

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: When Beauty Turns Out To Be Hegemony

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Abstract

The United States of America is a race-conscious society that those who are colored (as opposed to white) have generally been put in inferior positions and treated accordingly. Consequently, apparently White Anglo Saxon Protestants (WAPS) has been inherently put as the dominant group whereas the African American is consciously placed as one of the subordinate ones. Theory of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci has been believed as a means to understand the position of the superior and the inferior groups in the society. Meanwhile, the concept of beauty is an example of cultural institution; hence, the standard of beauty is based on the dominant group e.g. White people, so there is the White beauty standard as a means of hegemonic practice in the American society. This phenomenon is thoughtfully depicted by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*. Therefore, this writing aims at describing the phenomena when beauty turns out to be the hegemonic practice of White beauty standard in African American society as it is depicted in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The study shows that White beauty standard has been the hegemonic practice that is consciously alive in the African Americans as the society members involved in the story. The hegemony itself is from the beauty standards which are standardized using the White people's beauty standards e.g. light skinned, blue eyes, blonde, slimmer body image, etc. The White beauty standard hegemony is not solely the single reason of maintaining domination and power; in fact, society members, and their will and consciousness have also participated in it. Therefore, the implications occur within the society under the hegemonic practices or the hegemonized society, so do the characters in this novel. Those implications are extracted from the characters living in the novel as the characters are the hegemonized subject in practice. It is the fact that White beauty standard hegemony has led to the emergence of intra-racial

discrimination happening within the African American society as it is reflected in the literary work due to the characters' efforts to seek for White's approval. The second is the emergence of the self-loathing upon the characters in the novel, and the third is the emergence of the self-identity degrading.

Keywords: hegemony, beauty standard, and intra-racial discrimination.

A. Hegemony in American Society

American society is the multicultural society producing the multicultural problems. The problems are shown by multiple faces of American life among its WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) decedents, Native Americans, and African Americans as well as other races living in the American society. All living together in the United States, they might create some gaps and undergo superiority over one another.

For instance, the first is widely known as the most controlling and powerful position whereas the second is obviously famous as the exiled-land owners since they had to be stirred out from their own land by the Whites. Consequently, the latter is positioned as the powerless group of races. The third has vocalized a slight of tragic history in the multicultural society in the United States of America. Referring to the history of African Americans' coming to the New World, Scott and Shade (2005: 6) have noted that African Americans' coming was different from that of European immigrants'. The latter migrated voluntarily and their rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness were embraced in the New World whereas the former was on the contrary. They arrived involuntarily because they were transported to the America between 1450 and 1850 by the European, and even their basic human rights were ignored. This fact has made African Americans share the same position as it happens to the Native American i.e. the inferior people. In conclusion, these facts show how the issue of hegemony and the superiority has been embraced in the life of American society in particular by the Whites.

The atmosphere of being controlled, feeling inferior, and living under hegemony by the Whites has inherently existed in the lives of non-WASP decedents such as African Americans. Apparently, the superiority and the hegemony of the Whites have influenced and streamed in every single aspect of this nation from time to time. Also, unfortunately, the hegemony has become a

consensus culture to maintain within African American society. It could exist and happen in the society unconsciously. The worse is even the hegemony could be the status quo in their daily life and their daily way of thinking. As a result, African Americans are living in a society with a strong belief that White people are superior upon them; hence, the racial discrimination could emerge, and it oppresses African Americans so roughly (Tyson, Lois. 2006). Consequently, African Americans in the American society are living in an internalized discrimination because of the hegemony and superiority practices from the White people.

The word hegemony is derived from the Greek words “hegemonia” which means authority and rule, “hegemon” which means leader, and “hegeisthai” which means to lead. In its common use, hegemony is defined as a condition of predominance and or influence of one state over another. Interpreted from those of his prison notes, Antonio Gramsci has tried to illustrate that hegemony is to explain the dominance of one social group over another in order to maintain the power of the dominant group and to persuade the subordinated ones to accept, adopt, and internalize their values and norms in the society not by using the armed force, but it is primarily through coercion and consent. In relation to the world of literature, Makaryk (1993:549) has also tried to situate the function of Gramsci’s hegemony by stating that hegemony is the tool for analyzing the relation of literature and society and of situating writers and intellectuals in relation to society and its play of social forces within the literary texts. Therefore, this could mean that Gramsci’s hegemony might help bridge the discussion of a literary work as the product of society with the practices of hegemony in that particular society as it is reflected in the literary work.

