

The Forgotten Heroins in African Ammerican Literature: The study case of Ann Petry's *The Street*.

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Abstract

The paper studies the role that the African American woman plays in her society in spite of the fact that she lives in a state of double oppression pressed upon her by the white community and her own community. The Street, by Ann Petry is a relevant study ground to elaborate on the role of African American woman in her society. The historical context of black people's presence in America and the unbearable conditions which go along with categorize black people as inferior beings. Although these inhuman conditions, black women play a key role in the process of survival in their families restrictively but beyond in their community when their men were missing or when they were present but could not get a job due to the social restrictions. This article aims to investigate about the important role they play in a society dominated by white community. But in spite of the the weight of oppression pressed upon them by the history, the white communities and even their own community they stand as the pillar of the black community's survival. Its objective is to demonstrate how these women, in a society where their men cannot get a job or are reduced to manual jobs, they succeed to be the cement for the survival of their community. These women, who achieve toilsome tasks by sweeping and cleaning in white people's houses days and nights, permit to the black world to survive are less celebrated.

Keywords : black women, heroins, pillars, alienation, gender, dehumanization.

Introduction

In a country where the burden of alienation is still visible in spite of the proclamation of freedom, black women proved to be of an unprecedented importance in their society. By working in the white people's houses sweeping and cleaning the floors they become the pillars for their society by supporting their families with the least livable necessities. They take up the reign of their different families where their men are missing because of the social austerity which obliges them to be jobless. And this impossibility to get a good and sustainable job to satisfy the needs of their households makes of black women the real leaders of their families because they assume this double burden. Ann Petry, a postcolonial writer depicts under a general angle blacks' alienation but she casts a particular glance to the black woman's case in her novel *The Street*. Thus, in the framework of Marxist theory, this article aims to elaborate on the undeniable black woman's heroism despite the austerity of the history and society against her. This article will evolve in three movements knowingly the systematic racial against black woman's development, the black woman at the intersection of forces and her heroism, and finally it will show how she suffers from gender-based consideration but she heroically stands firm and brave.

I-Systematic racial afterwards

The social and historical context in which the black woman was born, limits her social status to that of thing instead of being seen as a human. The historical context of slavery and any other form of debasement which followed during centuries, has cast a gloom which looms over black community in general but particularly black woman. The black woman has to face a systematic racism which means exclusion and abuse as portrayed in *The Street* by Ann Petry in the following extract :

There was a cold November wind blowing through 116th. It rattled the tops of dustbins, sucked window, blinds out through the top of the open windows and set them flap back against the windows ;and it drove most of the people off the street in the block between Seventh and Eighth Avenue except for a few hurried pedestrians who bent double in an effort least possible exposed surface to its violent assault (Petry,7).

The wind possesses human characteristics. Its personification is the symbol of the social harshness in which black community lives. An analysis of the above passage reveals that black people are ostracized and pushed in a corner where the wind is violent than the other part of the society. Through this natural disaster, the author portrays a social stratification which victimizes both black man and

black woman. But if the wind oppresses both men and women, the black woman bears the most profound scars of this alienation.

The wind is nothing but the oppressor who is ironically the white community. The wind is the ironic personification of the white people for whom, black people deserve living in dirt and be discarded from the white society. In this context all the black community is victim of the social exclusion. But, Lutie Johnson as a woman plays a crucial role in her community under the weight of these inhuman conditions. The heroin is the product of such a racial society which does whatever possible to hurt and dehumanize her altogether with her community as in the following passage:

It did everything it could to discourage the people walking along the street. It found all the dirt and dust and grime on the pavement and lift it up so that the dirt got into their nose, making it difficult to breathe, the dust got into their eyes and blinded them ; and the grit stung their skins. It wrapped newspaper around their feet entangling them until the people cursed deep in their throats, stamped their feet, kicked at the paper (Petty,7).

The brutality pressed upon the black community is visible through the first sentence. To do everything can mean that to plan and execute any policy being efficient to animalize the black people. The white society makes it impossible to live that is why it attacks her different organs such as noses, eyes and the skin. Put together, the wind seems to

toil to extinct black people. So, Lutie Johnson grew up in a society which is austere to her being black. Lutie, as well as her community have nowhere to go and this turmoil is symbolized by the unstable board on which are inscribed the different names of the streets. In spite of this harshness, she does not stop fighting for a betterment of her conditions as well as that of her family or community.

