The Image of The Victimized Woman in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eyes*

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**ABSTRACT**

This Paper focuses on a significant issue that touches the life of a minority in the American society, namely the black women. The researcher in this paper offers for the victimized black women by the cruel white society and the family as well. The main character in this novel carving for the white idealization in the way of getting blue eyes for herself in order to be liked by the society. Such aim on the account of the protagonist enhances the self-hatred and depreciation in her, and she loses the confidence in herself and contributes to the demise of her identity. The researcher has selected the novel *The Bluest Eyes* to serve his purpose.

**KEYWORDS**

Racism, Toni Morrison, Self-Hatred, Victimization
Introduction:

Toni Morrison, the Afro-American novelist raises this subject-matter in her fictional works on behalf of the victimized black American women. In America racism has become a fact. Through the post-modern perspective, the attitude against colour discrimination receives much focus and attention. Morrison has grown as the representative of the black people. Her literary products are stories of the victimized black women who are oppressed by the white dominance and patriarchy of the society. At a very early stage in her life Toni Morrison has understood that racism is the greatest means of victimization of the black woman in America. She attempts to justify that attaining black identity is the only way to get rid of the racial segregation. Morrison has begun writing the novel *The Bluest Eyes* after a conversation with her friend of her from childhood. She has mentioned, “The origin of the novel lay in a conversation I had with a childhood friend. We had just started elementary school. She said she wanted blue eyes” (Morrison, 2007, p. X).

Morrison employs Pecola to depict her friend. In the same way her school friend craved for blue eyes, Morrison enabled Pecola to look eagerly longing for blue eyes. Morrison despises the idealism of the white as the measurement of beauty. Notably, the setting of the novel is Lorain, Ohio Morrison’s birthplace. Thus, it concentrates on the tragedy of the psychological desolation of Pecola Breedlove, a young Afro-American woman who casts about gaining the status of the ideal American beautiful feminine as is considered in the common American tradition of the time. The novelist investigates the lingering influences of racism through depicting and remarking on the black self-hatred. During the early years of mid-twentieth century, women and men from the black community has moved north to just run away the intense racist circumstances of being living in the South. They expected convenient environment in the North Yet, the urban centers in the North are barely what the black women anticipated it to be.

Black women, of course, had made that migration to the city looking for a new life and found that the substance remained the same, though the apparel looked different. Instead of being house-keepers, cooks, and cotton pickers, they became domestics, garment factory workers, prostitutes — the hard bottom of the labor market (Wilson, 1981 p. 8).

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is greatly influenced by The Black Power Movement of the 1960s in America. Morrison reveals in *The Bluest Eyes* that being black is not the only problem of the black women. There were further imparted burdens like poverty; inability and lack of self-respect. These are the main hampering factors for the progress in the black society and particularly for the black woman. In fact, in this novel, the novelist focuses on the clash between the identity of the black and white social attitude in the American society.

Self-Deprecation:

The novel of *The Bluest Eyes* (1970) is a manifestation of human weakness and despair with the cruelties of life. Morrison wanted to pinpoint that weakness in the character of Pecola, her mother and other female characters. As a result of
that feeling the main character in the novel starts to hate herself and her biological assets. Pecola’s parents, as many of other black families, also moved North to look for a better life and opportunities of employment. The novel examines the essential theme of the black feminist literature during the 1960’s and 1970’s that is built on the black woman’s body as a foundation of the black feminist discourse. The novel starts in a setting that sound as a direction assigned to children and it is also a model of the idyllic — Dick and Jane Primer. It is composed in the schoolbooks approach. It also presents the Breedlove family to the readers as,

Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green and white house they are very happy see Jane she has a red dress she wants to play who will play with Jane see the cat it goes meow meow come and play come play with Jane the kitten will not play (Morrison, 2007, p. 2).

Morrison emphasizes the common idea that the house of white is always stable and prosperous. However, Pecola’s family is overwhelmed by the tragic event of losing their house as their father, burns it down to the ground when he was drunk. Conner condemns the house of Pecola, “... The house is simultaneously a respite and a jail; like the community, for which it stands as synecdoche, the house seems to promise rest and comfort, but it provides neither, especially for Pecola” (Corrner, 2000 p. 13). Morrison enables the reader to comprehend the catastrophe aftermath of slavery in her fiction. The manifestations of evilness started with slavery. The black women were victimized first by the act of slavery and then racism that was widely spread. Denial of rights and segregation were results of racism. White idealism has become a fact and replaced racism. The psychological changes and hardship that occur to disturb the life of individual due to these outer circumstances sound agonizing and unbearable. In The Bluest Eyes, Pecola, since birth itself, is oppressed and has been exposed to the worst practices of the age. Her father Cholly, is a vicious and pitiless man. Pauline is apathetic to the odds that her children are exposed to. The house is always in disturbance and peace lacking, and there is a constant conflict and lack of harmony between husband and wife.

Moreover, Pecola suffers in neighborhood and school in a way that prohibits her from running a normal and open life. Almost everyone in her contact frequently calls her “ugly” The girl is daunted by school children as well as her mother at home. Such a constant criticism, the pitiless bullying she has faced in school and her rude family life pushes her to look for shelter and way-out of her misery through imagination namely to have ideal beauty. Pecola starts to think that if she can just attain the physical charm her life will inevitably become better. Pecola pleads and pray to have blue eyes every day. She wanted to attract the attention of someone who will love her, besides; the way others feels about her will change. Life is going to be changed and totally different, and become in her favor. In the words of Mcbride “Picola is a little black girl who through racial experience has come to think of herself as ugly, unworthy, and displaced in a society where the image of
beauty is the little yellow haired, blue eyed, white girl” (McBride, 1993 Pp.767-768). She also thinks that her parents will behave in a respectable and lovely manner. She also believes the conflict and quarrels between her parents will come to an end. Pecola has performed this sincerely and thoughtfully and she has prayed earnestly for an entire year. She prays actively with a fixed hope. She faces the mirror for long hours and stares trying to figure out what the secret of ugliness that transformed her into an easy prey for the cruel society. She sets an endeavor to find out what pushes her colleagues and teachers to ridicule her. Unluckily, she lives a materialistic world whereas love and appreciation are compromised by money, and enforced by violence:

Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always … (Morrison, 2007, pp. 45-46).

This delusional assumption apparently stands to be ultimately demising to Pecola, destroying her entire life and, gradually, her sensibility. Morrison analyses how black women response to the so-called white measurements of beauty in the American society, Ron David, notices,

Every black person in America is forced to struggle against a standard of beauty ... and by implication (beauty is never just beauty), everything else, from goodness to worthiness of love – that is almost exactly the opposite of what they are … and the consequences can be deadly. The novel suggests that the oppressive standard of beauty peddled by movies and advertisements ravages white self-esteem as well... but it isn't just a matter of degree. Low self-esteem is an entirely different creature than self-hate (David, 2000 p. 43).

There is a great deal of works in the American literature that treat directly the heritage of slavery and the time of a deep and entrenched racism that come after slavery. However, the common design of The Bluest Eye is not connected directly with events, yet it depicts the eerie experiences by surveying and commenting on self-hatred of the black. The major characters in the novel, Afro-Americans, are dominated with the constant culturally accomplished belief of white beauty. Then they get a disastrous tendency to act out their sense of self-loathing on other individuals of the black society subconsciously. Morrison allows the reader to have pity on such characters that are supposed to attain ways to pass these curbs to realize self-images and achieve successful relationships. Morrison introduces the multiple ways of the runaway and retreat into empty perceptions of whiteness by the poor black women characters in this novel. The center of attention in The Bluest Eye is more intricate and it acutely represents
the impact of racism practicing an emphasis on the manner self-hatred inflicts the black individuals. Morrison mentions in *The Bluest Eye* concerning the Breedloves, you looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that is came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious and all-knowing master had given each one of them a cloak of ugliness to wear and they had each accepted it without question (Morrison, 2007, p. 39).

Morrison pays attention to the sense of low self-value after long time of being taken down is still maintaining and is leading to an ugliness that is always felt and it is indirectly observed. The black women is victimized and captivated with this sense of submission which they unquestionably tolerate as ugliness and lack of self-deprecation. The contempt and hatred that happen outside the environment of the family is one of the greatest troubles that the family encounters. Patrice Cormier Hamilton in “Black Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey away from self-love in ‘The Bluest Eye’” talks about the same issue” (Cormier, 1994 p. 111).

It is irritating that the family that is affected most from this feeling of antagonism resulting from self-hatred of black. The whole society experiences the same issue too. In novel, the Breedlove family is the centre of such problem as well as many other cases in the society at large. Toni Morison displays characters that hate themselves due to the domination of the whiteness as a vision that is imposed and victimizing them, hence, this sustains racism and the societal hierarchy. The novelist examines this self-hatred and assesses its substance, its roots and its annihilating impact on the lives of individuals who are physically free, are still destined by the society that assures that they still hate themselves. For example, Pecola goes to the grocery shop to purchase sweets. She is astonished why people see her dandelions ugly. She plans to have Mary Janes, however, she meets burden of communicating with the shop-owner Mr. Yacobowski, who sounds to gaze at her. He can’t comprehend what she is signing to and talks rudely to her. He avoids touching her hand when she hands him the money. In her way home, Pecola is outraged; moreover, she is ashamed of herself. She determines dandelions are unpleasant, and that the blonde, Mary Jane the girl with blue eyes, printed on the candy cover, is beautiful. This is an instance of the evil of white idealism imposed on Pecola by the society. If there was justice in the world, she will not have had any room for thinking about Mary Jane or dandelions the. She is young and weak, moreover, not grown up to the point that she be angry on the storeowner, hence she recoils her emotions in being ashamed of herself. The little girl, with immature mind has been victimized by the society and its dysfunctional structure, and enforces her to think that she is less value for her own “self.”. The Self-deprecation is not due to poverty or difficulties, yet it is the result of the cyclical and historical oriented inclination of white tradition to advance its superiority.

**Victimization of The Black Women:**

Many of the black individuals in *The Bluest Eyes* particularly those who fear the worse at the end, like the two female members of the Breedlove family, deeply
personalized the potential notions of white superiority. In such typical American community, the white is deemed as the utterly thing deserves giving trust, respecting and idolizing, and this is victimizing to the black characters in the novel, particularly those who are needy and totally incapable of living up to the cultural perception of the white idealism. Another victimized character is Pauline due to these ideas of superiority of the white exactly the same as her daughter, in spite of the less tragic ends. As several other black women characters that try to renounce themselves a self-asserting apart from white community and racial matters, Pauline insatiably absorbs these messages in tradition by films. Morrison mentions about Pauline in the novel, “She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look a face and assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen” (Morrison, 2007, p. 122).

Throughout the novel Pauline is frequently indulged with the perception of the superiority of the white and she eventually neglects herself and daughter. Pecola displays the most developed issue of the devastating idealism of white culture and consequent denouncement and elimination of the identity of the black and is the tragic symbol in Morrison’s effort to elaborate this heritage of racism. One time Claudia and Frieda made a visit to Pecola at the house of the Fishers. Pecola unconsciously drops a container of hot blueberry cobbler over herself and the clothes of the little girl from the Fisher family, as well as the cleaned white floor. Pecola’s mother furiously violates Pecola for the confusion. She scorned her daughter and comforts the little white girl. There is no indication of forgiving Pecola. Throughout such incidents, Morrison elucidates the origins from where the matters of the inferiority of the black mind of Afro-Americans sprouts from and how, due to despair and frustration in being incapable of living up to such measurements, hatred is initiated and passed on to partners and offsprings. In the end of the novel, she replaces her mind for the blue eyes which she thought of as savior and the means through which she will be liked by others.

The inherited sense of ugliness and worthlessness is a major feature in Pecola’s character. Pecola is shunned by her community and especially her mother. She fancies the neatness and the cleanliness of the life of the white family. Pecola is shows a wish with double-importance for the main idea which Morrison introduces for the reader. In one hand, if she owns that blue eye, that are inherent in the white race such thing would make her racially approved. And in the other one, by figuratively speaking to have different eyes is to see life differently. Pecola is patiently waiting for the day in which she could blind herself and not to see the hatred in her family and society. Morrison provides the reader with a complicated comprehension of such “self-hatred”, which eternalizes plenty of the problems that the characters go through, by firstly introducing a resolution by non-color, just to express that it leads to insanity and blindness as in itself, it is worthlessness. She is trying hard in a culturally asserted notion of the white superiority, as it is embodied in the images of white-skinned, blond, and blue-eyed, people as lacking substance. In the words of Lisa William, it is the “internalized self-hatred” that shuns and demolish the young girl Pecola Breedlove. Pecola abhors herself as black and strongly desires for blue eyes and white skin. She thinks that white characteristics
as blue eyes and white skin will enable her access a world that once had expelled her. Moreover, this self-hating destitute is repressed by sexual violation and self-hatred due to blackness. Pecola at last withdraws to a sphere of delirium whereas she cannot announce her silenced rage. Throughout *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison analyzes the ultimate circumstances that evolve into be the reason of Pecola’s demise. Being black is a cause for her isolation and banishment. Morrison seals her fame and asserted her own identity as a novelist and woman by giving voice to the “erased presence” of a poor black girl. She is “the ultimate other, the most outsider member” (Williams, 2000 p. 54).

In a resembling case to Pecola, the major character in *The Myth Maker* a novel by Frank London, Ernest Day experiences a haunting self-hatred, however, in his case it is a little bit different. The protagonist is capable of analyzing this burden of self-hatred. Day has the feeling that being black is the utter reason for his predicament in a prejudiced society. *The Myth Maker* examines self-hatred as a main cause of psychological decadence and criminality. His poverty and hunger, transforms to anger due to self-hatred. He watches a black-skinned child begging for a dime. He moves away from that famished kid as he perceives with his eyes a sad reflection of himself through of the starving black boy. Frank says,

Ernest walked away from the child, glancing at himself in the mirror of the storefront windows. The light of the sun upon his dark skin made him seem shiny, and he hated himself when he was shiny. He turned away from himself...

Once he asked himself, what was it all for...this walking and reading and looking at people and hating his darkness (*The Myth Maker*, p. 179).

The novel depicts racism as a monster thrown away on people of the society. Racism turns Ernest into a skeptic. Moreover, according to Morrison, any young girl is vulnerable to such kinds of destruction. She also points out that the demonization of a race starts from such kinds of problems. In the Afterword of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison Says,

I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take roots inside the most delicate member of the society: a child, the most vulnerable member: a female. In trying to dramatize the devastation that even casual racial contempt can cause, I chose a unique situation, not a representative one. The extremity of Pecola’s case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family unlike the average black family and unlike the narrator’s. But singular as Pecola’s life was, I believed aspects of her wound ability were lodged in all young girls (p. XI).

Pecola is considered the victim of all of these instances where an unconfident child tries to defend themselves by either being aggressive or submissive. In Pecola’s
case, she makes an effort to define herself according to her mother’s definition of beauty. She is forced to unrealistic standards of beauty, which is why she is in such great need of blue eyes. When Pecola is sexually assaulted by her father and loses her innocence as a result, the situation of the traumatised child is tragically worsened (Musir, 2018).

**Conclusion:**

The idea of being marginalized and isolated into the darkest corner of the world is the consequent result of our self-hatred and deprecation; it starts within us, the family and at larger extent the society. Toni Morrison is a loud voice of the segregated and discriminated against black women in America, she has the audacity to point out the weakness basically in her community as well as a revolutionary writer against the so called “White Idealism”.

In *The Bluest Eyes*, she wanted her readers to display the weakness and the shallow thinking of black women in the midst of the dark human conditions, unfortunately, these individuals are victimized by their domestic as well as the outer environment. Hence an urge for the idealism comes out and it is directed towards the descriptions of the white America. The writer pointed out that weakness and wanted the readers to compare the status of Pecola with other women in the novel.
Bibliography:


