugly and beat- up looking, you's old " (p.88). Adding insult to injury, Brownfield addresses his wife as 'Miss Ugly' or simply 'Ugly'. He calls his children 'stupid', instead of calling them by their names. Walker portrays black males who have a tendency to instilasense of worthlessness and a lack of value in women. She critics this particular kind of abusive black masculinity. Although Brownfield has the white racist system to blame, he still has responsibility for his actions and there is room for transformation if he so wishes, Walker seems to be saying.

The black male character is often represented as an over – sexed individual. This kind of hyper masculinity is seen when Brownfield searching for his father ends up leading a life of lust and unrestrained sex. He finds the beds of both Josie and her daughter Lorene open to him. He later settles for Mem. Heterosexual males are represented as crotch –sniffing hounds, obsessed with sex. This is reminiscent of the pedigree bull that was so much valued during the era of slavery. There is need for black males to reject models of human conduct derived from slavery, Walker seems to suggest.She shows through the demise of Brownfield, the danger blacks face as they try to achieve prescribed masculinity.

 It can be noted that for the African American man, he is either exceptionally good or a criminal (Covington 2013). There is rarely any representation of those in between, law abiding middle class African American men. It does not take a genius to discern the

depressing images of African American males. Enough ink has been spilled in representing the black American male as a menace to society. These violent images of black masculinity fed to readers point to the womanist ideology which seeks to accentuate black women's suffering at the hands of their male counterparts. An important question to ask is : To where does the depiction of violent black males lead? Obviously it leads to the endemic violence in the black community. Connell (1995) argues that the ideology of patriarchy legitimises violence towards women, and the abuse of Mem bears testimony to that.One cannot expect all male portrayal to be perfect, but they all should be not be extreme either. In her personal life, Walker's rejection of the African American man through her decision to marry interracially speaks of her dislike of the African American man to a certain degree. She found them seemingly not worth enough, and this also manifests itself in her artistic creation of black males in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

Walker makes use of one character's life to give readers a summary of the entire male category in the community. Brownfield is a replica of his father Grange except that the son does not undergo transformation.This points to limited images of black males that are portrayed in African American literature. For Walkerthe black male has to be a devil or a saint, as is shown by Brownfield and Grange in his 'third life' respectively. Readers are presented with carefully constructed conceptualisation of the African American male character. The categories of complicit and subordinated masculinities are bracketed out as the writer seeks to advance her ideological view point. According to Hutchinson (1996) when certain types of limiting images are produced by black writers the impact on black males themselves is particularly strong. The black males are not immune to appropriating these negative stereotypes in their real lives.

Black males who constantly find their dignity and sense of masculinity crushed handle their humiliation by drinking and abusing their women. One can go further and argue that unemployment and being a victim of a white racist society is a fertile breeding ground for alcoholism and abuse of family. Nothing equals disaster better than this equation. This is embodied in Grange, living in a universe he finds very hostile. Much as Grange is not technically a slave, he is bound by the white male –ruled sharecropping system. The black male in the sharecropping business represents subordinated masculinity. The intersection of pervasive racism and womanism continually undermines the representation of American males of African descent. The assertion that males make up one group of oppressors, has not enabled a realistic understanding of black males. Focusing on the dynamics of

oppressionBarrel (2010) notes that oppression is a force, even a character, that both acts and is acted upon. He contendsthat :

> people who are oppressed cope with the frustrations of their condition by appropriating the same tools of oppression that are used against them upon other people who are even more vulnerable than they are (p.245).

The relations of characters like Brownfield and Grange, in his 'first' and 'second life', with their female counterparts is only conceived in the context of violence.

Traditional gender roles along with the pressure exerted by poverty and racism weigh on black male shoulders leading to frustration and its destructive consequences. Like all oppressed people, Brownfield has his desires and demands. He was:

> never able to do more than exist on air; he was never able to build on it, and was never able to have any land of his own and was never able to set his woman up in style, which more than anything else was what he wanted to do (p.54 -55).

Readers are thus presented with beleaguered black masculinities scampering for pressure valves to let out their frustrations. As is usually the case, violence and death often trail behind human resignation and despair. As a powerless black male, Brownfield "saw his own life was becoming a repetition of his father's. He could not save his children from slavery; they did not belong to him" (p.54). Such frustration accounts for his atrocious behaviour. In the text there is a connection between a brutal dominant male with black masculinity. Such representation must not be taken at face value, it has to be interrogated to expose its ideological basis.

The other critical point is that heterosexual masculinity is shown thriving on the exploitation of the female other. The image of Grange visibly manifests the scars of centuries of slavery as he manifests men's psychological pressure to endorse traditional masculine male control over women's bodies. The body as an important site of dominance is raped or killed as what happens to Mem's as a way of controlling it (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007).A recalcitrant body is killed.Participation in violence is looked at as having the effect of bolstering masculinity. Connell (2000) highlights a number of ways in which men predominate across the spectrum of violence, abusing women or as downright criminals. Such images of black males abound in African American literary discourse. Booker (2000) notes that slavery took the place of family and responsibility and forced the black male to reconstruct his masculinity

in terms of sexual prowess and possession, even of women. The preponderance of violent behaviour in the construction of black American masculinities cannot be over emphasised.

It is not overstretching to assert that representations of male characters are made to fit ideological frameworks, directing readers to a partisan interpretation or understanding of the African American male character. However, important to observe is that much as art mirrors life, art is also reflected by life. The prevalent imagery of abusive black males are played out in real life.Such images has seen the young generation of blacks being indoctrinated to think the only way for black masculinity to manifest itself is through violence, sexual escapades, and general anti-social behaviour. Such representation of black male characters coalesce to give a grotesque image of the African American male. This in a way will make whites relate to black males through the prism of hyper masculinity as represented in African American literary texts if they are not already doing so. Rampant criminalization and lynching of the black American males highlight the influence of representation on black male.

The writer indulges in representations of black masculinity that suit her ideological agenda. Readers are fed with a diet of narrow images of African American males that obscure the individuality of these characters. Walker looks at the life of African American male as he emerges from slavery and struggles towards economic empowerment in racist America. Immigration is an endemic part of African American male's life as epitomised by Grange's journey North. For the African American male, the North turns out to be less than the refuge or sanctuary that it was thought to be. If anything, it is a place where the black males remain poor, exploited and marginalised by the American system.

The representation of most African American male characters can be understood better when one looks at the impact of capitalism on them. Much as slavery was ended, capitalism continued in its unabated form. After slaves were freed there was nothing for the black people set up as to where they could get a job oranything to start off with. The forty acres and a mule promised at emancipation remained a pie in the sky for the freed blacks. Grange finds himself involved in sharecropping- an agricultural system that supports the enslavement of tenant farmers. From this Grange cannot make an adequate living for his family. Failing as a husband and father, Grange finds his ego eroded until he realises himself as a "stone or a robot''(p.8). American masculinity is characterised by taking care of self and family, and that becomes the model for measuring the worth and value of the African American male.

However, most blacks cannot measure up to this ideal masculinity owing to centuries of historical imbalances.

Manipulation of ideas about black manhood is noted in images of black males in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.There is a deliberate exaggeration of negative associations with black males. When the story unfolds a variety of everyday virtues of the African American male are excluded in the delineation of Brownfield and Grange before his transformation. Walker (1983) considers a womanist as "being committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, males and females" (p. xi). However her womanist position generally belongs to the feminist philosophy, given her comment that " womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender "(p.xii).Her bias towards women is noted when she writes in her essay "I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women" (p.250). Important to observe is that Walker's concerns transformed as she also looked at the African American male as he struggles to exist in racist America. However, the images of these black males are far from being positive.

