

African Americans in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*: a Marxist analysis

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Abstract

In the last three decades, numerous literary works have been written on the lives of African Americans living in the twentieth-century capitalist United States of America. Nobel Prize winning African American author Toni Morrison, in her novels *Beloved* (1987) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) portray the mistreatment and cruelties of the Occidental force inflicted on these marginalized, peripheral and subjugated Africans. Although both novels are studied from various critical perspectives, it can be seen that Marxism has not been sufficiently applied to examine the two novels. This qualitative study fills in this gap by examining existing scholarship on these novels and discusses the Marxist angle in the texts whereby the class conflict which resulted in the psychological fragmentation, communal disruption, and physical oppression of the proletariat African Americans by the bourgeoisies or upper class Europeans through direct control or Repressive State Apparatuses, indirect rule by hegemony, ideology, and Ideological State Apparatuses are delved in succinct details. Finally, this article aims to address the repercussions of class difference, the commodification of Africans, which remains the main tenet of the Marxist theory as displayed in these two novels.

Keywords: *Marxism, base, superstructure, ideology, ISA, RSA, hegemony, slavery*

Introduction

The detrimental impact of slavery on African Americans remains the key aspect of Toni Morrison's fiction. The story of Sethe killing her one child, Beloved, to save her from the manacle of slave life is inspired by Margaret Garner, who killed her children in order to save her offspring from slavery. Morrison (1987) wrote *Beloved* as a record of the traumas of these African slaves in the 19th century USA. Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye* foregrounds the psychic turmoil of a black-skinned girl called Pecola in the racist Ohio, USA, in the 20th century. *The study argues that Toni Morrison's novels expose racial oppression where African Americans are systematically objectified as disposable things through economic exploitation, ideological control, and cultural hegemony. The study demonstrates how class relations operate via Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses to produce psychological fracture, desubjectivization and bodily commodification of USA African Americans in both novels.*

Accordingly, the key research questions to be addressed in the paper are: how do African Americans function as a

proletarian class within a racial capitalist system in the USA in these two novels; in what ways do Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) are used as tools of racial and class domination; and what are the impacts of class conflict, commodification and reification of African Americans in the two novels.

The paper is organized into four sections. The first one examines the different approaches adopted in studying these novels. The second section deals with the key aspects of Marxism, such as base, superstructure, ideology, hegemony and class struggle. The third section analyses both novels and the concluding section synthesizes all the major points presented in the paper.

Literature review

This section focuses on the literary scholarship on both novels in order to identify the various critical approaches that have been applied to them. *Beloved* has been dissected from various critical approaches by researchers, especially on themes like the atrocities of slavery, psychological trauma, community, Black subjectivity, and maternal love. In

addition, the usage of symbols and metaphor has also been studied.

Al-Ahmedi (2014) examines the symbol of colour arguing that white represents the slave owners (p. 15), the untrustworthy white abolitionist, who, according to Baby Suggs fathered her eight children and also participated in the enslavement of Africans (p. 17). Despite of the fact that white colour is associated with peace and goodness (p.17), the characters of the novel hate white people due to the savagery inflicted on the Africans during colonialism.

Several critics have examined the theme of slavery. Lakshmi (2017) posits that the Afro-American community faced at stultifying atmosphere of prejudice, discrimination and condescension (p. 65), where women, as one of the most vulnerable groups of Black society, were sexually abused by the oppressed (p. 67). This critic finds Sethe's infanticide unpardonable (p. 69). Bansal (2023) argues that it is the slavery system that kills Sethe's newborn baby girl, not Sethe herself (p. 86). Martinez (2008) sheds light on the psychological no-self of slavery (p. 9) where ghost-like slavery haunts the psyche of black descendants,

ultimately contributing to processes of healing (p. 22). In other words, facing the past is a way of recuperating from the effects of enslavement. Similarly, Duran (1994) elucidates that the character of Beloved is the personification of the past (p.13), and although all the characters want to forget their past, they cannot. Xu (2014) notes that the national culture of the Africans has been destroyed by the intrusion of the colonialist culture, which led to severe repercussions such as the demise of African traditional language and culture (pp. 101-102). Selfridge (2018) explores the psychological trauma inflicted on African Americans and mentions that the overlap of motherhood and slavery creates a deeply painful and tragic cycle of trauma that Sethe cannot escape, even after the abolition of slavery, and this leads to her insanity (p.72). Being a mother and also a slave, Sethe undergoes double colonialism, which in turn ravages her psyche.

