

The Narratives of Racism, Trauma, Slavery and Resilience: A Comparative Analysis of

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*

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

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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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.
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Approval

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Abstract

The Bluest Eye and *Beloved* are Toni Morrison's two seminal works which portrayed the intergenerational racism, trauma, slavery and the longing for self-worth within the African American community. A comparative analysis of Toni Morrison's these two novels are introduced in this thesis paper. Moreover, this paper will discuss about the themes of race, trauma, slavery, identity crisis and the enduring effect of systematic oppression which Toni Morrison discussed briefly in these two novels. This study aims to portray the similarities as well as the differences between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. In addition, this thesis will focus on the psychological and emotional consequences of racism, trauma and slavery on the characters and communities of both the novels. Toni Morrison in both the novels explores the complexities of racial identities and the impact of trauma on the psychology of the Black African Americans. The key research question of this thesis paper is, How do the two seminal works of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* explore the portrayal of the psychological impact and consequences of racism, trauma, slavery and violence on the individual and communal identity of the African Americans? While doing this research, I have approached the research question by conducting comprehensive analysis of both the novels by finding the similar themes, motifs and narrative techniques. The significance of this research is to discover the impact of racism, trauma and slavery on the psychology of the people of African-American community. In addition, Morrison addresses these critical issues of racism, trauma and slavery to portray the struggle of this African-American community. Therefore, the key task of this research is to find the similarity and differences between these two novels. Hence, through exploring the comparative analysis between these two texts, the importance of African American literature is reflected in this thesis paper.

Key words: Toni Morrison, Racism, Trauma, Slavery, African-American community

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Toni Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* are two significant literary works that portray the life of African American people who are living in America. Although each novel tells a separate story but both the novels explore the themes of race, trauma and identity. In this thesis, the two renowned novels of Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* are discussed and comparisons between these two texts are presented. Both of these novels are significant as it discusses about the life of Black African Americans living in America. Toni Morrison just like another author Zora Neale Hurston has published her own observations about the life of Black African Americans. Morrison in her novels focuses a very unique narrative style that explores the complexities of racial oppression among the people of African American.

Morrison discusses about the enduring impact of racism in her novels on the lives of individual as well as African American community. *The Bluest Eye* which was Morrison's debut novel published in 1970. This novel is about a Black African American girl whose name is Pecola Breedlove. Pecola had to go through psychological distress and traumatic experiences because of her black skin tone. The key themes of this novel are racism, trauma and societal beauty standards. Moreover, this novel is set in 1940s Ohio city and it significantly discusses about the internalized racism and societal pressures on beauty standards that Pecola had to go through because of this discriminations of skin color which was present in African American society during those time. So, Morrison portrays the harsh realities of racism that Black African American girls have to face in those racially discriminated society.

On the other hand, *Beloved* is also written by Toni Morrison which was published in 1987 and this novel focuses on the haunting legacy of slavery that existed in America back then in 19th century. In addition, the aftermath consequences of slavery are also discussed in this novel *Beloved*. Sethe is the protagonist of this novel who had to go through trauma because of her past life since she is haunted by the ghost of her dead child whose name was Beloved. Morrison in this novel tells about the themes of slavery, motherhood, memory and the pursuit of freedom which was difficult to achieve in the time and context of post-civil war America. Although *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* have similar themes of racism but both the texts have their different themes and motifs. *The Bluest Eye* is different from the novel *Beloved* because it explores the destructive effects of societal beauty standards. On the other hand, *Beloved* portrays the haunting legacy of slavery through the story of the protagonist Sethe who was haunted by the ghost of her dead daughter.

During an interview of Toni Morrison along with Alice Childress conducted by *Black Creation* magazine, Childress addresses this issue that “all black writers, whether they intended to or not have been writing about not being free. Always from the beginning of America right up to now.”(Walker and Weather 92). Therefore, one cannot imagine African Americans without considering society’s insidious attempts of racism to retain black men and black women as cheap sources of labor, whether enslaved or ostensibly “free”. (Cormier Hamilton, 110). Therefore, a universal nature of Morrison’s published novels has been her portrayal of male and female protagonists failing or succeeding on the difficult journey to freedom which could be achieved through self-awareness. Therefore, it is noticed through the protagonist Pecola from *The Bluest Eye* and Sethe from *Beloved* that they struggle to realize their own identity and it has been

difficult for them to understand repeatedly. Hence, according to Morrison, by accepting the past, African Americans can achieve a psychological wholeness in the present which will also strengthen their power as a race in the future. (Hamilton, 111). Through this, Toni Morrison tells her readers about the psychological distress that her protagonist Pecola and Sethe had to go through in their past.

In *Specifying*, Susan Willis captures very well the importance of Morrison's themes as she says:

There is a sense of urgency in Morrison's writing, produced by the realization That a great deal is at stake. The novels may focus on individual characters like Milkman and Jadine, but the salvation of individuals is not the point. Rather, these individuals struggling to reclaim and redefine themselves, are portrayed as epiphenomenal to community and culture, and it is the strength and continuity of the black cultural Heritage as a whole that is at stake and being tested. (93-94).