II-Black woman at the intersection of forces and her heroism

Black woman suffers from the austerity of the history but beyond, she suffers from the cruelty of the white society as well as the black one. She suffers from her encounter with black males as well white males. From the different white kitchens in search of better living standards, she goes through exploitation and debasement like in the following passage: "When will my salary start ? And how much will it be? She asked finally. She had to know tonight. She couldn't wait any longer for him to brush the subject" (Petty, 218). The extract reveals that she is used by other people to enrich themselves while she remains poor and at the bottom the social scale. She is exploited and dehumanized. History has done wrong to her as a black person but the components of the society do not spare her neither.

She is trapped between a social systematic alienation and the persons who exploit her for their own interests as mentioned in the following excerpt : "Salary ? he asked blankly" (Petty, 218). Through the word 'blankly', she means

nothing but an object to be exploited as stated in the following extract : "Baby, this is just experience, he said. Be months before you can earn some money at it" (Petry, 218). She is a money provider for others.

The people she comes accross are cruel and look down at her for their personal interests like in the passage below : "You said that I could earn my living singing. Just last night you said the job was mine for as long as I wanted it. Sure. Babe and meant it, he said easily .It's true. But I don't have all the say. So the guy who owns the casino -guy called Junto said you ain't ready yet" (Petry, 218). Lutie Johnson is a tool of profits for Boots and Junto. To be singer in Junto's casino she attracts clients, she lines up Boots and Junto's funds. She helps them to thrive their business up but they show ungrateful with her with false promises. She is exploited and abused just because she is a woman.

So, beyond the historical context which obstructs her living conditions by debasing and dehumanizing her , the black woman has to face the cruel reality of social interaction because it deprives her of what can better her life in the profits of the oppressor like in the following passage : "You've got a good voice. Very good voice, he said. I can pratically guarantee you a job. About twenty-five dollars a week" (Petry, 230). Mr Crosse, by promisings to her such sum, he has an unveiled intentions. He desires her like Boots and Junto do. Her neighbourhood sees her not like a person but as a thing to throw away after use. Through Lutie Johnson, there is a painful portaryal of the black woman in society where history and persons make of her life a void. She is in the claws of a double oppression.

The proclamation of the independence shows to be a decoy for the black community as demonstrated through the blacks' living conditions in politics, social and financial issues. If the false-granted independence strikes the black community, it makes of the black women some special beings who seem to be bestowed with an almighty strength to break through these harshness and unbearable conditions. In spite of the difficulties, black woman does not flinch, she shows strength to become the heroin of her society despite the shadow of invisibility which looms over her head. She becomes the angular stone in her community because she assumes both roles, her own role as woman but also that of her man. She is engaged in a double fight as it is said in the following extract :

We poor coloured women wage-earner in the South are fighting a terrible battle. On the one hand , we are assailed by by white men, and on the other hand, we are assailed by black men, who should be our natural protectors ; and whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, we are little more than the pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves (Gerda,157).

The colored women are crushed by the claws of oppression, be it white or black. The fight they lead or the oppression which crushes them down, reveals their potentiality as heroins in their community. Their suffering from both sides, ironically does not weaken them but makes of them stronger, entrusting to them an important role, that

of supporting their families. In spite of their ill-treatment they do not leave their households like their men whose absence confers to them a double role. They become the pillars on which all the family takes hold for its survival because they support their families with the meager pay they get from sweeping and cleaning the white people's houses.

Despite their dehumanizing and uncomfortable working milieu and conditions, they still remain on these unbearable and unliveable places in order to bring the livable loaf of bread at home to save the family from starvation and collapse. They must not leave or stop doing these manual jobs which can mean the collapse of the black community because their men, due to their unemployment, they are impotent to support their households. So, black women are these unconsidered and downtrodden beings who keep black families alive as it is said in the *The Street* :

Most women have been marketing, for they carried bulging shopping bags. She noticed how heavily they walked on, feel that obviously hurt despite the wide cracked shoes they wore. They've been out all day working in white folks kitchen, she thought then they came home and cook and clean for own families half the night (Petry, 51)

Black women have a double burden consisting in working in white men's houses and in their own houses. They are exhausted but they have to go through a sacrifice which is to supply their family with the needs. To provide the family

with the necessary needs is the primary role of men. So, black women, suffering to supply their households become the architects who avoid to the black community to fall into pieces. In *Native Son*, Mrs Thomas is alone fighting in execrable conditions for her family's well being. With her missing man, she has to surveil and provide whatever the family needs. In this token, Mrs. Thomas is the leader and heroin of her family.

