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**Performing gender and identity in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" Copying the Other, Denying the Self**

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# ***Dedication***

*I didn't get here alone because I took the journey with wonderful parents who paved my road and embraced me with unconditional love. My achievements would never see light without my dad and mom.*

*I could not get here alone.. There was a role model that I always look up to.. My beloved sister Salima.*

*And I definitely could not be here alone without my guardian angels who believed in me and set the bar so high for me to be the best version myself, my two brothers Fateh and Riadh*

*Special thanks to the person that God has sent me and become a huge source of support and inspiration, my fiancé Salah*

*Finally.. I have to pay so much tribute to the joy of heart my nephews and nieces: wissal, Nour Elhouda, Fayçal, Jenna Celine, Ahmed Adam, and Mohammed Ghaith.*

*Each one of you has a precious piece me and I would certainly not be here without you all in my life*

***Ikhlass Dikra***

# ***Dedication***

*I dedicate my dissertation work to all whom I love and my father's soul*

*A special feeling of gratitude to my family. I will always appreciate their unconditional support.*

*Also, I would like to thank my husband and my dearest Friends for their love, encouragement and support.*

*Thank you all for being there for me.*

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## **Abstract**

- This research is to illustrate into the issues of sexism and identity in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" (1970). In this novel, she describes the lives of African-American women in the twentieth century who were profoundly affected by society's beauty standards, in which racism is pervasive. Furthermore, they face racism and prejudice, as well as being oppressed twice by a patriarchal culture. The primary goal of this research is to study the impact of beauty standards on black female perceptions of her own beauty and blackness. It also serves as an effective example of how racial and gender prejudices shape identities.

Race and sex Based on the concepts and basic tenets of performativity theory, black women perform blackness and femininity to depict the ways in which race and gender intersect to perform the role of woman as an oppressed black female

**Keywords ; beauty standards, racism**

**كلمات المفتاحية؛ معايير الجمال, العنصرية**

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Race and gender were vastly debated concepts that brought about controversy most of the time; they remarkably influenced and shaped the lives of communities around the globe the minorities most particularly. For instance, in the United States, the native Africans and African-Americans have been persecuted on the land mainly because of the color of their skin. In addition, colored women have had an unspeakable share of a dual oppression that was resulted from race and gender combined.

Slavery traces its roots far back in Africa's history that its impact is still being witnessed in this day and age among societies. Therefore, stories from various nations have inspired writers and enriched the literature which ultimately becomes an essential tool to expose social injustice and bridge communal gaps.

*The Bluest Eye* by the Afro-American writer Toni Morrison is a novel with social and cultural dimensions. It sheds light on the topic of colorism in societies that endured slavery and developed a collective unconscious for enslaved mentality which eventually defines its future. This novel points to the political and cultural elements that outlined the reality of the United States in the 1940s. It further covers the challenges faced by the minorities living in a white mono-cultural country that relentlessly resists diversity. In Essence, The Novel Portrays The contribution of societal institutions to structuring the unconscious of the younger generations as they impose the culture of the "ruling" majority class. As result, society standards are defined and set to satisfy the Majority first [and only]. On the other side, minorities are unconsciously compelled to embrace the "ruling" culture in pursuit to fit in—giving away their true identities. Consequently, this integration process is oftentimes coupled with mental disorders and self-esteem Issues

The novel inspired by true story happened with Toni Morrison childhood colleague. A black young girl and her family who are affected by the dominant American culture. Her first and last

dream to get a white skin and blue eyes, that she believes are the ultimate representation of the ideal of beauty, and also to match the beauty standards of her society. The novel protagonist spends most of her time looking for beauty. She attempted to copy others seeking for the social acceptance. Tony Morrison wrote the novel to illustrate the effect of racism, sexism and societal standards of beauty. as the author points out in the book's foreword, the fact that she is a young child is crucial to the story: "I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (Morrison)

Thus, she turned it into a literary masterpiece that reflect the hard reality in culturally diversity society dominated by mono-cultural which imposes its culture and its beauty standards on the other components of society. Morrison stated in an interview with The Paris Review that her work is very important to her, and that she considers it more vital that her work falls into the black culture heritage than the literary canon tradition. (Morrison, 2008).

The novel takes place in Lorain Ohio -Toni "Morrison" hometown- during 1941. It narrates the tragic story of Pocola Breedlove, a black skinned young girl has been suffered from the worst sorts of treatment by the entire community around her, including –and especially- her family. She spends few days with the MacTeer family when her father, Cholly Breedlove, an alcoholic and an unstable man burns down their house. Sadly she was raped and impregnated by her father, her pregnancy eventually ended with a miscarriage because it was a premature birth. She was destroyed by feelings of self-hatred, rejection and being abused physically and emotionally by the people surround her. Thus, she was traumatized and driven insane.

## **Research Problem**

Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" examines how society constructs the identities and beliefs of a young black girl, as well as the impact of race and gender standards on Pecola's self-image.



Thus, this research is carried out to study the issue of black females double oppression in Toni Morrison's novel "The Bluest Eye"; by examining Pecola's interactions with the other characters and the reason behind her longing to have blue eyes as an effective standard of beauty and acceptance within her society and her family. We look at how Pecola internalizes racism and acts her created identity, which is caught between who she is and who she wants to be.

### **The aim of the study**

- To discover the impact of racism on African Americans.
- To discuss the concept of race and identity in literature.
- To illustrate the causes behind Pecola's behavior.
- To discover the impact of sexism on African American women.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent can race define the beauty standards?
2. How is portrayed copying the other in the novel?
3. Why did Toni Morrison seek to expose racism's impact on Black oppressed women?
4. How did sexism impact women characters in the novel?

### **Significance of the study**

The choice of *The Bluest Eye* was not random; Toni Morrison has a strong literary sensibility and addresses the subject of oppressed communities in her novel. Specifically, black female childhood experiences and how they shaped their identities, whether they were joyful or miserable events. Morrison is a writer who wants to portray the suffering side of African-

Americans in Western countries. As a result, we decided to discover the causes of Pecola's longing for blue eyes, as well as why she opted to perform what she is not according to her race and gender.

## **Introduction:**

This part invites to recall the origins of slavery through history, and gives the historical context for the question of racism, discrimination and sexism against the African Americans in the United States, also it focused in the main movements of that period; Civil Rights Movement, Black Arts Movement. Moving to the leaders who assist in raising African American voice.

Further, it offers a short background to African American literature and its writers, besides the major African American contemporary women writers. As a second Step this part provides a brief personal history of Toni Morrison and her impact on African American literature. in addition to, Toni Morrison's theme and style. Furthermore, this part introduces the critical approaches used in analyzing the novel.

