

**INTERSECTING OPPRESSION OF GENDER AND RACE
IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE* AND *GOD HELP THE CHILD***

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Abstract

White domination in America can make white ideology of beauty spread and influence the African-American society. Toni Morrison's novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*, depict the influence. This study attempts to uncover the intersecting oppression of race and gender in the novels and to explain how African-American women cope with the oppression. This study is descriptive qualitative research. The data sources are Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*. The study has two findings. Firstly, African-American society experiences oppression as an impact of the white beauty hegemony. The most disadvantageous oppression is the internalization of white beauty values. Holding such values makes African-American women feel inferior and hate their own physical characteristics that are far from the white ideal of beauty. Meanwhile, African-American women who have darker skin colors experience the hardest oppression because they also become the victims of oppression committed by some circles of African-American society, which tend to consider them unequal. It reflects the complexity of oppression experienced by African-American women. Secondly, self-consciousness is the main factor of attempts to release them from the oppression. Without self-consciousness, African-American women can be trapped in values that deteriorate their self-pride of identity.

Keywords: intersecting oppression, African-American women, skin color

**INTERSEKSI OPRESI GENDER DAN RAS DALAM *THE BLUEST EYE*
DAN *GOD HELP THE CHILD* KARYA TONI MORRISON**

Abstrak

Dominasi kulit putih di Amerika memungkinkan ideologi kecantikan kulit putih tersebar luas dan mempengaruhi masyarakat Afrika-Amerika. Novel Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* dan *God Help the Child* menggambarkan pengaruh tersebut. Studi ini mencoba mengungkap interseksi opresi gender dan ras dalam kedua novel tersebut dan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana perempuan Afrika-Amerika menghadapi opresi tersebut. Studi ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Sumber data adalah novel *The Bluest Eye* dan *God Help the Child*. Penelitian ini menghasilkan dua temuan. Yang pertama, masyarakat Afrika-Amerika mengalami opresi sebagai akibat dari hegemoni kecantikan kulit putih. Opresi yang paling merugikan adalah internalisasi nilai-nilai kecantikan kulit putih.

Memegang nilai-nilai tersebut membuat perempuan Afrika-Amerika semakin inferior dan membenci karakteristik fisik mereka yang jauh dari standar kecantikan ideal. Sementara itu, perempuan Afrika-Amerika yang memiliki kulit lebih gelap mengalami opresi yang paling berat karena mereka juga menjadi korban dari opresi yang dilakukan oleh sebagian kalangan masyarakat Afrika-Amerika yang cenderung menganggap mereka tidak setara. Hal ini menunjukkan kompleksnya opresi yang dialami perempuan Afrika-Amerika. Yang kedua, kesadaran diri adalah faktor utama untuk membebaskan diri dari opresi. Tanpa kesadaran diri, perempuan Afrika-Amerika dapat terperangkap dalam nilai-nilai yang menggerogoti kebanggaan identitas diri.

Kata Kunci: interseksi opresi, perempuan Afrika-Amerika, warna kulit

INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America, the white supremacy has made it possible to widely spread the white ideologies within a variety of groups. The ideology of the white beauty confirms the physical characteristics of the white women as the criteria for assessing the level of one's beauty. For black women, the standard of beauty has placed them at a disadvantage since their physical features do not match with those that are idealized. Iswalono (2014: 160) states that fair skin, pointed noses, and thin lips become some of the main features of the white beauty. It is by this reason that the black women are not regarded as being parts of the wide majority and they become inferior citizens in their own country.

The imposition to women to have an attractive appearance according to a particular criterion is certainly a form of oppression towards women. It is as if women are burdened with the responsibility to realize the idea of beauty. Women's body is used as a medium to visualize the beauty idea. The oppressive pressure becomes heavier when the body is far from being the stated

standards of beauty such as that experienced by black women in the United States.

Beauty is, in actuality, a social construct. It is the society that formulates the criteria whether or not a person is viewed as beautiful. It is a dynamic construct, furthermore. What is regarded as attractive at a certain time may not be so at other times. Beauty is not a universal entity (Wolf, 2004/2002: 29). It is, therefore, unjust that white beauty is used as an indicator to determine beauty across races. An ideal beauty for one race can be different for another.

The race is a physical indicator that shows differences among different groups of people. Koentjaraningrat (2014: 64) states that a race is a group of people having physical characteristics that are specific and perceptible. In the classification of human races made by Kroeber, as described by Koentjaraningrat (2014: 66-67), Caucasoid and Negroid are two of the races. The white people, who become the majority in the USA, belong to the Caucasoid race. Meanwhile, black people, one of the minority groups in the country, belong to the Negroid race.

The supremacy of the whites brings about oppressing discrimination and injustice especially for the black-skinned people who are regarded as inferior in that country. The racial issues in the United States cannot be separated from its historical aspects. In the early 20th century, racial problems were still raging in that country. Even though slavery had been eradicated, it did not mean that equality was established between the blacks and the whites. DuBois' statement in Bay (2000: 188) that the problem of the 20th century was that of color line reflects that racial problems are not easy to solve. The conflict between the blacks and the whites in the 20th century is a crucial problem. Various violence actions and racial laws, such as lynching and segregation, are evidences for this situation.

Ciment (2007:120) explains that lynching that can take the forms of torture, persecution, murder, mutilation to those who are alleged of breaking the rules occurred in the South. From the last decade of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century, about 100 blacks were killed each year. In the North, racism was often experienced by the blacks, based on the assumption that blacks are inferior to whites. All these show the supremacy of the whites over the blacks. Meanwhile, racial segregation was implemented in the South giving privileges to white people in public facilities and services (Henretta, Brownlee, Brody, Ware, 1993: 945-946; Ciment, 2007: 119). Despite the principle of 'separate but equal', segregation remained an act of injustice. This rule caused conflicts in the society. Racism in

American society made it hard for racial equality to be realized.

The emergence of various social movements demanding equality in the civil rights is a response to the gap and injustice experienced by the black people. These movements, which represent the rising of the black minorities are marked with mass demonstrations and protests. The movements also raise the self-esteem and pride of the black people as reflected in the cultural movement of 'black is beautiful' (Ciment, 2007: 157-176).

For black women, racial injustice gives them experiences that are different from those of the white women. The white supremacy places them on the lower position. Meanwhile, gender inequality gives black women different experiences from black men. The American patriarchal society treats women as subordinate to men. It is by this reason that African-American women are vulnerable to injustices not only because they are of the Negroid race but also because they are women.

Injustices experienced by African-American women have drawn the interest of Collins (2000: 22-23) who, in *Black Feminist Thought*, stresses that the black women in the United States experience intersecting oppression of gender, race, class, and other social categories. Being black and women has given them experiences different from those of women who are not black. The intersecting oppression becomes important in that it can give specific and clear pictures about the experience of black women. Udasmoro (2015: 30-31) states that Collins observes an overlap between gender and other problems such

as race. This overlap brings about multiple oppressive impacts. Furthermore, Udasmoro (2015: 13) explains that such overlap occurs since interaction among individuals is complex and not only concerned with gender.

Oppression, according to Ruth (1988: 434-436), can be maintained through the four circles of physical, economic, psychological, and internalized controls. A physical control can be in the form of punishment or threat such as force, intimidation, and beating. An economic control can be in the form of making the oppressed powerless by giving minimum wages, low-level employment, or unemployment. A psychological control can be in the form of establishing norms by the authority about the oppressed such as by way of stereotypes or myths. An internalized control is one in which the oppressed “acknowledge” their inferiority or weaknesses so that they “accept it” to be oppressed.

To resist the oppressive injustices, Collins (2000: 119) stresses the importance of attempts that encourage personal drive of black women. She underlines self-consciousness as the primary factor to deal with the injustices. Self-consciousness is then strengthened by self-definition, self-valuation, self-reliance, and self-empowerment.