She challenges her oppressors because in spite of the misery and poverty as symbolized in the following passages : "Planks in wooden floors ; a narrow space between two iron beds" (Wright, 15), she stands firm and keeps on fighting for the survival of her family. Her life is an uncomfortable one but she does not flee her duties and neither waits for someone else to bring support. The difficulties make of her stronger. She is a heroin, she is winning a battle by being able to support the double burden.

Living with her three children in a single room house, she replaces the missing father and has to achieve a double task. She becomes the male of the house, a degrading house without the presence of a single comfort. She accepts to live where men can be reluctant to live there. In *The Street*, such living place is qualified ironically as: "Nice little place" (Petry, 10). Festered and abandoned home becomes first choice living house for Lutie Johnson. The point is that looking for an appartment is men's duty, but she does it. It means that she is the one who has in charge the family.

She replaces the missing man and takes the reigns of the family. So, black women face and challenge what the white society brandishes in front of them. Where their men seem weak and impotent black women show an

unprecedented strength and courage. So, out of misery, black women become some silent leading figures of their communities. They are the foundation of the black community's existence.

She becomes the leader who permits to the family to stay alive. Her leadership is visible through the passages : "What's the rent ?" and "Twenty-nine fifty" (Petry, 20). To pay the rent without a well paid job and being alone, means for her to go in white man's houses for cleaning and sweeping the floors where she is looked at down as said in the following passage : "So, she went by herself. And feeling the suitcase bump against her legs when she walkd down the long ramp at Grand Central to get on the train"(Petry, 30). How to pay a rent and how to feed a family become black women's duties instead of being men's duties. The bitterness of the society obliges them to dethrone their men because they are in a perpetual seek for betterness for their household.

She is on her way in search of better living conditions not because her man is missing but because he cannot get a job due to social prejudices as stated in the passage : "What else is a woman to do when her man can't get a job ? What else had there been for her to do the time Jim couldn't get a job ?"(Petry, 51). Out of exclusion and racism, her man cannot get a job, what means ironically that he is not able to bring at home foods for his wife and children and also satisfy their needs.

Therefore, Lutie Johnson becomes the leading figure of her family, she is obliged to provide what is necessary for her family's existence. Her presence from the Pizzinis' to the Chandlers', toiling days and nights and being used less than a human being is the symbol of her fight to save her

household. Such spirit of fighting for bettering her social standards is the proof of her heroism.

Her heroism does not consist in bringing food and renting house for the family but she is a mother who is concerned with the morality as in the following excerpt when talking about Pop and Lil: "She always swallowing coffee in the kitchen ; trailing through all seven room in housecoats that didn't quite meet accross her hush loose bosom ; drinking beer in tall glasses" (Petry, 13). Lutie concerns is to avoid her son Bub to copy and start liking Lil's allitude. She wants to save him from degarding attitude as testified by her reaction in the following passage

And what was far more terrifying giving Bub a drink on the sly; getting Bub to light her cigarettes for her Bub at eight with smoke curling out of his mouth. Only last night Lutie slapped him so hard that Lil cringed away from her dismayed ; her housecoat slipping even farther away from the fat curve of her breasts. Jesus ! she said. That's enough to make him deaf. What 's the matter with you (Petry, 13).

: Lutie Johnson is determined to get out of the corneer where the white world wants heer to be. Her determination is expressed through her attitude toward her son and those in contact with him. By maintaining Bub far from Lil's world she just wants for him a better life than that of beer and cigarettes. Lil, by living with cigarettes and beer seems to accept what the world has

shaped for her. So, Lutie's heroism is in her perpetual eager to escape the fate that others have determined for her. She is a fighter as illustrated in the following passage :

It took a year and half before she mastered the typing because at night she was so tired when she went to the business school on 125th Street she couldn't seem concentrate on what nshe was doing. Her back ached and her arms felt as thoigh they had been pulled out off their sockets. But she finally acquired enough speed so that she could take a civil servant exaination. For she had mind up her that she wasn't going to wash dishes or work in a laundry in order to earn a living for herself and Bub (Petry, 45).

The above passage is the proof of ther strength and determination not to cope with what others have pressed down on her and that is why in spite of the pain she feels she refuses to stop. Because to stop means failure to achieve her goal that of overcoming the different obstacles that the society erects in front of her. She never subdues as illustrated in the folowing passage : "Another year dragged by. A year in which she passed four or five exams each time way down on the list. A year that she spent waiting and waiting for an appointment and taking other exams. Four years of steam laundry and then she she got an appointment as a filling clerk" (Petry, 45). These years of trying without being disheartened by the different deceiful results show that she is resilient, a true leader who never abdicates.

In Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, children complain to their mothers when they are hungry instead of rushing to their father as in the excerpt : " Mama, I am hungry, I complained one afternoon" (Wright, 14). To address his mother about his hunger, is the proof that his father is not at home as his mother answers : "Where's your father ?"(Wright, 14). This question reveals that the mother is the only parent at home as testified in the passage : "Who brings food into the house ? My mother asked me. Papa, I said. He always brought food. Well, she said. Where is he? I don't know, she said" (Wright, 23). When she said that she does not know where the father is, it means that whatever the family needs, she has to provide it and to try to make the ends join becomes her daily task, so she can be seen as the one who solidifies her family's existence.

So, black woman out of her miserable conditions, she succeeds to turn her life into that of a heroin as stated in the passage : "My mother finally went to the work as a cook and left me and my brother alone in the flat each day with loaf of bred and a pot of tea" (Wright, 14). She keeps her family alive in spite of her sorrowful and dispaired conditions. The loaf of breaad she leaves on the table is the cement of the family. It is the one which permits to the family to avoid starvation. So black woman is the leader who succeeds to give a sense and exisistence to her society. She permits to her community to stand firm and avoid collapsing in an alienation society.

From despair she ensures her family with smile as stated in the extarct : "Mama, I'm hungry, I complained one afternoon. Jump up and catch a hungry, she said trying to make me laugh and forget. What's a hungry ? It's what little

boys eat when they get hungry, she said" (Wright, 13). She jokes to hide her difficulties, her incapacities to satisfy her son's present needs. So, out of her poverty she tries to make her family feel good.

The joke comes to relieve the bitterness in her but it is difficult to discard or come over such a serious plague with simple jokes as said : " She was ironing and she paused and looked at me with tears in her eyes" (Wright, 14). The tears in her eyes show that the jokes are not sufficient to ameliorate their living conditions. But, despite the miserable living standards, black women stay firm and continue supporting their family and never leave in mysterious conditions as stated in the passage : "We did not understand what happened between our father and mother and the most that these long talks did to us was to make us feel a vague dread whenever we asked why father had left, she would tell us that we were too young to know"(Wright,14). By being the one of both parents who cannot turn her back to her children makes of her more human than her man who chooses to disappear.

So, the black families exist because black women toil day and night to preserve this existence. So, black women in spite of their suffering from cleaning and sweeping white people's houses till their own houses, they are the pillars of black society. Even beyond the harshness in the whites' houses, they also face difficulties in tending their home problems. In their own homes sometimes the atmosphere seems not conducive and unbearable with their own children but they do not choose to flee as stated in the passage : "Aw ? for chrissakes ! Bigger said, lighting a cigarette" (Wright, 19). Bigger challenges his mother, he, who is

supposed to replace his missing father, he becomes rude and unbearable. Instead of satisfying his mother he goes astray. She fights day and night to make the ends join for his well being but she has to conform herself to his temperature. But, she does not choose to flee and leave them alone like their father does.

They quarrel with their children like in the following passage : "Well, I'm telling again. And mark my words, some of these days you going to set down and cry. Some of these days you going to wish you had made something out of yourself, instead of just a tramp. But, it will be too late" (Wright, 19). Mrs Thomas' words may seem a cursing or one may think she is prophecising about her son, but in reality she does not. She just means to see her son be a strong man for the family. He must replace his missing father.

She wishes to see him as a real man able to assume primary role in the family as she said in the passage : "If you get that job, his mother said in a low, kind tone of voice, busy slicing a loaf of bread, I can fix up a nice place for you children. You could be comfortable and not have to live like pigs" (Wright, 22). Black women's anger against their children means nothing but love and tenderness. Their melancholy and anxiety are ironically love for their children. She is the perfect opposite of her man who flees. Their lament with their children as shown in the extract means ironically their eager to operate a positive change in their living standards. So, they assume such bitterness in their efforts to tend their families issues. Black men who are

missing do not have to worry for their children but the black women do as in the passage :

You didn't get in until four. He turned and looked at her. I got in at two. It was after four Bigger, she said, turning and straining her eyes to look at an alarm clock above her head. I tried to wait up for you, but i couldn't. When I heard come in, i looked up the clock and it was after four (Wright, 89).

She is careful about what is going on with her family than a missing father who does not assume his primary role which consists in taking care of his children by providing them with food and good education. Black women assume a double role at home, and this will of infusing their children with strength is expressed in the passage : "She slapped him sharply across the face. His look of utter astonishment made her strike him again___ this time more violently and she hated herself doing it, even as she lifted her hand for another blow" (Petty, 52). By slapping her son, Lutie Johnson expresses her refusal to see him becoming what the white world wants him to become, an effective shoe cleaner. She wants him to be an outstanding person than being a shoe cleaner. Fundamentally, black women have to behave to orientate their society toward better standards, to lift it up. Even if they are exhausted in white people's houses, they have always the necessary strength to tend their own families' issues. They are the guides of the black community

toward a safe ashore like in this following passage by Mary Rambo :

It's you young folks what's going to make the changes, she said. Y'all's the ones you got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher. And I tell you something else, it's the ones from South that's got to do, them what knows the fire and ain't forgot how it burns. Up her too many forgits. They finds a place for theyselves and forgits the ones on the bottom (IM, 207).

Mary Rambo, as a poor black woman may be far from political arena but she knows what is necessary for the black community. She does not need to be a literate to give this piece of advice to her interlocutor. She is a guide and visionary for her community. So, ironically these poor black women working in white people's houses have the wisdom for their community's development.

They can be said to be at the beginning of their community's development as in the extract : "I had felt for a long time, that if I was ever told to get up so a white person could sit, that I would refuse" (Carrow, 12). Rosa Parks' act of refusing to give her seat to a white person ignites the fight for human rights in the United States of America. As a tailor: "tailor's assistant" (Carrow, 11), she behaves as a leader for her community. She sets the pathway leading to the revolution about discrimination in public facilities. In spite of their social status which can be seen as an handicap, black women proved to be leaders for their community.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eliza challenges the white society by refusing to see her child sold on a slave auction as it is mentioned in the passage : " A wicked man was going to take little Harry away from his mother, and carry him 'way in the dark ; but mother won't accept let him_she's going to put on her little boy's cap and coat and run off with him, so the ugly man can't catch him"(Stowe,31). Eliza, as a slave knows that there is no law which protects a fugitives as she is planning to do, but she does not care. She is ready to face the white man's wrath than to let him go with little Harry as a slave. She is a courageouse in her attempt of fleeing, she challenges a whole system by being strongly against the idea to see her child departed from her as a chattel. This heroic strength of the black woman is also portryed in *Miss Jane Pittman's Autobiography* by Ernest J Gaines in the following passage :

I jumped up from there and sunk my teeth on that nigger's hand. His hand was rough as 'cuda legs. He wrenched his hand out my mouth and numbed the side of my face. This time when i got up i grabbed that hoe I brought out the field. An old man we all call Unc Isom stepped in front of me. Hold he said. Hold nothing, I said.Nigger, said your prayers.Maker, here you come (Gaines, 11).

At a very young age, she challenges the big black man who wanted her to stay mute and take orders from him or more aged persons. This spirit of fighting or elboing her way through harshnes and difficulties is a proper germ, in black

woman's attitude. She needs to be so for her survival and even that of her society.

The society does not really, as ironical as it may seem, succeeds to oppress the black woman but turns her into a bold, a strong fighter. In spite of her disregard, the black woman stands firm and sometimes challenges her oppressor to preserve her honor although the history and the society serve to handicap her. Even if the historical context and the society press down heavily on her the weight of alienation and debasement, black woman is ironically the leader, the heroin of her society because where the racist society takes away from black men their manhood the black woman responds with her womanhood.

III- Gender

The black woman suffers from the drawbacks of the history and society. She is shaped and conceived by the society and the history. And one of the angles under which black woman is animalized is at the level of gender. First of all, as a black and part of a community which is invisible, but as a solely entity, she is victim of this double invisibility as in the following passage :

Denied the protection of the laws, denied even an extralegal, marriage to a man she loved, she writes that in a desperate attempt to prevent her hated master from forcing her into concubinage, she relinquished her purity in an effort to maintain her self- respect ; she abandoned her attempt to avoid a sexual involvement in an effort to assert

her autonomy as a human being, to avoid being entirely subject at the will of another (Jacobs,xlii).

The historical context which denies to black people any human fibre is not the only path of her oppression. A direct afterward of the historical context is the gender-based assault that she is victim. The above extract reveals how hard and painful it is for the black woman to face this fight based on gender-abuse. Black woman is trapped in a whirl. She becomes sexually, a prey for men as stated in the following extract : "A yankee like nothing better than a little nigger gal and chewing her up" (Gaines, 16). This joke by Jane's Mistress is ironically true. Even if in the present context Jane's Mistress wants her to rush doing what she asks her to do, the truth is that the black woman is always a sexual toy for men. The little black girl is exposed like a sexual toy for the males of both races to satisfy their lust.

This harassment is due to the lack of protection because she seems not a human being but an object which is used without complaint. In *Clotel or The President's Daughter*, the author gives a view about the rate of sexual brutality against black woman as stated in the following passage : "With the growing population of slaves in the Southern States of America, there is a fearful increase of half whites, most of whose fathers are slave-owners and their mothers slaves" (Brown, 2). The increasing number of these half white children testifies the fact that they are conceived in forced conditions because historically no slave woman could freely have a white man as a companion apart from being assaulted. Their mothers, the poor slaves are

abused by their white owners. Black women as slaves and impotent cannot defend themselves or complain about the ignoble treatments from men.

In *The Street*, the author shows that men, both blacks and whites who come accross Lutie Johnson abuse of her because she is a woman and weak as stated in the following : "You know a good-looking girl like you shouldn't have to worry about money ; he said softly. She didn't say anything and he continued. In fact, if you and me can get together a coupla nights a week in Harlem, those lessons won't cost you a cent. No sir, not a cent" (Petry, 231). Lutie's social situation is not the concern of the men in her surrrounding, their main interest is to bed her. She is assaulted and harassaed by them. She becomes "a sexual object" (Jacobs, xxxvi), She is deconsecrated.

Talking about the Golden Day in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator said : "I seldom went there myself except with some of the fellows when word got out that a new bunch of girls had arrived from New Orleans"(Ellison, 64). This new bunch of girls, is not composed of white girls but of black girls who are brought from New Orleans to serve as sexual merchandises. They are brought to serve the whites undercovered owners' of the Gold Day as money providers. They are sullied by men. So, from history to her present situation, the black woman has lost her dignity because she is in disgrace, disfavoured and unprotected as explained in the following passage :

Explaining the situation of the black women in

racist America, Ellen Willis asserts that at a time when the American society is guided by the norms of 'whiteness' and the 'maleness' the white women have to fight for their feminism, Black men for their blackness but Black women have to fight their battle on two fronts because the black woman suffers both racial and sexual invisibility (Walker, 79).

An analysis of the extract reveals that the black woman has to face an historical plague but also a gender-based ill-treatment. This immoral treatment is visible in the following extract :

The guy named Junto owned the Bar and Grill too. Evidently his decisions that she wasn't to be paid for singing had been based on his desire to sleep with her, and had concluded that if had to continue living in that house where his friend Mrs. Hedges lived or in one just like it, she would be a pushover (Petry, 302).

She is threatened by Junto because she is conceived by men to be put aside, to be underestimated. She is weak and thus exposed to the males' sexual desire. She is a piece of merchandise to be sold and to lead an extravagant life as Boots puts it in the following. : "Boots said, Junto a good guy. You'll be surprised how you'll take to him" (Petry, 302). She becomes a trophy to fight over. She is not respected or deified but looked at down. For both black and white men

she is a tool to be prized. Boots for financial reasons, he pushes her into Junto's hands like in the following passage :

Boots got up from the bed, pushing her away from the door and went, slamming it behind him. Sorry, Junto, Boots said. She's mad as hell. No use your waiting. I heard her, Junto said sourly. And if this something you planned, you'd better unplan it. You hear her didn't you ? Yes. But you still could have planned it, Junto said. He walked toward the foyer. At the door he turned to Boots. Well ? he said. Don't worry, Mack, Boots coldly she'll come around. Come back about ten o'clock (Petry, 303).