The delineation of Brownfield is without doubt a poor representation of African American manhood. Just like his father, Brownfield beats his wife Mem"because it made him feel briefly good---trying to pin the blame for his failure on her by imprinting it on her face" (p.54).Mem's education increases Brownfield's sense of disempowerment. Less educated black males feel their masculinity is threatened by more educated females. Merida (2007) notes thatBrownfield becomes "jealousy of his wife and degrades her to the point where he can recover part of his ego by feeling superior to her" (p.234). This is also eloquently expressed in Morrison (1977) when First Corinthians could not find men interested in her because of her education. Owing to his feelings of inadequacy, Brownfield kills his wife.Mem puts Brownfield's manhood in crisis when she goes ahead to sign a lease for a house without consulting Brownfield first, who angrily screams:

> " Long as I'm supporting this fucking family we go where I say go. I may not be
> able to read and write but I'm still the man that wears the pants" (p.87).

Magee (1995) notes that Brownfield's utterance is a desperate clutch at security in masculinity (p.28).Black women more educated than their husband are shown as seemingly diminishing the authority of black males within their families, exposing them as unable to serve as responsible fathers and providers partly because of their limited job prospects. This shows masculinity in crisis as black males no longer know how to cope with women who are

educated and they struggle to find their place in a changing society. Mem's education is a threat to Brownfield's "crushed pride, his battered ego --- Her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write" (p.54).In a way this shows the unjustified masculine belief that by virtue of one being male there are certain privileges that individual should enjoy over his female counterparts.Brownfield feels doubly threatened by white racist ideology and Mem who shows some degree of independence owing to her better education. This savage- like portrayal of Brownfield exposes the womanist agenda of representing black women whose lives are ruined by their husbands who fail to meet masculine demands of their society. Intellectual power or simple literacy is portrayed as central to how black males construct their masculinity, and its lack is shown as decreasing one's sense of masculinity.

The black males are depicted showing a victim mentality. Mem challenges Brownfield when she says, " I have let you play man enough to find out you ain't one" (p.91). Brownfield answers back, "Mem baby, the white folks just don't let nobody feel like doing right" (p.91). He blames everything on whites as he does not accept responsibility for his poor manner of coping with his circumstances. Magee (1995) posits that the white man is represented as the castrating figure responsible for all the limitations of the black male.hooks (1992) maintains that " racism has exacerbated for blacks the always difficult social relationship between men and women"(p.198).

Black masculinity is depicted as revolving around controlling and possessing people and property. When Brownfield meets Ruth on her way to school after he had been released from prison, he shouts at her, "You belongs to me, just like my chickens or my hogs--- a man's got to have something of his own " (p.220). Since Brownfield has no real wealth to possess, he feels an illusion of being powerful when he stamps his authority over his poor daughter.To Brownfield dominance over another human and possession of an object or creature are indicative of masculinity (Magee 1995). Brownfield makes a feeble attempt at exercising hegemonic masculinity that Connell (1995) defines as

> The configuration of gender practices which embodies currently accepted answer
> to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant
> position of men and the subordination of women (p. 77).

The dominant gender according to Connell (1995) has access to and uses the means of violence. Violence becomes a way of asserting masculinity. For the black male struggling to achieve ideal masculinity causes more problems than it solves.

It is possible to feel that Walker has imposed her own vision of life on her male characters. She invents Brownfield with all his misogyny and presents to readers as the typical Southern American male character. Looking at Walker's representation of the African American male character, it is his mistreatment and abuse of the black woman that attracts her attention.

Brownfield's control over women is meant to relieve his sense of powerlessness as he insists Mem should call him, "Mister". Here it is important to remember Celie and her Mr- in Walker's (1982) novel *Color Purple*. It was only when Celie had empowered and liberated herself with the assistance of Shug Avery that she knows her husband is Albert. The insistence on the title "Mister" by Brownfield shows male dominance in a master –servant kind of relationship between husband and wife.Jankins(2007) suggests that Walker's black male characters gain access to their masculinity and "manhood through the recreation of a violent patriarchy in their own homes (p.101).

To show what a pathetic figure he is, Brownfield is portrayed as someone who

> had no faith that any other place would be better. He fitted himself into the slot in
> which he found himself; for fun he poured oil into the streams to kill the fish and
> tickled his own vanity by drowning cats (p.59).

His social environment strips him of purpose in life and most importantly his manhood. Brownfield's soul is perforated and cannot contain any hope anymore as he is depicted as " a human being ---completely destroyed" (p.225). Despair and resentment are the hallmarks of his life. His situation emasculates the will to act in socially and economically meaningful ways. Walkershows what happens when individuals accept roles prescribed to them, as entire lives are lost owing to Brownfield's resignation to fate.

Walker delineates a grotesque picture of Brownfield that is as repulsive as his behaviour. She notes

> his once clear eyes were now red-veined and yellowed, with a permanent squint ---
> and he developed severe athletes' foot that caused him to limp when the weather
> was hot or wet--- and he developed a serious bronchitis aggravated by rashes and
> allergies, his hands broke out and his skin so that he almost scratched it off. [the
> same hands later] ---were like gray leather on the outside, the inside scaly and
> softly cracked, too deformed for any work except that done to and for animals. The
> harder and more unfeeling the elephant – hide like skin on his hands became the
> more often he planted his fists against his wife's head (p.83).

To further highlight the male characters' misogyny the writer depicts Brownfield rejecting his conscience as hewould :

> pinch [Mem's] torn worn cheek. Even as he did it he knew dull impossible visions of a time when that cheek was warm and smoothly rounded, highlighted and sleek" (p.84).

Black males are depicted as exploiting women in order to elevate themselves to another level of masculinity. Staples (1982) argues that

> denied equal access to the prosaic symbols of manhood, they manifest their masculinity in the most extreme form of sexual domination. When they have been unable to achieve status in the workplaces, they have exercised the privilege of their manliness and attempted to achieve it in the bedroom, tenderness and compassion are eschewed as signs of weakness which leave them vulnerable to the ever- feared possibility of female domination(p.85).

Brownfield is linked to disease, decay and death as can be noted even when he is described when he was still very young. The narrators says

> tetter sores covered his head, eating out his hair in size of quarters. Tomato sores covered his legs up to the knee. When tomatoes in his mother's garden were ripe he ate nothing but tomatoes all day long – and pus ran from boils that burst under his armpits (p.7).

The above description of Brownfield could be meant to illustrate the extent of racial damage and parental neglect on the African American male body and psyche.

Oppression of black women by their male counterparts is a long standing legacy of slavery. Walkergives a socio- historical picture of the rural South in the 20th century. Oppression in Walker's novel is an allegory of slavery. The manner in which black males brutalise their women is reminiscent of slavery experience. Black males are actually depicted re-enacting how they themselves have been mistreated and abused by the white society. For Brownfield, " his rage could and did blame everything, everything, on her [Mem] His rage and anger and frustration ruled"(p.54). However the writer does not excuse the violence on or abuse of women as her abusive black male characters are actually destroyed physically and psychologically.

The writer seems not to be writing about black men, but what she thinks about black males.Black males are represented as beasts that need to be controlled.There is exaggerated representation of male-insensitivity in black-female relationships. At first, Grange is delineated as an angry, mean man who rules his family with "no smiles about him ---and takes every action as a personal affront" (p.9-10). He hates whites in the same manner he hates his family and himself. Drunkenness and violence are his coping mechanisms for his powerlessness. In turn this destroys the life of his wife Margaret and adversely affects the childhood of his son Brownfield.As Brownfield grows into an adult, we note the interaction of poverty, ignorance, racism and violence which fuse to mould the character he is.In fact, violence finds personification in Brownfield. Violent masculinity is enacted by Brownfield and Grange in their families and this shows marriage as a one of the dangerous places for black women. Violence is used to endorse black masculinity.

Representations of black males are reduced to a singular stereotype of deviance and deficiency. Blacks are perniciously stereotyped as criminals and violent brutes. In a way racism continues to exert a very real and pervasive influence on literary imagery. Both Brownfield and his fathertry to prove manliness through methods endorsed by racist whites. These are assertions of power over women in the form of sexual conquests and abuse of wives. Brownfield and Grange's sexual escapades are reminiscent of the pedigree bull image so much treasuredby the slave master during slavery for the multiplication of slave population due to selective breeding. The sexual objectification of the male body since slavery has ripped the fabric of black masculinity. In examining the structure of gender, Connell (1995) highlights the nature of sexual desire, and the practices that shape that desire which are an aspect of the gender order. She shows that heterosexuality promotes male dominance over women.