Two novels by Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (2004) and *God Help the Child* (2015), raise the issues of race and gender in relation to skin color and physical attractiveness. Pecola, the character in *The Bluest Eye*, and Bride, the character in *God Help the Child*, both receive rejection because of their dark skin. Color shades become a crucial matter for African-

American women because of the hegemony of the white skin values as described in the novels. The present study is an attempt to reveal the overlapping oppression experienced by the African-American women characters in the two novels and to describe how the two characters deal with the oppression.

The Bluest Eye, Morrison’s first novel, has been much researched. “A New Midwesternism in Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye”” (2013) is one conducted by Long. The study reveals the relation between the setting of the novel, which is in Ohio, Midwestern, during the migration of the African-Americans in the early 20th century, and Morrison as the novelist who was born in the Midwestern and has a close tie with the area. The thesis paper “Hegemony of White Beauty Standard in Toni Morrison’s the Bluest Eye” (2009) by Trisnawati describes the superior-inferior relations in the hegemony of white beauty in America. In “Chapter 9: Resisting the White Gaze: Critical Literacy and Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye”” (2008), Wallowitz tries to look at the impacts of racial issues in the teaching of literature by using *The Bluest Eye* to high school students in New York. Meanwhile, Moses, in “The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye” (1999), reveals the aesthetic values of *The Bluest Eye* that arouse emotion like those of the *blues* music.

Studies on Morrison’s recent novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), have also been found. Keita, in “Conjuring Aesthetic Blackness: Abjection and Trauma in Toni Morrison’s God Help the Child” (2018), observes the aesthetics used by Toni

Morrison in presenting the terrors on the black people. Ramirez, in "Childhood Cuts Festered and Never Scabbed Over": Child Abuse in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2016), analyses violent experiences on children and the traumas they bring about. Meanwhile, the study "Childhood Trauma in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2015) by Ramtani discusses how violence on children has an impact on their life.

Unlike the previous researches, this study analyses women characters of the two novels from the perspectives of black feminist thought. This study aims to get a description of the oppression experienced by African-American women in the two novels.

METHOD

The present study is descriptive qualitative research. Data sources are two of Toni Morrison's novels, *The Bluest Eye* published by Rosetta Books (2004) and *God Help the Child* published by Vintage International (2015). Research data are in the forms of words, phrases, sentences, and expressions that have a content of oppression towards black women. Supporting evidences are obtained from a variety of related reference sources such as those concerning with history of the black people in America.

The research phases are described as follows. The data collection phase was done by reading the novels repeatedly to get comprehensive understanding and taking notes for the data. The data analysis phase was conducted by implementing the perspective of black feminist thought proposed by Patricia

Hill Collins (2000). The steps of analysis were categorizing the data into units of analyses to answer the research questions, assigning meanings to the categories, describing the data units, and drawing items of conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Race and gender oppression related to beauty issues in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child* shows complex relations between race and gender experienced by black women. In a general frame, it can be said that black people are victims of oppressions because they adopt white values. However, some members of the black society are perpetrators of oppression towards the two women characters in the novels, Pecola and Bride, mainly for the reason that they have black skin.

Table 1 presents the forms of oppression experienced by Pecola and Bride. Ruth's (1988) ideas are used as a reference for looking at the internalized, psychological, and physical processes of the oppression.

In both *the Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*, the African-Americans are hegemonized by white beauty and experience injustice. They are victims of white superiority and placed in the inferior status. For the African-American women, this condition can be more severe. The demand to be beautiful addressed to them makes them the more depressed knowing the fact that their physical features are far from being the ideal. This can raise in them the feeling of self-hate.

Negative judgements that are

Table 1 Oppression in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*

Oppression	<i>The Bluest Eye</i>		<i>God Help the Child</i>	
	Society	Pecola	Society	Bride
Internalized (Accepting inferiority and incompetence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels inferior • Hates identity of black • Despises physical features thought to be ugly • Feels having nothing valuable • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels inferior • Hates identity of black • Acknowledges own ugly physical features • Feels having nothing valuable • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels inferior • Feels ashamed of black skin • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submits and obeys • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society
Psychological (Stereotypes, prejudices, ignorance, myths)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Coon</i> stereotype • Black is ugly • Black has low value • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Black e mo</i> stereotype • Black is ugly • Black has low value • Neglected • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black has low value • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sambo</i>, <i>coon</i> stereotype • Black has low value • Neglected • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society
Physical (Force, intimidation, threat, imprisonment, beating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beating • Sexual harassment • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaten • Victim of bullying • Sexually harassed • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejection • Victim of white ideology • Oppresses the weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejected • Victim of bullying • Victim of white ideology • Victim of black society

addressed to these women make their position get worse since they feel more convinced that they have lacks and weaknesses. What frequently happens next is that they try to make some efforts in order to realize the beauty ideas according to the white standard. Besides,

there is tendency for the blacks to oppress other black women whom they see as less beautiful than they are, such as Pecola who has dark skin and Bride who has blue black skin. Because of these two dark tones of colors, Pecola and Bride are seen as having a lower status. It is no

wonder that women like these two characters are put at the very lower position of the white beauty idealized by the members of the society at large.

Exception is found, however, but not a lot. The narrator in *the Bluest Eye*, for example, who is one of the characters in the novel happens to be one who is not hegemonized and who values dark skin highly. This person is also not a perpetrator of oppression over the weak. Meanwhile, in *God Help the Child*, Jerie becomes the first person who realizes the positive values of Bride's physical characteristics and teaches Bride to appreciate the beauty of her skin color.

Discussion

Oppression in the Strata of Skin Color and Beauty Values

In most societies, expectation to have attractive appearance is more addressed to women than to men. This also happens to black women who are expected to have more attractive physical appearances. Meanwhile, this expectation is not so much intended for black men (Hill, 2002:78). This causes black women who do not have attractive appearance carry a heavier burden than black men who do not have attractive appearance. This situation shows that there is oppression towards black women.

Hill (2002:77) states that supremacy of the white ideology puts the position of African descendants below that of the whites. The whites identify themselves with anything civilized, having high values, and beautiful. On the other hand, they identify blacks with anything low, have poor values, and ugly. The dominant ideology puts the blacks and the whites in

different strata. They even see them as having opposite images.

The social construct of color gives a contribution in forming the ideology that white, or bright, represents anything that is sacred, clean, and decent while, on the other hand, black represents anything evil, dirty, and indecent (Thompson, 2006: 48). It is by this construct that white is more preferable because it is regarded as having positive values while black is not because it has negative values. It is no wonder that, later, white skin is idolized while black is despised. Patton (2006: 26) shows that the beauty of white women is contrasted to that of black women. The contrasting images of black and white are also applied to skin color.

The construct is disadvantageous for black people. However, many of the people have the same thought and feeling about the construct which actually puts them in the lower position. The African-Americans are hegemonized by the white beauty ideal since they are widely exposed with the white ideology of beauty. Posters, movies, and advertisements that expose artists with idealized white beauty are much found around them that eventually have an impact on them concerning their thoughts about beauty.

Hegemony is a form of domination which, in certain ways, is accepted by the dominated (Aschroft, Griffiths, dan Tiffin, 1998: 116). They accept the thoughts willingly without force. In relation to the idealized values of white beauty, the black society nods to the thoughts that are identical to the physical characteristics of the beautiful white women. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, it is described how powerful is the white

influence that makes the blacks willingly accept the thoughts.

There the black-and-white images come together, making a magnificent whole – all projected through the ray of light from above and behind. It was really a simple pleasure, but she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate (Morrison, 2004: 111).

