

DEBUNKING BLACK SELF-DENIAL: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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Abstract:

Toni Morrison's novel The Bluest Eye explores many African American adults' preference for White American standards of beauty and culture while some of their children fiercely hate these. By means of awakening Blacks' consciousness about their racial self-love, this contradiction prevails. Infused with psychoanalytic approach, this article debunks black self-denial as Morrison's anger at Blacks' self-debasement.

Keywords: *beauty, black skin color, debunking, mainstream American values, self-denial.*

Résumé :

Le roman The Bluest Eye de Toni Morrison explore la préférence, par de nombreux adultes afro-américains, des standards de la beauté et la culture des Américains blancs, alors que certains de leurs enfants les détestent farouchement. En éveillant la conscience des Noirs sur leur amour-propre racial, cette contradiction prévaut. Imprégné d'une approche psychanalytique, cet article démonte le refus de soi des Noirs comme étant la colère de Morrison face à l'auto-avilissement des Noirs.

Mots-clés : *beauté, couleur de peau noire, démystification, valeurs américaines dominantes, refus de soi.*

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is about black self-denial through a black family, the Breedloves (Pecola, the daughter; Pauline, the

mother; and Cholly, the father) in their search for white beauty – blue eyes, white skin color and blond hair – for social approval. Their self-denial comes under hating their own black skin tagged by Whites as ugliness, filth and uselessness. Despite their struggles, the Breedloves neither achieve white beauty nor meet the approval of the Whites. Rather, they become victims of white obscenities, suffering on physical and psychological grounds. Prior to their sufferings, Claudia, a small girl, angrily opposes white beauty by destroying anything made of it. What do Claudia's anger and the Breedloves' sufferings imply? This article answers such a paramount question. It draws a link between two important concepts, namely mainstream American beauty and black self-denial. The first indicates the celebration of the white skin color, blue eyes, and blond hair in America. This veneration of white American physical values marginalizes African Americans' beauty, which drags them to loath themselves – their black skin color and culture. Visibly, blacks' self-hatred traces their self-denial. Self-denial is “the act of not having or doing the thing you like, either because you do not have enough money, or for moral and religious reasons.” (Wehmeier, 2008: 1325). Figuratively, self-denial means hiding from one's self: one's root, culture and identity. Black self-denial in *The Bluest Eye* seems compelling. Throughout the novel, black beauty is represented as ugliness and dirtiness while African Americans deny their black identity. Such racial denial shows the extent to which African Americans view their value systems as a shame they should run away from. Actually, they are not and can never be Whites. Then, why do they pretend to be who they are not? This study is undertaken in a psychoanalytic perspective. Psychoanalysis is a literary approach which studies both the psychological influences on and the motives of characters' behaviors and belief systems (Eagleton, 1996-[2003]: 131-132). Originally, psychoanalysis is a medical method (clinical and therapeutic) that stems from Sigmund Freud and which is used to treat nervous patients. But this theory has quickly imposed itself in literature because it often helps to unveil the repressed meaning of a text. According to Green and LeBihan (1996: 147): “Repression is the action that produces the unconscious by rendering experiences, thoughts, desires and memories irretrievable. Psychoanalysis is the process whereby clues to repression are recognized and repressed in a way that can be understood by the conscious mind.” So, this article digs into the system put in place for Blacks to deny themselves and the

narrative technique used to denounce black self-denial. It shows how black self-denial creates self-destruction in the Black community and adds more to Whites' prejudices regarding the black skin color. The study draws attention on the importance of knowing one's self and preserving the rich inheritance of black culture. To achieve this purpose, this article presents, first of all, the revolt against white beauty and its implications; secondly, Blacks' physical sufferings, and finally their psychological sufferings to counter black self-denial.