Turning to Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye*, it can be observed that several critics have applied diverse critical approaches, including aesthetic myth, Voyant tool, Bakhtinian polyphony, New Historicism, Kantian aesthetics, racism and

psychological trauma. Khan (2014) focuses on the psychological ramifications of racism in the novel. Geraldine develops obsessive neurosis, renouncing blackness by putting Jergens lotion on his son Junior's face to save it from becoming ashen (p. 27).

Bhardwaj (2016) refers to the subjugators of Pecola, arguing that they are themselves shaped by internalized racist ideology, which in turn drives their participation in her marginalization and abuse. As a child, she cannot resist her oppression. The MacTeers believe Frieda's story of sexual abuse by Henry and although Mrs. MacTeer gives a blue-eyed pink-skinned doll to her daughters, she never says that they are ugly (p. 103). Eddine (2018) uses the Voyant tool in analyzing this novel, noting that the frequencies of words such as Pecola and blue indicate negative beauty standards set by a society obsessed with the white race. Al Mamun and Siddika (2020) identify the polyphonic and multivoiced narrative technique of the text. Similarly, Mankhia et al. (2020) apply Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in their research.

Nardi (2022) elucidates the geographical inequalities and segregation as depicted by the urban space, the houses, the streets and the neighbourhood of the 1920s industrialized North. The dandelions embody the unkempt locality (p. 406). Pecola's poor home characterized by a broken sofa is in stark contrast to the happy white middle-class world presented in Dick and Jane primers (p. 408). Li (2022) focuses on the breakdown of the family structure of the African-Americans as displayed by the lack of communication within the Breedlove family and the abnormal Geraldine family (p. 446). Morrison adopts Blues, which symbolizes sadness and in this novel, the collective suffering of Blacks (p. 448). The primer is the negation of the Black by the white (p. 447). As New Historicists believe that all texts are interconnected, the fairy tale of the isolated Ugly Duckling is retold through Pecola, who becomes the scapegoat of the communal erosion (p. 447).

Muhlisin and Sudewi (2023) concentrate on the dysfunctional family of Pecola whose alcoholic father is rejected by his original father, Sampson Fuller, leading to his vagabond life (p. 24). Her mother,

born out of 11 siblings behaves like White people, causing Pecola to accept the society's imposed standards of ugliness (p. 24). Hence, Williams (2018) calls Pauline a refrigerator mother (p.101).

Singh (2023) applies Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory to analyze body aesthetics among African-Americans. According to Kant, the four characteristics of beauty are disinterested, universal, necessary and purposive without a purpose (p. 27). In this context, Pecola's interest in blue eyes lacks cognitive reasoning, thereby reflecting a form of disinterested aesthetic judgment (p. 27). The body aesthetic myth, which proclaims that blue-eyed people are beautiful is universal, among the African community, and Pecola's subjective internalization of it drives her to madness (p. 33). Arslan (2023) reviews how beauty standards, racism and sexual abuse cause the tragedy of this novel. Eleven-year-old Pecola sees around her White actresses like blue-eyed Shirley Temple and Mary Jane. Her own school boys stop bullying her when lighter-skinned Maureen appears in the school. Williams (2018)

reflects on the vulnerability of young black girls in this racist society (p. 91).

While the study acknowledges the contributions of feminist, psychoanalytic, and trauma-based approaches, it prioritizes Marxist analysis in order to foreground the material and institutional foundations of racial domination. As the role of economic structures, labor relations, direct rule and ideological state mechanisms in shaping racial oppression has not been sufficiently theorized, this study intervenes in existing scholarship by foregrounding class and material relations through a Marxist framework. Thus, it contributes to Marxist literary criticism by demonstrating how Morrison's novels expose racial oppression.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in Marxist literary criticism. The primary texts—Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970)—were selected because they respectively engage with slavery in the nineteenth century and racialized capitalism in the early twentieth-century United States.