Therefore, here Susan Willis says about Morrison's novels writing in Black Cultural Heritage. So, Morrison's works represent her female protagonists in a new way where they struggle with their intergenerational racism. Again, Morrison's female protagonist like Pecola from *The Bluest Eye* and Sethe from *Beloved* face a world that is very complex and makes their life difficult to survive. So, racism is a key theme which is represented by Toni Morrison in both her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*.

Chapter 2: Research Questions and Methodology

Toni Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* portrays these themes of trauma, racism, societal standards of beauty and the legacy of slavery on African Americans as these issues illuminate the sense of self-worth, pursuit of freedom and relationships by highlighting the human spirit in the middle of adversity and their resilience. The research design for this thesis involves a qualitative approach. The use of qualitative research helps identifying some complex phenomena such as literary works, exploring the profound depth analysis of themes, characters of the novel and many other significant narrative techniques. This thesis is a comparative analysis between the two novels of Toni Morrison which are *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. The comparative analyses section will focus on finding the similarities and differences between the two novels by considering various elements such as themes, plot structure, literary devices and character development. Moreover, theories like psychoanalytic, feminist criticism and post-colonial theory are added in this thesis paper. In addition, references to various scholarly articles and theories are discussed in the chapters below while answering these following research questions: How do the themes such as racism, trauma, slavery and self-worth portrayed in these novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*? How do the characters in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* express their respond to societal oppression and trauma? Moreover, how do the settings of the two novels contribute to the development of the central themes such as racism, trauma and slavery? How do the narrative techniques are applied by Toni Morrison in portraying the experiences of African American women in both novels? How do the history play in shaping the narrative and character development in both novels? The primary data for this study will be taken through the close reading of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Moreover, this will include

analyzing the text to identify the key themes, narrative techniques or style, character development and other elements. In addition, secondary sources such as scholarly articles, literary works or critiques and interviews of Toni Morrison will also be added to provide the additional context and various insights. Again, while discussing the themes such as, racism, trauma, slavery and identity additional care will be given to present the analyses and interpretations in a fair and respectful manner. In this way, by applying this research methodology, this thesis aims to discuss about the comprehensive and comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Toni Morrison in her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* portrays the struggle of African Americans. Morrison also portrays the profound exploration of African American people's trauma, identity crisis and most significantly their enduring struggle with racism. Hence, in American literature, it is noticed that Toni Morrison's two seminal works *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987) stand as an important pillars in various historical contexts because these novels portrays the difficulties, struggles as well as other complexities faced by these African American people. Therefore, this literature review of my thesis will focus on the comparison and exploration of the themes, techniques of narrative style and the other socio cultural contexts and implications that is present in these novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*.

In both the novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison expresses the deep root of the historical trauma of the African Americans through the character Pecola Breedlove and Sethe. Moreover, in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, we readers could notice the long pervasive effects of

the racial discrimination that existed back then in African American community. Again, there was also internalized self-hatred on the psychology of African American individuals which is specifically noticed in the protagonist Pecola Breedlove of the novel *The Bluest Eye*. On the other side, *Beloved* is set in the context of post-Civil War America. In this novel, Toni Morrison portrays the haunting and dangerous legacy of slavery. In addition, the harmful effect of this slavery is profoundly noticed on the lives of ex-slaves of America such as the protagonist Sethe and their families. Therefore, Toni Morrison's portrayal of trauma can be deeply noticed in both of her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Additionally, through close reading of both these texts, readers could notice the intergenerational transmission of difficulties, struggle and pain for both the individual characters of the novel as well as the communal members of African American. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola had to face racism in an extreme level where she started to believe that having blue eyes and whiter skin tone is the ultimate epitome of beauty. Again, in *Beloved*, Sethe had to go through the struggle of being a slave in her past life as she has darker skin tone.

Scholars have presented many literary works about the writings of Toni Morrison's fiction. In *The Bluest Eye*, scholars have focused on the themes which are beauty standards, racial differences as well as societal standards of beauty through the eyes of young African American girls such as the protagonist Pecola Breedlove living in 1940s Ohio city. Likewise, in *Beloved*, scholars mentioned about the haunting presence of slavery and its dangerous impact on the lives of individual as well as collective groups. Lisa Wookfork's in her article "Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Study in Myth and Afro-American Experience" talks about the profound analyses of the symbolic importance of physical appearance and racial identity in the literary works of Toni Morrison. Scholars also discusses about the innovative narrative techniques in the works of

Toni Morrison. Morrison's literary writing follows a non-linear storytelling which has been the subject of discussion among the scholars. In *The Bluest Eye*, the novel was written by Morrison in shifting perspectives which highlights the inner lives of its characters. But, in *Beloved*, Morrison wrote the novel in fragmented narrative writing style.

In the article of Carolyn Denard's "Narration and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", the author discusses about the narrative writing strategies of Toni Morrison's and the following implications of it on the thematic sector. In addition, many scholars have portrayed Toni Morrison's works within the broader socio-cultural contexts. For example, these issues of race, gender and power are briefly discussed by many renowned scholars in their articles. Scholars in *Beloved*, shows and focuses on the situations of post-Civil War America which Morrison has discussed in her novel through the ongoing struggle for racial injustice. Barbara T. Christian's article "Race and Gender in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*" and in the article "Toni Morrison and the Burden of the Passing Narrative" by Sherry L. Redstone; the authors have discussed briefly about the intersections of race, inequality, gender and identity crisis of the characters in Toni Morrison's fiction. Although the scholarly writing has shed light on numerous aspects of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, but there could be more research in various areas where further discussions can be presented. For example, there is a necessity for more interdisciplinary analyses which would discuss about Toni Morrison's novels within the extended broader aspect in the contexts of literary, historical and cultural writings. In addition, there could be more terms added in the discussions of Toni Morrison's writings in the areas of critical theory of race and gender as well as studies about trauma. It is important to study in this sector as it would bring more light and expand the perspectives of Toni Morrison's writings in African American literature. Therefore, this literature review aims to elaborate the

different analyses of Toni Morrison's texts *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* through different literary theories such as psychoanalytic theory, feminist criticism and various other critical literary frameworks.

Psychoanalytic theory which is connected in Freudian concepts such as, the unconscious, trauma and repression provides a significant understanding on the depth to explore the characters of Toni Morrison's in *The Bluest Eye* novel. In this novel, *The Bluest Eye*, protagonist Pecola Breedlove suffers with internalized racial inferiority complex. Protagonist of this novel Pecola Breedlove develops a strong desire for societal acceptance as she was neglected by her own African American community members. Hence, through Pecola's desire for social acceptance, her psychological distress is profoundly noticed along with her lack of strong individual identity in her community. In one of the article written by Smith (2005), the traumas of the characters of Morrison's novels are observed. Here, the depth of their psychological landscapes are discussed which connects this psychoanalytic theory. Similarly, another article written by Johnson (2010) for the novel *Beloved*, readers could notice the haunting memories of slavery through Sethe in connection with it to Freud's theory. Toni Morrison in the novel *Beloved* expresses the haunting memories of slavery through Sethe's along with the loss of her child in her past which expresses the psychological distress that she faces in her later life. Therefore, through Morrison's characters in the novel *Beloved* where the protagonist is Sethe and in the novel *The Bluest Eye* where the protagonist is Pecola Breedlove, this psychoanalytic theory is profoundly noticed.

Again, in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, feminist criticism is a significant framework for analyzing and discussing the complex intersection of gender discrimination, race and power dynamics. Scholars have discussed about the female characters of Toni Morrison through the lens of feminist theory. These female characters have to go through

the high expectations of the society as well as patriarchal structures which have shaped their roles in the society. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia and Frieda had strongly resisted these so called societal beauty standards. On the other side, Pecola could not resist this societal beauty standard as she had to experience the self-hatred because she could not ignore the pervasive influence of the patriarchal beauty norms set by the society. Hence, scholarly works of Jones (2017) highlight this writing style of Toni Morrison's gender roles and her significant discussion along with the portrayal of female resilience in the context of oppression and violence. Likewise, Smith (2013) in the novel *Beloved* discusses and expresses the themes of motherhood and the long legacy of slavery through the narrative of the protagonist Sethe. In this article, the discussions of maternal identity is analyzed which portrays the concept of motherhood. However, there is a research gap which could be noticed as this concept of feminist criticism overlooks the intersectional life experiences of women in the context of feminism.

Moreover, post colonialism discusses the insights and portrays the racial legacies of slavery in America. Additionally, Toni Morrison's narratives in the novel *Beloved* reflect the colonization concept. In both the novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, the characters of the novel experiences the haunting intergenerational trauma and this trauma is developed in their psychology because of racism and slavery. Again, there were also these long enduring effects of colonial oppression among the characters of both the novels. So, Toni Morrison's writing reflects this post-colonialism concept as most of the critique of her writings brought up this discussion of Eurocentric validation. However, most of the scholarly articles have not directly discussed about the intra-racial dynamics in the writings of Toni Morrison reflecting the concept of power and race together. Scholars have discussed about the themes of the novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* separately. However, there is a significant noticeable gap in comparing the two novels with their

themes and motifs. As most of the authors did not find and explore the similarities and differences of the two novels themes. In the article “Exploring Race and Identity in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”, author Smith et al. (2018) portrays the themes of race and identity crisis of the characters of the novel *The Bluest Eye*. On the other side, in this article “Maternal Love and Sacrifice in Toni Morrison’s ‘Beloved’,” author Jones and Williams (2019) portrays the significant discussion of maternal bonds in the novel *Beloved*. However, there is a lack of research which is noticed that authors comparatively less discusses about the differences and similarities in terms of their themes and motifs between both the novels. For this reason, a more solid comparison between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* could provide a light on Toni Morrison’s novels reflecting the discussion about race, trauma, slavery and identity crisis in her writings of fiction. The reason behind this is, these themes reflect the life experiences of the African Americans living in the United States of America.

A researcher named Lisa Jackson published a research paper named “A post-colonial Feminist approach to Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” (Erdemir, K, 2020) where she published a study and conducted a research on the college students of African American women. The research on these women was named “Examining Both Race and Gender in the Experiences of African American College Women” where Lisa conducted her research among 20 different college women from various social contexts and background. She portrayed the struggle of African American women in this research. Lisa depicted in her study that how African American women are marginalized group in the United States of America. Moreover, these African American women on daily basis had to face racism, struggle and various stereotypes under different conditions and circumstances. Lisa in her research shows all of these sufferings of African American women who are living in America. However, there are some research gaps in

this study and research which is Lisa conducted her study in a developed society but there are also various areas where these marginalized groups of women of African American are being ignored and neglected in every sector. Therefore, more research could be done in the context of Postcolonial circumstances of African American women in the areas of the United States of America and beyond.