The quote shows how Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, obtains understanding of beauty as what is attractive and liked, as what is ugly and disliked, as what she watches in the movies. Pauline eventually comes into a conclusion that white is that which has positive values while black is the opposite. Movies become one of the effective media to spread white ideologies that the society accepts without much resistance. It is no wonder that such media are readily accepted by the black society since they are very attractively packaged and presented.

Physical attractiveness is, in fact, determined by many factors such as body height and weights, posture, skin color, eye color, hair color, nose and lip shapes, and others. Of these characteristics, skin color is prominent and soon becomes problematic when beauty is related to race. This problem is experienced by Pecola and Bride who both have the same oppressive experiences. They have to face not only rejections from people around them, but also violence.

Bullying is an example of the violence. Bullying can be defined as "repeated oppression, psychological and physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful one." (Farrington, 1993: 381).

Pecola receives verbal bullying from her friends who want to humiliate her for the reason that she is seen as having unattractive physical characteristics.

She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say, "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!" and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused (Morrison, 2004: 45).

Pecola is associated with something which is low. She is regarded as a person whose beauty is absent because of her black skin. The harrasers choose her as the victim because they think that she is vulnerable to be mocked. They think that Pecola does not have self-esteem.

Pecola's friends do not want her to become part of them. She is supposed to be alienated from them because she is regarded as a nuisance. Isolation is also a way of protecting the white supremacy from being contaminated by anything black that will deteriorate them. For them, Pecola's black and ugly face is associated with something negative. Pecola becomes more inferior and alienated. This is observed by Junior, Pecola's friend, as described by the narrator:

She kept her head down as she walked. He had seen her many times before, standing alone, always alone, at recess. Nobody ever played with her. Probably, he thought, because she was ugly" (Morrison, 2004: 82).

It is not only her peers who alienate her, but teachers also do it. Teachers, who are supposed to treat all students fairly, also tend to isolate her from their interactions.

She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always. But what about Marie Appolonaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino. Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond (Morrison, 2004: 44-45).

Teachers minimize their interactions with Pecola by arranging her seating in such a way that she sits by herself. This way, she is forced to see that her teachers also want her to be isolated. All this is because Pecola is regarded as different from the rest of the class. She is not given space to be part of the class. She is deliberately alienated so that she does not become a nuisance.

Discriminative treatment to Pecola is a sad thing. The black people feel that what they do, without feeling guilty, is something natural. This shows how the hegemony of white beauty was very strong in the African-American community in 1940s as the setting of the novel. Giving a privilege to certain people based on skin color is a discrimination. In this case, these black people imitate how the whites treat the blacks because the whites have a higher privilege.

Meanwhile, bullying to Bride occurs in the form of mockery by imitating the movement and voice of a monkey's. This

is done because of Bride's skin color which is bluish black.

"One day a girl and three boys heaped a bunch of bananas on my desk and did their monkey imitations. They treated me like a freak, strange, and soiling like a spill of ink on white paper" (Morrison, 2015: 56).

Bride's friends relate what they do to Bride to characteristics frequently attached to the monkey. In mostly the same way as what Pecola has, Bride is also regarded as unattractive, different from the rest, and annoying. By bullying, Bride's friends regard her as inferior while them as superior. Racial stereotypical labels are also often given to Bride such as "Coon, Topsy, Clinkertop, Sambo, Ooga, Booga, etc." (Morrison, 2015: 56). Bride, who was born in 1990s, is quite accustomed with what people around do to her. She just lets them humiliate her without resistance in order to avoid raising bigger problems. What Bride experiences shows that racial conflicts still occur after several decades of the Civil Rights Movement.

Through her novels, Morrison shows that racial issues still become a big homework in the United States although the American constitution ensures the rights of the people. The case of Rodney King is a racial conflict that draws the attention of the American public. Rodney King was a black motor-cycle rider who, in 1991, was recorded as being kicked and hit by white policemen even after he was down helplessly. This incident raised the anger in the people, both black and white (Henretta, Brownlee, Brody, Ware, 1993: 1017;

Ciment, 2007: 204). It can be stated that racial relation which has melted has not put racial problems to an end in the country.

Through the stories of Pecola and Bride, Morrison further shows that racial problems give serious impacts not only to adult people in general but also to children. Children may even become more severe victims of injustice as they do not have enough capabilities to fight back. They become the target of hatred merely because they have different skin colors or certain physical characteristics.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola sees how expression of dislike is shown by white-skinned Yacobowski when she talks to him. He does not look at Pecola when she comes to his shop.

The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes (Morrison, 2004: 47).

Yacobowski's reluctance to look at Pecola when she comes to buy candies gives a picture of the society's attitude that the black is not to be given attention, not important, and to be ignored. Pecola's blackness makes her be hated by white people (Guerrero, 1990: 766). It is no wonder that she receives unpleasant treatment. It is true that even her black friends also hate her without being aware that they are all black.

The same thing happens to Bride in *God Help the Child*. She feels how Mr. Leigh's hatred is expressed through the racial labels he uses to call her.

"His nastiness or the curse he threw at me? I was six years old and had never heard the words "nigger" or "cunt" before but the hate and revulsion in them didn't need definition." (Morrison, 2015: 56).

The quote explains that Bride who is only a child has not learned words *nigger* and *cunt* which are racial and carry negative connotation. However, she can feel the hatred and scorn of Mr. Leigh behind those words.

Oppression experienced by the two children in the novels happen not only in the environment outside the family but also inside. Although there are differences in the expressions of the two families, the impression that is deeply rooted in the girls is that they are not loved by their parents. Pecola often receives violence while Bride feels the rejection from her parents.

In *The Bluest Eye*, violence is a prominent part of Pecola's life. Her parents become the doers of these physical harassments. Pecola is a victim of a sexual harassment. Even during her pregnancy, she receives beating from her mother.

"Well, it probably won't live. They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself."

"She be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking"

(Morrison, 2004: 168).

The quote gives a picture of Pecola's weak body because of the pregnancy and of her mother's treatment to her. This physical violence adds to the intensity of oppression received by Pecola.

Other treatment that oppresses Pecola is the ignorant attitude that defies her from appropriate attention. This is evident from what Pauline, her mother, does to her. Although she knows that Pecola is the victim of a rape done by her husband, she does not do anything to help her daughter. She even disbelieves her innocence.

I did tell her!

I don't mean about the first time. I mean about the second time, when you were sleeping on the couch.

I wasn't sleeping! I was reading!

You don't have to shout.

You don't understand anything, do you? She didn't even believe me when I told her.

So that's why you didn't tell her about the second time?

She wouldn't have believed me then either

(Morrison, 2004: 179).

As a victim of sexual abuse, Pecola does not know what to do. Pauline's ignorance adds to Pecola's suffering that she has to face the problem by herself in the middle of her helplessness. This incest sexual abuse by her father makes Pecola more depressed. Her father, who is supposed to protect her, becomes the doer of this criminal harassment.

His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made – a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like a rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. Following the disintegration -

the falling away – of sexual desire, he was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrists, the fingers clenching, but whether her grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion, he could not tell.... She appeared to have fainted (Morrison, 2004: 148).

This sexual harassment becomes the climax of Pecola's oppression. She becomes more alienated and isolated by her environment. She eventually suffers from serious mental illness. In the condition where she is psychologically hampered, she still dreams of having the blue eyes that symbolize beauty. This shows how her bitter and sad suffering is so deep that it pricks into her subconsciousness. All the mistreatments she receives from her environment have made her condition worse. What she eventually wants is nothing else but to be beautiful since being beautiful means being happy.

In *God Help the Child*, Bride feels that she is not loved by her parents. Her parents are divorced because her skin color is different from theirs. Her father accuses her mother of being unfaithful to him. They are both bright skinned, *high yellow*, while Bride is bluish black, or *Sudanese black*. Bride has been regarded as ruining her parents' happiness. Although Bride is still nursed by her mother, she can feel that she is not loved by her and she even feels ashamed to have a daughter with such color of skin. This is apparent, among others, from how her mother wants her to address her.

I told her to call me "Sweetness" instead of "Mother" or "Mama." It was safer. Being

that black and having what I think are too-thick lips calling me “Mama” could confuse people (Morrison. 2015: 6).

In this quote, Bride’s mother wants her to call her Sweetness, instead of Mama. It is as if she does not want to be associated with her because of her skin color. In her mother’s views, skin color has strata. The brighter the color, the higher it is in the strata, not to mention Bride’s that is bluish dark. Sweetness’ ancestors’ experiences and those of herself on racial issues so strongly influence her attitudes. In other words, Sweetness feels oppressed because she is a descendant of African-Americans. Yet, she also oppresses her daughter because Bride has darker skin than she does.

In *The Bluest Eye*, a similar attitude is reflected in the advice given by the mother of Junior, one of Pecola’s friends.

...; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group—he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool, the part that was light-skinned, it was possible to ash. The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant (Morrison, 2004: 81).

This view of Junior’s mother implies that she feels the oppression since she indirectly acknowledges that she is subordinate against the white people. On

the other hand, she also undermines those who have darker skin than she does. Although she remains part of the black community, still feels different and wants to be differentiated. With a brighter colored-skin, she feels that she is somewhat higher. She also implants this belief in her child.

Pecola and Bride’s suffering is an overlap of oppression in gender and race in its various forms. Pecola is an instance that Morrison uses to show how the hegemony of white beauty can bring about bad impacts to the black community. Equally, Bride, who has a deep dark skin faces oppressive treatments that are not easy to bear in the racist patriarchal society. Her expectation to be accepted by the society becomes faint because her skin color is different from the ideal. Attitudes of these African-Americans reflect low self-confidence in their identity that may lead to self-hatred. As explained by Synnott (2002: 33), Malcolm X, a figure in the movement of human rights that struggle for equality between black and white in the United States, states:

(The whites) very skillfully make you and me hate our African identity, our African characteristics. You know yourself that we have been a people who hated our African characteristics. We hated our heads, we hated the shape of our nose, we wanted one of those long dog-like noses, you know; we hated the color of our skin, hated the blood of Africa that was in our veins. And in hating our features and our skin and our blood, why, we ended up hating ourselves. And we hated ourselves.

Through *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*, Morrison criticizes the inferiority of African-American society. She also exposes the severe oppression that can happen to the victims of the white ideology as well as the hegemonized African-Americans who tend to hate the physical characteristics of their own race.

Resistance towards Oppression

From the two novels analysed in this study, it can be stated that resistance towards oppression that can be realized by African-American women is by upholding efforts from the black women themselves. Morrison emphasizes the importance of self-consciousness and efforts of the African-American women without relying on supports from others. This inner determination is absolutely needed to free the black women from oppression.

There are differences in the manners that Pecola and Bride have in facing oppressions. Like the members of the community where she lives, Pecola believes that having a white skin will make one happy. It is no wonder that she is deeply obsessed by white beauty. On the contrary, Bride does not have this kind of obsession although her very dark skin tone has made her neglected and hungry for her mother's love. The differences in the attitudes of the two women bring about differences in how they cope with the oppression.

In *The Bluest Eye*, beauty is symbolized by white skin. Since Pecola is obsessed to have white beauty, she drinks three quarts of milk all at once with the expectation that her skin will become white.

“Three quarts of milk. That’s what was in that icebox yesterday. Three whole quarts. Now they ain’t none. Not a drop. I don’t mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk! What the devil does anyhow need with three quarts of milk?” (Morrison, 2004: 24).