Furthermore, the texts foreground economic deprivation, labor exploitation, and bodily commoditization. The article applies the Marxist framework, which is operationalized through close textual analysis using key concepts such as base and superstructure, class struggle, reification, hegemony, and Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. The scope of the analysis is limited to the selected novels and their critical interpretations within Marxist theory, and it does not extend to Morrison's broader body of literary works.

Theoretical Framework

As Morrison's novels depict the key concepts of Marxism such as base, superstructure, ideology, ISA, RSA, hegemony and the class struggle, this section focuses on the Marxist theory in explicit detail. The two pioneering stalwarts of this theory were two Germans called Karl Marx, a philosopher and Friedrich Engels, a sociologist. Marx and Engels (1848) observe that history has always been a struggle between the exploiting, propertied, ruling land owner bourgeoisie and the oppressed, exploited non-propertied worker proletariat classes (p. 5). He further argued that the latter

cannot achieve emancipation as they have no property. Enslaved by the bourgeoisie manufacturer and the machine (p.17), people, according to their age and sex, become instruments and appendages of the machine. In other words, both Marx and Engels seek the union of all nonexistent working people to transcend their chain of work and establish their authority (p. 46).

In the 1840s and 1850s Marx records that inequalities prevail in our society as many workers labour, but very few of them enjoy the profit which results from their hard work (Ryan, 1999, p. 52). This means that capitalism exploits the workers who are only treated as mere commodities (Bertens, 2001, p. 83). Both claim that there is a battle prominently going on in society where the rich class, comprising of landlords, factory owners, capitalists, and business tycoons want to control the working proletariat, the poor sections of the social ladder composed of serfs and factory workers (Nayar, 2010, p. 122). In contrast that the societal belief that culture, legal, religion, and mental ideological aspects guide human life, Marx stresses that economy and social base controls all dimensions of human

life (Selden, 2005, p. 82). Unlike idealist philosophy, which emphasises at religion as well as spirituality of life, Marxist thought is grounded in material conditions and the idea that social classes struggle for power, thereby driving historical progress (Barry, 2002, p.157). Bowens (2009) remarks that if we look at history, the ruling class has never given up their power without a violent fight with the help of the police and the army (p. 70).

Concepts of the base and superstructure model remain indispensable parts of this theory. It is believed that the economic base (which includes factors and relations of production) influences and regulates the cultural superstructure, such as arts, religion, the law, media, lifestyles and so on (Nayar, 2010, p.136). This means that if you have money, then you can participate in art. Even your education and your life depend on how much wealth you have. Hence, the superstructure is the secondary reflection (Barry, 2002, p.164). Tyson thinks that economic power is the real premise behind all social and political activities (Tyson, 2006, p. 53). He adds that as the have-nots or the proletariat are dehumanized by the haves, Marx

envisioned a classless society which can be achieved only when the have-nots fight for their rights through a violent revolution against the perpetrators (Tyson, 2006, p. 54). Marxism examines how class divisions often shape human experience more significantly than gender, race, religion, and ethnicity, and how historical conditions, particularly ideology, are largely conditioned by material circumstances or the economy. In a nutshell, Marxism aims at the production of an equal social system where the rich will not oppress the downtrodden (Barry, 2002, p. 156).

Hegemony and ideology are other key aspects of this theory, where hegemony refers to the exercise of control without the direct use of force, coercion, or physical violence (Hawthorn, 2003, p. 146). Instead, the consent code is activated. In other words, affluent sections may use institutions such as religion to shape consciousness, dominating the psyche of the poverty-stricken people in such a way that the poor sections of society follow all the doctrines of the wealthy. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) sheds light on these indirect ways of control (Webster, 1990, p. 63).

