

Space and the Commodification of Difference in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

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Abstract

This study aims at examining Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* (2015) within the context of Henry Lefebvre's theorization of space. It highlights white America's endeavour for the homogenization of space through the commodification of difference. Through the protagonist, Bride, Morrison discloses how the monopoly over space entails the docility of the black body which is reduced into a commodity. Bride believes that her success requires wearing only white clothes to showcase her beauty. Ideologies which promote whiteness are processed in the conceived space to be disseminated as the prime norm. Accordingly, Bride is living in an illusory space where her blackness is treated like commercial products. The journey to Whisky village, however, helps her to break the chains of commodification and regain her subjectivity. Ultimately, the novel emphasises Bride's reconfiguration of her body to be able to assert the right of living in a space that celebrates difference.

Keywords: Production of space, Toni Morrison, Normalization, Body, Homogeneous space.

1. Theoretical framework:

Using Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* as an example, this study is conducted with the objective of exploring white America's hegemonic tendencies which are inherent in its production of space. It explains how thirst for power pushes the white American culture to seek a homogenous space where its ideals prevail and dominate. The desire to create a homogenized space entails a sense of elimination of difference and the imposition of what amounts to white supremacy. To realize such scheme, white America must come to terms with the African-American segment of the population and must ensure the docility of African-American body, the most salient feature of difference, which is reduced to the level of a commodity. The traditional view of space is endowed with conceptions of geometrical emptiness and fixity in comparison to the fluidity of time. Michel Foucault indicates that "space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (1980, 70). However, space is elevated into a crucible for different established ideologies and a platform of confrontation among divergent social groups. African-American literature may provide a fertile ground to explore the mechanisms of space within the inherent struggle of blacks against white American supremacy and racism.

Accordingly, this study attempts to expose how, in the words of Henry Lefebvre, "space was ridden with powers, more often malign than well disposed" (1991, 263). Sometimes, these powers are concealed behind the different white values which are assumed to be the prime standard. The African-American body, especially, constitutes a target for the hegemonic white culture on which it inscribes its values.

* The article is extracted from the author's Ph.D. dissertation

Under the guise of liberty and equality, white America's control over space seems color-blind, but the truth is the opposite. Henceforth, the hidden malevolent power inherent in their ideological constitution of space tends to undermine blacks' identity through compelling them to adopt white values. In *God Help the Child*, Morrison portrays the impact of embedding such values in the black body. Specifically, this paper sheds light on how whites attempt to control space, fostering the African-Americans' sense of inferiority and tormenting their psyche. Additionally, it tackles Morrison's antidote to break the chains of subordination and regain the agency of African-Americans.

In his milestone study, *The Production of Space*, Henry Lefebvre (1991) makes it clear that "(social) space is a (social) product" (27). This means that human relations have the ability to produce the space they live in, then, pack it with different interactions pertaining to gender, conflicts of interest, racism and so forth. In the light of this, Doreen Massey, in *For Space* (2005), asserts that space is "always under construction... [it] is a product of relations-between, relations that are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made, it is never finished; never closed"(9). In other words, space is constantly in flux and in a process of becoming since individuals can produce and reproduce their own space. According to Lefebvre, what hinders us from perceiving space as a social product is the existence of what he terms "double illusion" (Lefebvre 1991, 27). There is the illusion of transparency which embodies a subjective conception of space and tends to consider it "as innocent, as free from traps or secret places" (Lefebvre 1991, 27). In contrast, the realistic illusion provides an objective understanding of space through "its appeal to naturalness, to substantiality" (Lefebvre 1991, 29). Lefebvre's transcendental understanding contributes in defying these reductionist propensities through proposing a unifying approach.

For this very end, Lefebvre introduces his special triad which describes "the three moments of social space" (Lefebvre 1991, 40). As such, he divides space into three types: Spatial practice (perceived space), Representations of space (conceived space) and Representational space (lived space). Lefebvre explains that the perceived space reflects the physical world in which human interactions take place. In contrast, the conceived space refers to the mental representation of a certain space. He maintains that "[r]epresentations of space are certainly abstract, but they also play a part in social and political practice" (Lefebvre 1991, 41). The last one is the lived space which is understood "as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' " (Lefebvre 1991, 39; emphasis in the original). Lefebvre also writes that "any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, and speculated about" (1991, 15). Hence, the mercurial nature of space creates diversified spaces within the fabric of the narrative which incorporate different levels of understanding. Morrison's *God Help the Child* captures the injustices inherent in white America's production of space, in the sense that Lefebvre speaks of, in order to eliminate difference and assert supremacy.

Lefebvre's Marxist agenda may constitute some source of confusion as this study is dealing with racism. Generally, race theorists criticize the narrowness of the Marxist approach which emphasises economic issues inherent in capitalism. Stuart Elden, in "There is a Politics of Space because Space is Political: Henry Lefebvre and the Production of Space" (2007), clarifies how Lefebvre's work transcends

"the resources that Marxism can offer" (101; emphasis in the original). Elden explains that Lefebvre's discussion of space considers the significance of Marxism in shaping his work. Yet, Lefebvre realizes that Marxism in and of itself is not enough to understand the surrounding world and needs to be espoused with other thinkers, particularly Heidegger and Nietzsche (Elden 2007, 102). Due to this fusion, Lefebvre's "Marxism was open to many possibilities" (Elden 2007, 115). Accordingly, this study may benefit from Lefebvre's open Marxism to comment on issues of racism concerning the production of space in the United States of America. The lived space or the social space is the arena where whites' capitalist hegemony enacts its venomous project to contain difference. Subsequently, racism comes to inform white culture's production of space which ensures, through its capitalist machinery, treating the black body as a commodity.

The novel revolves around the traumatic life of an African-American young woman called Bride who suffers because of her blue-black skin. As she grows up, Bride transforms her exotic beauty into a means by which she gains acceptance in mainstream society. In "Polyphony of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2016), Jihan Zayed and Shaista Maseeh approach the novel using Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. They emphasize Morrison's structuralization of the narrative and the different voices which participate in weaving the story. Zayed and Maseeh argue that the different accounts provided in the novel reinforce the belief that truth is relative and enable characters to "speak their own version of reality without stamping it into the ultimate one" (2016, 40). Delphine Gras, in "Post What? Disarticulating Post-Discourse in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2016), questions the myth of America's post-raciality. She argues that the novel highlights the effect of slavery which is still haunting black people (1). She writes that "Morrison forces her readers to acknowledge the pervasive mental and physical damages racism and sexism still cause to this day, particularly for Black girls and women" (Gras 2016, 3). In addition to post-raciality, Gras discusses post-feminism to highlight how the black female body is analyzed under "commodity feminism" to reflect on the male gaze (Gras 2016, 7).

The present study investigates how the racist production of space contributes to the commodification of the black body in general. The article is not dressed in a feminist cloak under which the concept of commodification is wrapped. Through Bride, Morrison is commenting on the whole phenomenon where the black body, especially those of a darker skin regardless of being male or female, is commodified. In the novel, Sweetness states that "[b]lue blacks are all over TV, in fashion magazines, commercials, even starring in movies" (Morrison 2016, 176). Behind these words, we deduce that Morrison is addressing a more general problem which threatens the subjectivity of African-Americans. This means that white America's production of space ensures the commodity of black bodies regardless of gender. The current study is not much concerned with the notion of "commodity feminism". However, it may touch on some of Gras's ideas regarding post-raciality and the radicalized body in an elaborated way by delving into the dynamics of spatial trialectics. So, this article will add a new perspective in diagnosing issues of racism and commodification through the prism of space. It analyses how mechanisms of power are entrenched in white America's monopoly over the production of space.

In *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010), Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber argues that “[o]ne of Toni Morrison’s great achievements is her ability to depict what it means to be black” (11). One hundred and fifty five years since the Emancipation Proclamation has been issued and the black body is still a captive of the white whip. In a neo-slave era, however, the whip transcends its physicality to become costumed in a set of racist ideologies that keeps the black body under constant captivity. These racist ideologies are processed on the level of the conceived space which “at times combined ideology and knowledge within a (social-spatial) practice” (Lefebvre 1991, 45). As such, the lived space involves these discriminatory ideologies which are invested in different social interactions. In *God Help the Child*, Morrison highlights how the ideology of whiteness and its idealized values of beauty are instilled in Bride’s mind. Bride, as the name indicates, reflects her adoration of the white color which she believes is the secret behind her attractiveness. She stands as another tar baby modelled by the white dominant culture which seeks to objectify her. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine is presented as “a Europeanized African” who constitutes “a creation of capitalist culture” (Ansari 2013, 42). Like Jadine, Bride stands as a creation of the white hegemonic production of space which tends to present her body as a commodity.

In her novels, Morrison underscores how the black body becomes a target of white ideologies. For instance, *The Bluest Eye* examines the dangers of denying one’s blackness in the pursuit of white idealized standards of beauty. Linden Peach, in *Toni Morrison* (2000), argues that Morrison’s use of white American primer “unfurls the history of Euro-American Standards of beauty and in white America’s idealization of the family from an African-American perspective” which reflects how “*they come into conflict* with the history that is situated, *metaphorically and literally*, in *the black body*” (Peach 2000, 32-33; emphasis added). Hence, the black body transforms into a site of struggle that hosts conflicting ideals of blackness and whiteness. Perhaps, Bride can be viewed as a mature version of Pecola Breedlove because she succeeds to bear the scourge of racist eyes and make her own path. Pecola ends up mad and sealed in her own imagined space performing bird-like gestures; whereas Bride stretches out her wings and manages to survive in a racist lived space. Although this success is illusory, Bride transforms her circumstances into a motive to be able to move on in her life.

In *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of Relations of Production* (1976), Lefebvre maintains that “[t]he body, at the heart of space of the discourse of power, is irreducible and subversive... It is the body which is the point of return” (89). Accordingly, Morrison is conscious that any practice of power is always directed towards the body which Foucault regards “as object and target of power” (1977, 136). Moreover, she is convinced that the body is the nucleus of change with its ability to overthrow the shackles of oppression. Perhaps, this consciousness resonates throughout Baby Suggs’s words in her masterpiece *Beloved*. In the Clearing, Baby Suggs says:

[I]n this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it... What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavings instead... Flesh that needs to be loved...love your heart. For this is the prize. (Morrison 1987/2004, 103-104)

this echoes the importance of self-love through accepting and respecting the blackness of African-Americans’ bodies. Sethe’s whipped back, which resembles a chokecherry, stands as “a visual and tactile

narrative of [her] personal suffering and the strength of her resolve which bifurcates to embody the history of her entire race” (Fultz 2003, 33). *God Help the Child* emphasises the enchainment of the black body which is ideologically whipped in a discriminated lived space. Modern versions of Schoolteacher tighten their control over the conceived space because it is considered as “the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)” (Lefebvre 1991, 39). It is ideologically processed to determine how the perceived space and the lived space will be structured. Bothe, Sethe and Bride come under the devastating effect of such type of space but they have reacted differently. In *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (2016), Sara Upstone argues that “124 Bluestone Road becomes a metonym for the slave ship of the *Middle Passage*, guiding its inhabitants on a *mental journey towards the same imprisoned existence...*”(63; emphasis added). While Sethe engages in a “mental journey” back to slavery, Bride embarks on a physical journey towards emancipation. Sethe is still confined to that mental conceived space where the horror of Schoolteacher’s whip is still haunting her life. Yet, Bride’s journey to Whisky village enables her to pull off the conceived space’s ideological garment which meant to present her as a commodity.

2. Towards Producing a Homogenized Space

Lefebvre indicates that “each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (1991, 170; emphasis in the original). This highlights the relationship between body and space, explaining how the body is an active agent in the production of space and how it is socially produced. In this novel, Morrison discloses how whites’ monopoly over the production of space denies African Americans the right to celebrate their difference in a land where they are supposed to live equally. In the eyes of supremacist Americans, black bodies are treated as objects unable to produce or organize the space surrounding them. For this reason, their production of space ensures the docility of black bodies through the standardization of white norms in lived space experience. Accordingly, Bride, her parents and her grandparents provide an example of a “docile body,” a body that “may be *subjected, used, transformed, and improved*” (Foucault 1977, 136; emphasis added). In our view, the italicized adjectives possess pejorative connotations because any attempt to transform, use or improve the body serves the interests of higher powers at the expense of the individual’s body.

This project of docility is realized through launching a set of ideologies which ensures the supremacy of the white race. This is done on the level of the conceived space where white America’s racial ideologies are prepared to be injected in the lived space. It is a lived space where they can both inhabit but are not allowed the “touching of the same Bible” (Morrison 2015, 4). When Bride’s grandparents wanted to marry, they “had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. The other one was for white people’s hands” (Morrison 2015, 4). This illustrates the white culture’s dominance and underestimation of difference. In order to avoid stigmatization, African Americans sought “to group [themselves] according to skin color—the lighter, the better—in social clubs, neighbourhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools”(Morrison 2015, 4). This reveals how the white grip maintains its control over this lived space through spreading its culture as the normal standard. As such, culture constitutes the

heart that pumps power into different social structures in order to keep the wheel of hegemony rolling. What Morrison attempts to convey is that the problem of skin-colour is the main reason behind the suffering of African Americans' in all aspects of life.

In *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, David Swartz (1997) highlights the interactive relationship between culture and power. In his introduction, he argues that “culture provides the very grounds for human communication and interaction; it is *also a source of dominance*...Whether in the form of disposition, objects, systems or institutions, *culture embodies power relations*” (Swartz 1997, 1; emphasis added). As such, the hegemonic order uses culture as a tool of power to keep social agents under its surveillance. In the African-American context, the white culture follows a discrete project for the re-enslavement of black people. It maintains its dominance over the lived space by means of normalization and naturalization. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2017), in *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and The Persistence of Racial Inequality in The United States*, elucidates that “[n]aturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences” (56; emphasis and bold in the original). Thereby, white culture hides behind the masquerade of normalization to disseminate its values, which guarantees the docility of black people.

This docility is reflected in Bride's belief that wearing only white clothes will make her distinguishable and attractive. Bride follows the instruction of her designer Jeri whose recommendation for her is to wear only white clothes and not to use makeup. He tells Bride that “[y]ou should always wear white, Bride. Only white and all white all the time” (Morrison 2015, 33). Morrison does not state directly that Jeri is white; however, it is inferred from the nature of his instructions and advice where mechanisms of power are embedded. Jeri calls himself “a total person”, which is a hint that Morrison provides to indicate that Jeri advocates white culture which generally claims for totality (Morrison 2015, 33). In fact, Jeri's job is to foster Bride's inferiority complex in order to push her to embrace white standards. He says:

If you must have a drop of colour limit it to shoes and purses, but I'd keep both black when white simply won't do. And don't forget: no makeup. Not even lipstick or eyeliner. None... Just you, girl. All sable and ice. A panther in the snow. And with your body? And those wolverine eyes? Please! (Morrison 2015, 34).

For Jeri, the black colour is considered a second choice and for things which are barely noticed, such as purses and shoes. Jeri's intentions are to condition Bride's consciousness and drive her to internalize that white color is the means to gain acceptance and success.

Inevitably, the stigma of colour renders the black body a visible target where power is invested to guarantee its docility. Morrison highlights white America's concealed practices to eliminate difference and impose its culture. Their tendency towards a homogenized space is maintained through creating a cultural space where white values prevail. Subsequently, the spread of white culture “universalizes identities and common sense of rightness [, therefore,] [t]he prevailing ideology of whiteness incorporated assimilation as a moral project” (Visano 2002, 209-10). In other words, white culture attempts to impose a fixed identity based on ideals of whiteness as the right choice for a normal social life. Generally, African-Americans take a step towards merging in that hegemonic space in order not to be discriminated against. Sweetness, Bride's light-skinned mother, treats her daughter as if she is a freak or an alien. In

fact, even Sweetness's parents prefer to sell their souls to the white culture as "[n]either one would let themselves drink from a 'colored only' fountain even if they were dying of thirst" (Morrison 2015, 4). Sweetness's attitudes towards her daughter demonstrate the impact of normalization on colonizing African-Americans' mind and psyche.

Bride's source of trauma is her mother who treats her like an outcast. She avoids direct contact with her to the point that she stops breast-feeding her because she imagines Bride as "a pickaninny sucking [her] teat" (Morrison 2015, 5). Sweetness is extremely frightened when she sees Lula Ann's blue black skin and enters in a kind of hysteria. She utters the harshest words that a mother uses to label her baby upon her first sight. She depicts her as "[m]idnight black, Sudanese black... Tar is the closest [she] can think of yet her hair don't go with the skin. It's different—straight but curly like those naked tribes in Australia" (Morrison 2015, 3). Instead of embracing her daughter, Sweetness participates in traumatizing Bride and shaking her self-esteem. Through keeping blacks preoccupied by stigmatizing each other, the hegemonic white power reduces the potential of resistance and ensures its monopoly over the production of space. Lefebvre's emphasis on the body as a producer of space holds in its folds the idea of resistance since "[r]esistance, he thinks, has to start with the human body, with its corporeal ability to produce space. This ability to *produce* space, rather than just to *conceive* space, is the means by which people can take back power in their everyday lives" (Stewart 1995, 610; emphasis in the original). In this novel, Morrison sheds light on how African-American bodies come under the repression of white culture which restricted their ability to produce their own space and break the chains of subordination. Bride and her mother are examples of those docile bodies that are left only with the potential to conceive space through mental idealization of white standards.

Considering the body as a space in itself, Bride is undergoing a process of docility. This is reflected in her submission to the ideology of whiteness through accepting to follow Jeri's instructions. Hence, Jeri represents a microcosmic version of how the culture of whiteness is disseminated and internalized on the part of black people. Bride looks pleased when she says, "I took his advice and it works. Everywhere I went I got double takes but not like the faintly disgusted ones I used to get as a kid. These were adoring looks, stunned but hungry" (Morrison 2015, 34). Jeri's intentions are to make Bride a slave to the white color that stands as a symbol of the racist dominant culture. His poisonous advice pushes her to embrace white values which provide her with an elusive sense of wholeness. Bonilla-Silva explains that "[s]ubscribing to an ideology is like wearing a piece of clothing. When you wear it, you also wear a certain fashion, a certain way of presenting yourself to the world" (2017, 77). Consequently, Bride is wearing a cultural garment on which white standards are woven by threads of power. This is realized through normalization which helps in stitching the different pieces of this garment and ensures to mask power within its fabric.

Normalization, therefore, forms one of the invisible faces of power. In this respect, Foucault elucidates that "[w]hat makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it *doesn't weight on us a force that says no*" (1980, 119; emphasis added). Foucault's statement clarifies that power does not function using traditional means of coercion in order to produce docile bodies. Instead, it is

disseminated through ideology and culture which unconsciously conditions the lives of individuals. Therefore, white standards are hidden within a set of ideologies to fulfil an intended hegemonic project. Any discussion of space cannot be dissociated from the discussion of power as Foucault argues, “[s]pace is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (1984, 252). This novel seeks to display white America’s invisible grip which serves to preserve its hegemony over the production of space. One of the issues that Lefebvre aims to highlight in *The Production of Space* is “how space serves, and how hegemony makes use of it” (1991, 11). The hegemonic tentacles of the white culture stretched out to manipulate space where difference is concealed.

Raymond Williams. (1976/2015), in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, maintains that hegemony “is seen to depend for its hold not only on its expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as ‘normal reality’ or ‘commonsense’ by those in practice subordinated to it”(100). Accordingly, the white culture’s practice of hegemony entails more than spreading its ideology, but a total affirmation of its standards as the norms of living. In the narrative, Morrison demonstrates how normalization is entangled in Jeri’s phony charisma which gives Bride an impression of his sincere willingness to help her in overcoming the skin-color problem. However, he is more interested in exhibiting Bride like an object as he declares that “[b]lack sells. It’s the hottest commodity in the civilized world” (Morrison 2015, 36). Thereby, blacks live in an inauthentic lived space where the white civilized culture takes advantage of blacks’ exotic beauty only to induce pleasure.

In a capitalist city like California, Bride’s blackness is commodified because her exotic beauty transforms into an alternative way that provides pleasure. White America’s desire to commodify the black body and negate its subjectivity is further revealed in Jeri’s language. Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress and Gareth Jones maintain that “[t]he systems of ideas which constitute ideologies are expressed through language. Language supplies the models and categories of thought, and in part people’s experience of the world is through language”(1979,81). In this sense, Jeri’s language while speaking to Bride is pregnant with ideological implications which meant to present her body as a commercialized object. His endeavor is to showcase Bride as an eye-catching as well as an irresistible commodity. He addresses her saying that “*black is the new black*. Know what I mean? Wait. You’re more *Hershey’s syrup* than *licorice*. Makes people think of *whipped cream* and *chocolate soufflé* every time they see you” (Morrison 2015, 33; emphasis added). Accordingly, new perception of blackness becomes related to these sweet commercial products which constitute only additional elements adding flavor to the basic ingredients. So, this discourse of commodification and Bride’s unwillingness to disapprove it reflects how blackness is crashed in the American society. Bride’s survival in a racist lived space necessitates such type of language since it fills her with satisfaction. Jeri’s words confirm that African-Americans are living in an inauthentic space which tries to objectify their bodies.

Undoubtedly, the city which constitutes an incubator of the hegemonic capitalist culture has a great impact on Bride’s sense of being. Bride, the California city girl, believes that resistance lies in using her exotic beauty to take revenge from the society that once rejected her. Confidently, she states that “I *sold my elegant blackness* to all those childhood ghosts and now *they pay* me for it. I have to say, forcing those tormentors—the real ones and others like them—to drool with envy when they see me is *more than*

payback. It's glory" (Morrison 2015, 57; emphasis added). This echoes Bride's unconscious self-commodification as well as the fruitlessness of her revenge. Additionally, the atmosphere of the city with its glamour fosters her desire to indulge in the white capitalist culture. As a result, Bride submits to white standards and decides to change her name from Lula Ann to Bride. In her mind, the name of Lula Ann carries a rustic overtone and does not fit a successful woman living in a city like California. She is convinced that Lula Ann "is no longer available and she was never a woman. Lula Ann was a sixteen-year-old-[her] who dropped that dump *countryfied* name as soon as [she] left high school" (Morrison 2015, 11; emphasis added). Bride grows as an attractive and a confident woman who enjoys a successful career. She transcends Sweetness's fear that "[h]er color is a cross she will always carry" (Morrison 2015, 7). However, this success and glamour comes at the expense of the commodification of her black beauty. It seems that Bride overcomes the issue of her skin color but she fails in understanding and employing this blessing.

Morrison's *God Help the Child* explicates current issues about the concealed racism which is threaded in the hegemonic ideologies of the conceived space. In America, racism does not disappear completely because white culture cannot ensure its supremacy without it. Booker, Bride's intellectual boyfriend, clarifies to her that "[s]cientifically there's no such thing as race, Bride, so racism without race is a choice. Taught, of course, by those who need it, but still a choice. Folks who practice it would be nothing without it" (Morrison 2015, 143). Therefore, racism is a choice as well as a persistent issue which is socially constructed in order to maintain the domination of the white race. Although white America claims to be color-blind, racism is still enmeshed in the different plans and ideologies involved in the social production of space. In "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial America", Bonilla-Silva (2015) provides a discussion of what he calls "new racism" describing the different hidden racial practices that the white culture schematizes to maintain its superiority. Out of this "new racism", a new ascendant ideology sprouts and Bonilla-Silva terms it as "color-blind racism"(2015, 363). He explicates that "[t]his ideology is as smooth as seemingly nonracial as the typical practices of the new racism period"(Bonilla-Silva 2015, 365). Respectively, Lefebvre maintains that "what we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein" (1991, 44). Therefore, as an ideology, color-blind racism belongs to the space of representations where ideologies are mentally processed to be projected in reality.

Under the guise of the color-blind racism ideology, standards of whiteness are injected into the veins of the social structures. These standards spread through different institutions which have an effect on daily social interaction. Although Morrison does not mention in a direct way these institutions, she emphasizes their poisonous impact on the African-American identity. In the novel, Sweetness admits that the bad treatment and the awful things she does to little Lula Ann is "[a]ll because of skin privileges"(Morrison 2015, 43). This confirms that the system is not color-blind as white America claims because racism is still embedded in it. Bonilla-Silva argues that "Jim Crow never died one hundred percent, and its ideology remained important in many sections of the nation and in segments of the white

community” (2017, xiv). This is revealed in Bride’s constant refusals while looking for job. She states that:

After I don’t know how many refusals, I finally got a job working stock—never sales where customers would see me. I wanted the cosmetics counter but didn’t dare ask for it. I got to be a buyer only after rock-dumb white girls got promotions or screwed up so bad they settle for somebody who actually knew about stock. (Morrison 2015, 36)

This means that African-Americans are living in a tricky lived space where racism is subtle and still affecting their life. In other words, color-blind racism ideology serves white America’s hegemonic tendencies to control space since it proves to be “extremely effective in preserving systematic advantages for whites” (Bonilla-Silva 2017, 206).

The tyrannical lived space where African-Americans are stigmatized participates in fracturing their identities as they are destined to live with a “double consciousness”. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E. Du Bois (1903/2007) clarifies the psychological divide which reflects black’s awareness of their being as American citizens of black descent. He writes that “[o]ne ever feels his tw-oness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 1903/2007, 8). Thereby, they begin to see themselves through a “veil” which metaphorically stands for the psychic division and the invisibility of the black subject in white society (Du Bois 1903/2007, 8). This “double consciousness” is also fostered by white culture’s hegemonic production of space where colour-blind racism ideology is enmeshed. Therefore, black’s internal struggle is intensified as their “dogged strength” is dissolved in discriminated lived space where whiteness is always idealized.

Regarding her traumatic childhood, Bride chooses to capitalize on her beauty because she believes that it is the best way to avoid social stigmatization. However, the racist lived space where she is in a direct contact with white people provides her with an elusive success and ensures her objectification. She becomes a slave of white color and its shades, which is manifested in the way she is attired. She confesses that “[a]t first it was boring shopping for white-only clothes until I learned how many shades of white there were: ivory, oyster, alabaster, paper white, snow, cream, ecru, Champaign, ghost, bone” (Morrison 2015, 33). The impact of such planned space shakes her sense of identity and makes her believe that salvation is inherent in whiteness that invades even her choice of food and drinks. In her way to Whisky, she asks the waitress for a “white omelet” containing “[n]o yolks” reflecting her subordination to the white culture (Morrison, 2015, 81). In another instance, she denounces that “[t]he more white wine the more [she] thought good riddance” (Morrison 2015, 11). Bride’s fascination with everything white mirrors her self-commodification as a way of getting satisfaction from others. So, the accentuation of her beauty and charm is a way to feel worthy. She “could see the effect [she] was having: wide admiring eyes, grins and whispers: ‘whoa!’ ‘Oh, Baby!’” (Morrison 2015, 36). Happily, she admits that “[t]rue or not, it made me, remade me. I began to move differently—not a strut, not that pelvis-out rush of the runway—but a stride, slow and focused” (Morrison 2015, 36). Bride derives her self-confidence from the satisfying impressions of her admirers. At first, this satisfaction ‘made’ her feel comfortable in her natural

skin-color through accepting her difference as a blessing. Then, it 'remade' her as a commodified as well as a docile person trapped in an inauthentic lived space.

3. Towards a Reconfiguration of the Black Body

Bride loses herself in the pursuit of fame and money in order to achieve acceptance. The city surrounds her with a luxurious lifestyle with a fancy Jaguar car, expensive clothes and jewellery. However, she starts to question her actions as feelings of void and sorrow find their way into her heart. Partly, these feelings are connected to her past which she all the time tries to repress. Bride's false accusation of her white teacher for child molestation stands as a burden that hinders her from moving on in her life. The other part is related to Booker who leaves her without providing explanation. Her curiosity to know the reasons behind his unexpected departure motivates her to embark on a journey. Yet, her journey transcends these superficial inquiries to be a quest of her authentic self. Sidney I. Dobrin (2011), in *Postcomposition*, maintains that "space is where hegemony is trying to happen, but when counter hegemonies still have footholds" (41). Morrison's versatility enables her to expose the different racial practices involved in white America's production of space and at the same time provides healing solutions. One of these solutions is the reconfiguration of the body since it is the fundamental element that stirs up the wheel of change.

The journey is like a cleansing process that serves to exorcise Bride's commodified self. The latter entails a journey-back to demystify the enigma of her childhood as well as a journey- forward to defy white culture's planned space. Bride notices some bizarre changes on the level of her body such as the disappearance of her pubic hair and her earlobe piercings. During the journey, her body starts to shrink as her oyster-white cashmere dress does not fit her anymore. Altering the status of African-Americans should start from a microcosmic level through emphasising the body as a subversive tool of change. Bride's de-commodification of her body is necessary to regain her filial attachments and to forge her authentic self. Bride is "[d]etermined to discover what she was made of—cotton or steel—[and] there could be no retreat, no turning back" (Morrison 2015, 143). The word 'cotton' symbolizes the white capitalist culture that strives to absorb difference, whereas 'steel' stands as a symbol of African-Americans' strength in asserting their difference. Hence, Bride is eager to discover what kind of relation she needs to embrace in order to survive in a racist lived space.

Accordingly, Bride's journey aims at raising her consciousness about the hidden impulses underlying white's production of space. Bride needs to be aware that within such inauthentic lived space there is always "the framed Confederate flag that nestled the official American one" (Morrison 2015, 81). The Confederate flag is a living symbol of the racist history of the nation and it is placed close to the official one. This close friendship between both flags reflects the inherent racist attitudes of the American nation. *God Help the Child* aims at making African-Americans aware about the injustices that surround the production of space. Soja argues that "[w]e must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality" (1989, 6). Consequently, African-Americans need to enlarge the scope of their

thinking in order to understand that space is not innocent. Rather, it is produced by the hegemonic white culture to keep them in the furnace of uncertainty and oppression.

As a part of Bride's cleansing process, most of her privileges witness some kind of damage. She loses her oyster-white cashmere dress because her body starts to shrink and crashes her fancy Jaguar in an accident. To purify Bride's body from the imprints of white culture, Morrison sets the village of Whisky as a therapeutic space in order to help her. After crashing her car, a white couple living in the edge of Whisky road take care of her until her fractured ankle recovers. Steve and Evelyn lead a simple life as if the tentacles of civilization fail to reach their shelter. Bride wonders how she "was among people living the barest life, putting themselves out for her without hesitation, asking nothing in return" (Morrison 2015, 90). She observes the couple's love and happiness despite the modesty of their life. The material life of the city teaches her that money is the source of everything; however, Steve and Evelyn prove the opposite. Everything has something in exchange because she does not believe in good intentions. Additionally, Bride and Rain (a young girl whom the couple find and raise) develop a special kind of relationship that is of mother and daughter. This relationship acts like a regeneration of Bride's lost filial emotions because of her traumatic childhood. Rain contributes in awakening Bride's slumbering emotions including love and care. She comes to realize that the essence of a person is not money, but the set of noble values and sincere emotions. Moreover, this friendly relationship teaches her the meaning of sacrificing one's self to protect other people. When Regis shoots Rain, Bride uses her body as a human shield to protect her. This act of self-sacrifice has an important role in improving and polishing Bride's persona.

In a white racist society, docility and objectification are the appropriate identifications that can be attributed to the black body. For this reason, Morrison calls for the proper reorientation of the body as a subversive power capable of ushering social change. Reconfiguring Bride's body is more than necessary to reach her self-awareness and break the chains of subordination. Bride discovers that her chest becomes completely flat and "she was changing back into a little black girl" (Morrison 2015, 97). In fact, Bride's purification requires her to recede back to childhood, particularly the moment when she lies about her teacher. For this reason, Morrison uses the relationship between Bride and Rain as a part of the purification process. As her name may symbolize, Rain constitutes the cleansing water which serves to remove the impurities of material life. So, Bride undergoes purification by water as a first step towards achieving an authentic self.

After recovering, Bride continues her journey to find Booker to hand him the trumpet he left in the repair shop and to listen to his answers concerning his departure. Arriving at Whisky, she discovered that it "was half a dozen or so houses on both sides of a gravel road that led to a stretch of trailers and mobile homes" and "[t]he houses had no addresses but some mobile homes had names painted on sturdy mailboxes" (Morrison 2015, 142). Subsequently, Whisky's simplicity constitutes a liberatory lived space that challenges the materialism and the sophistication of the city life. When Booker's aunt, Queen Olive, sees Bride, she tells her that "[y]ou look like something a raccoon found and refused to eat" (Morrison 2015, 144). Bride is astonished because Queen does not praise her beauty. She used to get admiring eyes and "[f]or the past three years she'd only been told how exotic, how gorgeous she was—everywhere,

from almost everybody—stunning, dreamy, hot, wow!”(Morrison 2015, 144). However, Queen’s words “had deleted an entire vocabulary of compliments in one stroke. Once again she was the ugly, too-black little girl in her mother’s house” (Morrison 2015, 144). Morrison’s intention is not to depict Queen as a racist character like Sweetness, but to make Bride confront the source of her trauma which is her dark skin-color. Unlike Jeri’s objectifying words, Queen’s vocabulary serves as a wakeup call to make her rethink the shallowness of her life.

In the provincial life of Whisky, Morrison intends to reset space through making Bride confront the fears of little Lula Ann. Her interaction with Queen compensates for her past relationship with her mother. All she learns from Sweetness is how to lower her head without complaining or making problems. Bride wonders how she will face Booker, for “she had counted on her looks for so long—how well beauty worked. She had not known its shallowness or her cowardice—the vital lesson Sweetness taught and nailed to her spine to curve it” (Morrison 2015, 151). With Queen, she finds encouragement in facing problems using the power of the heart rather than the power of the appearance. The new social relations that Bride develops with Queen, and even with Rain, contribute to regain the agency over her body. Thus, Bride liberates herself through believing in her inner strength as the only way to overcome her trauma.

In addition to guiding Bride, Morrison uses Queen as a mentor for the entire nation. The soup that Queen pours in Bride’s bowel symbolizes the hope of maintaining a heterogeneous space where difference is tolerated. Inside the bowel, Morrison writes:

*Pieces of chicken floated among peas, potatoes, corn kernels, tomato, celery, green peppers, spinach and a scattering of pasta shells. Bride couldn’t identify the strong seasonings—curry? Cardamom? Garlic? Cayenne? Black pepper and red? **But the result was manna.*** (2015, 145; emphasis added)

Queen’s soup constitutes a heterogeneous mixture because all the ingredients are kept and no flavour is identifiable over the other. Despite this heterogeneity, the effect is delicious as Bride confesses that she does not “remember eating anything that good” (Morrison 2015, 147). Thus, the soup comes to represent the diverse nature of the American lived space that should be maintained. What white America needs in its production of space is Queen’s recipe which is based on respecting heterogeneity. She tells Bride that this is her “United Nations recipe from the food of all [her] husband’s hometowns. Seven, from Delhi to Dakar, from Texas to Australia, and few in between” (Morrison 2015, 147). In her recipe, Queen ensures to preserve the particularities of all her husband's culture without privileging one over the other. Then, the tolerance which informed the making of the soup exemplifies how the production of space in the United States of America should be. Morrison’s symbolic use of Queen’s soup comes to challenge the American concept of the melting pot where difference is dissolved into the mainstream culture. The delicious taste that Bride enjoys symbolizes the taste of living in a non-racist lived space which acknowledges the subjectivity of the black body. Queen’s open heart and tasty soup provide Bride with a push forward which fuels in her a determination to confront life problems with a brave heart.

The confrontation with Booker constitutes another important point in Bride’s spiritual healing. Actually, Booker abandons Bride because of her act of giving gifts for her teacher who is recently

released from prison due to child molestation. He could not bear such behaviour because his older brother is murdered by one of them. Bride confesses to him that her teacher is innocent and that she lies in order to gain acceptance and tenderness from her mother. At this moment, she is released from the guilt of the past and feels that “[h]aving confessed Lula Ann’s sins she felt newly born” (Morrison 2015, 162). Now, this new born Bride is ready for her second step towards purifying her body from the residuals of the materialist white culture. She undergoes purification by fire when Bride enters in the middle of the flames to rescue Queen along with Booker. The act of flinging off of her T-shirt to save Queen symbolizes the shedding of her old commodified self. After she takes off her T-shirt she realizes that her body returns to its normal state as her chest is no longer flat. Morrison uses fire as a symbol solidification that Bride needs to overcome the injustices inherent in white America’s production of space. At this moment, Bride succeeds to exorcise her commodified self which bows to rules of consistency that white culture’s production of space dictates.

Her authentic self is achieved when she learns how to love and sacrifice through finding new social relations. Consequently, she is able to transform from Bride to Bright. Lefebvre argues that “new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa” (1991, 59). The ‘new space’ that Morrison seeks to achieve is a space where African-Americans transcend colour problem and stand against white America’s hegemonic production of space. In order to resist this hegemony, they should look beyond the transparent space that the white culture attempts to present. They have to defy the one dimensionality perception of space and embrace its multi-dimensionality which consists of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space. Bride “had changed from one dimension into three—demanding, perceptive, daring”(Morrison 2015,173). She is no longer the naïve black woman since she becomes a ‘demanding’ person who is not easily satisfied with superficial things. Additionally, she learns to be ‘perceptive’ through looking beyond the surface which will enable her to observe that space is not only physical, but a product of social relations. By sharpening the way Bride thinks, Morrison is able to sculpture a ‘daring’ person capable to challenge the whites’ oppression which is embedded in their abstract planning of space.

4. Conclusion

The paper covers issues of racism inherent in white culture’s desire to create a homogenized space where blackness is inferiorized and commodified. Bride’s attempt to escape social stigmatization drags her into the trap of commodification. Within a lived space which is supposed to promise multiplicity and difference, white ideologies are disseminated in order to chain the black body. Bride’s self-commodification reflects the success of the dominant order to realize its project of concealing difference. In order to survive in such a racist lived space, Bride prefers to seek ideals of beauty as a means to gain acceptance in the mainstream culture. Her decision to wear only white clothes clarifies how mechanisms of power are scripted on her body which succumbs to rules of homogeneity. Morrison analyses how racial ideologies in the conceived space serve to objectify the black body. These ideologies are enacted on the level of the lived space where African-Americans are still stigmatized because of their skin colour. Yet, in reconfiguring Bride’s body, Morrison finds a solution to purify it from the imprints of the illusory lived space that the white culture designs for enslaving her. *God Help the Child* suggests that embracing

blackness as a sign of difference is the only way to defy white America's hegemonic tendencies to control space, and the only means of self-assertion and transcendence.

الحيز وتسليع الاختلاف في رواية توني موريسون (كان الله في عون الطفلة)

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معالجة رواية (توني موريسون) "كان الله في عون الطفلة" (2015) في سياق نظرية الحيز ل(هنري لافبر). وتبرز السعي الحثيث للثقافة الأمريكية البيضاء لفرض تجانس حيزي يلغي الاختلاف. وتبين (موريسون) من خلال شخصية (برايد) كيف أن السطوة على الحيز تفضي إلى مطواعة "الجسد الأسود" وتسليعه، مما جعلها تعتقد بأن نجاحها مرتبط بان تلبس ملابس بيضاء فقط من أجل إبراز جمالها. يتم تحضير هذه الأيديولوجيات التي تسعى إلى تعزيز الثقافة البيضاء في الحيز المتخيل ليتم نشرها معياراً أساسياً. وبناء على ذلك، تعيش (برايد) في حيز مصطنع يعتبر سواد بشرتها فيه كالمنتجات التجارية، ومع ذلك فإن رحلتها إلى (ويسكي) ساعدتها على تحطيم قيود التسليع واستعادة ذاتيتها، وتؤكد في هذه الرواية سعي (برايد) لمحاولة التحكم بجسدها لتتيح له تأكيد هويته في حيز مكاني يعلي من شأن الاختلاف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إنتاج الحيز، توني موريسون، التطبيع، الجسد، الحيزالمتجانس.

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