## **I. The Historical Background**

### **I.1 The Roots of Slavery in the Ancient World**

Slavery, also known as *chattel slavery*, is the act of depriving a human-being from their free-will and deeming them to serve and depend on other human-beings who are referred to as *masters* or *enslavers*. Although it is almost impossible to precisely pin out the beginning of slavery; yet, according to the known human history, slavery dates its roots back to civilizations of the archaic times; to name a few: Ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Rome. Slaves can be captives of wars, indebt persons, or simply human-beings of a particular race.  
(History.com, Editors)

### **I.2. The Need of Slavery in the New World**

Slavery in America was, as in antiquity, a legal practice since the early colonial days British America. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the demand on slaves to work in plantations and cotton fields thrived exponentially leading to the rising of a profitable business that is commonly known in the literature as “Slave Trade”. Thus, Slaves were largely sourced from Africa as well as from African-American communities that already existed in America. The Slavery life was nothing short of a constant suffering and despair that varies from hard labor, unbearable punishment, to the horrifying lynching. According to William Wells Brown, a born-to-slavery writer and historian, slave men were required to pick 36 kg cotton per day while slave women to pick 32 kg daily. Failure to deliver those quotas, a slave would be whiplashed for each pound they were short of. (History.com, Editors)

Also, a New Yorker who attended a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century slave auction, stated that three-quarter of male slaves who saw at the sale had whipped scars on their backs.

Despite the emotional and physical abuse, the slaves stood their ground to survive through agony; their suffering is translate in a unique musical artwork know as *Negro Spirituals* which fostered the modern-day music and pop culture. The turning point of slavery in America was post the civil war. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation and declared freedom for all the enslaved people within southern United States. The majority of slaves chose to be free and decide for their own lives. In contrast, others slaves, with all uncertainties as to where else to go, preferred the plantations and working for salaries in return to their services. (History.com, Editors)

### **I.3 Race as a Social Construct**

Race is not a scientific classification of humans and there is no agreed upon a fixed definition of race. This does not imply, however, that there is no scientific genetic variation that distinguishes people from one another, such as physical characteristics, accents, and skin



pigmentations. This genetic variety does not imply that it has developed to the point where scientific classification can be trusted to accurately define race. Instead, it falls under what taxonomists would classify as a sub-species. Throughout history, different cultures have connected various values and meanings to race, leading to the development of oppressive systems based on race, such as apartheid, slavery, and colonialism. (Binary, 2016).

Otherwise, the Critical Race theorists assert that race is a social constraint while also serving as one of the fundamental tenets of their theory, which helps in viewing race from a social perspective in which society produces a cultural meaning for the body, molding it and challenging individuals through specific social norms.

Since race is a learned concept based on societal expectations rather than a natural one, it can be constructed and deconstructed. The social construction thesis maintains that race and races are creations of social cognition and connections, as Delgado and Stefancic argued in their discussion of this issue. They are not objective, inherent, or fixed, and they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are social constructs that society creates, uses, or discards as it sees fit (7).

According to Critical Race Theory, a person's social interactions, relationships with other members of the community and other groups, as well as their perceptions of others, all contribute to the composition of their race. As a result, because there is no genetic reality, it has a subjective basis that renders the concept of race as being 18 changeable and non-inherent. The manufactured races, on the other hand, are classifications that society has created based on presumptions in order to promote the interests of the majority group and subtly dominate the minority group. However, it also examines the fact that the idea that race is simply a social construct or that it does not exist in reality does not conflict with the social construction of race. Critical race theory discussed that:

People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory. (Delgado and Stefancic 7, 8)

That is to say, the shared physical characteristics such as eye color, hair texture, and skin tone among people with similar ancestry such as family, relatives, or people from the same region are a small part of the genetic endowment to what actually makes people similar. Indeed, human attitudes and morals, as well as intelligence and so-called higher-order traits, are unrelated to human characteristics; however, society is the one who defines races and has chosen to ignore these scientific facts in order to avoid providing justifications and explanations for the fixed premises of defining race.

#### **I.4 “Racism” Term Appearance in the US**

Since the European landed on the New World, *Racism* against other ethnic groups had manifested itself in a variety of forms; including mass genocides, human enslavements, social segregations, and unequal rights. However, the term “racism” as a political and socioeconomic ideology emerged in the US shortly after Abraham Lincoln put an end to slavery. Now, for the former slaves, black people were not -should not be- conceived anymore as only a color in the American fabric but an important thread that holds it together. On the opposite side, the White America was not ready for a new partner in country with equal rights. Thus, racism uttered in every possible expression.

Racism can consist of various forms in the society. Racism is divided into three forms; these forms of racism include institutionalized racism, also known as systematic racism, intra-racial racism, and internalized racism. All of the previously described forms can occur between one race to another or inside the race itself.

According to the description above, the African-American population has endured multiple racist treatments from white Americans for many years. Not only start when they still serve as slaves, but it also continues after they gain independence. They continue to face discrimination as they become a minority in America. White Americans also enacted Jim Crow laws, which would eventually make it even more difficult for black Americans to live their lives.

#### **I.4.1 Institutionalized Racism**

According to Jones racism is a human-made system rather than a defect in an individual's behavior, a specific moral failure, or a mental disorder. Recognizing that racism does not have to be individualistic or intentional. Institutional racism refers to institutional and cultural behaviors that maintain racial inequity. (9) Benefits are structured to advantage powerful groups at the expense of others. JimCrow laws and redlining practices are two examples of institutional racism. (Carmichael and Hamilton) .

#### **I.4.2 Intra-racial Racism**

Intra-racial racism is often categorized as a form of racism. Unexpectedly, prejudice exists not only between races, but also within races. A race can be consisted of different groups, and they frequently discriminate against groups they believe are more inferior than them. (Jones,2000)

### **I.4.3 Internalized Racism**

Internalized racism is not simply a self-blame and feeling responsible in the context of racism. Internalized racism is mostly about cultural imperialism, dominance, structure, and compliance to the "way things are" in our racialized society. Furthermore, racism has recently grown more subtle than before, with more avoidance than hatred. The dominant group has shaped racism through media, language, and daily requirements. As a result, the oppressed group unknowingly accepts it as normal and finally accepts it. This is racism that exists within individuals. It is when one holds negative ideas about his/her own culture, even if unknowingly. Xenophobic feelings or one's internalized sense of oppression. (Jones, 2000)

### **I.5 Double Oppression**

Frances Beal introduced the term "double oppression" to public in 1972. She is a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) Women's Liberation Committee and a member of the Third World Women's Alliance. She used the term to express the dual oppression that black women face. Black women, particularly in America, experience double oppression in the form of racism and sexism. Furthermore, "Aziza" also noted that it can come from both white and black men, as well as white women. In depth, double oppression can occur whenever they experienced such inequality from every kind. (6-7)

In other words, Double oppression is a concept originally refers to a source of inward twoness. It was African American women's lot to endure a binary form of oppression that emerged from being "Female" and "Black" simultaneously. To understand African American female we must go back to slavery. During that era, women were viewed and raised to be breeders, servants, and sexual objects that satisfied the need of their masters.

## **I.6 Civil Rights Movement**

The end of the American civil war in 1865 was thought of to be the end of slavery as well. However, shortly after the freedom, the colored people had to realize that another long struggle was yet ahead before earning equal civil rights. Although colored men citizens were able to vote since 1870, the Supreme Court laid out the racial segregation doctrine through the legal principle of “*separate but equal*” in 1896. Soon after, segregation was broadened in all southern states to include almost all aspects of civil life and public establishments. Ultimately, the “equal” segregation, originally introduced by Jim Crow laws, led to colored people being considered and treated as second-degree citizens; essentially that these laws enforced the segregation of public education and civic facilities—Jim Crow Laws were maintained until 1965. In 1909, a group of prominent black and white activists; namely, W. E. Du Bois, Mary White Ovington, Moorfield Storey, and Ida B. Wells, created the National Association for Advancement of Colored People “NAACP”. Their goal was to advance justice for African American and challenge the existing racist legislations—Crow laws for instance. By the mid-century the group became pivotal in the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka court case 1954. It demanded that school segregation should be dropped. In fall of 1955, the United States attended the first integrated school encouraged by the decision; the Civil Rights Movement began to hold high profile boycotts and other peaceful protests. This included Montgomery bus boycott in support of Rosa Parks. By 1961 universities also become integrating. This area also saw the climb of Black Power led by Stokely Carmichael. In opposition to extremists like Ku Klux Klan. This ideology was exemplified by the Black Panther Party, which stands on principles followed by Malcolm X.

### **I.6.1 Civil Rights Movement Leaders**

#### **I.6.1.1 Martin Luther king:**

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January, 15, 1929 in Atlanta Georgia. The second child of Martin Luther King sr. Earned Ph-D and pastor a humanitarian, activist, pastor and the leader of the Civil Rights Movement who believes that not only black people but all races should always be treated equally to white people. King led many African Americans used peaceful and nonviolence strategies such as protest marches, sit-ins and boycotts. Martin Luther King organized the 1963 March on Washington where he delivered “I Have a Dream” speech. King Jr. won a noble prize in 1964. He was murdered by James Earl Ray in 1968. (History.com, Editors)

### **I.6.1.2 Rosa Park**

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks was born in February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Subsequently, Parks’ parents James and Leona McCauley separated; her mother moved the family to Pine Level, Alabama to live with her parents Rose and Sylvester Edwards who were formerly enslaved people and also strong advocates for racial equality. Rosa Parks spends her youth in Edwards’ farm. Living with her grandparents allowed Rosa the meaning of being African American, but also showed her how to be strong. In one experience, Parks grandfather protected their farm from the Ku Klux Klan, this group was known for killing the African Americans while the Ku Klux Klan members marched down the street. In 1932, Rosa Parks met and married Raymond Parks, a barber and an active member in the NAACP. She got her high school degree and became involved with the NAACP too as a youth leader. In December 1, 1955, this when Rosa Parks arrested for refusing to her seat for a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. (History.com, Editors)

Her defiance sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Rosa Parks’ arrest caused on the anger of the blacks and decided to boycott riding buses relying on the nonviolence strategy as

a tool to end racial segregation. Martin Luther king declared to the Montgomery Improvement Association:

We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice. (Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 36)

### **I.6.1.3 Malcolm x**

Malcolm Little later El-hajj Malik El-Shabazz born in May 19 1925, in Omaha. His parents, Earl and Louise Little, were followers of the Pan-African activist Marcus Garvey. When Malcolm was four years old, his family was subjected to constant harassment by the Ku Klux Klan who burned down. The family moved to Michigan where they were threatened by the Black Legion an offshoot of the KKK. Four of Malcolm's uncles were also murdered by white racists. When Malcolm was 13, his mother was committed to a mental institution; her children were split up and sent different foster homes. He was an excellent student, but dropped out of school after a white teacher told him it was unrealistic for a young black boy to aspirations of being a lawyer after a few years in Michigan and Boston he moved to Harlem at the age of 18 where he was involved in gambling, robbery, drug dealing and pimping. At the age of 21, after committing a string of robberies with a small gang in Boston, Malcolm arrested and sentenced eight to ten years at Charlestown State Prison. Incarceration was the beginning of Malcolm's transformation while in prison; his siblings began writing to him about the Nation of Islam and its leader Elijah Muhammad. The nation of Islam promoted black independence and rejected the nation of the superiority of white people. Malcolm,

initially hostile to the idea of any religion eventually became a member of the Nation; he read books constantly and began writing regularly to Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad's taught to abandon given family names as they were actually the names of former slave-owners. So Malcolm Little became Malcolm X. In 1958, Malcolm married with his wife Betty, and gave six daughters. He is one of the most prominent Muslims in the modern history and a symbol of black liberation, who has inspired generations. He was deeply critical of the growing civil rights movement and its leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who preached integration. (biography.com)

## **II. Literary Background**

### **II.1 Background of African American Literature and Genres**

When going back to the birth of the African American literature, it is necessary first to know the main matter of that phase. Race and tensions were the issues that pushed the African American to use their publications to state the black community voice, authority and to establish their right place in society. The English contributed to the issue of segregation. They had developed the ideas of inferiority and distinction through drawing on preconceptions rooted in images of blackness and physical differences between the two peoples (Bruce 02).

Early in 18<sup>th</sup> century colored people were deprived from the right of making testimonies in the courts precisely in the south. African American were given names such as 'colored' 'Negros' and 'Blacks'. Due to these issues and so many other- African American writers and the escaped slaves restored to literature as a way of self expression and their works were a reflection of their identities. "Bars Fight" considered as the oldest known work in African American literature written by Lucy Terry in 1746. After the American



independence, Phillis Wheatley the first black woman poet who broke the barriers to publish her book in 1773 *“Poems Various on Subjects, Religious and Moral”*.

Correspondingly, the enslaved people were writing their stories that tell their experience with the horror of capture, sale and the mistreatment, and some were passed orally. That is genre of African American literature named ‘slave narratives’ that was written between the mid 1700s and 1800s, then it was developed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It includes some of the most well-known narratives such as those of Frederick Douglass. Indeed his autobiography *“Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave”* (1845) *gained the most attention and it was an immediate bestseller.*

African American literature has been developed by the twentieth century, and it took a place globally; it depicts the African Americans journey, their lifestyle, and their experience. It displays the questions of freedom and equality that were deprived from the Africans in the United States for a long period; it is based on other topics such as: African American culture, religion and slavery. Thus, Identity is the centered topic in the African American literature. In most cases, it makes the writers in a never ending struggle about ‘who they are, and who they should be’. Langston Hughes confirms in “I, Too”(1926) and I“Mulatto”(1935).

## **II.2 Harlem Renaissance**

The environment of New York drew Harlem writers since the major publishing houses were located there. However, Harlem became the black cultural center while New York City was the white cultural center. The foundation of the Harlem Renaissance was based on the social and political thoughts of a group of young and talented individuals who were linked by a common black experience. (Bloom, 5)

At the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, African\_ American faced many factors that lead them to leave the South and move towards the North; lack of job opportunities, great racist violence, and natural disasters. This migration open up new economic opportunities, especially when many white men left their jobs and joined the armed forces because of the World War I in 1917. In addition to the north was a place which offered cultural possibilities for those who wanted to make African American voice heard. (Bloom, 5)

The Harlem Renaissance is the African American intellectual reawaking in 1920s that began in the New York district of Harlem and ended with the Great Depression in 1930s. It was a cultural, social and artistic explosion, included numerous of black social thinkers, artists, jazz and blue musicians. It is considered as the re-birth of African American art. It is best known with its literary productions.

The Harlem Renaissance was inspired by the great migration and it was also associated with the New Negro Movement which was an effort to define the meaning of being an African American by African Americans themselves.

### **II.3 Black Arts Movement Literature**

Black Arts Movement, in the 1960s and early 1970s, a period of artistic and literary progress among black Americans. The goal of the Black Arts Movement is to change the way African Americans are presented and portrayed in literature, because they have been portrayed in the media as criminal slaves. One of the movement's innovators, Larry Neal, stated that the purpose of the movement was to create art that spoke to the concerns and aspirations of black Americans (Mays & Burton, 2003).

Furthermore, the Black Arts Movement favored the magazine *Liberator* in 1964 since it presented the movement's views, beliefs, and ideologies. Harold Cruse's thoughts and poems were published in this publication.

Women's issues were one of the foundations, despite the sexism depicted in the works. Toni Morrison was a novelist who focused on problems like as ethnic identity, racism, gender, and enslavement in her novels, such as Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

## **II.4. African American Writers:**

### **II.4.1 W.E.B Du Bois (1868-1963):**

The initial situation was with W.E.B Du Bois in "*Souls of Black Folk*" that is sociological book rather than fiction it discusses the struggle of the Blacks seeking for their rights.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts (1868). An American sociologist, historian, activist, author, editor and one of the founders of National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. He was the first Black American to receive PhD. Du Bois lead Niagara Movement; a group of African American activist who defend for equal rights. (Seed, 2010).

### **II.4.2 Booker Taliaferro Washington**

Booker Taliaferro Washington was an American educator, author, social critic and reformer of international reputation. Booker T. Washington a son an unknown white father. As a child he was only known as Booker then he chose the name Washington. Booker T. Washington born in 1856 that considered the last generation born in slavery. He devotes his life to help blacks transition out of slavery and into freedom. (Seed,2010)

Years following civil war Washington argued that African American must concentrate on self-education , learning useful trades and investing in their own businesses, and stated " do not get the others to do what you can do yourself" . Booker T. Washington believes in the important of education for blacks in achieving success.

Washington's most significant published work is his autobiography "*Up from Slavery*" 1901, that contain the slave narratives and a collection of speeches. The book was the bestseller in 1998 then it listed the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 100 best nonfiction books on The Modern Library. (seed, 2010)

#### **II.4.3 Langston Hughes**

Langston Hughes born on 1902 in Joplin, Missouri. An important American figure in leading the Harlem Renaissance to promote equality, a thinker, a poet and a writer who formed the African American experience as a central subject in his writings. (seed, 2010)

#### **II.5 Contemporary African American Women Writers**

The emergence of feminist views in 1970s supported black women thoughts and highlighted the real meaning of African American women's literature which is noted by the common themes such as: racial and gender inequality, black identity fate, women's search for selfhood, her position and role in a multicultural society and facing double oppression as black a female. Women at 1970s began to express their experiences as both suppressed and a members of a minority group. Thus, numerous African American women writers of that period claimed the need for women to reflect their own experience, their struggle for their position, explored the issue and their rejection of male power over women. For instance: Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, and Shierly Anne Williams.

Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou correspond to the most representative black female writers of a recent era who continued that resist on African American women's literary tradition by standing for such central themes: racial oppression and sexual violence, search for identity, the importance of ancestry.

#### **II.5.1 Toni Morrison**

Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison known as Toni Morrison in February 18, 1931 born and raised in Lorain, Ohio, U.S. American writer noted for her examination of Black experience -particularly Black female experience- within the black community. She received the Noble Prize for Literature in 1993. Toni Morrison grew up in America in a family that appreciates Black culture. Storytelling, songs and folklore are deeply formative part of her childhood. (Gillespie, 2008)

Morrison graduated from Howard University in 1953 with a B.A in English. Then she earned her master degree in American literature from Cornell University in 1955. After teaching at Texas Southern University for two years, she taught at Howard University from 1957 to 1964. She met Harold Morrison during her teaching career they got married in 1958 and had two children Harold and Slade before divorcing in 1964. ( Gillespie, 2008).

### **II.5.2 Toni Morrison's works**

“Morrison” became the first black female editor in fiction at Random House in New York City in the late 1960s. “Toni Morrison” works tackle the African American issues especially black female situations. Her first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is a novel about a victimized black female who is obsessed to meet her society products the white standard of beauty and longs for blue eyes and white skin. In 1973 a second novel *Sula* was published which examines the dynamic of friendship between two black women. *Song of Salmon* (1977) told by a male narrator the novel follows the life of “Macon” in a searching journey about his identity. *Tar Baby* (1981) set on a Caribbean island, explores race, class and gender. The critically acclaimed *Beloved* (1987) which won Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988. In addition to other novels such as *Jazz*, *Paradise* in (1999), *Love* (2003) and *Mercy* (2008). Morrison also, published non-fiction works: *Playing in the Dark* (1992), *Racism and Fascism* (1995), *Remember* (2004) and *What moves at the margin* (2008).

### **II.5.3 Theme and Style**

Toni Morrison considered as one of the leaders of modern American novelists, essayist and literary critic. Morrison cherished black culture for the reason that Morrison grew up in a spiritual family. Thus storytelling, songs, folk tales took a place in her childhood that transmitted all of these in her books. (Theme, 2009)

Due to her distinctive use of language, attractive vocabulary, and vivid imagery, Toni Morrison's work is particularly exceptional and instantly recognizable as literary. Her writings focus on African-American communities through details that allow the reader to become involved and visualize the events. Her books are simple to read, and she incorporates many different styles into her works, such as switching the narration's voice often to give the reader a distinct viewpoint; she skillfully employs multiple narrative voices, using first-person and third- person perspectives to explore various characters experiences and struggles. This technique allows readers to gain insight into the complex emotions and harsh realities faced by the characters in their quest for self-worth and acceptance. Morrison is renowned for using unusual yet powerful comparisons to further describe the information she gives. In order to help the reader relate the text to different images and experiences, she especially uses similes in her writing.( Theme, 2009)

Morrison's writings emphasize on black female experience in shaping identity in an injustice society, she tends to represent as a women's heroine who struggle to find a space for themselves within their families and their communities as well. Morrison is known for including themes of racism, beauty, identity, and family in most of her works to reflect aspects of her own life.

The writer has actively challenged the stereotypes which have been imposed on African American women throughout history. Here, Morrison's struggle can proved by her

novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987). Throughout this novel, the author critiques the destructive influence of white beauty standards on African American communities, as well as the psychological damage caused by internalized racism.

## **II.6 Post Colonial Theory and Feminist Criticism**

The world was centered on the United States after the Second World War, when it attained more power than it had ever before. Europe, which was once thought to be more significant due to its power, began a process of reconstruction following the war's damage and gradually lost its importance. While some nations finally achieved independence, others were socially and economically reliant on other nations that had previously practiced authoritarianism. These countries were compelled to live under pressure as a result of the establishment of a power hierarchy over them, and dominant countries appropriated their resources and labor force. In this setting, colonialism took on new significance. The postcolonial theory derives from these circumstances, which is interdisciplinary in nature but does not confine itself to any particular field. For the colonizing nations, feeling in control and dominant is a desire. In a changing society where ideologies and beliefs took the place of more archaic ways, the concept of domination and power acquired a new meaning. Over time, powerful nation had written their names on history books, while others attempted to exist under the hierarchy of these countries, Because of hierarchy, these countries have lost their essence, lost their value, destroyed their unique cultures, and damaged them financially.