ISA and RSA are also indispensable aspects of this theory. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" by Louis Althusser, he asserts that a country is run by two types of systems, mainly by Repressive Structures or Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological Structures or State Apparatuses (ISA). RSA consists of direct rule by the police, the armed forces, the government administration, the penal system and so on to control a state, and ISA comprises indirect rule by religion, the legal system, education and culture, the media or communications, and family life (as cited in Webster, 1990, p. 61). Karl Marx defines religion as 'the opiate of the masses', as like a tranquilizer the dilapidated class remain happy with their fate (as cited in Tyson, 2006, p. 59). It can be found that the forms of Literary texts are determined by political circumstances (Barry, 2002, pp. 167-168). In George Lukács's view, the novel reflects social reality (Selden, 2005, p. 87). So, the basic tenet is that politics and society influence the author and their Literary texts (Barry, 2002, pp. 166-167). Reification leads to human bodies as disposable commodities. Capitalism exploits its laborers and reifies them as

objects or things (Bertens, 2001, p. 83). The dominant rich class, driven by its material interests exploit and dominates the lower classes. Nayar (2010) states that culture is not about aesthetics, truth or beauty; rather, it is formulated to propagate and glorify certain privileged classes (p.123). Overall, a Marxist criticism of a text mainly accounts for the author's social, economic, and cultural context, including issues of class, race, gender, and technological media (Nayar, 2010, p.128).

Taken together, these Marxist concepts provide a coherent theoretical framework for analyzing Morrison's fiction. In Morrison's fiction, African Americans are positioned as the proletariat class who are subjected to economic dispossession and ideological domination. How the economic poverty of the Breedlove family leads to their inferior treatment by the rich Blacks and Whites is also examined. Both repressive and ideological state apparatuses and reification operate within U.S. capitalist society, where the exploitation of women's bodies under slavery and Pecola's internalization of White beauty standards are represented in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*.

Discussion

This section studies the two novels from the angle of Marxism. Concepts like base, superstructure, hegemony and ideology of Marxism are applied in the analysis. African-American males as well as females are associated with the proletariat class, who are in struggle with the White Americans. It can be observed that Europeans consider Africans as the proletariat class and that is why they apply direct rule policy or RSA and also ideology and hegemony to dominate over them. Women bodies are commodities for them, which can be abused. Class conflict is apparent in both novels. Driven by Eurocentric beliefs in racial superiority, non-Black groups inflict both physical and psychological violence on Black individuals.

Reification-women bodies as commodities

To begin with, *Beloved* is a Marxist text as it portrays reality, the true incident of a slave woman killing her daughter. Blight (2024) asserts that for African women, their bodies and their wombs provided a target of this commerce, its source of profits and its future growth (p. 34-35). The novel's setting is the aftermath of slavery in the 19th century

USA, when wealthy plantation owners exploit Africans. In fact, slavery is a product of the capitalist system. Reification of women as commodities occurs as White land owners in the novel rape Black African women.

Reification of Sethe's mother and Baby Suggs

She is sexually assaulted several times while being transported from Africa to America, and she is forced to abandon many of her children as well. She has a branded mark on her ribcage, and she gets no opportunity to nurture her children as she has to work for the whole day in the fields (pp. 60). According to Sethe, her mother never tended her hair as she has to work even at night (p. 60). Also, her babies are not supposed to sleep with her. Another one-armed woman called Nan serves as Sethe's wet nurse, and Sethe is forced to drink Nan's milk only after the white infants have been fed (p. 200). Significantly, Sethe's mother, who speaks an African language, is never given the chance to pass it on to her child. Colonial oppression creates a barrier that prevents the transmission of language and culture from mother to daughter. These African slaves are just like the millions of men who were

dislocated from their gods, their land (Césaire, 2010, p. 43) by the Occidental force. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2016) writes that Africans were mere commodity which were brutally maltreated through unpaid labour for 400 years (p. 90) and Thiong'o (2009) contends that this colonial hell involved genocide such as physical massacre, linguicide, the death of indigenous languages and also language liquidation (p.17) and what Thiong'o terms as Linguistic famine or Linguifam (p.18) discussion is apparent in this novel. During the sea voyage, Nan and her mother were raped by the crew members' multiple times (p. 62). She threw away the children fathered by the Whites and but chooses to keep and name her girl child, Sethe, after a black man whom she loved. Eventually, she is executed alongside other African women, an act that violently severs the bond between mother and daughter.

Besides, Baby Suggs is also sexually violated. Her eight children have six fathers. Her four daughters are sold before they had their "adult teeth" (p. 23), and she cannot wave them goodbye even. She utters, "I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased" (p. 5). The "straw boss" (p.