Another research paper based on the novel *Beloved*; “Colonization and oppression of women: A postcolonial Feminist Study of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” (Nasim, A., & Saddique, S, 2021) analyzes that how African American women were mistreated by the foreign colonizers who colonized them for years. Hence, this colonization affected their Inter-Community female relationships which are depicted by Toni Morrison in the novel *Beloved*. The scholars of this article highlights the facts that how African American women suffered a lot because of this colonization. The vital part of this research was to portray the sufferings of women only but this research also shows that how males and children had to go through these cruelties and sufferings too. This research article gives a brief idea about the Postcolonial Feminism but Toni Morrison does not claim herself as a Feminist. Toni Morrison presents herself as a Black female writer who writes and shows the sufferings of black women of Africa. For this reason, this article portrays the postcolonial feminist perspectives. Hence, the purpose of the author of this research is to focus only on Black women of Africa and to portray their sufferings through this research. Therefore, through the novel *Beloved*, readers could see how Black African American women like Pecola were mistreated both physically and psychologically.

Therefore, through analyzing these scholarly articles it can be noticed that very few articles compares between the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Hence, it is the research gap which compares between these two novels in terms of their themes and motifs. So, more research could

be done in order to depict the writing of Toni Morrison's in terms of racism in African American community and beyond. Therefore, by doing the comparison between these two novels, the complex themes such as, racism, trauma, slavery and identity of African American community are reflected through the writings of Toni Morrison's fiction.

Chapter 4: Societal Standards of Beauty and its impact on self-worth, relationships and pursuit of freedom

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* portrays the destructive effects of societal standards of beauty. Moreover, she includes how these societal standards of beauty impact on self-worth, pursuit of freedom and relationships particularly on young Black girls such as, the protagonist of the novel Pecola Breedlove. The novel portrays the depth of the societal standards of beauty which is how African Americans prioritize whiteness and features of Europe. Because of prioritizing the white Eurocentric beauty, black girls like Pecola Breedlove suffers from low self-esteem.

Pecola Breedlove faces criticism from her own society and she started to believe that she is ugly. Pecola lose her self-worth and this lead to a strong desire in her for blue eyes because she thinks that having blue eyes is the ultimate epitome of beauty. Moreover, Morrison portrayed Black female personality of having inferiority complex in a very organic way through Pecola as Toni Morrison writes:

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had

prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pp. 35).

Here, in this passage Morrison highlights Pecola's constant prayers for blue eyes, which she sees as the epitome of beauty. Pecola believes that if she can have blue eyes then she can escape her sense of ugliness and unworthiness. Although Pecola felt discouraged at many times but she was hopeful and remain stick to the belief that such transformation would happen in her life. This strong desire became an obsession for Pecola as she always lacks the importance of her self-worth and started to belief that her own natural beauty is inadequate. Hence, through this passage Morrison explores the themes such as self-worth, identity and societal pressure by showing the destructive impacts of internalized racism and societal beauty standards imposed on individuals like Pecola. In addition, an insight can be interpreted through this which is, Pecola's longing for blue eyes symbolizes the bigger impact and struggle for acceptance faced by many who do not fit into society's narrow and low definitions of beauty and self-worth.

In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, feminist criticism theory illuminate this point, that how societal beauty standards effect the psychology of Black African American women. This novel shows us readers that how white centric beauty set by the society is considered as superior. On the other side, black skin tone of African American women is considered as inferior. Pecola in her

subconscious mind develops this strong desire to have blue eyes and white skin color. It shows that how racism and patriarchal norms of the society oppress the women of black skin color. Critics have also mentioned that Pecola is neglected and victimized by society that considers her as ugly and worthless. Pecola is ignored by the society because she does not epitomize the white western culture's idea of beauty standards. (Patrice Cormier-Hamilton, 115).

Pecola develops this belief that if her eyes were blue then she would be pretty and loved. Friends would play with her, teachers would smile at Pecola as the way they smile at Maureen Peal who have white skin tone. (The Bluest Eye, 40). Pecola also believes that if she gets blue eyes and white skin tone then her parents would also stop fighting. Toni Morrison portrays in her novels that how beauty standards are connected with the systematic oppression. Therefore, in the article "Black naturalism and Toni Morrison", the author says, "For African Americans there is a direct connection between the economic gain and light skin." (Hamilton, 115). Through this, he meant that if an African American has white skin tone then he gains social value, earns respect in the society and receives economic solvency.

Due to societal standards of beauty, the characters' relationships in the novel are also affected. For this reason, Pecola develops a strong desire for blue eyes because she started to think that having blue eyes will make her accepted in the society. Hence, this longing for blue eyes also creates a sense for validation and acceptance which impacts her relationship with others especially with her family and friends. In addition, the novel also explains how beauty standards influence the relationship between Pecola's parents. Pecola's mother Pauline Breedlove's marriage to Cholly Breedlove is also affected due to their internalized self-hatred as well as societal pressure.