Walker's latent fear of the black males as sexual beings is predominant resulting in her painting a picture of the supposed hyper – sexuality of black male.Male sexuality confirms gender and masculinity is enacted through sexuality. African American males' promiscuous behaviour is meant to boost their fragile manhood. This indeed culminates in the representation of a sorry image of black masculinity, in the character of Brownfield. Here, Walker has taken an ideological position almost closer to that shared by the dominant white racists.

There are no refreshing new images of black males as there is the systematic perpetuation of representations associated with criminality and violence. Black males are over represented as perpetrators of violent crimes and victims as well.If Walker had not managed to subtly address the big picture causality which is pervasive racism, one would have naively assumed that black males are innately inclined towards criminality and broken families. The cold and brutal relationship of Mem and Brownfield, shows that slavery and its aftermath provided inhuman models to black males.However through Grange, Walker shows that how a black man handles his "apparently subservient position to the white majority is critical to his success in domestic and personal life" (Billson and Majors 1992: 68).

At the end of the text, Walker delineates a transformed protagonist who is a far cry from the savage and brute initial self. Grange redefines masculinity in terms of love for wife and children and of course a commitment to fulfilling one's family responsibilities regardless of racial oppression. It is in his 'third life' that Grange is transformed when he notes " We guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it" (p.265). Walker's authorial voice cannot be mistaken and Grange's transformation is replete with womanist features. Grange in his 'third life' and Ruth represent black men and women who are able to live harmoniously together. In fact Walker creates a utopian vision as her protagonist undergoes a rebirth. She shows the possibility of embracing other new qualities of black masculinity. Perhaps important to highlight is that the delineation of Grange in his 'third life' is informed by the writer's womanist ideology.

Walker, through Grange defines masculinity as hinged on being responsible for one's actions. Grange intimates that " we both of us jumped our responsibility and without facing up to at least some of the wrong a man loses his muscle" (p.208). Masculinity as viewed by Grange should not be centredaround a victim mentality. There are certain things that black males can control in their lives, for instance being loving and caring to their families notwithstanding the rampant racism in America. Grange shows that he is later able to cope with situations in which he finds himself relatively powerless but does not vent his frustration on his family.

The successful rebirth of Grange shows his triumph over the racist world which has robbed many black males of their humanity and masculinity. He becomes Ruth's teacher instructing her in "the realities of life" (p.139). Grange's rebirth defies the dictates of the harsh and ugly environment he lives in. His name 'Grange Copeland' suggests his ability to cope with the land he lives in and turn it into a habitable farm or 'grange'(Gwin 2002). It is from this

'grange' that Grange is able to embrace the role of husband to Josie and play father to his granddaughter, Ruth. In his 'third life' he is now able to show love and care to other people, which he could not do in both his 'first' and 'second life.'Brownfield is denied this rebirth as if to suggest that age is also linked to one's ability to cope with one's environment and exercise forms of masculinity that are healthy to black male - female relationships. This exposes the relationship between Walker's representation of male characters and her womanist agenda.She critics oppressive patriarchy and the white racist society.Walker's black women are depicted as the most vulnerable social group preyed upon by all sorts of hostile forces, their male counterparts included. Connell (1995) mentions the monopoly on tools of violence by the dominant gender as is represented by black males in black communities.

In his 'third life', Grange becomes Ruth's absent mother's substitute. The care he gives to Ruth is both paternal and maternal. He is caring, loving and protecting at one and the same time. Through recovery of the meaningful roles of father and husband, Grange undergoes regeneration. He ultimately sacrifices his own life to save Ruth from Brownfield, for he is killed by the police after shooting Brownfield, when the court takes Ruth from him. Walker shows the possibility of alternative masculinity that is caring, sensible and responsible. She gives readers her transformed masculine ideal that embraces love and responsibility for one's actions no matter what. As is noted through the depiction of Grange, he achieves " his total triumph over life's failures" (p.136).His transformation is graphically captured when he tries to explain to his son that

> If I had my life to live over, your ma and me would maybe have starved to death in
> some cracker's gutter, but she would have died with me holding her hand! For that
> much I believe I could have done ---and I believe she could have seen the man in
> me (p.208).

Masculinity, as can be discerned from the above quotation can be defined in terms of a man's ability to love his family notwithstanding his inability to provide for his wife.

Grange manages to transform and channel his hatred into doing something positive for his granddaughter, Ruth. Changing from his old ways of alcoholism, infidelity, violence and desertion of family which drives Margaret to commit suicide, Grange is now able to understand the social forces contributing to his misogyny. His South – North – South itinerary brings him back to his roots, to a nurturing home. Grange's reclamation of his South

homeland, brings about his regeneration. Ashcroft (2001:15) posits that to occupy a place is a statement of identity. In his 'third life' we see a Grange different from the one in his 'first life', who is broke, stalked by humiliation, fear and self hatred because he is unable to provide for his child Brownfield and wife Margaret. It was at this stage in his life that Grange regularly transferred his rage to his wife and child since he was afraid to take it to the whites. In turn, the child's wounded anger is directed towards parents, especially the mother and to women in general. This is how misogyny as a black masculine characteristic develops.

Walker basically takes readers through a roller coaster of weird behaviour by Grange who starts his life on a very low point both morally and economically. At the end of the text he is presented as financially on his feet and at a moral high point. Before his transformation,Grange tries to assert his manliness by using Josie and abandoning his wife. Later, Grange is forced to examine his life and make changes in order to survive. "Some mens, in order to live, can't be innocent", Grange intones. For him to save his granddaughter, Grange shoots and kills Brownfield. Needless to say the killing of Brownfield suggests that for a 'woman' to be free, patriarchy must be destroyed. Brownfield is the supreme embodiment and confirmation of the negative stereotype of the black male. He is a figure in whom violent black masculinity and misogyny are distilled. Perhaps this grotesque representation of black man enacting violent masculinity is meant to force the African American man to "circumcise his heart and mind so he can increase love for himself and those around him"(Darden 2012 : 45).

The depiction of Grange in his 'third life' challenges confining gender binaries, whilst exposing the debilitating aspects of masculinity and white supremacist ideologies. Most importantly is that through Grange, Walker explores the possibility of alternative masculinity. Grange is thus represented as a paragon of reformed masculinity, a masculinity that rejects patriarchal notions that women should be oppressed and dominated by their male counterparts. Walker invites readers to see Grange in his 'third life' as a black male character not insulated from loving and caring like his son. Walker shows that in spite of racism, a black male's "thoughts and actions are within his control and has choices in how to handle external circumstances" (Magee 1995). The black male is therefore not destined to behave or speak in an abusive manner. Masculinity is thus reconstructed from Walker's womanism which emphasises wholeness of societies in which black men and women co-exist peacefully. Courageously, Walker takes a womanist position by redefining black masculinity and manhood.

The phallic significance as represented by the pistol is highlighted in the text. In the American imagination the pistol has always been seen as an emblem of male power. Grange shows his total control and dominance over Brownfield when he shoots and kills him. The police also hunts Grange and kills him, which shows the phallic significance of the pistol. This killing of Brownfield shows violence and the power dynamics within gender as black males relate among themselves. The gun represents hegemonic masculinity and those males who are suppressed through the use of it represent subordinated masculinity.

While Bontemps's (1936) portrayal of Gabriel can be criticised for presenting men as better than they real are in everyday life, Walker's depiction of Brownfield can be viewed as dealing with black male characters worse than they are in real life. We thus note that women's fixed notions about men abound in the text. In Brownfield's case, his only intersection with women's life is sex and violence. The sexual act itself has phallic connotations of virility, penetration, control and conquest. It is divested of mutual fulfilment and edification. Walker tries to sympathise with the black Southern American male who is discriminated against, but she misrepresents him as she sees only the ugly in him until he fits her narrow womanist vision of life. According to Walker, the destruction of the black woman is superintended by black males.

Grange, and through him, Walker rejects misogyny as he shows that he has depth of soul and feeling for black women and humanity in general. He ceases to be selfish or only acting out of pleasure and self-indulgence.Throughout time, a man's ability and desire to provide for those that depend on him has been central to his masculinity. In the American context, the role of breadwinner is a formidable challenge to the black male. Hooks (1992) concurs with Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity, which highlights the possibility of multiple masculinities, depending on culture among other variables. Because hegemonic masculinity fails black males, Hooks (1992) calls for black men

> to break with hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, being that block their capacity
> to see [themselves] oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent [themselves]
> in ways that are liberatory (p.2).

Hooks (1992) highlights the need for diverse versions of masculinity, which black males can control, for instance loving one's family and being responsible for one's actions as is advocated by Grange in his 'third life'. Morrison shows that black males can exist constructively in spite of pervasive racism, if they choose to see stars instead of seeing mud.

There is some kind of ideological crisis noted, when Walker leaves Grange to face cruel death. Fine, he has undergone a rebirth, but the question that remains is : if he is Walker's paragon of ideal masculinity, why is he left dying?In her critical text, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens,* Walker notes that she concerns herself with love for life, and the preservation of the dignity and human rights of African American women and men. However in her other novel, *Color Purple*, she shows through her character Sophia that " you have to git the man off your eye ball, before you see anything at all" (p. 168). It is again this ideological position that makes Walker kill her character Grange, despite his transformation. Before the death of Grange, Walker had shown her faith in the black male, when Grange comments " what I know, and reckon the most I know is that people change. That is the main reason not to give up on them"(p.195). The researcher views this as an ideological crisis on the part of the writer, as there is apparent ideological vacillation and inconsistency. Walker seems not concerned about the wholeness of the black community as ostensibly espoused by her womanist philosophy, but rather the welfare of the black woman.

Grange ends up conveying qualities that are typically associated with 'good' masculinity. He is nurturing and sensitive, attributes that would be traditionally associated with femininity. So after his 'rebirth', Grange refuses to fall neatly into stereotypical gender categories. He is an atypical version of responsibility, of what it is to be a 'good' man in the context of American racism. Just like Connell(1995) Walker advocates plural forms of masculinity. Indeed there is diversity among black males and how they exercise their masculinity.

Through the various representations of black males, ways in which black masculinity is conceived, conveyed, and manipulated for different reasons in Walker's womanist agenda are noted. Writers are not immune to being unconsciously affected by societal gender stereotypes, and this fundamentally affects their depiction of characters. Bloom (1999) intimates that historically there were binary notions of gender, with the belief that there should be a clear-cut distinction between males and females. At the end we note a reconstruction of masculinity through womanist lens. Most importantly, Walker has shown the constructed nature of masculinity, as individuals have a choice as to what forms of masculinities to perform.

According to Staples (1995: 18), "many blacks define their manhood in the same way white men do – as breadwinners, provider, procreator, and protector". However, he further highlights that most black men have not had consistent access to social capital they need in

order to fulfill their dreams of masculinity. Abuse of black women and children is therefore a reaction by black males to ward off the ill effects of racial oppression and social inequality. Brownfield and Grange respond to their sense of defeat with cruelty to their wives and children. Walker shows this as how the two" black males navigate their masculinity through hegemonic social institutions" (Coleman 2005: 68). It is this black male's sense of defeat that has seen them having volatile relationships with their women. Through this black males have become a threat to themselves, black women and society. This shows that black males themselves also need to be liberated from masculinity as it is auto- destructive (Connell 1995). Benefits of masculinity are also equivalent to its costs.

In her 1988 afterword to *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* Walker wrote, " In my immediate family too there was violence. Its roots seemed always embedded in my father's need to dominate my mother and their children" (p.344). The frustrations and pains suffered by Walker in a way influenced the manner she portrays her male characters in her novel. Her unpleasant experience with males from an early age reinforces her steadfastness to her womanist ideology and the representation of black males.

Chapter five

Subversion or Confirmation of DominantMale Images inSong of Solomon?

In Morrison's text, male characters occupy a central and leading position, but black women are given victim countenances as they are shown suffering double oppression of the white society and their male counterparts. Representations can be viewed as ideological loads of discourse. In African American literary discourse, there are dominant images of the black males. It is within the scope of this study to establish whether Morrison's depiction of American males of African descent confirm or subvert these dominant images about them. Literary images of black males by black female writers continue to stress gender and sexuality.

Black males are introduced with a sense of self that is not compatible with productive relations with others, especially with women (Magee 1995). Guitar and Milkman take out their anger and frustration on society. The American situation leaves the black boy with only two options of channelinghis anger and frustration and these are violence and sexual indulgence. Indeed it seems the only masculine feelings that are shown are sexual and anger, and all other strong feelings are blocked or suppressed. Violent and hyper-sexual masculinities are the major forms of masculinity that the black boys exude.For Milkman, it is only after his transformation that he can show compassion and genuine love as he freely helps a stranger in the South to lift a crate. Before his rebirth such feelings were suppressed.

Milkman's passion for sex provides him an avenue to channel his feelings of angst. For him sex becomes a way of expressing and registering his manhood in a society where African American males rarely draw attention to themselves for any good cause. According to Zhuwarara (2001: 81):

> Sex can become a form of male domination of the weaker sex, a kind of compensatory ritual by males anxious to massage bruised egos.

This is reminiscent of Cholly's brutal rape of Pecola in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which in a way gives credence to the above fact. Some feminist believe that sex, whether consensual or otherwise represents violation of the woman as a result of intrusion into her body.

Milkman's being spiritually arid expresses metaphorically the soulless character of the exploitative relations of capitalism and racism which are insensitive to such concepts as

family relations. Given how gendered capitalism and racism are it can be noted that Macon's obsession with self-aggrandizement is informed by the need to dominate and control. His allegiance is to nothing else, but the dollar. This materialism and compulsion to acquire resulted from the context of slavery from which the African American emerged with no economic base.Such is the situation in racist and capitalist America. Cash and possessions seem to be critical earmarks for masculinity to Macon Dead. The acquisition of material that represent wealth becomes a prescription for masculinity. Macon Dead is represented as extremely materialistic and an image – oriented black man, and "for him it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man" (p.37).He preaches to his son the gospel of acquiring possessions including women.

Milkman grows to possess elements of thirst for dominance and a craving for cash to be independent. Milkman comments " I just know that I want to live my life. I don't want to be my old man's office boy no more. And as long as I'm in this place I will be. Unless I have my own money" (p.223). Milkman shows that masculinity and being his own man is closely linked to money. His father teaches him that money equals power. To be wealthy is to be masculine according to Milkman and his father. Nothing in life is given a higher value than money by these characters.At first Milkman mimics his father's behaviour because that was all he knew in reference to being masculine. Macon rubs off his deep seated beliefs about masculinity, his lifestyle choices and way of interacting with the world, on Milkman.

The significance of wealth as a mark of masculinity to Macon Dead is highlighted. As a young man, he saw money as a means of clearing a path to a respectable future marked by accepted status symbol. When in an unfamiliar part of town, Macon feels like a "propertyless, landless wanderer " (p.27). His manhood is defined around wealth or possessions and this accounts for his marrying Dr Foster's daughter. For Macon " to entertain thoughts of marrying the doctor's daughter was possible because each key represented a house which he owned at the time" (p.22). Masculinity is shown as closely linked to heterosexuality and the domination of women through domesticity (Connell 1995). Through marriage, black males are represented establishing dominance over the intimate space. Eddy (2003) notes that

> Malecharacters confer upon themselves a position of masculine dominance by transferring the structure of slavocracy to the relationship between men and women(p.6).

There is some kind of individualistic, pleasure- seeking philosophy in which the self is number one, which drives Milkman on in his dealing with Hagar and other women. He is into a search for physical excitement as the answer to the aching emptiness or hollowness of his life. It is a 'wasteland' of relationships, in which genuine love, caring, selfless generosity and concern for others is thrown out of the window. Milkman's licentious disposition is a caricature of black masculinity. Empty self- aggrandisement, the trope of mythical sexual prowess, are images of black males redolent of ideological bias.Much as some black males have appropriated such racial stereotypes, the images are by and large degrading.

