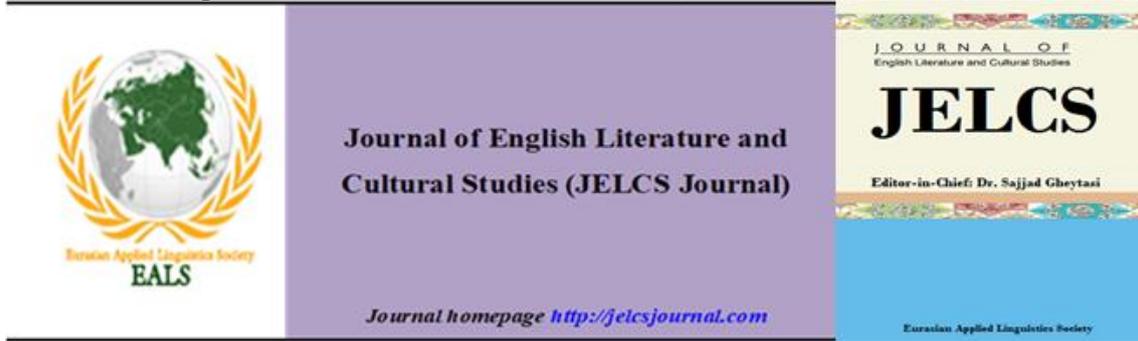


Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies (JELCS Journal), 2018, 1(1), 1-155.



Original Research Article

Black Identity and Struggles for Survival

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 29 April 2018 Received in revised: 16 May 2018 Accepted: 20 May 2018 Available online: 8 July 2018 DOI:</p>	<p>America's white ideology is certainly under threat by African American blackvoices. The <i>Bluest Eye</i> by Morrison shows the dimensions of and resistances to the dominant discourse of America's white bourgeois system. This study focuses on the point of disagreement between new historicism and cultural materialism that is the outcome of resistances to the dominant discourse/ideology. New historicists tend to pessimistically look forward for the evidences of containment and cooption of resistances within the dominant discourse, while, on the other hand, cultural materialism concentrates on the action itself that is the resistance without prejudging an outcome for it. The outcome of black resistances to the white ideology and the effects of America's dominant discourse on the black way of life will be studied according to new historicism and cultural materialistic mode of thinking.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>New Historicism cultural materialism discourse Ideology Resistance containment</p>	

1. Introduction

The *Bluest Eye* portrays a nine – year – old girl in a community paralyzed and contained by the dominant ideology of white standards. Pecola's wish is to have blue eyes, white skin, and blond hair which are regarded as beauty standards and are also the means of hegemonic dominance of the white bourgeoisie over the blacks. In such a society those who don't possess the standards are considered/labeled as ugly, wild, and have to be tamed. Such an atmosphere has been fully portrayed in the novel.

In the *Bluest Eye*, there are just two characters –Claudia and Ferrida – that resist against the Paralyzing forces of the white ideology. It is really against the grain to articulate statements about the beauty of being black, breaking white baby dolls-the symbols of white beauty- and helping Pecola to believe in herself. These sisters' (Claudia and Ferrida) resistances against the dominant ideology/ discourse are the point of disagreement between new historicism and cultural materialism. The two movements have been widely affected by the theories of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser who believe that individuals in the democratic and capitalist Societies are under constant surveillance, such a control is reached by the use of socio – political institutions and hegemonic discourses.

Althusser situates ideology in social /material institutions such as political and educational institutions, mass media, etc., he also claimed that the dominant ideology in capitalist societies – with the help of sociopolitical institutions –forces the individuals to comply with the dominant (Althusser, 1971:112 – 15).The process of accepting rules and regulations of the dominant ideology is done through Ideological state Apparatuses (ISAs). The dominant, with the use of ISAs, contains all resistances and closes the doors on change. According to the Althusser's supposed model, the dominant ideology in capitalist societies contains all individuals to comply with the dominant (Althusser, 1968: 693 – 702).

This is evident when reading the *Bluest Eye* where most of the blacks have internalized their own ugliness and inferiority. The process of internalizing the rules and the regulations of the dominant discourse under hegemonic pressure has been differently stated by Foucault. Foucault's theories/statements about power and resistances are somehow contradictory. Greenblatt believes that Foucault (1991) is completely pessimistic about the outcome of resistances. He interprets Foucault's text as closing the door on change and condemning resistances to perpetual defeat within the dominant discourses' modes (Greenblatt, 1981: 48). Accordingly, new historicists claim that the totalitarian structure of the dominant discourse forces individuals to police themselves.

