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**Eurocentric Beauty Standards in Toni Morrison's
The Bluest Eye (1970)**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved aunt, Badiâa, who passed away a year ago.

I will always love you.

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to highlight aspects of Eurocentrism and its impact in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Eurocentrism is the sum of perceptions and attitudes that distinguish Europeans from non-Europeans. It is a biased world-view that perceives European race, history and culture as superior, and those of non-European descent as inferior. On the one hand, it contributed to the promotion of Enlightenment ideals. On the other hand, however, it led to the creation of a hierarchical world with Westerners being on top and the rest of the world at the bottom. The first chapter of the present work is a theoretical study that endeavors to provide a theoretical overview and critique of Eurocentrism and its repercussions. Chapter two focuses mainly on the various ways Eurocentric beauty standards are promoted through different means in *The Bluest Eye*. The third chapter provides a psychoanalytic study of the protagonist Pecola as a victim of the blind perception of Eurocentric attitudes and standards and her opposite Claudia as well as other characters. It also highlights *The Bluest Eye* as an Anti-Eurocentric novel through which Morrison condemns the ideals that contributed to the distortion of Pecola's image about herself.

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Introduction:

Eurocentrism is a form of ethnocentrism where the world is perceived from a mono-dimensional viewpoint that privileges one's own nation (Europe) over the others. Hence, it is generally understood to be the conglomerate of European attitudes towards all that is non-European in a way that gives superiority to Europe and puts it on a pedestal and ignores the rest of the world. Such vision is usually biased, making race, history, culture as well as the politics and economy of non-Westerners appear abnormal and inferior to the Western ones.

This worldview has manifested itself in all domains such as social sciences, history, politics, economy, religion and literature. It relies heavily on theories and beliefs that claim Western superiority to be a universal truth rather than a manmade system. Hence, Eurocentrism is used as a justification to rationalize the events and actions taken by Europe and, later by its former Western colonies, against the rest of the world.

In literature, Eurocentric tendencies can be found in many colonial works written from the colonizers' perspectives which were in favor of Europe's imperial actions. In addition, works written by Western white authors also advocate such ideology while writing about interracial experiences. Thus, in the category labeled minor literature, Eurocentrism and its impact on the minor community is of crucial concern to minor writers. One of whom is Toni Morrison.

Growing up in Midwestern Loraine, Ohio, in the United States, Morrison opened her eyes to racial issues of segregation and discrimination whereby the people of her community were oppressed and forced to adopt the West's Eurocentric ideals. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) was written at a time of African-American pride and Black empowerment. Her work serves as a wake-up call entailing that the West still has a long way to go concerning the abolishment of racial issues due to the deeply rooted Eurocentric ideologies. Toni Morrison through her

works aims to dismantle and challenge the authoritative Western master voice. One of the many ideologies Morrison challenges in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, is Eurocentric beauty standards being seen as universal, which had — and still has — devastating effects on those of non-Western descent. As seen in the novel, the pursuit of such ideals costs the protagonist her own sanity.

The present work attempts to explain Eurocentrism and its implications on non-Westerners. This study is conducted through the use of a plethora of analytical approaches. These include the Marxist approach which is used to understand the impact of advertisement in popularizing Eurocentric ideals. The Psychoanalytic approach is applied to highlight how society plays a role in internalizing one's views about oneself since childhood, and also how a child's sense of self-esteem is constructed (and deconstructed) partly on the basis of beauty standards popularized by Eurocentrism.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter attempts to highlight the notion of Eurocentrism, its manifestations and an understanding of how it became prevalent among those of non-European descent. The second chapter highlights the methods through which Eurocentric standards are promoted in *The Bluest Eye*. The third chapter offers an analytical examination of the impact of Eurocentrism on the black community in the USA through the study of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. The emphasis is put on the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in particular on the protagonist as it has the most undesired effects on her psyche and body.

Chapter One: An Overview and Critique of Eurocentrism

This chapter attempts to provide an overview and at the same time a critique of Eurocentrism through using evidence by different scholars. The first section deals with the origins of the term “Eurocentrism” and the notions associated with it. The second section provides the ideological impact of Eurocentric ideologies on different domains such as history, religion, economy, as well as racial sciences. The last section is devoted to discussing beauty standards from a Eurocentric viewpoint, as an important example of Eurocentric ideologies, and its psychological impact on non-Europeans.

Origin of Eurocentrism

Although Eurocentrism has been around for centuries as a belief, and for decades as a term, it seems to possess no general definition. What is certain, however, is that historians, researchers, and anthropologists interested in Eurocentrism agree upon a number of its characteristics. Samir Amin, a Marxist economist and the one who coined the term “Eurocentrism”, in his 1989 classic, *Eurocentrism*, describes it as a “prejudice that distorts social theories” (167). Thus, it is a biased set of beliefs because it provides a subjective view of how societies evolved overtime, giving credit to Europeans as makers of history. While the rest of the world remains ahistorical “until it is brought into contact with Europe” (9) as Robert B. Marks states in his 2015 work, *The Origins of the Modern World*.

James Morris Blaut, in his 1993 remarkable work, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*, gives a detailed overview of Eurocentrism and challenges its tenets. He considers Eurocentrism to be the body of “empirical beliefs” (9) that “postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans (and over minority people of non-European descent)” (9). This perception of Western superiority relies on the claim that the Western White race is more superior to any other race. This establishes Europeans as naturally dominant and justifies their agency over other nations.

Eurocentrism is often equated with other widespread biased attitudes like racism and sexism. Eurocentrism, however, tends to be a bit more than just an attitude. As Robert B. Marks highlights, Eurocentrism does not only postulate historical superiority and “views history from a European point of view (the “centrism” part)”, but it is much more than that because it does not acknowledge the rest of the world and the fact that “there are many different peoples and cultures” who might hold the same capabilities and be as developed as

Europeans (Marks 9). Eurocentric thought simply means that “mine is better *because* it arises from my people and culture” (9), as Marks eloquently explains.

Evidently, Eurocentrism rose to the status of a belief due to the intellectual and scholarly support of various experts in different domains. These include scholars such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus who consider European or Western superiority over the rest of the world as factual. This has made Eurocentrism “uniquely powerful” (Blaut 10) and enduring throughout all this time and enabled it to stand against its eradication (10).

The Ideological Impact of Eurocentrism on Different Disciplines:

1.2.1 History:

Eurocentrism is much evident in historiography. Tapping into history, one is baffled to see that a lot of historians are in favor of the idea of Western superiority over the rest of the world and are willing to defend such claim with no rational evidence (Blaut 9). Eurocentrism is widely accepted and its legitimacy is hardly ever questioned. It has been “able to gain acceptance in European historical thought, and thereafter survive as accepted beliefs...for generations and even centuries” (9), as Blaut states. Thus, Research mainly revolves around providing arguments about Europe being the center, and the rest of the world being the periphery (Marks 9).

According to Eurocentrism, the world has “an Inside and an Outside” with Europe being the Inside (the normal, the good and the familiar), and the rest of the world being the Outside (the abnormal) (Blaut 13). Although termed differently, both Marks and Blaut agree on the idea that Eurocentrism has its essence in the center-periphery as well as the active-passive dichotomies, and the idea of Europe being the center of the world and its active agent, while the rest of the world is the passive periphery (Marks 9).

Many scholars associate positive values with Europe. Robert B. Marks notes that Europeans believe they are exceptional and are “progressing rapidly while the rest of the world appeared to be stagnating” (3). Eurocentric thinkers such as Smith and Malthus see Europe as “dynamic, forward looking, progressive, and free” (Marks 4), and describe the rest of the world as “stagnating, backward, and despotic” such as Chinese and Indian societies (4).

However, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance era when Europe was supposedly flourishing, it was not the only one undergoing such evolution. The Islamic world had its share of development as well, one that was even bigger than that of the Christian world. During times where Europe was helplessly battling the Bubonic Plague which killed 60% of its population, the Islamic Umma was enjoying unprecedented development in production and the trade of goods such as ivory, silk, spices and carpets (BBC “The Islamic World in the Middle Ages”). They excelled in medicine and cosmetics and were “going to beauty parlors, using deodorants and drinking from glasses” (BBC “The Islamic World in the Middle Ages”). Hence, Islamic nations were medical masters at a time where Europeans did not really care much for cleanliness, and European doctors were still superstitious believing that the plague was due to the movement of the planets, or a punishment from God (BBC “The Black Death”).

Islamic civilizations continued to flourish and excel in science and culture. The Islamic world expanded its territory and took over those affected by the plague, while European population continued to be swiped over by diseases. It was not until early 19th Century that recurrences ceased and Europe regained its health. Even with such facts, Europeans still choose to make Europe the center of the world, and the “European Mind” as the source from which modernity and all forms of progress overflows (Blaut 15). They celebrate its successes and triumphs as something unprecedented throughout human existence.

Eurocentric historians believe Western superiority to be natural and innate and that they are destined to possess the status they have in the world. If one goes back in time, however, and views things objectively, one can find out that this is not the case. Europe was not destined to have such power, and as Blaut puts it, “did not have historical priority—historical superiority—over what we now call the Third World”. It was rather due to its imperialistic efforts and seizing the goods of other civilizations as well as the rise of capitalism that enabled Europe and its former colonies to achieve all their glory (2).

Thus, imperialism, precisely, colonialism, contributed to a great extent to the formation of Eurocentric ideologies. Walter Rodney, in his 1973 work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, states that “without African labour the West Indies were valueless” (128). Hence, the European economy was not independent, nevertheless it developed thanks to the African slave trade and bringing Africans to work which contributed to the development of economy and the success of its capitalist system (129-130). These acts, which all go under the name of colonialism, were all justified under the name of modernizing the world. The religious missionaries that accompanied them were regarded as the White Man’s Burden to spread the Word of God.

Historical evidence is tied to Geographical evidence as well to prove Eurocentric Superiority. Eurocentric thinkers such as Eliot Smith, William James Perry, and Griffith Taylor believe that a place called the Caucasus region, or Greater Europe, is where cultural evolution took place (Blaut 11). European inhabitants are the people who formed culture, urbanized the world and benefited the rest of humanity with their inventions. They are the only ones able to think creatively, who possess what is known as “European Rationality”. They also believe that “all that is good, progressive, and innovative starts only in Europe” (Marks 9) then the rest of the world follows and takes their ideas and constructs their civilizations later on. Caucasians are the only ones capable of independent inventions and the

rest of humanity are mere imitators. Hence, psychic unity of mankind is not to be believed, and belief in the power of the Western mind takes place instead (Blaut 13).