Moreover, in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, the pursuit of freedom is also affected due to the oppressive beauty standards set by the society. In the novel, it can be seen that characters like Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer had to face difficulties to break themselves free from these beauty standards set by the society and then to form their individual identities. Therefore, Pecola's longing for blue eyes symbolizes her strong desire for liberation from these so called beauty standards imposed on her by society. However, her pursuit of freedom from these societal standards of beauty only creates a sense of self-worth and validation from her own African-American community.

In the broader context of the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison also explores and examines how systematic colonialism and racism intersect with white supremacy and other beauty standards which also reinforce the structures of power and oppression. The influence of this white supremacy also impacts the characters' lives in the context of their economic and societal advancement. By focusing on these power dynamics, Morrison portrays the immediate need to stop these systems of discrimination and privilege that neglects the people who are marginalized.

An unrealistic expectation is often created due to the pressure of societal standards of beauty. Hence, this lead to the individuals to feel for themselves as an inadequate or unworthy when they do not meet up this expectation of the society. From a study by Phelan et al. (2014), it is found that often too much exposure to idealized images of beauty in social media may significantly lower the self-esteem of a person especially among women. Hence, in this context, it can be noticed that in *The Bluest Eye* novel characters like Pecola Breedlove faces this internalize societal standards of beauty which lead to her a feeling or sense of worthlessness.

Interpersonal relationships can also be affected due to the pursuit of beauty set by the society because as individuals like Pecola may seek validation or acceptance from her community based on her appearance. A study by Cash et al. (2017) shows how societal pressures to a particular beauty standard can affect relationships by leading it to dissatisfaction and conflict among each other. For example, in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, character like Maureen Peal was admired for their perceived beauty standards. On the other hand, those who do not perceived those beauty standards which were considered as an ideal beauty standard then those had to face rejection and isolation for example Pecola had this feeling of isolation and rejection from her own community. Similarly, societal standards of beauty can place a restriction on freedom of an individual by imposing narrow definitions of self-worth and beauty.

Chapter 5: Trauma and its impact on self-worth, relationships and pursuit of freedom

Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel *The Bluest Eye* is a young Black girl who faces internalizes racism around her in every place by her own African-American community. Because of her darker skin color, she is always marginalized and mistreated by her community.

Moreover, the Breedlove family, particularly parents of Pecola, Cholly and Pauline Breedlove exemplify dysfunctional familial relationships. Pecola's father Cholly is abusive, neglectful and emotionally distant. On the other hand, Pauline, Pecola's mother is also emotionally distant as she was consumed by her job as a domestic worker. Because of this dysfunctional family dynamics, Pecola always faces a sense of isolation, deprivation and worthlessness.

Through trauma studies and psychoanalysis, scholars have portrayed how Pecola in her childhood was affected by racial discrimination, and how that affected her psychological health. Moreover, trauma is one of the profound themes of *The Bluest Eye* novel. The novel depicts the constant progressive trauma of Pecola Breedlove because of being rejected and physically abused by her mother. Moreover, Pecola's psychological health deteriorated because of sexual abuse by her alcoholic and unpredictable violent father. Lastly, Pecola had no choice but to seek help from her community but from her own African-American community also she faced rejection, discrimination and negligence. Hence, Morrison depicts in her novel why Pecola developed a strong desire for having blue eyes as she says:

We had just started elementary school. She said she wanted blue eyes. I looked around to picture her with them and was violently repelled by what I imagined she would look like if she had her wish. The sorrow in her voice seemed to call for sympathy, and I faked it for her, but, astonished by the desecration she proposed, I "got mad" at her instead. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pp. 167).

In this passage, Morrison portrays how Pecola developed a strong desire for blue eyes in the very early age. Because, Pecola was traumatized by the abusive behavior of her parents and she started to believe that only having blue eyes would give her escape from the reality. So, in the context of psychoanalytic theory, it can be seen that Pecola was delusional and she was unaware of the fact that blue eyes would not give her escape from this trauma as she was criticized by her own community for having black skin color.

Toni Morrison's novel such as *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* profoundly portrays the Black female characters. Morrison explores the themes of racism through these characters of Black African-American woman. A study of Amanda Putnam (Fall 2011) in her article "Mothering Violence: Ferocious Female Resistance in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*" shows that how Black African-American women like Pecola had to be scarred both physically and emotionally. Author of this article Amanda Putnam expresses her deep concern for these Black women who were racially exploited and sexually violated.

In this article, Amanda Putnam focuses how this racial discrimination affected the psychological health of Black women like Pecola from *The Bluest Eye* or Sethe from *Beloved* novel. These female characters had to face social and racial domination within the white patriarchal society. Nevertheless, these black women stood against the racial discrimination. Hence, in this article, Amanda Putnam (2011) shows how these female characters choose violence and were against the racial discrimination to find their escape. A point of view is expressed in this article that whatever circumstances Black women like Pecola or Sethe had to face but they were not powerless or without any options. The reason behind this is, Black women can create their own path despite facing racial discrimination or having any traumatic experiences. Hence, Black women can built up their new patterns by refusing to socialized gender and racial identities.

In many cases, it is seen that the violent choices created by Black women might create a negative affect among other members of the African American community. For example, in this article, Putnam (Fall 2011) expresses that how difficult it is for Black female characters to reside within their own African American community. For example, Pecola was not having any

freedom within her community because of her black skin color. She was psychologically disturbed and had many traumatic experiences because of her parents especially due to her father Cholly Breedlove. In addition, this pattern of violence started in Pecola's life in her early childhood. Hence, it affected her innocent mindset from a very young age.

In this article, "Black Women, Gender and Families", the author expresses how black female children despite their trauma and neglectful experiences react verbally and physically to white societal standards of beauty to built up their self-identity. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, readers could see how Pecola reacted to white beauty societal standards by wanting the desire to have blue eyes and whiter skin tone in her subconscious mind. However, Morrison also shows the other side where nine year old Claudia rebels against this culture of white beauty standards. In fact, Claudia hated white baby dolls and she shares her dislike for Shirley Temple who danced with "Bojangles" Bill Robinson who is a famous tap dancer of African-American films. Hence, Morrison portrays Claudia's thought in this way:

I couldn't join Freda and Pecola in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not

Because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my

friend, my uncle, my dady, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and

chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance

thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under

their heels. (Morrison 1994, 19).

Morrison expresses through Claudia that how racial discrimination existed among the children also in African-American community. In this case, it is clearly portrayed by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* that how Claudia was deprived of this opportunity to work because of her skin color and the role of the film was given to a white child star instead. However, Claudia rebels and put her voice out against racism. On the contrary, Pecola was totally traumatized because of the terrific life experiences that she witnessed because of being a Black African-American girl. Hence, Pecola accepts a self-hatred as she embraces every white thing around her. Such as, she was fond of Shirley Temple, white baby dolls and the white Mary Jane on the cany wrapper. Eventually, Pecola built a strong desire to attain blue eyes which she thought would give her escape from the sufferings of her own African American community.

Toni Morrison portrays the effect of white beauty standards through Pecola Breedlove in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. According to psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs, the authors of the magazine *Black Rage* expresses their disappointment that how every Black American girl have to experience racism and had to suffer some degree of shame because of their appearances. For this reason, Pecola was shameful of her own skin color. In addition, she accepted this shaming because of dark skin color and eventually bows down to the traumatized heavy weight of the oppression of white people who constantly made her feel worthless in the African American community. Young black African American girls like Pecola are often taught by the society to obey white feminism and white motherhood which Toni Morrison's reflect in her novels. (Amanda Putnam, 28). Therefore, in this way, trauma is a significant theme in the novel *The Bluest Eye* which determines the characters' self-worth, relationships and pursuit of freedom.

Chapter 6: The Legacy of slavery and its impact on self-worth, relationships and pursuit of

freedom

In the novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison portrays the harmful and devastating effect of slavery through the character Sethe who is the protagonist of the novel. Hence, slavery impacted the characters self-worth, relationships and pursuit of freedom. Moreover, this novel *Beloved* is written in the context of post-colonial era and it is one of the most celebrated books of Toni Morrison. This novel discusses the theme of slavery. A research of an author Robert Lee, in his article “The Past Recaptured: Beloved and the Haunting Trauma” expresses and discusses how the protagonist Sethe’s sense of self-worth is affected significantly due to her traumatic experiences working as a slave in America. Lee portrays in his article that how Sethe’s struggle working as a slave in her past life affected her psychological health. Lee discusses in this article that slavery affects a person self-worth under colonial systems. (Robert Lee, 2005). By this, he meant that under colonial power, slavery was a common job for the African Americans during those periods. Moreover, there was no escape of slavery for the Black people because it was considered their ultimate fate. Sethe was also determined by the white colonizers to accept her fate in slavery.

Additionally, Morrison’s novel *Beloved* focuses on the history of slavery. So, Toni Morrison discusses the acts of slavery in this novel through the point of view and perspectives of the white dominant social class of people. Hence, Morrison in *Beloved* expresses a parallel connection between the individual and psychology recovery of them through the process of re-visiting of history. So, Sethe, the protagonist of the novel describes the individual perspectives and the historical notions of the unconscious through this way:

If a house burns down, its gone, but the place the picture of it stays, and not just in my

rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.

(Morrison, *Beloved*, 36).

Here, Morrison shows how Sethe's individual memories exist in the world as historical memory which can be also a recollection of memories in the historical level. By this, she meant that how history of slavery impacted the lives of African Americans. Arnold Rampersad, in his discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* also narrated the recovery of history as both a personal necessity and national. It is as follows:

[Du Bois's] point of view is clear. Admitting and exploring the reality of

Slavery is necessarily painful for a black American, but only by doing so can he

or she begin to understand himself or herself and American and Afro-American

culture in general. The normal price of the evasion of the fact of slavery is

intellectual and spiritual death. Only by grappling with the meaning and legacy

of slavery can the imagination, recognizing finally the temporality of the

institution, begin to transcend it. (123)

In Rampersad's analysis, the repression of the historical past is nothing but the psychological damage of the repression of personal trauma. Hence, in *Beloved* Morrison, like Du Bois in *Souls*, negotiates the legacy of slavery as a national trauma as well as an intense personal trauma.

In *Beloved*, the presence of ghosts acts as a ritual guide. (Linda, 397). Linda Krumholz discusses in her article that how the ghost-woman in the *Beloved* novel acts as a psychological catalyst for the three central living characters. Moreover, she divided the healing ritual in *Beloved* novel into three stages. According to Linda, the first stage of healing is the repression of memory that occurs from the traumas of slavery, the second stage is a painful reconciliation with these memories and the third one is the cleaning process which is rebirth of the sufferer.

Morrison in *Beloved* uses Freudian psychological constructs to depict the response of slaves to their psychological torment. (Linda Krumholz, 397). In the novel, readers could notice how Baby Suggs's rituals in the clearing manifest the Freudian psychoanalytic process of healing. Moreover, it also shows the spiritual process of healing which is the combination of African and Christian religious elements. Hence, according to Freud, the repression of traumatic memories directs energy away from social satisfaction to the construction of symptoms. Therefore, according to Freud psychoanalytic treatment, it involves unedited associational speech that is meant to elude the unconscious censors which transfer emotions into the analyst and eventually works as an acting force to turn the trauma free from those energy. (Linda Krumholz, 397).

Morrison portrays the description of double consciousness as she expresses it, Stamp Paid thinks, "...it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them" (198).

Morrison focuses in *Beloved* that race is not an absolute division among the African-Americans. However, within the context of American slavery, racial oppression could not be separated from the abuses of power, social domination and oppression. Therefore, slavery and racism impacted the lives of the African Americans.

Chapter 7: Comparison between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*

The comparative analyses of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* portrays and discusses how these themes of racism, trauma, the legacy of slavery and societal standards of beauty impacted the lives of African American people. Moreover, these themes illuminate the issues of self-worth, pursuit of freedom and relationships on the African American people and how it is reflected on their human spirit in the middle of adversity and resilience. In addition, Morrison portrays in both novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, the significant psychological consequences of systematic racism which is faced and experienced by the African American people especially women. This comparative analysis will discuss and focus on both the thematic similarities and differences of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* which are the two seminal novels of Toni Morrison.

Both novels explore and focus on the complex identity formation of the black African Americans. These two novels portray the western societal standards of beauty which is the white skin tone. Critique Claudia Tate says, "*The Bluest Eye* focuses on the dominant societal standards of beauty because it reveals their capacity to break down the psychology of young African American girls." (Claudia Tate, 1993). Likewise, in the novel *Beloved*, Sethe had to face

racism and she faces this struggle to get back her identity and self-worth. In addition, it was one of the difficult tasks to regain once identity in the context of post-slavery era for the African American people. Moreover, beauty standards and racism impacted the lives of the African American in a miserable way. Pecola struggles to get back her self-worth among her African American community and Sethe struggles to escape the haunting legacy of slavery. Therefore, both the novels portray the concept of racism and idealization of white beauty standards.

In addition, Toni Morrison's portrayal of motherhood is another significant similarity between both the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, we readers can witness and gets the idea that how the absence of motherly love impacted the young Pecola's emotional wellbeing. In fact, this absence of motherly love in Pecola's life creates an internalized self-hatred in her subconscious mind. On the other hand, in *Beloved* novel, Sethe's maternal feelings are tested by the trauma of her past life. Sethe had to experience the haunting presence of her death daughter ghost in their home of Ohio city. Scholar Jennifer L. Griffiths says, "*Beloved* explores on the endurance of the motherly love and it describes the significant effects of slavery on the familial bonds." (Jennifer L. Griffiths, 2009). Therefore, through this comparison it can be interpreted that Toni Morrison portrays the thematic exploration of motherhood concept as a source of strength as well as vulnerability in the middle of human adversity and resilience. Moreover, it can be said that Pecola lacks motherly love and Sethe tries to protect her child from racism by reflecting her inner worries for her children.

Again, both the novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, significantly portrays the effect of racial trauma on the psychology of African American people. The protagonist Sethe and Pecola had to face racial discriminations from their own community as well as by the western colonizers.

Author Sharon L. Jones says, “*The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* portrays the enduring traumatic experiences of racism through Toni Morrison’s strong poignant storytelling and her vivid characterizations.” (Sharon L. Jones, 2005). Hence, Toni Morrison focuses on the destructive impacts of white beauty standards through the protagonist Pecola. Similarly, in the novel *Beloved*, Morrison portrays the harmful long legacy of slavery through the protagonist of the novel Sethe. In addition, Sethe and Pecola both had to go through the enduring psychological wound that is occurred to them because of the systematic oppression and racism. This comparison is important in the context of racism because racial discrimination affected the psychology of both Pecola and Sethe. They were traumatized because of racism from their own African American community.