1. Revolt against White Beauty

Either in *The Bluest Eye* or in the real American society, white American values are more sublimated as the standards of American values than the rich African American value systems, which are expressed through: black identity (hooks, 1992), black culture, black spirit and soul (Dubois, 1995), black tradition and ancestry (Morrison, 1997). However, the view that whiteness symbolizes beauty, purity, prestige, and a blessing remains a prejudice against blackness (Fanon, 1986; Wauthier, 2008: 209-233; Morrison, 2015: 1-12). Likewise, the mainstream American beauty as delineated in *The Bluest Eye* is biased, for its placing the value on the white physical appearance and debasing anything related to blackness. America being "a salad bowl or a melting pot" (Advani and Reich, 2015: 1-3), the State's mainstream values should take into account its diverse racial and cultural values. Unfortunately, only the white skin color, blue eyes, and blond hair are chosen to represent the mainstream American beauty:

Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it."¹

¹ Morrison, Toni. (1970). *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume, p. 20-21. All the subsequent references to this novel will be parenthetically marked *TBE* in the text followed by the page number.

This claim sustains that only white American beauty makes up the whole American beauty. In fact, African American beauty and values are excluded. Inductively, such a biased representation creates a revolt against white beauty. Best epitomizing this revolt in *The Bluest Eye* is Claudia, a small black girl who likes her black values, revolts against White Americans' representation of beauty and disgracing of other racial values. So, she looks for means of contradicting white beauty. First, she prays for African American beauty: "I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live – just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temple, and Maureen Peal." (*TBE*: 190). The black baby Claudia wants to live in order to counteract white beauty is that of Pecola; viewed as "a seed in the little black dirt." (*TBE*: 9). The preceding statement reveals a metaphor. Metaphor, like simile is easier to illustrate than to define. (...). In general, a metaphor ascribes to some thing or action X a property Y which it could not literally possess in that context. Responding to this anomaly, the hearer or reader infers that what is meant is that X is Z, where Z is some property suggested by Y, X or the interaction of the two, that can be literally true of X in some context. (Childs and Fowler, 1973-[2006]: 138-139). Here, the black skin color is compared to black dirt, which shows the frightening level of the baby's black skin color. For Whites, Pecola's baby denotes a shame that should be expiated. In contrast, Claudia wants it to live just to oppose white beauty and show that black too is beautiful and black values praise-worth. Claudia's self-love and thought entail that beauty is really a relative term depending on the eyes of the beholder, and that black ugliness depends on who is judging. Likewise, black ugliness derives from personal choice – how a black person represents himself/herself than how Whites portray him/her. So, the Breedloves, in the light of Claudia's attitude regarding white beauty, should not accept the ugliness unjustly thrown at them.

The Bluest Eye debunks black self-denial through its depiction of revolt against white beauty. Some Blacks deny their black skin color because white people delineate it as dirtiness. This attitude reveals some Blacks' lack of self-esteem. It also reveals their debasement of their physical identity, a shame they put to their blackness. To counter it, Claudia revolts against white beauty aiming at rebuking this attitude of some Blacks toward their own skin color. She constantly shows anger: "Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and

presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging. (...). The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. Its thirst too quickly quenched, it sleeps.” (TBE: 50). The revolt via anger underlines emotional beauty and craftsmanship in *The Bluest Eye*. It displays a literary function as Eagleton (1996-[2003]: 26) affirms: “Literature works primarily by emotion and experience, and so was admirably well-fitted to carry through the ideological task.” Anger is a psychological state which sides with an overall refutation of black self-denial despite the debasement of the black skin color by Whites. Nothing should lead Blacks to deny their skin color. *The Bluest Eye* manipulates the emotional force, shown through Claudia’s anger, to boldly debunk black self-denial and convey its standpoint on black self-esteem and pride.

Coping with revolt, *The Bluest Eye* debunks black self-denial by depicting a search of visibility of the black skin color and values. The representation of the white skin color as the only marker of beauty seeks to centralize the mainstream American values on whiteness. It means that only anything pertaining to whiteness partakes into the genuine American values, dignity and pride. In so doing, blackness is uprooted from the core American values. “Blackness,” as Betts (1971: 17) explains, “is a reaction against what is considered cultural imperialism derived from the ethnocentric assumption of the universality of principles and institutions defined by and viable for one single people.” Thus, to Claudia’s mindset, white beauty has to be destroyed, which she does:

I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, “Awwwww,” but not for me? The eye slide of black women as they approached them on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them. (TBE: 22-23).

Claudia prefers the black baby dolls because the white baby dolls display and empower white beauty by accentuating insults to the black skin color. She destroys them to show her love for her black ideals of beauty. Psychologically revolting, her anger at white beauty displays the same anger at the black characters' revelation of psychological weakness by denying themselves. Claudia hates white beauty because it debases black beauty. Adopting the same horror done to the black skin color by white Americans, black self-denial offends the worthiness of the black skin color by making it more invisible. Ideologically, the destruction of white dolls, symbols of white beauty, suggests a firm belief in black beauty and dignity, and a call for all Blacks to see how their skin color is beautiful. Either white Americans deem the black skin color as being also beautiful or both the white skin color and the black one are not beautiful. If some white people think that blackness symbolizes ugliness, then black people also should not regard whiteness as representing beauty. Even, black beauty should replace white beauty at the mainstream American values, because it does no harm to white beauty. In fact, the humiliation is not geared toward the black skin color, but it is indirectly oriented toward Blacks in general: Africans and African Americans. African Americans should love themselves and vehemently challenge white Americans who evict them.

Moreover, the debunking of black self-denial comes under the dissatisfaction with intra-racism and the black vain glory. Racism in America resembles to a two edged sword – racism by Whites and racism among African Americans themselves. The blacker Blacks are discriminated by Whites and by the fair-skinned Blacks who are their black peers. Claudia's eviction of white beauty also stimulates her to criticize the vain black celebrity, which is not handled for the interest of all Blacks. Peal, "A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back." (*TBE*: 62), is the image of black beauty dominating white loveliness. Peal incarnates not only black prettiness, but also black intelligence. Claudia tells that "She enchanted the entire school." (*TBE*: 62), including both Whites and Blacks. Since beauty implies being loved and accepted, Peal effortlessly integrates the white world and she even dominates it. Despite her black origins, she benefits from the admiration and favor of her surrounding: "When teachers called on her, they smile encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't

suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet." (*TBE*: 62). Unfortunately, Peal's beauty indeed exacts a vain glory with regard to her people; a fact that Claudia denounces. She even insults Pecola: "Black e mo. Black e mo." (*TBE*: 65) to mean that Pecola has a darker black skin. To Claudia's moral norms, Peal should use her famous black beauty to challenge white beauty on behalf of all African American characters tagged as ugly people. Instead, the famous beauty of Peal is just a celebrity in the white world and a menace in the black one. Yet, Peal's state of mind proves that the notions of ugliness and beauty do not attune to physical appearances but how one views and represents himself/herself. Through Peal, *The Bluest Eye* highlights the beauty of the black skin color and its worthiness, which derive from Blacks' self-representation. If Blacks cannot love themselves, white people will not love them either. Thus, if Blacks fail to value their black skin color, white people have the occasion to condemn it.

Equally, the debunking of black self-denial runs through anger against white beauty. Anger sides with psychoanalysis by painting the actions of the character out of her psychological state. Claudia's anger empowers her psychology to stick to her convictions against that of the society. She plays an activist role. Activism is defined as the "immediate on-the-spot struggle." (Kluge, 1982: 212), and also a way of "generating the future of societies." (Jordan, 2002: 23). From both definitions, activism stands for a struggle for change. A true activist acts for other people's causes. White racists do not discriminate Claudia; however, she engages to defend the black victims. Psychologically hurting, the biased representation of white beauty hurts Claudia because it depicts the perfection of whiteness while she knows that nothing is perfect worldwide. This reveals some Whites' conspiracy for the annihilation of the black skin color against individuals in general and black people in particular. Also, activism prompts her to hate Whites and sympathize with black victims. Claudia's protest against white gorgeousness links her sympathy with Pecola. She hates white people while she befriends the black victims. Being a homeless child, Claudia's family – the MacTeers – sympathetically welcome Pecola in their house. Although she is a small girl, Claudia is given the role of a social insider. She speaks from adulthood and proves herself able to look at a number of shortcomings in the society and criticize them while telling the story. Sociologically,

black people learn from Claudia's revolt against white beauty. The choice of Claudia to revolt against white beauty demystifies the myth of white beauty and empowers black self-esteem. African Americans realize that their self-denial has no meaning, because white beauty can be challenged. Likewise, the white racists manipulate the black skin color to justify their evil mind regarding black people. White beauty comes as a pretext to debase the black culture and identity.

