

**Review**

# **The Black Community's Ideologies Regarding Whiteness in Toni Morison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Comparative Study between the American Standard of Beauty and Racism**

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Accepted 21 August 2016

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This paper has been written to present the ideologies of black community regarding the standards of American beauty in Toni Morison's *The Bluest Eye*. How the captivating ideas of ethereal beauty in the form of whiteness devoured their sense of actual beauty. While they were tend to grab the spurious whiteness, they made themselves far from their ancestral beauty which is blackness. Eventually they have met with the predicament situation and the precious existences became perished. The ugliness of racism came forward throughout the novel and their sense of inherited beauty was sold by the hands of whiteness.

**Keywords:** American standards of beauty, Racism, whiteness, Black community

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**Cite This Article As:** Haque F (2016). The Black Community's Ideologies Regarding Whiteness in Toni Morison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Comparative Study between the American Standard of Beauty and Racism. Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult. 4(7): 132-137

## **INTRODUCTION**

Whiteness is the purest and heavenly shape of beauty, which was the main theme in *The Bluest Eye*. The devastating racism manifested by the concept of white standards of beauty. People who are not white, they are not enlisted in the realm of beautiful creatures and always ignored by the society as a worthy human being. Toni Morison clearly portrayed the concept of whiteness and its effects on the black community through her characters in the novel. In this novel many of the characters were described in a physical manner which symbolized the

unattractiveness and ugly sides of American features. They have curly hair, and flat nose which is the strong and apt elements of ugliness. Morison constantly showed those traits and features to prove how the white societies have set their own standards of beauty where the black race was lagged behind. Only one character who was stood against the set standards of white beauty and her name was Claudia. In contrast of Claudia there was another girl named Maureen who was the symbol of angelic beauty in the novel's amenities. Though Maureen

was the arch-enemy of Claudia and regarded as an beautiful girl at school. Morison has brought up this character for showing about the society's intention of worship and adornment towards whiteness. Compared to whiteness with blackness, Pecola Breedlove was the character who was fully deprived from all kinds of beauty and kindness in her life. Because she was not white, therefore she was neglected, devastated when her father raped her.

### **The American standards of beauty has proclaimed its superiority by the characters of *The Bluest Eye***

Pecola Breedlove was the main character who was yearning for the standards of American beauty till the end of the novel *The Bluest Eye*. She was immensely fascinated about having a pair of blue eyes. She thought, if she can have her eyes blue then she could be a beautiful girl according to the white standards of beauty, and as a whole her all kinds of problems will be disappeared forever. In her class, the teachers and the classmates were almost indifferent about her as she didn't possess the white skin. They used to show disgust and disdain towards Pecola. Inside of her heart, she wished to get the bluest eye to remove her ugliness. Alone with her own very existence she used to share her hatred through mirror, and tried to figure out from where her ugliness came. For one year, Pecola prayed that somehow her eyes will turn into blue colour. As she was suffering many problems in life starting with her own family issues. For that reason she has decorated the urge to get the exotic pairs of blue eyes, and was thinking that her agonies and pains might go and she could be able to present herself as a beautiful girl in front of the world. Being a black girl in a society that worships blonde-hair, blue-eyed beauty, Pecola thought she is ugly from every phases of her life. She got snared with a philosophical thinking regarding dandelion and she felt pity for it, as she knew that it will be devalued. Pecola has found out beauty in weed, for she believed that people will see her as a weed. She used to visit Soap head church with the hope that by praying there she could be able to snatch the bluest eyes, and will be able to free herself from her unnoticed sadness. And those sadness will go to the distant place. She had the ingrained belief that, the cynical world will embrace her with love because she has now the elements of standard beauty which is the bluest eye. In terms of Pauline Breedlove, she has occupied herself by going to the cinema halls. From those movie days she has got the idea of idealized beauty for the first time. In those movies she saw the Hollywood actresses with blonde-haired, blue-eyed bombshells. They have actually unveiled the concept beauty in Pauline Breedlove's mind. When she looked towards herself, she has found her not pretty. This is the tricks of the white

standards of beauty where people like Pauline was compelled to think herself as ugly in front of the white kingdom of white beauty.

