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# Analysing And Understanding The Concept Of Racism Through The Lens Of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye And Beloved

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### Abstract

Toni Morrison's popular novels and significant works of African-American Literature *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* are examined in this paper. The authors' life experiences in the black community regarding suffer of the black women is their source knowledge. One could say that as women of color, Morrison has the opportunity to express what it is to be a woman of color in society. It is clear that their slave ancestors and years of women's rights struggle give them the chance to create life-like characters in their novels. Racism and black female actors who have grown up from their poorer, oppressed and more humiliated status to a new sense of awareness of freedom, liberty and equality in their society were discussed in this paper. They are full of with new desires, ambitions and hope so they are valued with respect and dignity in society.

**Keywords:** Beloved, Racism, Bluest eye, Black women, African-American Literary Works.

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## 1. Introduction

All over the world the position of people is decided by genders. This fact charge genders, particularly women. It becomes very complicated to live in any community if they are not only females but also colored. They are separated from the society. Both white men and women violence and racist behaviors have to endure by them. In addition, women of color not only fight against racist people, however have to suffer at the hands of black men.

Well-known contemporary author Toni Morrison aim to describe the experiences of black women in their novels with these facts in mind. Morrison "...deepen our understanding of the limitations and possibilities of lives of black Americans..." (Bell, 1987: 269) She is American writer. Through creating fictional characters, their knowledge was expressed by Morrison regarding black life. "Morrison's strengthening of definitions and focusing of perception is reflected in the novels' narrative structures" (Birch, 1994: 151).

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Emerged as one of the important part of American Literature, is African American literature after 1970s. Especially experiences of Blacks dealt by most of the African-American writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Struggle of Blacks and suffer in the United States has focused by black writers of contemporary American fiction Toni Morrison. Compared to be a woman, be a black woman is very different which is emphasized by Toni Morrison as she is black writer. How Black women could survive in hard conditions has presented in the novels of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. The African-American women's life demonstrated by the writer vividly and the characters in their novels have suffered beyond what one can think human being can endure. Sufferings and the problems faced by the black women can be seen through reading these important works.

## 2. The Bluest Eye

How society inflicts on its members an inappropriate standard of beauty and worth showed by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*. A standard mandates that to be loved one must meet the absolute "white" standard of blond hair and blue eyes. In history, the idea of romantic love (canceling both lust and caring) and the idea of an absolute, univocal standard of beauty are two of the most destructive ideas said by Morrison's narrator.

Pecola is the most extreme victim of these destructive ideas in the novel. Once Pecola has been thoroughly convinced of her own ugliness (confirmed when she is raped by her own father, Cholly), she finds refuge in madness. Another victim is Pecola's mother Mrs. Breedlove. She gets her idea of an unvarying standard of beauty from romantic a motion picture that glorifies white film stars. As well she gives up any hope of maintaining a relationship with Cholly, her husband, except one of complete antagonism and opposition, when she realizes the impassible gap between that ideal and her physical self (she has a deformed foot and two missing teeth). Than her own daughter Pecola, the little white girl was preferred by Mrs. Breedlove who she takes care of at work.

The sugary, unattainable world of the family reinforced the ideal of unattainable physical beauty portrayed in the school readers of *Mother and Father* and *Dick and Jane* and their middle-class, suburban existence. The difference between that standard of living and the fact that children live makes them ashamed of their reality, of the physical closeness of families where children see their fathers naked.

Pecola's schoolmates Freida and Claudia MacTeer do survive with some integrity and richness even though Pecola is thoroughly victimized. Shirley Temple seems to accept as the ideal of cuteness by Freida. However her sister Claudia, a center of consciousness in the novel, reacts with anger and defiance, dismembering the hard, cold, smirking baby dolls she receives at Christmas. An experience of family closeness in the kitchen, an experience of security, fruit, flowers, and music are the desires of Claudia at Christmas.