23) sexually exploits her only to sell the son that he has fathered. Likewise, the overseer of the ship wants to have sex with her as well. In her opinion, "slaves are not supposed to have pleasurable feelings of their own, but they must have a lot of children to please whoever owned them" (p. 209). Her owners, Mr. and Mrs. Garner, renames her Jenny Whitlow, her sale bill name. Therefore, her name, which is her identity, is lost in the process of her subjugation. She always lived in trepidation that she will be sexually abused by the Whites before her children (p. 208). Baby Suggs also observes that the Garners treat the Africans like paid labor (p.140). Because of her broken hip, Baby Suggs is considered less valuable on the Garners' farm in Kentucky, called Sweet Home. Sethe tends her as she would have tended her own mother (p. 201). Even though they give food and no one rapes African women in Sweet Home, Halle has to work hard to buy his mother's freedom from the bondage of the Garners. When her freedom is finally bought by her son, Halle, she notices her heartbeat for the first time, "my heart's beating" (p. 141) as she has never enjoyed independence before. This moment underscores the emotional and

psychological death she endured during slavery. It is evident that she is denied the possibility of a stable family life under enslavement. Although she becomes an unchurched preacher (p. 87) at her old age, she loses faith in religion and God later on when Sethe is captured into her house by the schoolteacher and his associates. She thinks that "she had done everything right and they came in her yard anyway" (p. 209). She fails to get a proper burial because of a law by the Whites. So, her whole life and even death are fully controlled by the Whites, whom she condemns in her assertion that "there is no bad luck in the world but white folks" (p. 89).

Anti-reification by Sethe

The main protagonist, Sethe, was a victim of acute desubjectivization in the hands of the Whites. It can be observed that Sethe is reduced to a thing, a non-being and one animal according to the White schoolteacher, who, along with his allies, goes to capture Sethe out of the Fugitive Act of 1850. Nephews with mossy teeth (p. 70) of the schoolteacher not only beat her but also suck milk from her swollen breasts, which Sethe describes thus, "And they took my milk" (p. 17). Here, the schoolteacher compares Sethe with

creatures like a horse, a hound and a rabbit (p. 149) who has gone wild as a result of being mishandled, and in her case, she is overbeaten. She is treated like a cow, a goat (p. 200). She only gets twenty-eight days of emancipated life, and after her infanticide of Beloved, she is ostracised by the Black community. Sethe attempts to kill all four of her children, but succeeds in killing only her third child, her eldest daughter, Beloved, by cutting her throat with a saw so that her daughter does not live as a non-entity objectified as property like her. For Sethe, infanticide only seems to be the pathway of freedom for her children from the schoolteacher and his allies. Her resistance to the oppressive system aligns the novel with what Frantz Fanon (1961) describes as "literature of combat" (p. 193). In this sense, her defiance of white domination parallels the resistance of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, as both figures confront the forces of colonial oppression.

She is forced to exchange sexual favours for a headstone for Beloved's grave after her release from jail. Although Paul D thinks that it is risky and dangerous (p. 45) for a slave woman to love her children too "thick" (p. 164) and Sethe

has "two feet, not four" (p. 165), we can detect that Sethe had no choice but to save Beloved from the manacles of a torturous slave chain. As a punishment for her murder, she has to live alone for 18 years (p. 173) and members of the community refuse to eat foods prepared by Sethe during Baby Suggs's death ceremony. Sethe, fearing that Mr. Bodwin will take away her children, attacks him with an icepick, though he supports the abolition of slavery and saves Sethe from execution. The traumatic experiences of slavery profoundly affect Sethe's role as a mother, contributing to her eventual psychological tragedy. In the context of slavery, slaves, like Sethe, were considered commodities and property. This condition, combined with her memories of sexual violence, the loss of her children, and the fear of them being re-enslaved, drives her to a desperate act of killing her child.

Trauma of minor characters

Ella, who helps fugitive slaves, is herself a victim of sexual exploitation by "the lowest yet" (p. 256), a white father and his son, and Stamp Paid's wife, Vashti, is also forced to satisfy the sexual demands of her husband's enslaver's son. Ella also refuses to nurse the seeds of her rape.

Furthermore, the impact of slavery is much too harsh on the psyche of children. It is visible that the psychic history of slavery cannot be a linear story (Terzieva-Artemis, 2004, p. 133) because it is full of psychological as well as social turmoil. The thirsty ghost of Beloved with "three vertical scratches on her forehead" (p. 51) who was not even two years old when Sethe's whose maternal love becomes tragically destructive (p. 132) kills her, returns to haunt Sethe. Howard and Buglar are chased off by her. Sethe is guilt-ridden as she cannot keep her "best thing" (p. 272). Eighteen-year-old Denver is lonely and rebuked (p. 13) in the abandoned 124 Bluestone house. This 124 Bluestone is a metaphor for a stubborn, destructive past (Ng, 2011, p. 232). In spite of her love for her mother, Denver is scared (p. 205) of Sethe, who has decapitated Beloved. She believes that she has no sense of self (p.123) without Beloved. In contrast to all these women, we can find Amy, a white indentured servant girl, who is singing the song her mother has taught her. It is hinted in the novel that Mr. Buddy is her father (Coonradt, 2005, p. 172). She sees the spiritual significance in Sethe who is a child of God and one of God's Beloved

(Coonradt, 2005, p. 178). Similarly, Lady Jones, who has "yellow woolly hair" (p. 247) can become educated because of her light skin. Being different from the Blacks, she feels that they scorn her just as she despises herself for not being completely Black.

Repressive state apparatuses

Repressive State Apparatuses or Direct rule are applied to African men. U.S. capitalist society exploited Africans who were bought as slaves (Bowens, 2009, p. 42). In this novel, Paul A, Paul F and Paul D live in miserable agony. Paul A is hanged, and Paul F is sold. Paul D is bought by a White man called Brandywine, whom he attempted to kill when he was chained with forty-six African men who are also called "Buffalo men" (p. 112) by the Whites. With "tobacco tin" (p. 117) heart, which is the embodiment of his caged life, he used to sleep in a box in the prison camp of Alfred, Georgia for 86 days and though later he manages to escape with the other members of the chain gang, he mourns, "how much is a nigger supposed to take" (p. 235) as he is psychologically shattered. Sixo stops speaking in English because he feels that there is no future in it (p. 25), and when he does not die after

being set on fire, a gun is used to shoot him to stop his singing. Halle works on Saturdays and Sundays to raise enough money to secure his mother's freedom. Halle loses his mental balance when he sees the nephews of the schoolteacher raping Sethe in the loft. As per Paul D, this horrifying incident "broke" (p. 69) Halle to a great extent. Definitely, the Europeans do not want to give power to the Africans. Douglass (2016) points out the whipping, killing and barbarous tortures of white rulers like Captain Anthony and Mr. Plummer (p.15), Mr. Severe (p.19), Mr. Thomas Lanman (p. 27), Mrs. Hamilton (p. 34) and others as he worked as a slave. Smith (1891) provides illustrations of buying and whipping of African slaves, where at one instance blood runs down the backs of coloured people (p.18), denoting the monstrosity of enslavement.

Class conflict

The "little man" (p. 11) schoolteacher (p. 11) who has "book learning" (p. 11) chastises the nephew that Sethe has gone wild like a horse (p. 149) as she is overbeaten. Mareeswari (2017) rightly unfolds that he is definitely an anti-Christ figure who signals a return to chaos (p. 151). Surprisingly, he is

researching a book (p. 37) on African slaves. This parallels the occidental gaze of the District commissioner of Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* who is writing a book titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (p.148) as he has no knowledge of the African culture.

This schoolteacher beats Sixo, who has stolen the shoat to exhibit that "definitions belonged to the definers- not the defined" (p. 190). Although Mrs. Garner presents Sethe with a pair of crystal earrings (p. 58) in her marriage and cries like a baby (p. 9) when she gets to know that Sethe is raped, she refuses to stay with Black men in her house alone after the death of her husband. Mr. Garner's evangelicalism is evident when he prides himself on having men, not boys (p. 11). He is also liberal (pp. 10-11) and distrustful of African men as he discloses "I wouldn't have no nigger men round my wife" (p. 11). Just like a master, he considers his slaves as his own niggers. The names- Paul A, Paul D and Paul F- further imply that Africans have no independent existence. Conflict between the two classes is always present.