Mrs. McTeer gets a queer surprise finding Pecola has drunk that much milk. She knows that Pecola wants very much to have white skin. Milk is associated with white skin; so Pecola, who is eleven years old, thinks that drinking that amount of milk will make her get her dream.

Pecola also believes in the correlation between beauty and happiness. She is sure that Shirley Temple, whom she idolizes, is happy. She, therefore, wants to have blue eyes just like her.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. 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, 2004: 45)

Pecola has the conviction that, if she is beautiful, her life will change to be better. She will be loved by her parents and treated well. The dream, however, is in contrast with the reality since nothing changes. In her strong drive to realize her

dream, she goes to Soaphead Church, a person claiming to be able to read and interpret dreams, to ask for help to make her eyes change blue. It is irrational, of course, but it is motivated by the powerful hegemony of white beauty and her strong wish to be beautiful. She clings to her conviction that, if she is able to change her identity, she will live happily and be treated well.

Bride has a different attitude. She is not as obsessed as Pecola is. She merely obeys and keeps silent in order to avoid problems. She does not want to imitate people. She is aware that skin color cannot be changed. She knows that her bluish dark skin will always become her identity. Her encounter with Jerie changes her life and raises her conviction that this identity becomes her strength, not weakness.

“but because of what it does to your licorice skin,” he said. “And black is the new black.” (Morrison, 2015: 33).

Jerie tells Bride that her skin color is so different from that of most people and it will give her a plus value for beauty. He further advises her to show off her skin and wear white clothes.

“You should always wear white, Bride. Only white and all white all the time.” (Morrison, 2015: 33).

The white clothes will make contrast with her skin color and becomes a strategy to show off her beauty. Jerie also advises Bride not to wear make-up, nor accessories. Without make-up and accessories, and with the contrast

between the skin and clothes, she will have her beauty look prominent.

“Just you, girl. All sable and ice. A panther in snow. And with your body? And those wolverine eyes? Please!” (Morrison, 2015: 34).

Jerie is right. Bride becomes the center of attention and succeeds in her career as a manager in a cosmetic industry.

“I’m young; I’m successful and pretty. Really pretty, so there!” (Morrison, 2015: 53).

Through Bride, Morrison sends the message that African-American women must be confident and proud with their identities. They do not need to change their physical features to be like other people. On the contrary, they must show them as their plus values and potentials. Domination of the white-beauty ideal does not need to be obeyed; nor does it become an obstacle to love and be proud of their African heritages. It is, in fact, true that their identities offer criteria for the ideal beauty which are different since, basically, beauty is subjective in nature.

Self-consciousness is an important trait to free from the oppression. In *God Help the Child*, self-consciousness becomes a key of success for Bride to change her life. Her conviction that she is valuable, just as other women who have fair skin are, raises her praise for her self-identity. By self-consciousness, she is also able to look at herself more objectively, not from other people’s points of views. This self-definition has enabled her to empower herself.

On the other hand, Pecola falls to become the victim of beauty hegemony. She becomes insane in which condition she is still obsessed of having blue eyes and fair skin, an obsession that can never be realized. In here, Morrison criticizes African-American women who are carried away by the hegemony and, in fact, oppress themselves. Through the two characters in the novels, Morrison shows that self-consciousness becomes the primary key for them to be freed from oppression; consciousness that their identities must be treated positively; consciousness that it is self-identity that will make them equal to people from other races.

CONCLUSION

Pressure to have bright skin for the reason of being more attractive and accepted by the society is a form of oppression to women since it can become an unbearable burden, especially when such pressure is unaccomplishable. For black women in the United States, white-beauty hegemony is a form of oppression. Unconsciously, this hegemony has placed them outside the circle of the beauty categories since their physical characteristics are far from conforming to this hegemonizing standard. Furthermore, oppression will have more serious impacts for African-American women whose physical characteristics are judged to be less favourable than those of other African-American women because their skin is darker. Self-consciousness of the white beauty hegemony and respect of self-identity are needed to resist the oppression.

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