

Depiction of identity disorientation and sexual barbarity:

Analysing the racial degradation in Toni Morrison's

The Bluest Eye and Beloved

By

Sumaiya Tasnim

ID: 16103013

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:



Sumaiya Tasnim

ID: 16103013

Approval

The thesis titled **Depiction of identity disorientation and sexual barbarity: An epistemology analysing the racial degradation in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*** submitted by Sumaiya Tasnim, ID:16103013 of Summer 2020, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

(Member)

Dr. Abu Sayeed Mohammad Noman
Assistant Professor, Department of
English and Humanities
Brac University

Co-Supervisor for

Scholars Program:

(Member)

Masnoon Khair
Lecturer, School of Economics and
Social Sciences
Brac University

Departmental Head:

(Chair)

Professor Firdous Azim
Professor and Chairperson, Department
of English and Humanities
Brac University

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Abstract

This thesis aims to focus on the amalgamated effect of internalized racial identity loss and sexual violence manifested as a power tool in order to control the African American community on *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*; two of the most brilliant works of Toni Morrison. The purpose is to shed light upon the concept of generational trauma inherited by the characters and passed on to their children fabricating new forms of oppression such as cultural hegemony, colourism and internalized sexual malice, that the community is furthermore burdened upon within, ultimately making them the “Other” of a society. Additionally, it will also discuss the result of sexual violence regardless of gender and the unspoken trauma that is evidently normalized or hidden ultimately creating double objectification of the African American community. This argument will be further studied through the lens of the womanism and psychoanalytical theories. Therefore, this thesis will convey how Toni Morrison created a hybrid form of post-modern consciousness on the bilateral effect of sexual barbarity and racial identity loss that occurs heavily within the African American community throughout generations, in defiance of historical timeline differences.

Keywords

racial identity loss, systemic racism, colourism, internalized racism, racial hegemony, sexual assault, incest, rape, paedophilia, postmodern consciousness, womanism, generational trauma, Black Identity Development (BID)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

African American literature has inaugurated gateways to different identities and beliefs through which readers can redefine their knowledge to rediscover cultural and communal ideology. These categories are instrumental in the formation of a collective sense on other categories like justice, morality, and the likes of vocalizing the discriminatory outlook on race. Alternatively, from love to war, to sex, to sexual abuse, this literary phenomenon has interpreted the unjust throughout the years. This, by the works of literature, has reached important milestones that have created an Afrocentric safe space which led to crucial success and many more to come in the future. Those milestones may be regarded as historical, political or even philosophical, but the most crucial impact that it adheres to is the search for what we know as “identity”. The reason why I claim its significance is because of the intense articulation of the brutality of enduring slavery in 1873 in Cincinnati and openly hostile livelihood of the African American community during the 1940s in America as seen in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eyes* respectively.

My approaches to the novels are based upon two factors. Firstly, I would like to discern the suppression of racial identity that the characters, in both the novels experience through oppression and violence. Secondly, I would like to emphasize on the brutality of sexual assault which examines how the characters experience an identity confusion and an unresolved trauma. By choosing not to disregard the sexual misconduct done by the characters in the novel who submitted themselves to paedophilia and incestuous rape; but by breaking their narrative and analysing their involvement in those acts by psychological, anthropological and literary theories, I aim to bridge the gap of decoding how and why sexual violence is used as a power tool and that incidentally the effect of racial identity hysteria as well. The reason behind this is because, I believe that there should be more discussion on how Morrison aimed to illustrate her characters in the

novels with actual representation of historical events leading to the amalgamation of identity disarray and sexual violence. Therefore, we should discern these characters by not categorizing them into a portrayal of ‘good’ or ‘evil’, rather it is how slavery has affected each African Americans to be victimized by generational trauma. I would like to further contribute to the concept of ‘double objectification’ of African American women in a community as my third factor of discourse. In order to represent important female characters such as Sethe, Pecola, Baby Suggs, Freida and others we cannot move forward defining ‘identity politics’ if we must opt to understand the concept of ‘Womanism¹’ in order to break down the narrative of both the novels. Now the reason why I chose these novels using literary analysis and anthropological theories is to significantly understand variation of the two different timelines in order to dwell into the motion that, the community has had to struggle with generational trauma after the end of slavery, while also highlights the callous and inhuman torture against them. What I am bringing new to the subject of concern in terms of generational trauma is by researching the characters under Black Identity Development, a research performed by Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson III’s in their work for “New Perspective of Racial Identity Development”. I believe that this topic has not been approached by critics from this concept of discussion. Hence, the purpose is to shed light upon the concept of generational trauma inherited by the characters and passed on to their children fabricating new forms of oppression such as cultural hegemony, colourism and internalized sexual malice, that the community is furthermore burdened upon within, ultimately making them the “Other” of a society.

¹ In 1989 by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined this term to describe the intertwined impacts of racism and sexism upon Black women

i) Mapping postmodernism into a hybrid representation with the author's work:

In order to define Toni Morrison's work, it should be understood that there is no fastened narrative she adhered herself in. The reason behind this is because while black representation was itself a 'near to impossible' success to thrive for, it became more complicated for black female writers to reach towards an equivalent challenge. However, despite this negative environment, Toni Morrison has however made her progress with the narrative she believes in. Susan Sniader Lanser in her book *Fictions of Authority* speaks of the 'postmodern authority' of Toni Morrison believing that, there is a similar merging of African-American consciousness with European postmodern sensibility in the ways which Morrison "maximizes" the concept of 'a realist authority' (p.135). She further clarifies that Morrison synthesizes postmodern consciousness with African American politics which uses a dismantled discourse² in America. I believe Lanser has mentioned an interesting point which is the author's narrative journey from *The Bluest Eye* to *Beloved*. She mentions that other than moving from the Western epistemology that exposes the racist foundation of the culture, the author makes another critical move where the narrators increasingly tend to refuse to accommodate a white audience.

From Kimberly Chabot Davis's work "Postmodern Blackness: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History" we learn that Toni Morrison herself was against the post-modernist appeal given it was highly under criticism because it had insufficient to no illustration of diversity. Her portrayal of redrawing and representing the authentic historical agency shows that her novels were mostly African American social protest that counterclaims that any assertion that lives of black people have nothing to do with postmodernism ignored the complex history

² African American literature authoritatively spoke against the exposure of racism and maligned indifference to violence against black people. Kimberly Davis believed that this specific literature opts to fill a gap neglected by historians, to record the everyday lives of the "disremembered and unaccounted for" p.245

between black protest and diverse academic discourse. She further mentions that Morrison represents history as fictional however, she believes that the author does it, in order to heal her readers. She re-evaluates history through a conceptual outlook through the novel *Beloved* in order to open the reader's mind to something "real". While the novel shouldn't merely be assimilated into the canon, Morrison's work ought to be recognized as a contribution to a recent voice to the debates concerning postmodernist history, a voice that challenges the political orientation of abundant postmodernist theory (Chabot 243). In a 1988 interview, Morrison applauded the emergence of an advanced body of historical fiction and found it ironic that "that black writers are descending deeper into historical concerns at the same moment white literati are abolishing it in the name of something they call 'postmodernism'... History has become impossible for them" (p.247). Barbara Christian, a renowned critic upon Toni Morrison's win for the Nobel Prize mentions an interesting take which helps my motion of debate with postmodernism appeal being essentially problematic while analysing an African American, in fact any black literature in general. She mentions that "the power of this novel as a specifically African American text is being blunted" as it is being appropriated by white academic discourse (Christian 6).

I believe that a culturally powerful discourse as postmodernism should not be limited to a few critics to refer to a sealed set of texts, usually produced by white men. I agree with Kimberly Davis when she mentions that she would like to see it continue to be a site of contestation for meaning, cultural power, and political changes. Morrison's novels pose a great challenge towards theories especially on two views as it confronts metanarratives related to history and time, and also claims the African American representation on the postmodernism view, thus adding more diversities and shifting the limited ideologies more into a hybrid and progressive modification.

ii) **Selection of the two text for analysis:**

Published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye* was Toni Morrison's first novel which was set in 1941, a year following the Great Depression, in Lorain, Ohio. Each of the characters in the novel has his or her own stories and perspectives but one of the most important characters that the author has structured accordingly in order to highlight the effects of colourism in the external and internal factors of it, especially through Pecola. She is the survivor of being marginalized because of her skin colour and the victim of incestuous rape. With the grotesque sexual violence and oppression towards the community, the author expresses the problems and harsh realities of not being incompetent because one was not born "white". Sexual oppression can be difficult to speak of but once these unspeakable events of female subjectivity are confronted within literary masterpieces, the readers deal with these difficult situations on their own terms. The media culture has given such importance to the beauty standard of "whiteness" which till this day has been a burning issue for discussion. *The Bluest Eye* voices against the unfortunate standard that puts every other community as "minor" because of colour itself giving rise to "internalized racism"³.

Beloved, published in 1987, has a different setting than that of *The Bluest Eye*. Set after the American Civil war (1861–65), the author wrote the novel, being inspired by the life of Margaret Garner, an African American woman who escaped slavery in Kentucky, by crossing the Ohio River to Ohio, a free state. She was known for her "notorious behaviour" because she chose to kill her own child rather than being set back to slavery. Representing the characters Sethe, Denver, Paul D and Beloved under horror-like scenes from the beginning of the novel, Morrison sheds light to complex family relationships, the effect of slavery and definition of manhood.

³ conscious and unconscious belief of a racial hierarchy in which white people are consistently ranked above of people of colour. Believing the racial negative stereotypes, norms and values of the oppressor and following the white standards by disregarding one's own.