A new little girl named Maureen Peal came to Claudia and Frieda's school. Maureen was a girl of brighter skinned with angelic impression than most of the other children. For that reason she felt relieved. Everybody loved and adored her because she got the light skin. Maureen was somewhat more beautiful than other people around her. This was the reason of jealousy for everyone, though Claudia and Frieda were not jealous of her beauty. To show the ingrained concept of white standards of beauty the Breedlove family were one of them. They were the poor and ugly family mentioned in *The Bluest Eye*. The Breed loves thought and believed that the white American media has portrayed this standard of beauty which they could not acquire in their life. So they didn't strive to have it as they don't deserve it. To the contrary of Pecola, Frieda and the Breedlove family, Claudia was one of the different characters in *The Bluest Eye*. She has refused to adopt the white standards of beauty which has been fixed by the American society. At first encounter scene with Claudia we have seen her mind was full with anger about whiteness. In one Christmas, she got a blue-eyed, pink-skinned, blonde-haired doll. She needed to adore that fancy doll, but instead of it she destroyed it because of her inside wrath about the measurement of standard beauty. She was shocked that, why this world only adore the white skin and blue eyes, why not the inherited beauty of a human kind? Following this kind of thinking, Claudia appeared as a true hearted friend for Pecola. She wished and prayed that Pecola's baby will survive. She felt that, it is the dire need for the baby to be alive to oppose the society's stereotype standards of beauty. Claudia hoped that this new black baby will set the new doctrine about beauty, therefore will change the society where blackness will be something that can be admired and something that can be beautiful.

### **Beauty has been occupied the main theme of the novel, where ugliness came forward to prove the racism of black community**

In this novel most of the black characters were considered as the worshiper of whiteness and they thought whiteness is the paragon of beauty. They were constantly manipulated by the movies, books, candy, magazines, toys and advertisements. Those people were mostly gullible towards the set of white American beauty. Early in the novel Pecola and Frieda were blown away by the beauty of Shirley Temple. The character Pecola believed that having blue eyes, the credible standard of beauty will flourish. This enthralling idea of having blue eyes has been created a significant place of peace and

tranquillity in Pecola's life. As her life was becoming more brutal, her craziness of getting the bluest eye was more concrete. Therefore this types of illusion made her life isolated where she was alone and started to think she got the blue eyes. After the incident of rape by her own father, Pecola got shattered and alone. Farhana Haque has remarked about white rulers brutal and heedless attitudes towards their subordinate people. She has explained about European colonialism and their superlative traits, she also mentioned that, the whites felt proud about themselves, therefore they have ensnared the inferior natives who has been called as colonized people.

“The white rulers started to imprison the inferior natives to inflict the European cultures, languages and other stuffs”. (Haque, 2016, p. 87)

To relate the statements of Farhana Haque with the theme of beauty in *The Bluest Eye*, I must include the theory of colonialism. How they imprisoned their subordinate people in their realm and here in *The Bluest Eye* how the character Pecola got imprisoned with the hands of white standard of beauty. Pecola's life was caught up by the huge and devastating incident by her father and had changed her mind towards insanity. She has started to think that she got the bluest eye. Likewise the character Mrs Breedlove used to enjoy her time in movie theatres, admired the white actresses and wished to have the prettiness like them. Another character who was essentially obsessed about whiteness and disliked blackness and her name was Geraldine, being an educated and observed the Western ways of life, she has drawn the lines between coloured and black. Geraldine used to teach her son about the difference between coloured and black.

“Coloured people were neat and quiet: niggers were dirty and loud” ( Morison, 1970, 1999,67)

In society, the standard of beauty means light skin, where Maureen Peal was the appropriate girl to retain the position of beauty. She thought she was pretty enough to get the utmost love from everyone around her. Maureen thought Pecola was ugly. Here lies the difference between the idealized physical attributes and the attributes related with blackness.

“[a] high-yellow dream child with long hair braided into lynch ropes that hung down her back” ( Morison, 1970, 1999, 47). Maureen was the prominent girl at school, in Morison's statements,

“She enchanted the entire school, when teachers called

on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids”. (Morison, 1970, 1999, 47-48). In quest of having the personality like Maureen, Pecola's started to yearn for blue eyes in the hope that people will love her as Maureen Peal was being loved by everyone.

### ***The Bluest Eye* has been depicted the oppressed side of women**

In *The Bluest Eye*, the women were not only observed and suffered the terrific face of racial oppression but also the despotic attitudes and violence brought upon them by men in their lives. In this novel there are some youngest characters who had no idea about womanhood, but by the gradually happened incidents and predicament situations lead their life towards the wicked definition of womanhood. Pecola, Frieda and Claudia, they were the youngest female characters who were the witness of men's brutal nature towards them. Some of them were compelled to do sex which was totally brutal and illegal. Pecola was raped by her father, the cruelty which was beyond description. Its the ultimate example of men's oppression that how can a female can only be the commodity in hands of a man or under the men's society. Mrs Breedlove and Geraldine's narratives exhibited the shattered and harsh realities of marriage and the same time met with oppression at their homes. These women experienced brutality from their men at home and in return they exercise their power over their children through physical force and verbal assault.

As they were furious towards children, likewise they were aggressive over other women. In this novel, as those oppressed women were spoiled by men, in return they turned themselves as tyrannical over the vulnerable and weak. They have gained this power after losing their femininity and sexuality by men. Those spoiled women are called as prostitutes which references were given by the characters China, Poland and Miss Marie in *The Bluest Eye*. They have created their own potentiality through drinking, aggressive attitudes, masculine behaviours. These attitudes were actually considered as the feelings of disdain towards men's society and their suppressive nature upon women. Male's oppression over women reached to its highest peak when cholly, Pecola's father raped her. This scene proved the ultimate objectifying nature of a man.

### **White race's hatred against Black race in *The Bluest Eye***

Racism is the complicated and sensitive issue in *The*

*bluest Eye*. This novel initially expressed the issue of racism throughout the black characters. There were few white characters, yet racism encapsulated the core of the text. Black characters were the main focus through the echo of whiteness depicted from the behind to prevail over those black existences. White means sacredness, elegance, polish attributes and values, while being black is associated with uncivilized, brutal, dirtiness, worthlessness, ignorant and uncultured. Simultaneously race is not defined by the colour of one's skin or the beautiful shape of one's face or the perfect texture of one's hair, its about one's socio-economic class, educational background, origin of birth place. Incorporate with these ideas of racism, eventually leads the white race towards hatred about black race or black community. This is the blatant truth in this novel by Toni Morrison. To present this hatred we can ponder over the characters in *The Bluest Eye*. First of all I would like to vignette about Claudia's life regarding the oppression she got from men. Mrs. Macteer insulted her existence as a black girl.

When she was fallen sick, Mrs. Macteer showed rude behaviours to her because she thought as Claudia fall into sickness means uncleanliness and uncleanliness means blackness. In Soaphead Church, the man was against dirtiness thus proved his disgust about black race. The other characters of this novel generated their own concept of whiteness and self-respect by some unconventional activities to hold their worth being a black entity. Such as Geraldine, she attempted to separate herself and her family from looking like black. She did straighten her hair, used lotion on skin to keep herself and the family away from blackness. She used to made tidy of her room for making that as example of purity and cleanliness. After all these endeavours, the black community people like Geraldine marked herself as same as before and lagged behind the white race. The whiteness or the white race then appeared with their superiority in the sector of socioeconomic, educational, religious, regional and hereditary aspects. For example Soaphead church used his white heritage through his place of origin and educational background. Again the racial self-hatred came along with the rape scene of Pecola, who was raped by her father. After the brutal rape scene, its the amalgam of Cholly's self-hatred and deprivation of proper behaviours from the white race. As a result Pecola was the ultimate victim of men's oppression by having her father's baby.