Claudia's anger at the white baby dolls springs from a conviction of her own reality and her own worth. Shirley Temple and "Meringue Pie," the high yellow princess, Maureen Peal were rejected by Claudia in defense of her own individuality. It was her true self-defense that makes Claudia sympathize with Pecola and try to defend her, even to the point of sacrificing Freida's money and her own.

Mainly, Claudia is mystified and regretful that nobody says "poor baby" to the raped Pecola, that no one wants to greet the unborn baby into the world. It would be only natural, "human nature," it seems, for people to sympathize with a victim and celebrate at the creation of a human life. As an alternative, social disapproval have dam up the springs of human sympathy.

Suffering from the self-hatred they have absorbed from the society around them, inflexible social standards were maintains by the black community as well as realizes respectability in looking down on Pecola. Nature requested to help Pecola and her unborn baby by the two MacTeer sisters.

However, just as prayer did, they failed by nature. That year, no marigolds sprout and grow. The world does not let go. The baby is stillborn. Finally, even the two girls stay away from Pecola, her only

imaginary friend, part of her who can see the blue eyes promised to her. For the society around Pecola, she functions as a scapegoat. As well as, later sympathy of Claudia develops into an understanding of how the community used Pecola to secure themselves from scorn and insult. The last thing that blooms in Claudia is more understanding and respect for her truth.

### 3. Beloved

*Beloved* is based on a true account of a runaway slave mother. Slave mother instead allowing her children to be taken back into slavery, killed three out of four. While the youngest child Denver, survived the murder attempt since the novel begins, Sethe's sons, Buglar and Howard, have already run away. As well as, Denver still lives with her mother in a house beset by her murdered sister Beloved's spirit.

As Morrison delves into the "interior life" of slavery, she intentionally disorients the reader creating an experience similar to that of slavery, because the narrative breaks apart, shifts, and confounds. 124 Bluestone Road personified by the author as a tormented being when Beloved returns, emerging from a lake, fully clothed, the same age she would have been had she survived the infanticide. What the spirit wants initially is unclear.

Metaphorical imagery with tremendous skill was used by Morrison. For example when describing Sethe's back, a relief map of scars from savage beatings, such as resembling the branches of a chokecherry tree. A former slave Paul D whom Sethe once knew, moves in, Beloved wreaks havoc. The spirit acts as an angry child, but the damage she does is that of a full-grown woman. The characters' thoughts intertwine until one cannot be sure which character is which because the ghost continues to threaten her mother and sister.

### 4. Racism

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* novel begins with the comments "...on the movement's assertions of racial beauty" (Matus, 1998: 2). 1960s and 1970s, the political movement's assertions demonstrating about the colored ones are good-looking. Similarly, through the help of her story Morrison aims to imply this thought. In the novel, "The self-hatred is often focused on the body as the most obvious indicator of race; hair and color, for example, are recurrent concerns" (Peach, 1995: 28).

In *The Bluest Eye*, color of people's skin is the real cause of the discrimination. "The poignancy of Pecola's victimization arises not only from the racism and resulting interracial conflicts...but also from the intra-racial conflicts related to color ..." (Bloom, 1990: 12) The concept of black in the novel "...is a construct partly of the characters own making but mostly social, based on white definitions of blackness which associate it with violence, poverty, dirt and lack of education..." (Peach, 1995: 26-27)

At the hands of white race, the black females are only seen as housemaid or a slave was stated by Morrison. Even, the white little children order something and they act as if they have no wish. The white people "...use to despise African Americans" (Kubitschek, 1998: 34). Women of colored are often seen as someone who has endure violence and hardness at home. The black women should "...combat the waywardness of their husbands and children and the racism of whites" (McKay, 1988: 70).

The dream of having blue eyes was taken through Pecola's concept of beauty and a better life. Morrison writes, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights-if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different...If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they would say, why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes". (p. 323)

According to conventional beauty, Pauline is obsessed with categorizing faces which she learns from the movies was said by the reader. Kuenz (1993) states about Pauline's fascination with the movies are the absence of alternative portrayals of beauty as well as a social network "whose own lives would

provide a differing model and the context in which to erect her own,” (p.426) that compels Pecola to the movies.

