NOTHING GOOD EVER COMES OF VIOLENCE

Abstract

Toni Morrison's seminal work, "The Bluest Eye," has been a subject of extensive critical analysis, with scholars exploring various aspects of the narrative. However, a discernible gap exists in the comprehensive examination of gendered violence within the novel. While existing critiques touch upon psychic and gendered violence inflicted by Whites upon the Black community, this paper aims to address the underexplored dimensions of violence within domestic settings and trace its broader implications. The exploration spans physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological forms of violence, delving into the intricate manifestations and consequences of each. Drawing on definitions from the World Health Organization and other scholars, the paper establishes a framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of violence. It also highlights the interconnectedness of different forms of violence and their impact on the psyche. Through a meticulous examination of instances within "The Bluest Eye," the paper elucidates the gendered nature of violence within households, dissecting physical altercations, sexual exploitation, verbal abuse, and psychological trauma. The analysis underscores the cyclical pattern of violence, affecting characters individually and contributing to the disintegration of families. Moreover, the paper explores the intricate relationship between physical and psychological violence, emphasizing how societal notions of beauty contribute to the characters' internal struggles. The work of scholars such as Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems is referenced to illuminate the psychological toll of violence on characters like Pecola Breedlove. The exploration extends beyond gender dynamics, examining how violence operates in colonial and non-colonial societies, and how it is often a tool for control and demoralization. Drawing

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parallels with real-world violence, the paper connects the characters' experiences to broader societal issues. The paper presents a poignant observation of violence as a pervasive theme in "The Bluest Eye," resonating with Martin Luther King's insight that violence begets more violence. By unraveling the layers of gendered violence within the novel, this analysis not only contributes to the understanding of Morrison's work but also prompts reflection on broader societal challenges.

Keywords: Gendered violence, Domestic settings, Physical violence, Sexual violence, Verbal violence, Psychological violence.

Unveiling the Kaleidoscope of Gendered Violence: A Comprehensive Analysis of Physical, Sexual, Verbal, and Psychological Dimensions in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye"

Toni Morrison's inaugural novel, The Bluest Eye has undergone scrutiny by numerous critics over various periods, each offering critical analyses. However, upon closer examination of the existing body of critical readings, a discernible gap emerges in the comprehensive detailing of the question of violence in the novel. While scholars such as James Mayo, Aroop Saha, and Ary Syamanad Tahir have provided glimpses of a kaleidoscopic perspective on violence, the majority of their analyses have primarily focused on psychic and gendered violence inflicted on the Black community by Whites. Some academics, including Muhammad Ismail Abbasi and Shaheena Ayub Bhatti, have delved into linguistic aspects of the novel. Notably, Kusum Nandal and Joshua Kim have explored the novel's concept of violence from a distinct angle. This paper aims not only to scrutinize the gendered nature of violence in domestic settings but also to trace its broader implications. The exploration encompasses commonly discussed forms of violence namely physical, sexual, and emotional, as well as the uninvestigated expanse of verbal violence related to gender.

Before delving into the instances of violence in Toni Morrison’s debut novel, it is peremptory to inspect the various manifestations of violence. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines ‘Violence’ in the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH) as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation." (WHO, 2018) This definition underscores the expansive nature of violence, encompassing minor altercations between individuals, mob assaults, or catastrophic events such as a bomb blast claiming numerous lives. To illustrate this point, we will examine diverse perspectives on violence. Rajbir Singh, views violence as an extension of conflict, asserting, “Conflict may be defined as escalated natural competition between two or more parties about scarce resources, power, and prestige, whereas violence could be defined as a form of severely escalated conflict. It occurs when two opposing parties have interests or goals that appear to be incompatible, which can occur at any time.” (Singh, 2010) In contrast, Anderson and Bushman distinguish violence from aggression in their definition, stating, “Behavior intended to produce deliberate harm to another and violence having extreme harm as its intent. Violence can be defined as the physical attack on one person or group by another in the context of aggressive behavior.” (Anderson,Bushman 2018)Monahan provides another perspective, defining violence as the "overtly threatened or overtly accomplished application of force, which results in the injury or destruction of person or property or reputation, or the illegal appropriation of property."

However, the quotations mentioned thus far, fail to precisely define what constitutes violence. It is as if we are led to believe that anything explicitly labelled as violence fits in this category, while all that remains unmentioned is inherently non-violent. This perspective is also echoed by Monahan. The common thread running through these definitions is the attempt to designate any word, gesture, or action with the intent to hurt, injure, harm, or kill anyone, whether human or animal, as an act of violence. This idea may involve a desire or a response to an action perceived as distorted, misappropriated, or misapplied behavior or force, revealing the instinctual, barbarous, and malicious intent of the actor. It is important

to note here that while I initially categorized the various forms of violence, this paper will specifically address gender-related violence. However, strict boundaries cannot be drawn to segregate the different forms of violence, as they continuously overlap or intersect. Whether physical, sexual, verbal, or psychological, each kind of violence affects the psyche. Despite this interconnectedness, the paper will make an effort to spotlight the distinct forms of violence.

Physical violence, as the term implies, involves causing harm or injury to someone through the use of force mediated by objects such as a stick, gun, heavy or sharp objects, or even bare hands. Sexual violence is defined as obtaining sexual pleasure from non-consenting people or animals through force. Forced prostitution or fellatio can also be categorized as sexual violence. Sarcastic, satiric, or abusive language directed at someone is considered verbal violence, and anything that inflicts emotional, psychological, or sentimental harm to an extent that induces fear can be termed as psychological violence.

The works of Toni Morrison are rich with themes of violence. In Morrison's fiction, we find not only various forms of love between characters but also witness different manifestations of violence, including racial violence, gender violence, and class violence. Each of these forms of violence encompasses the types discussed earlier.

To begin, this paper will examine the gendered nature of violence portrayed in the household in Morrison's "The Bluest Eye." This paper will explore how this gendered violence contributes to the disintegration of the family, resulting in loneliness for each individual. Some characters adeptly adapt to this loneliness by conforming to demands, while others are forced to endure its consequences. The house is portrayed as both resisting and revolting against such violence, depending on the circumstances.

Addressing physical violence, both genders play dominant roles. An altercation between Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove exemplifies this. A disagreement arose between Cholly and Pauline over coal, with Cholly returning home late and drunk. The dispute escalated, leading to a physical struggle that culminated in both falling to the ground, exchanging slaps, and ending with Mr. Breedlove unconscious after being hit by a stove lid thrown by Mrs. Breedlove. Another instance of physical violence occurs when Pecola's mother, Pauline, abuses her. Pauline violently reacts when Pecola accidentally spills boiling blueberries, resulting in scalded feet. Pauline forcefully knocks Pecola to the floor, exhibiting anger and abusing both Pecola and her friends, Claudia and Frieda. This violence is not directed solely at Pecola but reflects Pauline's own discontent. Pecola becomes a mirror of Pauline's misery, a weaker and more vulnerable reflection. In beating Pecola, Pauline unconsciously punishes herself, attempting to exorcize the ghost of violence. However, in doing so, she perpetuates the cycle, highlighting the cyclical nature of violence. While violence in Morrison's novel is presented in various forms, its causes are equally diverse. Violence can be a residual reaction to mishaps, a tool of dominance, or a method of self-defence. This complexity is demonstrated in scenes involving Claudia reacting to the physical violence perpetrated against Pecola and the MacTeers' furious response to Frieda's assault by Mr. Henry. Instances of women inflicting physical violence on men or other women are also depicted. Notably, the three prostitutes—Mary, China, and Poland—forcibly strip a man of his wealth and throw him out of a window. Despite the confinement and subjugation of women in the domestic sphere, physical violence is not

solely perpetrated by men against women. The dynamics are fluid, revealing instances where women also engage in physical violence against men and even against members of the same gender.

Moving from physical violence, gender perspectives reshape the narrative when it comes to sexual violence. Morrison's novel unveils instances such as Mr. Henry taking advantage of Frieda when she is alone at home, displaying audacious behaviour by touching her breasts. Another distressing example is Cholly's petrifying act of raping Pecola, his own daughter. Cholly and Pauline's sexual life is also depicted as violent. Cholly's sounds suggest inner turmoil, while Pauline remains silent, reduced to an object providing an outlet for Cholly's anger and frustrations. In Morrison's exploration of violence, both physical and sexual, the narrative unfolds as a complex web where characters grapple with their own vulnerabilities and perpetuate cycles of abuse, reflecting the broader societal context in which they exist.

Verbal violence strongly pervades Morrison's novels as well. Here, in this novel, Pecola's inability to answer the question of a young boy makes her fall victim to an instance of "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Blacke mo black e moyadadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo " (p. 65,) In the novel, we come to know about an instance when Cholly engaged in a physically intimate moment with Darlene in an open field, is confronted by two white men who first flash light on Cholly's back and then hurls verbal abuses at him insisting him to continue with the use of words as, "I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good." (p. 148) Sometimes, the Afro- Americans are seen speaking in a satiric, mocking and disdainful manner. Their remarks are so formidable and mordacious that they almost traumatize the hearer. For instance, Maureen Peal yells insolently at Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (p.73). Again, Pecola's inferiority gets settled with Geraldine's snobbish way of speaking. When Pecola was falsely accused by Geraldine Junior of killing the cat, Geraldine hurls abuses at Pecola by stating "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house." Verbal violence much like physical violence mediates between both the genders.

When discussing psychological violence, it is imperative to encompass various forms of violence, as each type significantly impacts an individual's psyche. Pecola's experiences vividly illustrate the relentless toll that treacherous behaviours take on her mental well-being. Her mother does not trust or like her, her father exploits her to satisfy his sexual desires, and she faces rejection and humiliation from her peers. Even a simple shopkeeper overlooks her. Pecola's rape by Cholly accelerates her descent into madness, leaving her pregnant and ostracized by her community. Cholly, too, suffers profound psychological scars from verbal abuse during his intimacy with Geraldine, resulting in permanent damage to his psyche. Scholars Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson Weems rightly note that "Cholly, too, is bruised in a visual confrontation that involves the negating glance of 'the Other'". This intense oppression, rather than subduing the native, transforms them into individuals who comprehend only the language of violence. Colonized individuals become desensitized, accumulating the poison of daily violence until it erupts against their tormentors. In both colonial and non-colonial societies, violence manifests in various forms. In developed countries like America, violence tends to be homicidal rather than genocidal. Jean-Paul Sartre, drawing on Jungian principles, suggests that the native's inclination towards violence is an expression of collective unconscious anxiety. Violence

becomes a jungle fire, indiscriminately consuming both the dead and the innocent. In a colonial setting, violence often targets the innocent rather than the true oppressor—the colonizer. This inversion of violence dynamics is also true for revolutionary ideals. In the neo-colonial world, as Frantz Fanon notes, capitalist first-world countries use violence not to decimate the colony's population but to demoralize and control them. Fanon contends that "The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (Carroll). Pauline, Cholly's wife, similarly experiences psychological violence at her workplace when her mistress demands she forsakes her husband to receive owed money. Pauline's refusal results in the loss of her job, leaving a lasting impact on her psyche. The psychological violence persists when Cholly sets fire to their house, disrupting the entire family. Despite their separation, Pecola continues to face psychological violence, captivated by a Shirley Temple mug given to her for drinking milk.

Pecola became so engrossed in the enchanting image of Shirley Temple that she ended up consuming three quarts of milk. When Pauline discovered this, she remarked, “I don’t mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk! What the devil does anybody need with three quarts of milk?” (p.23) Such verbosity was incredibly distressing, leaving a profound void in the psyche, as the narrator confesses, Mama never named anybody, only spoke about folks and certain people, each thrust of her words deeply painful. She would continue for hours, connecting one offense to another until all the things that vexed her were expelled. (p.24) Maureen Peal's words were so forceful that they likely contributed to Pecola's path toward dissolution. Parents are typically expected to provide mental support and solace. However, when parents deny such support and instead focus on disrupting their children's peace, there is no respite, as no one has closer access to children than their parents. This fact is particularly true for Pecola. She experiences more psychological violence from her parents than from others. Consider the violation inflicted on her when her mother overtly expresses a preference for a white girl over her, withdraws her from school, and openly declares a lack of trust in Pecola. Cholly Breedlove, much like Pecola, also endures profound psychological violation from his parents. Supposedly abandoned on a garbage heap in infancy by his mother, he was raised by a surrogate father. Pauline Breedlove, too, does not escape mistreatment from her parents at home. Lacking even the smallest measure of love or a nickname, she had no one to confide in or continue conversations with. Her loneliness was profound, and the psychological blow she endured was equally significant.

Psychological violence permeates not only between genders, affecting each other reciprocally, but it also extends to animals, chosen as victims to instigate psychological violence in humans. An incident in The Bluest Eye illustrates this when Geraldine Junior invited Pecola to his house, threw a cat at her, and astonished that the cat did not harm her, proceeded to throw it out of the window, causing its death. Upon hearing the commotion, Geraldine, on her son's account, blamed Pecola and subjected her to verbal abuse, thereby harming Pecola's psyche. Simultaneously, the cat's death infected Geraldine's psyche. In this instance, the act not only violated the cat but also Pecola and Geraldine's son. Some people consider harming animals as a means of revenge and justice, redirecting their rebellion, often against their authorities, in this case, parents toward animals to achieve their desired revenge.

As for psychological violence, it cannot be divorced from its physical aspects, but an intriguing connection exists between the two. The Bluest Eye delves into the disastrous consequences of the Western notion of physical beauty on a young, impressionable, black girl, Pecola. This notion, essentially racist, glamorizes features of Caucasian origin—white skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair—and dangerously equates white skin with personal worth and virtue. Toni Morrison vehemently rejects this equation, stating that it is "one of the dumbest, more pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world." Physical beauty, according to Morrison, has no bearing on our past, present, or future and can, in fact, damage one's self-image, destroy happiness, and stifle creativity. Pecola's quest for this imposed beauty leads her to commit violence upon herself, ultimately spiralling into madness. Just as excessive violence to the body leaves it disgruntled, an overdose of psychological violence similarly disgruntles the psyche. After exploring various forms of gendered violence, it becomes evident that this violence operates in a cyclical pattern of stimulation and ramification, with far-reaching and widespread effects. A main outcome is the disruption of homes and the fragmentation of families. John Duvall succinctly captures this reality: "[L]ife in the Breedlove household is anything but restrained. The ritualized violence of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove's relationship emotionally scars their children, who repeatedly witness parental fights…" (Duvall, 2000)

The home, as depicted, becomes a site of rebellion and resistance against such pervasive violence, eventually culminating in catastrophe. What unfolds in the novel is not merely a literary creation but rather a haunting manifestation of violence masquerading as literature. As this violence is laid bare, it seizes the senses of the readers, bringing them—much like the victimized characters—to a state of helplessness and despondency. Throughout, there is a constant plea for recognition and a call to action. Consequently, violence gives rise to more violence, ensnaring people in a relentless cycle, aligning with the poignant observation of Martin Luther King, as encapsulated in the title of this paper.

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