

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Resistance against White Ideological Stereotypes in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Md. Hasinur Siddique

Assistant Teacher of English, Japan International Dream School, Gazipur, Bangladesh

### Abstract:

*The white dominant society uses stereotypes to exploit the black people. Stereotypes justify the suppression and convinces the blacks to accept the domination as normal. The paper studies how narrative technique resists white ideological stereotypes in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. In the text, stereotypical black characters like Pauline leads a self-loathing life who is investigated in the paper considering the impacts of society. The paper will analyze how the white supremacy doomed Cholly to engage in horrendous incest with his daughter. The background history of each character resists to identify them as the ultimate culprit and opens up the exploitation frame of the ideology. Troubled actions of differentiating from the whole community by Soaphead Church, Geraldine and Maureen reveal as the outcome of surroundings. The text resists generalization of the whole black community portraying the motives behind their desperate effort to fit into the white cultural standard.*

**Keywords:** Stereotype, ideology, resistance, suppression, consumption

### 1. Introduction

The white beauty ideal is a political power tool which contributes in stereotyping the whole African American community. Standing as the epitome of beauty standard, it throws all the black people in the 'other' periphery. Consuming all these suicidal concepts, the blacks finish themselves running after the 'wanna have some whiteness' journey. At the same time, the stereotypes open up the floodgate of power and authority exercising for the white elite society. Julia Jordan-Zachery points out the contribution of the stereotypes as to "function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations" that "normalizes the inequitable position of black woman" (26). The dominant white elites control and manipulate media and social organizations to retain their grasp over the whole surrounding. As a result, stereotypes turn out to be important tool in fabricating the scenario as natural. When the blacks fall for the same ideologies, it gets easier to justify the exploitation.

The paper studies the resistance material against the white beauty ideals in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This paper will focus on the white obsessed character Pauline who desperately tries to associate herself with some sort of white beauty and does not bother neglecting her household. Possessed by beauty concepts she finds comfort in the kitchen of a white elite family. The novelist provides her background to shed light on her transformation as a white beauty hunger which eventually takes the reader's focus to the responsibility of the established beauty standards. The paper will also investigate the troubled experience of Cholly Breedlove who seems to have permanently damaged her sense of responsibility as a father and husband. His growing up and first sexual intercourse which was interfered by two white people have made him incapable of dealing sensibly with the women. The stern rejection of dominant ideology and its effects can be traced in the narrative of Claudia who is the only person to deny consumption of the established ideology.

The essay will examine desperate effort of the black characters to create distance from their community. Maureen Peal is found to enjoy more self-esteem because of her light skin color. She identifies herself superior to other black girls. Geraldine also despises all black people and tries desperately to hide her black entity. The hatred has geared up so much by the consumption of beauty standards that she keeps on creating distance from the whole African-American community. The stereotypes have been portrayed in so much convincing way that they have established their roots deep inside the black community. All the blacks are stereotyped as less beautiful, less effective, less stable and less lovable. They are ghettoized to the utmost extreme and instead of resisting that, everyone tries to pull themselves out of that. The ancestry of Soaphead Church is spotted to be so carefully structured only to lean towards light colored skinned. The blackness has become some dirty boiling pot of trauma from where everyone is trying to escape leaving family, friend or community.

### 2. Diagnosing Pauline's White World

*The Bluest Eye* resists white biases by breaking one dimensional narratives. The novel portrays troubled lifestyle of all the black characters and introduces the readers to the established stereotypes. By bringing forward the background information regarding bizarre activities of the characters, the novel forces the reader to question the one dimensional established stereotypes of the white supremacist ideas. Instead of blaming the characters straight ward, the reader is prompted to investigate the responsibility of the ideological suppression.

Pauline is so tailored by white beauty standard that her personal life gets damaged totally. Most of her consumption comes from the movies. She starts to mimic the white actresses from the screen and starts to live in that reality. Screen becomes a major escape and educator in her life. Movies conditions her to believe in the beauty concept which she can never overturn. Jean Baudrillard describes the situation as, "I'll be your mirror' does not signify 'I'll be your reflection' but 'I'll be your deception'" (69). Pauline actually deceives herself by being a mere puppet to accept all the hegemonic ideas as norms. She gets to imagine perfect beauty standard based on cinematic projection. She tries to change herself as far as possible to be a copy of some white beauty queen which fails horribly. Leaving her African root, she aspires to fit into white society. After losing her teeth, she comes to the realization that she would never be able to secure a place there.

When Pauline starts her job in the Fisher family, she finds the chance to be real part of some white elite family. The house described to be a beautiful one with "Short crocus blades sheathed the purple-and-white hearts that so wished to be first they endured the chill and rain of early spring" (106). May be her place is in kitchen but she preserves it carefully as her only place of solace. Pauline feels proud being part of this majestic house. She loves to keep the whole kitchen neat and clean maintaining proper structure. Claudia identifies her as beautiful and glowing during her visit to the house. The white uniform which she is wearing stands as so much real making her part of the family. The scenario reminds of Franz Fanon's writing, "Whether he likes it or not, the black man has to wear the livery the white man has fabricated for him. Look at children's comic books: all the Blacks are mouthing the ritual 'Yes, boss' " (17).

But all of this soothing scene changes drastically when Pecola drops a blueberry pie on the floor. Pauline screams hysterically, "My floor, my floor" (109). She seems to be clueless. It gets puzzling to figure out why Pauline is so upset. It seems she is panicked because she spots bit of nuisance in her well preserved escape zone. The disturbance is created by Pecola who is her child, part of her household. As Mrs Breedlove tries to escape from that chaotic household, when nuisance is created in her personal heaven which has also been created by an entity of her troublesome household, she cannot stand the scenario. This is the ultimate conflict of two separate worlds for her. That is why she goes on to punish her own daughter and rushes to soothe the little Fischer girl. Pauline beats Pecola like a maniac and struggle to find words to express her anger. It is narrated as, "Over her shoulder she spit out words to us like rotten pieces of apple" (109).

The stereotype of bad black mother always features these features where a mother denies her family and does not show affection for her household. *The Bluest Eye* resists the stereotype by intersecting it from different dimension. The narrator puts the messy house of Pauline and beautifully cared house of her workplace side by side. The Breedlove family is described as poor, but the most noticeable feature is they are "relentlessly and aggressively ugly" (38). The novel labels this ugliness as "unique" (38). Because it seems to be deliberate choice. The MacTeer family is poor as well. They have similar possession as well. But their description of house does not bring such ugly atmosphere. Also Pauline's capability to decorate house is very obvious by the description of Fischer family's kitchen. Actually, it is her indifference to keep her house neat that hinders to give effort in her house. She believes it all with her heart that they are ugly so they are meant to reflect that all over their lifestyle. Even if she cares to keep her house clean, the ugliness of being black will never perish. So she does not bother about the terrible mess of her house.

The novel resists stereotyping of the all black females as messy and ugly by showing it is Pauline who chooses white ideology to guide her lifestyle. It has nothing to do with the whole black community. If she cared more about the values of own community, she would not have reached to the point of such helplessness. Her isolation from the African root has made her vulnerable and made her easy prey of white beauty concepts. The novel clearly states that the economic condition is not responsible for their disastrous household. It is all about their state of mind and belief. "And the joylessness stank, pervading everything," the texts describes, reflecting a place devoid of love and joy which has encouraged Pauline to hide herself in the kitchen of Fischer family (35).

The representation of Pauline's background is another eye opener to spot Pauline as the product of her surroundings. The novel dedicates a part to draw the time of Pauline's growing up. It is found that she has not grown up with all these beauty concepts. She has developed all of these after moving to north. When she becomes lonely, she starts to visit cinema and starts to devour these ideas. Lara Fulton points out Pauline's hugging of stereotypes "that equate it with ugliness and servitude" (34). Because of her submission to white supremacist ideals, she turns out to be a worthless slave who cannot even love herself. All she learns is she does not deserve anything good. So it clear that Pauline does not represent all the black women. She has submitted herself to a suicidal concept which turns out to be her individual journey.

*The Bluest Eye* is narrated in the voice of Claudia MacTeer who shows stern hatred towards Shirley Temple. She voices out: "I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (19). She clarifies that she does not envy Shirley's traditional beauty, but she cannot tolerate of her dancing with a black person. She believes that if anyone to dance there it should be she. She is furious because by no means she can ever expect to have the chance to dance with a white man.

### 3. Root of Claudia's Hatred

Claudia hates Shirley also for the amount of attention she gets. She hooks appreciation and attention from everyone around her. Nothing is left for either her or for any other black girl. It feels like Shirley has stolen all these from her. She gets furious after receiving any white doll for the same reason. Claudia feels invisible in front of them. The sense of hatred can be felt so strongly that it evokes question in a reader to judge its validity. The reader prompts to seek the root of this hatred which can taunt even a child of such a tender age. The novel creates resistance by ringing inside the reader

this alarm of ideological suppression. Claudia's voice is the wakeup call to investigate the stereotypes. For such situation Franz Fanon said, "Society, unlike biochemical processes, does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are prepared to shake the worm-eaten foundations of the edifice" (Introduction/ xv). Human being build suppressive foundation and childlike Claudia shake them up to inject sense of resistance into people around her.

#### 4. Resistance through Cholly's Background

Cholly is the irresponsible father in Breedlove family who fails to provide for the family and cannot get rid of the complex of this failure. When Pauline starts to work outside, she is no more dependent which creates anger in Cholly. Then his heinous act of raping own daughter takes him to the highest point of disgrace. But the narrative resist him from being the total villain. Even after all this, readers feel pity for him. His troubled childhood has deprived him of everything. He has never experienced affection of a father so he does not know how a father show act. Two white men has permanently damaged his ability to maintain normal relationship with women. After the death of Aunt Jimmy, he loses his last connection with community. So he never has the chance to heal his wounds from any fellow feelings. This narrative techniques saves Cholly from total dehumanization. The narrator digs deeper to put aside Cholly to open up the investigation to find out the real culprit. Undoubtedly, all the pointers indicate towards racist framework of the society as the main culprit resisting Cholly to be the answer to all questions. The narration evokes question to dig out the root of the problems and ensures resistance to stereotypical attack to the black community.

#### 5. The Reflection of the Community

Digesting all the hegemonic norms, black characters try to wipe out association with black identity in every possible way. The ancestry of Soaphead Church has tried to execute the plan of achieving light skin color by limiting marriage within similar blood line. He is also proud of his skin color and cannot help feeling pity for Pecola for her black skin. He strongly consider himself superior to other black people and maintains certain distance from that community. The attitudes of Maureen Peal and Geraldine also focus on the same line of thinking. Both of them make desperate effort to maintain distance from black community and love to be identified as superior to common black skin people. They are always conscious to represent the features which will differentiate them from the dark color community. These blind insanities push the reader to the brink of enquiry what motive can drive anyone up to this level of stupidity. Fanon writes about these people as, "So here is our returnee. He can no longer understand Creole; he talks of the Opera House, which he has probably seen only from a distance; but most of all he assumes a critical attitude toward his fellow islanders. He reacts differently at the slightest pretext. He knows everything. He proves himself through his language" (8). Fanon is not ridiculing these people. He is trying to reveal the reason behind their actions. These people have suffered horrible experiences in various stages of life from racist society which encourage them to distance from own community.

#### 6. Conclusion

The paper studies how narrative style has fought to resist stereotypes in *The Bluest Eye*. Instead of stopping up to the activities of the characters, the historical background is portrayed to provide judging materials. The reader is pushed to form some sort of opinion and go further investigating the source of evil. By bringing out the underlying impacts of the white ideological stereotypes, the novel reveals the frame work of suppression which push the blacks to the extremes. Even though no significant white character is there, still the exploitation continues. This clearly takes attention to the whole set up which is so strong that it can run on its own. The establishment has convinced the blacks to conform to the system which will cause damage to themselves. The paper shows how people who digest white cultural value breed self-hatred to drive themselves in the path of destruction.

#### 7. References

- i. Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. Trans. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- ii. Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. 2nd edition. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Print
- iii. Jordan-Zachery, Julia. *Black Women, Cultural Images, and Social Policy*. Dawsonera (2008). Web. 27 May 2014
- iv. Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Vintage Books, 2007. Web.