Preaching the gospel of amassing wealth, Milkman's father advises him to " own things. And let things you own, own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (p.55). This serves to show that money, power and sexuality are fundamental to how black masculinity is constructed in the American context.This is precisely how Milkman's father defines his masculinity. The representation of the black male borders on dwarfism. He is depicted as a moral and spiritual midget. The images of Milkman and his father abundantly expose this moral dwarfism of some sort. Milkman's oddly short leg metaphorically points to manly facade with cracks through which readers view his weaknesses. In fact the short leg figuratively highlights that he is spiritually crippled as he lives in a moral vacuum. The racist world has destroyed him. Milkman's anxiety over his short leg also points to the fact that masculinities for males who are physically disabled are dominated by those males who are able bodied.

 Macon Dead's dominance over his wife shows that hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual and is closely linked to marriage (Connell 1995). Dominant forms of masculinity can be "economically exploitative and socially oppressive at one and the same time"(Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 60). Milkman's father is an embodiment of oppressive and exploitative masculinity. Macon Dead displays his wealth in an ostentatious manner. Connell (1995) highlights that patriarchy instils men with financial, political and symbolic gains.Equating masculinity with wealth is shown as equally harmful to both males and females. Milkman's father is a shrewd businessman and this has detrimental effects to both men and women. The wealth he has accumulated shows the gendered nature of capital and production (Connell 1995). Wealth is generally the province of the dominant white males and black males strive to achieve that as a way of increasing their masculine status. Hooks (1992) notes that

the masculinity that the black men seek to replicate encourages them to embrace a worldview where white man are all powerful, forming the " white man keeping me down syndrome" ----and the drive for white masculinity presented as an ideal in America, only serves to strengthen white male hegemony (p.98).

What Hooks (1992) is suggesting is that black males need to find other alternative forms of masculinity which the majority of them can identify with, without necessarily having to strive for the white ideal masculinity.

The racist system keeps the black male out in the cold, but all the same he has masculine obligations to meet. This is the challenge Guitar faces and leads him on a murderous path as he seeks wealth. Morrison graphically captures Guitar's life which is a chilling nightmare as it lacks parental warmth. This inevitably leads him to look up to crime as a career. Guitar represents young black males withno future who turn into criminals as they become men. Masculinity as a concept taxes both males and females heavily. With financial obligations to meet in the family and in the Seven Days group, Guitar is forced to resort to crime as a means to help the precarious situation, in which he finds himself.

The violence and fear that Milkman's father instils in his family is central to how black masculinity is performed. In his house, " the quite was not peaceful, for it was preceded by and would soon be terminated by the presence of Macon Dead "(p. 5). To give an illusion of a powerful figure, Macon Dead subjects his family to constant fear. He is described as

> " solid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon Dead kept each member of the family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her--- The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down to them like ashes "(p.10).

There is an element of misogyny in the kind of masculinity exuded by Macon Dead. The intense fear he instils in his daughters is graphically captured, when the daughters, " under the frozen heat of his glance they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yolks of their poached eggs"(p.11).Black males are represented as always responsible for the crinkles that emerge in the fabric of black male and female relationships. A patriarchal family is not a safe place for any woman to be, Morrison seems to suggest. The concept of domination is pervasive in Macon Dead's life.Connell (1995) notes that violence is a part of the system of domination, but it is also a sign of the system's weakness for it would not have to resort to intimidation if its legitimacy was not questioned.

Elements of what Fanon (1963: 53) dubs " the collective auto-destruction " of the subjugated as Macon Dead performs violence on his fellow victims are noted. Milkman's father does not hesitate to prey on his fellow victims, in fact he lives in a picaroon kind of world- eat or be eaten kind of society. What seems to inspire Milkman and his father is the illusion of power; and of course the illusion of exercising authority over their women folk. This is how deprived and depraved masculinities are enacted. The two are just a mimic of the former slave masters. Abused by the system, their only recourse is to abuse their own people. As a form of compensation for their helplessness against the system, they do not have any qualms about transforming their feelings of inadequacy to hurting others. African American males seem invisible in the American scheme of things and they seek visibility in a number of ways. Sexual violence is one way of asserting their masculinity or existence as men in the American society. Such imagery is a confirmation of the racial stereotype of the black males, who enact negative forms of masculinity in their quest for recognition as hegemonic masculine subjects.

Macon's actions are what society demands from him for his very survival. Morals have become a luxury which only a selected few black malescan afford. In the face of an oppressive system, individual males fail to imagine alternative ways of being men, owing to the inaccessibility of other modes of relating to the self and others (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007). They contend that such masculinities tend to be hegemonic as the only viable option within the circumstances. Violent masculinities are exhibited as males vent their anger and frustration on weaker members of the society who are largely women and children. To prove his manhood, Milkman beats his father on the pretext of defending his mother. Milkman threatens his father " you touch her again, one more time and I will kill you" (p.67). Such an incident is a reassurance of Milkman's manhood.

Quite refreshing is Morrison's portrayal of violence as not only a preserve of black males as she shows Hagar bent on killing Milkman. The writer's exploration of the theme of violence here is evenly distributed between sexes. There seem to be no saints in as far as violence is concerned in racist America. Connell (1995) highlights the fluidity of masculinities which is shown here when a woman can also be violent. As Milkman seeks refuge at Guitar's place, Morrison seems to suggest that black men also need protection from violent women. Social expectation on an individual should not be biologically determined, Morrison seems to suggest.

Pilate is killed – literally by Guitar and symbolically by the racist society that has made it a tall order for the likes of Guitar to earn a decent living. Guitar represents black young men merely trying to eke out an existence in a society where day to day survival is a full time struggle. Morrison's representation of Guitar depicts a character cruelly victimised by the extreme racism and poverty that surrounds him. The gun that Guitar wields becomes a phallic symbol of destructive power. The gun is portrayed as a weapon of masculinity. Unlike in most representations where whatever destruction the black male does is only to himself and his fellow blacks, Guitar and his Seven Days group avenge the killing of blacks by whites.

The theme of black male flight also speaks volumes about their performance of masculinity. For Solomon flight was a viable option given that his existence on the plantation was a living nightmare. Though some critics view Solomon's flight as callous abandonment of his family, it is worth noting that the African American man was too much brutalised by history to be able to offer comfort and support in all its varied forms to anyone. Survival was the only driving instinct. Plantation life was " a hell hole from which the swiftest flight possible was desirable" (Fanon 1963, 53). From a womanist perspective, Solomon stands accused of a callous rejection of his wife and children, but it is also important to acknowledge that during slavery everyone enslaved suffered in his private hell and no one was there for the other, each needing comfort to deal with his own crisis. During slavery as has been discussed earlier, black males representedmarginalised and subordinated masculinity.

The flight motif symbolises the idea of human flight to freedom. According to Staples (1982) flight suggests that

> the generational history of African Americans contains not only enslavement but
> also the necessary components for liberation (p.87).

 Solomon's flight shows that he did not bow humbly to being enslaved, but instead liberated himself. The leitmotif of flight represents black males as responsible for themselves only. On the other hand women are shown as responsible for themselves, their children and their communities. To drive home the point of skewed gender roles in favour of black males, Morrison shows later generations valorising Solomon for abandoning his family. As if the singing in praise of Solomon is not enough tribute, residents of Shalimar, have given his name to a scenic mountain peak. In contrast, a scary dark gulch is named after Ryna, whom they demonise for failing to support the twenty one children that she is left with after Solomon flies away. To escape the confines of a dull life in Michigan, Milkman goes to

Virginia leaving Hagar to die of unrequited love. The tragic end of the two women : Ryna and Hagar's lives highlights the pain and suffering caused by their men's irresponsible escapism. Hagar's mad desire for Milkman validates his manhood. He used her

> Her love, her craziness---It told men and other women that he was a bad dude, that
> he had power to drive a woman out of her mind --- because he had fucked her and
> she was driven wild by the absence of his magnificent joint (p.304).

Women are therefore presented paying the price for their men's masculinity and valorized existence.

