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Racialized Identity, Then and Now: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the Rise of Donald Trump, and the Role of Academia

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Abstract: *This paper explores the formation of racialized and gendered identities in Toni Morrison's novel The Bluest Eye. To this end, the intervention aims at analysing how these identities are constructed along the colour line and also reconnoitred in the novel by putting W. E. B. Du Boas' seminal term "double consciousness" into operation. The study also zeroes in on the sea change taking place in the United States in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election and beyond to demonstrate how various racial constructions are still at work in assorted forms and practices and reinforced under the guise of Donald Trump's slogan of "make America great again". It, further, tries to show how we can address these issues by drawing on the course Critical Race and Ethnic Studies taught in the American academia that can eventually, to certain extents, help us to identify several critical tools and paradigms to deal with the politics of the "personal and spiritual" with a view to envisioning a future in relation to emancipation and equity.*

Toni Morrison, in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), takes issue with the predominant white standards of beauty and makes it evident that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Morrison also identifies how taking whiteness for granted as the standard of beauty (or anything else) devalues the worth of Blackness, thus undermining or destabilizing that very tendency in her novel. With her characters' insistence on taking pride in being Black, she also concentrates on the damage Black women have incurred by modeling themselves on the mainstream standard of feminine beauty in a racialized society. Hence, the current study examines the construction of racialized and gendered identities in Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. My intervention aims at analyzing how these identities are fashioned along the color line and also reconnoitered in the novel by putting W.E.B. Du Bois' seminal term "double consciousness" into operation. The study also zooms in on the sea change taking place in the United States in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election and during the four-year-regime of President Donald Trump to demonstrate how various racial constructions are still at work in assorted forms and practices and reinforced under the guise of his slogan of "Make America Great Again." It, further, manages to show how we can

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address these issues by drawing on some critical tools and paradigms growing out of the course like Critical Race and Ethnic Studies taught here at many universities in the United States: the selfsame critical tools that can help us to deal with what Lata Mani calls "the personal and spiritual as political" with a view to envisioning a future in relation to emancipation and equity (quoted in Vang, "Prompt," 16 Nov 2016). Now, before we address the issues of racialized beauty in Morrison's novel, it will be appropriate to dwell on Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness."

In defining "double consciousness," Du Bois looks at it as a dual identity experienced by the African American individual — both as a Black African and an American — a duplicated responsiveness encumbered with the anxiety/dilemma of living in an American society which "yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (5). He typifies the Negro two-ness as "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 asunder" (5). The vital point in Du Bois' argument is that the American Negro desires to exist wholly and live completely, both as a Black African and an American, without any formidable constraints to professional advances, self-realization, and emotional assertion. Writers belonging to the African American literary tradition seek to forge, in general, special devices to deal with issues surrounding the American Negro's double-consciousness, with women writers giving particular weight to said issues. And in her works, especially in *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison links the Negro two-ness with that of the Negro woman and its conceptual and practical intimations and ramifications. Now, to problematize the issues surrounding beauty in its relation to double-consciousness, it will be apposite to explore the reactions of Morrison's characters in the novel. To this end, the paper will first consider constructions of femininity and then suggest how Morrison's Black characters respond differently to the prevailing white standards of beauty.

To begin with, the novel's protagonist, Picola Breedlove, epitomizes the conflation of the two-ness of femininity with a personal quest for identity, self, and humanity. During her quest, she advances an uncritical compliance to the values of white beauty while simultaneously discarding those of her Black culture. In her pursuit of the ideals of the beauty endorsed by the white world, Pecola undergoes a mental and physical disequilibrium, and her lunacy puts off her dream of forming her own brand of identity, self, and humanity. The reason Pecola Breedlove longs for blue eyes is that she sees herself, and is considered by most of the characters in the novel, as ugly and unappealing. The criterion of beauty that her peers endorse is represented by the white child actress, Shirley Temple, who was perceived as possessing the desired blue eyes. The novel opens with the description of an ideal white family where we encounter Dick and Jane and their gorgeous parents residing in a pleasant and cozy house with a pretty dog and cat. The Dick and Jane episode functions as a force demonstrating the supremacy of having "the bluest

eye," by which a dominant culture reproduces "hierarchical power structures," testifying to Foucault's assertion:

> A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, the discipline produces *subjected body and practiced bodies, docile bodies*. (1995, 138, italic mine)

The Dick and Jane text implies one of the primary and most insidious ways that the dominant culture exercises its hegemony is through the educational system. It reveals the role of education in both oppressing the victim and — more to the point — teaching the victim how to oppress her own Black self by internalizing the values that dictate standards of beauty. The standard of white beauty has emerged at the expense of other forms of beauty, such as Black beauty, Asian American beauty, Mexican American beauty, and the like, thus turning them into what can be called, in line with Michel Foucault's assertion, "subjugated" or subordinated forms of knowledge, and by my extension, "subjugated" form of beauty:

> …by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (1988, 82)

Set against this hegemonic identity, the key Black characters in *The Bluest Eye* are portrayed as situated in three hierarchical families: first, Geraldine's family (light-skinned), then the mid-level MacTeers, and finally, the Breedloves at the bottom of the social order. The novel exposes how these Black characters act variously in response to the dominant white culture and undermines simple binary social divisions, thus giving rise to double consciousness along the color line.