### **Whiteness and blackness has been expressed through the elements of home and family**

In *The Bluest Eye*, home represented as the construction of vigour where a family lives. The homes were depicted as the essence of self-respect and self-worth in this

novel. The black families used to live in the style of Dick and Jane Primer which served as the non-traditional homes. From the beginning of the novel, the black families were failure in front of their black skin and also if its about their home then it would be very salient thing to observe their potentiality to fight against the white race. The actual scenario was depicted by Toni Morrison about the significance of the homes of blacks. The Breedlove lived in an abandoned storefront and proved their lowest self-worth. To the contrary, the Macteer lived in an old house but its their own house so they felt proud of themselves. Besides of them, Geraldine was the another character who lived in a beautiful house which allowed her to feel arrogant and prevalent in front of the other black families. Claudia has drawn a significant definition about a life without a home and a life which could be called as outdoors. Outdoors means the voidness and possess no home or family. Pecola represented herself as a member of this outdoor people's group. Cholly made her life as outdoors because he raped her daughter and therefore Pecola got no home or family. She was actually having identity crisis and got lost. Pecola was the true victim of brutality where her father showed this kind of shameless act which was beyond imagination. By doing such Cholly has violated the rules of home and family.

### **Sex has been stretched the areas of violence, humiliation and immortality in *The Bluest Eye***

Sex is consider as an enjoyable act, performed between the two people. But in *The Bluest Eye* sex was exhibited as the chapter of ugliness, brutality and the act of highest shamelessness. Sex was therefore proved as a shape of oppression towards women. Most of the characters in this novel observed the most unusual and uncomfortable sex in their first time sexual experiences. Cholly's first sexual experience was full of humiliation and hatred. Once the white men forced him to rape Darlene, here lies the sexual distortion. This distortion leads cholly to be oppressed over his own daughter and devalued the women's self-respect. That type of unwanted sexual experience was the reason behind his hatred towards his own race, women and his inner feelings related love. These were the prominent elements for Cholly to rape Pecola, his own daughter. The another distorted person whose failed marriage and hatred about women leads him to his vicious intention about abusing children. Therefore he has created a sexual desire towards children. For the younger characters, sex experiences were incredibly unhappy. For example Frieda's first sexual experience was forced upon her by Mr. Henry and made her to believe that she has been spoiled. Sex became an explorable element in the phase of womanhood which has been experienced by the adolescent characters in *The Bluest Eye*. They got the

lack of understanding about the wicked sides of sex. Instead of this brutal and unhappy side of sex, they had the thoughts about sex mixed with purity, love and sense of self-worth as a woman. Mrs. Breedlove was fascinated by her early life's sex thoughts and about a man who shall come into her life and will offer her relief as she got heedless behaviours from her family. Geraldine's thoughts about sex were slightly different from others. Her sense of worth as a woman still comes by her relationship with her husband. Geraldine's husband married her because she can cook, clean and take care of the house. The concept of sex was not violent to her but she was unable to enjoy sex as she viewed it as a burden. Some women in this novel were bitter, tired, unconventional. They have seen oppression and brutality from men's society, and as a result they have changed their mind and turned that towards another direction. For example, the prostitutes exploited their own sexuality to gain power over men, at the same time this process of gaining power leads them to self-hatred of the opposite sex, hence it is to be said that, sex has been presented as the fundamental form of oppression in *The Bluest eye* novel. Those who were able to escape from the violence of sex, later in their life they were actually oppressed through sex, which they couldn't ignore. They had to bear these adverse incidents in every steps of life. Pecola's rape leads her to the ultimate devastating situation and she has suffered the effect of sexual violence.

### **Cholly was the person of ultimate self-hatred in *The Bluest Eye***

When the book, *The Bluest Eye* has been published Toni Morison explained that this book will show the nature and relationship between parental love and violence. Here in this novel the black parents were used to do violence to their children everyday. This was centered by the adjustment with white standards of beauty. As a result those black parents compelled their children to judge themselves by white standards of beauty. Child abuse was strongly appeared through some characters. When Mr. Henry touched Frieda's breasts which was the foreshadow of Cholly's rape of Pecola. When Cholly raped Pecola it was a physical manifestation, yet it was of the social issue. The physical and personal distortion leads Cholly towards this kind of rape upon his own daughter. Cholly was a man of self-hatred, his name represented the essence of love at the end of his name 'Breedlove' but there was no presence of love in his real life. Only he can breed but he was incapable of loving his own self and others. This was happened because he didn't get proper treatment from white society which was the reason of his ultimate violence and hatred towards women. He did not breed any good things but self-hatred.