However, Morrison does not turn away her gaze from the big picture causality. She unflinchingly shows that the social conditions that forced Solomon to fly away from the cotton fields and that force Milkman to run away from home are responsible for the continuing deprivations of the African American community. Racism is therefore the central cause of suffering in the novel. It has a long lasting, damaging effect on the black male character and how he exercises his masculinity. As a power relation, racism though not explicitly discussed is shown destroying black masculinity.

Bloom (1999) notes that masculinity seems ultimately linked with the mythic need for autonomy captured by Robert Smith's announcement that he was to fly away on his own wings. In a note, Robert Smith writes

> At 3.00 pm on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I will take off from the
> Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all (p.1).

Masculinity is in this case linked to the economic, political and social mobility that is metaphorically represented by the ability to fly on one's own wings. Life in America is so hemmed in discrimination, repression and violence that black political, social and economic development is arrested. The possibility of flight therefore represents freedom and the ability to rise above all the debilitating forces. This representation of black males and their propensity to flying away is a fresh image in African American literary discourse.

We note gender binaries in *Song of Solomon* from the description of the scene at the Mercy Hospital at the time when Robert Smith was about to 'fly'. At that time

children were in school; men were at work; and most of the women were fastening

their corsets and getting ready to go see what tails or entrails the butcher might be

giving away (p.1).

Men are depicted engaged in productive work, whilst women are presented doing unproductive household chores. Morrison makes mention of "1918, when coloured men were drafted" to fight in the First World War. The American society emphasised on gender differences as only black males, and not females were conscripted into the army.

The fight between Guitar and Milkman shows a regrettable failure to realise that the things that bind them together are greater than the things that separate them. This is a microcosmic image ofthe interracial conflicts among the African Americans. Economic suppression fosters an environment ripe for black on black crime and chaos. Guitar finds himself living in a forbiddingly harsh environment which ultimately criminalises his ambitions and dreams as an individual and a black male character. The risks associated with masculinity cannot be over emphasized looking at the violence that Milkman and Guitar find themselves embroiled in. Through Milkman and Guitar, Morrison shows the black adolescent males involved with the criminal justice system, which in itself is gendered as it represents hegemonic masculinity.

Guitar and his group are tormented souls whose actions are a product of their situation rather than who they are. The fight between Milkman and Guitar demonstrates that when suppressed fury fails to find an outlet it devastates the oppressed people themselves (Fanon 1963). Black American males fight among themselves owing to their inability to face the real enemy oppressing and marginalising them. Guitar vents his anger on whoever dares to stand in his path of destruction, white or black. The bitterness that is shared by Guitar and Wright's Richard vividly depicts a culture of deeply –ingrained self loathing which is imbuing in the black young men. To them, to be a black male means to be violent. Such a violent disposition is a response to conditions of intense vulnerability. Milkman's father is usually angry and abusive and this can be traced back to his poor childhood. The murder of his father seems to be the source of his bitterness. This bitterness manifests itself in the ruthless and oppressive manner in which he exercises his masculinity. Masculine coping strategies are influenced by gender though, not determined by gender. Societal expectations on the behaviour of black males influence how they perform their masculinities.

The difference we note in the representation of Milkman and Guitar shows how class spawns differences in the manifestation of masculinities. There are disparities between black males

who experience social disenfranchisement and those who have been able to achieve some degree of social integration in racist America. Different life experiences lead people to view the world differently and represent reality differently. Milkman and Guitar are divided by their upbringing and worldviews. Unlike his friend, Milkman is blind to the pervasive white racism, protected from it by his affluence. On the other hand Guitar lives in grinding poverty and sees everything through racial lens. He sees oppression in every direction he looks, hence his hostile attitude towards the world. In contradistinction to his fellow, Milkman has a spring board from which to start into life while Guitar begins from zero. There is a huge gap of perception between Guitar and Milkman. Guitar's actions are a reflection of his poverty – stricken background . He relates what he sees around him to oppression and racism. The issue of class shapes conceptions of reality and how one performs his masculinity.

Guitar makes use of the Seven Days to negotiate his public and private space as a black male. The Seven Days is a group of black males who kill whites in acts of revenge. The group negotiates black masculinity through violent means. It is the 'slave status' (p.160) that is rejected by Guitar as he assumes the role of a quasi- patriarchal figure. Masculinity in this case is based on violence.Male children born in poor families like Guitar are raised not only with economic, but also social and psychological disadvantages. They are less able to control their violent impulses. In fact Guitar is emotionally withered by the nearly pathological environment which surrounds him.

The relationship between Henry Porter and Milkman's father attests to Connell's (1995) assertion that not all men have the same amount power as some have more power than others. Macon Dead wields more power than his slum tenant Porter. When Milkman's father is made aware that his daughter First Corinthians is seeing Porter, a black man of a low social standing his express order is the eviction of Porter from his dwelling. Macon goes on to force her daughter to quit her job. Both Macon Dead and Porter are black men, but by virtue of class and wealth, the former wields more power than the latter. Connell (1995) comments that masculinities are constructed in relation to other subordinated masculinities. Class therefore plays a very important role in the gender contestation of power. A black man is presented in a position of powerlessness in relation to another black male. Readers thus note the intersection of class, gender and masculinity.

Read in the context of the Civil Rights Movement one will immediately discern that Guitar and Milkman represent different attitudes to the movement. According to Golden (2005)

Guitar is a radical revolutionary whose views are a combination of those of Elijah Mohammed and Malcom X, who fought for black self-sufficiency and separation from whites (p.78).

Guitar joins an anti-white Seven Days group, which transforms him into an radical extremist. The Seven Daysgroup represent violent masculinity that deals with individual and group subordination by striking back violently. The propensity for violence is represented as the black American male province. On the other hand, Milkman represents the black Northern upper middle class which did very little while blacks in the South were beaten, imprisoned and murdered by racist whites. If the two can be taken to represent divergent attitudes towards the Civil Rights Movement, then its gendered nature cannot escape the reader. Both are male characters and more so, the rights that the movement clamoured for had gendered implications.

Towards the end we see black male characters who re-configure their psyche so as to understand themselves tracing their roots. There is this obsession with tracing one's roots that grips African American male characters like Milkman, which is a leitmotif in African American literature. Milkman is represented grappling with the question of who he is in the American scheme of things. We observe an earnest attempt by African American males to understand the nature of their relationship with history. On the other hand there is not even a vestige of such traits in the representation of African American women, as if to suggest they are at peace with the nagging question of identity. Here, Morrison is expanding the meaning of masculinity, manhood and maleness for the black male, as she constructs an alternative masculine identity. This comes after a realisation that white models of masculinity will not provide the same benefits to black men as they do white men.

Milkman attains a higher level of consciousness. One sees the possibility of man and woman realising their unenviable condition. They recognise their enemy and band together to overthrow conditions of marginality. Milkman develops gradually as he ends up being able to live harmoniously with female counterparts like the prostitute Sweet. Milkman boldly transcends gender boundaries and this can be viewed as the author's ideological standpoint that gender roles have to be redefined if black males and females are to live harmoniously together. Milkman's love encounter with Sweetie is not conquest, but rather a mutually fulfilling act. Sweetie actively participates in the enjoyment of her own sexuality. According to Merida (2007), Morrison believes the African Americans should stand together and respect

each other. At the end of the text, Milkman represents Morrison's wish for an 'ideal' manhood. Morrison does not only criticize black males who oppress their female counterparts, but also implodes the 'neat' categories of the gender binaries. Through the character Milkman, Morrison explores the possibility of multiple masculinities. Analogously, Walker does the same with her Grange who undergoes the same kind of transformation. Both writers highlight relationship reconciliation between black males and females.Milkman becomes Morrison's masculine archetype. Through Milkman's transformation, Morrison constructs a new masculinity that endorses equal partnership in intimate spaces as is shown by the protagonist's encounter with Sweet.

Said (1978) insists that "no process of converting experience into expression could be free of contamination" (p.69). Macon Dead's infatuation with accumulating wealth and wielding power is juxtaposed with his sister Pilate who shuns material goods. His way of validating his manhood and exercising masculinity is through amassing wealth. This is as if to suggest that accumulating of wealth is evil and a preserve of black males. In this way, Morrison is portraying black men in an unfavourable way.