The colonial approaches to imperialism that centered on the interests of developing nations are damaged, and the interests of every country that have something in common with the intellectual contributions of African Americans. Africa is viewed as a developing area, which leads to the exploitation of its labor and resources. Culture and language were severely damaged under the hierarchy of a more dominant culture and language. The assimilation

policy was effective, but the results caused identity issues. Although they were born in American lands and raised according to American ethics and culture, an African American was never recognized as an American, and was instead condemned to be the “other”. However, the self-identity of Africans vanished in the cultural, sociological, and linguistic context, and they are forced to form a new identity. “Hybridity”, a concept created by Homi Bhabha, which are two fundamental cognitions: the colonizer and the colonized. This colonized/colonizer association emphasizes their independence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities -mimicry and ambivalence-. According to Bhabha, all cultural claims and systems are created in an area called “the third space of enunciation”. Identity, which is cultural, always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space. They are forced to live with this identity. For female African Americans, this identity-formation process became increasingly difficult. Comparatively speaking, women were physically deprived of their liberty in more severe ways than males when they traveled to another country, and they had to deal with more challenging circumstances. (Bhabha, 2010).

Postcolonial feminism is an ideology that criticizes how social, cultural, and/or economic processes devalue the status of non-Western women. Postcolonial feminists aim to combat the Western ideas of freedom and progress that portray women in the developing world as illiterate, uneducated, and victims of religion. As Leila Gandhi notes, it is the encounter with feminism that encourages postcolonialism to produce more critical and self reflexive account of cultural nationalism. (102)

During the years of slavery, women were viewed as possessions, and the treatment they were subjected was shaped correspondingly. African American women, who were taken from their countries, started to be used in the sex trade. Additionally, they endured verbal and sexual assault as well as being forced to work without freedom in fields and factories. Undoubtedly, everything was done as a part of the white man's attempt to rule over other



people. African women have traditionally endured harsh living conditions, even in post-slavery period. The white male established his hierarchy over white women and then African American.

Toni Morrison's works can be considered in a postcolonial feminist context. The writer addressed the issue of black women in a postcolonial and imperial environment as well as the continual anxiety and stiffness that women experience in her works. Morrison uses the "time" concept in many ways; she combines the effect of the past that damages the future. Morrison frequently discusses slavery and the damage it does to society and the environment. In Morrison's works, the devastation is reflected in acts such as alcoholism, rape, murder, and incest. This context is apparent in Morrison's novel *"The Bluest Eye"* also considers the post-slavery period and its effects, as well as rape and incest.

## **Conclusion:**

To sum up, this chapter presents a historical background for the topic of racism and discrimination that African Americans faced in the USA in the 1930s, as well as some of the hardships they had to endure to create and validate their identity. Additionally, it provides a brief personal history of the author Toni Morrison, a phenomenal writer who has had the tremendous privilege of introducing the world to Black culture through her literary works, as well as her influence on Black literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

**Copying the Other, Denying the Self: Race and Self-identity in *The Bluest***

*Eye*

## Introduction

This chapter highlights the importance of identity, the formation of the 'self', and the influence of the environment and society on that development. And analyzing the major factors that shape self-identity, then discussing the reasons for wearing whiteness and performing dual role and identity with one body as a way of copying the other, as well as why they ignore the fact that their blackness this is not something they can change and that the race concept is constructed by society rather than inherent. Last but not least, it examines Pecola's daily racism, which led to her terrible tragic end, and the deep hatred for her own self-image.

### 2.1 Identity Formation

It is essential to understand that identity refers to the enduring aspects of a person's definition of her- or himself, the conception of who one is and what one is over time and across situations. It also important to know that personal identity is a cumulative product built up over a person's lifetime experiences (Kelman, 3).

Cholly Breedlove is a male character in *The Bluest Eye* whose life is harmed by his inability to identify with his ancestors. Cholly is abandoned by his father before his birth, by his mother nine days after birth, and is raised by his grandmother, who never fails to remind him that he owes her his life. Cholly's formation of his own self-identity is hampered not only by his birth parents' abandonment, but also by the origin of his name

He wasn't nowhere around when you was born. Your mama didn't name you nothing. The nine days wasn't up before she throwed you on the junk heap. When I got you I named you myself on the ninth day. You named after my dead brother. Charles Breedlove. A good man. Ain't no Samson never come to no good end. (*Bluest* 133).

The origin of one's self in identity formation is important. Frederick Douglass, in the first chapter of his autobiography, expresses his difficulty with the fact that he is unsure of his exact age: "A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could tell not why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege" (17). Since Cholly cannot identify with anyone he is related to, he lacks any resemblance of a sense of self and his maturation is stunted, which makes it easier for Cholly to internalize society's racism.

It is obvious that the theme of racial identity is explored by the novel's characters, starting with the Breedlove family's internalization of their ugly nature. The narrator describes how they live, claiming that:

The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. ("Morrison"36)

They were convinced with the idea that they were ugly and needed to hide from the public. It is shaped in Pecola as well. In addition to the disharmony in her home, the outside world spins her existence in an endless circle. Everyone attempts to remind her with her dark skin and ugly face, "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (Morrison,43).

Pecola Breedlove grew up in a family that was filled with racial self-loathing. The family's single conviction was that they were ugly; they were all of the same opinion, as was

Pecola. It is worth mentioning that family can play a significant role in shaping people's identity. Family can provide the sense of belonging, support, and guidance which helps in the development of values and beliefs. Unlike Pecola's mother, Pauline, has had the largest influence on her. Despite the fact that Cholly Breedlove commits horrors against his daughter and is the one who drives her insane, Pauline's hatred for herself and her living situations has rubbed off on Pecola. Furthermore, a woman who reacts to her newborn child in the way Pauline does cannot help but transfer it to her child; When Pecola was born, Pauline's initial impression of her was not what she had anticipated and said:

Anyways, the baby come. Big old healthy thing. She looked different from what I thought. Reckon I talked to it so much before I conjured up a mind's eye view of it [...] I used to like to watch her. You know they makes them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly.

(Morrison, 125).

The scene shows Pecola's initial identification as an ugly girl, as well as the construction of her self-identity and the most important that Pecola's internalization of her ugliness begins with her mother.

Toni Morrison expressed the importance of self-identity construction regarding the surrounding society's rules that can influence the development of the identities. Here, shadism also has taken place in losing Pecola's self. Shadism by definition is the discriminatory treatment of people of the same racial class based on their skin color. To simplify, the term is linked to racism within the same race and is impacted by other factors such as gender and class. That is to say that, the surrounding community is another cause for Pecola's insanity.

Intra-racial racism is prevalent in the surrounding community, and they have all involved in the victimization of Pecola at some point, because she is black-skinned:

“Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Blacke mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo . . .” They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. (Morrison, 65)

Nafnouf argues that racism and oppression are perpetrated even by children of the same race, demonstrating that they do not share the same class, social, or racial roots (226). The expression "black e mo" in the quotation indicates that Pecola was darker than they were. As a result, those who were not particularly light-skinned themselves took advantage of the chance to mock and humiliate someone who was darker than they were.

## **2.2 Performing Whiteness**

Toni Morrison makes an effort to shed light on how Black people and women who experienced double oppression had their self-images damaged by the internalization of white beauty standards. She challenges the presumption that being white confers superiority over Black people. The definition of the white beauty stand is that it is not black. As a result, Black people start to associate beauty with acting whiteness.

The title of the book *The Bluest Eye* makes performing whiteness apparent. Morrison deliberately conveys a message while exploring the effects of Black's inferiority complex about their appearance. White idealization starts from Maureen Peal, the newcomer to Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia's school. She is the mulatto girl who is the center of attention at school.

Morrison characterized her with special detail which is not random. Starting from her skin color “high- yellow dream child” then she adds: “long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care.”(60) Moving to her high quality of clothes she wears, neat and new "Brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff". On the other hand Frieda and Claudia and Pecola wear simple and used clothes. This indirect comparison Morrison highlights the problem of class in black society. The light-skinned girl is a striking example of how the colonial group's legacy affects the "Other," or the persons who acquired white aspect and act on the conviction that if they dress, speak, and act like white people, they would be seen and considered superior. Because of Maureen's position and circumstances in society as beautiful, wealthy, and light-skinned; she is able to convince herself that she is not black “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!” (Morrison 73) she recognizes her privilege from Black people and acts upon this concept.

Performing Whiteness in the Black Body is also shaped in Geraldine, a woman from Mobile, where everyone acts differently from Black people in poor neighborhoods and considers themselves rich with the necessary beauty standards that permit them to treat poor black people with contempt and lesser than them. Geraldine's expression toward Pecola and her thoughts about poor black girls:

She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel of the shoe. She saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up...They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at

her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (Morrison 91)

According to the writer the Mobile citizens are characterized as being thin, brown girls, narrow, tall, and still with an eye that can tell you time by the color of the sky. "They live in "quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed."(82). They contain all ideals of white beauty in a black body, but they think that these ideals may conceal their blackness and allow them to escape reality. Morrison emphasized that in this claim "When they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, and worry about the edges of their hair."(83). This demonstrated that reality cannot be avoided and that mimicking white culture will inevitably result in empty race performance. Geraldine categorized herself and her son Junior in the colored group and explaining to her son that the former is "colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud." (Morrison, 87) and he is not allowed to play with them even if he wants to.

Without a doubt, the heroine of the story, Pecola, was the character who suffered the most from white beauty standards. Pecola's desire for blue eyes is shown both implicitly and explicitly throughout all the seasons of the book with different characters. Pitiful Pecola is a young black girl who longed to have blue eyes and to escape from her ugly appearance. She believes that blue eyes are a sign of beauty, and having them ensures that others will love and accept her. "If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes. ("Morrison"46).

Pecola's appreciation of whiteness and beauty is a result of the echos she hears around her. Because she is a poor black woman who is frequently referred to as ugly, she



internalizes the nickname and becomes convinced with, resulting in her self-loathing hatred and confusion.

The little breedlove drank four cups of milk when Frieda gave her cookies and milk in a Shirley Templar cup, just to keep holding the cup and look at the picture of the white girl. "She was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face." (Morrison 19). Her awareness that white girls are beautiful while she is a black ugly girl justifies why she never misses a chance to interact with white girls. It is represented also with Mary Jane candy that she bought, because she believed that "To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane." ("Morrison" 50).

### **2.3 Self-loathing to Alienation**

Self-loathing as well as many other racial discrimination outcomes can influence the identity of black people. Racial self-loathing is strongly manifested in *The Bluest Eye*.

The Breedlove family was ugly, they always knew this, and society made sure that they remember it for the rest of their lives : "They lived there because they were poor and black. And they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was tradition and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique" (Morrison, 38).

since people's identity is closely related to the outcome of experience, black people are consistently excluded from the mainstream culture, the neglected minority feel as though their existence is unworthy, which promotes self-hatred and inferiority complex. Constant racial disregard can lead to feelings of worthlessness in people. When Pecola goes to buy candies The look in the seller's eyes transforms the white outlook which lacks individual's acknowledgment "The total absence of human recognition, the glazed separateness...But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet his vacuum is not new to her" (Morrison, 48-49). That vacant disgusted look is nothing new for Pecola; all white people

view her with the same contemptuous eyes. Morrison reveals the significant impact of self-hatred on the protagonist's weak identity construction.

Racism and self-hatred invariably lead to Pecola's alienation that pushed her to insanity and had a negative impact on how others perceived and treated her, which was ultimately a result of her skin color, poverty, and lack of beauty. Alienation is the situation or experience of being isolated from a group or activity to which one should belong or participate.

Pecola represented the tragedy of being poor and black in 1930s. She grew sensitive to self-hatred in the absence of a solid support system, and her great desire to achieve the white standard of beauty led to ultimate mental instability. "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes ...were different that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different" (46)

Pecola is also isolated in a world where racial discrimination is a daily practice. Pecola's alienation begins in her family, where she is neglected by her mother and mistreated by her father. Moreover her tragedy gets worse when her father rapes her. Her desire for blue eyes ends because how can an ugly black girl have blue eyes? Her dream appears to be a nightmare. When she decides not to go to school after she is scolded as being a certain kind of black in school, she feels alienated. Pecola was born to an unfortunate family at an unfortunate time; her skin was a dark color, she was poor, her parents neglected and abused her. This combination made her an easy target for alienation and discrimination. Once people began to alienate her, everyone followed along. It had an impact on her self-esteem and made her aspire to be a little white girl with blue eyes. She was not proud of herself in any way. Her obsession with blue eyes and her visits to church to turn her eyes blue, she never really got blue eyes, but she saw herself with them, she felt beautiful in her own eyes. This was just

a form of denial to cover up her hatred, which reflects her emotions of alienation and estrangement from both societies. Everyone caused in Pecola's aliention, including her mother, who avoided her, People avoided Pecola, and without human interaction and affection, she became insane. As a result, she created an imaginary friend.

During that miserable summer, she spoke with her imaginary friend about having a blue eye, telling him that Mr. Soaphead gave her the color by magic. The reader can see from Pecola's speech that her suffering comes to an end tragically.

Why don't you look at me when you say that? You're looking drop-eyed like Mrs. Breedlove. Mrs. Breedlove look drop-eyed at you? Yes. Now she does. Ever since I got my blue eyes, she look away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she's jealous too? Could be. They are pretty, you know. (Morrison 195).

Pecola claims to have the bluest eye in the world, and she thinks that everybody around her are jealous of her. She also thinks that her mother does not look at her because of her eyes, but the reality is that she lost her mind.

## **Conclusion:**

It is important to note that identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, and there is no one size-fits all answers to how people form their identity. As a result of white culture's hegemony over black people's minds, there are conflicts in terms of performing identities. Morrison's first novel "*the bluest eye*" exposes the result of white presence in society on African Americans and how this presence imposes difficulty in on the individuals to form an identity, also the pursuit of perfection and whiteness was the main focus of any oppressed female such as Pecola, who is in turn faced daily racism and hatred, particularly among her

family, who were the major cause of traumatic development in her life; in the end, she was raped by her own violent father and distrusted by her mother, so she lost her self by losing her mind and became alienated from her society. It is interesting to study how one's race might alienate and abuse a person simply because he is regarded ugly or inferior. As a result of the inferiority complex constructs and escape the problem, he/she adapts the standards of the superior group and does it as a solution to hide behind it.

**CHAPETR THREE:**

**The Social Construction of Gender Impact on Woman Behavior in *The  
Bluest Eye***

## **Introduction:**

This chapter is allotted to illustrate the different themes used by Toni Morrison to involve readers with the novel's extremes, through the critical analysis of *The Bluest Eye*. It explores how the sexism identity is constructed through social norms and cultural standards they live in. Then it discusses the concept of womanhood in "The Bluest Eye". In the sexism analysis the study depends on Butler's claim of sexism social construction.

### **3.1 Sexism in "The Bluest Eye"**

Sexism is the first side of the theme of hatred that contributes to the effacement of black womanhood in the novel. In her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Hooks argues that sexism is temporarily disregarded and postponed by women activists, compared to racism: "When the women's movement raised the issue of sexist oppression, we argued that sexism was insignificant in light of the harsher more brutal reality of racism" (1). "Hooks" confesses that this was a big mistake made by black feminists at that time as it worsened the problem of sexism and led up to more devaluation of black womanhood. He further quotes S. Truth's warning that "If coloured men get their rights, and not coloured women theirs...the coloured men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before" ("Hooks", 4).

Man is designated to be the masters and women are never to be granted freedom. It has emerged from the debate of anthropologists and sociologists that the subservient role of the female gender is either the result of biological necessity or the construct of power

relationship culturally determined by society. For centuries, Black women have been called the 'mule of the world' and 'slave of a slave' and had the status of the wretched on the earth. Uprooted from her native African culture and placed in a dominant, she was very often intimidated by racists. Initially, the main concern of the Black Women's organizations was to abolish all kinds of economic and political disparities against them. Now they are mainly concerned with the issues to black women who are oppressed by sexism, and racism.

Kashinath Ranveer asserts that

Black Women in America are triply burdened and disadvantaged. They are black, female and economically underprivileged. This triple burden restricts them from a fuller and meaningful participation in American society mainly because they are confined to their race and the narrow enclosures of sex. As a result, they suffer as blacks amongst the blacks, slaves of the slaves and forced to occupy a very marginal place in the Americans social life. Not only this, their humanity and the black female self are denied by white men and also by their people, particularly black men. This made them feel insignificant, faceless, subservient, and devoid of identity

"The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison is just as much about sexual violence and gender disparity as it is racial hatred. Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove is raped and impregnated by her father, and slowly goes insane after the baby dies prematurely. She is not only violently assaulted to the point of fainting, but also ostracized and mocked by her community. Neighbours participate in victim-blaming, saying things like:

"Ought to. She carry some of the blame."

"Oh, come on. She ain't but twelve or so."

"Yeah. But you never know. How come she didn't fight him?"

"Maybe she did."

“Yeah? You never know.”

“Well, it probably won’t live. They say the way  
hermama beat her she lucky to be alive herself.”

“She be lucky if it don’t live. Bound to be the ugliest  
thing walking.” (Morrison, 189)?”

Her mother is said not to believe her, choosing to either remain removed from the matter or take her abusive husband’s side. Although Cholly is originally seen as evil, Morrison reveals that he dealt with racism and was forced to be sexually violent to Darlene when he was a teenager.

A second-wave feminist lens is the best way to critique Pecola’s mother. Pauline uses her husband’s adultery and violence as a gateway to a community of Christian women who view her as a martyr. She does this by complaining of how badly Cholly treats her. Pauline’s foot is a source of embarrassment when she moves up north, and she tries to be beautiful like the white women in Hollywood. Like Pecola and Claudia, she is aware that whiteness means beauty. When she loses her tooth, she decides to put all her energy on serving her “white family,” the Fishers. Pauline cares more about this family than her own, letting them call her “Polly” and baking a pie for the little white girl she watches. When Pecola accidentally knocks down a pan full of blueberries, her mother slaps her twice in a rage and comforts the little white girl:

The little girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedloveturned to her.

“Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord,

look at your dress. Don’t cry no more. Polly will change

it.” She went to the sink and turned tap water on a fresh

towel. Over her shoulder she spit out words to us like

rotten pieces of apple. “Pick up that wash and get on out



of here, so I can get this mess cleaned up.”

(Morrison, 109).

Pauline is not incapable of being a mother to her children, but chooses to nurture the white family because they match her ideal household. In this way, she challenges biological essentialism, because she chooses whom to nurture. Morrison offers a view of gender disparity through a race in “The Bluest Eye”, showing that black women and girls are doubly oppressed because of their race and gender. Pecola is a triple victim, because she is young, black and female. People take advantage of her size, her build, and her race. For instance, Junior lies to and terrorizes Pecola by luring her to his house and locking her in a room. When his mother comes home to see her cat injured, Junior lies and says Pecola killed the cat; the only thing Geraldine cares about. “Get out,” she says to her. “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house (Morrison, 92).” Pecola embodies “niggers” who are “dirty and loud,” who sleep “six in a bed, all their pee mixing in the night as they wet their beds each in his candy-and-potato-chip dream (Morrison, 91-2).”

Geraldine calls the girl a “nasty black bitch,” using a gendered insult on top of racial insult. She is black instead of “light-skinned” or “colored,” and the fact that she is a girl makes it worse. Pecola’s and Darlene’s right to security of person/freedom from sexual violence is violated when Cholly rapes them. Because of this, they no longer have control over their bodies. It is doubtful as to whether Pecola ever had control of her body. Her mother constantly abuses her, her father uses her as sexual property, and the state forces her to have a baby born of incest. This is taking away her bodily autonomy, even if abortion was illegal and extremely dangerous in the 1940s. Pecola’s sexual autonomy is taken away despite not being sexual, yet people still blame her.

### **3.2 The Double Oppression Experienced by Black Women in *The Bluest Eye***

In this novel, black women are both ostracized by the white community and by men in their own black community. Therefore, they experience double oppression. This situation led to a mental breakdown for them. The issues of race, gender, and class created by the white world were issues that black women had to struggle with. These three major problems illustrate the traumatic conditions they experienced in white America. Women's characters' life was full of torture. While white women are also victims of social judgments, the situation of black women has always been worse. "The blacks have suffered due to their status in society, as a poor, marginal group. The black women, like the black men were also working women. The black women had to work on plantation farms as laborers and also as mammys or maids in the kitchens of the white households. One of the biggest crises in Pauline's life was the day Pecola was born. When Pauline first saw Pecola, she thought that she was very ugly. Pauline has developed a hatred for her since the day she gave birth to Pecola. On the same day, Pauline experienced inequality. In the hospital offensive words were spoken by the doctor. "When he got to me he said now these here women you do not have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (Morrison: 124-125). These words hurt and shocked her. She was not treated as a human being because of her skin color. This race discrimination was very humiliating for Pauline. She cannot show love and affection to her children. According to Collins, Pauline has reasons. "For far too many black mothers, the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection must often wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied"(55) . Struggling for survival with the problems such as pressures, class differences, racial and gender issues, Pauline fights both with her husband and with the white community. Women are not only subjected to racial but also gender discrimination. The behaviors expected from women and men in society are

different. In other words, the gender perception of the society determines male and female behavior. Pecola's brother, Sammy, and his attitude towards his parents is another example of gender in *The Bluest Eye*. While Pecola must stay at home, Sammy is able to resist and leave home.

Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times. Once he got to Buffalo and stayed three months. His returns, whether by force or circumstance, were sullen. Pecola, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance.

(Morrison, 43)

Claudia tells the women as the victims suffering in silence because of the discrimination created by white society, especially males. Black women judge themselves based on the forms of appearance constructed by a society, which makes them feel inferior.

Toni Morrison's novel, "*The Bluest Eye*", strongly focuses on a major theme of women facing oppression. Throughout the novel, women endure physical and emotional abuse and are struggling to survive often resorting to desperate attempts. Concurrently, however, many of the women also abuse other women. For example, Pecola Breedlove is abused by her mother, and her insecurities are rooted in the verbal and emotional abuse her mother put her through as a young girl. Moreover, other female adults in Pecola's life confirm her insecurities by criticizing her appearance, utilizing racist insults that are used against African Americans.

Basically, Pecola faces the same psychological oppression like the female black characters, such as Pauline. All of them are oppressed psychologically by the master, the White people. Here, the master has given an image for each of them as ugly people who are expected to wear that image (the ugly people). Further, Pecola and is considered ugly because of her physical nature. Her skin is black, her hair is curly, she has heavy eye brows which are nearly met, crooked nose, etc. All of those physical natures contradict the physical characteristics of the White people who have white skin, straight hair like Black people, a sharp well Formed nose, The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow Foreheads. The low irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called Attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face...It was as though Some mysterious all knowing master had given each one a cloak of Ugliness to wear,...the master had said, "You are ugly people" (Morrison 38-39). Moreover, Pecola is oppressed culturally and physiologically by the image of White people's beauty which is supported by the media, such as a candy wrapper, cup Of milk, magazine, etc. Culturally, Pecola is oppressed by the standard of beauty which Is dominated by the White beauty as the real beauty and accepted. In fact, Pecola is not A White person but Black. From that, we can also see that Pecola faces physical Oppression.

### **3.3 Womenhood in The Bluest Eye**

Toni Morrison's novel, "The Bluest Eye", strongly focuses on a major theme of women facing oppression. Throughout the novel, women endure physical and emotional abuse and are struggling to survive often resorting to desperate attempts. Concurrently, however, many of the women also abuse other women. For example, Pecola Breedlove is abused by her mother, and her insecurities are rooted in the verbal and emotional abuse her mother put her



through as a young girl. Moreover, other female adults in Pecola's life confirm her insecurities by criticizing her appearance, utilizing racist insults that are used against African Americans. Nevertheless, there are a few female characters who drastically differ from the others and instead empower Pecola; China, Poland, and Miss Marie are three female characters who do not physically or emotionally harm other women. The three are Pecola's neighbors, and they each turn to prostitution in order to survive. Moreover, they also feel empowered in their choices to be prostitutes; they explain to Pecola that they feel as though they are in power through their sexuality and femininity, especially over men. They also adopt stereotypically masculine characteristics, such as heavy drinking and aggressive personalities. Thus, the three represent a mild rejection of gendered roles, and they summarize Morrison's depiction of womanhood in the novel. By rejecting gendered roles and claiming power over their oppressors, they fundamentally promote the idea of independence in women despite their situations and traumatic histories.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" discusses two important issues or sides of sexism and racism. Both deeply portray the dilemma of black women at large and exposes their intricate situation. Sexism includes patriarchal oppression represented in black males who, under the stereotype of weakness and emasculation, practice the most sexist oppression against their fellow women, which is a result of social construction of gender. For instance, Cholly is the father figure who tragically shares in the plight of his family. His feeling of inferiority and rejection by his family makes him a sexist person.

Although the women of "The Bluest Eye" experience oppression from the men in their lives, they are not completely powerless. They exercise authority over their children

through physical force and verbal assault, and likewise, over other women through gossip and slander.

## **General Conclusion**

The Bluest Eye is a work that depicts the Black females' experiences and how they were brutally assailed by the female beauty codes which eliminated them and prevent them from any sense of well-being. The beauty standards set by the American white society strongly brunt on the protagonist mantel state which made her interrogate herself, identity, and seek for another ideal identity that fit the society standards . The African American female suffered from different form of racism,sexism, haters, and total rejection of American white society as well males of their race. The story is narrated by two voices. Shifts between Claudia Macteer's and the omniscience merge. Toni Morrison is the writer of the novel and she uses this technique in order to gain greater validity for her story.

In the first chapter we have seen the roots of slavery in the ancient world and their needs in the new world and the issue of racism and the double oppression that has a deep effect on the African American's life. After the Great depression America witness. The crises affect on social classes but Black people hardship was worse. Slaver was abolished but racism was not, they suffered from segregation in different aspects and places. Also we have talked about African American writers.

Toni Morrison as an African American writer who lived and raised in time of Great depression, could study and achieve a large success in her life through her literary works and epic style. She reflects the inter and intra suffer of the Black's in most of her novels.

In the second chapter we have identified the aspects of performing gender norms through Pecola self-image the society and family set for her. By calling her ugly the moment she born classifies her in one of society categories and create a self-internalization on her mind thus she perform on the base of ugly girl that's to show the importance of identity formation and the daily family and society influence and interactions she passed through as the ugliest dark girl in the town and believes on too. Pecola was sounded by negativity and



violent verbal and physical attitudes and the performativity concept help us on construction the black female ugly image through Pecola, Pauline, Cholly behaviors .After the deep analyses we have understand the reasons behind Pecola collapse because of her mother abuse and the hate she transmit to her daughter in a picture of slapping, ignorance and breaking Pecola trust her mother. Also the performance of Maureen and Geraldine, who are light-skinned females and consider themselves above the Black people, because of the features that allowed them to act like they are beautiful, cute and clean. The double oppression is speeded through the characters story special with the light skinned girl Maureen and Geraldine who considers them slave above black people and acquires the white aspects to perform it is part of their identity but also have the black features in their souls and blood. Then We came to illustrate that the major reason of Pecola faces a self loating and alienation and tragic end is her father who raped her twice; this horrible damaged experience was the drop that over flooded the cup.

In the last chapter, we have Eposed the sexism issue and in what way black female in “The Bluest Eye” suffered from sexism , by interactions with white and black society life, and how they perform their identity. We have analyze Pecola's conscious of her dark skin and ugly face, and her longing to have blue eyes as a solution to riddance her ugliness, in addition to the unlimited love she hold for whiteness.

We have also pointed to double oppression experienced by African American women, then the last point was identifying the concept of womanhood in which we examines the impact of racism, sexism and poverty on the lives of black women and girls, and the way in which these factors can shape and limit their experiences of womanhood.

Through this research we have realized our objective by answering the research questions we set. We have discovered the impact of race and discrimination on the life of

African\_American in America during the hardship crises of the great depression period, it affect all society members and black people worse. They faced racism every day in everyplace, lynched, fired from jobs, mugging houses, everything was separate by lines and for colored signboard. The mistreatment and daily racism did not hold them from defending their rights and attempts to find solutions. Literature helps black writers like Toni Morrison to talk about the harmful experiences they lived. In the other hand the Critical race theory tenet that say race is a social construction help in discovering the basic elements of racial identity construction and how the daily racist experience shape identities. This lead to the an unstable identity and conflict of double consciousness of what black people is to what he wants to be according to what make hem accepted and seen in society.

To conclude, "The Bluest Eye" is Morrison's first novel. It portrays the issue of Black female in the American society through the most innocent and delicate member of the society a little black abused girl. Pecola is double oppressed and mistreated by the society and family as well. The self-Image she built through the eyes of others and racist beauty standards are the main cause of her yearning to have blue eyes as a solution to escape from her ugliness also for the negative impact on her self-identity. The Novel provides a close and clear picture of Black female traumatic life especially the Black children.

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