It is significant that the names of African slaves were changed during slavery. For example, Jenny becomes the name of Baby Suggs. She keeps the name Baby Suggs because her husband used to call her that. Stamp Paid's previous name was Joshua, which he changed to show that he is now enjoying his own salvation. Paul D, Sixo and other men can also sing as they worked. This indicates that Africans had a rich culture. Community feeling is also apparent here as Ella and Stamp Paid rescue the fugitives, and the former is disconcerted when a "working man" (p. 186) like Paul D sleeps in the church cellar.

The novel ends with hope as thirty women come to exorcise the spirit of Beloved, thereby saving Sethe when Denver needs their help. Ella, who hates Sethe, also comes to her rescue. Paul D states to Sethe, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (p. 273). The novel begins with a promise that good will win out over evil, no matter how powerful the evil is. In fact, the epigraph is taken from Romans 9:25 in which Apostle Paul accepts the once despised and outcast Gentiles and so the passage proclaims not rejection but reconciliation

and hope (Atwood, 1987, p. 5). Hence, the union of the proletariat class can rescue them from the familial and communal alienation caused by centuries of slavery.

Marxist analysis of *The Bluest Eye*

Turning to Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye*, we can notice that the role of the racist and capitalist class is prevalent in the novel. The Breedlove family's economic base is poor and Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist, suffers from a deep sense of inferiority and a desire for blue eyes as they are treated as others by the more economically privileged families in the community. Being the subaltern of the subalterns, the impact of a capitalist society whose inhabitants believe in denitification and devalue their own culture and race by internalizing European beauty standards is extensively explored in this novel.

Ideological state apparatuses and commodity fetishism

The concept of treating humans as objects, or reification and the excessive love for a particular thing or commodity fetishism are present in this novel. Pecola's obsession with blue eyes reflects the process of commodity fetishism, where societal values are attached to an

object like physical beauty in a capitalist society. Gabriel (2007) claims that dark skin's association with poverty and ugliness makes African-Americans hate dark skin (p. 21). Pecola's longing for blue eyes symbolizes a desire to escape her lower-class status and fit into a world dominated by white, capitalist ideals.

The US society promotes Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) by using media, art and books. Girls, like Pecola, receive dolls with blue eyes and blonde hair (p. 13) whose attributes are in contrast with their own physical dark appearance, reinforcing the idea that white features are the standard of beauty. It can be seen that the beauty industry, commercial media, and popular culture perpetuate these false fair White skin standards. This can be exemplified by the fact that fair-skinned American actresses like Clarke Gable and Jean Harlow are visible everywhere. The candy consists of Mary Jane photo, and the mug has blue-eyed Shirley Temple as its model also. Picture books consist of white-skinned, blue-eyed girls sleeping with teddy bears, and the Dick and Jane primer in their books tell a story about a white, rich family, too. Thus, Pecola believes that blue eyes will grant her a better life and a sense of worth, revealing how ideology

can shape one's self-image and social value. This reflects how the ruling class maintains control by shaping the desires and values of the oppressed. In marked contrast, Claudia, who rejects the notion of Shirley Temple's beauty, attempts to deconstruct these ideas by breaking the doll. As per Akhtar (2014), this spilt doll symbolizes the fragmented or split psyche of the characters (p. 5). The democratic unity of African people (Ikediugwu, 2020, p. 19) has been eroded in the USA as they succumb to white beauty standards. While many in the community, like Pauline, adopt white beauty ideals, Claudia is determined to understand and question why people idolize white dolls and beauty with exclamatory expressions like "Awwwww" (p.15) by looking at these dolls.