Instead of being fed with a diet of images of black males who are unintelligent and criminals, it is refreshing to see a representation of intellectual giftedness in the form of Doctor Foster. It takes a significant amount of intellectual prowess to become a doctor and the black people show their respect by naming the street where he used to live Not Doctor Street, when he dies. Doctor Foster was," the only coloured doctor in the city had lived and died on that street" (p.2). He is a history maker. Doctor Foster represents the highly educated and successful blacks, and his image is an alternative to the dominant narrative about black male intellect. Dominant racist images of black males portray them as buffoons among other negative stereotypes that marginalise and exclude African American masculinity.

The representation of Freddie as a boy who grew up in jail owing to lack of orphanages for blacks in Jacksonville, Florida speaks volumes about the conditions of the African American male. If black mothers give birth to their male children astride prison cells, there is no prize for guessing the destiny of such children. Growing up in jail in itself is an experience that destroys childhood innocence. Being suggested by Morrison is that the American society is so skewed against the black male that his chances of avoiding prison life are between slim and none. For the black male chances of being arrested and jailed at least once in their life time are extremely high. Despite being cushioned from the harsh realities of American racist

life, Milkman is at one point arrested and he begins to appreciate the pervasive racism in America. Middle class status does not protect black males from police brutality and its inherent racist assumptions. Black males represent subordinated masculinity. Black male wealth does not increase their masculine status in the eyes of the whites.

There are victim images of black males, for instance Guitar's father who dies at the hands of his white boss. The death of Guitar's father has far reaching effects on the development of the boy who grows to hate all whites and view them as unnaturally callous. Showing how the black male's life was devalued in America, the saw mill owner offers sweets and money to the Baines family as compensation for the father's death demonstrating that he equates these things with the value of the man's life. In Mississippi, Emmet Till, a black Northerner is killed raising the death toll of blacks at the hands of racist whites. Milkman's grandfather is killed by the Butlers. The motif of the disposable male sex is touched on by Morrison. Black males represent subordinated masculinity in the American set up.

Milkman's walking against the flow of traffic figuratively implies his individuality. He is kind of alienated from everyone else demonstrating a black male against the world attitude. He deeply feels to be a victim of circumstances as shown when the narrator comments that " deep down in that pocket where his heart hid, he felt used. Somehow, everybody was using him for something or as something" (p.165). The victim mentality that is depicted by Milkman tends to make the black male shift blame for his actions to the hegemonic white society. Indeed racial discrimination has a castration effect on the black males, who

> tell tales of atrocities, first stories they had heard, then those they'd witnessed, and
> finally the things that had happened to themselves. A litany of personal
> humiliation, outrage, and anger turned sickle- like back to themselves as humour.
> They laughed then---the ruse they had invented to escape or decrease some threat
> to their manliness, their humanness (p.83).

Racial tensions therefore had a dent on the black American man's masculinity. Racism erodes black male self-esteem and self- respect, which in most cases results in malevolent black male behaviour. The mistreatment of black women by their fellow men is because of the latter's desire to feel masculine and in control of someone since they are not in control of themselves.Racism brings with it moral, spiritual and psychological debility.

Morrison makes a very good attempt at representing male characters who are in a way diverse and complex. When Pilate temporarily settled on an island in Virginia she found a

"good man" who fathered Reba. Although she was in love, Pilate refused to marry him. At least here black males are shown as loving and are exonerated from the blame of being responsible for broken families. The image of an African American father who is out rightly uncaring and unloving is subverted here.

The reference to First Corinthians having problems in finding a man to marry her owing to her being " too accustomed to middle class life " speaks volumes about a significant number of African male characters who cannot match her. More so, First Corinthians' falling for Porter a lowly man shows that most black males are far below the middle class status. Most black males' lack of interest in marrying First Corinthians can also suggest that they want someone of a low class whom they can dominate economically, socially and physically. Most men feel their masculinity threatened when dealing with a woman of a high social standing. Before consummating their love, Porter mentions his low social status as a decoy to make First Corinthians give in. The crux of the argument is that most black males as has been highlighted by Morrison (1977) are not keen to establish relations with women of a better intellect or social standing than themselves. They view this as an affront to their masculinity.

The penis is shown as a symbol of authority and an organ for the abuse of black people, mostly women. Lena reminds her brother, Milkman of the time he urinated on her. She bursts out telling him that all his life he has been urinating on people, and has nothing to show for himself except "the little hog's gut" that hangs between his legs. The penis and the gun that Guitar uses to kill Pilate are phallic symbols that represent the power that some males have over women and fellow black males.

Morrison uses Milkman as a catalyst to prove the possibility of transformation. She builds her male characters around certain assumptions about gender. Milkman ends up experiencing selfless compassion towards others. As a writer, Morrison is socially and culturally aware that despite his anti-social behaviour the African American man must be restored. This accounts for the rebirth of Milkman. Milkman's transformation attests to the fact that Morrison does not subscribe to degrading black men in order to make the women appear admirable. Morrison shows the evolution of the black male in his quest for masculinity.

Women are sometimes made more manly and dominant than men for instance Pilate. Unlike Walker, Morrison sees the possibility of a woman's freedom without necessarily having to destroy man.In this way, Morrison shows a radical departure from Walker's vision. Morrison's novel idealises strong women, painting black male characters in unfavourable

light. Pilate is elevated to the status of an admirable female role model. She isnamed after Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler – a powerful male figure in the New Testament.For one to be independent and self assured, is to be man - like or masculine, Morrison seems to be saying. Pilate is masculine in thought, though a woman in body. In this way, readers note that Morrison is trying to show that masculinity is not an exclusively male preserve. However interesting to observe is her name that is linked to male power.

Milkman ends up admiring Pilate for she could fly, "without ever leaving the ground". This metaphorically represents the ability to rise above one's troubles like the rampant racism, on one's wings of self – respect. Black males, through Milkman who ended up 'flying' as well, are shown the possibility of exercising masculinity that is conducive to black male – female relationships. Morrison shows that black males have the capacity to transcend the debilitating circumstances if they learn how to handle themselves and their unfortunate experiences, without necessarily abusing those beneath them.

Masculinities vary according to location and culture. In Virginia, Milkman is confronted by hostile local men. In his fight with Saul, Milkman's face and hand is cut with a knife.This knife – fight on its own is a site for the definition of black masculinity, and the same can be said of doe hunting. The endeavour to subdue wild- animals is a mark of black masculinity in the American South. Here Morrison traces African concepts of "masculinity lost and destroyed by slavery" (Booker 2000:67). When he is in Shalimar, the locals perceive Milkman's version of masculinity as an overt threat to their own, " he was telling them they were not men--- that thin shoes and suits with vests were the measure" (p.226). To emphasise the transformation that Milkman undergoes, " all he had started with on his journey was gone " and he had to think of a definition of masculinity beyond the possessions of the North and focus on the South where "all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use " (p.277). For Milkman, this was his defining moment. Morrison shows alternative forms of black masculinity quite in opposition to white masculinity dominant in America. She creates a new space for black masculinity. This is in line with Connell's (1995) conviction that masculinities are multiple and dynamic, as they change with culture and with individuals. However, important to note is that some forms of masculinity like that of hunters in the American South, exist in tension with hegemonic masculinities. They challenge the notion that to be a 'man' is to possess wealth.

Connell (1995) notes that members of the privileged group use violence to maintain their position. This is clearly illustrated when Till is killed for the 'crime'of whistling to a white woman and freely speaking of sleeping with them. The rampant lynching of black males for allegedly sleeping or harbouring intentions to sleep with white women, exposes in the white man's fear of being displaced sexually by the black man. In this case Till is a victim of white supremacist ideology, a fate similar to Bob's in *Black Boy*. Besides highlighting that black males represented subordinated masculinity in America, the incident points to the politics of sex, which leads to serious problems between white America and the black male. What this reflects is the point of intersection of sexuality, race, gender and masculinity. The representation of the African American male as a sexual martyr is a confirmation of the dominant image of the black American male character.