The author portrays two cynical persons, a white man and black man who coalesce to harrass a black woman. It is the symbol of the double fight against the male gender and the feeling of loneliness, of abandon and nothingness toward her. She is undervalued and she deserves nothing but ill-treatment and dehumanization. She is a source of sexual satisfaction as Boots expresses it through his sayings : "Let him get his afterward. I'll have mine first" (Petry, 306). She is humiliated. She is an invisible person for them. They disrespect her. She is the battle ground between them as mentioned in the passage below :

He closed the door quietly behind Junto. He hadn't intended to in the beginning, but he was going to trick him and Junto would never know the difference, sure Lutie would sleep with

Junto, but he was going to have her first. He thought of the thin curtains blowing in the wind. Yeah, he can have the leavings. After all he's white and this time a white man can have a black man's leavings (Petry, 303).

There is a lack of esteem for her just because she is a woman. And for Boots and Junto, black woman is nothing but an object to be displayed and manipulated at will. Black woman lives in a society which gives her little space to express herself. She is between the hammer and the anvil. She is an invisible. She goes through harshness for a long time as it is said in the passage : "In Pennsylvania station, she bought a ticket for Chicago. One way ? The ticket man asked. One way she echoed. Yes, a one way ticket, she thought. I've had one since the day, I was born" (Petry, 311). She has never had the chance to feel a human. Through these words from Lurie Johnson, the author reveals that the black woman is a long time sexual victim and any other bad treatment. Her existence is a set of moan and sorrow from history and from men as well.

She is victim of both the history and the men she comes across, meaning that black woman in the American society is meaningless, and underestimated. She is seen just as a sexual gift for men both blacks and whites as stated in the following extract : " Nigger, what's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller" (Hurston, 21). Nanny's Mistress discloses the fact that Nanny, as a black woman has a fair complexion child, meaning that she has a sexual intercourse with a white man, a forced one. She might have been harassed. So, ironically the revelation is that the black women, since long

are sexual preys for men. She is martyred by the men but also by the white woman as in the following excerpt :

She begin to tuh slap mah jaws ever which a'way. Ah never felt the fust ones 'cause Ah wuz too busy gettin' de kivver back over mah chile. But dem last lick burnt me lak fire. Ah had too many felin's tuh tell which one tuh follow so Ah didn't cry and Ah didn't do nothin' else. But then she kept on astin' me how come mah baby look white (Hurston, 21).

This passage not only reveals the cruelty she experienced in the white master's house but beyond the colour of her child, is the symbol of sexual immoral and wicked practices she has been victim of. She has been muted by the oppressor and used and humiliated sexually as stated in the passage : So, Ah told her, Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger ah and ah slave" (Hurston, 21). A slave does not have a say. She is a savage and used without any right to complain about her oppressor. Her child is not one she has by will but by haraasment, by being raped perhaps by her master. So, black woman has a status of invisible creature which confers to her only disregard and humiliation.

But to be a heroin, black woman has to face all the destructive practices directed toward her as in the following excerpt : "You no good bastard ! She shouted. You can tell Junto I said if he wants a whore to get one from Mrs. Hedges. And the same thing goes for you. Because i'd just as soon get in bet with a rattlesnake _I'd just

soon..”(Petry, 307). In the passage the author celebrates black woman's heroism. In spite of her femininity or weakness, she challenges Boots and Junto who are the symbols of black and white communities. Her fight like in the following extract expresses her heroism and resilience:

He was so close to her that she struck him on the side of the head before he saw the blow coming. The first blow stunned him. And she struck him again and again, using the candlestick as though it was a club. He tried to back away from her and stumbled over the sofa and sprawled” (Petry, 308).

Through the above passage, the author celebrates her victory over Boots, which means that she does not succumb under the weight of the evil pressed upon her by both the white and black societies. So, the black woman has not failed to cope with any rude situation she comes across. She has been kept long from happiness but in this bitterness she does not let the drawbacks of history and the society itself crush her down. So, this capacity of overcoming her alienation makes of her a heroin.

Conclusion

The social and historical context framework the black women's status. They confer to her alienation through exclusion and exploitation. In spite of these social disadvantages they suffer from, from white people's houses to their own people's, they never flee their homes.

They become the pillars of their families and communities by providing them a better life. They become therefore the cement of a fragile community due to the social conditions. The fact of being at the intersection of history and humans does not prevent them neither to toil for bettering their households and their community. They solidify the black community and give to it a sense of existence. By bringing food, paying the rent, clothing and schooling their children by themselves, black women play primary roles in their families as well as in their community. They are thus the leaders of their community.

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