On the contrary, cultural materialists, while noting Foucault's ideas about power and resistance in his *History of Sexuality* (1990), state that one should not presuppose any outcome for resistance. According to Foucault, wherever, we have power we have also resistance (Foucault, 1990: 94 – 6). Cultural materialists believe that Foucault's claim

does not necessarily mean that resistances will always face defeat/containment (Sinfield, 1992, 48). In other words, in a continual contest between resistances and the dominant at some conjunctures the dominant will lose ground while at the others the dominated will scarcely maintain its position (Ibid).

2. Theoretical Assumptions

Containment: the outcome of Resistances

New historicism was founded by Greenblatt in 1980s. Under the influence of Foucault and Althusser, they developed pessimistic ideas about the nature and outcome of resisting voices. In the early works of Foucault, readers are presented with a prolonged discussion about a panopticon tower: an architectural device in a prison by which one is able to see all the inmates without the observer being seen. Foucault writes, “the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at, at any moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (Foucault, 1977:201).

Foucault uses such a metaphor to show what is going on in democratic or capitalist societies. In such societies the individuals are under constant watch, the all-seeing tower of the dominant discourse compels the individuals to intrinsically comply with the dominant (Foucault, 1977:304). The natural outcome of such a system, as it mentioned before, is the individuals internalization of the dominant discourses’ standards. The other theorist who influenced new historicists is Althusser who also theorized the resistances defeat but in a Marxist way.

Althusser changed the orthodox model of ideology in favor of a theory that situates ideology within material institutions or ISAs (Althusser, 1968: 701). Under the hegemony of ISAs, the individuals will internalize the rules and regulations of the dominant, in such a way the dominant won’t use any coercive power. Accordingly, new historicists, under the influence of M. Foucault and L. Althusser, developed the theory of cooptation: that is any resistance to the dominant discourse/ideology is doomed to be contained within norms of the dominant. In other words, the dominant contains them to become more powerful (Makaryk, 1993, 261). Thus, according to this theory, the dominant has an absolute presence and is always reproduced in socio – cultural practices. Contrary to new historicists, we have cultural materialism in England.

Adherents to the movement are less pessimistic and more radical in their approach to the concept of resistance.

Cultural materialist's aim is to show that there are always some lines in a literary work which negate the dominant, and this resistance is not always doomed to be contained. They state the dominant power tries to reproduce itself through literary texts, but, literary texts are filled with contradictions / fault lines which in turn question the dominant and sometimes will overthrow it.

Cultural materialism was founded in late 1980s and early 1990s in Britain. The term was coined by Raymond Williams who believes that in every historical period, different cultural forces are in play: he calls them dominant, residual, and emergent. He claims that the dominant cannot contain the residual – the cultural formation of the past – and the emergent elements – or newly created social energies (Williams, 1977:123). Alan Sinfield who is one of the precursors of cultural materialism also founded a theory which insisted on the role of resistances in bringing changes to the dominant or suspending it. In what he calls as reading dissidence, he (as cited in Rivkin and Ryan (2008)) states that there are always some faultlines in literary texts which negate the dominant (Sinfield, 1992:750).

In general, cultural materialists try to refine/reform the rigid dogma of new historicist theory of containment, and present a radical/ negative literary criticism. In the following pages, *The Bluest Eye* will be analyzed according to the contradictory stances of new historicism and cultural materialism.

3. New Historicism: containment of Black Resistances

The Bluest Eye portrays the socio-cultural atmosphere of being black in the America's society. Nearly, all of the blacks are contained within the dominant ideology of white bourgeois standards. But, there are some characters who try to dismantle the dominant ideology at work. At the end of the novel these resisting voices are also compelled to comply with the dominant: to bow before the white ideology. New historicists call it process of containment.

3.1. White Ideology and Cooption of the Black Voices

New historicists, influenced by Althusser and Foucault, created an omnipotent version of power which could contain all other social energies within a society. Althusser (1971)

states, “ideology represents an imaginary relationship of individuals to their real material conditions of existence (p.109). As it mentioned, he argues that in capitalist societies, the dominant, or white ideology in this novel, tries to enforce itself by using state institutions (Althusser, 1968: 701).