In relation to the hegemonic practices happening in the United States of America, there are some examples that can be taken into account. Steven J. Gold wrote in *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 27 in 2004 entitled *From Jim Crow to Racial Hegemony: Evolving Explanations of Racial Hierarchy*. He confirms that:

After decades of debate regarding the underlying engine of racial inequality, there is a general consensus that racism in the USA is largely the result of white supremacy, and involves multiple, rather than singular, sources that exist in the realms of culture, economics, psychology and history. For example, earlier assertions that racism should be understood solely as the consequence of irrational psychological prejudice, or purely

as an outcome of capitalist exploitation, have been refuted (Wellman 1977; Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Yet, the role of prejudice and economic exploitation has not been fully rejected, either. Instead, each is now seen as one of the many forces contributing to, shaping, and shaped by, a multifaceted and evolving process of racialization, (Gold, 2004: 953).

Although Gold does not obviously address the term hegemony, he implicitly means to refer to hegemony as one cause of racial inequality happening in the United States of America. The notion of white supremacy represents the hegemonic practice from White people over other races in the United States of America, and it has become a general consensus among the scholars. In short, it is understood and concluded that White hegemony is exercised over other races in the American society, and even it has become a consensus general and widespread agreement among all the society members in the United States of America.

Another obvious example that can be captured among many of the hegemonic practices in the American society perceived and accepted by the African American society is on how the concept of beauty is perceived and is believed among the African Americans in the American society in general. It is all about the desire of having the so-called White beauty standard. According to Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* published in 1992, she takes conclusion that it may be true that beauty is a central focus of many women, and indeed it is a very powerful myth. She defines the beauty myth as the myth that the ideal beauty depiction is largely depicted as a woman with light skin, blond hair, and blue eyes which she herself is doubtful about such myth. Meanwhile, Eric P.H, et.al in their journal entitled *Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Culture* has argued that people from non-white culture, like African Americans "bleached" themselves (first with folk preparations and later with commercial skin lighteners) in an attempt to blend in the dominant society, the White society. Consequently, these facts show the inherently harmful disadvantages of these beauty images that have been proliferated and believed in the society for the sake of self-existence within the White society particularly in the United States of America.

In addition, in fact, this concept has much manipulated the beauty concept perceived by the African Americans. The White beauty standard concept is considered to be the only one beauty concept that they must pursue and achieve. By being perceived this way, consequently it has racialized the beauty concept that

might be alive in African American society. As a result, it could create some serious matters as African Americans feel obsessed to such beauty concept; furthermore, they could dismiss the value of their own blackness, and it could lead to the damage of the black value in African American women particularly their own beauty value.

In relation to the consequences of such hegemonic White beauty standard, Lipsitz (1998) mentions that the power of whiteness depends not only on the white hegemony over separate racialized groups, but also on manipulating racial outsiders to fight against one another, to compete with each other for the Whites' approval, and to seek rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized populations. This means the African Americans have to compete with each other to get closer to White beauty standard in order to blend and to be called "their" society. This fact will lead to what so called intra-racial discrimination since the competition among African Americans is possibly to trigger the conflict among them.

Meanwhile, in her works, Toni Morrison has tried to show her readers how such hegemonic White beauty standard myth has created and triggered several backlash and problems in American society in general and African Americans in particular. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, it is obviously illustrated by the story of an eleven year old black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wants to have the blue eyes in order to make herself prettier. Her biggest desire is to possess one criteria of White beauty standard, the blue eyes. She uses the standard of beauty myth owned by the white child actress, Shirley Temple, who has the lovely blue eyes, of course. Besides, *The Bluest Eye* also depicts African Americans' life in Lorain Ohio in the 1940s which is much related to the condition of African American society living in under the classist rationale. These setting of time and place depicted in the literary work could enlighten and much illustrate the situation of social life which is caused by the racial discrimination given by the Whites.

In this particular writing, by analyzing Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the writer is probing the phenomenon of the hegemony of White beauty standard in the American society as it is depicted in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Indeed, in her work, Toni Morrison has invented the situation to see how the White beauty standard myth is exercised in the life of African Americans as the hegemonic practices, and she also intends to show the backlash resulted by this particular hegemony practice. Based on the phenomenon emergence, the objective of this

writing is to investigate how the beauty concept believed by the American people is able to be a major hegemonic practice for African Americans reflected in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Probing this White beauty standard concept as the hegemonic practice, the writer also studies the characters in the novel under the study.

B. Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony

Theories of hegemony have attempted to explain how dominant groups or individuals can exercise and maintain their power. Besides, theories of hegemony can be related to culture and the cultural hegemony in relation to exercise and to maintain the power of the dominant group. Shortly, this part will draw the construction within the civil society and its intellectuals to implant the power and its hegemonic practices through culture leading to the cultural hegemony.

In order to help understand the construction within power and culture, Baldwin et. al. (2004: 98) has illustrated how the relation of power and culture by pointing to the example of the bourgeoisie's power referring to the following quotation:

The bourgeoisie have power, through their power they have knowledge and through their power and knowledge they create the dominant culture. Marxist thought draws attention to the connection between power, knowledge and culture and proposes a systematic relationship in which cultural beliefs and practices are a cultural code for relationships of power, (Baldwin, 2004:98).

This illustration has shown that the dominant group could set up the dominant culture by using their apparatus such as their knowledge and power; in addition, those apparatuses could build up the dominant culture by means of the systematic relationship through the cultural beliefs and practices of the power. Then, an analogy is not going to be entirely different if it happens to the domination of White people in the American society. The White people maintain their power by their dominant culture by implanting some cultural beliefs and knowledge. Consequently, indeed, there is a connection among power, hegemony, and culture. The connection among power, hegemony, and culture could be leading to the claim proposed by Jordan and Weedon (1997:11) that everything in social and cultural life is fundamentally having something to do with power; therefore, power is at the

center of cultural politics; and it is integral to culture whereas hegemony is exercised in order to maintain that particular power in the society.

However, the fact that social divisions can be found within the social and the cultural life is sort of undeniable truth. Mostly social divisions rarely divide equally meaning that in any society some groups are more powerful and/or have higher status than others. For example, in most contemporary Western societies, it is generally the case that men exercise greater power and status than women, the wealthy than the working classes, White people than Black people, and so forth. As a result, very often, social divisions are reflections of social inequality. Jordan and Weedon (1997:4) refer the emergence of this social inequality because of the gaps, differences of wealth, power, and/or status. Once more, power plays an important role to define the social inequality where culture is alive within in, and this is the reason why they mention that these relations of inequality are closely tied to questions of culture. In practice, in the social life, the relative domination of various groups by other groups is partly secured and produced through the practices and products of cultural institutions.

Furthermore, there are many cultural institutions in practice that people can mention. In relation to this cultural institution, Marx has proposed the method for conceptualizing these connections which is called the base-superstructure metaphor. Baldwin, et.al. (2004: 99) has explained this base-superstructure metaphor as the (material) base of a society that will determine the broad character of its superstructure. Arguing that people wish to understand the principal features of the superstructure of a particular society namely by carefully analyzing the force of production and the social relations, Baldwin et.al. (2004: 99) have also mentioned that the superstructure includes the culture along with its legal institutions, political organizations, and belief system. Additionally, the superstructure covers the family structures, religion, belief system, forms of political organization, system of law and education as the forms of the cultural institutions. Therefore, there can be seen the lines to connect power, culture and hegemonic practices that the hegemonic practices are exercised and produced through these cultural institutions; consequently, this could relate the connection among the exercise of power inserted through culture and its cultural institution which are leading to the cultural hegemony.

As it is understood, hegemony is as acquiring consent of the masses through seemingly innocuous support for dominant moral, cultural, and ideological influences which legitimate ruling class authority. Further, Gramsci describes this “spontaneous” consent given by the masses at the level of cultural institutions-- the family structures, religion, belief system, forms of political organization, system of law and education--as the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group. This dominant fundamental group, or ruling class, comes to the position of influence historically, and by the way of prestige (and consequent confidence) that this class enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. Then, the power imposed through the cultural institution altogether with its consent from the society could maintain the hegemonic power.

This is also acknowledged by Marx and Engels (1968) in Baldwin et. al (2004:100) in their most famous quotation to illustrate and to strengthen the position of the dominant class as the owner of the dominant ideas:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. ... The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. ... The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationship, the dominant material relationship grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.

Obviously, this could show the powerful state of the ruling class as they have the prestigious position; in addition, at the same time, they have bigger chances to control the dominant material relationships in terms of ideas which are reflected through the culture and its cultural institutions even. It could lead them as the single-group maker of the dominance i.e. the rulers are the thinkers, the idea

producers, and they regulate the distribution; eventually, their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. Moreover, this might develop to the condition that existing power relations and social inequalities are thus stabilized through cultural hegemony since there has been diverse culture, both from the dominant and the subordinated ones, yet it can be ruled or dominated by one group or class the dominant class only by means of its material production.

