

MODESA OF SOCIAL DOMINATION VS SELF-AVERSION AND SELF-ASSERTION IN TONI MORRISON'S 'THE BLUESAT EYE'

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ABSTRACT

The Daily Telegraph considered The Bluest Eye "A fine book. A lament for all starved and stunted children everywhere." The New York Times described the book as "an inquiry into the reasons why beauty gets wasted." It also found the book to be charged with pain and wonder. The starved and stunted child whose beauty gets wasted is Pocola Breedlove and this paper tries to analyze the modes of social dominations that caused self-aversion in her, while those with the power of self-assertion were able to resist the undermining impacts of social dominations. The debilitating social forces enfeebled Pocola and brought about a complete and irrevocable doom of devastation of the self.

KEYWORDS: Social Domination, Self-Aversion, Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye

Pre-molded genetically and temperamentally, a child brings with it not clouds of glory, but immitigable imprints of race, color, class, culture, gender, religion, and language. Along with these inherited qualities, the child also acquires many other qualities, conditioned by the availability of exposures offered to it. The authentic modes of experience and being are not wholly unhampered by indomitable forces outside the self of the individual. The human cell thus finds itself "alienated in the contemporary society, estranged from his or her authentic modes of experience and being." (Morrison: 1974) There are super individual structures such as language, ritual, and kinship, which make the individual what he or she is thereby proving the fact "it is not the self that creates the culture, but the culture that creates the self." (Sumana: 1998)

The experiences of being black, female, child, ugly and poor remained obliterated in the consciousness of Pocola, and thus her growth was monstrous with depleted self-confidence and bloated self-aversion. There were social as well as domestic aggressions that cause a little child to fall apart. There were a series of rejections that shattered the positive self-image, the child could have constructed for herself. In the acute identity crisis, Pocola devaluated herself, and she remained the most vulnerable when paralleled with Claudia (the child narrator) and Freda, (the narrator's sister) both of whom were black female children and poor like Pocola. The difference between Pocola and the sisters was that Pocola had cultivated self-aversion while the sisters indulged in self-assertion, despite their disadvantages the enervating self-depreciation was a result of the alienation that the cola felt in her family, in the classroom, the playground, the parks, the localities, and neighborhood.

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"She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk." Her teachers tried never to glance at her. "If any girl particularly wanted to insult a boy, she would say, "Bobby loves Pocola Breedlove" and never failed to get peals of laughter from those in earshot and anger from the accused." {p.34}

Mr. Yacobowski's store was another place where the child's peal of anticipation was met with a cold stare. "The total absence of human recognition, the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little child." {p.36} her little world of experience dictated to her." The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for that creates the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes., {p.37}

Instead of being enraged, the little girl was only filled with an inexplicable sense of shame when the man tried not to touch her hands while accepting the money offered by her.

Such insulting treatments had created in Pocola a deep-felt longing to emerge as a transformed girl of beauty. In her opinion, beauty was the key to obtaining love, acceptance, and admiration. She had equated beauty with power and so in her innocence, believed that" To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, Love Mary Jane, Be Mary Jane." (p.38) She was also eager to drink milk from a blue and white Shirley Temple Cup and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temples's dimpled face. {p.12}

Pocola's longing for the fair-faced blue-eyed Shirley

Temple is a consciously cultivated thought implanted in her by the adult world. Society had instilled in her an implacable self-loathing for being black and ingrained in her wistful longing to be blue-eyed. Then social acceptance is denied in the outside world. Pocola did not have any parental love to substitute for the loss. Claudia the narrator also was not fondled or pampered by her parents, "My mother's anger humiliates me her words chaff my cheeks, and I am crying." ^{p.7} Despite this apparent harshness, Claudia's mother had shown concern because "in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repined the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and restated a moment on my forehead. So, when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die." ^{p.7} Claudia also had the assurance of Frieda's love and care. Whenever anyone of the sisters was in trouble the other was ready to console, to sing, to wipe the tears, and thereby life was endurable for them. Pocola was deprived of such bonding. She enjoyed a lovely orgasm with Mary Jane an inanimate candy, and the other human company was the friendship with the three prostitutes who lived upstairs. Though the three women entertained Pocola there were reservations and Pocola knew her limits. She never dared to ask any questions if they were disinclined to talk. The friendship was thus not a 'bonding.' Pocola was isolated emotionally from her mother because she called her Mrs. Breedlove a term that did not give any assurance of a mother-daughter relationship. Chilly her father and Sammy, her brother, did not care for what Pocola thought or wanted. Thrown into the abyss of loveless self-depreciation, the child had learned self-aversion and never tried for self-assertion.

In the words of the author, Pocola's racial self-contempt "stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family, unlike the average black family and the narrators." ^{P.168} The Breedloves lived in an abandoned storefront, which was like a box of peeling grey. Pedestrians simply looked away when they passed it The Breedloves believed them to be ugly and had an unalterable conviction about it. For following bribe love. Her ugliness was a prop and for Sammy, it was a weapon to cause pain for others. Pocola hid behind her concealed, veiled eclipsed peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom and then only to yearn for the return of her mask.

Pauline once had ideas of romantic love and physical attractiveness. It was unfortunate that added to her twisted and crooked legs, she happened to lose her front tooth. Her husband, Chilly had also started drinking, and he was oppressed with a monotony of making to the same woman every time. He also had friends who took him away for long hours. There was financial insufficiency that drove Pauline to search for work at white people's houses, where she experienced the shame and bitterness of being black and poor. She finally started neglecting

everything in her house, including her children. There were interminable fights, shouts, blows, and abuses, which drove Pocola under the quilt. She grew up timid nervous and unloved.

Chilly too did not care for his children. His nagging wife was abhorrent to him, and "he poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires." ^{p.31} The memory of his past, along with its immediate humiliation, defeats, and consultations, stirred him into flights of depravity. Chilly was discarded by his mother when he was only four days old. And his father had never bothered about him. Having no idea of how to raise children and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend "what such a relationship should be." ^{p.126} The repeated denials and his racial and economic conditions had left him with a patchwork psyche being fragmented, he too could not provide a fragmented world to his children.

Gender restrictions compelled Pocola not to curse or to run away. And she learned to be regressive and the unnatural suppression of fear, anger, tears even joy smiles, and laughter made her less and less self-assertive. She willed herself not to cry or not to give place to anger. When confronted with a racial prejudice shown by Mr. Yacobowski. "Anger stirs and wakes in her, it opens its mouth and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dregges of her shame." (p.38) yet her anger was impotent and failed to flare up a fire of rage and fury of violent retaliation because she allowed her shame born of self-aversion to well up again and let its "muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes." ^{p.38}

Her self-pity and experiments with methods of endurance made her defenseless, submissive, and vulnerable. Psychologists believed that racial predators are causes of frustration and evoked various types of responses from the victims.

"Aggression, regression, fixation and resignation are the characteristics of behavior induced by frustration."⁵ Usually fixation and regression are combined with aggression in racial prejudice. A child who can defend himself should be self-assertive and thereby aggressive to a certain extent. Like Pocola, Claudia and Frieda were also placed in the white community and so experienced a sense of inadequacy and social rejection. Yet the rejection by society did not lead to self-aversion in the case of Claudia and Freda. When Rosemary Villanucci rolled down the window of her car and told them that the black children 'can't come in' in her father's café. Claudia wanted to "poke arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth." ^{p.4}

Claudia had wanted to beat her (Rosemary) up and make red marks on her white skin. Sammy found an emotional

outlet through physical agitations. He ran or even abused his father. Pocola did not find any emotional outlet or anger. She “only covered her head with the quilt and tried hard to control the sick feeling in her stomach.” Her escapist notions and daydreaming were unrealistic and impractical. Like an ostrich that digs its head inside the sand, she failed to face the harsh realities. Her attitude was pragmatic because she whispered into the palm of her hand “Please God, please make me disappear.” She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Her fingers went by one. By one then her arms disappeared to the elbow. Her feet now. The legs all at once. Her stomach Then her chest. Her neck, the face. except for the eyes.” {p.32}

In a narrative technique, quite symbolic. Toni Morrison points out that Pocola’s self-image is a pastiche like a patchwork quilt she used to cover herself. The assembled experiences have constructed Pocola’s consciousness, and she did not have an integrated and independent individuality that could transcend the patchwork to assert itself. Through such a representation, Pocola becomes both race-specific and universal, an emblem of all those defenseless children who go through the traumatic process of deconstructing themselves due to chameleon and social domination, exerted over them. Pocola had a split- self due to the paradoxes in her experience. She began to identify beauty with the blue eyes which were essential for social acceptance. Extreme poverty, parental neglect, and social rejections impaired her vision of herself. She ardently longed for blue eyes in her black body, which in its horrible combination and unattainability reflected the aberrations in Pocola.

There were traits of abnormalities in Pocola because social domination had conditioned her intellect not to be rational, but to be submissive. Unlike Claudia, she never attempted to overcome the impediments by analyzing modifying, and altering the sense data projected into her. Her intellect was passivized and conditioned by modes of social domination. She lacked self-awareness like Claudia, who knew her origin and roots- “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weakness and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major fold of the garment that is society. Our peripheral existence, however, was something we {Claudia and Frieda} had learned to deal with.” {p.14}

Like Pocola, most other little black children were not loved or adored. Their parents admired White baby dolls because of the imposed notions of beauty.” Adults, Older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window- signs- the entire world had agreed that blue-eyed, yellowhead, pink-skinned doll was what every child treasured.” {p.14} Claudia had also experienced

suppressions and rejections- “Adults do not talk to us. They give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall, they glance at us. If we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us, are we crazy, when we catch a cold, they shake their hands in disgust: our illness is treated with contempt: and castor oil that blunts our minds.” {p.5} Claudia had objections to the fact that children were not given any importance.” Frieda and I were not introduced to him (Mr. Henry) merely pointed out. Like, here is the bathroom, the clothes closet is here, and these are my kids, Frieda, and Claudia, watch out for this window, it does not open all the way.” {p.10}

Despite such domination by the elders, Claudia and Frieda never failed to assert themselves. Gloria could never accept a notion put into her by the elders that white dolls are to be admired. She was only interested in dismantling the dolls. She was very original and even hated the idea of being clean just because the elders considered it the best. Being clean was irritable and unimaginative for her. Claudia was never hypocritical and never attempted to cloak her real self under the shroud of social codes. She daringly confessed her horrifying desire to dismantle little white girls. She learned to redirect position contempt on those who originated the idea and thus was ever eager to retaliate.

To be self-assertive, the knowledge of the self with all its weaknesses and strength was essential for Claudia. And so was the knowledge of the opponent’s weakness and strength. Claudia, along with Frieda, had been observant of the enemy and had made a thorough effort to direct the hidden weak points, which would be. Later used as dreaded missiles. When Maureen Peel, a high yellow dream child, came to the class, envy and hatred welled up within Claudia. Swaddled in comfort and care, Maureen was able to enchant the entire school. Even the teacher smiled at her, encouraging gay. Claudia could never be molded by the standards of social courts set by the abstract, objective world. She would rather be subjective and please herself than yield to the modes of social domination.

Claudia and Freda eagerly sought after moments of small triumphs and took what they could get. They also knew their limitations, Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peel of the world.” {p.48} Claudia could not be easily persuaded to believe something just because everybody else believed in it. She was so assertive that she wanted to know,” What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so, what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses

released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness." Such acceptance of the self with pride proved to be a strong point in Claudia.

Brainwashed by the notions fed into her Pocola was unable to notice any worthiness in her. Her distorted self-image enfeebled her and made her undemonstrative. When a group of black boys harassed her, she edged around the circle incapable of defending herself. Claudia and Frieda first watched the Macabre Ballet around the victim with fear, and then with conscious effort, they overcame their initial fear. They knew that the black boys were important to fight the white for the imposing values. They only directed their contempt for their blackness on Pocola. The boys had taken all their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds, - cooled- and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path." {p.50}

Claudia and Freda could bring about a change in the boys when they intimidated them with words, abuse, and blows. Their daringness could also be seen when they confronted the insulting marriage who shouted "I am cute. And you ugly! Black And ugly black egos. I am cute!" {p.56} The sisters waited only for a second or two before collecting themselves from the weight of the remarks that stunt them after their initial shock. They chanted the most powerful of their arsenal of insults. Six - finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie!" {p.57} Even then, Pocola did not join them to retaliate. She only folded into herself like a pleated wing and her pain antagonized Claudia. She wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect, and split the misery out on the streets." {p.57}

Contentious self-estimation combined with impractical notions of escapism had made Pocola too vulnerable to defend herself. She had grown up submissive and accepted unprotestingly whatever ill-treatment was meted out to her. When Geraldine shouted at her, "Get out-Your naughty little black bitch" Pocola took it as if was a customary reaction. When her mother split out words like rotten pieces of apples and soothed white baby instead of converting Pocola who had burned herself on a hot pie, she was mute. So was she mute, timid, and defenseless when her father sexually assaulted her? She bore the shameful evidence of the sexual violence like a drudge. People were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by her stories. But nobody felt sorry for her. She became a social outcast, marginalized by all, set aside, and pushed into the periphery of society.

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