Milkman's care for forgotten names of his ancestors, suggests that knowledge of one's family is more important than any amount of material goods. This is quite in sharp contrast with the portrayal of his father who is obsessed with material possessions. Morrison has shown the possibility of other forms of masculinities different from the dominant ones that emphasize dominance and material wealth. Morrison has shown black masculinity as also constructed around a sharp interest in and knowledge of one's cultural heritage. This is quite in line withConnell's (1995) assertion that what is defined as masculine differs with society and masculinities are influenced by social factors.

The ways through which we represent others and ourselves are not simple reflection of some external grounded truth(Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Representations are value laden. Morrison's ideological convictions surface as she represents men like Milkman's father who have sold their soul to the god of money in negative light. However unlike Walker, Morrison has tried to honestly represent diverse masculinities, exploring the varied notions and constructions of masculinity. For instance, Saul in the South who cuts Milkman's hand with a knife exudes his masculinity differently from the showy Macon Dead in the North.

Apt names are used by Morrison to emphasise that black males represent marginalized and subordinated masculinities. Macon's family got the name 'Dead' after registration subsequent to the end of slavery. Important to note is that the social death that is suggested by the name, though it failed, points to a form of subordinated masculinity as the African American male had no power to name himself. The name 'Milkman' exposes authorial ideology as the

protagonist got his name for sucking beyond the normal age. Suggested is the black male's over-dependence on the black female.

Morrison explores the definition of masculinity in relation to economic responsibility, familial relationships, cultural heritage and the American context.The ideological vision that the novel promotes is of harmony among the black community. Morrison offers her own interpretation of black masculinity as centredaround cultural heritage, as well as redefinition of gender roles. She uses the males to reflect women's concerns such as abuse of women by men, but also tries to explain male behaviour in relation to being powerless in racist America. Her representation has to a limited extent confirmed certain stereotypes of violent black masculinity. However, Morrison has gone further to delineate black males performing other masculine identities, apart from those prescribed by the white society.

Bloom (1999) notes that in contemporary societies hegemonic masculinity is defined by physical strength and boldness, heterosexuality, economic independence, authority over women and other men, and an interest in sexual relationship. In the text, readers are shown that such an ideal is hardly attainable. However given that standards of masculinity vary from time to time and from culture to culture, Morrison shows the possibility of other forms of black masculinity. Most important,perhaps is the clear point that Morrison is highlighting that not all black males are cut out to be the personification of masculinity as narrowly defined by the racist American society. Her exploration of other forms of masculinity subverts the prescribed masculinity of the black male as always showing hostility towards women.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the study winds down with a review of the different representation of black males in African American literary discourse. The concept of black manhood has been interrogated from slavery to the post emancipation era. Manifestations of black masculinities across time have been explored. This dissertation does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of the representation of black male characters in African American literary discourse, given the limited number of texts examined. In order for the study to become manageable within the time and space of the course, it was thought prudent by the researcher to dwell on four texts. However, the depth and breadth of the images of African American males in the selected texts have been dealt with. It is necessary at this juncture, to reflect on the various images of the black male as the researcher concludes.

The research has focused on the interplay of ideology and the gendered representation of black male characters in four African American literary texts. There are different ideological bases of looking at the African American male as is particularly manifested in the representation of black male characters in the texts. Indeed representations are shaped by a variety of ideological assumptions and attitudes, as writers create images of black male characters of their imaginations imbued by the hue of ideology. It is such ideological stains on the representation of the African American male characters in literature that accounts for the sometimes contrasting images of these people. The making of so much noise about black women's suffering does not mean their male counterparts are having it good in the American scheme of things. Such warped mentality is even echoed in musician Beyonce Knowles's lyrics " If I were a boy, even just for a day---". Implicit in the meaning is that women wish they were men, whom they think life in America treats better. The study has shown that black male characters' suffering is equally the same if not more than that of their female counterparts. It is only a matter of representation of African male characters heavily coloured by ideology which tends dominate African American literature.

In addition to the above, the research shows the diversity of the study of men, black men to be more specific, as well as ideology and the representation of these black males. The intersection of masculinity, ideology and representation of black males in African American literary texts has been studied. From the analysis it appears the male gender was hit harder in

its ego by capitalism, slavery and racism than the female in America. Most representations of male characters are imbued with the legacy of slavery.

During slavery most black slaves negotiated their manhood through being defensive and submissive. Male slaves were biologically male, but not socially male, hence Bontemps's attempt at giving a very masculine narrative that counters the portrayal of black males during slavery. Bontemps highlights that notions of black masculinity during this period are fairly reductive. Through the character Mingo, Bontemps shows intellectuality as a mark of masculinity. Intellect enables him to function as an independent mind - with the power of reasoning, which allows him to recognise that slavery was not a pre-ordained institution for blacks, no wonder why he is a free man and not a slave.Education is therefore central to the attainment of manhood in America as has been shown by Douglass (1849) and Du Bois (1903).

In *Black Thunder*, black men's struggle to attain and define freedom, manhood, and their identity. In *Black Boy*Wright shows his firm belief that African American men are affected by the negative past so much so that it becomes a fixed part of them, so that they somehow possess malevolent tendencies. The 'boy' aspect in the title of the novel is suggestive of marginalised and subordinated masculinities. " Boy" reduces the black male into a being that cannot think for itself, one unequal to a white man.

It can be noted from the study that we do have positive and negative representations of the African American male character, and the former area is the most documented. There is narrowness of representations of masculinity, where the black male is constricted to the role of an exceptional like DrFoster or a criminal.

Representations of black males in African American literary discourse continues to be hamstrung by stereotypes. There is a failure to portray the richness, diversity and complexities. Segments of black males are used to represent the entire black community. There are some positive tropes, but those does not help matters as they are tropes all the same. Indeed this highlights the organic tie between ideology and representation.

The potential of the black male can be unlocked when we move from stereotypical images and begin to question these restrictive and deterministic images or representations in African American literary discourse. Most importantly, as is suggested by Collins (2005) is the need to have more holistic versions of success and masculinity which include personal character

apart from economic achievement and other hegemonictendencies.Through this masculinities will cease to be oppressive and taxing to both black men and women.The study has explored how the ideology of class, gender, race has informed the representation of black male characters in the selected literary texts.

Representations of black males highlight different constructions of masculinities within novels. From Grange to Milkman, each man becomes a paragon of masculine perfection at last, according to Walker and Morrison respectively. Their depiction of black male characters are mere ideological constructs. The various representation of black males is informed by different ideological tendencies within African American literature. By and large, the different ideological positions that have coloured the portrayal of the black male point the fact that there is no unified African American worldview, and neither is there a single definition of black masculinity. Differing perspectives on black masculinity prevent the relationship between gender and race, class, place as well as age from becoming limited or monolithic, hence the representation of plural forms of black masculinities.

Walker and Morrison try to forge a masculine identity that allows unity with women in the characters of Grange and Milkman. The two characters gradually try to reject an inability to control certain aspects of their lives as license to abandon responsibility in all areas. Instead of blaming all their problems on white society, the two are allowed to outgrow their poor behaviour. Interestingly, the rebirth of Grange and Milkman takes place with some help of a woman, be she a family member, or a lover, for instance Ruth plays a crucial role in the life of Grange, while Pilate is a prop to Milkman. Therefore both female writers express the importance of mutual understanding and mutual respect between black males and females, in order for black males to exercise healthy forms of masculinity. Representations of black males by female writers need to be examined on the backdrop of the authors' feelings that black male writers did not acknowledge the gender struggles within their own race.

It is hoped this hoped this study has significantly added to the growing body of work on black masculinity and how that is represented in literary texts. More importantly it is intended to illumine on the complex interplay between ideology and this representation of black males in African American literary discourse. What the research has shown as key to the enactment of masculinities by black males is that they need to define masculinities in their own terms without emulating white hegemonic masculinities that cause more harm than good in the black community. There is the more cohesion in black male – female relations if

masculinities are reconstructed and redefined in line with the history and culture of the African Americans.

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