C. White Beauty Standard in American Society

One might have difficulties to define what beauty means in their daily life. It is because definitions of beauty change from time to time depending on when and where those definitions are shaped and are perceived. However, it is also believed that the psychological aspects behind the definitions of beauty remain the same though the definitions are changing from a particular age to another. The changeable definitions of beauty concept could lead to an understanding that there is no rigid and fixed definition of it, yet it thoroughly depends on the society and the dominance of a particular way of thinking or ideology exercised in the society.

There might be some reasons arguing the moving trends of beauty concept and the standards to be entitled beautiful women. One of them is trying to be connected and revealed by Naomi Wolf (1991: 12) that because beauty is currency system similar to the gold standard that, like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. This signifies that beauty has something to do with the dominant power to shape and reshape its definition and eventually the standard of the beauty definition itself. Therefore, why the beauty standards could change is because of the trend of the 'politics' depending on and determined by the dominant group.

As it is tried to be connected to the discussion of how certain hegemonic practices are exercised in a particular society, the beauty standards of a particular society could also emerge under the same circumstance. It emerges because of a particular dominance upon the society members--upon the subordinate ones. The dominant group maintains its power through its culture and cultural institutions preaching particular commonsense, philosophy, and eventually it inherently becomes dominant or hegemonic ideology. The dominant group preaches and

creates situations of what so-called the beauty standard items. When the society members embrace these and approve them as the beauty standards, people rate themselves as well as others on their ability to conform to those standards. Those who are trying to conform are going to follow, sink, and drown within the beauty standards shaped and re-shaped by the society. Hence, the particular beauty standard becomes the dominant or hegemonic ideology in the society leading to the internalization of their mind set.

To discuss specifically, American society consists of the dominant and the subordinate groups. Employing the perspective Peter Rose (1997) has used to see the diversity of all society individuals in general and in the United States in particular, the writer tries to show that indeed the discrepancy between the dominant and the subordinate does exist in the American society. The following quotation taken from Peter Rose's *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States* is able to explain that particular phenomena:

It is a fact of social life that in all societies individuals are differentiated by biological and social criteria; people are ranked in hierarchical fashion, as superior or inferior, according to those attributes that are subsistence is apt to be the primary concern, distinctions are made on the basis of age groupings, gender, and kinship ties. More advanced societies, in addition to those methods of ranking, are also divided into strict social classes. Those higher on scale have access to greater opportunities for wealth, prestige, and social control. The discrepancy between those in superior and subordinate positions is generally quite evident. There is an obvious disparity in the lifestyles and material possessions of parvenus and peasants, gentlemen and yeomen, bosses and workers. No less significant is the differential access to political and economic power of those on top and those below, (Rose, 1997:7).

Seemingly, the term superior and inferior is really obviously inherited in the discussion of social hierarchy that is attaching to the existence of the human being in the society. In fact, it implies certain consequences that possibly influence much their lifestyle and material possession. In addition, Rose also specifically has argued that if within the society there were no cultural value placed upon ancestry, whether "pure" or "mixed, it would matter very little what one was called or under which rubric one was placed. In other words, one would not be bothered by the attribute he or she belongs to whether she is superior or inferior in the society when

she belongs to a certain social class. At the mean time, Rose has also acknowledged that consciously the United States of America has its own social hierarchy related to the position of superiority. It is stated that in a race-conscious society like the United States, those who are colored (as opposed to white) have generally been put in inferior positions and treated accordingly, Rose (1997: 11). Consequently, based on this "consciousness-hierarchy awareness", apparently White Anglo Saxon Protestants (WAPS) has been inherently put as the dominant group whereas the African American is consciously placed as one of the subordinate ones.

Hence, the beauty standards are the products of WAPS' people. The standards are to follow and conform with the White people's standard e.g. the White beauty standards. The beauty standard could cover the appearance from the hair style, body shape, eyes, skin, etc. Some have reported several of those beauty standards based on their recent studies and investigations though some of them might vary from one finding to another.