Another way of revolting against white beauty in order to debunk black self-denial derives from faulting white beauty. White beauty is represented with imperfection. White beauty does not symbolize purity and holiness. Not all white people are beautiful or handsome, which shows that white people deceive themselves with regard to their white identity:

And fantasy it was, for we were not strong,
only aggressive; we were not free, merely
licensed; we were not compassionate, we were
polite; not good, but well behaved. We
courted death in order to call ourselves brave,
and hid like thieves from life. We substituted
good grammar for intellect; we switched
habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies
and called it truth. (*TBE*: 205-206).

Psychologically influencing, the choice of words in the above quote emphasizes the imperfection and emptiness of white beauty and redeems the black mind from black self-denial. Fantasy, as it is used, stands for aesthetics, just an appearance and playing a game. Thus, the representation of white beauty should not lead to black self-denial because it is just fantasy, a game of imperfection. This imperfection concerning white beauty unveils how men in general and white racists in particular blunder about themselves. Playing on the black psychology debasingly, the differences in physical appearances are manipulated to term other people inferior to us, believing our race is the purest and the worthiest. In the same way, it probes the imperfection of human beings, not being exactly who they intend they are. Apart from revolt, sufferings are also used to oppose black self-denial.

The lack of Claudia's norms (self-confidence and self-love) in the Breedloves causes their preference for what the society thinks about them than who they believe they are. Consequently, in addition to Claudia's revolt, *The Bluest Eye* debunks Cholly, Pauline and Pecola's self-denial through the depiction of their sufferings.

2. Blacks' Physical Sufferings

The Bluest Eye debunks black self-denial by making African Americans' self-denial results in many devastating consequences they suffer from on physical ground. The novel is then condemning black people who deny themselves despite the racism exerted on them by the white racists. The physical sufferings show the pain which is inflicted on the body. Among the physical sufferings in *The Bluest Eye* is the separation of the family. The family of Cholly is torn apart because of their exclusion from white exquisiteness; which, in fact, originates from their own conviction and self-denial, unable to challenge white beauty. As a result, it has led to their mutual hatred and fragmentation.

The hopeless life of Cholly, characterized by double ugliness – physical and mental – contradicts Pauline's appeal for the white ideals of beauty. To her mind, her husband should afford to be identified as a white man like she herself emulates white women's styles, succeeding her entrance into the mainstream world. Unfortunately, Cholly desperately keeps on delving into drunkenness and sexual immorality. Pauline hates Cholly by bearing in mind that he is a useless man and, therefore, they repeatedly quarrel at home: "Their marriage was shredded with quarrels. She was still no more than a girl, and still waiting for that plateau of happiness, that hand of precious Lord who, when her way grew drear, would always linger near." (*TBE*: 118). Resulting from mutual accusation and quarrels through self-denial, Pauline draws her desperation from her husband's relentless immorality. Selfishly oriented, she compares him to their neighbors instead of helping him come out of his despondent life. The worst in their quarrels is examined in the shout of Sammy: "Kill him! Kill him!" (*TBE*: 44). The unstoppable fights between Pauline and Cholly out of mutual accusations finally result in the family's separation. It begins when Cholly sets the house on fire and drags his family outdoors: "Mrs. Breedlove was staying with the woman she worked for; the boy, Sammy, was with some other family; and Pecola was to stay with us.

Cholly was in jail.” (*TBE*: 18). The Breedloves get separated and destroyed. Cholly dies, Pecola becomes mad and Pauline keeps her stay in the Fisher family. The mutual hatred and the physical separation of the families of Blacks who deny themselves play an ideological function. Black self-denial is manifested by self-hatred. And how a person can hate himself/herself and still have peace of mind? Their mutual accusations and quarrels represent an offense for one’s own self that results in self-accusation, lacking peace with one’s self. Also, it demonstrates that black self-denial stands for disaster. As the narrator puts it in *The Bluest Eye*, “It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth.” (*TBE*: 65). By denying themselves, some Blacks put their bodies to pieces, a fact illustrated in family separation. People love themselves by loving their racial identity. In this, black self-denial disgraces black values.