This is Pecola’s tragedy: It is a tragedy based on hating the skin and the dream of being beautiful. Her dream of having “the blue eyes” - to be loved in her family and to be respected in society - strongly points out the influence of racism. Whiteness is the standard of beauty and family life, at the same time black skin is related with ugliness. Also, a state of inferiority is ugliness as well as the tragedy of Pecola intensified by skin hatred. Pecola sees everything related to her life and her family as ugly: “The Breedloves did not live in a storefront.... They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly” (Morrison, 1982, p.317).

Black, poor and ugly are the problem of Pecola since it is evidently clear. In the minds of both, the white and the black races ugliness breed up by Racism. The white storekeeper ignored Pecola completely in one situation. Even the white storekeeper does not bother to look at her:

“How can a fifty-two- year old white immigrant...see a little black girl?” (Morrison. p.234). In portraying how racism works in the ruling society and how black people are viewed by certain whites, this situation is ultimately important. G. Joseph states that “Racial prejudices have become so ingrained in white U.S. society that a typical racist anti-Black mentality has developed, with emotion and ignorance ruling over the intellect” (qtd. in Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997, p.108). The “racist anti-black mentality” (p.108) is represented by the storekeeper in Joseph’s words.

It is racism that compels Pecola to try to beautify her race, which she sees as unattractive and inferior. In her novel *Passing* (1929), this character is reminiscent of N. Larsen’s Clare Kendry. She has a black side in her family even if Kendry is light-skinned, a fact she hides from her husband. In the argument of Althusser (1986) about ideology, the representation of the black race as inferior to the white race might find an answer. Generally, the power obscure ideology to repressively control the masses which are believes of Althusser. In his view, the powerful “base their domination and exploitation of the ‘people’ on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to control other minds by dominating their imagination” (1986, p.240). The essence of racism can be identified with the help of Althusser’s words. It is based on “a falsified representation of the world”: The black race is inferior to the white race.

At first, blacks are slave also at the hands of white people in the novel *Beloved*. They have not only “...been abused by white men...” (Matus, 1998: 119), in addition they start to lose their humanity. Permissions are not given for the black people to learn writing and reading. It is clear that “...if blacks could write they should not be treated as animals” (Rice, 1996: 103).

The inhuman acts of white race in her community are bravely mentioned by the female characters in the novel, especially Baby Suggs. “Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed, “she said, “and broke my heartstrings, too. There is no bad luck in the world but white folks” (Morrison, 2004: 104-105). To visualize the hardness of the black life in a racist surrounding, one may get help through utterances of Baby Suggs.

The thoughts and attitudes of racist are displayed vividly in most parts of the novel. Knowing the fact that Seth had killed his daughter, Paul D insists on looking at the pages of the newspaper. “Stamp Paid reluctantly shows Paul D the clipping from the newspaper concerning Sethe’s crime. Even so, the very fact that he has kept the clipping is significant” (Rice, 1996: 110). Since black race is ignored even in newspapers, there should be an unusual event while both of these characters knowing if a black’s face is seen on papers. Sethe’s act is seen as a “...private story” (111) to white people. There is a mystery meaning under this news in addition. “The newspaper is the product of white society.” (111) There is also an implication that the reason of Sethe’s behavior is white race.

Through showing racial domination, the social evils and economic, injustice and redefining the foundation of literature in U.S.A., the plight of African women revealed by Toni Morrison in America.

Exploitation of black women dealt in Morrison's novels. As well as the black women deprived from the basic principles of freedom, equality and justice which have written in the U.S.A. constitution. To search for identity and how to find themselves as individual in American society, the black slave women forced by the white American culture. The search of the identity of the black community in general and the identity of the black women in particular focused in the African American novels.

The voice of black people was considered by Morrison. As well as they called her "black woman novelist". African American self-perception expressed through her writing. The discrimination based on gender, alienation, slavery, class, equality, freedom, religion, dispersion, search for identity, aspiration and frustration, contemporary African American problems, discussing the issues of racism focused by her. The relationship between gender, race and class represented in her novels; believes racism is the basis of black oppression in the United States because of gender-based racism.

To claim their identity and how they could find themselves as individuals in American society, black slave women forced by white American culture. Who the black community is and who they are, especially black women are focused in African American novels

The African American woman as victims of deviant racial society was represented in Toni Morrison's novel. Morrison focused on self-identity. The trauma silence of her character focused in *Beloved*. Problems such as reconstruction, search for perfection deal by her. The capitalism is the main enemy to African society but not the discrimination and racism was revealed in her novel. Still individually the racial problem cannot be solved, but the struggle of the collective classes against capitalism gender solidarity. The *Beloved* story is the story of all African American people and not the story of an African American which is confirmed by Morrison.

During the period of reconstruction and after the end of civil war in America, devastating effects of African slaves dealt in the story. It is the period of the women's failure to fall prey of gender and sexual repression. The turbulent past that haunts the lives of African American with the word "remembrance" represents in *Beloved*. Sethe's relationship with her mother start from this period which includes: recovery, understanding, loss of betrayal and servitude where they were bad for men but, worse for women. The brutal exploitation of work inside and outside houses such as farms were revealed in the novel. Slavery owner's treatments toward African Americans were treated like animals reflected in the tree painted on the back of Sethe "chokecherry".

Slavery denounces and demands freedom for slaves, the successful development of the identity of the blacks shows in the Morrison novel. The slavery to the slave people that distorted the intimate human relations and subvert the self was depicted in the novel; also reconstructed memory dealt with it. The slavery encouraged the slave women to be stripped of humanity were represented in the novel. As Sethe in the novel "*Beloved*", Margret Garner forced to kill his daughter.

After the period of reconstruction, the savagery of slavery and the laws of jungle, the horror were recreated in the novel. Slaves died in the middle of silence that preceded the storm without telling their stories. It is a memorial novel for the slaves. Their death was in appropriate and their memories were frightening which died with them and turning in to ghosts. The novel seems to heal those destructive spirits. As well as in the brutal system, there is an area of repressed trauma memories, even the past existed with repression.

## 5. Conclusion

During 1950s and 1960s the social movements emerged in the United States, written with the impacts of experience of slave life, and the violent racial forces, the suffers of colored women displayed in the novels of contemporary writer Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. In these novels, the black characters try to endure gender discrimination, violence, racial attitudes and sexual abuse. The truth of black women's life was explained by the writer.

In *The Bluest Eye*, suffers of black females in a white society focused by Toni Morrison. This novel "...shows racism's damaging effects on the black community at large and on black families" (Morrison). The supremacy of white society realized by a black girl Pecola Breedlove and longs to have the features of white females in *The Bluest Eye*. With prayer, she starts her desires to have *The bluest eye* in the world. To demonstrate the willingness to have even more superior features than white race, the superlative form of this word is used.

Other significant novel of Morrison's *Beloved* is very successful in displaying "...the most painful part of the African American heritage, slavery..." (115). The cruel times of slavery remembered by the protagonist of the novel Sethe. She and her daughter, Denver does not leave by the ghost of her baby girl. After so many years, the spirit of her dead daughter changes into a grown girl and starts to disturb her life. She goes the place where she is killed by her own mother. Always her mother the brutality of slavery and the scene of murder remind by Sethe.

Suffers of black women are portrayed by the writer in these two novels of. Still sometimes suffers differ, like motherhood, violence, rape. Racism (or) their color is the most important reason that causes their pains. As of their God-given colors, the white society discriminated them. They are seen as the objects that do not have any feelings. A few black female have the chance to search their identity and survive in the hard atmosphere of racial society in the novels of Morrison. However, some black women characters do not dare to object the discrimination and prepare their lives' end.

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