D. Hegemony of White Beauty Standard Reflected in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

The reflection of the hegemony of White beauty standard can be studied by scrutinizing three major hegemonic practices that could be described based on the novel happening to the characters actually e.g. Pecola's dream to have the blue eyes, Pecola's parents' behavior and treatment to run the Breedloves, and the image of the happy family presented in the White family during the story. Among those three major hegemonic practices found, there are only two hegemonic practices found which are related to the hegemony of the White beauty standard. However, Toni Morrison has thoughtfully presented the issues of hegemony as an intertwined sequence which is, of course, related each other, and even one hegemonic practice could foreshadow the upcoming of another scene or story. Morrison has tried to illustrate the story as a big cause-and-effect for the readers. Consequently, the discussion of the hegemonic practices based on the White beauty standard is presented orderly by analyzing Pecola and the hegemony of White beauty standard happens to her life, and Pauline--Pecola's mother and the hegemony of White beauty standard which has imposed to her. In addition, the discussion of the hegemony which is not based on the White beauty standard hegemony is also presented and is included here in order to fully understand the

power of the hegemonic practices done by the White toward the African American society as it is presented in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

D.1. The Dream of Having Blue Eyes as the Hegemonic Practice of White Beauty Standard in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

What has become the major issue in this novel starts from the fact that Pecola Breedlove dreams to own the blue eyes. It sounds naïve and impossible since Pecola Breedlove is an eleven-year-old black girl who believes herself as an ugly and unlucky because of her being black in the American society. This dream does not appear without any reasons; there is an order of events depicted within the story that has influenced Pecola and her decision to have blue eyes in her black body; however, it could be taken into account that the hegemony of White beauty standard has been the underlying factor of Pecola's dream to have the blue eyes.

Firstly, the event is seen from the fact that Pecola has been unconsciously preached by the situations around her that being White people could benefit a human being; therefore, owning one of the White people's belonging e.g. the blue eyes could benefit Pecola's life as well. Throughout the novel, there are several scenes depicting a very strong reason why Pecola wants to have the blue eyes; in fact, it is the real effect from the White beauty standard hegemony living consciously in her mind. It is taken as the very first message Morrison wants to deliver to the audience that Pecola wishes for blue eyes. For Pecola, who perceives herself as ugly, the blue eyes would make her beautiful, would make her mother love her, as her mother has treated the little white girl whose family she works for all those mistreatment and discrimination from her surrounding. Based on the point of view of the narrator--Claudia, Pecola is described as a little black girl who is crazy about the blue eyes. Morrison through Claudia's point of view has illustrated Pecola's dream to have blue eyes as well as several good things that might be following when Pecola is a blue-eyed girl. Many positive things could be experienced when Pecola has them. It can be seen through the following quotation:

It has 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, that is to say, beautiful, she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes."

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip

runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes, Henry 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, 1970: 46)

Pecola imagines that having the blue eyes could bring different life for her, a better life with beautiful scenes which she is rarely to face in her life as a little black girl because she looks similar to the White girl. This fact is the climax of Pecola's experiences after she undergoes a lot of discrimination and mistreatment from her in-group and out-group communities. Her wish to have beautiful blue eyes is the relief to help her have happy life. It is the blue eyes that would make her equally treat by the members of the society both from the American society and the African American society.

Some other events that lead Pecola to dream to own the blue eyes under the unconscious influence of the hegemony of White beauty standard are because of both the in-group and out-group discrimination which is based on her being ugly black girl. The in-group racial discrimination emerges from the surrounding in which Pecola spends her life within a fully understanding that her life is ugly because she is ugly, and her father, her mother, and her brother are all ugly as well. Pecola feels so because she is black; in fact, this is the result of Black people's inferiority undermining their own race that Black is definitely not beautiful, another hegemonic practice found within the story. Besides, this is also the consequence of the dominance of White people that there is no beautiful race but White. As the story goes on Pecola is not only suffering from her internal feeling that she is so ugly; moreover, it is even worsened by some members of the in-group community such as her own father, mother, and some other friends demeaning Pecola's self esteem. Consequently, this has resulted to the greatest alienation, and indeed it has threatened Pecola's life.

Meanwhile, the out-group racial discrimination is obviously exercised by some members living around Pecola's life. This out-group discrimination has become the second source of Pecola's feeling ugly because she is a black girl without any other specialties. This comes from stimuli received from members of the out-group depicted in a very touching scene when Pecola decides to purchase candy from Mr. Yacobowski's grocery store. Since the very beginning the scene has foreshadowed the treatment that Pecola would receive from the out-group

community member. It can be seen from the following depiction Morrison has written down:

... She pulls off her shoes and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant store keeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary, (Morrison, 1970:48)

Here, Pecola is depicted as an invisible subjecta human being that White people cannot see, and even they do not want to see though Black people are alive and do exist in the society. Pecola is treated unfairly even though she seems to be still innocent in this scene. It is because it is only the beginning of experiencing the unpleasant discrimination that she could ever feel; in fact, soon after this Pecola would go through and experience harsher and more painful discrimination and maltreatment from the out-group members.

In addition, Pecola has struggled hard to figure out the reasons of mistreatment she has always received from the people around her. The following quotation could explain how hard she has figured out the reason; eventually, she manages to understand that it is because her being ugliness.

... As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. ... Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond. She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say. "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!" and never fail to get peals of

laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused,
(Morrison, 1970:45)

This could be clearly understood that Pecola and her ugliness have triggered a sequence of agony in her life as well. What the teachers and classmates have done to her could clearly have worsened Pecola's experiences of racial discrimination from her community the racial discrimination which is caused by the hegemony of White beauty standard. .

Taken from the further event, there is a continuance of treating Pecola unfairly simply because she is a little black girl. It is when she offers up the change to pay for her candy; Mr. Yacobowski looks down at her in distaste. Moreover, as the scene has progressed, Morrison describes how Mr. Yacobowski scrapes the change out of her hand in an attempt to limit his actual physical contact with her. This does show how Black people are seen as the dirt that White people must keep the distance with. Morrison's vivid words and illustration could really drive sense of pity and sorry for Pecola's condition within the community. In line with this, Morrison (1970:49) has written down:

“She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. 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 girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. 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 vacuums edged with distaste in white eyes,
(Morrison, 1970:49).

Obviously, Pecola starts recognizing her existence that her being black is not beneficial at all. She has sensed that the discrimination is not something new for her because she gets used to it.

In conclusion, those events are signified as the fact leading to the ultimate form of hegemonic practice found in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola's dream to own blue eyes is an internalization effect of the White beauty standard hegemony. Pecola has been influenced by the hegemony of the dominance that those who are White are those who are beautiful and free from discrimination; therefore, she

wants to be a White person that is by having the blue eyes one of the characteristics of being White.

D.2. The Dream of Being a White Lady as the Hegemonic Practice of White Beauty Standard in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Another evidence of proving the intangible power of hegemony of White beauty standard is also illustrated by Toni Morrison by foreshadowing Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove's life and her youth in the story. The character of Pauline and her childhood and motherhood background have foreshadowed the story of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in terms of understanding her treatment to Pecola and her household life with her husband, Colly Breedlove. The hegemony of White beauty standard lies in her efforts to adjust herself with the society she is living in; apparently, Pauline gets drowned in the situation where she consciously accepts the standard because she feels comfort enjoying the fake pleasure she has within the American society though, as a consequence, she must lose her self-identity as an African American.

Pauline did not have a happy childhood until she got married with her husband, Cholly Breedlove. Unfortunately, their moving to the city had started their marriage and simple happiness to crumble. It was because Cholly paid less attention to her and more attention to alcohol. Moreover, the city women looked at Pauline as just a simple country girl; consequently, she had no friends even though she tried to fit in by dressing like them and wearing make-up as well. Therefore, Pauline made up a fantasy life based on the movies she spent her days in. She judged her own beauty based on the standards of the movie stars. Thus far, the hegemony of the White beauty standard has been represented by city women's look on Pauline's appearance and also by the way Pauline has got influenced by the movies she had watched. The following quotation could represent her efforts in order to adjust herself to be accepted by city women though it just resulted on her being realized that she remained being ugly:

... I'member one time I went to see Clarke Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers in a magazine... I was sitting back in my seat, and I taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could have cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went

then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly, (Morrison, 1970: 123).

Taken as a point, she has embraced the ideal White beauty standard such as the light skin, the straight hair, the blond hair, and blue eyes. This could be marked as a particular social structure embraced within the African American society that becomes Toni Morrison's serious concern. Besides, some African Americans in this novel are taught to think of themselves as ugly or inferior because of the signs and ideals the culture imposes on them. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly.

In fact, Pauline and Pecola could never meet the standard, so Pauline believed she was ugly, and in turn, her children being a part of her were also ugly. This brought consequences for Pauline's family. Pauline treated her own children badly; she did not know how to provide her children with that love. She even did not care when Pecola was raped by Colly by concealing the meanest crime a father could ever do to his own daughter. She did this because she was aware that her family was ugly; therefore, there was no use to defend the ugly people in front of the society.

On the contrary, Pauline had created a fantasy home for herself as the maid for a white family the Fosters. She was pleased to work for the White family; she gave the Fosters' children all the love she had; on the other hand, she believed her children were unworthy. She did not love her children in the way a mother should do, and Pauline could not stop the abuse toward her children. Indeed, she was a broken person; her life was hard, and she coped the only way she could. Her self-esteem is extremely low. She does not believe she is worthy of pleasures in life because she is a black, and then she is ugly. The worse is the denial from the women around her. If she had had girlfriends in the community, maybe she would have had the support she needed to fight her way out of her horrible marriage. Instead, the women gossip about her and exclude her from their lives. They treat her as a lower class person, just some simple country girl, never as their equal due to the fact that Pauline is a black woman in that particular society. This foreshadowing event has led the readers to understand that, thus far, Pauline had a fragile self-esteem, but she managed to fix it by consciously accepting the White beauty standard existing in the American society. By doing so, she could survive, mingle, and even grow her imagination to be the White family.

To conclude, these descriptions tell and reflect what has happened to Pecola and Pauline under the hegemony of White beauty standard. They are consciously aware that the White beauty standard could bring them satisfaction in life when they have them in their life; therefore, Pecola dreams the blue eyes, and Pauline makes adjustment to be White lady in the way she runs her life. They consider being White is beneficial since this is what they have seen in the society members. It is because all the White characters in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* are represented to possess happy life and nice treatment from the rest of the society members. At the same time, it has implied that the society is really vulnerable to see the equality among races even within American society, and Morrison has grasped the idea of White dominance in term of White beauty standard as another social structure reflected by Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and she has tried to tell more people that the American society depicted in *The Bluest Eye* at that time was reflecting the racist society.

D.3. Ideal White Family Hegemony in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

The last hegemonic practice discussed within this chapter is not directly considered as the practice of White beauty standard hegemony meaning that the source is not because it is hegemonic practice based on the White beauty standard. In fact, this falls into the practice of White hegemony in general. It is more related to the image of White happy family which is portrayed as a prosperous and perfect way of life; this image tends to be widely spread and propagandized to the society members leading to the cultural hegemony that White families are always happy and setting up a very good example for the society in the novel.

The White ideal family hegemony is included here by reading the beginning of the chapter that Morrison has illustrated in the following quotation:

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. 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, 1970:3)

Obviously, Jane family is depicted as the happy family with the nuclear family structure. There are father, mother, and two children who laugh and play together. Jane's life and her family represent a cultural ideal, a model of what family life ought to be in America: loving parents, amiable friends, happy puppies, picket fences, spacious houses, and abundant resources in their life. Such cultural internalization is alive in the society members' mind and lives; in fact, it has influenced them to have the same happy and loving family for their lives. This internalization is the source of the hegemonic practice that the society members are conscious to accept and to exercise the concept of ideal White family. Thus, the hegemony could be alive in the society members as it is intended and is expected by the White people to exercise their intangible cultural power.

As it is mentioned earlier, the latest hegemonic practice discussed here does not have any connection to the White beauty standard hegemony. However, indeed it exists to foreshadow the condition of the Breedloves in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Pauline and Cholly have understood that the concept of happy family is exactly like what they have believed so far. The hegemony creates the greater pain if such an ideal life cannot be attained by the Euro-American middle-class life, and it could be imagined as well how much more despairing it must be for African-Americans when they cannot attain it in their life. Morrison uses Pecola as a character who is raised under the hegemony of the happy White family in which unfortunately her family cannot attain the standard. In addition, Morrison is also addressing Pecola character to vocalize the underlying issues of the continued feeling of inferiority experienced by a child being raised by parents with lack of the happy White family standard and by the Black community where such cultural hegemony is alive strongly. Consequently, Pecola feels so inferior; she thinks herself ugly not only because she is ugly but also her family is ugly for not being able to raise her in line with the concept of a happy White family as it has hegemonized the society members in the novel.

In addition, understanding the position of the Breedloves in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* could also be done by perceiving their family position as the minority family in the American society. This is in line with what has been defined by

Andersen that at least there are some traditional interpretations of minority families living in the society. Andersen (1983:136) argues that those traditional interpretations are minority families are seen normal only when they conform to dominant group norms, and minority families have also been targeted as the source of social disorganization in minority communities. The Breedloves does represent those two traditional interpretations. It means as the minority family they have seen themselves normal as they have tried to conform the dominant group the hegemony of the White people; in fact, their in-group community the African American society has perceived this as something usual that African American family must be able to catch up with the dominant norms in the worse way. They do not think that the Breedloves is doing something wrong; therefore, they do not do anything to make up this family better. Consequently, the hegemony of the happy White family and the position of minority family in American society have much contributed the damage of the Breedloves as it is depicted in the novel.

E. Conclusion

The points to conclude have something to do with the idea of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci and a thoughtful concept dealing with sociology of literature that could bridge the understanding of the hegemonic practices presented in a piece of literary work which can be studied in order to explore the function of a particular literary work as the social production of art and as the spirit of the age and the society. In this case, Gramsci's hegemony becomes the underlying concept of scrutinizing the White beauty standard that is alive as a major theme in the Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as well as to study the implications that the hegemony of White beauty standard impacts to the society members. Meanwhile, the points learnt after conducting this study must be shared as well in relation with the fact that, indeed, in the in-group community, referring to African Americans, there are chances for intra-racial discrimination to happen when they have to compete against each other for the sake of White people's approval.

Thus far, it is believed that theories of hegemony have attempted to explain how dominant groups or individuals can exercise and maintain their power through their belief and cultural hegemony that are consciously influenced the society. Studying Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the writer can conclude that Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is taken into account as the mental evidence to prove what Gramsci has proposed e.g. the hegemony theory in practice. In the novel, it is depicted that

White beauty standard has been the hegemonic practice that is consciously alive and influenced the African Americans as the society members involved in the story. The hegemony itself is from the beauty standards which are standardized using the White people's beauty standard perspectives because the White people are the superior and the dominant group in the society although there are not White characters involved in the novel. At this point, it means deeper that the hegemony of White people to the African Americans in the novel is so strong that the White could be so powerful and influencing much their hegemon without even being existed in the novel.

Any hegemonic practices do bring implications toward the society under the hegemonic practices or the hegemonized society, so do the characters live in this novel. After analyzing the hegemonic practices found in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* which is sourced from the White beauty standard hegemony, the writer is able to list that there are three implications emerging as the result of the hegemonic practice. Those implications are extracted from the characters living in the novel as the characters are the hegemon or the hegemonized subject in practice.

Firstly, White beauty standard hegemony has led to the emergence of intra-racial discrimination within the African Americans as it happens to Pecola Breedlove done by some other characters. Besides, the emergence of this intra-racial discrimination could suggest another significant point that it happens because of the favor of White people's approval and acknowledgement. It means that they compete each other no matters who the opponents are, they would seek for the approval in order to be closer to the power controller, the White people. Secondly, the emergence of the self-loathing is significantly identified after analyzing the hegemonized characters in the novel. Indeed, the implication of the White beauty standard hegemony is so severe that it could manipulate their psychology e.g. they hate themselves. The hegemony has turned their mindset beyond when they are not able to keep up or to be in line with the common belief as the hegemonic practice in the society. In this case, the White beauty standard cannot be reached by the hegemon in the novel, so they tend to hate themselves. The last, the self-identity degrading has emerged among the hegemonized characters. Some characters tend to be 'someone else'; they are not originally them; they are drown in the situation of getting approval from the White in that they become someone else and degrade their self-identity as the African Americans.

Furthermore, not only has the writer tried to conclude the analysis and the study that have been conducted, she also intends to share some other points to learn after conducting the study on Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Upon the implication of the hegemony of White beauty standard e.g. the emergence of intra-racial discrimination, it shows hegemony could create a huge tragedy within a particular society; in fact, in this case, the tragedy happens in the form of the in-group conflict when the in-group members have to struggle and to contest each other to win the White people's approval. It is too pathetic to know the fact that the bond and the connection as the African American are indeed not that strong since it can be ruined by the competition among them for the sake of White's approval, in fact.

Besides, the writer needs to clarify through this chapter that the existence of the novel in reality cannot just be ignored its significance. It is so significant that it could reveal some facts that might not be so easily explored in the real world. Studying Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the writer is able to point out that Toni Morrison has represented as the member of African American society who is able to be critical and sensitive in exploring and seeing the phenomenon happening around her society. She is also able to bring the issue of hegemony and depict it as an on-going fact existing in the society. She takes it as the example as well as the warning for other people on the hegemonic practices in any level or matters of the society. Therefore, the novel could represent as the mental evidence of the power of hegemony exercised in particular society, people should be aware of its implications.

The last thing to share is dealing with the powerful country, the United States of America itself. Indeed, this mental evidence of American literature, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, has really represented the depiction of American society in real regarding with the statement that the United States of America is a race-conscious society. It is shown by the characters' attitudes and behavior that they do realize what race they belong to in the society. Further, consequently, the society members have also understood how to adjust their lives; however, some other members of society are also aware of keeping in line with the dominant culture that will lead them to seek the dominant group's approval by competing others. Thus, this dualism between adjusting and competing is possibly to trigger chaos and discrimination as it has been shown by the novel through the characters.

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