Despite having differences in terms of plot and setting, what the characters from the two novels share with their mothers, women objectification, the disoriented journey of finding one's true identity and many more. Again, let us recognize both the novels address the history, racial discrimination, oppression and the internalized negative virtue of being "black" even after years of slavery that is highlighted through sexual oppression.

iii) **Who is Toni Morrison? Recognizing the writer:**

Before we dwell into the topic of discussion it is important we look at the author herself. The essence of the novels can only be captured once we get to know the author and her struggles, beliefs and intentions of being an African American woman in America where racism prevails, demand and protest for equal rights were and still is frequent. The Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. In her late 1960s' she became the first black female editor in Ransom House in New York City. When the author was young, she realized the concept of colourism, racism and the feeling of being the 'other' and not the same in a society. Her father grew up in Cartersville, Georgia where he found a group of white people lynching two black businessmen who lived in his street. He was fifteen years old when he had to experience this horrible scene revealing a sentiment of fear. In aspiration of escaping racism, violence and affirmatively securing his employment, he moved to a more racially integrated town of Lorain, Ohio. Morrison in an interview mentions that "He never told us that he'd seen bodies. But he had seen them. And that was too traumatic, I think, for him"⁴ in an interview with *The New York Times*. Her father's notion of circumstances has great similarities with Paul D, one of the African American slaves who escaped from *The Sweet Home* because it became almost impossible to live a life with constant violence and dehumanization. On the other hand, When Morrison was

⁴ Ghansah, Rachel Kaadzi (April 8, 2015). ["The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison"](#). *The New York Times*. Retrieved April 29, 2017.

around two years old, the landlord of her family set fire to the house they lived in when they were home, because the rent was not charged by her father. Her family reacted by laughing at the landlord rather than collapsing into despair to what she called this “bizarre type of evil⁵”. This setting is also seen in *The Bluest Eye* as Cholly Breedlove, the father of Pecola as he burned their house out of spite. As we dwell into the novel, we can see spectrums of experiences that the author had experienced and symbolically portray in her novels.

However, her professional life was equally difficult because of the title she earned for herself. Marcus Nehl’s book “Transnational Black Dialogues” explains some of the controversies she faced during her publishing of the novel *Beloved*. He mentions that during the 1980s, after the publication of the novel, she was heavily criticized by black male intellectuals and writers like Ishmael Reed and Stanley Crouch for focusing explicitly on forms of disloyalty, violence and corruption within the black community and, particularly, for representing black male protagonists as both victims of white racism and oppressors of black women. Quoting Maria I. Diedrich and Werner Sollors⁶, he adds that these male critics were somewhat agitated by the sole representation of “radical feminist project and envious of the critical and popular success of Morrison’s novels”. To counterfeit this very argument, Nehl’s motion was expressively impressive because he explains that this very “radical feminism” not only brought changes on the perspective of what feminism represents, but also shed light and opened up about the experience of intra-violence acts against black women from within the community (Nehl 68). I have to take my stance and agree with Nehl’s motion because, in order to bring more radical changes in the system of representation and to expose the repressed and internalized issues, it is important to touch on

⁵ Streitfeld, David (October 8, 1993). "The Laureates' Life Song". *The Washington Post*. Retrieved April 29, 2017.

⁶ “Introduction” *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*

different aspects such as violence in class, race and gender regardless if it outside the community or happening within one.

The Bluest Eye since its publication in 1970, has often faced challenges and controversies. The novel not only deals with grotesque sexual violence, internal racism, but it also expresses the intense psychological the African American community had to face because of the loss of identity and becoming a victim of a cultural hegemonic environment. However, the engaging part of the novel is the participation of young characters and how they had to somehow charter themselves to similar oppression. Most recently, the article published in 2014, *On Beauty: Banning Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*, Laila Lalami mentions how the novel was always challenged. The recent case being On August 29, 2013, Alabama State Senator Bill Holtzclaw mentioned to *The Atlantic* that, "The book is just completely objectionable, from language to the content⁷". To get more context about the controversy, Alyssa Rosenberg further looks into the article written by Ali Jones published by *The Atlantic* mentioned that "The novel is seemingly the most controversial on the 11th grade reading list, and thus, an easy one to criticize—there have been efforts to ban it in schools and libraries since it was written in 1970" (Jones, 2013). To that Alyssa Rosenberg in her article "The Most Disturbing Argument in The Attempt to Ban *The Bluest Eye* From Alabama High Schools" says that misrepresenting an artist's view of identifying sexual violence as a content for awareness is far too common in a larger culture. She further mentions that if we drive people away from honest depictions of sexual assault because they think consuming the content will make them conniving in the sexual exploitation of children, or that it fundamentally will render them "sexually odd", what we are doing is finding a good way to prevent

⁷ Jones, Allie. "None." *The Atlantic*, *The Atlantic*, 29 Aug. 2013, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/08/alabama-republican-wants-ban-toni-morrison-bluest-eye-schools/311580/.

them from engaging with work that could broaden their knowledge and empathy. (Rosenberg 2013)

However, apart from achieving several awards including the Nobel Prize itself, it should be mentioned that what she has achieved for the cultural and social impact and outlook of race and awareness towards sexual oppression is far more credible. Despite the controversies and challenges that were put against her works, she still had proper acknowledgement and confidence to not shy away from it. I am therefore choosing to honour her, because of how her work has moved me to look into the effect of history; how it affected an entire community through generations, and how much internalized racism and psychological trauma entails in families due to colour and history.

Chapter 2: Methodology

My perspective is to understand the co-relation between sexual violence and racial tension with one another in order to dissect the characters with the help of psychological dissociation of identity loss and confusion. My motion is to prove that the social construction of race and then dissemination of it, as a negative value which is instrumental in the way actions and reactions can become group specific which has affected the community in a psychological way, leading them to resort to violence to assert “power” or “authority”. I believe I can contribute to Toni Morrison’s works through acknowledging the representation of the African American community and recognizing the trauma with an in depth literary analysis and anthropological references.

i) Looking into the novels through spectrums of historic timeline:

The importance of learning the historic timeline (Depression, The American Civil War, Jim Crow Civil Rights Movement) when it comes to understanding the effect of violence and

racism puts on a certain community is crucial. Furthermore, we need to understand that the two novels were set in two different timelines, yet the trauma lingers through generations. Therefore, we must look into why slavery is such an important topic to discuss even after 200 years of the “Colonizing Trick”. Now there are two historical contexts we must look at given the settings of the novels and the different historical contexts portrayed in them. *Beloved* was written in 1988 but the narrative is set to concentrate on the historical event which lingers in 1873, Cincinnati. It was written as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act 1850, passed by the Congress. At this point, the division of slavery affected Sethe and her family was victimized to. The law was part of a series of Congressional compromises. It was designed to build a political balance between the Northern “free” states and the Southern “slave” states. It was often seen that fugitive slaves from the South would flee to the Northern parts such as Ohio, Delaware, Pennsylvania etc. just like Sethe did. On the other hand, *The Bluest Eye* was set in 1941, when the United States of America was recovering from The Great Depression (1929–39) and just getting involved in World War II (1939–45). These moments were very traumatizing for the entire country, however the African Americans had to face more brutal consequences. About 25% were out of work but for the African American community it became 50% given the white community were given most priority⁸. Some places in America made sure there was a strict segregation between the white community and “the people of colour”, which makes us concentrate on looking into historical timelines such as The Anti-Jim Crow Movement and The Harlem Renaissance.

By understanding the historical timeline, we can concentrate on one of the essential theories known as “systemic racism”. To understand the essence of “systemic racism” we can look into Joe R. Feigan’s work. From his book *Racist America*, we get the insight of the social, class

⁸ Krysan, M., and R. Farley. “The Residential Preferences of Blacks: Do They Explain Persistent Segregation?” *Social Forces*, vol. 80, no. 3, 1 Mar. 2002, pp. 937–980, 10.1353/sof.2002.0011.

and gendered discrimination which added to the racist oppression. While explaining the racist connotations in a social setting, Feigan believes that most of these “contemporary forms of racial discrimination” adheres from the idea of oppression from post slavery and Jim Crow. This gives birth to the enrichment of a poor past. When black Americans encounter whites in a social setting, they are often met with negative beliefs, orientation and ideologies. To this Feigan adds that racial disparities exist because a vast number of whites still hold such anti-black attitudes, biases, photographs and perceptions, because their views are very negative. Research reveals that when most whites communicate with Black Americans at work, in restaurants, on the street, at school, or in the media, they continue to think of Black Americans as the “other” and oftentimes a minority or a threat (p. 145). In his book *Systematic Racism*, he further explains that African Americans essentially became the victim of oppression because with the passage of time they had become the “other” group. The reason why black community discrimination is so prevalent is because of gender specific systemic racism. Many black women were raped by white elites and the working middle class. The children resulting from these rapes were still labelled as ‘slaves’ and were ultimately enslaved. To this Feagin mentions that, perhaps the obsession of these white extreme characters comes from the history of the need to oppress and replace a group of people, when in reality they are dominating over their “unacknowledged kin”. (p.16)

Systemic racism officially came to an end during the Civil Rights Movement, as it has been subtly replaced with colour-blind racism in the neoliberal state. Now from a general discussion on the definition, we know that the term “a colour blind society” means a society where racial classification will not limit an individual’s opportunities. Eduardo Bonilla Silva in his article “The Structure of Racism in Colour-Blind, ‘Post-Racial’ America” mentions that for about twenty years he has been claiming that the end of Jim Crow racism, does not necessarily mean that it was

the end of systemic racism in general. Instead a new system emerged which he calls “the new racism”. Now this very new racism is further labelled as “colour blind racism”. He further clarifies by acknowledging that the philosophy is as straightforward and clearly non-racial as the current racism period's traditional practices. By colour-blind racism he refers to racial ideology focused on the shallow extension of liberalism principles to racial problems resulting in "raceless" reasons for all kinds of race-related issues. Furthermore, the arguments of Whites essentially justify our current racial status because they see no justification for any kind of interference to even boost the level of racial injustice. And the current political rhetoric of Whites makes them "look fine" because they no longer sound "racist." (Silva 7)

ii) Perceptive outlook on sexuality, violence, power dynamic:

One of the most vital aspects which we will be concentrating on are the rape scenes, sexual oppression and childhood trauma scenes in the novels. The reason behind this is because sexual oppression in the novels does not only portray the gender objectivity, and the force of “balance of power”, it also shows how the author made it a tool to explain how sexuality in itself is a strong tool to voice against the system. After understanding the historical timelines and the causes of racial tension in the internal and external parts of African American community, we have to shed light upon theories of sexual violence and how it is often used as a source of not only malice rather a ‘power tool’. Hence discerning how sexual oppression occurs we need to look at two points: power dynamic and sexuality. Michel Foucault’s theory on sexuality and power in *The History of Sex* gives “sex” and “sexuality” a completely different form. One of Michel Foucault’s theories was that the idea of sexuality has to be taken more seriously because it has been repressed by history. He took different ideas of history and explained that sex was beyond just reproduction and that there were far too many concepts other than it being controlled by the “state”. Chapter

five of the book famously known as ‘Right of Death and Power over Life’ has an interesting take as he dwells into knowledge about sexuality and race and says “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques” (qtd in Chow). Rather than looking at ‘racism’ in an antagonist or in a concept of tension regarded towards colour, or geopolitical issue, he analysed racism which is characterized as a power dynamic. Therefore, racism is a systemic wedge that can constructively create war like struggle between who can live and who can die⁹. Again, Dorothy Willam’s work on “Definition and Violation: Incest and Incest Taboos” takes grand theories from both Sigmund Freud including other quantitative research, participants, analysis from anthropologists such as D. Szabo, C.W Wahl and others to show the rationalization as to why incest should be fundamentally prohibited.

Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi Ann Roberts in their book *Objectification Theory* mention that “many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use. The sexual exploitation and victimization of African American women from the days of slavery to the present has led to media images and stereotypes of Black women as sexual aggressors and sexual savages” (8). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed this theory as an integrative system about how to perceive indictment of women's socialization and sexual objectification experiences are interpreted into mental health issues: mainly depression and sexual dysfunction, which is more prevalent among women than among men. In a noteworthy study their findings backed a model where surveillance of skin tone was carried out related with skin tone discomfort and body shame in a special and optimistic way. Outside the task of skin tone monitoring, body shape and size surveillance were uniquely and positively linked to body shame

⁹ Foucault Michel, ‘Society Must Be Defended’: Lectures at the Coll è ge de France 1975– 1976 (hereafter ‘Society’), ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York, NY: Picador 2003), 259

but not skin tone disappointment¹⁰. The generational trauma and disorientation that is prevalent amongst young children and adults show us how the effect of ‘colour’ is a factor which affects African American community much like it did for the characters in *The Bluest Eye*.

iii) Analysing the novels with Fanonian observation and addressing the “Other”:

In order to understand the racial connotations in the novel I believe we should be looking at the cultural and historical references through a Marxist standpoint. Therefore, initially we will be looking at Frantz Fanon. He was a writer, psychiatrist, philosopher whose works are influential in the fields of post-colonial critical theory. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* his take on violence. Fanon proposes the rationality of constructive violence and its role in the decolonizing process, a process that completes the emancipation politically and, precisely, psychologically. Although his focus is one the decolonization of Africa, however, his perspectives are parallel to African American community and underscores the difference between African and American situations. His message is simple yet assertive. The struggle for power in colonized states will only be resolved through violence. The reason being, these states are kept in control with violence, therefore the authority can be rightfully gained back through reversing the action of violence itself. He highlights how the concept “racialism” has divided societies with marked inequalities in all fields. When it comes to the concept of decolonization Fanon suggests that the middle class who will assume that it is the end of the colonial regime, will remain to be fiscally dependent on the power of that very group that has colonized them. With external trauma psychological damage emerges, and brings the sense of subjectivity of the natives with it. Exposing oneself to relentless violence, bigotry, and degradation destroys the native psyche. In order to leave

¹⁰ The experiment was performed in an African American College African American college with participants Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar, and Yoder (2008)

the powerless helpless for the future and without an identity, this destructive brutality often stirs up a great deal of inner anger for the natives¹¹.

While concentrating on Frantz Fanon, we should also mention Jacques Lacan and use his theory of the “other” from a racial standpoint and analyze it with the idea of “mirror stage” and the concept of “self” and “other”. For Lacan this is the social self that watches, criticizes and guides the structures of cultural distinction rooted in psychological differentiation. Helen Moglen in her article “Redeeming History in *Beloved*” evaluates her research with Lacanian theory of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ and mentions that anxieties caused by emotional separation are projected in imagination onto others who are then identified as fundamentally different from themselves, at the same time the differences that threaten the dignity of the ego are denied and that union with the ‘Other’, who reflects those differences, is perceived as necessary to the completion of the self. The Other, in the first case, is the object of extreme fear and hatred; in the second, an object of likewise intense desire. And while the resolution of the self-caught dilemma as it is between fear and desire theoretically occurs with the subject's entry into the Symbolic Order, this resolution is inevitably compromised by the larger societal processes that decide it, but only in a mediated process. (Moglen 19)

iv) Racial hegemony and understanding racial identity:

Toni Morrison’s characters in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eyes* also symbolically identifies the hardships they face. I would like to use the concept of “cultural hegemony” which would help to explain aspects of both the novels when it comes to looking, dressing or living a lifestyle a certain way which would represent the whites more than their own culture, especially *The Bluest Eye*. Antonio Gramsci is an Italian philosopher who created this concept based on Karl

¹¹ Renko, Caroline. “A New Way of Thinking”: Frantz Fanon ’s True Opinion on Violence. Vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 6–7.

Marx's theory which asserts that the dominant ideology of society is reflected in the beliefs and interests of the ruling class. Gramsci argued that the growth and consent of the ideologies of the dominant society is essentially reared from institutions like school, colleges, church and media. He further states that these ideologies and systematic assumptions are taken as natural and inevitable conditions by the dominant society. This theory will be used in demonstrating the adolescent characters in *The Bluest Eye* interpreted the standards of beauty, and how the characters in both the novels were subjected to the norms and their own objectification.

v) Exploring the concept of 'Womanism':

Lastly, I want to take a womanist approach towards the two novels. The reason behind this is because I believe that the African American or black feminism in general are different from one another in both theory, struggle and historical timeline. I have noticed this experience through Morrison's portrayal of the female characters as well. First coined by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) the term "womanism" is now frequently used to represent the African American female writers to express their collective thoughts on the social system and how direly they need to change. Although, it must be mentioned that during the anti-slavery period the white women fought side by side to free the African American women from the oppression of the slavery and the racist system. However, the approach to white feminism and black becomes substantially different. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is one of the famous works with which many white feminists often rallied with because it portrayed the discrimination of power and privilege when it comes to gender. Protesting against the unjust inequality and unfair treatment between gender is a revolution as old as time. However, what makes womanism different from that is they wanted to change and seek a different approach

to class, race and sex. They believe that in order to revolutionize social hierarchy it is extremely important to bring in change into these three categories. Frances Beal (1970) in her essay “Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female” criticized the white women movement saying “Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and antiracist ideology have absolutely nothing in common with the black women's struggle” (Beal 98). Therefore, to proceed with my research I believe I am aiming to look at the author’s approach from a womanist standpoint effectively.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Expressing the racial oppression with violent outcomes is not something uncommon for the African American community. As mentioned before, with the passage of time and different concepts of ideologies, many believe that the term ‘colour-blindness’ is something that has demonised the “racist connotations” whereas it is more than just a misconception. The internal and external ignorance still prevails and if anything, the pseudo liberalism only masks the history with their so-called “acceptance”. The author showed us that the years of oppression has not only created a limited pathway to equal opportunities, it has also generated a chaotic position for the African American community being neglected of not only rights but also equal opportunity to lead a humane life.

i) Analysing reflection upon *Beloved*:

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison excellently portrayed the characters, separating their tragedies and tracing it back to their identity contradictions which makes us rationalize the problematic behaviours, and mortifying scenes in the novel.

Helen Moglen on “Redeeming History: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*” analyses how Toni Morrison significantly re-conceptualizes the psychological complexities of distinction and other social implications by fundamentally challenging the wonderful tradition she often works

within. She explains that Toni Morrison raises the universal concept of motherhood out of this paralinguistic space and returns her to history, exploring the dynamics of her social construction and at the same time expanding our understanding of the position inside the “self” from which the mythical figure is thought to emerge. Through reflecting on a black woman who is represented as a mother and a survivor throughout the story, Morrison describes the horrific human cost of becoming “other” and brings us throughout the dark “de-subjection” and non-differentiation regions which Freud or Lacan have not discussed. As a response, she opposes the traditional oppositions between reality and the surreal, between the symbolic and the imaginative, as well as between socio-political and psychological (Moglen 22). In a ‘conversation’ with Margaret Garner, Toni Morrison explains that her story was in fact inspired by two different women. A slave who tried to kill her four children-only her baby daughter was killed successfully-when she was captured as a fugitive: “She had made up her mind that they would not suffer the way that she had and it was better for them to die” (Moglen 584). The other was the story of a jealous lover shot by an eighteen-year-old girl. With her silence, the girl ensured his freedom, but deprived of medical treatment, she paid with her life for her silence. Morrison was engrossed by how these two historical figures elucidated their “form of love” suggesting that, “the best thing that is in us is also the thing that makes us sabotage ourselves” (Moglen 585). Moglen believes that Morrison has perceived the characters historically integrated and not as a whole entity, in order to show how the traumatising events perceived them differently in a negative manner. She further analyses that the result of cultural psychosis is due to the process through which the “self” survives and fails to prosper because of the hysteria of his or her surroundings. A hysteria in itself is a sign to fail to represent oneself in a cultural dimension since one is unable to find who he or she really is and where they essentially belong to. “In fixing the ‘other’, one fixes oneself as the Other of the other.

The fetishized object is shaped by fetishistic [sic] desire, and the need to objectify reproduces the fear of objectification which produces it.” (Moglen 24).

Aribert Schroeder in his book, *An Afro-American Woman Writer and her reviewers/critics: Some Ideological Aspects in Current Criticism of Toni Morrison's Fictions* mentions that often black writers were not taken as seriously and viewed from one standpoint disallowing their creative willingness to be noticed. The black writers were only taken into account of critic is when their fiction imitated the means and works of white writers for instance Ernest Hemingway or William Faulkner, in fact when a Black author is given praise the least bit, considerably, he is compared to alternative Blacks solely albeit modern white novelists who have touched similar ground. He then goes on to mention that this first immersionist approach was seen when Stanley Crouch, a white critic who looked into Morrison's work *Beloved*. Crouch instigated two accusations against Morrison. The first being that Morrison did not speak against Stokely Carmichael, LeRoi Jones, Eldridge Cleaver that is speak against the falsehood of a black policy that mixed a separatist thought, virulent anti-white bigotry, romanticized African past; and threats to overthrow the United States Government by any means necessary. And the second accusation being that in her sections concerning the sufferings of African slaves throughout the “middle passage”, Morrison, like many different Afro-Americans, fails to say the involvement of Africans in the traffic in her equation of injustice (113). To these critical views I want to argue that by commenting on Crouch's disallowance of letting black writers fixate on a matter of subject according to their likings other than fixating on the “universality” of a subject of concern, which seemed to be allowed and quite flexible to the white writers disregarding their gender and also somewhat for the popular black male writers as well. Moreover, I believe that the accusation is not accurate given the character Geraldine in the novel represents as an ideal individual who happens

to hate her own race and idealize the white American culture. The accusation of misrepresentation of the African Americans will be explained by Frantz Fanon's outlook on racism and violence against the oppression by dwelling into years and years of traumatic experiences that needs to be talked about and fought against, and why exactly Morrison did not look into the "universality" of subject matter in concern because I believe she concentrated on the core issues were the devastating cost of slavery even after years after "freedom" and the prolong identity conflict that is still to this day has become an issue with the passage of generation.

The novel shows how despite the slaves working under contracts, or taken in by white families such as the Garners in the novels, the oppression shows that the initial process of claiming human beings as slaves and asserting power through violence. Frantz Fanon in his book *Wretched of the Earth* mentioned that in forced labour there is no concept of labour, because it asserts intimidation and through course of time that is exactly how oppression starts. He mentions, "Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them" (p.15). One of the most essential quotes which helps to make the assertion of fighting back strongly is how Fanon looks at the term 'violence' in itself. While addressing the book to Europeans, he not only expressed the racial injustice that has been done to an entire community, rather the psychological torment that has led up to:

"You said they understand nothing but violence? Of course; first, the only violence is the settler's; but soon they will make it their own; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go toward a mirror" (p.18)

Violence in general according to Fanon has not been initiated primarily by the African Americans or "Negros" rather it was because of the initial brutal forced labour that has forced them to fight

against the system in order to have the justice that was denied for generations. Paul Nursey-Bray in his work "Race and Nation: Ideology in the Thought of Frantz Fanon" points out that Fanon's political position has also been misinterpreted. Critics also argued that his view of the relationship between ideology and social change is too simplistic and deterministic in its attribution of vital value to the transformative impact of violence on colonized consciousness. Bray mentions that it is in fact somewhat true that the role of violence has a strong emphasis on Fanon's point of view however he argues that he believes that Fanon has clear justification of facts when he mentions through his understanding that a "liberated consciousness" is not an inevitable response to social change, Fanon anticipates a variety of contemporary positions. In reality, he also argues that actively participating in the struggle to achieve the change may not be sufficient in itself. It is to be remembered that "Racism is not the whole but the most visible, the most day-to-day and the crudest element of a given structure. Racism is an ideology that justifies economic exploitation, oppression, and the domination of one country by another, of one race by another" (p.136).

I believe that the Freudian psychoanalysis to trauma and violence will significantly help us trace how the internal violence was affected through the identity loss and confusion of the African American slaves working in Sweet Home. It is believed that the "unconscious" is the suppression which serves as the cover for wishes and traumatic events. Sufyan AL-Dmour in her work "A Psychoanalytical Reading in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Trauma, Hysteria and Electra Complex" believes that through the arrival of Paul D, and the ghost Beloved herself, Sethe is reminded of the memories that she repressed and ran away from to move in her new life with her child Denver. However, quoting Deborah Ayer Sitter in her essays "The Making of a Man: Dialogic Meaning in *Beloved*" who also researched on the repression of the characters in the novel, mentions that the book was never about the institution of slavery or historical throwback rather it

was about the journey and torture of these anonymous individuals who were labelled as ‘slaves’, what they do to keep moving on and “how they make a living from scratch, and risk their lives through escape and make it last however it much time they have left to do so” (p.50).

Rape and sexual violence is a strong tool used by the author for the characters especially Sethe to revisit her difficulties in life and the violence she faced while serving as a slave for Sweet Home. The internalized violence goes to show that life has been a daunting journey of torture and violence. It is important to notice that sexual violence was not only cornered towards the women in the novel, rather Paul D’s experience also portrays that sexual violence was not limited to a certain gender. Pamela E. Barnett in her work “Figurations of Rape and the Supernatural in *Beloved*” points out that it is repressed memory of traumatic events that author represents through the scenes of rape which goes to show how the historical narrative or rape, internal violence, sexual oppression masked with slavery. Morrison potently narrates the rape by white enslavers of black women and black men. Slave narratives, as Morrison has written, are often silent on “proceedings too awful to document” (qtd. in Henderson 63). Morrison revises the traditional image of slavery by emphasizing the primacy of sexual abuse over other traumatic encounters. The novel portrays how Paul D was sent to prison in Alfred, Georgia where he had to stay with forty-six inmates and all of them were black slaves. They were locked in small boxes in the ground at night and were subject to sexual abuse and chain gang work during the day. Thomas A. Foster work on “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery” has an in depth look into how and why rape was a form of activity which would be so prevalent towards the slaves irrespective of the gender. He mentions that rape and sexual assault was a form of punishment which was a form of domination, however it is disappointing that the documentation of these rape cases are very few and most have been hidden in plain sight. He further points out that the sexual

assault took a wide variety of forms but the common factor in all of it was the legal ownership that enabled control of the enslaved body. Anglo-American culture held a long fascination with the penises of black men and projected both “desire and jealousy upon and objectified and disembodied black phallus” (qtd in Jordan 450). His idea of objectification is an interesting study which can lead us to trace the representation of Paul D. in the novel. Foster mentions that objectification of black men affected bodies and minds.

“Depictions of sexual prowess and the myth of the black rapist constituted one form of sexual abuse. This myth contributed to the legal and political disenfranchisement of black men from the earliest days of the Republic. Yet the psychic toll was also high. Being told that one is hypersexual and uncontrollable cannot be dismissed as mere racist caricaturing; for some men such messages would have inflicted great emotional pain.” (452)

As a result, we can depict why Paul D used to shake in trauma and become heavily depressed because of the experiences he had to go through and hence his mental breakdowns were so severe. Morrison stated the conditions of the torture which were often unseen or untold by history, by reminding the readers that recognition of the past must be done in order to see the unfair and unjust present.

ii) Analysing reflection upon *The Bluest Eye*:

Going beyond the Fanonian conception of *The Bluest Eye*, which essentially assumed a black subjectivity constructed in relation to a white ego-ideal, Morrison asks more fundamental questions about the creation, looks into the socio-economic issues, through reconstructing the roles of the characters through the lens of a racial subject. One of most interesting details about this novel is how Morrison began the story with several lines repeated in

different paragraphs written in a similar form of the best-selling children's books called "Dick and Jane". A representation of an urbanised family Sarah Ladipo Manyika in her work "On meeting Toni Morrison" mentions that she felt rather disoriented while reading the lines first, which the author intended most African Americans to feel. She mentions that, in Nigeria, where she learned to read, the corresponding primers were the "Peter and Jane" Ladybird books with the same stock of white characters and no black characters (courtesy of Nigeria's former colonial masters). All the characters were white. As a result, the absence of representation of the black children or even a black family was near to non-existent to her. As a result, it is evident to see that the novel itself is a depiction of how much the African Americans through the passage of years and generations had very less illustration in Literature and society in general. In the interview Toni Morrison herself mentions that, she is "writing to, about, and for other black people," and that she writes about black people because she finds it "interesting", and further adding that if there is a book one is searching for to read but cannot find it, then one must write it. This goes to show the amount of effort and inspiration Morrison herself had was from the revelation to represent history, and the external and internal violence and ignorance that a community has been facing through pages of her novels. It must be remembered that the novel shows the internal violence and hegemonic expectations that lead the characters to reveal identity loss, and sensing their absence of acceptance in a society. Progressing towards the novel, we are going to essentially concentrate on important elements, which are the cultural hegemonic expectations, identity crisis, internal family dispute of various sorts. This will help us understand the internal violence in the African American families more intricately because I believe a collective of problems after the post-slavery period has caused these vital issues which Morrison showed through this novel.

Morrison focuses on the influence of the fixation of white culture's arousing effect on African American community with the characters who are coming of age. It is interesting because I believe that the choice of age differences amongst the characters show how the adults and young individuals go through a similar identity crisis because of the distinct traumatic history of slavery and racism that segregates their existence in one way or the other. Eduardo Bonilla Silva mentions in his article on "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, 'Post-Racial' America" brings out a very compelling argument that even after the years of slavery, there has been a systematic racism which differentiates the group nonetheless. He mentions that the new form of racism is a system where the 'colour' and 'superiority' is still an issue that separates one community from the other. The black majority wherever they reside, face the same consequence when it comes to obstacles when it comes to the labour market, education, wage earnings and free mobility. This is something we can detect in the novel as well given most the characters' economic situation was below average all in itself. The white culture's arousing impact thus created the desire for the African American community to become like them in order to 'fit in'

Antonio Gramsci's perception of hegemony which not only includes the element of consent, but it also speaks of the various spectrum of coercive violent oppression, we can look into the internal issues that have been highlighted accordingly. The Italian philosopher created this concept based on Karl Marx's theory where he believed that the dominant ideology of society reflects on the beliefs and interests of the ruling class. From the book *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* we can see that, Gramsci argued that the growth and consent of the ideologies of the dominant society is essentially reared from institutions like school, colleges, church and media. He further stated that these ideologies and systematic assumptions are taken as natural and inevitable conditions by the dominant society. This theory will further state how the adolescent characters in

The Bluest Eye interpreted the standards of beauty, and how the characters on both the novels were subjected to the norms and their own objectification. Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book *Racial Formation in the United States* look into the dynamics of racism in America, the place where we see the characters in the novel are built in. In their fourth chapter on “The Theory of Racial Formation” they established an idea that racism itself cannot be an avoidable element of social structure which has been institutionalized in the United States, and referring to Gramsci, they describe that the means of structural racism is very clear. What we need to see that the constant racial and cultural hegemonic ideologies that keep surrounding the characters especially Claudia, Frieda and Pecola. One of the most important aspect that Omi and Winston had pointed out is that hegemony and hegemonic consent is actually relative to most oppression be it racial, gender, class or any other social constructions (67). One of the most prominent traits we get to find in a story is how most of the characters, especially the young ones, have a distorted sense of their identity, hence creating a consciousness within a question that prevails: “Who am I really?”. Now, Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson III’s work on “New Perspective of Racial Identity Development” has an interesting trace of this identity development research. According to their research on intersectionality on race, they have concluded an individual’s reaction to race and racial identity in five stages which are known as Naïve, Acceptance, Resistance, Redefinition Stage, and Internalization Stage. Now if we look into the characters we see a notion of the second stage. According to the stage 2 known as ‘Acceptance’ in the BID (Black Identity Development) scale it is said that it follows the conscious, unconscious, ideology of racial dominance and subordination, of an individual which facets towards their public and private lives. Since the BID developed it was seen that the notion and developing traits had changed more from time to time over the years, however the transition from naïve to acceptance has however stayed unchanged

and rigid. Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson III further pointed out that the black person in the conscious awareness stage of Acceptance has been described as following the prevailing notion that “White is right”. This person tries to achieve through resources like acceptance, sense of importance, products, power, and money by Acceptance and adherence to white social, cultural and institutional norms and values. His answer to prevailing social mode is an unacknowledged rather than consciously analysed behavioural patterns taken for immediate survival (Wijeyesinghe, Jackson 42). The Breedlove family, The MacTeer, Geraldine are handful characters we can directly find the same stage two traits in. The reason behind this is because, this sensitivity typically causes a Black individual to avoid interactions with other Blacks, and seek interactions with Whites, a behavioural pattern that in most social situations may appear to adhere to the dominant style. (44)

Looking into Dubin Edelberg in her work, “Morrison's Voices: Formal Education, the Work Ethic, and the Bible” she expresses her assimilated perception of the book by saying that Morrison’s message has been “consistent and plain” throughout her novels. She moreover argues by saying that “formal education is destructive” that the novelist “posits a kind of primitivism as an answer.” In her perception, “the operative assumption [...] is that the black cultural heritage of 'ancient earthly wisdom' and formal education are mutually exclusive.” Edelberg further mentions that the education of the novel has a “white middle class value” and emancipates a form of “funkiness” and “freedom” which the Blacks lose once they attempt to seek it. She exaggerates the term freedom by further notifying that: “To learn how to do the white man's work is necessarily to lose something very special, and like a traitor to play whitey's games and become an oreo or a coconut” (113). Now as evidently problematic as the statements are, Aribert Schroeder argues that her dichotomies are clearly invalid because they do not stand up to the actual examination. The

reason behind this is because her arguments were made outside the context of white racism itself. He believes that each of the characters have their own traumas which makes them perform the disturbing acts that they for instance Cholly Breedlove was first victimized by his parents, forced by white Southerners to act sexual initiation as a “performance”, and after years when he has freedom, he becomes dangerously free and loses track of his own identity making him commit terrible deeds which Schroeder points out that Edelberg completely dismissed. Again, it is important to point out that the children in fact, having the “white middle class value” education is fundamentally what the author expresses is problematic, not an identity or a lifestyle choice as Edelberg has mentioned. The reason behind my argument is because from the beginning of the “Jane and Dick” introduction in the novel it is clear to understand that the representation of the family in literature books were mostly presented through a white cultural and societal perspective making the characters feel displaced and disorientated from their true roots. Schroeder further points, that her discussion of educated characters pays little attention to the racial context. Therefore, agreeing to Schroder I also believe that the arguments to Edelbergs’ thesis were quite invalid and not well researched. To make my argument for Morrison stronger we can emphasize on Zanyar Kareem Abdul’s work on “The Silence of Women in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*” mentions amongst the given novel, he also talked about *The Bluest Eye* saying that there is a specific reason why the female characters especially Pecola portrays the sexist and racist oppression of a certain “Anglo-Saxon standard of female beauty”. The reason behind this is because Morrison wanted to show that the enemy of these issues is not only men, black or white, it is an entire culture surrounding the issue.

The Bluest Eye does not only use cultural specifications to show a hegemonic, one-sided society, rather it also emphasizes on sexual violence, molestation, identity loss and scapegoat

syndrome-like behaviours which highlight deeper problematic issues of a post racial society which becomes equally difficult for the community to adjust to. Keith E. Byerman's "Intense Behaviours: The Use of the Grotesque in *The Bluest Eye* and *Eva's Man*" mentions that the grotesque as a literary convention holds on to certain aspects, and one of them includes how the characters seem to carry an invisible burden where their fanaticism is re-approached not eccentric (qtd in Byerman). Dorothy Willner's work on "Definition and Violation: Incest and Incest Taboos" is another important criticism focusing on incestuous rape and power dynamic which applies psychoanalytical case studies of Sigmund Freud and Levi Strauss. She proposes that the idea of incest should be prohibited in the first place because it is essential to reduce the trauma and psychic disruption because sexual activity inflicted upon children imposed by adult predators. She further points out that, "fathers dominate their daughters by virtue of male dominance over females and by virtue of household authority" (139). Again the critic Bakerman from the article "Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison" mentions that by looking at Cholly's past should not be a surprise that he himself is a broken man because he was sent to the world to be an adult with so little time to prepare for interpersonal relationship: "set adrift by the death of his guardian, taunted and humiliated by white men during his first sexual encounter, [...Because he] does not know about nurturing love, and feeling love, he is incapable of expressing it healthfully" (544). On the other hand, Shelly Wong in her article "Transgression as Poesis in *The Bluest Eye*" believes that Cholly Breedlove's social and historical despair and his sexual disempowerment in various cases has grounded him to new measures which were grotesque and violent. Hence, we can trace a pattern in parenthood where Cholly was abused and abandoned by his guardians and the trauma is traced back to him sharing a toxic trait, which his daughter, Pecola became a victim to.

Now as we discussed before that the internalized oppression and identity loss is fundamentally present in the families in the novel. Toni Morrison herself in her afterwards mentioned that in order to represent the blatant truth about the damaging internalization of “immutable inferiority” that originates through the “outside gaze” it was important to look deeper into the root cause with the portrayal of a child who has been the victim of a social and domestic aggression. However, one of the most interesting principles she denoted was how there were characters and incidents that mounted Pecola to her downfall however she did not want to dehumanize the characters who contributed to her collapse. Rather, she carved a storyline for the other characters as well, to show how systemic racism, even after years of oppression has internalized an entire community from the deep within including the families. John R. Howard and Robert C. Smith’s book on “Meaning-Making, Internalized Racism, and African American Identity” has performed various quantitative research, two hypothesis and their findings resulted that parents in families who have academic competence, social acceptance, job security and ethnic awareness have adolescents and children who are more self-aware and create more positive self-awareness towards their physical appearance and choose to show interest and importance in their ancestral history. On the other hand, adolescents’ perceived physical appearance was most powerfully foretold by parents’ racial shame attitudes. This finding indicates that families at-risk of not being able to provide a buffer for adolescent children may operate from an internalized oppression perspective, that compromises caregivers’ ability to push and support their children’s development of a powerful racial identity and positive perceptions of physical look (Sullivan and Cross 58). Therefore, we can agree that, when it comes to acknowledging the internalized oppression inside a family or even a community, the recognition of the racial identity loss plays a big role within an individual and his/her growth through time.

Chapter 4: Textual Analysis of the novels

Despite the settings and storyline construction, one of the relevant factors we can agree is showcasing through both *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eyes* is that the characters have faced identity loss, confusion and sexual violence due to the repressive severity of historical slavery and unjust racial differences which tarnished not both the adult and young characters.

i) Racial identity loss, hysteria and disorder

The struggles of being in slavery and the aftermath of escaping the Sweet Home could not help Sethe to escape the loss of trauma and violence she faced in *Beloved*. Paul D's arrival and their brief and unsatisfactory sexual encounter in the beginning of the novel had them reminiscing the harsh reality that both had to escape. The novel takes us deep into Sethe's life from the beginning of her slavery in Sweet Home till the end of her time which shows the intensive trauma that her journey has been. Morrison has focused on the concept of identity loss and confusion because of the cultural and racial trauma faced by these very characters with violence be it physical or sexual, and in this novel we get to see the losses and violence that had not only tarnished but also created a sense of post-traumatic stress which sustained within them. The Lacanian concept of 'self' and 'other' is portrayed through the cultural psychosis where Morrison shows the narrative of being the "other" through a black woman who is the victim of black subjectivity and violence. On the other hand, if we look beyond the Lacanian concept, *The Bluest Eyes* brings up radical questions about construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of a socio-economic, both gendered and racial subject.

Morrison conceptualized the character Beloved in a fantastic fashion whilst making a realistic amalgamation of the traumatic memories of all the other characters. She continued the tradition of Late Gothic in the conceptualisation of the fragmented self as a supernatural energy that resides after death in the world, naming itself the materiality of history, the immateriality of Historical human perception; and follows the romantic form, imagined as a ghostly double that too enacts division and isolation, mirroring “others” are also self-projections, which are separated internally. The character Beloved in itself is the ghost of the deceased baby daughter of Sethe. She is the representation of Sethe’s trauma, the mournful sacrifice and most importantly the outlook of the character as a mother and a woman who had to sacrifice everything due the harsh reality of historical slavery. The variation in Sethe’s character changes from time to time but its shape is kept constant. In the novel, what we mostly get to pick up from the characters is how much they repress their past in order move towards a “better future” that too is a phenomenon they are quite uncertain to: for instance, Sethe’s stammer, Halle’s madness when he witnesses Sethe’s assault, Paul D who “locks away his heart in a tobacco tin buried in his chest and shuts down a generous portion of his head”, Baby Suggs who becomes unwell and takes to her bed after the murder of her grandchild, Denver’s two year muteness when she discovers that her mother is responsible for the murder of one of her siblings etc. are symbolic to the repressive memory which creates more confusion in their journey to survival, because the hysteria is allowing their ‘self’ to survive but not to prosper but it does mirror a psychosis that they suffer from. Another representation of ‘power dynamic’ which forces these characters to lose trace of their own representation and initiate an idea of self-dehumanization with the relationship that the schoolteacher shared with the slaves at Sweet Home, Sethe, Paul D, and Halle, as he beats one of his slaves “to show him that definitions belong to the definers, to the defined” (190). This confirms two perspectives I have shared before

from Helena Moglen and Frantz Fanon. Moglen believed that by dominating the “other” the black community hence evidently through the course of years will struggle to throw off the “white imago that reflects them to themselves” (Moglen 33). On the other hand, we can recognize the Fanonian understanding of violence which in the novel is also being used as a tool used to dehumanize the enslaved characters, as an example to show “power”. We can furthermore see countless times where Paul D has fallen victim to subjugation and this is where we understand that the trauma is deep instilled inside him even after his escape, as he fails to grow out of the endless violence and torture from Sweet Home. While discussing the aspect of different stages of Black Identity Development constructed by Bailey W. Jackson III, we can fit the characters especially Paul D, Sethe and Baby Suggs under stage 2 and 3 which is primarily known as “Acceptance” and “Resistance” as the individuals have the notion to believe that “whites are inherently right” but on the other hand in the Resistance Stage, one grows out of that idea, in its complex and multiple manifestations — individual and institutional, conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, attitudinal, behavioural, and political — one begins to understand and recognize racism. Individuals in Resistance become painfully aware as Black people of the many ways in which covert as well as overt racism affects them daily. This comes from the belief that his answer to prevailing social style is an unexamined rather than actively analysed behavioural patterns adopted for survival. The internal commitment to these criteria as a worldview, all that is Black needs to be rejected and devalued. After Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home, she had 28 days of freedom without the worry of being caught by the ominous grasp of Sweet Home:

“In its complex and multiple manifestations — individual and institutional, conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, attitudinal, behavioural, and political — one begins to understand and recognize racism. Individuals in Resistance

become painfully aware as Black people of the many ways in which covert as well as overt racism affects them daily.” (Narrator 172)

In the Ohio community through religious manifestation she kept trying to unlearn her past or keep it aside and re-create herself and claim her own future. She tried to discover the true self by not being a former slave rather being an independent person and caregiver to Denver. However, the reappearance of the Schoolteacher rewinds that very stage back to the Acceptance Stage due to fear and trauma. On the other hand, we see similar manifestation of this very occurrence with Paul D, as he was chained, lynched, sold, collared with which he eventually got to realize that manhood cannot “lie in the naming done by a white man who was supposed to know,” for Schoolteacher can erase the honorific ‘man’,” bestowed by Garner, and “break into children what Garner had raised into men” (220). Everything he learnt was rest upon Garner’s existence because “without his life, each of theirs fell to pieces. Now ain't that slavery, or what is it?” (220). On the chain gang, he becomes incredibly fearful of his own life which evidently makes him escape, locking his memories in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be” (72-73). He often repressed his memories of the Sweet Home, and the incidents to start a future of his own. While we discuss about racial identity loss we must acknowledge that the commodification of the black body was used as merely a slave and nothing more. When Paul D initially knew this value as “as a labourer who could make profit on a farm,” discovers, when he is sold by Schoolteacher from Sweet Home, “[t]he dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future” (Morrison 226). Sethe’s worth is also considered in a certain spectrum where she is a product of not only slavery rather she is also taken as a breeder. Without legal or familial connection both the male and female gender are excluded from any sort of social object. The males were allowed to carry guns, learn to read, and Sethe, was allowed to choose her life partner after a

substantial amount of time. These 'choices' are all secondary characteristics which does not justify once freedom to practice their freewill or gendered ideology for the primal characteristics should come from within and not the restrictive system of oppression they had to face under slavery. Therefore, defined biologically they are considered nothing but animals because they have a sexual function but in a social structure they are ostracized from any sort of inheritance of identity. Because systematically the independence that an individual is to receive and nourish from had been taken away from them. Hence we can interpret that the major reason for the identity loss or the aspect of 'self' is destroyed in the characters because they are unknown of their birth, and are aware of the subjectivity that the black community in general had to face for centuries.

The Bluest Eye as we know has a different setting than that of *Beloved* however it is crucial to know that the characters do face similar identity loss due to repressed socio-economic standards of their community. The internalized conflict to prove their worth and constant struggle of 'fit' into a certain standard till they face a downfall is the most gruesome truth of the African American community. Race is not defined by the outside physical attributions in a person, rather it has to do with their educational background, socio economic class and origin. In the novel we can see how the characters believed that "Whiteness" is synonymous with honesty, cleanliness and merit, whereas blackness is synonymous with immorality, filthiness, and worthlessness. Such concepts of race, which have to do with cleanliness, morality and merit, are internalized by various characters to differing extents. As a result, internalizing these forms of racial self-hatred brings upon different dysfunctional characteristics and attitude amongst the characters in the novel. For instance, we can see that Soaphead Church often uses its white heritage, its place of origin and its educational history to describe its "whiteness". Geraldine attempts to isolate herself and her family from appearing black by straightening her hair, using lotion on Junior's skin to prevent it from

being ashen, and keeping her house tidy. Again on Chapter 7, when we get introduced to one of the older characters Pauline Williams a.k.a Mrs. Breedlove we get to see how Morrison is letting her readers dive into the concept of identity crisis and insecurities through her. For instance, in the beginning of the chapter we learn that she is one of the children from her eleven siblings who impales her foot on a rusty nail leaving her foot crippled and causing her to flop about as she walks. She blames the tragedy of her life on the handicapped foot, alleging that her father rejects her on account of it and blaming her for her general sense of separateness and indignity. I believe that her self-perceived sense of ugliness starts with her handicapped foot, which gives her family a sense of alienation and a feeling of worthlessness, demonstrating the detrimental effects of self-perceived ugliness. However, this sense of worthlessness and feeling of isolation increases when she falls in love with Cholly Breedlove and after marriage moves to North of Loraine, Ohio. We learn that Pauline starts to miss her own people, and she had not encountered white people in the south as much but in the North she has to live amongst not only white people but with the black community who are very different than she is:

“Pauline felt uncomfortable with the few black women she met. They were amused by her because she did not straighten her hair. When she tried to make up her face as they did, it came off rather badly. Their goading glances and private snickers at her way of talking (saying “chil’ren”) and dressing developed in her a desire for new clothes” (Narrator 94)

The internalised racism in the community and the hegemonic demands that forces Pauline to feel more insecure than before, gives us perspective on the idea of how Pauline kept losing a sense of self-awareness because of the structural racism in the North. As I have mentioned before during the discussion of the historical dynamics of systematic racism, we come across the differences

between the South and North of U.S.A where there is a different type of prejudice in the North. The cultural groups were heavily divided at home in the South, and the whites were openly racist towards the blacks. Although bad, this has the effect of bringing together all the black people in a form of equal status and culture. The whites and blacks are more integrated in the North, and racism is less open and aggressive, but still there is an active existence. As a result, beyond the burden of white violence and brutality does not tie the black community together and blacks may begin to recognize the disparities between themselves, based on the white culture values they have adopted and prejudice grows in and within black's own and black communities, though freer is crueller as well. Salzman, M. and P. Laenui on *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* mention that the concept of internalized racism is both the cause and effect of a larger societal oppression:

“Internalized oppression is not the cause of mistreatment; it is a result of mistreatment. Internalized oppression would not exist without the real external oppression that is imposed on the less powerful by the more powerful ... it includes the internalized negative self-evaluations and dehumanization believed to be true by peoples suffering unjust and imposed social conditions such as racism, colonialism, and conquest ... it influences the thoughts, behaviours, and attitudes toward self, members of one's defined group, and the dominant group.” (88)

Morrison portrays racial discrimination which is vividly visible in the novel. The psychological response to direct racial discrimination can also be depicted by the young girl child Claudia. She is seen to be not affected by the white culture or the norms which is perceived as “acceptable” as the author mentioned as “blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned dolls” (Morrison, 1999, p.5). My perception of this is related to the dislike of the white dolls which, I believe, shadows Claudia's

detest towards the white beauty standards in general. Jane Kuenz's outlook on the novel in her work "The Bluest Eye: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity" mentions that one of the lessons we learn from history is that economic, racial and ethnic differences are erased and purposefully replaced by the false "equal ability" to consume even though what is consumed are competing versions of what we know as the "white image". She further explains the idea of how most characters in general are in a sense of self-denial to fit into the mass culture because African American culture frequently requires abdication of self or the ability to see the self in the body of another because of the constant portrayal of being "slave" or "Negroes" (422). When Claudia gets scolded for tearing the doll apart, she gets hurt by the result of hatred, and receives the reinforcement that the standard of beauty is white and white only: "But the dismembering of the dolls wasn't not the true horror. The truly terrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to the little white girls" (Morrison 57). Other references such as the character Maureen, who is a light skinned black girl in her school who is significantly more popular, which made her feel like she had the authority to be hurtful towards Claudia, her sister and Pecola. As a result of this discrimination that these children had to face from a young age, they begin to look for refuge, a hiding place which would make them feel safe: "The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love." (Morrison, 1999, p.16). The confession of the adult Claudia is furnished with understanding the self-loathe and generational trauma which was inherited due to experiencing violence and discrimination: I learn much later to worship Shirley Temple, just as I learn to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learn, that the change is adjustment, without improvement. (Morrison, 1999, p.16).

In "Probing Racial Dilemmas in *The Bluest Eye* with the Spyglass of Psychology" Zebialowicz and Palasinsk since blacks were denied equality and inclusion by the enforcement of

unequal and discriminatory perceptions of race and place, they felt a great sense of alienation and otherness in a society dominated by whites. Both the novels remind the readers not to forget the brutal slavery and the aftermath of the trauma that prevails through centuries. The characters may be fictional but they represent real struggles and actual incidents that Morrison believes should not be hidden or untold. Indeed, the cultural hegemonic outlook when looked at from Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony we can see how the African American community internalize their own roots because they are being fed the demands by the dominant standouts of the society. He believes that with forms of cultural aspects, in studies, institutions and media the dominant part of the society will influence the other communities to match up to their standard. Analysing this theory Peter Rose's, *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States* is able to explain that particular phenomena obviously the term superior and inferior is inherited in the discourse of the social order that is linked to human life in society. In addition, it implies other implications that can affect their lifestyle and possession of materials. I agree with Rose's statement because had there been no racial or cultural strata based upon ancestry it would matter very little if one were to be deemed 'superior' or 'inferior'. Rose acknowledges that the United States of America is consciously putting it on social hierarchy to climb the ladder of 'superiority'. She states that those who are coloured have generally been put in the inferior position and treated accordingly on all sectors of the society (Rose 11). Therefore, the White Anglo Saxon Protestants (WAPS) has been put as the dominant group whereas the African American is consciously placed as the inferior. As a result, there is a constant internal battle between individuals who are not white to behave like the 'dominant' part of the society in order to get benefits that are initially their own right. For some the internalised expectation of pursuing the white standard of beauty makes them think quite like them too, which evidently makes them treat poorly. As a result, the concept of

internalised racism comes in place. For instance, when Junior wrongfully accused Pecola of killing Geraldine's cat she became furious and ordered her to get out by addressing her as "nasty little black bitch" (Morrison 72). Both Pecola and her mother, including most young women in their community suffer from an internalised hatred which makes them want to constantly change or have the intense desire to change who they truly are.

ii) The unending violence through sexual assault and rape

The concept of sexual violence, rape, incest and shame is relevant in both the novels. Morrison chooses to show the trauma of sexual violence through internal and external force to not only portray the shame and difficulties the characters often face, rather the psychological trauma that follows them for the rest of their lives. The effect of rape does not only haunt women, rather it also influences various obligations to the male characters which stops them from emotionally evolving from their past.

a) Distress of rape as a slave regardless of gender or age:

Sethe in *Beloved* is a character who faces slavery in the most violent and traumatised ways possible. In the novel we get to see how Sethe, who decided to abscond from Sweet Home, where she worked as a slave, re-built her whole life on 124 BlueStone road, could not escape the memories that haunted her. The novel portrays the aspect of beating, lynching and normalized violence as one of the most brutal cases that the black community had to face. However, the representation of rape and sexual violence holds a deeper importance as allusions of rape left the characters incredibly traumatised and unsettled for Sethe, one of the main characters who killed her own infant child so that no "white man can dirty her", "so that no young man can with mossy teeth can ever hold the child down and suck her breasts" (Morrison 251, 70). This trauma of rape, lynching and brutal violence forced Paul D to "lock his painful memories in a

tobacco tin heart” (113). The memories of her rape had traumatized her more than the brutal lynching that left scars on her back. Beloved on the other hand is a character who is presented as a ghost of the past or the child which is open to interpretation. The reason I mention this is because, not only is she the ghost of the infant child, rather she is a grown woman who is a symbol of succubus as she assaults men and wants to steal their semen¹². Her body swells up as she feeds off her victims. Beloved serves as more than the receptacle of unforgettable stories; she re-enacts sexual abuse and thus figures the recurring nightmares common to trauma survivors. Sexual violence in this novel is not limited to gender. For instance, two memories of rape were prominently the ones which shadows Beloved’s particular form of sexual assault and violence. The narrators refer several times of the incident in which two “most-toothed boys” pin Sethe down and stuck and ‘steal’ breast milk¹³. Another memory that Paul D remembers from time to time is how he worked on a chain gang in Alfred Georgia where prisoners were forced to perform fellatio on white guards every morning (107-109,227). This, to me is one of the most enlightening aspect of the author in terms of expressing the distress and unending violence towards the slaves, is speaking out on the taboo of male rape which were very prevalent in the fields where black men and women used to work in. The wife of Stamp Paid, Vashti is coerced by her enslaver into sex (184, 232). Baby Suggs is forced to have sex with a straw boss who later breaks his manipulative vow of not selling her child (23) and a superior (144) again. Throughout the Middle Passage (62), Sethe 's mother is "taken up many times by the crew" much like many other enslaved women (180). Sethe's explanation for adopting the mysterious Beloved she fears that white men will "spring on" a homeless black girl wandering (68). The arrival of Beloved becomes the rumoured

¹² One type included in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian classifications of demons is the "night terror, female demons that attack sleeping men, children and women in child- bed to suck them of their vitality and blood" (Guiley 92).

¹³ Morrison, Toni *Beloved*, pg. 6, 16-17, 31, 68-70, 200, 228

black girl who has been imprisoned and sexually enslaved by a local white man who has recently died (119, 235). Other scenes also include desperate prostitution that are similar to rape: the sex exchange for gravure on the tombstone of her baby (4-5, 184) and the slaughterhouse work of the Saturday girls (203). Sethe's mother is "taken up many times by the crew" (62), as are many other enslaved women (180). As we see, these characters suffer with sexual assault done towards them we can see how the concept of rape is forced upon them in order to control and assert power over the slaves that the white farmers own. The succubus, who rapes and steals semen, is allegorically associated with such violations and the exploitation of the reproduction of African Americans. Just as rape was used to dehumanize enslaved persons, the assault of the succubus or vampire robs victims of physical as well as psychological vitality. By representing a female rapist and a male rape victim, Morrison emphasizes race as determining domination or subjection to rape, rather than gender. While explaining to Beloved why killing her baby came from a place of protecting the child, she mentions about the memories of rape that deeply affected not only her but the practice of raping the slaves was a custom that "Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble" (251). Sethe's despair increases as she explains the constant terror as "whites do not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad, you [can't] like yourself anymore". The painful despair of getting lynched and sexually violated left her in a traumatic state of mind and in a constant struggle to forget her past, but she fought and made sure none of her children had to face the same struggle of assault and violation:

"And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing- the part of her that was clean. ...*She* might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter." (Morrison 251)

The entire narrative screamed of the terror and outrage against the system that Sethe and her loved ones had to suffer from. But the intolerance and traumatic recollection helps us understand how deeply rooted sexual violence under slavery had cost them. Examples of infanticide in the African American culture comes from a form of sacrifice as mothers are often afraid their children will face the same terrifying experiences. Charlotte Brooks' slave narrative *in American Slaves Tell Their Stories* contains six interviews with slaves where she was one them. Like Sethe killed her children. She thinks that it is better for them to die before becoming who she is. A slave. She mentions that,

“They died for want of attention. I used to leave them alone half of the time.

Sometimes old mistress would have someone to mind them till they got so they could walk, but after that they would have to paddle for themselves. I was glad the Lord took them, for I knowed they were better off with my blessed Jesus than with me.” (Brooks 8)

Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* studies Freud's perspective on trauma, which can help us understand how trauma can often lead to disruptive memories which become difficult to forget and move on. She defines trauma as an “overwhelming experience of sudden catastrophic events in which the response to the event takes place in the often delayed, uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). This recurring action is a response to the “unassimilated nature” of the event. In nightmares, the trauma experience is made evident to the consciousness, which the individual would initially be unaware of. For Sethe and Paul D, the trauma of surviving the past and living the present is both painful and disconcerting. Caruth's take on disassociation of time and identity occurrence is due to “the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story

of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7). The aspect of finding one’s true identity after escaping in order to survive in a functional environment without constant violence and assault is a change which is positive, but it can also be difficult as survival becomes perplexing as these characters struggle to understand who they really are. For instance, Sethe manifests a form of truth to this statement as she survived her past but struggles to forget it as she remembers those distressing times often, however she prevents her daughters from going through the same.

One of the most enlightening aspect of the author in terms of expressing the distress and unending violence towards the slaves, is speaking out on the taboo of male rape which were very prevalent in the fields where black men and women used to work in.

b) Representation of the unspoken: Incest, Child rape and Paedophilia

The gruesome sexual assault in *The Bluest Eyes* includes narratives of truth. Child molestation, rape, and the objectification of women is common, but also Morrison believed this was highly unspoken of. In the novel’s afterword she mentions that the representation of the fallen and the young characters who experienced obscene situations of tragedy and violence due to racial contempt and difficult family situation where adults have faced difficult consequences were quite unresolved (Morrison 168). She shows that self-degradation due to skin colour can affect the most vulnerable and weakest being in a society, that is a child, a girl.

Introduced as Mr. Henry, by the Macteer girls, Henry Washintgton is a boarder at MacTeer Residence. He has a reputation for being a hardworking, quiet guy. He had never been married but had a lascivious side to it. He was friendly with the MacTeer girls, but this likeability covers his personality 's underlying and perverted aspect, which focuses on young girls. On

Chapter 6, the conversation between Frieda and Claudia opened up secrets about not only Henry but also Soaphead Church, the trusted religious counsellor within their community:

““He...picked at me.”

“Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?”

“Sort of.”

“He showed his privates to you?”

“Noooo. He touched me.”

“Where?”

“Here and here.” She pointed to her tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress.”

(Morrison 76)

Mr. Henry’s internal perversion was the first of many gruesome incidents we will notice that would highlight the obscene cases for children like Pecola, Frieda and Claudia as they experience the meaning of adulthood, beauty standard and generational trauma due to racism.

Mr. Soaphead Church formerly known as Micah Elihue Whitcomb is a white skinned West Indian man who is not only a self-proclaimed misanthrope, he is also considered as a trusted intellectual who is a “Reader, Adviser and Interpreter of Dreams” within the community. However, he is one of the most morbid characters as his perversion is masked by religion, silently living amongst families who trust their children around him. As previously mentioned he had sexually gazed and touched Frieda, but this was one of the many survivors because Soaphead Church. The letter which he addressed to God manifested the neurosis that Soaphead Church had glorified himself with where he it was his firm believe that God had forsaken His Creations and it was up to him to give what He was apparently not providing which is ‘hope’ for the lost children:

“The little girls. The little girls are the only things I’ll miss. Do you know that when I touched their sturdy little tits and bit them—just a little—I felt I was being friendly? I didn’t want to kiss their mouths or sleep in the bed with them or take a child bride for my own. Playful, I felt, and friendly....”

(Morrison 143)

The letter was also a confession where he spoke of his childhood, his abandonment issues, but mostly about luring other children with sweets and desserts while he ‘played’ with them. “Explanations of Paedophilia: A Four Factor Model” is a research paper written by two American sociologists, David Finkelhor and Sharon Araji, who observed the psyche and neurosis of paedophiles by collecting data and discerning them under socio-cultural and psychoanalytical theory. According to them there are four factors in which we can divide and understand how an individual can submit themselves to paedophilia. The first factor being “Emotional Congruence” a theory by Hammer and Glueck (1957), which highlights that individuals who have low sense of self-esteem and efficacy in social relationships, including an unresolved difficult childhood often condemned to reach out to a child sexually because it gives them the feeling of “power, omnipotence and power” (qtd. in Finkelhor and Araji). Now, we know Soaphead Church had his set of induced psychological traumas which were induced by external factors where he was brought up in a class conscious family, who mistook “violence for passion and leisure for freedom”. He also had abandonment issues when his lover Velma decided to leave him. So I believe after analysing the factors with time, Soaphead Church gradually grew a sense of hatred and distrust toward others and projected his neurosis to children.

At the end of the chapter we read upon the tragic downfall of Pecola, a young girl who wanted to have blue eyes and her only desire was to fit in and be acceptable. We also get to look into Cholly Breedlove's childhood and how the Breedlove family fell apart due to his financial setbacks and unsettled trauma. From the beginning of the novel we get to see how the Breedlove family were always having problems which ultimately forced Pecola to be taken in by the MacTeers for a good amount of time as Cholly burned down their house. On a Saturday afternoon, Cholly came home drunk and saw his daughter in the kitchen. Filled with acrimony, revulsion, guilt and tenderness, his emotions varied from time to time within that short period of time. He compared her daughter with Pauline, his wife. In the confused concoction of the memories of his wife and the excitement of doing a forbidden act, he decides to rape his daughter. He was filled with hatred and tenderness. "The hatred would not let him pick her up; the tenderness forced him to cover up" (Morrison 129). *Beloved* also shadows the incestuous desires through the ghost herself as she is taken in by Sethe and Paul D. As *Beloved* drains Paul D of his semen and lures Sethe to feel a primal sensation of desire, she becomes the embodiment of the traumatic past of them in the form of a pregnant woman. The imagery here portrays the symbolic representation of the unjust violence, brutal sacrifices and an ambiguous past they cannot get escape from.

My previous discussion on the factors which triggers an individual into submitting oneself to paedophilia as I have mentioned has four different categories. The fourth factor that Finkelhor and Araji named is called "Disinhibition" where a person with no prior history of paedophilic act or behaviour commits a paedophilic act under great person stress which can be unresolved trauma, unemployment or financial distress, loss of love, death of relative which creates a lower inhibition¹⁴. Another factor for incestuous act has been stressed on alcoholism¹⁵

¹⁴ Gebhard et al., 1967, p. 74; Mohr et al., 1964, p. 95; Swanson, 1968

¹⁵ European studies on incest and taboo (Schachter & Cotte 1960; Virkkunen 1974).

(qtd, in Dorothy Williams). Firstly, mentioning the character Cholly Breedlove, we get to see that he himself has had a difficult childhood as he grew up with his Aunt and Blue Jack, who was a father figure to him. However, he was always unaware of the warmth and protection of unconditional familial love. He was forsaken by his father once he tries to find him, sexually shamed by two white men where he felt forced to have sex with Darlene. He felt a sense of shame, rage and hatred towards white men and incidentally towards Darlene as well. He thought of himself as ‘dangerously free’ up until he met Pauline Williams, his wife. The sameness of routine in work and home drove him to madness. Not only that, he himself had his share of trauma that internalized despair and hatred towards women and himself. He was solely responsible for the downfall of his family and brutality towards his wife and children.

Morrison mentions that she did not want to “dehumanize the characters who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse”. She further explains to her reader that narrative should not be taken simply just by pitying the young characters rather she advises to “break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader” (Morrison 168). The readers should not be just touched but moved by it. On the other hand, Paul D and Sethe had similar form of tragic past which they never faced, but quietly hid them in their memories until Beloved arrives and forces them to go through the tragedy, which to me is a symbol that history should never be forgotten, rather the tyranny should be spoken against the system.

iii) **‘Womanism’: The rising wave for black representation**

There is always a question of Morrison’s readers that prevails in the wonderment if her writings are aimed from a feminist point of view. The reason behind this is because oftentimes the protagonist or the characters who undergo great amounts of trauma or survive extreme violence, happen to be a female. After discussing about the historical events of slavery, the trauma

and internalized issue of colourism I assume we can agree that the experiences of African American women are significantly different than that of white women when it comes to climbing the ladder of success in any shape or form. In 1968, a national organisation was formed including professional activists who demanded the equal participation and “full partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights¹⁶”. In the United States, the history of African-American women causes them to distance themselves from other campaigns closely linked to white women. Painful past heritages of slavery and oppression, and new advocates for their rights and cultures are doing their utmost to try this separation. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in her work “Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English” mentions that the reason why many black women novelists who write in English naturally have not allied with radical white feminists because alternatively, they explored the spectrum of other positions and built a thrilling, dynamic collection that defies rigid categorization. Most often than not a black woman writer is likely to be a “womanist” while a white social writer will be a feminist. (Ogunyemi pg. 63-64). Black writers are aesthetically different even though their writing technique may be different. It is because we are aware that their race separates them from white feminists; since they witnessed the subjugation of the past and the present black society and subtle (or not so subtle) influence of the present day exercised by the western culture over them. With my previous discussion on the female characters of both *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, I am hoping I have made this idea very consciously clear that the African American women and young adolescents have not only been marginalized due to the unbearable normalization of racism, they have also been forced to surrender many times through sexual violence and questioned their ability not merely as women, rather as a black African American woman. With time their offspring

¹⁶ Nancy Wolooch. *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984). p. 513

regardless of their gender at times struggle with understanding their drawbacks and question their existence with the burden of intergenerational trauma¹⁷. Sethe in order to find social freedom and a life of liberty had to escape in the most difficult of times. In order for the child to not lead the same life as her, she was bound to sacrifice one of her own offspring. Denver, Sethe's last and only child had also gone through various difficulties as she struggled to befriend or lead a normal life because of the house she was brought up in, symbolically portraying her race and family being a slave escapee. On the other hand, the mothers of *The Bluest Eye* have had their share of being 'unfit' for the community as they were victim to the internalized racist connotations of not filling in the shoes of 'expectations', their daughters went through the same, if not more.

As a reader it is quite clear that in order to see through the lens of an African American writer is not just to look at the themes or storyline, rather it is much bigger than that. It is the historical trauma, the unforgettable and often untold stories that Morrison is highlighting. It is just not facing the patriarchal system and demanding justice, it is rather the injustice of history, violence, and wrongdoings that the community had been facing through years of oppression, and black women had to face the wicked form of being objectified by both gender and race. That is the blatant truth that Morrison recollects her readers. I must remind my readers that we can never fully dissect the meaning of Morrison's novels through the lens of gender politics if we never take the concept of black feminism and womanism in consideration, because one can never peek on a writer's mind if they disregard the contrast of a radical movement affecting each community differently.

¹⁷ Defined by Támara Hill a licensed therapist and trauma professional, in the article "Should mental health professionals understand intergenerational trauma?" she defines intergenerational trauma as a set of traumatic events that began years prior to the current generation but has been carried from one generation to the other, regardless of the pace of time or change.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Be it social or economic, the spectrums of historical setting to express the remorseful tragedy of slavery, Morrison spoke her truth. The calamities of years of oppression is yet to disappear even in the 21st century. Therefore, we must ask ourselves if the concept of generational trauma that simple or is it deeply impeded on a community which needs a global understanding to break the chain. Morrison believed that racism will not be useful once people stop profiting from it, because there is always one way or the other, racism finds a way to become a tool for showing dominance. My purpose was to dwell in her work and bridge the gap between identity loss and sexual malice faced with trauma that the characters face and become responsible for the better or worse. Like Morrison advised her readers, I aimed simply to not just read and empathize, rather to break each and every narrative and be moved by them. Little did I know that the atrocities of years of oppression would be presently so vivid. The remorse of generational trauma still avails but it is essential to represent the diversity instead of aiming to compete in order to become the 'dominant'. Toni Morrison marked the concept of realism through representing each and every historical distortion with characters faced with grotesque-like incidents yet the dystopian world that she illustrated is just the mirror of historical reality.

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