Pauline Breedlove, Geraldine, Maureen Peal, and Pecola are Black characters who strive to conform to an enforced ideal of femininity. They are captivated and marginalized by the "cultural icons portraying physical beauty": movies, billboards, magazines, books, newspapers, window signs, dolls, and drinking cups. Pauline Breedlove, for example, learns about physical beauty from the movies. In Morrison's words,

> Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another — physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. (*The Bluest* Eye, 120)

Accordingly, in trying to adapt to the ideal of white femininity, the Black women characters deride their Blackness, which in turn leads to self-contempt. They see themselves through the eyes of white people, and their adulation of white beauty also has disparaging consequences on their own community. This is, as Du Bois argues, "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (5).

Geraldine, for example, represses her Black characteristics that do not align with the white femininity she strives to achieve:

> Here they learn the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions. (81)

Geraldine also eschews the company of Pecola when she sees her in her house as Pecola appears to exemplify all the undesirable aspects of her visions of Black girls: Geraldine

> …saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up. Up over the hump of the cat's back she looked at her [Pecola]. She had seen this little girl all of her life. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edge of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying "Shet up!" (89-90)

Being well educated and having adopted white-perceived ways of life, Geraldine differentiates between "colored" and "Black." She deliberately teaches her son her conception of the differences between colored and Black:

> White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers…. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud…. The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and tell-tale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant. (85)

Maureen Peal, a light-skinned Black girl at school, also thinks that she is pretty and Pecola is ugly, and Morrison notes a hierarchy of skin tone marking nearness and remoteness in relation to idealized physical attributes:

> A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me. (60)

Maureen has captivated the entire school with her physical attractiveness and was treated well by others. When teachers called on her, they smiled soothingly. Even people from both communities — Black and white — looked upon her decently: "Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids" (60-61).

Quite the reverse, Pecola, unlike Maureen, having been treated very badly by most people surrounding her, yearns to have blue eyes in the hope that people will love her. Therefore, in the process of trying to achieve beauty, the capability of Black characters strikingly differs from those of other communities. This can unmistakably be grasped in the ways that some of the Black women in Morrison's novel persevere, as shown above, in trying to emulate white American standards of beauty.

However, not all the Black characters adulate or are in awe of white standards of beauty. The novel also gives voice to Black people who are mindful of the jeopardy of espousing Caucasian standards of beauty. Claudia, the novel's primary narrator, recounts herself as apathetic to both white dolls and Shirley Temple. She also recognizes that she does not really hate light-skinned Maureen; rather she hates the thing that makes Maureen perceived by others as beautiful and striking: "And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, I and not us" (74, emphasis in original).

As children, both Claudia and her sister, Frieda, are content with their variance, their Blackness: "We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness" (72). This may suggest that Claudia resists the pressure to conform to a white vision of beauty. Moreover, Claudia only later comes to love Shirley Temple: "I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness…" (21). Nevertheless, when Claudia later learns to love Shirley Temple, she discovers that "the change was adjustment without improvement" (21) and modification or fine-tuning made by Black people to live up to white beauty standards remains a delusion in the long run. Towards the end of the novel, Claudia comes to realize, "We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word" (204).

Nevertheless, from the above discussion of Pecola vis-a-vis other characters and their interactions with her, we can say that Pecola's ingenuous attitudes toward the ideals of the white culture reverberates the rational Negro's submissive disposition toward the white pattern — an attitude white society demands to fall short of perfection set by itself. Pecola attempts to arrange herself in line with whiteness, thus recklessly connecting her search for identity, self, and humanity

with the aesthetic values of Anglo-American culture. She innocuously accepts those values as true in her attempt to combine white beauty with her Black body and life by simply aspiring to possess a pair of blue eyes. The consequences of her erroneous aesthetic speculation are the devastation of her dream in that these have forced her to yield to the detrimental effects of the white values that systematically repudiate Black identity, self, and humanity along the color line. And Toni Morrison, in her first novel, challenges white American standards of beauty and has meticulously established that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Morrison also identifies how taking whiteness for granted as the standard of beauty, or anything else, devalues the worth of Blackness, thus undermining that very tendency in her novel. With some of her characters' insistence on taking pride in being Black, she also concentrates on the damage Black women have inflicted upon themselves by modeling themselves on the rubric of feminine beauty based on double consciousness in a racialized society and, to some extent, goes beyond the paradigm of double consciousness by portraying characters like Claudia and Frieda. In this regard, her novel attests to both her ethical and political positions as an artist in which responsibility is an active process ingrained in common struggle and the ardent sharing of ideas. This is the very responsibility that she maintains robustly: "The best art is political, and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time" (Quoted in Dan Berger, 225).

Now that we have discussed in brief the issues of double consciousness in Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, it would be relevant to shed at least a narrow light on the changes taking place in the United States in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election and beyond to demonstrate how various racial constructions are reinforced under the guise of the slogan of "Make America Great Again".