Equally, the debunking of black self-denial along with the physical sufferings has to do with sickness. *The Bluest Eye* uses sickness to physically punish some Blacks who deny themselves and also to redeem them from self-denial. One of the most signifying aspects of physical trauma illustrates Pecola’s sickness:

Little part of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too. Almost done, almost. (*TBE*: 203).

Pecola’s sickness stems from her low self-esteem as a black person, and the value she attaches to whiteness in her obsession with and lifelong prayer for blue eyes. The sickness is so serious that her body cannot stand and survive. Pecola’s fading body reveals her deep sink into the realm of ugliness. Her longing for white beauty prompts her to be always thoughtful up to committing suicide and creating her own physical destruction. On a sociological ground, sickness sides with a physical shame for the Blacks who deny their black skin color. By

admitting that their black skin symbolizes ugliness and useless, these Blacks do not take care of their body until making it sick and progressively destroyed.

Moreover, black self-denial is debunked by death. As punishment, those who deny themselves meet with death. Black self-denial is a personal choice, but it is very dangerous for the one who chooses to deny himself/herself. First, he learns from his parents' behavior that blackness means immorality:

Cholly wondered if God looked like that. No. God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that — holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it to the ground. (*TBE*: 134).

Cholly's desperation and death come from his own choice to deny his black origin. His belief, constructed from his parents' misbehavior, that blackness actually symbolizes ugliness and moral decay, does not allow him to value himself as a black man. Rather, he, too, misbehaves aiming at shaming the black skin color, showing that blackness stands for immorality. He leads a free and immoral life:

Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt — fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. (...). In those days, Cholly was truly free. Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites. And they alone interested him. (*TBE*: 159-160).

All of Cholly's immorality and irresponsibility cause his downfall and death: "Cholly died in the workhouse." (*TBE*: 205). Only Cholly dies. Morrison imposes upon him a punitive plot through his death, because

he has denied his black identity. How can somebody abandon himself/herself and still live? By denying his black identity, Cholly has already killed himself, uprooting himself from his racial origin. It is important to note that death is not only a separation from life, but also from living an unfulfilled life. Cholly was alive, but was, in fact, dead. From his childhood up to his adulthood, he has never been happy. He was an abandoned child, a bastard. In this context, Morrison uses Cholly to give warnings to Blacks who deny their identity so as to reform their conduct. Life is always a challenge to take up and self-reliance is the toll to pay.

3. Blacks' Psychological Sufferings

Psychoanalysis, as defined earlier, helps to understand Blacks' psychological sufferings, how Blacks' behaviors and attitudes derive from their psychological trauma. Also, "Trauma describes the disenfranchised pain and grief that cannot be integrated into a person's general meaning structure and belief system. The unspoken grief of minority subjects and their social abjection remain outside the realm of the social symbolic." (Hwango, 2004: v). Physical pains also affect people's psychology. The psychological sufferings in *The Bluest Eye* come under mutual hatred, homelessness, isolation, loss of identity, illusion and madness. These psychological sufferings play a great role in *The Bluest Eye*. Strategically, they permit Blacks who have denied their black skin color to experience psychological misery for them to recognize the beauty of the black skin color and love it. So, trauma illustrates pains, wounds, and sufferings related to psychology. It can be also said to be the effects of a psychological torment. However, it depends on the subject under attack. What can be tormenting to one may not be for the other. Talking about the effect of trauma on people in general that underlines their psychological wounds, (Hwango, 2004: 64) still maintains that:

Once broken by a traumatic incident, the personal narrative of self is prone to further disintegration unless some remedial efforts are made to put the incident into a manageable perspective and counteract the

repetition compulsion so that traumatized people can reinvest in their life and restore, to a certain degree, the basic value and belief system trauma has challenged. Moreover, as the self has been shaped in the relational context, the restoration of the self in the wake of trauma also requires supportive, empathic others who can sustain them through the difficult process of recovery and healing.