Pauline, Pecola's mother, embodies the societal pressures to conform to white beauty norms as she moves from the South to the North, where all African Americans are expected to assimilate, thereby mimicking white beauty ideals like straightening their hair, and wearing high heels, in order to align with the social standard. Pauline also tries to adopt all such occidental fashions. The doctor's belief that African women

deliver babies like horses (p. 97) further connotes her position within a subordinated racial hierarchy. She neglects her family and considers Pecola "ugly" (p. 98) and latter beats her for spilling the blackish blueberries in her pursuit of being the ideal servant (p. 99) of the rich white fisher family who calls her "Polly" (p. 85) unlike her children who calls her "Mrs Breedlove" (p. 32), emphasizing the novel's critique of societal standards that diminish black identity. The family has Breedlove as its surname, ironically not reflected in their relationships. She is not the nurturing mother of the Dick and Jane primer (p.1). On the other hand, Claudia and Frieda's mother not only takes care of Claudia when she is sick but also confronts Mr. Henry as he sexually abuses Frieda unlike Pecola's mother who does not comfort her even after her husband Cholly rapes her. As a consequence, both the MacTeer sisters are strong enough to resist the abuses of Maureen.

Pecola as reified object

Regarding Pecola's experience of racism, it can be noticed that it is intricately tied to the economic capitalist system that maintains her poverty. This makes her a "phobogenic object" (Fanon, 1961,

p.117). For instance, her trauma is exacerbated by the Eurocentric gaze of Mr. Yacobowski, a white shopkeeper who completely ignores her, and Geraldine, who despises her for not fitting the ideal of cleanliness and affluence. She is a religious woman of the African fraternity, like Pecola's mother, but both of them misbehave with Pecola due to her economic impoverishment and dark skin. In addition, it can be observed that Cholly, Pecola's father, neglects his familial duties, demonstrating how his own lack of familial understanding and childhood trauma result in his eventual violent behavior. Cholly's upbringing, marked by neglect and abandonment by his father, who neglects his child's mother as a bitch (p. 123), and then his traumatizing encounter with white men who order him to continue his physical relationship with Darlene, contributes to his inability to form healthy relationships and his abusive actions towards his daughter, Pecola. Notably, she is raped in the month of Spring which symbolizes joy (Shama, 2018, p.129). Hence, the marigolds cannot bloom in this land due to long-time oppression and communal psychic barrenness (Akter, 2015, p. 35).

In contrast to Pecola, we can see the three whores China, Poland, and Miss Marie, who are not affected by the White beauty mindset. Thus, Ziang (2007) associates them with Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival theory as they transcend the ideal beauty ideology and express authentic, free, pleasant body senses (p.112). Therefore, Toni Morrison critiques the destructive impact of internalized racism as well as Western fair skin and blond hair ideologies. As the novel progresses and Pecola strives to emulate the unattainable beauty standard, she loses her identity, agency, and subjectivity whereby she becomes the subaltern. The desire for blue eyes leads to her alienation from her own identity as she aspires for aesthetic beauty as per the dictates of the white rule. By accepting the Western ideology that lactification and epidermalization define beauty, she participates in her own subjugation. Significantly, the novel's title, *The Bluest Eyes*, not Blue Eyes serves as a warning for all African Americans that they must be proud of their skin colour and race before it is too late to reclaim it.

Conclusion

All in all, it can be seen that *Beloved* demonstrates Marxist ideas in many significant ways. It is notable that the Africans are subjected to direct forms of control through Repressive State Apparatuses, whereby they are chained, raped, killed, and forced to work as labourers in strenuous conditions. Therefore, it becomes clear, that in line with Marxism theory, that a class struggle is visible in her novel. Women's bodies are abused for sexual gratification as well as progeny which leads to acute mental distress among them resulting in infanticide of their children. The Africans are cut off from their language and culture, causing a rootless, displaced society cut off from their past. As the colonizers believe that they are superior, they brutally oppress and dehumanize the proletariat class. The ending of the novel

suggests a form of communal unity among African Americans, through which they can resist the violence of their oppressors. A Marxist reading of *The Bluest Eye* reveals how capitalism operates in the internalization of white beauty standard, perpetuating inequality and marginalization. ISA's use of media causes the commodification of beauty, racial capitalism, and the economic struggles of the Breedlove family that devalues Blackness and reinforces destructive beauty standards. Through Pecola's reification, Morrison projects the devastating effects of living in a system which prioritizes whiteness and commodification in a racial capitalist world which she advocates for decolonizing the mind from Eurocentric beauty ideology to build an equal world for all races of the world.

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