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**The Double Faced Ideology:  
Antifeminism and Racism  
in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eyes  
A B S T R A C T**

This paper examines the nature of racial inequality in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. It attempts to study it in terms of its historical variations and contemporary realities that represented by the role of racism and gender. The paper investigates how Pecola believes that racism and femininity are connected with the color of skin and whiteness. Taken as a black writer, the paper critically studies how black women are represented in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The unseen struggles and difficulties which confront the black women community are deciphered. The study is going to be based on the theories of race and racism that will clarify the concept of blackness. It brings to light the human rights and values that promote coexistence among all people from all background and ethnicity.

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الايديولوجية المزدوجة: العدائية النسوية والعنصرية في رواية توني موريسون " العين الزرقاء "

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**الخلاصة**

يدرس هذا البحث طبيعة عدم المساواة العرقية في رواية توني موريسون العين الزرقاء .  
اذ تحاول دراستها من حيث الاختلافات التاريخية والوقائع المعاصرة المتمثلة في دور العنصرية  
والجنس. هذا البحث يبين كيفية اعتقاد بيكولا أن العنصرية والأنثوية مرتبطان بلون البشرة والبياض.  
نظرًا لكونها كاتبة سوداء ، يدرس البحث بشكل نقدي كيفية تمثيل النساء السود في رواية توني  
موريسون العين الزرقاء. اذ يتم حل النضالات والصعوبات غير المرئية التي تواجه مجتمع النساء  
السود. سوف تستند الدراسة إلى نظريات العرق والعنصرية التي ستوضح مفهوم السواد. إنه يسلط  
الضوء على حقوق الإنسان والقيم التي تعزز التعايش بين جميع الناس من جميع الخلفيات

**1:-Introduction:**

Afro-American literature is born from cultural clash and identification. It is characterized by a tension of acculturation and separation since Afro-American writers. Those writes have confronted both cultural background and the new identity that gained from the new society. Since 1970s remarkable works of Afro-American writers have been produced. Such works have been reshaping the American literary canon. Toni Morrison is, undoubtedly, one of them whose visionary force and poetic import gives life to an essential aspect of American reality.

Toni Morrison goes beyond the simplistic dichotomies of the black male literary tradition in which the world is typically divided into black/white, good/evil, virgin/whore, self/other, male/female paradigms, and thus explores the history, tradition and fate of black people in the mainstream of society. She explores the plights of women in a male dominated and biased society. Her writing focuses on the marginalized black women, which are, in a large sense, ignored by the majority of Afro-American writers. *The Bluest Eye* documents the lives of African American women who are struggling hard to put their lives back together again. It raises a sense of self that they lost. Morrison's purposeful descriptions, while not letting the reader forget the horror and humiliation of slavery, often revert back to an earlier time of identity, closeness, and order. Morrison combines the psychological and cultural aspects of the black community. She brings to light some issues such as identity, family, and class conflict in a world where slavery has apparently become an unfortunate issue of the past, but emerges, throughout, as a haunting presence. Nonetheless, there are other forms of slavery that still subject and enslave women. (Shaheen, 2014: 200)

Morrison was born in 1931 and she is a great African American writer; she is an inspiration for many writers, artists and readers. By the time when the Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to her in 1993, she had already published her six novels that have been discussed later. Morrison, then sixty two years of age captured the attention of the critics and scholars throughout the world and her works were translated into more than twenty different languages. The Nobel committee of the Swedish Academy called Morrison, "a literary artist of finest work," who "gives life to an essential aspect of American reality". She died in New York City U.S in 2019. (Lisa R. Rhodes, 2001:8)

No one writes more beautifully than Toni Morrison. She has consistently explored issues of true complexity and terror and love in the lives of blacks. Harsh criticism has not dissuaded her. Prizes have not trapped her. She is a

writer who deserves this honor. (Walker, 14)