In America, ideological state apparatuses are in the hands of white bourgeoisie, they decide which materials are regarded as standards. Claudia says, “ adults , older girls , shops , magazines , news papers , window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed yellow-haired , pink-shined doll was what every girl child treasured ” (Morrison , 1979:14) . These ideological apparatuses should announce and propagate the beauty and goodness of the white. When blacks look at themselves and their community see nothing except ugliness and inferiority because they don’t possess the standards announced by the ISAs.

The novel is about a race contained within a network of values; such standards guarantee the dominance of the white ideology. Pauline says;

I remembered on time I went to see

Clark Gable and Jean Harlow [they are

The symbols of white American standards

Of beauty] I fixed my hair just like

I’d seen hers on a magazine ... There

I was five months pregnant , trying to

look like Jean Harlow , and a front tooth

gone. Everything went then. I left

my hair go back , plaited it up ,

and settled down to just being ugly

(p.96).

New historicists insist on the suppression of the masses by the dominant. Louis Montrose (1989) believes that power has a homogeneous structure in which all resistances are condemned to perpetual defeat, and the dominant culture uses the resisting voices to strengthen its hegemony over all members of society (p. 30). In the mentioned novel almost all of the blacks have internalized the standards of the American white ideology. The internalization can be traced in the speeches of the black characters. For Afro – Americans, even God looks like an old white man:

He [cholly] wondered if God look like

That , no . God was a nice old man, with
 Long white hair, flowing white beard , and
 Little blue eyes that looked sad when
 People died ... (p.105)

The hegemony of the white ideology of beauty is only questioned, not resisted, by Claudia and her sister Ferrida. Claudia says, “it had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big blue-eyed baby doll “(p. 13). An implied why surrounds her statements, when the addressee is faced with why, one should talk about the cause of the matter. Here, Claudia is aware of the limitations of why, she says:

What is clear now is that all of that hope,
 Fear , lust , love , and grief , nothing remains
 but Pecola and unyielding earth . Cholly is
 dead; our innocence too . The seeds shriveled
 and died ; her baby too . There is nothing
 more to say – except why . But since why
 is difficult to handle , one must take
 refuge in how (p . 4) .

To all that happens under the hegemony of the white ideology, one should ask how; in order to talk about the process not the cause.

Claudia is the only character whose presence and narration is felt and seen throughout the novel. She is also the only character who believes in the beauty of being black, she learns the traditional songs specific to the black culture, loves listening to her grandfather's violin, etc. It seems that there is a relationship between what Claudia believes in and her survival. The problem arises at the end of the novel when she bows before the standards she hated before. She learns that in a land in which blue eyes hold the hegemony no one can escape its all-encompassing gaze. Claudia says , “i learned much later to worship her [Shirley Temple : The symbol of white ideology of beauty] , just as i learned to delight in cleanliness , knowing , even as i learned , that the change was adjustment without improvement ” (p . 16).

In this way, the only resisting voice is contained and co-opted. Blue eyes can be regarded as the panopticon tower which subjugates the dispossessed and uses the ISAs to force them to internalize its rules / standards. In *madness and civilization*, Foucault states that the regulations of the dominant discourse determines the normal state of

affairs , thus , those individuals who do not possess such standards are labeled as abnormal and are condemned to silence (Foucault, 1977:237).

In capitalist societies, the standards of normality are determined by the dominant, then, the totalitarian power will induce them to all corners of individuals' life and thought. The reasonable outcome of such a process is the creation of a self – disciplinary system within all agents. In the *Bluest Eye*, such a process has been unveiled:

She [Pecola] remembers the MaryJane.

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it . A picture of little MaryJane for whom the Candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair ... , blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort . To Pecola they are simply pretty .She eats the candy . To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes , eat MaryJane . LoveMary Jane. Be MaryJane (P.38).

In this way nothing can unveil what ideology misrepresents: the dominant decides what will be normal:

It was as though some mysterious all – knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear , and they had each accepted it without question . The master had said , “ you are the ugly people ” , they looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement ; saw , in fact , support for it leaning at them from every billboard , every movie , every glance . “Yes” , they had said (P. 29).

Almost all of the blacks had accepted the norms without a question, and the only resistance, too, seemed to be contained and co-opted by the dominant. This is what the conservative new historicists of America had claimed. In the following pages, the novel will be studied considering the theories of cultural materialists.