### **Claudia's rejection of the white standard of beauty in *The Bluest Eye***

As a child Claudia felt awed that why people treat Maureen well because she is beautiful. She has learnt that beauty is something which is not natural or inherent, beauty is a own set of concept by the society.

"Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eye of our peers, the slippery light in the eye of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was its important? And so what"? (Morison, 1970, 1999, 57). The society made this illusion about the standard of beauty. Claudia realized that very clearly.

"[a]nd fantasy it was, for we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. We substituted lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the revelation and the world". ( Morison, 1970, 1999, 163)

Actually Claudia started to realize that if she wish to take an attempt to adopt the white ideology of aesthetic beauty she could not gain the beauty of soul. She blamed the black community which has been forced themselves to adopt the white standards of beauty, and eventually which made Pecola to be the victim of it. Claudia's instinct has decolonized her mind from colonialism, oppression and set the mind free from the white standard of beauty and the hierarchical power structures imposed on black people.

### **The Marigold seeds has been encapsulated the symbol of beauty to Claudia**

Claudia and Frieda saved marigold's seeds for selling in order to buy bi-cycle. But instead of that they saved those marigold's seeds for Pecola's baby's early recovery and safety. They offered ceremonial and didn't sell marigold's seeds which was an indication of their honesty and sacrifice for Pecola. They believed that if the marigolds grow, then gradually Pecola's baby will be all right. Moreover marigold represent the constant renewal of nature, but in Pecola's case this cycle of renewal turned into devastating situation as her father raped her. Although Pecola was going through the hard phases of her life, but Claudia didn't give up her hope, she wished

and pray that after the birth of this black baby the society's concept about beauty will be changed and the black community will be able to stand with pride with everyone as like the white people used to show their pride in front of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The standard of beauty is the setting by American white society. Pecola and Frieda were the ultimate victim under this rule in *The Bluest Eye*. They adored the whiteness and wanted to grab the elements of white in their lives. Pecola was the main attraction of the this novel who had a dream to look as pretty as the white girls. In her life she suffered much pains and gone through the hurdles and trauma by her family. When Cholly Breedlove burned their house, Pecola had to move to another's house for living. While she returned to her own house, she saw the neglectful father and self-righteous mother around her. They used to fight in regular basis and these altercations lead to physical violence. After observing all these things, Pecola didn't move from the house because she believed she has been fated to live her life like this as she is ugly. This social construction about the concept of beauty has been instilled in her mind. Hence she got crazy to get the bluest eye. She thought this is the only way to save herself from all kinds of problems. If she could able to look beautiful then she will allow her to see the world beautifully.

On the other hands, Mrs. Breedlove, who was lame footed woman and always left isolated and ugly. As a young woman, she engaged herself in movies. The beautiful white actresses exacerbated her belief that she is ugly. Though after her marriage she tried to make her life as a good Christian. She worked hard for a white family and spent time with them for making her disgust on own self and only with her. In this novel the self-hatred raised high when Cholly raped his daughter out of his anger. He knew that he is unable to care her daughter and hated her for loving him. Afterwards, Mrs. Breedlove has beaten Pecola when she got to know about the rape. Pecola became the victim of the white society and as well as in her family she was oppressed and neglected. All these things are somehow related with racism thus presented through the incidents in *The Bluest Eye*. In despair Pecola visited Soaphead church, a local charlatan who claimed he could work miracles, therefore foolishly Pecola asked him for blue eyes. Here once again Pecola was deceived and befooled by him.

Later part of this novel Claudia and Frieda were known about the rape incident happened with Pecola. They have planted marigold seeds in their backyard, believed that if the marigold seeds grow their prayers will be answered. At the end of this story the seeds didn't grow and Pecola's baby died. Pecola gone to ultimate madness

and used to think that she has received the blue eyes. The community disowned her, her fate cheated with her, thus she made herself isolated from the cynical world and started to live in her own world.

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