However, it is noticed that there are some differences in the narrative structures of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison narrates the novel focusing on the characters development. Moreover, the storyline of this novel is linear. On the other side, in the novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes the novel in a more complex structure of narrative. In fact, the storyline of this novel is nonlinear. Literary scholar and critic David L. Middleton says, “*Beloved* portrays the experimental narrative style but *The Bluest Eye* focuses on the more realistic approach.” (David L. Middleton, 2003). Again, it can be noticed while doing the comparison between the two novels that self-worth and self-identity are the key concept that is present in both the novels. It is significant concept of this comparison as both the novels protagonists Pecola and Sethe lacks their self-worth from their own African American community because of their dark skin color. Moreover, both novels focus on the pursuit of self-affirmation as it reflects the author’s thematic concerns about racism. (Drummond Mbalia, 2007). This comparison is profound to identify the writing style of Toni Morrison and her

contribution in the African American literature. Hence, in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's struggle to accept her identity within a hostile society is reflected by Toni Morrison. Likewise, in the novel *Beloved*, the narrative style of Toni Morrison reflects that how the past life can haunt the present life of Sethe. In addition, memory and legacy of slavery, these themes are reflected through the protagonist Sethe's recovery from her past life.

In addition, both novels portray the themes of isolation and community within the society of African American. Morrison focuses on the devastating effects of racism which completely isolated Pecola from her own community members. In addition, Pecola's sense of self-worth and belonging to her own community is shattered because of rejection from her own society. Again, in *Beloved*, Morrison portrays the role of community in healing from the trauma of slavery and racism. Sethe's journey to escape slavery is noticed profoundly in this novel *Beloved*. Therefore, both these novels portray the profound necessity of community in the life of the protagonist Pecola and Sethe from the novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*.

The comparison between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* is significant as it also indicates and portrays the African American life experiences of oppression. In addition, this oppression is not limited to a specific time rather it continues across several generations. Hence, both novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* together portray the broader aspects of racial injustice and the systematic oppression towards the African American people. Moreover, the brutal life experiences of slavery are also reflected while doing the comparison between both the texts. In addition, both novels also portray the power of resilience. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's tragic life story and in *Beloved*, Sethe's fight for the future of her children reflects their strong enduring power to overcome their difficult situations in the midst of adversity. Therefore, Toni Morrison

demonstrates how African American reality lies at the core of racial regional primer and slavery. (Lisa A. Long, 110). So, it can be interpreted while doing comparison between both novels that the life experiences of African American people especially women such as, Pecola and Sethe, are very difficult as they do not have the freedom to live their life freely. So, racism is a vital theme which Morrison portrayed in both *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*.

Therefore, all of these comparisons between these two texts reflect the concepts of racism, trauma, slavery and identity in the midst of human adversity and their resilience. Toni Morrison's contribution to African American literature is significant as it illuminate the struggle of the black African American people. These comparisons are important to study about the life experiences of African American individuals as well as community. All these similarities and differences between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* reflects the themes of trauma, racism, societal beauty standards, community bond, isolation, slavery and narrative writing style. By this comparison, the importance of African American literature and the narrative style of Toni Morrison's writing in fiction are profoundly reflected.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

To conclude, the comparative analysis between these two novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, the themes of race, trauma, slavery and identity in African American literature is profoundly noticed. By exploring and examining Toni Morrison's excellent storytelling in these novels, it is noticed that how both novels examine the complex theme of racism and it long lasting impact on individuals as well as communities. Based on the evidence that have been presented in this

thesis, several main conclusions can be drawn such as both novels profoundly portray the devastating impact of racism and trauma on individuals as well as communities.

Moreover, Morrison portrays the themes of identity formation and self-worth within the perspective of systematic oppression and racism. Again, the comparative analysis between the two novels depicts Morrison's unique narrative technique and effective symbolism portrayal to focus and convey all of these complex themes of racism, trauma and slavery. Lastly, Morrison also portrays the themes of resilience and communal bonds in both of these novels. Therefore, Morrison in both of her novels portrays the psychological impact of racism, trauma and slavery on both individual identity as well as communal identity. The discussion has highlighted the main themes of trauma, racism, societal standards of beauty and the legacy of slavery on African Americans. Moreover, all of these issues have illuminated the sense of self-worth, pursuit of freedom and relationships on the human spirit in the middle of adversity and their resilience. Hence, both novels serve as a significant reminder in literature and challenged the systematic oppression of racism and inequality. Therefore, Morrison's work has continued to inspire her readers to imagine a future which will be only defined by empathy and justice where there will be no presence of any racism in the world. While doing this thesis, there are few limitations of the work which is, the comparative analysis focuses primarily on the literary aspects of these novels since it does not fully represent the diverse range of perspectives and experiences within the community of African American and beyond. After that, the interpretations of these novels might vary depending on the backgrounds, cultural context and experience of the readers. Because, literature can provide and portray the vast insights into social issues but it cannot fully solve the complex realities of individual experiences. Therefore, it may be useful to investigate further implications of the work by extending beyond America as researchers can explore and

focus on global perspectives on race and trauma in literature. In addition, researchers can do comparative studies on these themes of trauma, racism, slavery and identity in different cultural contexts of these two novels. Therefore, this question can be asked which is how can these themes of trauma and racism in both novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* addresses the systematic oppression of racism and promote healing of psychological distress within these marginalized communities. Therefore, addressing these themes of trauma and racism in this thesis, the main aim is to focus on the people who went through these differences in the society and we should be empathetic towards them who are suffering from psychological issues because of racism and traumatic experiences.

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