

Identity Crisis in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Bluest Eye* questions the universalized image of black women in the dominant racist capitalistic western world. The set presumption about beauty imposed upon them with the help of various cultural icons, movies, magazines, books, newspapers, advertisements on toffee rappers, and drinking cups. These icons imbibe whiteness as an ideal beauty in their minds that generates hatred in them.

Toni Morrison portrays the psychological damage upon the various female characters especially on Pecola who accepts the western notion of beauty. The novel focuses on the Pecola's longing for blue eyes that she believes open the path of her acceptance. But her search is futile and at last she lost into the world of madness. However, like Pecola, not every girl worships the western notion of beauty. The young narrator, Claudia MacTeer, rejects the western notion of beauty.

The term 'identity' refers to one's worthiness, dignity, and equality in every phase of life. Here, it represents the black female's movement that demands equality, dignity not only among black men but also among white females. There are many writers such as Zora Neale Huston and Toni Morrison that focused on the identity of black women.

Toni Morrison is considered one of the greatest writers in African-American women who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She has presented racial-discrimination, emotional trauma, injustice, oppression, slavery, and identity among the black community. She wrote numerous novels; *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help The Child* (2015), that deals with numerous burning issues related to black lives.

Morrison's introductory fictional work *The Bluest Eye* was published during 1970, which has its setting in Lorain Ohio, in 1941. It was just before the civil rights movement. During this time blackness was considered a curse. The dominant culture prefers whiteness as a higher standard of beauty. The white culture has controlled the concept of beauty at such an extent that black feels self-hatred towards their selves. The novel describes the psychological injuries through the Breedlove family especially Pecola.

Pecola being a teenager in the family suffers a lot. She is growing in such a kind of environment where being black is like a curse. She is convinced by everyone around her that girls with blue eyes, soft white skin, and blonde hairs are always adored and cherished by everyone. This is the very reason that she desperately appeals to God for blue eyes. Blue eyes are not only just a symbol of beauty but for her, it belongs to her identity, dignity, and acceptance. In this futile craving, she forgets the fact that she is created as a black and that leads to tragic circumstances in her life. She is tempted by the concept of whiteness as purity. Often it is her failure to achieve social perception towards the concept of aesthetics. Pecola, the protagonist is entrapped inside the negative and dehumanizing environment and it's tempted through her continual delusions. Pecola is often depicted as a victim and as an object of other's insult. And with this, she becomes worthy of reader's pity. Her subjectivity is shadowed by the emphasis on the perception of her a victimized "other" within the African-American social colony. As Harris remarks, "Pecola due to her 'ugliness', suffers first hand psychic violence from other blacks who ignores and disdain her. She becomes the community scapegoat. Pecola will never be an insider in the black community and cannot possibly hope for acceptance beyond that community" (Ramírez 2013).

Therefore, Pecola craves for being a part of the world. Everyone around her misinterpreted her about the concept of beauty. She has been delusion by others about themselves. She sees herself through the eyes of the world. She always lives in the delusion of guilt as if she has been committed some heinous crime and everyone around her makes her believe about this especially her parents.

She always needs someone who is going to love her beyond everything. She wants to feel secure, to be cared but all her hopes are futile. Because she is unable to find a peaceful environment where she has to learn, how to behave, love, and care. In her own home, her parents always quarrel with each other. Their quarrel deeply affects her and she wants to disappear their continued quarrel triggered her behavior. She always thinks that if, she looks adorable and everyone treats her differently and also loves her especially her family just like they treat other children. She considered herself responsible for the disorganization of her family.

She is just eleven years old teenage that become the victim of the not only faces psychological abuse but also faces physical abused by her parents as well as by her teachers and fellow students at school. She is even forced by her teachers to sit alone in the classroom. And her fellow students make fun of her blackness.

As racism and beauty goes parallel in the novel. One day, when Pecola and two MacTeer sisters come across Maureen who makes fun of her while saying: "I am cute! And you are ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I m cute" (Morrison 1999:73) From here readers comes to know that although Maureen is also belongs to black community but being lighter in skin color holds a sense of pride or have a superiority complex. She is green eyed, middle class mulatto girl and

considers her more beautiful than other black girls. Here Morrison, through her character illustrates the hegemonic control of white's upon blacks. As just like Maureen, Geradine also holds this notion and similarly thinks like her. She also thinks herself better than other black women of the town. She also abuses Pecola when she is locked up by her son, she abuses her "get out", she said, her voice quiet, "you nasty little black bitch." "Get out of my house" (Morrison: 1999:90)

Similarly like Pecola her mother also lost her identity in the illusion of western beauty. She also determines or measures the standards of beauty by the things which she saw in cinema. Even her sexual pleasure is also depended upon the power, power from her sense of her admiration. She learned from movies that physical love means sex; it takes her to the pedestal where she is enabled to reach. She always wants to be accepted and loved like those movie stars. But soon she realized about her place in the society and developed hatred for everything around her especially about her own house and husband.

And Pauline generates a substitute dream at her proprietor's home. She approaches to delightful materialistic products. She tries to complete all her wishes by creating a fake perception around herself an "adaptation and adjustment to changing experience have to be conducted by her false self." (Ramírez 2013)

In the novel as every female character deals with own kinds of their self doubt's make the question about their identity. As for Pecola, it fills her with guilt of being a dark. Her eyes craving is her search for her identity, worthlessness, dignity. Through this realization she escapes into the fantasy world.

Hence, she decides to accomplish excellence and acknowledgement by getting blue eyes. Therefore she strongly believes that bluest eyes are the only way to get rid of her problems, and sufferings. Her psychological breakdown starts with her wish to get bluest eyes which is the impossible for her. Throughout the novel she goes to the bottomless of the universe of fantasies and dismissing the genuine world as a result of negation by everyone. She visits Soaphead Church in order to full fill her dream by having faith in him that he would change her world. And Soaphead Church like a God grants her blue eyes, which only she is capable of seeing.

So, she hallucinates herself in order to see her. She not only remains invisible to herself but also to society until she envisions herself through her alter ego by creating herself as beautiful, which marks the beginning of her mental breakdown. As Kai Erikson calls 'psychic erosion'. For the black girl psychic instability results from "a constellation of life experiences." (Ramírez 2013). It is her imaginary self who takes the form of an imaginary friend, who is the only person that sees her bluest eyes. It indicates that she has changed her reality by creating delusional self. In the end, Pecola creates the imaginary friend who loves and appreciates her in her madness.

The only character that rejects the mainstream western culture is Claudia MacTeer. She is the only one who gets disgusted with the western notion of beauty. She hates that ideology that makes Maureen beautiful and Pecola the ugly one. She hates Pecola and Frieda when they both love Shirley and feels. Claudia thinks back, at the time of Christmas her parents without even asking her what she wants gifted her white baby doll and in disgust. She destroyed the white dolls as it was real white girl.

Because she is mature enough to differentiate what these dolls symbolizes. She fully knows that everyone love these dolls due to their physical beauty. Her rejection of that dolls goes parallel with Pecola's love for them. She is the one who strongly opposed white ideology in the form of her love, acceptance of Pecola. In other words, she hates the whole ideology that effects black's psyche. There is no similarity between Claudia and Pecola's perception of beauty.

CONCLUSION

Thence, Toni Morrison concentrates in *The Bluest Eye* the emotional portrayal of the obliteration of the African-American identity and their battle for visionary culmination in a unfriendly world. By describing their difficulties she also gives a light of hope through Claudia's character that rejects their dominant concept of beauty. She is such a intelligent character in the novel who tries to save her friend Pecola from the western gaze. Morrison strongly presents her own vision through Claudia that the western notions of beauty are socially constructed that are there to dominate blacks.

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