The representation of beauty in *The Bluest Eye* along with the exclusion of black people torments them. This leads to argue that this novel is more a psychological prose than anything else. The psychological impact of the white racists' look at African Americans embodies scenes in the life-story of Cholly and his parents, Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy and much more Pecola, harboring many themes. Under psychological torment, *The Bluest Eye* debunks black self-denial via mutual hatred that illustrates psychological torments. The mutual misunderstandings among Blacks stem, in a larger part, from the conviction in their own ugliness. Cormier-Hamilton (1994: 122) is of the same view that:

Many African-Americans still suffer from a dangerously low sense of self-esteem originating from their internalization of the prejudices of white culture [and beauty]. Morrison's novel reflects this dangerous internalization of racist values and the cycle of self-hatred passed on from parents to children.

Morrison turns Blacks who deny themselves one against the other. She confuses them and strands them in misunderstanding to sustain that black self-denial stands for personal confusion. For instance, in a fight involving Cholly and his wife, it is said: "Cholly poked fun at me, and we started fighting again. I tried to kill him. He didn't hit me too hard, 'cause I were pregnant I guess, but the fights, once they got started up again, kept up." (*TBE*: 123). This quote suggests that their fights occur because of Cholly's indifference to and mockery at Pauline's search for

white beauty. The education of Pauline in movies about the white American beauty prompts her to dislike Cholly who does not manage to love and cherish her in the manner of white men to their wives. In this comparison of her husband with white men, Pauline hates him for life, because his ugliness irreversibly worsens. Thus, a least deviation in Cholly's behavior never meets Pauline's tolerance. Similarly, Pauline hates Pecola after her instilment of the white standards of beauty. Pecola, being always in a state of fear, also feels no clear affection for her mother. She does neither hate Pauline nor love her. Her own children call her Mrs. Breedlove instead of mother. Pecola's mistrusting Pauline or Mrs. Breedlove is justified in the incestuous rape with her mother's husband. The lack of motherly love derives Pecola to being more and more attracted to her loving father and consequently committing incest: the pitfall of sin. Additionally, mutual hatred, deriving from mutual accusations, is strategic in *The Bluest Eye*. Blacks who deny themselves turn blows against one another. They do not take their responsibilities in hand; they rather charge one another with their misfortune. Self-hatred through mutual accusation suggests that black self-denial reveals irresponsibility and ignorance. These African Americans lack psychological stability which should enable them to challenge the white obscenities. As a result, they deny their black identity, not realizing that the white racists have targeted them to display the world's ugliness.

Furthermore, homelessness is used to debunk black self-denial. Homelessness partakes in the psychological sufferings of Blacks who do not content with their black skin color. By definition, homelessness means having no home or having one, but feeling homeless as a result of one's psychological torment in a home. The homelessness of black people who struggle to put on the white skin involves two things: the consequences of being an "outdoor and a dissatisfactory state." *The Bluest Eye* suggests that 'home' is more than a place to live. The concept equally means a place where one feels at home – loved and accepted by his/her social environment. Pointedly, (Havlíková, 2011: 34) affirms that:

Considering the question of Pecola's and Claudia's household, it is obvious that Claudia grows up in a less threatening environment than Pecola. (...). Contrast to Fishers' household where Pauline works, MacTeers' is

old and poor. Although being not luxurious, it suggests that the MacTeers have a place where they live, meet and eat together. Figuratively speaking, the house is a metaphor for stable and consistent family where family bonds cultivate the personalities of the members, in this case Claudia and Frieda. On the other hand, Pecola's father Cholly burns up their house and leave his family outdoors. Pecola does not protest against the society where the white standards of beauty predominate as Claudia does because she does not come from a loving, stable and functional family.

The novel paints them as unsatisfied people because they have denied themselves. Self-esteem and self-love make a home for Blacks who value their black skin, culture and identity. Though the MacTeers' house is not finer than the Breedloves', they feel at home whereas the Breedloves feel homeless in theirs. The difference derives from the MacTeers' self-esteem and self-love. Psychologically unbearable, the Breedloves suffer homelessness by looking for redemption through blue eyes and white beauty: "Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life." (TBE: 17). They have no place to live; as a result, they become street people and psychologically tormented. Pecola's family indeed has "no place to go." (TBE: 17). Unlike the struggling but loving MacTeers, whose integrity as a family is intact despite economic hardships, the Breedloves, dispersed all over the town, are broken and show all the symptomatic signs of disintegration. The depiction of homelessness in *The Bluest Eye* is metaphoric. By denying themselves, Blacks retrieve themselves from the black home – black psychological stability, happiness and pride. By shearing their black skin, leaving their black body, they become dead people. The body represents the house of the soul and the spirit. So, these black people have no body for their soul and spirit to live in. Ideologically, Morrison demonstrates that black self-denial symbolizes killing one's self. Blacks cannot live without the black home, the physical black body that makes home for the black soul and spirit.

The Bluest Eye debunks black self-denial by isolating black characters who deny their black skin color. In this context, black self-denial symbolizes the lack of recognition of one's community, identity and culture. Thus, the novel isolates them because they are not trustworthy within the black community. The Breedloves are outcasts, isolated from the black community and refused entrance into the white neighborhood. The belief in their ugliness prevents them from an easy and happy life in the vicinity of the blue-eyed and blond-haired Whites. The novel drives them to the hem of life where they struggle to survive as they "creep singly up into the major folds of the garment." (*TBE*: 18) and coerces a psychological torment. They are black by birth and origin but run after white beauty for identification with whiteness. In so doing, they should not be trusted and have to be put at the suburb. The Breedloves lose their communal ties as they are marginalized and put outdoors. Being put outdoors is a lifelong imprisonment and condemnation.

The Bluest Eye does not allow undecided Blacks to be happy within the black community. Their choice to possess white beauty and to be identified as white makes them ideologically different from other Blacks. By clinging to white standards, they exclude themselves from the community and could not develop resilience. As Nubukpo (1987: 3) puts it, "to a large extent, to survive as a black person does not mean anything unless it implies surviving as a member of the black community." Community means sharing some core common values – having the same mindset, beliefs, practices, and a concern for others. The Breedloves' idea to have blue eyes and white beauty lead to their isolation by the black community which does not recognize them as being part of them; an isolation represented as nest: "Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests. (*TBE*: 18). Baker (2008: 5) affirms that "They [the Breedloves] are outcasts of society, living on the edge of destitution." The seclusion of Cholly's family hints that African Americans are doomed in American society. From slavery to racism, they have been subjugated, kept in an ongoing nesting by the white racists. Morrison isolates them, because they have denied themselves. She creates them as lonely characters, alienated. However, isolation comes not from the society but from one's self. The Breedloves'

shame thinking themselves different from Whites' surrounding has led to their self-isolation. Based on this ideology, *The Bluest Eye* substantiates that Blacks who deny themselves create their own isolation thanks to their self-denial. Self-denial constrains them under the weight of the white cultural domination stressing on their so-called the white standards of beauty. Black characters pull themselves out of social values accepting that they are ugly. This strategy of debunking black self-denial in *The Bluest Eye* warns black people and wants them to reconsider their attitude toward their own race.

Besides, black self-denial is debunked through the loss of identity. They are made to lose their black identity because they have decided to abandon their identity. The loss of identity examines the worst. Identity is meant to be who or what somebody or something is; the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish a people from others. Based on this definition, Morrison's novels deal traditionally with Blacks' search for an identity they have lost either on racial, social, cultural, or gender ground.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola's mother, does not really achieve white beauty denying her blackness delineated by Whites as ugliness. Mrs. Breedlove and other characters that deny themselves are in an in-between state. They are neither full Blacks nor full Whites: "Many of the characters in Morrison's novels exist in an in-between state, not enslaved and not entirely free. The characters in her novels construct identities for themselves that are compatible with the standard of the dominant culture." (Conway, 2007: 3). Psychologically, Mrs. Pauline Breedlove, for example, is tormented and cast between her desire for white beauty and her black skin, in addition to being stranded in black and ugly styles. Both prejudices hinder Mrs. Breedlove in her attempt to attain such beauty. Expressly, she displays the importance of hair for women and white beautiful styles. Particularly, Black women are defined by their hair. Pointedly, *Yoruba Girl Dancing*, Simi Bedford's novel published in 1991, tells the story of Remi Foster, an intelligent Yoruba girl who, at the age of six, journeys from her home and privileged life in Lagos, Nigeria, for a boarding school in England. Her grandmother wants her to cut off her hair because the Europeans won't know what to do with it. Because Remi's hair is cut off, part of her identity gets stripped from her when the Europeans cannot tell whether Remi is a boy or a girl.

Any transformation occurring in the aforementioned physical characteristics means a change in one's identity. Therefore, striving to dress her hair as good as white styles, Mrs. Breedlove equally changes her identity into an unknown one: she cannot achieve the exact white identity nor gain back her black forsaken identity. In Pecola's case, to typify the outcome of searching for white beauty after a long, painful and unsuccessful journey to get blue eyes, she ends up having an identity even lower than her black one: fake body and madness.

Debunking black self-denial, madness remains another plague that derives from Blacks' psychological fatal ordeal in *The Bluest Eye*. Black self-denial in itself reveals madness. Madness should be perceived not just as a physical issue, but also a spiritual imprisonment. So, moral disobedience, psychological loneliness and self-isolation may qualify as well for this term. How can somebody hate his/her black skin color into which he/she was born and still lives? Consequently, the novel binds characters involved in black self-denial to madness to ideologically show the meaning of their behavior. Pecola's obsession with the grandeur of white beauty drives her to madness: "The birdlike gestures are worn away to a mere picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world—which is what she herself was." (*TBE*: 125). Pecola is beautiful, but she believes with white people that she is ugly because the black skin symbolizes ugliness and filth. For her, to be beautiful and lovable, she has to have blue eyes. Unfortunately, "She, however, stepped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end." (*TBE*: 206). Pecola's self-denial has forcefully caused this to happen. Her story educates other black people. Even, the novel does not pity children and young people who deny their black skin color. Definitively, black self-denial comes as ignorance and a crime Africans and African Americans commit against themselves, which Morrison does not pardon.

Conclusion

This article has investigated in the debunking of black self-denial in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Since black self-denial derived from the definition of white beauty, it has, on the one hand, argued on the revolt against white beauty, the celebration of black beauty and, on the other

hand, the dangerous consequences which some Blacks who deny themselves suffer from. The psychoanalytic approach has helped in establishing the connection between the biased definition of white beauty and its impacts on Blacks' psychology. Strategically, Morrison chooses Claudia, a black small girl with a keen awareness of self-esteem and self-love, to show anger in the counter of white beauty. In addition, she rejects black self-denial by promoting black beauty and values through Maureen Peal, a high heeled black lady who enchants the entire white world. Via Claudia and Peal, *The Bluest Eye* suggests that black self-denial is a personal choice: personal conviction and a belief system. Peal has many physical flaws, but what matters is how one represents oneself. Among the disastrous consequences of black self-denial are the physical ones: the family separation, sickness, and death. On psychological ground, there are family separation out of mutual accusation, isolation, loss of identity, illusion, and madness. This article has raised an important question: if African Americans deny their black skin color and culture, what will people of other races do to it? Thus, it revealed that black self-denial disgracefully raises double ugliness – “ugly” blackness and “ugly” black attitude. Equally, it calls all Blacks to reconsider their stand with regard to their black identity. By denying themselves, some Blacks only consolidate white people's prejudices regarding the black skin color – that blackness actually symbolizes ugliness, dirtiness and uselessness; and that only Blacks' self-love shields them against the attempt of white culture to submerge their black culture. By reading this research work, we discover that self-esteem anchors the stability our life despite the rejection of people around us. On social ground, this article consolidates mutual acceptance regardless of racial belonging and social rank. The study also showed the importance of family and the community as the unavoidable foundations reflecting the physical, moral, and psychological state of any human society: if the family bonds are healthy, so are that of the society. The fact that the Breedlove family is divided and mused up by lack of self-esteem so is the black community in America, even the whole world. Equally, racism harms not only Blacks, but also white Americans who are snared in their illusion of superiority. For a peaceful racial cohabitation, the racists' pride of superiority over the discriminated by hinting at racial differences and social ranking is ignorant and useless. Instead, this study constrains that inter-racial love, respect, and acceptance heal America and the whole world.

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