The legitimacy of such claims is supported by religious scriptures in Christianity. Rodney, for instance, elaborates that “the Christian Church has always been a major instrument for cultural penetration and cultural dominance” (44). Hence, expressions like “the Bible Lands” and “the Garden of Eden” are used to convince people of Europe’s religious superiority which paved the way for its other privileges (Blaut 3). Blaut, also, suggests that Europeans claim to be created by a “Christian God” who favors them over the rest of non-believers, and “it would be both silly and blasphemous to suggest that He might show the same favor to non-Europeans, non-Christians” (3). Hence, it is a no-brainer that Christians are better than non-Christians; God chose them over the rest of races to be His chosen people. Even though they are not better than other civilizations in terms of anything, they still believe themselves to be superior just because of their religious affiliations.

Accordingly, religious teachings emphasize that White Christians are destined to guide those who do not fit the above mentioned standards into light. It is a “white man’s burden”, as Rudyard Kipling in 1899 has put it, to take care of those who could not do so by themselves, and save them from stagnation by showing them the “natural, normal, logical, and ethical” way of life (Blaut 1). The use of the Christian religion as grand narrative to legitimize and justify Eurocentric ideals is, in itself, Eurocentric. It does nothing but serve as evidence that the whites turn a blind eye on anything that does not march to the beat of the European drum.

Later on, religious arguments no longer proved European superiority. As a consequence, Eurocentrism got its legitimacy from other discourses, namely environment and culture. Eurocentric Environmentalists believe that Europe’s environment and lifestyle made

Europe superior and gave it authority to conquer other lands and “inferior environments” (Blaut 213). Those influenced by Eurocentric thought believe that Greater Europe or “Europe’s self-proclaimed cultural hearth” was where agriculture first flourished and that the Caucasian “Semites” and “Aryans” moved on to build the first ever civilized societies in those areas (Blaut 4).

However, this is not true. Thus, by looking at factual evidence, the first glimpses indicating any agricultural activity is actually first spotted in Southeast Asia and North Africa where “[uses]of wild grain” in those areas have been found dating back to 20,000 B.C.E., as stated by many anthropologists and archeologists. Early Chinese men are the ones who discovered basic agricultural practices as well as excelled in producing other goods such as “silks, porcelain, ships and scientific devices” by the 7th Century (Rodney 9-10).

The European cultural way of life was not that extraordinary as well. Inhabitants of Christendom did not possess any special traits that would prove them to be more progressive than other civilizations. Blaut also points that “the evolutionary processes that were going on in Europe during and before the Middle Ages were essentially like the processes taking place elsewhere in the world in terms of rate and direction of development” (51). Hence, during Medieval Times, the rest of the world was developing just as the Christian World was and there was no historical account for Europe’s “unique rise” at that time (53).

The truth of the matter is that Europe did not have any noticeable impact prior 1492. It was not until then that it rose to power, all thanks to profiting off of “the riches of the New World” (Blaut 188). Colonialism was the backbone of Europe and allowed it to dominate the world. Colonialism, as Blaut describes it, was “an immensely profitable business and considerable sums of money were invested in efforts to learn as much as possible about the

people and resources of the regions to be conquered” (23). This sparked the idea of sending colonial administrators and going on missionaries.

Europe, as a consequence, gained great benefits from its conquest of the Americas during the 16th century, and continued to do so until the 19th century. It took over the New World as well as Asia and Africa later on. As Blaut affirms in *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (2000), Europeans traded what they considered to be civilizing the rest of humanity while taking whatever “precious and nonprecious metals, plantation products, art objects, and other valuable things” the conquered lands had (195).

Later on, slave importation began. This was regarded as giving out job opportunities for non-Europeans and thus returning Europe’s favor of saving the people of Asia and Africa from backwardness, stagnation, and so on. Blaut states that “nothing can fully compensate the Europeans for their gift of civilization to the colonies, so the exploitation of colonies and colonial peoples is morally justified” (16). This was the starting point for manipulating Eurocentric ideology for economic benefits.

1.2.2. Economy:

According to Eurocentric thought, European modernization brought about economic and social revolution through the rise of Capitalism. Spreading Europe’s capitalist way of life is thought of as a vital stage that non-European societies must go through in order to solve their social and economic problems. This belief is collectively shared between a number of thinkers; from German economist and historian Max Weber who glorifies Western Rationality and Western Paternalism, to the German sociologist and philosopher Karl Marx who sees colonialism as liberating (Loomba 21), and the “slavery-feudalism-capitalism succession” (Amin 120) as inevitable to attain progress, to Walt Whitman Rostow, American economist and political theorist, who believes that Europe’s stages of economic growth are the ones to

follow in order to lead non-Europeans to development as expressed in his 1914 work *The Five Stages of Economic Growth*.

Max Weber attributes Europe's unique way of thought to Protestant Reformation. According to Weber, Western modern thought and the fact that "human beings can and must make their own history" (Amin 8), is the result of the ideas from Protestant rational way of thinking. Hence, European social evolution is believed to be "a product of conscious human thought", and not because Europe exploited other lands and people through colonialism. Weber also sees Europe's Feudal system as "unique" and feudal states as "crucial causes (or conditions) of progress" (Blaut 153).

Hence, to Weber, the Europeans are believed to have unique mental abilities. They are believed to have an "awareness" uniquely European that allows them to think rationally, to constantly evolve and invent things (Marks 3). Hence, it is the "calling" of Europeans to civilize those incapable of developing on their own (according to European standards) since Weber sees that non-Europeans "lacked the cultural values necessary for capitalism" and thus could not modernize and develop (qtd. in Marks 17). Hence, Weber along with other Eurocentric thinkers advance and justify the religious missionaries and the colonial actions committed by the European settlers during the pre-colonial and colonial eras, which did nothing but exploit and profit off of other civilizations, take over their lands, and strip them off of their indigenous culture, language, and heritage.

Evidently, Europeans spread certain falsified ideologies in order to take advantage of other lands in other continents. Walter Rodney, in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, writes that during the pre-colonial era, Europe initiated what seemingly was a trade business with both Africa and Asia. However, this latter was a one-way trade system since Europe was the only one allowed to take the goods of these two nations without offering anything in

return. Hence, the European “internationalisation of trade” was not of any benefit to the nations it traded with, but an overseas extension of “European interests” (Rodney 116). This strategy later paved the way to seizing African and Asian lands, as well as having full control of their waterways (117).

Countless examples come to mind when it comes to Europe’s fraudulent colonial past. The first one being the exploitation of Native Americans after Columbus’ discovery, and the arrival of Europeans from different social and religious groups. The English, the French, and the Dutch took over the Native indigenous people’s wealth, which was followed by a strategic ethnic cleansing of the people of the new found land. Eventually, the land was theirs and they brought African slaves to work on it creating a new social composition that was highly hierarchical.

Europeans saw it as their duty to civilize Native Americans. They managed to convert them to Christianity, teach them English, and cut their braids in hopes of cutting their ties with their native culture. The same atrocities were committed in Africa and Asia, making Europe more powerful as time went on. Hence, it is Eurocentric to believe that Europe was destined to be superior. Its superiority is due to a long colonial history filled with exploitation, imperialistic acts, and greed to rule the world.

Surprisingly, Karl Marx’s initial vision is similar to that of Weber in thinking that colonialism is a “historical necessity”. In his 1848 classic, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx implicitly advances Western conquest of the world stating that the British conquerors revolutionized Asian societies and were destined to have agency over Indians, making the “barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West” (Marx and Engels 28). He also considers capitalism and the struggle it accompanies “between exploiting and exploited, ruling and

oppressed classes” as necessary for social and economic evolution and the arrival at the better stage of socialism (22). Hence, Marx and Engels further advance Western capitalism by deeming it an inevitable step in human progress. Marx also counts the ways in which Capitalism led to Europe’s skyrocketing progress and - if followed by the rest of nations - would lead them to civilization as well. He states that:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most backward, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the underdeveloped nations’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world in its own image (28).

Marx luckily changes his views later on. In his 1867 work, *Capital*, he claimsthat “the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the turning of Africa into a commercial warren for the hunting of black skins signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production” (916).

Hence, it is clear that Europe’s economic rise was attained through heavy exploitation of African and Native American nations.

1.2.3. Racial Science:

Perhaps the most irrational argument put forward by Eurocentric scholars is that of race. Several authors think it a racial fact that Caucasians are more genetically superior to other races. In simpler terms, the superiority of Europe is justified as a biological matter.

Those in the field of racial science not only try to highlight the physical and behavioral differences between races, but go on to state that one race is genetically more developed than the other. Thus, by comparing their biophysical characteristics, it is conventionally agreed upon by many scientists that the white race, or *Europeaeus*, is the most evolved out of all races (Linnaeus).

Such ideas were especially magnifying during the 18th Century or what is known as the period of Enlightenment. This latter was a period of colonial exploration for Europe, so it is quite obvious that such ideas served as biological evidence and justification for the atrocities committed by Europeans against other civilizations. Western racial superiority continued to be further advancing during the 19th Century by a plethora of American authors such as George Gliddon and Samuel Morton, who supported the idea that the whites were indeed naturally superior to the rest of the races.

However, such view was refuted later on. It has become evident that Europeans are not biologically better, but they merely had access to more privileges than other races did. An example of such privileges is the geographical localization of Europe which allowed it to fulfill its colonial tendencies and take over the Americas instead of Africa and Asia doing so. As Blaut states, “America was conquered by Europeans, not by Asians or Africans, because of Europe’s location on the globe, not because of any European superiority in level or rate of development” (152).

Europe’s progress was unethically obtained. Unethical colonial oppression was the main factor that contributed to Europe’s rapid progress after 1492. Racial Western superiority continued to be prevalent until the 1970s Civil Rights Movements, where the idea of race and genetics was revolted against and was seen for what it really is: blatant racism.

1.3. Beauty from a Eurocentric Perspective and its Impact on Non-Europeans

1.3.1. Beauty from a Eurocentric Perspective:

The beauty industry started as a harmless tool to enhance one's appearance. However, with globalization as well as the reliance on one universal standard of beauty led it to become more harmful the more it grew as a business. Geoffrey Jones, in *Beauty Imagined* (2010), highlights that the beauty industry has been snowballing ever since the Medieval Times. It had its breakthrough during the 19th Century where product-makers excelled, and later on, turned the industry into a global business (4). Beauty was something sought after by many civilizations. For instance, the use of fragrances, one of the very first and ancient beauty products ever created, was part of their religious and spiritual rituals (4). They also were fond of oils and creams along with scents, and from that many concepts of the products we know today came into being (15).

Standards of beauty, accordingly, changed overtime across the globe. Each nation has had its own ideals of what it means to be conventionally beautiful. The desire to feel attractive, however, stayed the same throughout all this time, and it is safe to say that with the age of globalization it grew even stronger. Overtime, beauty started to become more visual, and moved from smelling pretty, to *looking* pretty. Awareness of one's appearance became significant due to the existence and gradual development in electricity and mirror qualities, and later on, photography, which gave people the chance to observe themselves for the first time. Such awareness led small businesses to profit off of people's insecurities and make products designed "to beautify one's hair, skin, etc." (Jones 44).

The visualization of beauty was what led it to become toxic on the long run. It is true that the beauty industry gave women the opportunity to become business leaders and have remarkable careers (Jones 2). However, it is the same industry that oppressed them for the

longest of times as it keeps on “inventing psychic flaws to sell psychic cures” (Wolf 103) and more women keep falling for that trap (103).

Naomi Wolf, in her revolutionary feminist work, *The Beauty Myth* (1990), emphasizes that women have fought to enjoy unprecedented success and recognition which they rightfully earned overtime. She explains that now “more women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before” (Wolf 10). However, women remained trapped in what Jones calls “an endless spiral of hope, self-consciousness, and self-hatred” due to beauty standards and the burden of having to be physically attractive (2). Hence, according to Wolf, beauty is something that keeps holding women back from being truly content with themselves by physically and psychologically depleting them (18). The industry’s grip becomes tighter each time women achieve a milestone in their lives.

As the industry grew larger in Europe and became international, advertisement and increased contact with other countries contributed to the promotion of what Europe considered to be beautiful. This was achieved through promoting not only products, but Eurocentric ideals as well. An example worth mentioning is the countless soap advertisements during the 1890s in Africa that linked “cleanliness and ‘whiteness’” (Jones 84).

The centralization and localization of the beauty industry is in itself Eurocentric. Jones states that “Many of the world’s leading brands identify themselves with two cities, Paris and New York, and two countries, France and the United States” (2). Choosing New York and Paris as the epitome of fashion, beauty and elegance and so on, instead of other cities is an attempt to make people internalize and associate beauty with Europe and the West in general.

In his 1997 article “Law as a Eurocentric Enterprise”, Kenneth B. Nunn makes a great point in highlighting how the West succeeded in making the entire world bow down to

its needs through violent means. He contends that “European culture tends to take aggressive, domineering stances toward world inhabitants” mainly through colonialism and capitalism (325-326). This is apparent in the demise of India and many Asian countries that had fallen victims under the European rule, and hence were exploited economically (Jones 60). Same thing can be said about Japan who had accepted to start a trade chain with the United States to “avoid the fate of other Asian countries” (60).

Consequently, beauty products were promoted and advertised in Western style even those which were not made by Westerners as an attempt to “modernize” the economy (Jones 2). Along with the promotion of products, “Westernized beauty ideals” were being promoted as well (61). Since Europe and the West strategically established themselves at the top of the scheme in the beauty industry, they intervened in other countries’ ideals of what is considered attractive. Upon the United States starting the trade relation with Japan, this latter imposed governmental laws on what was and was not deemed attractive. For example, the emperor’s ‘face’ was “Westernized”, replacing the age-old Japanese teeth blackening and eyebrow-shaving and adopting the Western pale face, rosy cheeks, and thick eyebrows look instead (Jones 60-61).

The manifestation of Eurocentric ideals and beauty standards might not seem as grand when compared to the impact it has done in other fields. However, it is important to consider the psychological damage it has left on non-Western women, and how it has “suppressed local identities, contributing to the wider story of the imposition of Western, and white, values and perceptions on much of the rest of the world” (Jones 7).

Hence, such effects should not be taken lightly. Women feel insecure as it is because of patriarchy. This is aggravated when women are discriminated against because of physiological things they have “no control over and cannot change”, as Morrison wrote in a

1994 foreword of *The Bluest Eye*, such as the color of their skin and the color and shape of their eyes. It is a completely manmade system designed to degrade women and to take their freedom over their bodies. The damage was, and is still, enduring especially on women whose features do not fit the conventional white mold, and who are not only degraded as a gender, but as a race and ethnicity as well.

1.3.2. The Psychological Effects of the Internalization of Eurocentric Ideals of Beauty on Non-Europeans:

It cannot be denied that we are living in a visual world, and are visual beings. No matter how “frivolous” this matter of beauty seems, it remains true (Wolf 9). Dr. DiaSekayi, in a 2003 article “Commercialism in the Lives of Children and Youth of Color” discussing the impact of commercials on women of color, highlights that “standards of beauty are dictated by others through the media, cultural traditions, fashion trends, and emanate from anywhere, it seems, but one's own eye” (467). Hence, failure to meet those standards will often negatively affect one’s psyche. If one is not properly cared for, supported and reassured, he/she will give up fighting and will fall victim to his/her own mind that internalized all these values the world dictated on them.

German psychoanalyst Karen Horney, in her 1950 work, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, best explains this as a journey in a child's psychic development. It is a journey towards achieving either Self-Realization and developing “the unique alive forces of his real self” or Self-Idealization where the child will struggle to separate who he/she is and who he/she wishes to be based on external standards that leads him/her to become highly dependent on outside validation (Horney 17). As Morrison explains, repressing the child’s authentic self leads to “dependency on the world for identification, self-value, feelings of worth” (qtd. in Carmean 18). As a result, the child becomes unable to have his/her own feelings and thoughts.

Self-Idealization, according to Horney, is something that everyone goes through. It is a process where “each person builds up his personal idealized image from the materials of his own special experiences, his earlier fantasies, his particular needs, and also his given faculties” (Horney 22). However, when the child is raised in unfavorable conditions, he/she will cope by completely detaching himself/herself from who he/she truly is and the “idealized self becomes more real to him than his real self” (Horney 23). Hence, the external environment such as family, school, and so on play a strong role in self-perception, especially at a young age. Children are exposed to many sources that either mirror their true selves, or the ones they aspire to be.

Family, school, commercials and many other external sources can either validate a child’s sense of existence or marginalize and exclude him/her. If the latter is the case, and if enough support is not given, the child will not survive and will grow up with numerous self-esteem problems. This is apparent in the role that Western commercialism plays in the promotion of Eurocentric beauty standards, which results in damaging minorities’ self-esteem. Little to no representation on the media and living in a world that is hostile towards minorities can take a toll on the spirit of children at such a vulnerable stage in their lives, as in the case of Pecola Breedlove from Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Therefore, the following chapter will highlight how Eurocentric ideologies mentioned in the above chapter are manifested in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*.

Chapter Two: The Manifestation of Eurocentric Beauty Standards in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

This chapter provides an analysis of all the influences of Eurocentrism and Western white supremacy that the characters experience in Toni Morrison's 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*. The first section is devoted to introducing the author and her book. The second section is divided into three subtitles. Each subtitle deals with a particular way through which Eurocentric values are promoted to the Black community and how this affects their self-perception, the perception of others, as well as their daily endeavors. For this purpose, a plenty of examples from the novel will be provided to further highlight such influences and the effects they produce.

2.1. Biography of the Author and her Book:

Toni Morrison is known as one of the great female novelists of all time. Morrison, originally named Chloe Ardelia Wofford, was born on February 18th 1931, to George and Ella Ramah Willis Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. She grew up in a talented family whose members were Folk music practitioners and storytelling fanatics who loved telling stories (Carmean 2). Morrison enjoyed both these activities which best represent the Black cultural experience (Ruiz 1). Most important, she, herself, was a talented child with gifted reading abilities which is apparent in her large linguistic repertoire and creativity as a writer (Bloom 9).

Although she was an advanced reader, Morrison was not a writer, or at least, did not discover her writing abilities at an early age. It was not until her late thirties that she indulged in writing in a poetry club (Carmean 2). Her early scribbles which she rarely devoted time to due to motherhood and work responsibilities, eventually turned into her 1970 classic debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, which paved the way for her to partake on the journey of writing and become the first African American woman to win a Nobel Prize in 1993 (Bloom 12-18). *The Bluest Eye* was eventually followed by Morrison's second novel, *Sula* (1974), and so it became clear that writing was not only something she wanted to do, but one which she needed to do (Carmean 1). Throughout the course of her life, Morrison produced a series of canonical works and left a remarkable touch as an African-American writer and a storyteller of the black cultural experience. *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987) are among her most widely read works.

Morrison is a representative voice of Afro-American people's experience. The "speakerly, aural, colloquial" tone of *The Bluest Eye*, for example, is Morrison's attempt to represent "the complexity and wealth of Black American culture into a language worthy of

the culture” (Morrison *Foreword*). She celebrates the art of storytelling which is a significant tradition in Black culture. Cat Moses, in her 1999 article “The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”, states that the lyrically “songified” narrative of *The Bluest Eye* is used by Morrison to represent the traditional blues lyrics, a genre representative of African-American music (623).

Being born black, Morrison was not directly affected by racist attempts, but both her parents and grandparents were when they fled Georgia due to racist atrocities (Bloom 9; Carmean 1-2). This led them to hold rather strong views when it came to racial matters. This pushed Morrison to develop a ““politicizing’ awareness” (Bloom 10).

Although Morrison’s entire literary collection is worth exploring with its beautiful language and touching themes, *The Bluest Eye* struck a nerve with the immaculate way the story is told and the portrayal of the character of Pecola and the rest of the characters. The novel takes whoever reads it by a whirlwind of inexplicable emotions mixed between sympathy for Pecola, and hatred towards a cruel society who excluded her and put her “Outdoors”, and made her put her own self outdoors (Morrison 19).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison recounts the tragic story of what a child named Pecola Breedlove goes through living in a society who chooses to abhor her for not being conventionally pretty. Claudia MacTeer, the narrator of the story and Pecola’s friend, survives the social oppression through the little familial support she has from her parents and her sister Frieda. Pecola on the other hand fails to stand tall and fight. With a crippling low self-esteem and the vulnerability of a child, as well as the neglect of “her own parents and community, who made her feel worthless and disempowered” (Ruiz 1), she gives in to inevitable insanity believing that she has not only acquired a set of blue eyes, but “the prettiest” (Morrison 166), “bluest eyes in the whole world” (169).

The story is based on a real-life incident. Morrison had a childhood friend who confessed to her that she no longer believes in God because He did not grant her wish of having blue eyes (Bloom 17). In *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (1994), Morrison describes how horrified and “violently repelled” (95) she was by the thought of her friend having blue eyes. Morrison wrote *The Bluest Eye* to express her anger and sorrow for a society that failed to protect the Pecolas of the world (Roye 213); who instead of being enveloped with acceptance, they were injected with internalized “racial self-loathing” (Morrison *Foreword*). *The Bluest Eye* is an eye-opening work about “the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be somebody else, and how devastating that was” (Morrison 96). She wanted through this work to bring into light the detrimental effects of standards of beauty dictated by society and its influence on its most vulnerable members, “the little black girls, shrunk in stature by the crushingly diminishing combination of their skin color, gender, and age” (Roye 212).

When contemplating her friend’s wish, Morrison came to understand that a child does not just think of something like that and internalize it so deeply out of the blue. Instead, there are influences that can surely make a child perceive himself or herself as less than he or she is (Morrison *Foreword* 6). Morrison focuses on depicting the inner lives of the characters, their psychological conflicts and inner struggles and contradictions of who they are and who they wish to be. She wants the readers to feel what Pecola feels and to experience “the love and the effects of its scarcity” (Carmean 18) and how that is enough to drive a child into self-destruction.

It might come off as wanting to provoke an emotional response out of her readers. However, the emotional tone in the novel is to tell the readers to take action and not just witness the events. Jerome Bump in his 2010 article, “Racism and Appearance in *The Bluest Eye*”, explains that “emotions often generate more energy for reform of race, class, and

gender inequities than abstractions” (Bump 149). Hence, Morrison not only wants her readers to feel, but to act and make change in regards to dismantling the superiority vs. inferiority narrative, as well as the ongoing oppression of ethnic minorities in terms of appearance. In the novel, she highlights the context that the people of her own community live in and their struggles “to survive whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, victims of something” (Morrison qtd. in Carmean 18).

In this case, Pecola is a victim of beauty standards she fails to reach, as well as family and community expectations she fails to meet. She blames her ugliness for every bad thing that occurs to her. For instance, Claudia narrates that “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” (Morrison 42). Accordingly, she prays and prays for those set of blue eyes “each night, without fail” (42), for she firmly believes that if she possesses them, she would be loved and accepted and would lead a life different than the one she has, and everyone would say “why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (42) instead of demonizing her. Pecola’s desire to have blue eyes is due to the many Eurocentric influences that are present in her environment, which will be highlighted in the coming sections.

2.2. Analysis of the Methods through which Eurocentric Beauty Ideals are Promoted as Evidenced in the Novel:

2.2.1. Through Narrative:

The novel opens with the Dick-and-Jane Story, which is one of the different facets through which Eurocentrism is promoted to those of both Western and non-Western descent. The story of the picture-perfect White middle-class family that Pecola Breedlove reads about at school reminds her of her ugliness and her failure to meet the standards. Eurocentric

narratives of White kids being model children and the center of admiration are heavily promoted through various external sources, one of which is school textbooks.

The passage reads:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (Morrison 9)

Pecola had to read that over and over again until she internalized what she has read.

This, inevitably, affects her thoughts. Thus, Pecola begins comparing between hers and Jane's "white bourgeois family" and concludes that they were nothing alike (Roye 213). For her, a good family must be like that of Jane: "middle-class, secure, suburban and white" typical American family, not hers: Black, lower-class, chaotic, unhappy and thus atypical, un-American misfit of a family (Werrlein 58). Hence, reading about Dick and Jane reminds her of her own inferiority and insignificance in comparison to the characters she reads about, which in turn damages her self-perception. This highlights how the Eurocentric or Western lifestyle is promoted in the United States, and how the lack of diversity in the educational system contributes to ruining the minorities' self-image since childhood, and results in inner conflicts they will have to deal with while growing up.

This also signifies how the upper class manipulates the ideologies of its citizens concerning superiority and inferiority through narratives. Morrison highlights the racism existing in European and Western educational systems when mentioning the fact that the Whitcombs, the family of Soaphead Church, are treated better than their Black peers because of having white ancestors; “they were seldom overlooked by schoolmasters” (Morrison 137) and were recommended “for study abroad” (137). Because of their white ancestry, the family distances itself from the lower class and tries to live up to the white society’s expectations. For instance, Claudia narrates that the kids do well at school for the purpose of proving that “all civilizations derive from the white race... that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it” (137). Thus, any brilliance that Soaphead Church and the rest of his family show is attributed to their white genetics. In turn, the family members are not ostracized like the rest of the black community, and are categorized as middle class citizens with privileges the Blacks cannot access.

Although they are terrible people and exploit others for their own benefits, the Whitcombs are not scolded for it because of their family lineage. As Claudia recounts, “that they were corrupt in public and private practice, both lecherous and lascivious, was considered their noble right” (137). This shows that the West is Eurocentric at root with its “race-based class structure” (Grewal qtd. in Werrlein 59). It caters to the needs of the White community only at the expense of the rest of the population (59). Survival is only possible if one possesses what pleases the West’s upper class society, while the rest lives in a state of constant anxiety and struggle.

According to Marxist thought, struggle between different classes has always been an inevitable reality in every society regardless of its historical epoch. Each society has its own order, and “establishes new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (Marx and Engels 25). Morrison’s focus on white narratives highlights

that “familial ‘pathologies’ do not simply spring from individual shortcomings”, but they are produced and reproduced by “America's brutal history of racial persecution in the United States” which reinforces the inferiority of non-White communities (Werrlein 59).

Another passage that highlights how Pecola’s self-image is manipulated through the narratives she acquires at school is that of Alice and Jerry book series. The passage reads:

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes. (Morrison 42)

The Alice and Jerry book series implicitly plant an image of how Pecola should look like in order to be accepted. To Pecola, the characters in the series symbolize beauty and innocence and exclude her all at once because she does not look like them. This means that Pecola would not have thought about herself the way she does if it is not for a plethora of external influences on herself and her entire community.

In this regard, Stanley Aronowitz, in *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (1973), highlights that the educational system plays an important role in the shaping of children’s identity and self-perception. He states that schools not only focus on teaching children how to read, but “they reproduce existing class structures, reinforce dominant ideologies, and bolster the political power of the state of capitalism” (65). Hence, when reading her textbook and attending a predominantly white school mostly composed of Janes, Pecola feels left out and unable to form a sense of identity for herself. Instead, she surrenders to an identity imposed on her by the society. As Cynthia A. Davis

contends in “Self, Society, and Myth” (1982): “one who really accepts the external definition of the self gives up spontaneous feeling and choice” (326).

Pecola accepts the identity that society constructed for her, and this does not do well for her. For instance, the entire school chooses not to perceive her existence; teachers “tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond” (Morrison 42), and students do not enjoy her company. As a result, Pecola is left wondering and sits looking in the mirror for long hours, “trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike” (42).

Morrison contrasts the school’s treatment of Pecola with the one towards the newcomer, Maureen Peals. Claudia describes her as “a high-yellow dream child” who “enchanted the entire school” (54). She is treated well by everyone, from teachers who “smiled encouragingly” (54) each time they call on her, to black and white boys who treat her respectfully, and the girls who silently admire her, “their eyes genuflected under sliding lids” (54). This highlights how Pecola and the likes of her are what P R Klotman, in her 1979 article “Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility,” calls “the antithesis of all that the society values” (124). Minorities are excluded from the American educational capitalist system which claims to offer equal opportunities for everyone and gives “access to the Rights of Man regardless of race differences” (Berlant 113). Simultaneously, it dehumanizes anyone who is not white and implicitly defines them as “a tangle of pathology that deviated sharply from the American standard” (Stacey qtd. in Werrlein 58).

2.2.2. Through Popular Culture:

Eurocentric beauty standards and ideals are highlighted throughout the novel through the whitewashed products and media promoted by the American culture that the characters consume. When Pecola goes to the store to buy candy, she notices the counter full of Mary

Jane candy which she eventually asks to buy; “standing before the counter, she looks at the array of candies. All Mary Janes, she decides” (Morrison 43). Mary Jane is a white blue-eyed child who is the ambassador of the Mary Jane Candy. The following description highlights Pecola’s internalization of the features of Mary Jane on the candy wrappers:

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. (Morrison 45)

The eagerness and obsession that Pecola has for the white symbols in the novel is successfully transmitted to us through Morrison’s excellent way of expression. The heavy influence of the media and products makes Pecola feverishly obsessed with wanting to have blue eyes because she firmly believes that having blue eyes will be her ticket out of her miserable life. She believes that if she was white-looking, she would be just as happy as Jane is in the Dick-and-Jane stories, and live in “a world of clean comfort” (45), just like that of Mary Jane on the Mary Jane candy.

The promotion of white faces as the epitome of beauty is also depicted by Morrison through a brand of a milk company with Shirley Temple as its model and ambassador. Claudia recounts Pecola’s admiration of Shirley’s face, and wanting to constantly drink milk just so she could “handle and see sweet Shirley’s face” (23). Blue-eyed Shirley Temple, being the face of a milk company and a TV sensation, highlights the West’s obsession and glorification of Caucasian features in opposition to others. Jones writes that “White faces, skins, and blonde hair were the focus of the beauty norms that were disseminated worldwide” and the beauty industry has always remained faithful to the superiority of these features regardless of the changes that happen within the industry (Jones 66). Jones highlights a

paradox existing within the beauty industry, stating that the obsession with the newest beauty trends “co-exists with profound respect for the past” (2). Hence, even though beauty measures seem like they are constantly changing into the newest and latest trends, they remain fundamentally Eurocentric and faithful to “names of people who lived one hundred or even two hundred years ago” (2).

All of this paints a picture of who the United States considers being “the epitome of the good, the true, and the beautiful” (Klotman 124). It is not the Pecolas and the Claudias, but it is the white, blue-eyed, yellow-haired Shirley Temples, Mary Janes, and “Maureen Peals of the world” (Morrison 65).

In addition to Caucasian sensational actresses, baby dolls are also significant for internalizing beauty ideals in children. Baby dolls, particularly the “blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned” (21) ones are what everyone considers beautiful, from “adults, older girls, shops” (21) to “magazines, newspapers, window signs” (21). Claudia narrates her frustration with getting the same Christmas gift every year, a blue-eyed baby doll, brought to her by adults who lecture her on appreciating the gift they so long yearned for when they were younger. She could see how “the emotion of years of unfulfilled longing preened in their voices” whenever they spoke of blue-eyed dolls (22).

Seeing her own community so obsessed with America’s Eurocentric whitewashed culture further confirms or justifies Pecola’s ugliness to her. Claudia states that “some mysterious all-knowing master” gave the Breedloves “a cloak of ugliness to wear” (36). But this mysterious master is not so mysterious; it is the upper white class that “generates its own pathologies” (Grewal qtd. in Werrlein 59) when it comes to all areas of life including beauty standards.

Other critics have interpreted the latter passage differently. They state that Morrison, by mentioning the “All-knowing master”, holds Christianity accountable for the Breedloves’ acceptance of their ugliness and inferiority, which will be elaborated on in the coming section. Claudia narrates that the Breedloves are not really ugly if one wonders about it; “you looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction” (Morrison 36) as well as the collective conviction and decision of an entire community. As Naomi Wolf states in *The Beauty Myth*, “since nothing is ‘objective’ about beauty, the power elite can, whenever necessary, form a consensus to strip ‘beauty’ away” (34) which is exactly what happened to the Breedloves and Pecola especially. The beauty industry stands at “a witness stand” (Wolf 34) and invites “all eyes to confirm her ugliness” which becomes “the reality that all can see” (34).

As a result, Pecola and anyone who is not white feels “concealed, veiled, eclipsed” (Morrison 37) by their ugliness which they see reflected in “every billboard, every movie, every glance” (37). It is a “masterplot” that everyone, both oppressor and oppressed, equally believe (Ledbetter qtd. in Werrlein 56). The Breedloves’ features of dark skin combined with “small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads”; their “low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met” (Morrison 36), are abhorred by everyone who instead praises and adores “dough-white” faces and blue eyes (29).

Hence, the United States’ popular culture cultivates an environment where “educators, shopkeepers, or so-called respectable ‘colored’ people” all equally perceive Black people and especially the Breedloves as invisible and treat them with “undisguised contempt” (Roye 213). Because of a society that is so whitewashed, as well as “cultural blindness and lack of all-inclusive representations” (Bloom 16), the Breedloves “wore their ugliness, put it

on ... although it did not belong to them” (Morrison 36). When Pecola befriends Maureen Peals, this latter mentions that “Pecola” is the name of a movie character who “hates her mother cause she is black and ugly” (59). This, as Karen Carmean highlights, shows that Maureen “has fully internalized traditional white associations of darkness with ugliness” (21). Therefore, her automatically thinking of such association upon hearing the name signifies how such assumptions are deeply rooted and heavily promoted within the white Western Culture.

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola’s mother, is another victim of beauty standards and white society lifestyle that is promoted through the big screen. She fails to fit in with the new community in the North (Bloom 24), and finds refuge in the movies. Eventually, however, cinematic love and beauty standards bring forth the fact that she lacks these two elements in her own life. Claudia narrates that the movies that Pauline loves to watch construct her ideas about romantic love and physical beauty (Morrison 102), which older Claudia describes as destructive ideas that “originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion” (102). Pauline’s self-perception begins to change after frequenting the cinema, and she starts to see herself through the eyes of the media. As a result, Pauline Breedlove begins to compare herself to the actresses on the screen, and is “never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen” (102).

In an attempt to emulate Jean Harlow’s look in one of her outings to the cinema, Pauline falls and loses a tooth. After that, she gives up trying and “lets [her] hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly” (Morrison 103). Pauline hence is another character who “molds her lifestyle to correspond to what the dominant culture applauds” (Alexander 298).

Another character is Geraldine. She tries to emulate “correct white behavior” (Carmean 22) of “patience, high morals, and good manners” (Morrison 72) in order to fit in and have a sense of significance. She is a girl who neglects her African heritage and all what has to do with it, including the people of her community, and idolizes the white society instead. She categorizes herself as a “colored” (Morrison 75) instead of a Black woman because that brings her closer to the dominant class; she is “neat and quiet” like the whites, not “dirty and loud” like “niggers” (75). She tailors all the parts of her authentic Black identity, “the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (72). As a result, she becomes nothing but a “plain brown girl” (73), whom only “a cat, perhaps” (74) is able to stimulate her affection which she chooses to show to her blue-eyed black cat, and not her black son, Junior (Mbalia 35).

Geraldine associates cleanliness with whiteness. She believes that if she keeps her home in a neat state at all times, it would make her somehow fit in with the whites. She treats her son like one of the house’s objects and only satisfies his physical needs of food and cleaning, neglecting his emotional ones. Although he longs for having a Black childhood, he is pressured by his mom to get rid of all the parts of his Black identity. He is only allowed to play with White kids; “his hair is cut short to deemphasize its woolliness”; and “his skin is continually lotioned to keep him from revealing his ashy Africanness” (Mbalia 35). Hence, his true authentic identity is completely wiped out.

Narratives like these and lifestyles that are taught at schools, through Biblical teachings, or in the movies, as well as automatic linguistic associations such as relating darkness with ugliness or whiteness with cleanliness, are all manifestations of Eurocentric beliefs. The internalization of such assumptions paves the way for minorities to remain oppressed by the dominant white society. Binary oppositions lead to power relations and hence the ostracizing of the oppressed group by a dominating oppressor.

2.2.3. Through Religion (Christianity):

A remarkable part of the Eurocentric propaganda is theological beliefs, which they believe is one of the tenets that have set them up for superiority over other civilizations. James Blaut, in *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (1993), highlights that narrative showcasing Biblical support of Eurocentric tendencies existed about 150 years ago in Anglo-America (3). Through the manipulation of Biblical scriptures, European and later American missionaries relied on religious teachings to postulate that Africans were “cruel savages, for whom the best possible fate is to be put to useful work, and Christianized” (3). Thus, the Christian religion, or rather, a falsified version of it, was used to manipulate Africans into being inferior to the whites.

Morrison depicts the influence of Christianity through various characters in her novel. Most characters judge each other based on Christian theological beliefs of “good and evil, righteous and unrighteous, believer and nonbeliever” (Alexander 294). They treat each other according to how Christian they are, regardless of whether they are actually good people or not. When Mr. Henry, the MacTeers’ “roomer,” is staying at the MacTeers’ house, he invites the three prostitutes who live above Pecola’s storefront house. He is caught by Claudia and Frieda who comes back home and finds him with the three women. To cover up his situation, he tells the two girls that he is doing “some Bible studies” with the ladies whom he describes as “good Christians” (Morrison 69). He warns Claudia and Frieda not to tell Mrs. MacTeer about the incident.

Mr. Henry, however, is not so righteous after all. This is revealed when he tries to take advantage of Frieda and is finally exposed and kicked out of the house. The three prostitutes, China, Poland and Miss Marie, whom Mr. Henry has invited are despised by church women who “never allowed their eyes to rest on” (Morrison 67) because they consider the prostitutes not Christian enough, despite them being better than Mr. Henry. “Pecola loved

them, visited them, and ran their errands” (46); they treat her well and do not have ill intentions towards her. Hence, Christianity is equated with being good, and it is something that the members of a minor community use in order to have authority and control over each other. They follow it at the expense of their own African religious heritage.

In addition, Biblical teachings highly influence the characters’ way of life. Pauline Breedlove perceives herself to be “an upright and Christian woman” (Morrison 39). According to Allen Alexander, she follows “a religion constructed around the tastes of the white majority to provide the guidelines for her manner of living” (Alexander 294). Pauline welcomes pain and suffering in her life and accepts it because only then is she seen by the major society. Her being a martyr “burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish” (Morrison 39) gives her a sense of identity and purpose in a society she is excluded from. Through her daily “violent breaks” (39) with her husband Cholly Breedlove, she can display her role as a martyr and hence becomes a woman with a purpose and not just an inferior woman of color; “to deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life” (39).

Through her acceptance of her roles as a servant and a religious martyr, Pauline is able to conform in some way to white society’s dictations which give her the power she yearns for. The characters turn to religion as something part of the white society that they can have, and through which they can feel visible. However, upon playing this role, Pauline “divorces herself from her African American heritage and in the process loses the closest manifestation of that tradition: her family” (296) as Allen Alexander writes in “The Image of God”. She completely neglects her family because they fail to live up to her Christian religious expectations (Alexander 295).

Another character highly influenced by Christianity is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, or “Soaphead Church”. He is a “prey to the prevailing belief in the superiority of ‘whiteness’” (Bloom 26). Soaphead belongs to a family who are proud of their “mixed blood” (Morrison 136) and past entanglements with white Englishmen. They desperately keep trying to maintain white offspring throughout familial generations by “interbreeding with members of the white race” in order to remain superior (Morrison 26). Soaphead is described as an Anglophile (136) who is obsessed and mesmerized by all-things British, and a misanthrope (134) who is repelled by all that has to do with humanity except little girls because to him they represent cleanliness and innocence, unlike the rest of humanity (136).

Soaphead Church prides himself for being a talented English speaker and is a master in self-deception as he thinks he is too good for the women he gets rejected by (139). His occupation as a “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams” (135) and a tool for God gives him authority over those he encounters. He becomes so obsessed with his alleged power and intelligence that he ends up thinking he is better than God himself (140) when he makes Pecola believe she has acquired blue eyes (146). He writes a letter to God stating that he, too, “have created” (147) and did what God “did not, could not, would not do” (146); he ended her suffering with being ugly.

Hence, Soaphead Church and Mrs. Pauline Breedlove both “try to live up to an external image” (Davis 325) designed by the white society, and in this case it is done through religious beliefs, as “an attempt to gain power and control” (325). Both characters use religion to have a sense of belonging through conforming to white society’s theological beliefs and values, desperately trying to fit the mold that the white society has designed. If they fail to live up to such expectations, they will be put “outdoors” (Morrison 18) by their masters, their families, and their own community.

Being “outdoors” is “the real terror of life” (18) for minorities; it is vicious and terrifying (Davis 327). Therefore, they have to just surrender to white values in order to survive. Hence, they desperately try to define themselves through the eyes of others using whatever means acceptable and go in accordance to the white society’s values. As Cynthia A. Davis describes, the result is a “cycle of conflicting and shifting subject-object relationships in which both sides try simultaneously to remain in control of the relationship and to use the Other's look to confirm identity” (325). Minorities are burdened with what W.E.B Du Bois refers to as “double vision” and seeing themselves through the other’s gaze in order to be perceived by, and have a place in, the white dominant society (qtd. in Bloom 41).

In conclusion, Eurocentric standards of beauty and lifestyle are so widespread within the Western culture that minorities feel bombarded by such standards (Hooks 94). As a result, minorities “find it difficult to affirm their own beauty” (Tracey 119) in a culture that is so whitewashed. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, in *Toni Morrison’s Developing Class Consciousness* (1991), writes that Morrison’s message is that beauty is a learned concept. It is taught through the promotion of white capitalist standards (33). This leads to the shattering of the minorities’ self-image because to consider one race’s physical appearance as the epitome of beauty automatically results in the other races being considered ugly (33).

The internalization of Eurocentric beauty standards by minorities negatively impacts their psyche and leads to various mental illnesses, as will be discussed in the coming chapter. Such psychological malfunctions are generally reflected in the abnormal behaviors of the victims, which, if not properly treated, may lead to their collapse.

Chapter Three: The Psychological Implications of Eurocentric Beauty Standards in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*:

This chapter endeavors to study the different psychological responses of different characters in the novel. The first section attempts to explain the psychological damage that Pecola experiences due to her exclusion and inability to fit in with the white society's standards of beauty; from opting to isolating herself and repressing her emotions to finally dissociating and becoming mentally ill. The second section offers an analysis and explanation of Claudia's reaction and the ways through which she avoids Pecola's destiny despite living in similar environment. The third section provides an analysis of the elements that render *The Bluest Eye* an Anti-Eurocentric novel.

3.1. The Impact of Eurocentric Beauty Standards on Pecola's Psyche:

Toni Morrison, through *The Bluest Eye*, highlights the consequences of aspiring to be anything but one's own authentic self. She condemns those "who share the class aspirations of their oppressors" and how such thing brings them nothing but suffering (Mbalia 36). The constant pressure and anxiety that the characters are put through in the novel causes each of them to behave in rather strange and sometimes psychopathic manner.

The efforts to fit in and adapt to the lifestyle of the white society instead of embracing their own heritage drives most of the characters either into madness, perverted sexual behaviors and tendencies, or unhealthy obsessions (Mbalia 36). The exceptional Claudia considers such conformational behaviors to Eurocentric standards an act of "adjustment without improvement" (Morrison 38), which "brings about varying degrees of damage" (21), as Karen Carmean states in *Toni Morrison's World of Fiction* (1993).

Growing up in an environment where the person is in constant survival mode leads to falling victim to mental illnesses and psychological problems. This is seen through Pecola. She falls victim to society's standards and is abhorred for lacking what society considers "beautiful". In *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self-Realization*, Karen Horney writes:

Like any other living organism, the human Individuum needs favorable conditions for his growth "from acorn into oak tree"; he needs an atmosphere of warmth to give him both a feeling of inner security and the inner freedom enabling him to have his own feelings and thoughts and to express himself. He needs the good will of others, not only to help him in his many needs but to guide and encourage him to become a mature and fulfilled individual. (18)

Thus, just like an acorn needs favorable environmental conditions to turn into an oak tree, a child needs a nurturing and warm environment in order to develop his/her full potentials. The absence of such conditions leads the child to fall into a state that Horney calls “basic anxiety” where the child is in a constant state of apprehensiveness (18). In the novel, the anxious energy is created by “the precariousness of one’s “place” in terms of class and race” that Pecola experiences because she is inferior in both terms (Bloom 33).

Morrison focuses on how the denial of such favorable conditions causes Pecola to “grow down” instead of growing up. Her potentials diminish, wither away and do not blossom, just like the marigolds of Claudia and Frieda do not grow. A safe and secure home is non-existent in Pecola’s life. The Breedloves do not even have a house; they live in the front of an old store that they have inhabited not because they were poor, but because “they believed they were ugly” (Morrison 36).

Relatively, Pecola, throughout the novel, is physically and emotionally alienated from her family and her community. She is forced to leave every home she goes to and abhorred by every person she encounters because of their racist attitudes that make her feel ugly and insecure. This is seen when she goes to Geraldine’s house to play with Junior. Geraldine is disgusted by Pecola’s dirty appearance and instead of seeing a scared little girl in front of her. She sees “a type, a class, a representative for whom she has only disgust” (Carmean 22) and whom she has her clear-cut assumptions about; “she had seen this little girl all her life ... they were everywhere ... they slept six in a bed, all their pee mixing together in the night as they wet their beds each in his own candy-and-potato-chip dream” (Morrison 79) and “like flies they hovered; like flies they settled” (79). She then orders Pecola out of her house and calls her a “nasty little black bitch” (79) as if she, herself, was not black. Pecola alienates herself and she manages to do nothing but silently shed tears in reaction to such horrific treatment.

Similarly, when Pecola goes to buy the Mary Jane candy, Mr. Yakobowsky, the White shopkeeper, treats her with contempt similar to that of Geraldine. The shopkeeper hesitates to take the money from Pecola's hands and overlooks her as his "eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover" (Morrison 44). Pecola could see "the total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness" which makes her angry and anxious (44).

Pecola tries to healthily cope with her situation through directing all her attention to the candy. She is enchanted by Mary Jane's face and wants to have blue eyes just like the model child printed on the candy wrappers. However, since she is too poor to afford skin lightening products or blue contact lenses, she is left with the only option she has; to "digest whiteness" (Tracey 118-19). Hence, she eagerly eats the candies because, to her, eating the candy means "to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. Three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane. Lovely Mary Jane, for whom a candy is named" (Morrison 45-46).

This obsession with and digestion of whiteness, is also highlighted when Pecola goes to stay with the MacTeers after her father, Cholly Breedlove, burns their house down (Morrison 18). Claudia MacTeer notices Pecola's fascination with Shirley Temple and how she "gazed fondly" (20) at Shirley's blue-eyed "dimpled face" on a cup of milk that Frieda brought her as a nice gesture to "keep [Pecola] from feeling outdoors" (20). Claudia narrates that Pecola loved Shirley Temple so much that she would drink excessive amounts of milk in order to see Shirley. Hence, her being constantly reminded of her ugliness and trying to live up to society's standards damages Pecola and "outstrips and disrupts [her] psyche" (Howard 214) leading her defense mechanisms to turn unhealthy.

Being a child, the psychological damage that Pecola experiences is disastrous. Horney states that surviving in such toxic environment causes a "cramping pressure" that

“prevents the child from relating himself to others with the spontaneity of his real feelings” and leads him to adopt coping mechanisms to deal with his anxiety (18). Such coping mechanisms are exemplified by Horney through the different actions that may be taken when being in such situation. She claims one may either “try to cling to the most powerful person around him, or he may try to rebel and fight, or he may try to shut others out of his inner life and withdraw emotionally from them” (19). Such reactions to toxic and anxious environments are portrayed by Morrison through her characters: Pecola, Mrs. Breedlove, and Geraldine. All these characters cling to, and try to emulate, those who they perceive to be powerful and superior to them. By contrast, Claudia and sometimes her sister Frieda take the path of being a rebel and choose to fight the influences that threaten their real selves.

Pecola, after her unsuccessful efforts to be her desired self, succumbs to mental illness and completely alienates herself from her surroundings and her community. Just like the “psychotic tends to regard the processes in his mind more exclusively as the only reality that counts” (Horney 34), Pecola does just the same by finally withdrawing from the external world and living in her own world that her illness constructs for her. Throughout the entire novel, Pecola’s voice is lost; we never get to know first-hand how she truly feels. It is through the words of Claudia, both young and old, as well as the voice of the omniscient narrator that we get glimpses of what she is going through.

Having no familial support whatsoever adds to the damage that Pecola has. For instance, Pecola is hated by her own mother because of her ugliness. When Pecola goes to the Fishers’ house where her mom works, she spills her mom’s blueberry pie on herself. Mrs. Breedlove is furious once she comes to the kitchen and sees what has happened, she hits Pecola and “yanks her up by the arm, slaps her again” (Morrison 92) and insults her telling her she is a “crazy fool” (92) who has caused a mess to “[her] floor” (92). The Fishers’ white daughter then begins to cry because the blueberries have splashed her dress. Mrs. Breedlove,

then, is quick to comfort her, calmly telling her to “not cry no more” (92) and that “Polly will change it” (92). Hence, existing in an environment that does not accept Pecola for who she is and does not allow her to be her authentic child self, she has no option but to aspire for some miracle to change her situation.

This withdrawal is manifested through Pecola’s inability for self-expression. Thus, The constant harassment by the external environment and being “psychologically raped and abused by white society’s promotion of an unattainable white aesthetic” (Tracey 99) leads her to experience a constant feeling of unsafety which prevents her from expressing herself and her real emotions. As a result, she resorts to repression and alienation. When she is bullied by the boys at school, she does not defend herself and instead caves in. Claudia expresses her anger and frustration at Pecola; “Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets” (Morrison 64). Pecola, however, did not spit her misery out on the streets, but took it all in and let it drive her mad. Even during the true moment of horror when her father commits “a wild and forbidden thing” (Morrison 133) and rapes her, she makes no sound but “a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat” (133) that escapes her.

Horney mentions that every healthy human being “builds up his personal idealized image from the materials of his own special experiences, his earlier fantasies, his particular needs, and also his given faculties” (23). She states that such process is healthy as long as it does not move the person away, but brings him closer to his real authentic self. This process, however, becomes harmful and unhealthy once the idealized image becomes more than just a vision, but an “idealized self” that the patient firmly believes of its materialization, and thus completely dissociates from reality. Horney explains that the person then abandons his real self at the expense of his desired self because “it answers all his stringent needs” (23).

This explains Pecola's state. At the end of the novel, she no longer has the mental capacity to cope with the jarring events in her life and stands against standards and ideals that "undermine rather than nurture her well-being" (Bloom 35). Eventually, she completely dissociates and lives in her own world where she is no longer suffering, and she has what she has always desired, "the bluest eyes". Pecola's dissociation into her idealized self as Horney explains, "is an entirely inward process; there is no observable or conspicuous outward change" in Pecola's eye color; "the change is in the core of [her] being, in [her] feeling about [her]self" (23).

Being in such state, Pecola is beyond saving. She is trapped in her own mind where she has conversations about her new set of blue eyes with her imaginary friend:

What? What will we talk about?

Why, your eyes.

Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again.

See how pretty they are.

Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them.

They are the prettiest I've ever seen.

Really?

Oh, yes. Prettier than the sky?

Oh, yes. Much prettier than the sky.

Prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes?

Oh, yes. Much prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes. (Morrison 166-167)

Although her state is an unhealthy one, it helps relieve the suffering Pecola has gone through. That is to say, being blue-eyed Pecola, she no longer has to deal with being ugly, her state “promises ... a riddance from [her] painful and unbearable feelings (feeling lost, anxious, inferior)” (Horney 23-24).

Pecola’s reaction can also be explained in terms of trauma response. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), highlights that “when the victim is already devalued (a woman, a child), she may find that the most traumatic events of her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality” and thus “her experience becomes unspeakable” (8). Hence, the silence and secrecy Pecola opts for when dealing with the different atrocious and traumatic events in her life seem invalid to her and unworthy of verbalization because she, herself, feels unworthy.

Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos suggests that Pecola is vulnerable because she is marginalized on various levels. In “New Dimensions of Spirituality” (1987), she writes that “Pecola stands for the triple indemnity of the female Black child: children, Blacks, and females are devalued in American culture” (34). As a result, she remains silent each time she is mistreated because of her ugliness and stands helpless against ideals that only a miracle would allow her to attain. Even when the “unspeakable” is committed against her by her father, she does not utter a word.

Another response to traumatic experiences is “to banish [atrocities] from consciousness”, which Herman considers as “a common response” to trauma (Introduction). Pecola as a patient completely detaches herself and chooses to live in her unconsciousness instead. Ironically, her illness becomes her cure and soothes her suffering from the cruelty of

her environment because to her, she now has blue eyes and no longer has to deal with being ugly. Her madness allows her to protectively imagine “an interior world that is immune from both the internal and external manifestations of racism” (Williams qtd. in Bloom 76). Pecola is put in contrast with Claudia, who does not absentmindedly take in the Eurocentric influences she is exposed to. Instead, she deciphers them and undermines their authority, as will be discussed in the coming section.

3.2. Claudia’s Successful Deconstruction of Eurocentric Beauty Ideals:

Claudia is one of the fascinating characters in the novel and the narrator of the story. She is “adventurous, mischievous, witty, suspicious, trusting” (Bloom 22), but what makes her stand out is her rebellious nature. She is one of Morrison’s characters who “refuse to become images, to submerge themselves in a role” (Davis 331). Despite growing up in a similar external environment as Pecola, they arrive to very different ends (Bloom 39). The reason is that Claudia has the thing Pecola lacks and which contributes to this latter’s demise; a loving family and a secure home, despite adversities.

Claudia has a protective father who, although does not say much, is always ready to protect and work to keep his family safe and secure. To Claudia, he is a “wolf killer turned hawk fighter” who “worked night and day to keep one from the door and the other from under the windowsills” (Morrison 53). Claudia’s father is unlike Cholly Breedlove. The latter is an alcoholic who contributes nothing to his family except fights. Claudia’s mother, Mrs. MacTeer, also, is a strict but a loving mother to both Claudia and Frieda. Her tough love makes young Claudia feel humiliated at times. However, Claudia grows to understand that despite the insults she takes from her mother, there is always reassurance of “love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup” in her mother’s voice (Morrison 14). Hence, even during moments of her mother’s anger, Claudia feels reassured of her mother’s motive which allows her to grow in a secure environment. This highlights that despite adversities of being poor, young and

confused, Claudia's childhood is relatively a peaceful one. This was her fuel to face whatever difficulties awaited her outside.

Outside, Claudia is exposed to various European whitewashed ideals and standards, but she does not allow such influences to get into her head. Instead of blind adoration of the white symbols in her life, Claudia has a curious and critical perspective regarding the blue-eyed dolls and dough-white girls. Even at a young age, she could not share the admiration that everyone has for them. "What was the secret? What did we lack?" (Morrison 65), she wonders trying to discover what makes adults' voices and eyes soften up when they look at, and speak of, white girls and baby dolls.

Claudia and Pecola do not respond the same to the Eurocentric standards they are exposed to. While Pecola tries to "digest whiteness" (Tracey 119) by eating Mary Jane candies and drinking Shirley Temple milk, Claudia tries to "dissect" (Davis 328) whiteness by dismembering blue-eyed baby dolls and wanting to do the same to white girls. She confesses her tendencies and how "the transference of the same impulses to little white girls" (Morrison 22) is a "truly horrifying thing" (22). She wants to dismember them "to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability" that everyone shared except her (Morrison 21). She hates Shirley Temple and is revolted and frightened by white baby dolls' "moronic eyes ... pancake face, and orangeworms hair" (21).

Although she admits of her desire of wanting what the Whites have, she does not compromise who she is at the expense of who she wants to be. She wants the bread and butter that Rosemary Villanucci eats in her 1939 Buick (Morrison 12), and the ice cream that Maureen Peal buys (60). However, she and her sister Frieda are conscious enough not to let their desires take over them. She says "we stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership" (12). Hence,

Claudia possesses a “double consciousness” by which she recognizes her desire and the inaccessibility to it at the same time (Schreiber qtd. in Bloom 32). However, she does not passively give in and is too witty not to let her oppressors know that they had something over her.

Claudia, unlike Pecola, does not stand silent when teased by the whites. When provoked by Rosemary, Claudia and her sister pull at her and attack “the skin that in white culture puts Rosemary above them and denies their subject status” (Schreiber qtd. in Bloom 32). Similarly, Claudia undermines the authority of Maureen, the “disrupter of seasons” and the new girl who enchanted the whole school (Morrison 77). She resists her through different means, one being mocking Maureen Peal’s name and changing it to “Meringue Pie” (Morrison 54).

Claudia, after wondering about what is so unique about Maureen, understands that Maureen’s power is learned, and that “*The Thing* to fear was *The Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us” (Morrison 65). Morrison through such expression is not blaming the white children who oppress black children, but she is blaming those who inflicted such beliefs into them, since what the children say reflects the assumptions and beliefs of an entire nation and gives a glimpse of its oppressive socio-economic context (Werrlein 55).

Hence, Claudia understands that whiteness is what made Maureen be classified as beautiful. Unlike Pecola, Claudia does not succumb to White beauty standards, but undermines and questions them instead (Werrlein 63). Claudia near the end of the novel reflects on her and Frieda, stating:

We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful

analysis; we had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. (Morrison 152)

Claudia's responses in the novel symbolize how Morrison wants minorities to react when being forced to conform to Western Eurocentric ideals. Claudia is aware that "white "ideals" deny her reality" by molding it "into strange forms of appearance and experience" that feel unnatural to her; with values that her community cannot live up to (Davis 328). Such pressure leads her to respond to the gripping cultural whitewashing in her life with "disinterested violence" instead of being consumed by it (Davis 328). Hence, *The Bluest Eye* does not only showcase the violent effects of Eurocentrism, but highlights how minorities should respond to it.

3.3. *The Bluest Eye* as an Anti-Eurocentric Novel:

Morrison makes physical beauty and its effect the point of focus in the novel due to the major implications it has on people of color. It contributes to ruining the minorities' self-image and makes them question their worth (Christian 52). The glorification of Eurocentric beauty standards of having "long, stringy hair, preferably blond; keen nose, thin lips; and light eyes, preferably blue" and having such measures be taken as the epitome of beauty automatically excludes others who do not fit such standards and thus classifies them as being ugly (Mbalia 33). Such matter is bigger than it looks, and what lies behind such glorification is the firm belief of Eurocentric superiority above the rest, allowing one race to take advantage of another. This is incredibly unethical and damaging to the minorities as seen in the novel. Hence, Morrison through her novel tries to stand against such narratives and beliefs that harm her community by dismantling and challenging Eurocentric propaganda.

Morrison opens the novel with three versions of the Dick and Jane story. The first version is properly written and punctuated in Standardized English; "Here is the house. It is

green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family..." (9). Then, the story is repeated without punctuation yet it is still comprehensible; "Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family..." (10). The third version is incomprehensible with no punctuation and the words stuck together with no space between each word; "hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamily" (10). In her article, "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility," Phyllis R. Klotman writes that Morrison's aim by such technique is "to juxtapose the fictions of the white educational process with the realities of life for many black children" and to challenge the West's supposed innocence and put it under scrutiny (123). Hence, the dismantling of the Dick-and-Jane story of innocent middle-class children is her way of "demythologizing" America's innocent past (Werrlein 54).

What Morrison did to the Dick and Jane narrative is similar to Claudia's behavior towards the dolls. In her article, "Not so Fast, Dick and Jane," Debra T. Werrlein explains that Morrison "acts out Claudia's rage" of dismembering White baby dolls through the dismantling of the White narrative promoted through the Dick and Jane primers (60). She does this through the creation of unintelligible sentences out of the Dick and Jane storyline; "hereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhite" (Morrison 10). The words are incoherent, just like the incoherence of "America's mythic homogeneity" (Werrlein 60), as well as the meaninglessness of such narratives against the realities of Western history (60).

The Dick and Jane story posits "a national masterplot that defines Americanness within the parameters of innocent white middle class childhood", and neglects the atrocities that non-White children go through as a result of white nationalist hegemony (Werrlein 56). Morrison finds the primers to be problematic, as it contributes to alienate children of color and "makes the very tools designed to teach literacy into a symbol of forced illiteracy" because they cannot identify with the lives that Dick and Jane primers dictate (Werrlein 62).

Consequently, the primers to them are nothing but a jumble of words they cannot decipher and thus can never identify with (Werrlein 62).

Most important, Morrison not only dismantles the narrative, but also criticizes Africans who distance themselves from their heritage and blindly follow the steps of their oppressors. Mbalia describes whitewashed Africans as a “buffer group between the ruling and the oppressed classes who are always portrayed as abnormal in some sense” (36) as seen in the novel. Because of their obsession with white ideals, they fail to help those in their own community and even magnify their suffering. Morrison concludes the novel with harsh truth regarding the poor cohesiveness of the African community against Eurocentric values and its failure to protect its most vulnerable members against such ideals. Tracey Lorraine Walters, in *African American Literature* (2007), states that “the fate that befalls Pecola occurs as a result of the community’s failure to protect its own” (130).

Pecola’s family and her whole community fail to protect her because they are too wrapped up in their own problems. The feeling of being ugly affects all performances of the characters in love, in parenting and so on. For instance, Pauline Breedlove, who is affected by being ugly herself, is busy trying to live up to the Eurocentric standards she sees in the movies instead of caring for her family. She projects all her anger and frustration on her family, and especially on her daughter Pecola. As a result, instead of loving and caring for her child, she caters to the needs of her master’s child who she thinks is prettier than her own.

Pecola’s and Pauline’s mother-daughter relationship is so strained that she does not call her mom, but calls her Mrs. Breedlove instead (Morrison 40). Mrs. Breedlove’s behavior can be understood as an attempt of trying to fit in a society that will never accept her for something she has no control over, which is her being ugly according to the society and media’s beauty standards. As an attempt to have a place in the society and restore the little

control she has over her life, she tries to live up to the Fisher family's expectations of being "an ideal servant" (106) in order to be seen by them. Cholly Breedlove is also damaged because of the treatment of the Whites who left him sexually traumatized. Such damage is projected through his sexual disorders and misconceptions which leads him to rape his own daughter.

Pecola's ugliness affects all areas of her life. This is apparent when she enquires about topics like marriage, love, and how does one end up being loved (Morrison 31), considering that she never experiences being loved in her life due to her ugliness. Pecola's entire family is affected by the society Eurocentric standards which prevent them from leading a peaceful loving life. They, in turn, fail to love and care for Pecola and lead her to internalize an ugliness that is not hers, pushing her further into isolation "among all the waste and beauty of the world—which is what she herself was" (Morrison 171). Morrison explains such failure through Claudia:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health. (Morrison 171)

Morrison also challenges Christianity and criticizes it for advancing slave narratives and allowing the continuing oppression of African-Americans by teaching them to accept suffering. This is concluded through her use of the following passage to describe how the Breedloves came to be convinced of their ugliness:

It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear... The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement. (Morrison 36-37)

Bloom states that the Biblical tone through which Morrison wrote such expression entails that "a white male god who looks down on black people and re-creates them according to his own image" (101-102). This highlights the role of Christianity in promoting what Morrison later, in 1994, referred to as "masternarratives" (Bloom 102). She also highlights how it convinces black people of their suffering as slaves by deeming it their destiny to do so.

Pauline Breedlove, who almost enjoys her suffering, is the prime example of such narrative. She accepts her life with open arms and sees that dealing with Cholly's irresponsible and unbearable behavior as her religious duty. Despite knowing that there is no hope for him to change, she keeps following the same pattern of insulting and fighting him. As is narrated in the novel, "if Cholly had stopped drinking, she would never have forgiven Jesus. She needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus" (Morrison 39). Hence, her quarrels with Cholly give her purpose and present noble religious motives for her, and make her aspirations to fit in with the Christian white society seem possible. As Cynthia A. Davis has best put it, "there is always the hope that if one fits the prescribed pattern, one will be seen as human" (324).

Morrison, throughout the novel, also highlights how the unquestioned reputation of Christianity is used to mask the community's ugly acts. For instance, Soaphead Church considers his job as a "Spiritualist and Psychic Reader" (Morrison 140) as noble because of its Christian font. Soaphead Church is not exposed for who he really is, and hides behind religion to fulfill his desires. His job is not questioned, despite its abusive and pedophilic nature that

only the children who are victims of it know about. Mr. Henry is another character who hides behind the assumption of being a faithful Christian to earn the trust of his community. He uses Christianity to justify his acts to get out of sticky situations, because he knows the position Christianity holds in the lives of his African-American community.

In conclusion, Morrison successfully manages through *The Bluest Eye* to depict the irreversible damage and suffering minorities go through because of the Eurocentric standards of beauty and lifestyle in general. The glorification of Eurocentric standards and the dehumanizing of other minorities' beauty standards, lifestyle and traditions, as mentioned in the second chapter, creates a rupture in their self-esteem and leads them to have psychological problems and illnesses. This novel, therefore, attempts to offer a counter Eurocentric discourse that can possibly, if adopted, heal the scars left on people of color who feel burdened by Eurocentric ideals.

Conclusion:

As has been discussed, the study proved that Eurocentrism is similar to racism and sexism because of its discriminatory nature between different nations. Much Eurocentric thoughts and ideologies are polemical and based on falsified facts about history, religion, economy and so on. Thus, as has been highlighted in the first chapter, Eurocentered ideologies were used to justify European unethical ways to dominate other peoples and races in the other continents. People of color, and especially blacks, were, and still are, victims of a plenty of Eurocentric thoughts about race and social status.

In response, some ethnic authors took it upon themselves to uncover truth about Eurocentrism. Through the study of how Eurocentric ideologies about beauty standards are transformed and their impact on the principal characters of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, we were able to reveal the false assumptions of such dominant ideology as well as the psychological damage that the blind belief in it can lead one towards. The internalization of Eurocentric beauty standards by African-Americans served as a primary example of Eurocentric thought and its impact on the lives of non-Europeans. Thus, in the second chapter it was confirmed that narrative, popular culture, as well as religion, manipulate the audience through the glorification of Eurocentric ideologies, which implicitly postulate the superiority of the white race over the others.

To expose the possible damage that such Eurocentric beliefs can engender, the third chapter discusses the major psychological implications of Eurocentric beauty standards on non-Europeans. Upon analyzing the characters' behavior in *The Bluest Eye*, it is concluded that changing one's true appearance to fit Europe's globalized, whitewashed beauty standards harms the minorities' mental health. It is also concluded that *The Bluest Eye* is an Anti-Eurocentric novel. Toni Morrison successfully showcases the damage of Eurocentric beauty

standards on the African-American community. She depicts such damage focusing mainly on Pecola considering that she is a child and thus the most vulnerable member of the community. Through touching upon the lives of other characters in *The Bluest Eye*, it was clear to see that the damage is intergenerational.

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Resumé

Cette thèse cherche à mettre en évidence des aspects de l'eurocentrisme et son impact dans *L'Œil le plus bleu* de Toni Morrison. L'eurocentrisme est la somme des perceptions et des attitudes qui distinguent les Européens des non-Européens. C'est une vision du monde biaisée qui perçoit la race, l'histoire et la culture européennes comme supérieures, et celles d'origine non européenne comme inférieures. D'une part, il a contribué à la promotion des idéaux des Lumières. D'un autre côté, cependant, cela a conduit à la création d'un monde hiérarchisé avec les Occidentaux en haut et le reste du monde en bas. Le premier chapitre du présent travail est une étude théorique qui s'efforce de fournir un aperçu théorique et critique de l'eurocentrisme et de ses répercussions. Le deuxième chapitre se concentre principalement sur les différentes manières dont les normes de beauté eurocentriques sont promues par différents moyens dans *L'Œil le plus bleu*. Le troisième chapitre propose une étude psychanalytique du protagoniste Pecola en tant que victime de la perception aveugle des attitudes et des normes eurocentriques et de son contraste Claudia ainsi qu'avec d'autres personnages. Il met également en évidence *L'Œil le plus bleu* comme un roman anti-eurocentrique à travers lequel Morrison condamne les idéaux qui ont contribué à la distorsion de l'image de Pecola sur elle-même.

ملخص

تسعى هذه المذكرة إلى تسليط الضوء على جوانب المركزية الأوروبية وتأثيرها في رواية "العين الأشد زرقة" للكاتبة توني موريسون. المركزية الأوروبية هي مجموعة التصورات والمواقف التي تميز الأوروبيين عن غير الأوروبيين. هي وجهة نظر متحيزة للعالم ترى أن العرق والتاريخ والثقافة الأوروبية متفوقة، وتلك التي تنحدر من أصل غير أوروبي هي أقل شأنًا. من ناحية، ساهمت المركزية الأوروبية في تعزيز مثل التنوير. أما من ناحية أخرى، فقد أدت إلى خلق عالم هرمي يعتليه الأوروبيون ويقع في أسفله بقية العالم. الفصل الأول من الأطروحة عبارة عن دراسة نظرية تسعى إلى تقديم نظرة عامة ونقد للمركزية الأوروبية وتداعياتها. يركز الفصل الثاني بشكل أساسي على الطرق المختلفة للترويج للدعاية الأوروبية المركزية من خلال الوسائل المختلفة المذكورة في رواية "العين الأشد زرقة". يقدم الفصل الثالث دراسة تحليلية نفسية لبطلة الرواية "بيكولا" كضحية للإدراك الأعمى للمواقف والمعايير الأوروبية المركزية ونقيضتها كلوديا وكذلك الشخصيات الأخرى. كما يسلط الضوء على رواية "العين الأشد زرقة" كرواية تدين من خلالها موريسون. المثل العليا للمركزية الأوروبية التي ساهمت في تشويه صورة بيكولا عن نفسها.