4. Cultural Materialism: Reading Dissidence

The novel begins with a section about a white bourgeois family who passes all standards. Whitebourgeois standards are deliberately set at the beginning of the novel in order to show their inapplicability to the black culture. This introductory section is repeated twice; the first time with correct grammatical order and punctuation, and the second time without punctuation, capitalization, and space between words and sentences. Such a deconstruction of the language and meaning constructed by the white can be regarded as the main theme of the novel: standards of white ideology are not appropriate for the African – American way of life. Morrison begins to break up and down the conventions to announce her narration to become a means of resistance to both personal despair and cultural oppression.

Claudia states:

I didn't know why I destroyed those
 dolls. But I did know that nobody
 ever asks me what I wanted for
 Christmas... i wanted to feel something
 on Christmas day . The real question would
 have been "Dear Claudia what experience
 Would you like on Christmas?" i could
 have spoken up , " I want to sit on a
 low stool in Big Mama's kitchen ...
 and listen to Big papa play his violin

(P.15).

The novel tries to show the experiences and sensations that are specific to the black culture and set them against the paralyzing power of the dominant. But, at the end, even Claudia's resistances are contained, she says, "the best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism was, was to fabricate hatred, to fraudulent love ... I learned much later to worship Shierly Temple ... knowing even as i learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement (P.16). She comes to this end: when one cannot resist the hegemony of the dominant culture, he has to construct a sort of fraudulent love. This can be interpreted by the light of Sinfield's dissident reading. Sinfield believes that in order to evade the new historicist theory of cooptation, he has used the term dissidence rather than subversion. He states, "Dissidence I take to imply refusal of an aspect of the dominant without prejudging an outcome (Sinfield, 1992:49).

Claudia's fraudulent love and her adjustment without improvement is not what new historicists call cooptation, rather it can be interpreted using Sinfield's theories: at that time the black community did not have the power to resist and articulate a voice of their own.

In other words, the best hiding place was to fabricate a false love. Alongside with Claudia's dissident voice, one can mention: the Black is Beautiful Movement, Harlem Renaissance, Malcolm X, L. Hughes, Jackie Robinson, M. L. King, etc. Nowadays, we witness a great upheaval in the lives of African – Americans.

Here, Sinfield's idea seems more reasonable: one should not prejudge an outcome for resistances/dissident voices (Ibid). In this way, resistances were not futile; they paved the way for social, political, cultural, and economical changes in the lives of the black people. The significant point is that power relations are two ways, and according to Foucault (1984), whenever we have power we have also resistance: this does not mean that resistances always fail.

5. Conclusion

The *Bluest Eye* was published in 1970 which was a critical year in the history of American civil rights. In the time, some changes which led to the suspension of the dominant ideology's hegemony occurred. One of these changes was about the beauty of being black. The blacks tried to construct new cultural energies which were in direct contrast to the dominant. Resistances of the black community transformed the dominant ideology: black – Americans began to argue for a new standard of beauty. Morrison's novel and Claudia's resistances were the symptoms of such attempts.

The initial publication of the novel was a complete failure and Claudia's resistances too. This is what Greenblatt calls cooption and containment. New historicists focus on the action itself, at that particular time, the resistances were subverted. According to Sinfield (1992), resistances may be subverted by the dominant culture of the time but at other points the dominant ideology may lose ground and resistances or dissident voices will overcome the challenges of the dominant discourse. Morrison claims, "The publication [of the novel] involved the exposure; the writing was the disclosure of secrets, secrets we shared and those withheld from us by ourselves and by the world outside the community" (P. 169). The assertions of Morrison clarify the point

well. The dominant ideology of white bourgeois standards compels the blacks not to talk about alternative standards, regarding e.g. the black beauty, and those who tried to articulate dissident voices faced closure and forced silence.

On the contrary, Sinfield's theory allows us to circumvent the new historicist theory of cooption. The same author believes in a kind of contest in which the dominant and the subordinate struggle with each other. Dissident ideas are not always condemned to be subverted. One cannot state that the black resistances to the dominant were futile. We can see the fruits of it nowadays in the black community.

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How to cite this manuscript: Sajjad Gheytasi. Black Identity and Struggles for Survival. *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies*, 2018, 1(1), 1-12.
DOI:xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx