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## Structural and Reverse Racism in Morrison's *God Help the Child*: A Black Feminist and Psychoanalytic Reading

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**Abstract:** In *God Help the Child* (2015), the overarching argument of this article is that Sweetness is incapable of conveying a meaningful reflection of her "true self". Her frailty to love and respect herself makes her vulnerable to exchange the same emotions with Bride. The objective of this paper is to scrutinize the impact of colorism and color-blindness on the lives of African-American women. We try to respond to two fundamental questions, namely how can "looking-glass-self" theory be applied on the maternal bond between Sweetness and Bride? and second, what is the impact of intersectionality or matrix of the social domination on the lives of Sweetness and Bride in *God Help the Child* (2015)? Drawing upon Collins's Black Feminist and Winnicott's Psychoanalytic theories, we try to examine multi-faceted aspects of racism, including reverse racism, structural racism, intersectionality, matrix of the social domination, and common stereotypical images attributed to Black women with a holistic approach. Although socio-cultural White ideology is dominant to Bride's Blackness, Bride rescues herself from the hatred of her own world by furnishing a kind of domination over other women and companies by her physical beauty and success in expanding cosmetics business. She turns her dark skin color into a marvelous asset in the guise of the White clothing.

**Keywords:** Looking-Glass-Self; Matrix of Social Domination; Reverse Racism; Structural Racism; *God Help the Child*.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the slavery era, Black mothers were the dominant household figures that suffered from their husbands' absence while they were working in the plantations away from their wives and children. In the absence of their husbands, Black mothers had to resort to paradoxical and violent mistreatment of their children to apparently save them from the violent White world. Black Feminists, such as Barbara Christian (1943-2000), and Barbara Smith (born 1946), gain strength and get inspiration from their Black mothers. Mothering and adoring the Black children embody empowering resistance against a sexist and racist culture seeking to denigrate and marginalize the Black culture and heritage, the Black children, and the Black mothers. Black Feminists view their Black mothers as perfect models of both creativity and resistance. In this regard, Patricia Hill Collins (born 1948), as an American Black Feminist, in her book entitled *Black Feminist Thought* is of the view that Black women have their unique cultural attitude towards life and must play a prominent role in evaluating and determining their position and their children by empowering them enough to stand and encounter the dominant culture and keeping their culture alive (106). Self-realization is the initial point for the Black female's real freedom from the constraints of the socially imposed stereotyping:

In this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how [their] lives have been fundamentally shaped by interlocking systems of race, gender, and class oppression ... [This] journey toward self-definition offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined, controlling images of African-American women. (Collins 106)

In order to emphasize the significance of self-identity, Donald Winnicott, as a psychoanalyst, tries to distinguish between the concepts of "true self" and "false self". Winnicott (1960) states that enduring love and protection of the child is essential for the development of the "true self" or "central self" (qtd. in Chodorow 60). Winnicott (1960) remarks that "true self" is the capability to experience oneself as an effectively emotional and interpersonal catalyst. On the contrary, as Winnicott (1960) asserts, "a false self emerges on the pattern of conformity or adaptation to, or else rebellion against, the unsatisfactory environment" (60). Both Winnicott (1960) and Fairbairn (1952) reinforce that children are provided with physical demands without the emotional bond originated from their mothers. The product, as Fairbairn (1952) and Winnicott (1960) assert, is the existence of psychotic adults without "ego" capacities. Thus, the continuity of care enables the infant to enhance a self-sense (77-78).

Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015) pivots on the role of colorism in the form of the mental and physical abuse which the parents inflict on their own children. As Bride, formerly known as Lula Ann Bridewell, becomes successful in her cosmetics business, her private life does not bring her emotional fulfillment. Bride's light-skinned parents are prejudiced against her "Sudanese Black" (2) skin. Bride's father, Louis, even avoids staring at his infant due to his colorist viewpoint and abandons his wife, Sweetness, for cheating on him and leaves her to raise the child on her own. Sweetness is not only emotionally detached from her daughter, but also ashamed of Bride's Black skin. After leaving home, Bride falls in love with Booker, yet their relationship is shattered when he abruptly abandons her, writing in a note that she was not the woman he wanted. She ultimately finds Booker in the small town of Whiskey, CA, after a car crash during which she develops a hospitable relationship with a couple, Steve and Evelyn. Her reunion with Booker leads to forgiveness and her confession that she is pregnant.

The overarching argument of this article is that Sweetness is incapable of expressing a meaningful reflection of her "true self". Her frailty to love and respect herself make her vulnerable to exchange the same emotions with Bride. The objective of this paper is to scrutinize the impact of colorism and color-blindness on the lives of African-American women. We try to respond to two fundamental questions, namely how can "looking-glass-self" theory be applied to the maternal bond between Sweetness and Bride? and second, what is the impact of intersectionality or matrix of the social domination on the lives of Sweetness and Bride in *God Help the Child* (2015)? Drawing upon Collins's (1990) Black Feminist and Winnicott's (1960) Psychoanalytic theories, we will try to examine multifaceted aspects of racism, including reverse racism, structural racism, intersectionality, matrix of the social domination, and common stereotypical images attributed to Black women with a holistic approach.

## 2. Literature Review

Ghasemi (2010) believes that racial myths fundamentally depict the Black mothers by means of two paradoxical definitions. One definition portrays the Black mothers as caring, cherishing, demanding little for themselves; entirely self-sacrificing individuals whose identities are inseparable from the caregiving services demanded from them. The other definition characterizes the Black mothers as Matriarchs incredibly powerful and supportive by providing for their children, a governing force in their families, who wipe out the traditional patriarchal role of fathers as the master of the household (237). The second image deteriorates strength and perseverance of Black women in defying the

intersecting chain of sex, race, and class oppression. The formation of idealized Black motherhood and Matriarchy is in harmony with exercising the systematic oppression of the patriarchy over the Black women. On the one hand, the ideology of motherhood cherishes Black motherhood, appreciates the Black mothers for their self-sacrifice for the sake of their children, views mothers as a vital component of their children's identities, and highlights the Black mothers' subservience and passivity. On the other hand, it charges the Black mothers with being Matriarchs who ought to be chastised for their power and determination which apparently result in Black family's deterioration by means of their influential dominance and the compulsion of the male master of the family by exercising much strength. Both dimensions of this ideology are detrimental which threaten the individuality of the Black mothers (Ghasemi 237).

A majority of Black mothers have been compelled to resist difficult obstacles to achieve pecuniary and cultural survival. A female character, such as Sweetness exposes the pitfall of such prescription for the Black females, since she does not fit any classification attributed to Black women by the White patriarchy. Likewise, Ghasemi (2010) argues that Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), similar to Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015), portrays a sacrificing Black mother who single-handedly strives to provide for her destitute children, Bigger, Buddy, and Vera, in a rat-infested slum of Black existence, which is a one-room tenement dwelling in Chicago's South Side ghetto. She exists on the meager income that she earns by taking in White people's laundry. As a Black woman, Mrs. Thomas, akin to Sweetness, admits that the impoverished situation of her family that is on relief cannot be improved (238).

By the same token, Chodorow (1978) traces the "black slave women's mothering" in the African-American context (33). White people were aware of the fact that Black women were perfect mothers, and as a result, they hired them as servants, serfs, or slaves to play a parenting role for their White children. The "Mammy" image was constructed during the slavery era, because she is the faithful, subservient, domestic, and sacrificing maid who looks after the White children of her White master and bestows care, love, and affection on these White children as if they were her own offspring. By depicting a cheerful image of the Black mothers as Mammy figures, the White community endeavors to justify the virtuous aspect of slavery (Chodorow 33).

Dorothy Roberts (2007) opines that the Jezebel image was one of the most common images of slave women. The Jezebel figure was a purely lustful figure with extraordinary passions and sexuality. Not only was she dominated by her sexual desire, but her coquetry

also aroused the strong passions of men (488). Jezebel was entirely at odds with the omnipresent image of the True woman, who was virgin, chaste, pure, and White. The formation of the Black promiscuous temptress served to justify White patriarchy's sexual harassment of Black women. The stereotype of Black women further characterized them as bad mothers (488). Roberts (2007) stresses that another stereotypical image ascribed to the Black women is the Welfare Mother or Queen, who lies and cheats to provide for her children. The myths about immoral, neglectful, and governing Black mothers have originated from the image of the Welfare Queen, the indolent mother on public charity, who intentionally breeds her children at the expense of extorting money from taxpayers to expand her monthly bill. The image of reckless Black fertility is terrifying in terms of the Black women's devious childbearing. The destitute Black mothers do not procreate irresponsibly, since they deliberately try to have more children to manipulate taxpayers into giving them more money (493-494).

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Reverse Racism Theory**

In *Race and Ethnicity: The Key Concepts*, Amy Ansell (2013) postulates that racism, "refers both to a mode of thought that purports to explain differences between population groups and a system of racial hierarchy that privileges members of one racial group over others" (129). Contemporary racism possesses remarkable peculiarities, including "attitudinal bias, culturally sanctioned beliefs, and systemic or institutional practices" (130) that conserves the White privilege. Dimensions of contemporary racism are confidential, vague, and unconscious (130). As Ansell (2013) elucidates, racism is a habit, which means that it is a blending of unconscious beliefs and deeds of the society members. Racism is a dual system in which an individual can be neither racist nor non-racist. Racism is an unconscious habit and the proponents of the non-White people are inclined to expose the racist treatment that is originated from the unconscious prejudices or biases towards members of a specific ethnicity; therefore, affirmative action apparently makes an attempt to discriminate against the White people (43). To Ansell (2013), colour-blindness is "an ideal that captures a vision of a non-racial society wherein skin colo[u]r is of no consequence for individual life chances or governmental policy" (42). This idealistic condition cannot still be attributable to the society, since in order to undermine habitual and systematic racism, it is significant to admit its existence. In this respect, colour-blindness is employed as a pretext to overlook contemporary racism and contest affirmative action. Through the bridge of "abstract and formally race-neutral principles ... the racially inegalitarian status quo" (Ansell 44) is both reinforced and legitimized.