In this quotation, Alice Walker explains the importance of Morrison when she was given the Nobel Prize. Here, Morrison has created memorable African American characters who struggle to live their lives as full individuals fueled by triumphs and tragedies. Her characters overcome the brutality of slavery, racial and economic oppression and sexism; they depend on their own inner strengths, spirituality and love of their African American culture. Toni Morrison's career is controversial as her novels are. In the late 1980s, some critics did not like her writing style whereas many other writers wonder why Morrison was not awarded the prestigious prizes. Some readers could not understand her novels easily and complain against her narrative techniques. Political conservatives have also criticized her exploration of the role of racism in American culture and literature. She often based her novels on the oral traditions of the Black American folk narratives. So, in her works, we can re-discover the history of African Americans and their cultural roots. (2001:10)

The *Bluest Eye* is Morrison's first novel and is also the best one that exemplifies her attitude about Afro-American women and their dilemma in the mainstream society of the United State. The novel tells the story of Pecola, a marginalized little black girl who is victimized by both the whites. She is oppressed and subjected to the white-made norms against blacks. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Franz Fanon finds that the identity of the blacks is being produced and constructed according the white-made norms. Those blacks blindly identify themselves in the white mainstream culture at the cost of their own racial identity. Here, Morrison wants to reveal that the psychological disintegration of Pecola does not relate only to the rejection of white mainstream culture, but more importantly to the blind identification of the black community and the loss of their heritage and values. In this context, Morrison reflects on exploring hope in the tragic story, and suggests how some blacks struggle to survive so as to extend their heritage and values. (Yuan, 2018:104)

## **2:- Female Sexuality in The Bluest Eyes:**

Feminism is a collection of social, political movements, and moral philosophies largely motivated by or concerned with the liberation of women. It traces the historical roots of contemporary black feminism, outlines the collective's beliefs, and discusses problems in black feminist organization, and names black women's issues. Most significantly, the collective approached black feminism through the perspective of what they termed "identity politics," or, the necessity of seeing black feminism as a movement through which the interconnected oppressive sexuality is combated. According to Barbara Smith:

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free

all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women --as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female selfaggrandizement" (Barbara, 1985:72)

The *Bluest Eye* (1970) opens with the horror of the pregnancy of Pecola, a female child which makes it clear that the novel has sexual overtones. Morrison attacks the male patriarchy which abuses the females sexually as well as mentally. The novel succinctly exposes the female sexuality. It shows how the women in general and black women in particular become the victims of male's sexual desire. Morrison has deliberately used sexual overtones, which exposes female sexuality in the novel. In the novel there are many incidents where the novelist uses the sexual depiction excessively. For instance, Mr. Henry tries to molest Frieda, Pecola's friend. Her sister Claudia wants to know how her sister might have felt when Mr. Henry molested her. It shows the curiosity of the adolescent female children towards sex. This desire for sex gradually develops among the girls when they become women.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison depicts husband-wife relationship sensuously. There is a depiction of love making between Cholly and his wife Pauline which reveals the sexual desire of a woman. "Pauline was fifteen, still keeping house, but with less enthusiasm. Fantasies about men, love, and touching, were drawing her mind and hands away from her work," (Morrison, 1999:88). Before marriage, she is portrayed as a woman who is eagerly waiting for a man with whom she wants to make love. Morrison writes about the sexual pleasure a woman gets after enjoying sex with her husband in *The Bluest Eye*.

It had occurred to Pecola sometime ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the rights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful she herself would be different. Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently for a year she had prayed. (Morrison, 1979:34)

Here, Toni explains that Pecola's desire for blue eyes is found in Chapter 3 of the novel. They demonstrate the complexity of Pecola's desire that she does not want blue eyes simply because they appeal to white beauty standards. But she wishes to possess different sights and pictures, as if changing eye color will change reality. Pecola has just been forced to witness a violent fight between her parents, and the only solution she can imagine to her passive suffering is to witness something different. She believes that if she had blue eyes, their beauty would inspire beautiful and kindly behavior on the part of others. Pecola's desire has its own logic even if it is naive. According to Pecola, the color of skin and eyes do influence how one is treated and what one is forced to witness. (www.sparknotes.com)

Appearance and money determine how much power I can really possess. And so I use these values in movies, magazines, newspapers, music, and television as mirrors to learn about me, my story, and my culture. What I am learning about is the power of a culture's persuasive mass-media techniques and, conversely, the power and ability of people to challenge that authority. (Morrison, 1979: 26).

The writer shows that the 'Blue' is a symbol made by media that attempts to define us and to whom we belong. So, the white couple is very bright, while the photo of the black couple is very dark in photo. Here she brings an attention towards the lighting. In looking at gender and how gender roles are enforced, in the picture of the white couple the man is prevailing in his physical posture, from his holding of the woman, down to the visibility of his facial appearance, he's totally uncovered. In the other picture there is a symbolic scoring through the black man's face and identity. (Beal, 1970:137)

Many critics think that the novel is the rise of African American writers, assigning significance to their revision of American history with their own cultural materials and folk traditions. However, the other side alludes to earlier black writings in order to communicate the traditionally silenced female point of view and thus utilizes conventional grotesque imagery as an instrument for social protest. It also attracts the attention to its deconstruction of 'whiteness' along racial, gender, and economic lines, while feminists have equated the violence of the narrative with self-hatred wrought by a wide range of illusions about white American society and African American women's. (1970:138)

The existence of a feminist movement was an essential to Morrison. There is no political movement to provide muscle to those who desire to scrutinize Black women's experience through understanding their history, literature, and culture. There is no political charisma that asks a least rank of consciousness and respect from those who write or talk about our lives. In conclusion, there is no developed body of Black feminist political theory whose hypotheses could be used in the study of Black women's art. When Black women's books dealt with at all, it is usually in the context of Black literature, which basically pays no attention to the propositions of sexual politics. When white women go through Black women's writings they are of course badly equipped to deal with the intricacies of racial politics. Steinem said: "Just as male was universal but female was limited, white was universal but black was limited" (Steinem, 1984: 7).

### **3. A Tragedy of Oppression and Internalized Racism**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Racism is the prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. In other words racism is an attempt to degrade one's self-esteem and confidence by using different

ideologies. (Belaid, 2017:12) The word, 'racism' was, first, used in 1897 by the French writer, Charles Malato. However, there were still many who believed that people should be treated differently according to the innate biological differences. There should be clear distinction between European white men and Native American or black persons. The purpose of colonization was in fact purely economic to make the colonial economy thrive by using slave labor. The colonialists used white man's burden as a justification to racism so that black and Native Americans could be considered a property. Slaves were brought from Africa to work on large cotton and tobacco fields, most of black women took care of the white's house and children. They were sexually harassed and raped by their masters. Racism was institutionalized and that led to the exclusion of blacks from education, marriage and work places. However, the colonialist s' efforts to dehumanize African Americans did not stop them from calling for their rights and as time went on more and more people joined abolitionist movements. (2017:13)

The *Bluest Eye* explores the tragedy of the oppression and internalized racism .This novel presents the story of two black families, Macteers and Breedlove. Both are poor African-American families. Though Macteer is a little better placed who have migrated from Alabama and Georgia (South American States) via Kentucky to Lorain- Ohio, an industrial state, in search of job. The novel shows clearly the evil of racism through the African adolescent female - like Pecola. She, like other African girls, suffers from the evils of racism and sexism in America which was dominated by the white.

A perusal of the novel *The Bluest Eye* creates an impression that Toni Morrison focuses on the concerns of two main themes. She explores the tragedy of the oppression and violation of children, especially poor children. This is a kind of discourse produced when members of the targeted group, in the case of African-Americans, begin to recognize how they are stereotyped and represented by white Americans who are superior in beauty, morality and intelligence. Morrison focuses on this problem of internalized racism as if affects children. The psychological mechanism of internalized racism hinges on the cycle of oppressions. (Paulo, 1972:13)

In *The Bluest Eye*, the oppressors of Pecola have themselves been hurt by oppressive adults and racist ideology. Morrison is very careful to point out that people are not born with the tendency to hurt other people; instead, they are taught to do so when they themselves are hurt. A perfect example of this phenomenon is Pauline, Mrs. Breedlove. She is rejected by the women in the Lorain community because she bears the marks of her colour and class too overtly. She wears the clothing of country people and speaks with a southern accent. Pauline responds by adopting the oppressor's discourse, particularly the discourse on physical beauty. Measured against it, Pauline is ugly and her white employers are beautiful and deserving of

all her care and love. Pauline, thereby, accepts her assigned role on the hierarchy of colour, beauty and privilege. This role leaves her incapable of caring for her daughter or anyone in her family. According to its script, they do not deserve any of her care. (2016:104)

Pecola is born with this ideology of racialised beauty. She does not have a chance from the beginning. Her mother has placed all her care in her job and she has internalized the message that black is ugly and white is beautiful to such an extent that she sees Pecola as an ugly ball of black hair when she is born. She and Cholly seem to have given Pecola no love and nourishment. They are so preoccupied with their own conflict against each other that they never notice its reflection on their daughter. Morrison constructs these two families as a sort of plot and subplot along the lines of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The MacTeers do not have it as bad as the Breed loves do. While the parents seem to be quite embattled by poverty, they retain their allegiance to their home. Mr. Macteer regards it as his steadfast duty to provide for his family and to ensure her daughters' upbringing in the accepted morality of their time. Neither parent has the time or the emotional energy to nurture their daughters. They treat Claudia and Frieda as pieces of furniture, which are inconvenient, but necessary to care for. Mrs. Macteer treats them with rough care, but cares nonetheless. She dispenses punishment arbitrarily and too swiftly, not recognizing their physical or moral integrity. She stops abusing them for the sake of releasing her own pent up frustrations. (Russell, 1988:45)

Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign - all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. 'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it. (Morrison 20-21)

Here, this means that Frieda is sexually molested by Mr. Henry; her parents believe her story and act on it swiftly, punishing Mr. Henry. Mrs. MacTeer, unwittingly, foists on her daughters the ideology of white supremacy when she gives them white dolls, as Christmas gift, to love and cherish, but she never says directly that her daughters are ugly. (Dump,2003:159)

The MacTeer family seems to represent the mainstream of African-American family in Lorain, Ohio at the time the novel was set. Most African-Americans were poor so they attempt to adopt the code of respectability. The poor treatment of children was the norm, but the violation of children's innocence was done ideologically more than physically. The Breed love family represents all the faults of this African-American community. In structuring her novel in this way, Morrison avoids the simplistic analysis which would simply regard the Breed loves as an unfortunate aberration. Instead, they are the logical extension of the norm. (2003:161)

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them... for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. (Friere, 1993:47).

Friere asserts that Toni Morrison deals with the serious problem of racism and sexuality of the black Africans who are living in America. They are much neglected and exploited by the men and women of white-skin against the black-skinned people in that great country. She is perfectly aware of and deeply concerned about the conditions of over-poverty, suppression and exploitation of those Africans in America. In this way, she has clear consciousness of the inter-relationship of race, gender and class.

Many African-Americans still suffer from a dangerously low sense of self-esteem originating from their internalization of the prejudices of white culture... Morrison's novel reflects this dangerous internalization of racist values and the cycle of self-hatred passed on from parents to children. (Morrison, 1982:22)

Similar to her mother, Pecola Breedlove has low self-esteem and lacks self-love. This is the reason why she searches for approval and acceptance in both the black and white communities. She is victimized by patriarchal oppression represented by her own father, Cholly who rapes her and leads to her madness, and by the racial oppression incarnated in the society in which she lives. As a black girl, Pecola is scolded by other black schoolboys as being inferior because she is dark black. She is made to believe that she is ugly and inferior. Consequently, she hates her black skin and aspires to attain some of the white physical features, believing that this might give her the badly-needed pass into the real world. (Cormier, 1994:102)

For Pecola, the little black girl, passing the inferiority of her race to the superiority of the white race takes the dream of the blue eyes. She believes that a pair of blue eyes would be the end of her troubles. She, for example, believes that the blue eyes would furnish her with the required credentials of acceptance in this society: to be loved, to be virtuous and attractive both to friends and teachers. She even believes that her parents might stop their fighting due to her attainment of the blue eyes. In fact, her relentlessly tragic yet futile quest for a pair of blue eyes leads her to envision the white world as a perfect image of the Garden of Eden. This white Eden includes the angelic Maureen Peel, "a high yellow dream child," who is treated with respect mainly because of her light skin, brown hair and green eyes: "Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty" (Morrison, 1982, p.405).

Here, the standard of beauty as determined by the white race dominates the ideology of people. This standard is based on white complexion and beautiful eyes. Pecola's identification with the black cat and the blue eyes is



a strong argument of her need for the blue eyes:

The cat rubbed up against her knee. He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluish green. The light made them shine like blue ice. Pecola rubbed the cat's head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her". (Ibid., p. 351)

This means that Pecola is possessed with the cat's blue eyes. The strong association with the blue eyes of the cat suggests her obsession with the blue eyes, which are seen as her passport to a superior world. The black cat's blue eyes, as Fulton (1997) points out, "signify the realization of the beauty myth" that Geraldine, Polly and many others in the black community aspire (p.47). Likewise, obsession with the blue eyes intensifies Pecola's real tragedy when she goes to Soaphead Church to make her eyes blue:

"What can I do for you, my child?"

"Maybe, maybe you can do it for me."

"Do what for you?"

"I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me."

"Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened."

"My eyes."

"What about your eyes?"

"I want them blue." (Morrison, 1982, p.405)

This dialogue between Pecola and Church indirectly condemns the impact of racism and the destructive power of white culture that provokes hatred and clashes.

In retaining the identity of our race, we held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and are least troublesome to maintain. Consequently we were not royal but snobbish, not aristocratic but class-conscious; we believed authority was cruelty to our inferior...we mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom...our manhood was defined by acquisitions. (Morrison, 1982, p.407)

The bare truth in Claudia and Church's critiques might lead to an awareness of the nature of racism in the American society. Through the two critiques, the cultural discourse of the novel attempts to enlarge our own perspective of the racial question. Morrison, on Church's tongue, clarifies that, "Our manhood [power and patriarchy] was defined by acquisitions and our womanhood by acquiescence." (Mahdi, 2015:50).

## Conclusion

In her *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison succeeds in demonstrating black women's misery and suffering. In this novel, the African protagonist Pecola attempts to continue in discrimination against women, violence, race and sexual abuse. Morrison's novel touches on the pain and suffering of black females in a new society of white community.

The white society discriminates the blacks because of their colors given by God. They are seen as artifacts that have no emotions. In Morrison's novels, a few African females have the chance to discover their identities and live in racial society's stressful environment. Pecola believes that by the end of the novel she has had her blue eyes, but she still wants more. This means that the rules of beauty will always be unthinkable, even for white citizens.

*The Bluest Eye* is the African American community, because this is the leading character. The bluest eye, after all, does not refer purely to the wish of Pecola. The word "eye" can we read as "I": self, topic the bluest eye can be perceived in a powerful tradition in African America. If she believed that she would be healed if she gets the bluest eye, the writer seems to think that an entirely restored personality certainly would emerge from social and other relationships.

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