Afterthought: Reflections on 2016 US Presidential Election and Trump's Regime

Before we get into any serious discussion on Trump and his rule in terms of racism and bigotry, it would be apt to shed some light, at least, narrowly on the nature and difference of racism portrayed in Morrison's novel and practiced in Trump's regime. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is predominantly about *internalized* racism, and how Black people in America have been conditioned, by the prevailing white society, to see themselves as "less than" in comparison, less good, less attractive, less clean, etc. — a set of beliefs deeply ingrained in their minds as natural (Rattansi 93-94). On the other hand, Trump regime is more about institutional or structural racism than an internalized one. Within institutions and power structures, institutional racism exists. This refers to the unjust rules and discriminatory practices of certain institutions (such as businesses, schools, judiciaries, etc.) that often result in racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. When they support racial injustices, individuals within institutions assume the power of the institution (4 Types of Racism, nd, accessed on 24 January 2023). In addition,

racism that is institutionalized and pervasive in society is known as structural racism. This is due to the cumulative and compounding impacts of a number of social elements, such as institutional and societal relationships, history, culture, ideology, and cultural norms that consistently favor white people and disadvantage people of color ("Dimensions of Racism," 19-20 February 2003). So, when we problematize racism or any form of bigotry in relation to Trump and his regime, our discussions focus largely and inevitably on institutional or structural ones.

Immediately before, during, and after the US presidential election of 2016, massive discussions and debates cropped up around the nature and purpose of the upcoming government and governance. Many people expected that the party with a more liberal stance in relation to race, sex, gender, and class, might capture the majority of votes (both electoral and popular) and hence come to power to lead the nation in the days to come. Nevertheless, to our utter disappointment and displeasure, a party with a more conservative stance, bigotry, and prejudice won the majority of votes in the electoral college, resulting in Donald Trump becoming the 45th president of the United States.

Belying all the predictions made by different surveys, polls, and media projections, what came out in the long run is a disaster, and, to a certain extent, a total devastation, both for liberal and progressive-minded people. For me, the reasons are multifarious. To begin with, while people could discern the sharp difference between the Democrats and the Republicans at policy levels, they, to their displeasure, found very little difference on moral and ethical grounds in that the candidates from both parties were involved, more or less, in debauchery and complicit in illegitimate manipulation in election engineering. In the Democratic primary, people saw how one candidate with a distinct progressive and manifest mass-oriented stance was forced to succumb to defeat in collusion with media hypes. In this regard, it would be apposite to mention how media beguiled people and manufactured false expectations among people, setting aside the real scenarios from public sight, leaving them in a precarious state of being. Both progressive and liberal-minded academics, pundits, thinkers, and activists were truly concerned about Trump's meteoric but appalling rise. White fears and aggressiveness, some believed, were major factors, which had gone so far to bolster Donald Trump's candidacy and victory, which is so astutely and meticulously summed up by none other than Toni Morrison in her New Yorker article "Making America White Again":

> On Election Day, how eagerly so many white voters — both the poorly educated and the well-educated — embraced the shame and fear sowed by Donald Trump. The candidate whose company has been sued by the Justice Department for not renting apartments to black people. The candidate who questioned whether Barack Obama was born in the United States, and who seemed to condone the beating of a Black Lives Matter protester at a

> campaign rally. The candidate who kept black workers off the floors of his casinos. The candidate who is beloved by David Duke and endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. (21 Nov. 2016)

Nearly analogously, in a post-election panel discussion titled "Trump's America: What's Next?" featured in the *Harvard Gazette,* by Cristina Pazzanese, Jennifer Hochschild said: "This electoral process has been a triumph of group tribalism, emotion, [and] passion at the expense of, or instead of, or over … ideology, policy disputes, rationality, the role of facts/information/analysis, [and] fact-based debate," (30 Nov. 2016). On the same panel, Claudine Gay and Wilbur A. Cowett expressed that "He [Trump] is remarkably successful at casting isolationism, bigotry, sexism, [and] nativism as expressions of working-class empowerment and in using that to galvanize his base of supporters" (30 Nov. 2016). The panel was also (correctly, as it turned out) concerned that Trump would likely get to nominate several justices for seats on the Supreme Court and would administer a Department of Justice that would be more impassive in monitoring voting limitations and more concentrated on accusations of voter fraud (30 Nov. 2016).

At the other extreme, a critic like Mark Lilla, a professor of the humanities at Columbia and a visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation, maintains: celebrating "differences"

> …is splendid principle of moral pedagogy — but disastrous as a foundation for democratic politics in our ideological age. In recent years, American liberalism has slipped into a kind of moral panic about racial, gender, and sexual identity that has distorted liberalism's message and prevented it from becoming a unifying force capable of governing. (*The New York Times*, 18 Nov. 2016)

While the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, showed her extraordinary feat in upholding American interests in global affairs in terms of inclusion, she seemed to lose that broad sight in domestic affairs, making a clarion call to African American, Latino, LGBTQ and female voters everywhere, forgoing other groups like white working-class men and evangelical Christians. Perhaps, which is why, Lilla believes: "Fully two-thirds of white voters without college degrees voted for Donald Trump, as did over 80 percent of white evangelicals" (*The New York Times*, 18 Nov. 2016). What is more, only 46 percent of all eligible voters cast their votes, demonstrating the sheer negligence/apathy toward the system. Among many reasons, one that can be readily pointed out is distrust of the status quo or the acceptance of the candidates on various grounds mentioned narrowly earlier. Perhaps this is why in his *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, prominent education columnist Dan Barrett rightly says: "'Voters' perception of race tended to reflect their levels of exposure to people of different backgrounds, and was refracted through categories like education level, party affiliation, class, religion, and gender" (22 Nov. 2016).

Nevertheless, what is obvious from their argument and counter-argument is the horrific impact of the upcoming regime that will fall unduly on the undocumented, people seeking reproductive rights, people without protection, people with different color skins, LGBTQ communities and, above all, various types of immigrant and religious communities. Black, Muslim, Hispanic, gay, disabled, and female students — all feel panicked that their rights, security, and acceptance, on which they eventually fall back, are at a stake, thus bringing down their morale and spirituality to their nadir. I myself, as a Muslim student, was no exception, and my sense of insecurity was blatantly manifested when I asked my Instructor of Record (IOR) Prof. Vang if I should write anything (according to the prompt she designed for this semester final paper) critiquing the upcoming regime, informing her of the reported arrest of someone who overtly made comments against Donald Trump. This fearful self-censorship on what to say, what not to say, how to say, and how much to say clearly indicates how severely and gravely we have been intimidated by the looming regime.

When I have mentioned morale and spirituality above, these are not phenomena devoid of politics; rather these are political. Critical race theorist M. Jacqui Alexander, mentioning Lata Mani, rightly puts that "the personal is not only political but spiritual," which in our case happened to come about in the sacred space of the classroom (7). In this regard, I would like to focus on a classroom discussion in which our IOR Professor Vang let the students relate their experiences in relation to the recent election. My fellow students opened up and poured out their hearts in a free discussion, narrating their stories of hesitation, fear, and confusion. Some of them burst into tears while others faltered greatly in communicating their experiences — they are virtually besieged by panic, fear, insecurity, and vulnerability in their anticipation of the precariousness of the upcoming regime. This dispirited spirituality revolves around the issue that is absolutely political and secular that, in turn, threatens his/her niche of spirituality. Momentarily, the whole class turned into a healing theatre of a medical center, as it were, with Prof. Vang taking on the role of Baby Suggs of Toni Morrison's ground-breaking novel Beloved. Totally overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation growing out of this open discussion, I could not help intervening in this poignant discussion, though initially I was reluctant to partake as I thought it was not my business as a foreign student here in the United States. I tried to console my fellow students and assured them it was not the time for lamentation but to work hard together if we wanted to resist the bigotry and repressive design of the upcoming Trump regime.

Political scientists warned that candidate Trump's rhetoric and actions mimicked those of other politicians who ultimately turned authoritarian once in office. Some scholars have concluded that during Trump's tenure as president and largely due to his actions and rhetoric, the U.S. has experienced democratic backsliding (Kaufman and Haggard 417-432). Many prominent Republicans have expressed

similar concerns that Trump's perceived disregard for the rule of law betrayed conservative principles (Leonhardt, 23 May 2018). His racist and bigoted gestures and stances are blatantly evident not only in his caustic rhetoric but also in his biased policies for crucial issues such as: Immigration, Family Separation, Reproductive Rights, LGBT Rights, Travel Bans, George Floyd Incidence, 2020 Presidential Election and Its Aftermath, and U.S. Capitol Attack and Its Aftermath, to mention just a few, among others.

i. Immigration Policies

Trump's racist impudence is acutely reflected in his immigration policy and rhetoric made on many an occasion. Despite the fact that certain statistics show illegal immigrants have lower crime and jail rates than native-born Americans, Trump has consistently portrayed them as criminals (Rogers, 22 June 2018). Before entering office, Trump pledged to build a wall along the Mexico-U.S. border and deport the estimated eleven million illegal immigrants that reside in the country (Tareen, 18 Nov. 2016). While the number of illegal immigrants stayed stable under Trump's administration, legal immigration was significantly reduced. The administration sought to revoke Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for displaced persons from Central America, Haiti, El Salvador, and other countries (Nowrasteh, 20 January 2021) as well as making it unlawful for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as spouses of H-1B visa holders, to work in the United States (Mullen, 15 December 2017). The administration's attempt to deport TPS applicants was thwarted by a federal court who cited Trump's alleged racist "animus against non-white, non-European" people (Gomez, 03 October 2018).

By February 2018, the number of illegal immigrants arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) surged under Trump by 40%. Noncriminal illegal immigrants were arrested twice as often as they were in the last year of Obama's presidency. Undocumented immigrants with criminal records were arrested more frequently, but only marginally (Mirof and Sacchetti, 11 February 2018). Asylum seekers who were prevented by U.S. authorities from applying for asylum had been preyed upon by human smugglers, organized crime, and dishonest local law enforcement. Experts also noted that the Trump administration's immigration policies had increased criminality and lawlessness along the U.S.-Mexico border in 2018 (Sanchez et al, 20 June 2018). The administration manipulated data, presented purposefully false analyses of the costs associated with refugees (omitting data that showed net positive fiscal effects), and established the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement to draw attention to crimes committed by undocumented immigrants in order to defend administration policies on immigration though there was no evidence that undocumented immigrants increased the U.S. crime rate (Lee, 01 March 2017). At a bipartisan immigration discussion in January 2018, Trump received harsh criticism for calling Haiti, El Salvador, and all of Africa's countries "shithole countries." Many world leaders denounced his words as racist (Ortiz, 13 January 2018).

ii. Family separation policy

Family separation is another example of Trump's xenophobic gesture to human bondage. In May 2018, the government said that it would remove kids from parents who were found breaking the law and entering the country from Mexico. Parents were frequently accused of a misdemeanor and put in jail; their kids were separated from them and there was no set process to find them or bring them back to their parents after they had served their time — usually only a few hours or days — for the offense (Stark and Hauck, 5 July 2017). Later that month, despite the fact that he had initiated the program, Trump falsely blamed Democrats for it and encouraged Congress to come together and approve an immigration law. Both Democratic and Republican members of Congress denounced the practice and said that the White House should resolve the divisions on its own (Woodward, 6 January 2008). According to a White House insider reported by The Washington Post, Trump decided to split up immigrant families in order to acquire political clout and persuade Democrats and moderate Republicans to support strict immigration legislation (Hsu and Wagner, 22 January 2018). Nevertheless, Trump changed the family-separation policy by issuing an executive order on June 20, 2018, in the face of widespread criticism and intense political pressure to do so, while previously saying "youkan's do it by an executive order" (Reeves, 14 August 2017).

iii. Reproductive Rights

Donald Trump's bigotry is also palpable in his obstructing the rights of reproduction. The Mexico City policy, which forbids funding to international non-governmental organizations that perform abortions as a means of family planning in other nations, was revived by Trump. Also, the government put in place a rule preventing taxpayer funds from going to family planning clinics that direct patients to abortion clinics, mention abortion to patients, or co-locate with abortion clinics (Belluck, 22 February 2019). As a result, Planned Parenthood withdrew from the program despite serving 1.5 million women with Title X birth control services (Chuck, 19 August 2019). Trump pushed for a ban on late-term abortions during his presidency and frequently made untrue statements about them (Cameron, 28 April 2019). In 2018, the administration forbade National Institutes of Health (NIH) researchers from obtaining fresh fetal tissue for research, and a year later all government-funded medical research that utilized fetal tissue was halted (Wadham, 7 December 2018).

iv. LGBT Rights

Trump's lopsided policy for LGBT Rights is another glaring example of his chauvinism. The administration repealed a number of LGBT rights, including those put in place under the Obama administration and addressing concerns with foster care, adoption, employment, housing, and the military (Berg and Syed, 22 November 2019). The government revoked regulations that forbade taxpayer-

funded adoption and foster care organizations from discriminating against LGBT adoptive and foster parents. What is more, the Department of Justice changed its mind on whether LGBT people were covered by the Civil Rights Act's workplace safeguards and claimed in state and federal courts that companies have a constitutional right to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Government contractors were free from adhering to federal workplace discrimination laws as long as they could provide a justification based on religion (Berg and Syed, 22 November 2019).

Regulations that forbade medical professionals from discriminating against LGBT patients were overturned by the government. Regulations requiring transgender persons to be housed in prisons in accordance with their gender identification, where appropriate, and to have equal access to homeless shelters were repealed (Diamond and Pradhan, 24 May 2019). The Census Bureau deleted "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as potential topics for the annual census and/or American Community Study, and Health and Human Services (HHS) ceased collecting data on LGBT participation in its nationwide survey of older adults. Calls with LGBT organizations scheduled for quarterly conferences were canceled by the Labor and Justice departments (*Trump's Record of Action*, 20 April 2017).

v. Travel Bans

Trump's travel ban is another heinous instance of homophobic policy confirming his racist gesture. In January 2017, Trump issued an executive order that barred entrance for 90 days to nationals of Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, banned admission of all other refugees for 120 days, and suspended admission of asylum seekers fleeing the Syrian Civil War forever. By giving preference to immigrants of other religions over Muslims, the directive also established a religious test for refugees from Muslim-majority countries (Shear and Cooper, 27 January 2017). Later, it appeared that the administration had reversed some of the order, thereby exempting anyone possessing a green card (Baker, 29 January 2017). Following a legal challenge to the order in the federal courts, a number of federal judges issued decisions prohibiting the government from carrying out the directive. In response to the then Acting Attorney General Sally Yates' declaration that she would not defend the order in court, Trump dismissed her. Yates was replaced by Dana Boente, who asserted that the Department of Justice would defend the order (Schleifer, 31 January 2017).

Trump imposed further restrictions on the six nations included in the second executive order in September 2017 and added Chad, North Korea, and Venezuela. The majority of people from Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Chad, North Korea, as well as some government officials from Venezuela and their families, were essentially blocked from entering the United States as a result of the ruling (Liptak, 4 December 2017). Much later, Nigeria, Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan,

Sudan, and Tanzania were added to the list of countries with visa restrictions by Trump in January 2020 (Jackson, 31 January 2020).

vi. George Floyd Incidence

Donald Trump's caustic rhetoric came to fore after the demise of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man from Minneapolis. As per *The New York Times* report, he was detained on May 25 after a convenience store clerk phoned 911 and reported that Mr. Floyd had purchased smokes with a fake $20 cash. Mr. Floyd was found pinned beneath three police officers, lifeless, and unconscious 17 minutes after the first squad car arrived on the scene. Later, by combining videos from bystanders and security cameras, reviewing official documents and consulting experts, *The New York Times* reconstructed in detail the minutes leading to Mr. Floyd's death. The video shows officers taking a series of actions that violated the policies of the Minneapolis Police Department and turned fatal, leaving Mr. Floyd unable to breathe, even as he and onlookers called out for help (Hill et al, 31 May 2020).

Consequently, the Police Department dismissed all four of the involved officers the day after Mr. Floyd passed away. On May 29, Derek Chauvin, the cop who can be seen most clearly in witness footage pinning Mr. Floyd to the ground, was charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. According to a *Times* review of time-stamped footage, Mr. Chauvin, a white man, maintained his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for at least eight minutes and fifteen seconds. According to the footage they reviewed, Mr. Chauvin continued to keep his knee in place even after Mr. Floyd started to lose consciousness and for a full minute and 20 seconds after the paramedics arrived (Hill et al, 31 May 2020).

Following Mr. Floyd's death many protests broke out in many states of the country, giving rise to unruly activities. In his reaction to this incidence, Trump tweeted the phrase "when the looting starts, the shooting starts," which was coined in 1967 by a Miami police chief and has been roundly condemned by civil rights organizations. The White House barrier would have been met with "the most terrible dogs, and most frightening weaponry, I have ever seen," Trump later said in response to demonstrators outside the building (Milman et al, 30 May 2020).

vii. 2020 Presidential Election and Its Aftermath

Donald Trump's reluctance to accept the 2020 presidential plection results and his subsequent manners and actions proved, beyond all doubts, how despotic and reckless he was in chasing his power goals. Former vice president Joe Biden of Delaware challenged Trump in the 2020 presidential election on the Democratic side. No candidate was declared the winner of the November 3 election for several days. The Associated Press and other major media outlets predicted that Joe Biden would win the election on November 7 (Koblin et al, 7 November 2020). And he won over Trump in the long run. Since Herbert Hoover's administration in 1932,

this was the first time an incumbent president had lost, and his party had, also, lost control of both houses of Congress (Blake, 6 January 2021).

Nevertheless, Trump refused to surrender, and it took until November 23 for the government to start working with Vice President-elect Biden's transition team (Holmes and Herb, 23 November 2020) . Biden and his transition team criticized political appointees from the Trump administration in late December 2020 for impeding the transition and failing to work with them on matters of national security, such as the Defense and State departments and the economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They claimed that many of the agencies that are crucial to their security suffered severe harm and were hollowed out, in terms of personnel, capacity, and a range of other factors (Forgey, 30 December 2020). Trump persisted in claiming victory throughout December 2020 and January 2021. He attempted to convince state and federal officials to reject the results, filed various lawsuits alleging electoral fraud, and pushed his followers to hold protests in favor of him (Holland et al, 6 January 2021).

viii. U.S. Capitol Attack and Its Aftermath

As per rule, Electoral College votes were to be verified at a joint session of Congress on January 6, 2021, confirming the election of former vice president Joe Biden as president. However, Trump-supporting rioters stormed the American Capitol in an effort to prevent that from happening. Earlier that morning, during his first rally, Trump urged his followers to march to the U.S. Capitol (McCarthy et al, 7 January 2021). Pro-Trump supporters then marched to the Capitol building, gathered with other protestors, and assaulted the structure. The Electoral College vote count and discussion of the election results were taking place while Congress was in session. Capitol security evacuated the Senate and House of Representatives chambers as the demonstrators showed up and secured a number of other structures on the Capitol site. Nevertheless, Congress reconvened later that night to review the results of the Electoral College vote and announced that Biden had won the election (King et al, 6 January 2021).

Later, on January 13, 2021, The House voted 232–197 to remove Trump from office on the grounds of "incitement to revolt" and the vote was joined by ten Republican lawmakers and all Democratic lawmakers. Also, president Trump happened to be the first and only one to have been twice impeached (Wagner et al, 13 January 2021). What is more, Trump broke with convention by declining to attend Biden's inauguration, making history by being the first outgoing president in 152 years to do so (Fortin, 20 January 2021)

Ratings of how effectively the American democracy was operating had dramatically declined since Donald Trump took office. In the United States, there had been a major democratic backsliding after Donald Trump's inauguration due to diminishing limits on the executive, according to the 2018 Varieties of Democracy

Annual Democracy Report ("Democracy for All?" 17 January 2021). Freedom House, also, conducted an independent evaluation and discovered a comparable, severe deterioration in overall democratic functioning ("Freedom in the World 2018: United States," 27 January 2018).

Now that we have known how different social and state apparatuses are pressed into the service racism and bigotry, we get to realize how crucial the role of Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at this hour of chaos, confusion, fear, and terror, for those of us who inhabit/cohabit spaces intersecting race, gender, class, sex, immigration status, and the like. Hence, from the above discussion of the predictions, apprehensions, warnings, opinions, and argumentations made by scholars and academics as to the precariousness of Trump's regime, we can say, with a lot more confidence and assertion, that the exigency and necessity of bolstering and drawing on Critical Race Study is both perceived and conceived, at this moment of sheer crisis, much greater and deeper and hence should be pronounced much louder than ever.

The necessity of Critical Race Study is crucial in the US in particular because Donald Trump, his allies and accomplices, as well as white supremacists did actually strengthen their bigotries, prejudices of all types, and other racist propagandas and agendas during his four-year regime. Thus, the section following is my humble endeavor to jot down some critical approaches taught under the rubric of the course Critical Race and Ethnic Studies that may help us to fend off or guard us against racism, to some extent, in academia. That being said, it will not be out of ordinary to mention here that the following section is a discrete or detached one, thematically in the least from the previous sections concentrating on several forms of racism. The only connection that we can attribute to the following section may be accounted for if we look at it as offering some kind of solutions (if any) to the said racial problems.

Some Approaches to Solution: Not in One, but in Many

And we cannot help being responsible as intellectuals working in academia for the sake of upholding the value of truth and justice and speaking the truth to power simultaneously — the role played so courageously by people ranging from Socrates, Galileo, Bertrand Russell, James Baldwin, Noam Chomsky, to Toni Morrison, Anita Hill and many more, regardless of their ideological stances and affiliations. They are the people whose legacy we are bearing forward to reinforce our mission as intellectuals — the mission which is so vividly depicted and immensely enunciated by Edward W. Said in his inspirational book *Representations of the Intellectual:*

> All of us live in a society, and are members of a nationality with its own language, tradition, historical situation. To what extent, are intellectuals servants of these actualities, to what extent enemies? The same is true of intellectuals' relationship with institutions (academy, church, professional guild) and with worldly powers, which in our time have co-opted the intelligentsia to an extraordinary degree…. Thus in my view the principal

> intellectual duty is the search for relative independence from such pressures. Hence my characterizations of the intellectual as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries *to speak the truth to power*. (xv-xvi, italic mine)

Thus, to get rid of this stifling, impending situation, here I would like to come up with several frameworks growing out of the course IH 220: History of Critical Race and Ethnic Studies under the tutelage of Prof. Vang, which we can test for their efficacy by being simultaneously open to other instructive and heuristic models that can be conducive to our purpose. To begin with, the concept that readily comes to my mind is Derrida's concept of "Universitas," to problematize the state/university dichotomy in which the roles of both are nearly similar, albeit not identical (Harney and Moten, 26, 32-33).

Derrida suggests right away in his cutting-edge article "The University Without Condition" that the university is concerned with questions such as what constitutes truth, where our concepts of the true originate from, what power relations are perpetuated by various conceptions of reality, and more in addition to the pursuit of knowledge: "…the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the *truth*…. The university *professes* the truth, and that is its profession. It declares and promises an unlimited commitment to the truth" (2002: 202).

As is clear from the quote, Derrida is here taking very seriously the conventional notion that doing academic research entails professing the truth and promising "an unlimited commitment to truth." However, such a commitment entails examining the very idea of truth that one is devoted to, rather than only pursuing the truth as it is understood in one's area. The idea of "humanity," which is at the core of the humanities, is similarly not presented as fact but rather as a topic to be investigated. Derrida is attempting to separate the concept of academic study from the idea of knowledge creation; he does not downplay this activity, but rather believes that the university's mission extends beyond the gathering of knowledge. And it is the humanities that can take the lead in this larger responsibility — and, in a sense, already have for a while. A significant portion of the work produced by humanities departments has similarities to an artistic creation in that it develops not only from the discovery of new knowledge but also from the emergence of unpredictable, unforeseen insights. Its affinity to art is also personified not in arrays of realities but in writing or other modes of signification which go beyond the transmission of the purely objective.

This pursuit of truth can be consolidated in academia by building a strong sense of community through what Michel Foucault calls the "care of the self" — the self that has been variously constituted. For Foucault, the discourses produced from the time immemorial saturate our contemporary discourses — their traces are everywhere to be found in the working out of power. To know ourselves, to care sufficiently for ourselves, undoing these power networks is indispensable. Thus, the question "What are we today?" pushes us into a domain that is, for Foucault, "historical reflection

on ourselves" (1988:145). There have been changes that pave the way to greater freedom in analyzing ourselves. Foucault recommends it be to our benefit that we need not relinquish ourselves to reflect seriously in the realm of ethics. Indeed, current discourse emboldens us to formulate ourselves and this, for Foucault, is an affirmative change. The practices needed to care for ourselves are numerous, exclusively for Foucault, since caring for ourselves necessitates caring for others. The main concept, among others, concerned in self-care is: "will to knowledge."

Of all concepts, the will to knowledge bears a special significance, especially for those working in academia. Care of the self is associated with decoding the social relations that culminate in the creation/fashioning of truth. Foucault marks, "the care of the self—or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves — appears then as an intensification of relations" (1986:53). Social relations are to be grasped only at the verge of a historical investigation of their constructions and foundations. Doing ethics then becomes a rather colossal effort. In adjunct to examining the playing out of this escalation of social relations, the person endeavoring to care for himself or herself must recall that the journey entails a scrutiny of truth. So, he maintains:

> *The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth* — the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing — *central to the formation of the ethical subject*. (1986:68, italic mine)

It is obvious from the above discussion that taking care of oneself, by way of continuous self-examination and being well-fortified with necessary knowledge, is not at the expense of others; rather it is relational and social engaging others on the way, thus giving rise to a space that

can be connected to the intervention of the "hospitality" expanded and expounded considerably by Jacques Derrida in his trailblazing book *Of Hospitality*.

According to Derrida, a host's welcoming attitude toward the guest is not simply a duty imposed by social and political conventions, but the basis by which all humans, non-humans, or any form of entities relate to one another ethically. In Derrida's remarkable articulation:

> Let us say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another county, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (2000, 77, author's emphasis)

Hospitality, in other words, is the ethical cement that keeps communities or different peoples or entities intact and committed toward those who are different

without feeling compelled to do so by any law, social order, or external imposition. Moreover, Derrida emphasizes that the question of hospitality contains a paradox — an impossible paradox. It is paradoxical or absurd in that the conventions or rules of unconditional hospitality contradict those of conditional hospitality, as codified in treaties and domestic laws. Simultaneously, the conditional laws would no longer be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, motivated, and appropriated by the law of unrestricted hospitality. They both entail and dismiss each other, giving rise to a middle ground for a decision-making solely on the basis of ethics. In other words, they give rise to a site where the antinomy of hospitality — straddling between unconditional and conditional — turns into a volatile site of "strategy and decision," the judgement taken simply on the ground of ethical decision-making, not the law of hospitality. This is the position in which one leaps to a decision that grows out of a particular situation/location in time and place, as it demands.

Thus, as opposed to the current identity-difference dichotomy, Derrida comes up with an approach to cosmopolitan hospitality that takes up both self and other in their totality without giving priority to one over the other — the very ethics Derrida's approach rests on.

As far as the relation between self and other is concerned, we can also rely on Mary Louise Pratt's seminal term "contact zone." She used the term for the first time as part of a transcultural pedagogic practice designed to get learners thinking about their own subject positions in cross-cultural bargaining and conflict. Pratt later created the phrase to designate social settings where diverse cultures frequently interact, fight, and wrestle with one another in severely unequal systems of dominance and subordination, such as those that resulted from all types of lopsided and contentious relations or their aftereffects as they are manifested throughout the world today (1992: 4). Since then, many people now use the term in other social and cultural settings. Contact zones can be spaces for interactions between any groups that are geographically, linguistically, culturally, or educationally distinct. This shows that the term "contact zone" is greatly helpful and adaptable for describing the various complicated interactions that define sundry other areas, like academia, than the colonial and postcolonial ones and their encounters. Admittedly, the goal of recent studies like this one is to turn the contact zone into a place of interaction where the disparities in the relationships between persons, groups, institutions, and the like involved may be discussed, if not eliminated.

This discussion of "contact zone" inevitably but relevantly brings us to the concept of "Third Space" put forth by Homi Bhabha in his landmark 1994 book *The Location of Culture*. He offers his idea of "the third space of enunciations" as an alternative to the dualisms that frequently predominate discussions of intercultural encounter. He calls this an "interstitial place" where "signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew," being a location of conceptual battle

and contestation (55). According to Bhabha, social actors can (re)negotiate their identities and (re)position themselves in the third space, free from the structures and hierarchies of both their "home" culture and the "other" culture. This means that individuals may create hybrid identities that provide fresh opportunities for empowerment and transformation by preserving some aspects of their own culture while simultaneously incorporating others. When considered in the context of broader social activity, the third space enables the development of an authentically "*inter*national culture based not on the exoticisms of multiculturalism or the multiplicity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (56, author's emphasis).

To recapitulate, after problematizing the issues and their possible solutions so far, we need to get back to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* dealing with the internalized racism in which the Black people all but unquestionably accepted their inferiority, as if, it were normal, as well as the institutional and structural ones prevalent during Trump regime and beyond, to gauge the necessity and efficacy of various critical approaches in resolving the said racial crises. That the aforementioned racisms — such as internalized one portrayed in Morrison's novel, and institutional or structural ones found during Trump regime — are still prevalent in various forms and appearances in our society is a reality, not an assumption or a speculation. Those being said, it will be a sort of anarchy if we impose any particular framework or approach as a readymade solution to our current crises. Rather, as done by Harney and Moten in their book *The Undercommons*, we can draw on many: such as, on Spivak to learn how to say "no," that is, to refuse the "call to order;" on Deleuze to absorb the strength and inspiration as to how to live in the world — in our own world, indeed (8, 10); and certainly, on Foucault and Derrida who have taught us how both the university and the state produce and reproduce the knowledge conducive to creating docile and subjugated citizens, thus serving the purpose of each other, and have eventually shown us how to take care of ourselves by taking care of others. Only by drawing on all these heuristic approaches and being open to others conducive to ours, can we create a milieu of what Derrida has called "hospitality," embracing all — humans and nonhumans — regardless of race, sex, gender, color, caste, and class, where we can, perhaps, envisage a world without a "color-line." And it is a shared responsibility for all of us — Blacks, whites, and others. As an optimistic person, my wish words always resonate with the very words of Du Bois with which I would like to conclude.

> They both [the black and the white] act as reciprocal cause and effect, and a change in neither alone will bring the desired effect. Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent…. Only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line in this critical period of the Republic shall justice and right triumph, —

"That mind and soul according well,

May make one music as before,

But vaster." (141)

Otherwise, not only did "the problem of the color line" remain a core problem of the twentieth century, but it also remains at present, and most likely will remain, an intractable problem of the twenty-first century and beyond.

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