Reinforcing the concept of colour-blindness, and as a result, overlooking the systemic essence of racism, Ansell (2013) believes that the existence and impact of White privilege is refuted and systemic discriminating repercussions in lieu of systemic reasons are attributed to private pitfalls or cultural differences among non-White communities (43). Beyond pondering over the idea that contemporary society is inherently post-racial and that colour-blindness is the most efficient perspective is to give credence to the notion of “reverse racism.” Ansell (2013) elucidates that reverse racism is “alleged to be a new form of anti-White racism practiced by blacks and/or the so-called civil rights establishment (alternately referred to as the anti-racism industry)” (136). This concept originates from the assumption that a majority of opponents are not fighting for equal rights, instead discriminating against the White people through affirmative action. Based on this idea, pivoting on race in social interrogations and striving to develop the socio-economic status of formerly disadvantaged and vulnerable parties is inherently racist. Unlike minorities, the sufficient evidence that White people are indeed privileged and prosperous is overlooked, and subjective evidence, such as instances of White people with few economic opportunities or triumphant stories of Black people over the White ones, is used to indicate the necessity to soar beyond race to identify equal behavior.

In “Weighing in on the Coaching Decision”, Sanderson (2016) states that racism is an incidental issue rather than a contemporary one. For instance, if a Black man, like Barack Obama, is able to become the president of America, it proves that everyone can make it (568). Nevertheless, it is crucial to pinpoint that racism is a systemic issue instead of being an incidental one, which means that racist biases and beliefs are so inherently embedded in culture and vague that specific parties are disadvantaged owing to the fact that the society privileges particular parties, namely White ones, not due to private pitfalls. Another idea is that not only can an individual be racist, but also an act can be so.

In *Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of Post-Racial Higher Education*, Cabrera (2018) asserts that the privileged procedure of reflection and neglecting the idea that systemic racism still poses an obstacle to non-White people is illuminated. Given discrimination, the excruciating distress of privileged people is clear by the impression that the society is striving to discriminate against them. They have to employ appropriate language terms or the belief that they are observed as the sole participants of racist deeds (47). Cabrera (2018) exhibits that his White-skinned experiment cases constantly fight for innocence and contend that they are being discriminated against owing to detrimental policies of affirmative action and the urge for the political refinement. This blending leads

to systemic racism that is an opaque issue (47). To Cabrera (2018), the blended unconscious prejudices of society members can make habitual treatment a systemic issue that is the principal concern with racism. Given an abundance of instances of individual racism, an effective manner to explain the pivotal point of racism is to concentrate on systemic racism that is “an oppressive social force” (4). Contemporary racism is prescribed by a systematic matrix of beliefs in harmony with race or ethnicity, not entirely prescribed by laws or a few consciously racist individuals, and as a result, affirmative action tries to discriminate against the White people (Cabrera 40).

In “Laissez-Faire Racism”, Bobo (1997), Kleugel (1997), and Smith (1997) opine that this systematic essence is prescribed by “laissez-faire racism” or “symbolic racism” (16). These terms refer to the idea that African-Americans themselves are innately responsible for being the disadvantaged and destitute party and possessing fewer socio-economic opportunities in the contemporary American society (Bobo et al. 16). This type of reflection that pivots on racism refers to both America and the Western society. This type of racism is reinforced by the idea of colour-blindness.

In “Maybe it is Prejudice ... but it is NOT Racism”, Goodman and Rowe (2014) opine that, owing to their privileged and prosperous experiences, the White people do not recognize the manners against which non-White people are discriminated and imagine that non-White people are magnifying about racism in public. To them, in the male-oriented White society, they are ascribed the role of culprits without having vicious intentions or ulterior purposes. At once, they are not able to solve systemic racism, for it is impossible to eschew their White privilege, since the privileges ascribed to them are fundamental human rights, such as the right to better education, or the right to be regarded innocent until proven guilty. Racial issues stimulate a defensive reaction, since the term racist is more considered as an insult than a term to declare a particular prejudice (35).

In *Racing for Innocence*, Pierce (2012) postulates that this defensive reaction hinders the effective exploration of racism and can lead to the marginalization of ignored people. Under such circumstances, committing one racist deed is identified with being racist that is regarded impossible. An instance that proves this impossibility is the fact that the subject has a non-White friend. Non-White people are still discriminated against in “employment, hiring, housing and education” (137). Pierce (2012) has called this act of becoming defensive as a privileged figure and being submitted to the potential of saying

or doing anything racist as “racing for innocence”, and thus, affirmative action is apparently an endeavor to discriminate against the White people (6).

#### **4. Analysis**

##### **4.1. Matrix of Social Domination**

By addressing the specific forms of domination which African-American women experience, Collins (1990) reinforces her theory of “the matrix of social domination” (18). Race, class, and gender oppression as forms of an overall framework of social domination are called “the matrix of social domination” (18). Collins (1990) displays systems of oppression pinpointing ways that individuals and groups experience multiple dominations, even when they dominate. Collins (1990) opines, “in such frameworks, all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system” (246). Within the realm of “matrix of the social domination”, different groups of people are likely to experience various aspects of domination (Collins 246). Reinforcing Collins’s (1990) theory of matrix of social domination, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1996) states that intersectionality is not only a theory of identity but also depicts the existence of other forces of oppression, such as race and sex which an individual experiences in life (58). Crenshaw (1996) remarks:

These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (58)

In this regard, Bride’s success in expanding her cosmetics business and physical beauty in the guise of the White clothing as a marvelous asset can be interpreted in the light of Collins’s (1990) theory of the “matrix of the social domination”, in which the systems of oppression pinpoint the ways by which individuals and groups experience multiple dominations, namely multi-faceted aspects of racism, including reverse racism, structural racism, intersectionality, matrix of the social domination, and common stereotypical images attributed to Black women even when they dominate the non-White people by means of reverse racism. Although the socio-cultural White ideology was dominant to Bride’s Blackness, she strived to exercise domination over other women by her beauty and over other companies, businessmen, and businesswomen by her success. Bride, who internalizes the White standard of beauty, hates her originality and finds comfort and relief in the charming White appearance that does not belong to her. Bride



narrates, “At first it was boring shopping for white-only clothes until I learned how many shades [multi-layers] of white there were ... Shopping got even more interesting when I began choosing colors for accessories” (Morrison 14). Bride consults with her designer, Jeri, whose advice illuminates that success is only possible if she surrenders herself to the dominant White culture:

‘You should always wear [only and all] white, Bride ... all the time.’ Jeri, calling himself a ‘total person’ designer, insisted. ... ‘Not only because of your name,’ he told me, ‘but because of what it does to your licorice skin,’ he said. ‘And black is the new black’. (14)

Bride rescues herself from the hatred of her own world by turning her dark skin color into a marvelous weapon. Bride’s success in expanding her cosmetics business and physical beauty in the guise of the White clothing is irrefutably a marvelous asset.

#### **4.2. Looking-Glass-Self Theory**

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) asserts that self-concepts or self-feelings are shaped as reflections of the reactions and estimations of others in the environment (96). Accordingly, individuals imagine how they look to others who evaluate them with regard to that appearance. Thus, individuals view themselves as they perceive others significant to view by enhancing self-feeling or self-concept. “Looking-glass-self” metaphorically embodies the way people’s self-concepts are constructed by their perceptions of how others view them. Christine Iijima Hall (1995) introduces Cooley’s (1902) theory by defining:

[in] Cooley’s ... looking glass self theory, self is determined by what a person perceives others think about him or her. If a person’s mirror is based in a culture that is unaccepting, the results can be disastrous for identity and self-esteem. (134)

The White standard of beauty has made the Black people confused and disoriented. They feel insecure about their skin color and are the victim of an inferiority complex. They look at themselves with hatred, lack of self-confidence, and through the eyes of the other people who are attractive and beautiful. It makes them miserable to consider themselves ugly and inferior to others. In order to eradicate this sensation and look charming, they begin to imitate the people whom they consider beautiful. In this regard, they fulfill the process of the dominant people’s manipulation and become alienated from their own origin. They neither become White nor remain Black. The application of looking-glass-self theory can be more detrimental than productive. Although Bride finds

a job as a regional manager in a successful cosmetics company, she does not feel cheerful and satisfied. The company is “for girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk. And it’s mine, all mine—the idea, the brand, the campaign” (Morrison 4-5). Accordingly, she enhances sense of “anxiety” or “frustration”, feeling that something is amiss and lacking in her. Considering both Winnicott’s (1960) and Fairbairn’s (1952) theories, Bride, who had the physical demands for the normal growth but was deprived of the emotional bond, might grow without “ego” capacities to maintain the relationships or be psychotic.

Winnicott (1960) postulates, “regression to infantile feelings and the experience of oneness enables a *mother* to emphasize with her infant” (qtd. in Chodorow 88). As Bride did not experience the feeling of “oneness” (88) with her mother, a “false self” (Winnicott 60) is enhanced in her, which reflects itself through her rebellion when she was thirteen. Sweetness reveals, “by the time she turned twelve going on thirteen I had to be even tougher. She was talking back, refusing to eat what I cooked, primping her hair. When I braided it, she’d go to school and unbraided it” (Morrison 71). Living with her mother for sixteen years, Bride decides to “abandon” or “reject” her mother in order to find a job, “I wanted the cosmetics counter but didn’t dare ask for it” (15). She became successful in her job and promoted her own brand soon. Johnsni (2018) admits turning away from Sweetness pushed Bride towards her independence, progress, and participation in the real world (82). After becoming wealthy and successful in her job, Bride paradoxically “abandons” or “rejects” her mother. Sweetness portrays the quality of their relationship in this manner:

I know she hates me. As soon as she could she left me all alone in that awful apartment. She got as far away from me as she could: dolled herself up and got some big-time job in California. The last time I saw her she looked so good, I forgot about her color. Still, our relationship is down to her sending me money.  
(Morrison 71)

We claim that “Looking-Glass-Self” theory can be applied to Bride, who shortened her name from Lula Ann Bridewell to Bride to gain acceptance and appreciation of others to compensate her lack of “attachment” which she had already experienced in her childhood with her own mother, Sweetness, who narrates that the Black color is defined as, “walking in the gutter to let whites have the whole sidewalk” (2). The Black color is considered a cross or mortification for the people who are born with it. Sweetness herself confesses, “Her [Bride’s] color is a cross she will always carry” (3). In the White world, the Black color is associated with disgrace, low status, lack of self-esteem, and savagery.

That is the reason why the transformation of Bride's skin into too Black terrifies Sweetness and she is startled with the realization about the reality of the grim future for both herself and her daughter. The hatred of Sweetness for Bride's Black skin is due to the sense of inferiority that the White have transferred to the Black, and as a result, they internalize the White standard of beauty and consider themselves inferior and ugly, which leads them to hate their own color, which is the same as the case of light-skinned Sweetness who hates her own child. Sweetness depicts the birth scene of Bride in this manner, "After they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black" (2). We claim that "Midnight black, Sudanese black" (2) color of Bride's skin can be interpreted as pomegranate seed in the ancient Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter.

Bruce Lincoln (1979) claims that the myth portrays the inextricable maternal bond between Persephone and Demeter, which falls apart when Persephone is kidnapped and abused by her uncle, Hades (223). The abduction was planned by Persephone's father, Zeus (225). Yet, it does not imply that he is not fond of her daughter. The mission of the Greek father is to organize the girl's marriage and send her to suitor's household, whereas Demeter does not regard this deed protective for her daughter and cannot endure separation from her (227). Persephone at once experiences an excruciating pain in her heart, because she was taken away by force, not by her own desire. Hades forces Persephone to spend one-third of each year underworld and gives her a pomegranate seed to avoid her unconditional return to her mother. However, Demeter cannot endure separation from her daughter and transforms the world into a state of chaos by famine. Zeus's attempt to discourage Demeter from rage is futile and ultimately decides to submit and sends back Persephone, who was kept in underworld during her absence from the earth, and the mother and the daughter eventually reunite (232-233). Thus, the Blue-black color of Bride's skin made her experience an excruciating pain in her heart due to her mother's "rejection" and negligence. Quite shockingly, maternal milk, which is the embodiment of nurturance, feeding, and attachment, portrays the shattered maternal bond between Bride and Sweetness.

#### **4.3. Reverse Racism**

Sweetness is not neglectful of maternal role. Instead, she is the doubled victim of colorism and discrimination. Sweetness hopes to teach Bride how to survive in the world which has been designed to destroy her. In her court testimony, Sweetness's behavior with Bride was startling for Bride that can be considered a victorious moment for Sweetness against

the White people. We claim that Bride's misleading testimony against Sofia Huxley and Sweetness's being proud of it can indeed be qualified as "Reverse Racism". Racism commonly engages prejudice or discrimination against the dominant group in the society. In this regard, the marginalized people seize the bigotry directed at them and re-direct it to the majority. Sweetness, who considers Bride's act as a courageous one, gives priority to race than truth, because she narrates, "it's not often you see a little black girl take down some evil whites" (Morrison 17). By diminishing Sofia to the skin color, Sweetness perpetuates "Reverse Racism", for Sofia's White skin seems to substitute her humanity, who is not a person except an "evil" (17) White. As the White people are viewed as the privileged group who generate racism and are not generally on the receiving end of it, the aforementioned quote pivots on "Reverse Racism". Nonetheless, the very fact that Sofia is vulnerable to the heinous accusations signifies that the White people are not invincible and can suffer from the same destiny as historically marginalized Black people.

We argue that Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015), in its examination of "Euthanasia" or "Mercy Killing", is akin to Somerset Maugham's "The Man with the Scar" (1925). "Euthanasia" or "Mercy Killing", whose therapeutic value is pivotal, can be regarded as a type of murder for love and affection. When an individual suffers from a fatal disease and there is no opportunity for one's recovery, the physicians prescribe "Euthanasia" for such patients in order to relieve their eternal suffering. Maugham's "The Man with the Scar" (1925), narrates how intimate love makes one kill his wife. The criminal man with the scar loves his wife so profoundly that when the police arrest and sentence him to death, he is released on parole to meet, kiss, and hug his wife. Shockingly, he stabs his wife in the neck, since he does not want her to mourn for him and suffer after his death. The man with the scar apparently is an impediment to love whose wife, as the love object, is murdered by him. Likewise, in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Sethe's love for Beloved is so "thick" (165) and strong that she cuts her own daughter's throat as if she were injecting "Euthanasia" or "Mercy Killing", for she does not want her daughter to be enslaved and raped by the malicious teacher and his nephews. Similar to Sethe, Sweetness, in *God Help the Child* (2015), is a violent and an abusive mother for Bride who deprives her of the maternal affection for which she yearns. Sethe murders her daughter, Beloved, and Sweetness tries once to suffocate her infant by pressing the pillow on her face after her birth, yet she does not kill Bride. Sweetness confesses, "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget" (17). The viewpoint of Sweetness is reinforced by exemplifying the mother of Florens who repeats, in Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), "There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that

cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below” (163). What Sweetness did was indeed immunizing Bride. Sweetness was cognizant of the fact that the outside world would behave her Blue-Black daughter harshly. Therefore, she took a very similar strategy, as Mehrvand (2020) postulates, to King Mithridates’ strategy (96).

Mithridates, who is called as the Poison King, was ruling over a Hellenistic kingdom, in which he constantly had the dread of being poisoned by his rivals, for it was a common procedure to poison either food or drink of the king during that era. In order to prevent any menace of getting poisoned, he apparently tried to develop immunity against various types of poisons by consuming them in small doses in case an assassin might endeavor to murder him by this means (96-97). Alfred Edward Houseman’s (1896) poem named “Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff” re-narrates the same issue that an Eastern king immunized himself by using various poisons, as his enemies tried to poison him, yet they were unsuccessful:

They put arsenic in his meat  
And stared aghast to watch him eat;  
They poured strychnine in his cup  
And shook to see him drink it up:  
They shook, they stared as white’s their shirt  
Them it was their poison hurt.  
I tell the tale that I heard told  
Mithridates, he died old. (lines 69-76)

Sweetness, akin to Mithridates, apparently employed a similar strategy to raise Bride. Thus, Sweetness’s harsh behavior towards Bride functioned like small doses of poison to immunize Bride for even harsher behaviors of others and made her resist against them non-violently (Mehrvand 97). From the beginning of the novel, Sweetness tried to use this strategy in bringing her infant up and there was a principal goal in her harsh behavior:

Things got better but I still had to be careful. Very careful in how I raised her.  
I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave,  
how to keep her head down and not to make trouble. I don’t care how many  
times she changes her name. Her color is a cross she will always carry.  
(Morrison 2)

In another section of the novel, for example, Bride remembered the scene in which Sweetness was washing her:

Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me. Rinse me, actually, after a halfhearted rub with a soapy washcloth. I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch. (12-13)

In this manner, Sweetness's tough treatment in raising Bride prepared her for the society's tougher treatment such as the way her classmates and Mr. Leigh treated her. Sweetness even regretted how she treated Bride, yet she was cognizant of the fact that this strategy would immunize (Mehrband 98) her against the harsher treatment of the outside world:

Oh, yeah, I feel bad sometimes about how I treated Lula Ann when she was little. But you have to understand: I had to protect her. She didn't know the world. There was no point in being tough or sassy even when you were right. ... . See if I hadn't trained Lula Ann properly she wouldn't have known to always cross the street and avoid the white boys. But the lessons I taught her paid off because in the end she made me proud as a peacock. (Morrison 16)

We claim that Bride can be compared with the phoenix, a beautiful mythological bird which matures to an extreme age before it bursts into flames and is reborn from its ashes whose identity is constructed through its rebirth. An effective procedure to associate Bride with the phoenix is through the dehumanization of Bride. Bride's classmates disturb her by giggling at the racial jokes and imitating monkey voices, as Bride narrates "ape sounds and scratching of the sides, imitating zoo monkeys" (23). An instance of "Anonymous Collectivity" occurs when Bride is demeaned as a Black ape by her classmates who strive to eradicate her identity and humanity. "Anonymous Collectivity" was coined by Albert Memmi (2003) who views, "The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity" (129). Reinforcing Memmi's (2003) viewpoint on "anonymous collectivity", Mehrband (2009) postulates that the colonizer treats the colonized as if they were all alike, having no separate identities. If the White people were truly concerned about the Black people, they would interact with them as distinct and dynamic individuals in lieu of symbols of a demographic, simplified to a big collective or mass as a vague, undifferentiated bunch (80). In another section of the novel, when Bride's classmates bothered Bride by racial jokes and monkey voices, she even did not complain about her classmates' behavior to the teacher; nonetheless, she alluded to the strategy she had employed:

I let the name-calling, the bullying travel like poison, like lethal virus through my veins, with no antibiotic available. Which, actually, was a good thing now I think of it, because I built up immunity so tough that not being a 'nigger girl' was all I needed to win. (Morrison 22)

This strategy made the subaltern female resistant against any external powers and impediments. It even made her such a powerful woman that she started her journey to find Booker while she had always crossed the street to avoid White boys. Furthermore, in the final lines of the novel, Sweetness appreciated herself for immunizing (Mehrvand 99) way she trained her daughter and made her autonomous:

I know I did the best for her under the circumstances. When my husband ran out on us, Lula Ann was a burden. A heavy one but I bore it well. Yes, I was tough on her. You bet I was. ... Still, some of my schooling must have rubbed off. See how she turned out? A rich career girl. Can you beat it? (Morrison 70)

Her skin color which was a deficiency for her in the earlier stage of her life turned out to be an advantage for her to such an extent that the Whites even cherished her beauty. Obviously, the immunizing (Mehrvand 99) way Sweetness raised Bride made her authoritative and her skin color was not the source of her weakness anymore; rather, it brought applause and self-esteem.

#### 4.4. Structural Racism

Structural Racism has manipulated the lives of the Black people to such an extent that they hate the Black skin. In the African-American context, for both Sweetness and Louis, the concept of “the lighter, the better—in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools” is considered the norm and keeps the higher rank as compared to the Black people which is the same as the case of Sweetness (2). When Bride is born dark-skinned, immediately after birth, Sweetness’s behavior alters and affection and care are replaced with hatred, embarrassment, and lack of love. Sweetness trembles with rage and conveys her feelings in this manner:

I hate to say it, but from the very beginning in the maternity ward the baby, Lula Ann, embarrassed me. Her birth skin was pale like all babies’, even African ones, but it changed fast. I thought I was going crazy when she turned blue-black right before my eyes. I know I went crazy for a minute because once—just for a few seconds—I held a blanket over her face and pressed. But I couldn’t do that, no matter how much I wished she hadn’t been born with that terrible color. (2)

Racism, which has a hierarchical order, is multi-faceted by nature. On the top of the pyramid, White people reside, while lower to White people, the people of color inhabit, who have light skin colors. The Black people are in the third and last level of the hierarchical stratification. The light-skinned people consider themselves superior to the Black and hate them. Collins (1990) remarks:

[T]his division of African-Americans into two categories—the ‘Brights’ and the ‘Lesser Blacks’—affects dark-skinned and light-skinned women differently. Darker women face being judged inferior and receiving the treatment afforded ‘too-big Negro girls with nappy hair.’ Institutions controlled by Whites clearly show a preference for lighter-skinned Blacks, discriminating against darker ones or against any African-Americans who appear to reject White images of beauty. (91)

Sweetness remarks that she cannot be judged, for she has no other way except to be harsh with her child in order to train her on hard grounds to deal with the racist, sexist, and patriarchal society. Bride exemplifies, “I made little mistakes deliberately, but [Sweetness] had ways to punish me without touching the skin she hated” (Morrison 14). This example can be interpreted in terms of Sweetness’s unspeakable fear. Although the legislation was against discrimination in the nineties, the hypocrisy of the White dominance for the colored ones paralyses their lives. Sweetness narrates:

It was hard enough just being a colored woman—even a high-yellow one—trying to rent in a decent part of the city. Back in the nineties when Lula Ann was born, the law was against discriminating in who you could rent to, but not many landlords paid attention to it. They made up reasons to keep you out. (3)

We claim that Bride can be compared with Velutha in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) through the idea of “Untouchability”, which is both literal and figurative. Velutha’s lower caste status alludes to the fact that Ammu must hold her hand open in order that Velutha can put the small wooden toys he shapes in it without touching her Black skin. Bride is not literally “untouchable” in the same manner, yet colorism prescribes who is enthusiastic to touch and be touched by her. For instance, when Sweetness’s parents attend the church to get married, they encounter discrimination, for they ought to put their hands on a Bible chiefly reserved for the Black people. Sweetness narrates, “she [Lula Mae] and my father went to the courthouse to get married there were two Bibles and they had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. The other one was for white people’s hands” (Morrison 2). The statement of Sweetness is ironic, for her mother worked as a housekeeper or a “Mammy” figure for an affluent White family and had to scrub their bodies in the bath as if her touch were solely cherished and permitted when it was solely serving the White people.



Mutual interaction with the Black people is regarded disgraceful to the White people. If they are even communicated, they are hired as slaves and servants who have no worth more than the lowest creature whose ultimate goal of existence on the earth is to serve the White people. Likewise, Velutha faces ostracization due to the fact that his caste status, as Dalit or “Untouchable”, is determined by the lower caste family he was born in and he is powerless to change it. He does not experience the same proportion of disappointment and mistreatment from his parents as Bride did, for he belongs to the same lower caste whose parents did not expect anything different for their infant. Yet, Velutha’s lower caste paves the way for his eventual death when he falls in love with Ammu, a daughter from a higher caste. Hence, Bride and Velutha are ostracized due to their inborn faults that affect their social status.

#### **4.5. Brooklyn and Sweetness as “Jezebel” or “Welfare Queen”**

Although Brooklyn is Bride’s best friend, she imagines unfriendly things about her. When she sees how injured Bride is, she feels sorry for her, yet she portrays Bride’s eyes as, “the ones that spooked everybody with their strangeness” as “alien eyes ... but guys think they’re gorgeous, of course” (Morrison 10). This incident signifies a tinge of jealousy in Brooklyn, who unflatteringly describes Bride’s gorgeous eyes, yet Brooklyn compares them to aliens. Brooklyn is apparently jealous of Bride, who reluctantly admits that her rival has peculiarities that the White men cherish, as if she, in our viewpoint, were a Jezebel figure, who exercised her influential dominance over the White men by her own beauty and extraordinary passions. Brooklyn is also jealous of Bride’s great success in her cosmetics job. Brooklyn believes that Bride should not advertise and sell beauty products that do not improve her own beauty, for Bride’s position at Sylvia company might fall vacant and go bankrupt soon, as Brooklyn narrates, “... her position at Sylvia, Inc., might be up for grabs. How can she persuade women to improve their looks with products that can’t improve her own?” (11).

Sweetness confesses, “I even thought of giving her [Bride] away to an orphanage someplace. And I was scared to be one of those mothers who put their babies on church steps” (Morrison 2). Chodorow (1978) pinpoints the disadvantages of single female parenting, as “single parenting is bad for mother and child alike” (217). Sweetness is at once under the burden of the racial segregation and the pressure of being a Black daughter’s mother without a responsible husband to support and console her and her daughter. Sweetness inevitably cannot govern Bride when she herself was unable to govern her own life. Not only does Sweetness feel embarrassed when she sees Bride in

the maternity ward of the hospital, but also Bride's father, Louis, feels repulsed by the dark Black color of the daughter infant. Louis makes the situation too harsh and severe for Sweetness and places a burden of responsibilities on her shoulder, pinpointing her state as a neglected woman, "I don't have to tell you how hard it is being an abandoned wife" (Morrison 3).

Sweetness cannot be considered the "Welfare Mother" or "Queen", who lies and lazily cheats to provide for her children. Sweetness has no choice except to retreat to a safe refuge to provide for her daughter, Bride. Sweetness narrates, "... though I never asked him to and didn't go to court to get it. His fifty-dollar money orders and my night job at the hospital got me and Lula Ann off welfare" (Morrison 3). After being abandoned by Louis, her husband, Sweetness finds cheap housing and temporarily receives the welfare aid to provide for herself and Bride. After finding a night job at the hospital and earning the sufficient money, Sweetness can avoid receiving the welfare benefits from Louis, who sympathetically sends fifty dollars per month.

## **5. Conclusion**

Given both Collins's (1990) Black Feminist and Winnicott's (1960) Psychoanalytic theories, respectively, we realized that Sweetness was incapable of expressing a meaningful reflection of her "true self". Her frailty to love and respect herself made her vulnerable to exchange the same emotions with Bride. The White standard of beauty had made the Black people so disoriented that they felt insecure about their skin color. Being the victim of an inferiority complex, they looked at themselves with hatred, lack of self-confidence, and through the eyes of the White people who were attractive. The sense of being victimized made them miserable to such an extent that they considered themselves ugly and inferior to others. In order to eradicate this sensation and look charming, they began to imitate the people whom they considered beautiful. In this regard, they fulfilled the process of the dominant people's domination and became isolated from their origin. They neither became White nor remained Black.

The application of looking-glass-self theory was more detrimental than productive. The Black colour and gender of the African-American women became the curse of colourism, which made them vulnerable. The Black women, victimized thrice, had suffered from racism and the sexual harassment by both White masters and their own husbands. The light-skinned women had never encountered the racial discrimination at the level of the Black ones. Although the socio-cultural White ideology was dominant to Bride's Blackness, Bride rescued herself from the hatred of her own world by furnishing

domination over other women by her physical beauty in the guise of the White clothing and over other companies, businessmen, and businesswomen by her success in expanding cosmetics business. The White clothes were appropriate when she gained her own power as a woman, leaving behind the frightened little daughter to become a powerful woman. Thus, she turned her dark skin color into a marvelous asset.

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