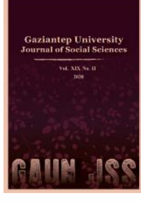

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A Microcosm of American Exceptionalism: Eigth-Rocks in Ruby as Chosen People in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Amerikan İstisnacılığının Bir Mikrokozmosu: Toni Morrison'ın Cennet Adlı Romanında Seçilmiş İnsanlar Olarak Ruby'deki Sekiz-Kayalılar

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Ö Z

İlahi bir tarih yazımına sahip olduğu varsayılan Amerikan İstisnacılığı, kader ve güçlü meydan okumalar ortaya koyan Amerikanlığın çeşitli yönlerini vurgular ve temsil eder. Bağımsızlık ve ahlaki üstünlük duygusu, oluşum sürecinin bir parçası olarak benzersizliğini ve sorumluluklarını önceleyen mitostan kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu ideoloji, özellikle, bu insanların geçmiş tarihinin, kendilerine özgü geleceklerini inşa etmek ve yüceltmek amacıyla "Yeni Dünya'ya" doğru yönlendirildiğini öne sürmektedir. Bu çalışma, Toni Morrison'un *Cennet* adlı romanında Amerikan İstisnacılığı ideolojisi ile seçilmiş insanlar olarak 8-kayalı aileler arasındaki bağlantıya genel bir bakış sunmaktadır. Morrison bu romanında, beyaz Amerikan toplumu tarafından modellenen uzun vadeli emperyal bir yerleşim talep eden siyahi bir göç hareketini tasvir etmektedir. Yeniden Yapılanma'nın başarısızlığıyla yüzleşen karakterleri, özgürlüklerini ve bağımsızlıklarını kendi kendilerine dayattıkları, çoğunlukla zora dayalı, ayrımcılıkla korumaya çalışırlar. Bu nedenle, çalışmaya temel oluşturan varsayım, Ruby kasabasının kurucuları olan 8-kayalı ailelerin, kömür karası ten renklerine ve kültürel paradigmalardaki aşağı statülerine rağmen ırk ayrımcılığı politikasını benimseyerek Amerikan İstisnacılığının ideolojik oluşumunu örneklediklerididir. Amerikan örneğinde olduğu gibi bu katılaşma, kendini Yeni Kurucular olarak ilan edenlerin, Amerika'nın haklarından mahrum bırakma tavrı ve ırkçılık doktrinlerini benimseyen bağımsız ve üstün bir topluluk inşa etmekle sorumlu olduklarını ima eder. Bu karşılıklılığı ve sonuçlarını ele alan Morrison, tıpkı iyi şeyler gibi ayrımcılık ve üstünlük fikirlerinin de öğrenildiğini ve Ruby sakinlerinin ten renklerini bir tahakküm aracı olarak kullanmayı öğrendiklerini doğrulamıştır.

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A B S T R A C T

American exceptionalism, which has been supposed to have a divine historiography, accentuates and represents various aspects of Americanness that manifest destiny and strong challenges. Its sense of independence and moral superiority stems from the mythos that prioritizes its uniqueness and responsibility as part of its formation process. This ideology, in particular, suggests that the prior history of these people is pointed toward the "New World" in order to build and glamorize their distinctive future. This study offers an overview of the connection between the ideology of American exceptionalism and the 8-rock families, as chosen people, in Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*. Morrison, in *Paradise,* portrays a black immigration movement that demands a long-term imperial settlement modeled by white American society. Facing the failure of Reconstruction, her characters strive to maintain their freedom and independence through self-imposed, forceful segregation. The assumption that grounds the study, therefore, is that the 8-rock families, the founders of Ruby Town, pattern the ideological formation of American exceptionalism, despite their coal-black skin color and inferior status in cultural paradigms, by adopting a policy of racial segregation. The solidification, as in the American case, implies that self-proclaimed New Founders are responsible for building an independent and superior community that embraces the doctrines of disenfranchisement and racism in America. In addressing this reciprocity and its outcomes, Morrison has confirmed that just like good things, discrimination and ideas of superiority are learned, and Ruby residents have learned to use their skin color as a tool of domination.

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Introduction

They think they have outfoxed the white man, when in fact they imitate him… How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it.

-Reverend Misner, in Paradise

Toni Morrison, in her historical trilogy novels *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1998), provides access to unearth the concepts of trauma (collective and historical), healing, transformation, and repetition to revise the notions of black identity and community. *Beloved* and *Jazz* invoke the impact of racial exclusion and historical traumas on the constant trope of repetition, with some differences from mainstream American racism. With the narrative draws of *Paradise*, Morrison employs the struggle to form a beloved community in Ruby "whose contemporary members understand themselves in relation to a historical narrative of ancestral perseverance, idealism, and triumph" (Dalsgard, 2001, p. 233). The contingent connection between the mythic history of the ex-slave ancestors and the imagined future of their descendants has been outlined in the context of the ideology of American exceptionalism.

In her book, *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison notes, "under the pressures of ideological and imperialism rationales for subjugation, an American brand of Africanism emerged: strongly urged, thoroughly serviceable, companionably ego-reinforcing, and pervasive" (1993, p. 8). This new brand, displacing the representation of racism, signifies the loss of innocence and rejects this difference as a sample ritual repetition of hegemonic American culture. This bears out that internalized racist attitudes and American exceptionalist manners have an impact on the nation-building concept of African Americans who attempt to reorganize their invaded cultural practices. To elaborate on the scope of the narrative, Krumholz (2002) articulates this tendency, "Morrison also considers what the danger of repetition without difference might be; what happens if the difference is rejected to maintain the utopian harmony of paradise?" (p. 21). The assumption is based on exclusion—that the victims, so to speak, internalize violence and attempt to use it while establishing their community, which specializes in the reception of *Americanness* unconsciously.

This study puts forth an argument for re-envisioning the issues of race, gender, history, and trauma as a black version of American history in the contemporary canon of American exceptionalism. As Storace has neatly put it: "Morrison is relighting the angles from which we view American history, changing the very color of its shadows, showing whites what they look like in black mirrors" (1998, p. 69). Hence, this study endeavor is an attempt to examine the underlying reasons for discrimination and massacre in the race-based black community of Ruby as a microcosm of American exceptionalist ideology.

American exceptionalism which is used widely across historical, religious, and literary studies constitutes the theoretical background of this study. Therefore, commencing with the origin of American exceptionalism and its potential historical variations is advisable. Byers, in his article "A City upon a Hill: American Literature and the Ideology of Exceptionalism", defines the term, "American exceptionalism is not only the claim that America is different, but that it is unique, one of a (superior) kind - and generally that kind carries with it a unique moral value and responsibility" (1997, p. 86). By this definition, Byers recalls the pre-claimed position of the American continent as a desirable land for religious refugees in the New World. Dalsgard elaborates on the religious aspect of the ideology, "American exceptionalism resounds the story of the small group of Puritan pilgrims who fled from persecution in England in the early seventeenth century to establish an exemplary Christian community" (2001, p. 234). On this religious background, this new continent, for religious refugees, provides the opportunity to

live their faith freely and serves as a utopian place that is defined by Ruland and Bradbury (1991) as follows: "The Bible, and especially its opening chapters, Genesis and Exodus, the tale of the Chosen people and the Promised Land" (p. 9). Therefore, these Puritan pilgrims from England consider that they have a significant mission to be endowed with moral responsibility that strengthens their superiority as chosen people.

Pilgrims' covenant with God for this Promised Land accounts for the origins of the American self, which constitutes the essential legacy of exceptionalism. Against this background, morally superior inhabitants of this new land, around the mid-century, encounter many internal and external problems as the colony enlarges. The conflict between the real and the ideal seems to stem from Puritans' strict religious doctrines and pressures to hinder those who misbehave and fail to comply with the basic principles of the community. America, a divinely inspired nation, recalls its origin and mission to unify and maintain its dominant position worldwide. Samuel Huntington in *Who Are We?* (2004) clarifies America's exceptional position as follows:

> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Americans defined their mission in the New World in biblical terms. They were a "chosen people," on an "errand in the wilderness," creating "the new Israel" or the "new Jerusalem" in what was clearly "the promised land." America was the site of a "new Heaven and a new earth, the home of justice," God's country. (…) This sense of holy mission was easily expanded into millenarian themes of America as "the redeemer nation" and "the visionary republic (p. 64).

As it sounds, the elevated status of this religious nation confers authority upon its leaders to penalize individuals responsible for the degradation of the land's exceptional quality. The discrepancy between the imagined and actual practices has eventuated the imprisonments and executions of women on charges of witchcraft in Salem in the seventeenth century. The case of the Salem Massacre supports the argument that the victims of the Old World turn the oppressors of the New, regardless of their holy mission and religious stance. As Davidson confirms in this case, "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1968, p. 258). Broadly speaking, to preserve the status quo and the power—in their minds, at least—Puritan pilgrims punish *the others* who are condemned to destabilize the conducted system and fail to follow the strenuous task of establishing a special community. One way or the other, the Puritan imagination, counter to the conflict between the utopian and the actual, constitutes the basis of the legacy of American exceptionalism, which attains its canonical status in the literary tradition. Hence, it should be noted that all punishments in this New World ascribe a more noteworthy aim; as Strehle claims, "suffering is the just consequence of a failure of virtue, misfortune conveys God's negative judgment" (2008, p. 417) in America where dissipation and idleness will follow cruelty so as not to give permission to younger generations who tend to veer from the God's plan. This inclination may appear to address the prevailing oppressive, patriarchal, and religious hegemony exerted by the Promised Land upon its residents. This hegemony, like all other hegemonies, is fraught with contradictions that lead to the ruin of the whole system, or at least externalizing whatever threatens it. In effect, there are two ways to count the existential paradox of American exceptionalism through the eyes of opponents and followers. Mary Vermillion (2014) accounts from both sides of this ideology as follows:

> For champions of American exceptionalism, America is the hero at the height of his powers: an exceptional and exemplary leader, both mightier and wiser than other entities, and thus their provider and protector. Opponents of exceptionalism tend to emphasize this hero's hubris and inevitable fall. For opponents, America's ‘‘greatness,'' like that of a tragic hero, both defines and destroys (p. 152).

Significantly, it is a superior, insatiable desire to reshape and maintain order, which grants us access to the backwater world of exceptionalism. Further facts about exceptionalism will empower the discriminatory attitude that alters individual freedom and restrictions in terms of labels and cultural relics. Theoretical contentions on tightly controlled versions affirm the

negative efficacy of this defensiveness on citizens who are labeled as *others*. Thus, this study represents a major effort to depict the discriminatory aspect of American exceptionalism in all-black town Ruby, covered with patriarchal and religious repression, via women in Convent. Morrison, in her book *The Origin of Others*, argues, "no one is born racist from the womb; no one becomes sexist because of an innate predisposition. One learns to marginalize by seeing, not because they are advised or instructed to do so"[1] (2019, p. 21). In her scholarly discourse, Morrison's examination of marginalization holds pertinence for the community of Ruby, suggesting that the origins of discrimination within this compact locale are rooted in learned and internalized predispositions arising from broader contextual factors.

Tracing American Exceptionalism in *Paradise*

Paradise (1998) is the last book in Toni Morrison's trilogy of historical novels (*Beloved* (1987); *Jazz* (1992)). As Rob Davidson accounts, "Morrison's trilogy is concerned with 're-membering' the historical past for herself, for African Americans, and for America as a whole" (2001, p. 355). In *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison concentrates primarily on the individual process of self-control, most notably for the protagonists of the narratives. However, *Paradise* delves into the intricacies of communal dynamics and their profound interconnections with individual processes. While her previous historical works focus on particular historical moments that have predominantly been accepted as milestones of black society, *Paradise's* motivation articulates a national ideal in the form of a collective imagination. Gauthier, in her article "The Other Side of *Paradise*: Toni Morrison's (Un)Making of Mythic History", extends the scope of the narrative with these words:

> *Paradise* combines factual and experiential truths from African American history to construct an insistent countermemory to national American mythologies in order to investigate the relationship of truth both to history—the complex of actual events as well as that which becomes the sanctioned version of the past—and to myth—those stories we tell ourselves about what has happened (2005, p. 396).

Through precisely such an idealistic and national point of view, *Paradise* scrutinizes the ways in which experiences are accumulated, maintained, remembered, and practiced in a vicious circle in communal history. Romero clarifies this process, "*Paradise* does the work of articulating African American conceptions of nation building by recounting the violent history of the citizens of Ruby, an all-black town in rural Oklahoma" (2005, p. 415). Indeed, Morrison's construction of a historical myth that significantly shapes the genesis of Ruby primarily draws upon American white male figures as her central exemplars. While in her other literary works, Morrison formulates her principal arguments, such as those centered on slavery and racism, within the framework of white-black relations, in *Paradise*, it is the black community that becomes the focal point of discrimination and exhibits manifestations of violence.

Ruby, a small West African-American community, is portrayed as a patriarchal, conservative, racist—ultimately—violent black town whose members are descendants of the ex-slaves, founding fathers of Ruby with paradisiacal certainty. It is critically acknowledged that these founding fathers are both representations of American exceptionalism and of the chosen people who are endowed with a specific mission in their community. It is an all-black town in Oklahoma founded by fifteen African-American families who struggle to find a place to maintain their freedom after long years of slavery and exclusion. Apart from race-based exclusion among whites, they were also rejected by some black communities because of their darker skin color during their journey in 1890. This rejection, called Disallowing, "attains mythic status in the historical memory of the elders" (Widdowson, 2001, p. 314). The rejection

[1] Translations of quotations from Turkish sources are my own.

holds profound narrative significance, as the subsequent generations, descendants of the initial fifteen families, largely structure their lives in accordance with this mythic tale. Consequently, the psychological distress resulting from this rejection permeates the lives of nearly every inhabitant of the town. Morrison's main point of departure in describing this community, which is discriminated against by both whites and their own race, the black townships, is the learned and internalized sense of superiority and what can be done with it. No longer ruled by an oppressive white society, “the citizens of Ruby guard against further oppression by establishing a rigid, isolationist code of behavior that refuses to allow any new ideas, beliefs, or ethnicities to interfere with their sense of racial pride and community” (Romero, 2005, p. 416). Ironically, after this rebuff known as Disallowing, the founding families of Ruby migrated westward to found their own safe place where they unconsciously imitate the ideology of American exceptionalism and create *the other* in there. Their first dream town, Haven, gives them the freedom and reassessment of the past to build their own all-black community. The Oven, which is attributed to a socio-cultural meaning and mentioned throughout the narrative, is the most important symbol of the new settlement established in Haven, but it also has a function to keep the social relations of the community alive. In fact, upon their relocation to Ruby, the setting of the narrative subsequent to their time in Haven, they dismantle the bricks of the oven, transfer it to its new location, and express a desire for its sustained operation, thereby manifesting the cultural significance imbued within this architectural entity.

Recording an autonomous history with many unwritten rules and principles, Ruby citizens try to eliminate racial exclusions that epitomize the Disallowing incident. Morrison, as noted in the narrative, accentuates that the main reason behind this rejection is skin color: “They wore summer dresses of material the lightness, the delicacy of which neither of them had ever seen […] Slender feet turned and tipped in thin leather shoes. Their skin, creamy and luminous in the afternoon sun, took away his breath”[2] (1998, p.109). This town, mentioned in the quotation, rejected the ancestors of Ruby citizens since they are “too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter” (p. 14) and, on the contrary, they have creamy skins. Actually, this creamy skin reminds them of their concomitant slave history, and it is “an outcome of the miscegenation intrinsic to slavery—which is not only forbidden in the “haven” that this memory engenders, but also inevitable within it” (Gauthier, 2005, p. 402). This consideration contributes to romanticization of exclusion among Ruby’s citizens by reminding the Disallowing story throughout the narrative. Morrison, in *The Origin of Others* (2019), notes, “one of the aims of scientific racism is to identify the other with whom one can identify oneself” (p. 21) in order to signify the psychological aspect of the issue.

In *Paradise,* which has interwoven stories, Ruby people have tried to construct *the other* based on a principle they call the blood rule and have tried to impose their own truth. As in much of Morrison’s fiction, it extensively deals with the concept of *the other*, highlighting a pervasive sentiment that individuals harbor apprehensions about outsiders disrupting their tranquility and potentially revealing behaviors that diverge from the norm, thereby signaling a perceived dissimilarity. The actual trajectory of *Paradise* offers an insightful perspective on the unspoken sentiments of Ruby’s perceptive inhabitants regarding *the other*, encompassing both racial and sexual dimensions, akin to a localized and controllable manifestation of American exceptionalism. Being discriminated against and victimized before settling in Haven, “Ruby built itself by keeping the outside world, especially whites or light-skinned blacks, out. This exclusion, however, could not keep at bay the racist ideology that necessitated this isolation”

[2] From now on, only page numbers will be given for the citations from *Paradise*.

(Schur, 2004, p. 283). In line with Schur, Morrison suggests that the emotional sensibilities of the residents impel them to establish an insular community, yet the assimilation and internalization of perceptions regarding *the other* subsequently influence their conscious decision-making. In seeking to find a reason, Morrison contends,

> We want to own the other, to dominate it, to rule it. And if we can, to glorify it and watch it in the mirror of our own selves. In both cases, that is, when we are afraid and when we feel false admiration, we deny him the individuality that we think we deserve; we disregard his personality, his unique individuality (2019, p. 49).

However, within the context of *Paradise*, the question arises: Who represents *the other* in this narrative, compelling the Ruby community to emulate the ideals of American exceptionalism? The novel opens as such: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest, they can take their time" (p. 3). This opening line, literally and metaphorically, articulates how Ruby men detour from the putative ideology itself that criticizes the race-based exclusions, and at the same time, turned their holy place into a nightmare. By situating the novel in the 1960s and the 1970s, Morrison stressed the shift from the civil rights movement to the post-civil rights era, in which gender equality, sexism, racial integration, and racism matters were examined. In this regard, one can argue that the narrative draws noteworthy parallels with the historical events of the era, illustrating how the pivotal occurrences of the period had a tangible impact on everyday existence.

In the narrative, Morrison portrays two different communities: all-black Ruby town, which comprises the descendants of the ex-slaves, first founded Haven as a safe and free place and then migrated to Ruby to guarantee a peaceful domestic site and to set a precedent for ideal paradise. The second community, on the other hand, known as the Convent, serves as a sanctuary for women hailing from diverse racial, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, primarily housing individuals grappling with marital strife, alcohol addiction, infidelity, and instances of illegal pregnancies. To ensure their politics of purity, the patriarchs of Ruby set measures and draw lines—even more aggressively than their founding ancestors—to rule, dominate, and order social interactions. One might suggest that the outside world is perceived as a potential threat to the citizens of Ruby, and Morrison echoes this in the narrative as follows:

> The twins stared at their dwindling postwar future and it was not hard to persuade other home boys to repeat what the Old Fathers had done in 1890. Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose—behind any standing tree, behind the door of any house, humble or grand (p. 16).

This perception stems from the desire to keep the outside world out, exemplifying their motivation to exclude the other from their utopian paradise. In this respect, the Convent women—the other in the narrative—are the cause of the decay and apocalypse of their well-structured and rigidly protected paradise. To seize the deterioration and the decline of Ruby, it is imperative to examine the dynamics of their interaction with the women of the Convent, often portrayed as outsiders, as these women "pose little threat to the socio-political status quo in Ruby because their interactions with each other and the outside world simply reflect and reinforce the exclusionary tendencies modeled by the patriarchs" (Griffith, 2011, p. 584). In other words, as Griffith states, given that the women residing in the Convent are perceived as isolated from the external realm, akin to the citizens of Ruby, and are cautious in safeguarding against potential external threats, their presence does not inherently jeopardize the well-being of Ruby, despite their status as outsiders.

In the theoretical realm, they are marginalized by the patriarchs of Ruby from the very beginning; however, since their social interactions are controlled by the rigid code of manner

in Ruby, their appearance does not interfere with the racial pride of citizens. Consolata, the putative owner of the Convent, recites the founding of Ruby: “It was 1954. People were building houses, fencing and plowing land, some seventeen miles south of Christ the King” (p. 225). The year 1954 holds profound significance in terms of pivotal legal rulings on racial equality in the USA, and Morrison urges us to discern how these novel circumstances manifest in the development of the characters. In addition, the present time of the novel is 1976, when the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Nationalist Movement, which intends to have equality in all areas and social justice for each citizen of the USA, failed. Hence, the novel might be assigned as articulating the current notions that are prominent in founding a nation and its failures.

A former Catholic nun, Consolata, affectionately known as Connie, willingly embraces women who have been marginalized in various contexts, endeavoring to provide a shelter for their recuperation. Each with a different history and pain, these women commence a cleansing ritual guided by Connie and encouraged by her to accompany her own healing process. Actually, neither these women nor their healing rituals attack the community’s socio-cultural structure or Biblical patriarchy, yet what frightens Ruby patriarchs, like Morgan twins, is, “each woman in the Convent embodies, literally and figuratively, lies in notions of racial purity and challenges the need for fathers to govern the mating of sons and daughters to pursue such pedigrees” (Kearly, 2000, p. 11). As Kearly claims, town patriarchs are outraged by the concern that the women of the Convent, designated as the other, are an apology for their pure blood principle and tacitly legitimize the issue of miscegenation, an unspoken but prevalent concern within the 8-rock families. These families from Mississippi and Louisiana, as previously discussed, are rejected by some lighter skinned blacks and that Disallowing causes psychological suppression and an apprehension of interactions with the individuals of white or lighter skin tones—miscegenate ones. Therefore, the misogyny—hatred of women arises from the gap between beliefs and learned heritage. The women of Convent do not need any man to survive and heal, which damages the authority or the dominant existence of Ruby men. In addition to their different backgrounds and places of origin, these women have different skin colors, and Morrison makes it clear in the first sentence that the characters are of different races. Throughout the narrative, it is evident to the reader that these women extend unconditional acceptance to one another, with their central objective being the mutual support and recovery from the traumas of their shared histories. Isolated from the outside world, the 8-rocks desire to control every aspect of the town under the assumption of preserving their authority and skin color from miscegenation. Morrison captures the essence of this desire,

> [i]n the immediate vicinity of this community of women for whom race is of no importance, lives another community that places great importance on race, and for its members, pure race is paramount. No one who is not "coal black” can live in their town (2019, p. 59).

Morrison's point, coal black, is nothing more than a color fetish; the Ruby people, who attribute past hurts and rejections to skin color and unfortunately learn what was done to them and treat others in the same way, see it as a duty to protect their children. Walter Benjamin puts this argument forwards as follows:

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism (1968, p. 259).

Benjamin declares the mentality of 8-rock families in terms of potential threats that will destabilize the status quo and become an emergency for their survival. This mindset, color fetish, and racist approach is rooted in American exceptionalism, in which Morrison urges a focus on how oppressed and marginalized communities might turn into oppressors under

favorable conditions and that this is a learned condition. Marginalization of the Convent women might be evaluated as a strategy for retaining power and maintaining their position after the Disallowing incident. To foreground their tactic and its possible causes, in the opening section of the novel, Morrison particularizes the intolerance of Ruby residents, especially Morgan twins, so as to include the impact of past experiences:

> The twins have powerful memories. Between them, they remember the details of everything that ever happened—things they witnessed and things they have not… And they have never forgotten the message or the specifics of any story, especially the controlling one told to them by their grandfather—the man who put the words in the Oven's black mouth. A story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves (p. 13).

The idea that forms the basis of the narrative completely coincides with the details in the excerpt, because when including the Morgan twins in particular, it can be claimed that they actually exhibit a constant remembrance and reactionary approach that exists in all black people who have been subjected to various lynchings in the twentieth century. It could be argued that this oppression is the reason why blacks fled to free lands and established their own color hierarchy, placing the darkest black at the top and discriminating against all others. In the first sentence of the novel, it is stated that the girl who is shot is white, that is, her race, but throughout the narrative, it is not specified to which of Convent women this white woman belongs. The names of the Convent women are given in the following sections of the novel; Mavis, Grace, Seneca, Divine, Patricia, consulate, Lone and Save-Marie. Each chapter focuses on the characters' lives before they came to the Convent and the events that led them to see it as a refuge, while also describing their relationships with each other. These women, having fled their former environments and grappled with psychological distress, do not conform effortlessly to societal norms; nevertheless, they earnestly endeavor to abide by Consolata, the Convent's proprietor's directives, displaying profound devotion to her. Morrison elucidates the rationale behind dedicating distinct chapters to these characters, individuals whose experiences are intricately intertwined with the historical events of the era and the complexities within their personal lives:

> So, in the midst of all this fighting, squabbling, endless conflict caused by the distribution of power in racial and gender classifications, I wanted to draw attention to individuals, individuals trying to escape evil, trying to overcome their frustrations. A story for each of them. One on one. (2019, p. 78)

From slavery to the Harlem Renaissance and to the Civil Rights Movement, *Paradise*, a historically contextualized novel, offers a rich perspective to understand Ruby's coal black men, perpetrators of crime, and the Convent women as victims. The revelation of particular events and detailed character insights within each chapter affords readers a privileged vantage point into the covert dynamics in narrative. As previously noted, the inhabitants of Ruby initially maintained a non-hostile disposition towards the women of the Convent, harboring no intentions of causing them harm. How has Ruby evolved over time? Initially, Ruby thrived as a sanctuary for individuals seeking to safeguard their liberty and distance themselves from their historical burdens. However, discord emerged with the advent of successive generations of young residents of who sought to challenge the traditional foundations and enduring values that had been painstakingly upheld in Ruby. The younger generation's suggestions for adaptation are regarded as morally compromised and a challenge to the cherished traditions of Ruby. Reverend Misner, a progressive clergyman, endeavors to persuade Ruby's patriarch that the proposals of the younger generation are neither insidious nor perilous. However, the outcome remains largely unaltered. In short, the sichisms within Ruby become so pronounced that a faction of town's male inhabitants begin seeking a scapegoat to expel the discord and commotion that plagues the community.

The non-linear narrative structure of *Paradise*, oscillating between the time of the massacre and prior events, conveys the notion that the women of Convent are perceived as *the other* or even as adversaries, exemplifying the enduring consequences of their historical marginalization. As articulated by the narrator, "everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (p. 189). Centuries of marginalization and rejection of black people compel them to seek someone for blame and exclusion. Reverend Misner states the underlying logic, "they think they have outfoxed the white man, when in fact they imitate… How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it" (p. 306). The words of Reverend Misner stretch the possibility of imitation of white American people by Ruby citizens, which is the discrimination learned and internalized as a result of having a dark skin. In her book *Race,* Morrison unravels, "the definition of 'Americanness' is color" (2017, p. 128) that echoes the reality that superiority, for many people, is related to skin color.

In their pursuit of supremacy, they assimilated behaviors, including exclusion, punishment, and isolation, influenced by the practices of white Americans towards those perceived as different. However, this is a painful reality that the residents of Ruby have vocally objected to since its inception and have indelibly etched into their collective memory. It may be hard to understand this untenable change of oppressed people of Ruby; yet, Morrison reminds, "the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead; that the herculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive" (2017, p. 67). When matters of memory and race are located, as in this quotation, her response tends to indicate that there is no escape from rememory if they want to survive. In this searing fact, American racial policy and attitudes and racial exclusion enforce the visibility of "founding fathers' movement from the position of crucified to the position of the crucifier" (Sweeney, 2004, p. 43). Living in a racially predicated world, Morrison fleshes out an Africanist other and displays how the fabrication of this persona is reflexive because of his fears, concerns, and desires. In addition, it takes hard work, according to Morrison, not to see the impact of racial essentialism on the black punishment regime, as they experience exceptionalism in all ways and enter through these punishments. The premise hinges on the observation that the incarceration of Black men and women has become a troubling fixation within American culture, necessitating a dedicated political effort to extricate this deeply ingrained practice (Sweeney, 2004, p. 45). Countering the notion that as long as American society continues to exhibit this fetish of color and race, it is inevitable that marginalized communities, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, will reciprocate when given the chance. In their hard-won earthly paradise, one might observe the fact that all their obligations, punishment, hierarchical attitude, fetish of color, and cultural norms shaped and preserved as a result of their pathetic yearning for American exceptionalist ideology. In contrast to this rigid maintenance and control, the women of Convent embrace a life as liberated as circumstances allow, inciting both anger and a sense of responsibility among Ruby's inhabitants to keep them in line. Billie Delia, one of the Ruby citizens who is marginalized for her freewheeling attitudes, describes the Convent as a place where it is possible to "think things through, with nothing or nobody bothering you all the time. They'll take care of you or leave you alone—whichever way you want it" (p. 176). That is, while Ruby's main display, the ontology of American culture, presents a historical panorama of exceptionalism, discrimination, and violence, the Convent women model the possibility of healing and redemption without sacrificing anyone. In this aspect, Ruby patriarchs are both victims and victimizers—that have the most impact—and their dual positioning, as a result of their colonized perception, point of view, and ideologies, presents what is constructed or inherited unconsciously.

Their rigid adherence to their principles—dogmatically—with the aim of preserving the great narrative of the Disallowing and reconstructing their present according to this narrative follows the realization that they align with the racial superiority of American ideology. Patricia who was among the 8-rock families but then implicitly is rejected due to her mother's light black skin, is searching about the historical archeology of Ruby to find out the unstated reason behind their denigration and exclusion. During the annual Christmas pageant, Patricia notices that, rather than Ruby's nine founding fathers, only seven families are represented on stage without any reason. The debate between Patricia and Reverend Misner summarizes the town's attitude, seems clear, towards even its own people. Even dared to articulate it, Patricia questions, "the holy families get fewer and fewer… It was skin color, wasn't it? … The way people get chosen and ranked in this town" (pp. 215-216). As Ruby's textual historiographer, Patricia realizes that skin color trumps everything in Ruby, and because of their profound racism, they are ready to isolate and exclude anyone who breaks the unstated rule. All Ruby-centered narratives in the novel indicate the underlying reasons for the Convent massacre, which is full of anger, violence, exceptionalism, and marginalization of people due to skin color. Steward Morgan, Deacon Morgan, K.D. Morgan, Sergeant Person, and Wisdom Poole are Ruby patriarchs who assault the Convent to force women to evacuate. Morrison does not offer a solitary explanation or rationale for the massacre; rather, the narrative intricacies underscore the underlying complexities of the mindset that substantiates this assertion. After killing the Convent women, all of these patriarchs created their own stories and excuses while giving details about the assault and trying to justify themselves. Among multiplying versions of the massacre and reasons, Patricia states that they assaulted the women, "(a) because they were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because they were unholy; (c) because the men could—which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and also what the "deal" required" (p. 297). In effect, this deduction can be interpreted as a justification for the elimination of some differences perceived as dangerous by Ruby patriarchs. Storace (1998) -to allow a deeper insight into Ruby's exceptionalist manner- argues that

> *Paradise* is a novel about pioneers laying claim to a country, and, less explicitly, about the ways in which profession of this country has been extended and justified through stories, stories kneaded strongly into the image of the country itself, so that the story of its claiming almost irresistibly evokes images of white founding fathers (pp. 64-65).

To Storace, it is no coincidence that Ruby's founding fathers follow the path of white American founders who create a free nation and preserve their nationhood ideology depending on their own mythical stories. Their Disallowing story, for instance, as a counternarrative of white American stories that praise white supremacy, defines the traumatic effects and posits "how these effects become transgenerational" (Read, 2005, p. 529). In Read's apt phrase "transgenerational" it is possible to understand the stories, later changed to the tales, and settle in the memories of the next generations and are commemorated on each occasion. Even this process suggests irrefutable evidence that Ruby's founding fathers pattern white American nationhood ideology, recognizing the potency of the stories they mythologized and handed down through generations as exemplars, viewing them as indispensable for the perpetuation of their sense of belonging. As a critique of Ruby's this manner, Reverend Misner unfolds that

> Over and over and with the least provocation, they pulled from their stock of stories tales about the old folks… Dangerous confrontations, clever maneuvers. Testimonies to wit, skill and strength. Tales of luck and outrage. But why were there no stories to tell about themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, passion. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by (p. 161).

This fixation, summarized by Misner, acknowledges how younger generations compulsively drawn into a self-alienated world that causes physical and mental isolation in racist mainstream culture. Through such events, Morrison represents the internalization of shame, its transformation into great anger, their isolation in the artificial paradise they have

built for themselves as a result of this anger, and the way they see themselves as different and superior to others, just like the first settlers of America. To mark the similarity between white Americans and black Ruby citizens about racial purity and superiority, Read (2005) redefines,

> Just as 19th century white male Americans reified and fetishized the combination of ‘pure white blood’ and ‘biological maleness’ as the essence of authentic manhood, these men make their ‘pure’ blackness a symbol of a racially determined ‘true,’masculinity. ‘Eight-rock’ skin becomes the most important of the external symbols through which they construct their identity; it masks their inner emptiness and defines their self-proclaimed superior masculinity (p. 534).

As in this excerpt, Ruby men idealize blackness as a racial hierarchy, taken over American exceptionalism, assign people with lighter skin as *other*, and strive to dehumanize them like the Convent women who are marginalized due to their miscegenated races and free lifestyles. The fact of miscegenation becomes intolerable for Ruby patriarchs since they are proud of their coal black skin colors and fetishize it as pure. Hence, so as to maintain their hegemony in this all-black town, they massacred and the obvious reason is articulated by Patricia, “everything that worries them must come from women” (p. 217). Therefore, the Ruby men, who had diligently preserved their racial homogeneity across three generations and took great pride in doing so, regarded the ethnocultural diversity and distinctive religious beliefs of the Convent women as a potential peril, fearing that it could introduce hybridity to their own racial heritage. At the root of all, these violent incidents served as the foundational underpinnings of the enduring specter of American exceptionalism that continued to afflict the community.

Conclusion

American exceptionalism, a significant facet of American political culture, can be delineated as an ideology rooted in historical and religious foundations, wielded to assert both local and global dominance. America, which is known to pursue expansionist policy in the international arena, claims to be in a different and privileged position from other nations based on the idea that it serves a transcendent purpose. In this context, there was a deep-seated belief that Americans constituted a chosen society, ordained by a divine mission and vested with divine authority. This ideology, in turn, precipitated the adoption of a discriminatory and patronizing stance towards societies of diverse ethnic origins. The main effort of this study is to verify the impact of the marginalizing framework inherent in American exceptionalism on individuals from various ethnic backgrounds residing in this sacred territory.

The selected novel for this study, Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, is a narrative about the changing mindsets of black people who secured their emancipation after enduring prolonged periods of enslavement. They subsequently founded their own communities, initially named Haven and subsequently rechristened as Ruby, in the rural environs of Oklahoma, with the aspiration of embracing and perpetuating their unique cultural heritage. Throughout the narrative, Morrison suggests that the town of Ruby has a male-dominated and race-based cultural structure and that anyone who does not have dark black skin is labeled as an outsider. To the residents of Ruby, anyone from an external locale or distinct ethnic background is viewed as a potential menace to the diligently constructed framework of the community. Morrison explains the reason for this attitude as the rejection of the Ruby people, the Disallowing, by other communities, and even by lighter-skinned black people, and mythologizes this incident as a motive that motivates new generations to be wary of outsiders. When examined from a micro perspective, it is seen that Ruby people constitute a microcosm of American exceptionalism and identify the reason for their hierarchical superiority in terms of race and skin color. Morrison recurrently emphasizes the concept of Disallowing, which holds significant import for the patriarchs of Ruby, throughout the narrative. This repetition

underscores the narrative's focus on the psychological ramifications of rejection and how individuals unconsciously internalized and absorbed this condition over time.

The outsider in the narrative is fictionalized as the Convent women from different ethnic, religious, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Leading up to the harrowing scene of the massacre, Morrison insinuates that the basic cause of this brutality does not primarily stem from moral or cultural differences. Instead, the underlying conflict arises from the women's mutual support and healing efforts, which challenge the established male-dominated order by undermining the notion of Ruby's inherent superiority, as they demonstrate their ability to be self-sufficient. Another important reason is that women have different skin colors. In the opening sentence of the narrative, Morrison alludes to the fixation on skin color, foreshadowing its role as one of the contributing factors to the impending massacre. Much like the concept of American exceptionalism, which rationalizes the eradication of any perceived threat to the American populace, supposedly ordained with a divine mission, the disposition for violence and the elimination of those deemed responsible is regarded as a deeply ingrained learned behavior within the subconscious of the men in Ruby.

As a result, through references drawn from the narrative, it is substantiated that the inhabitants of Ruby, who uphold the belief in their racial and color-based superiority, engage in the marginalization of those perceived as different and view the elimination of potential threats as a necessary endeavor to ensure their sustained existence. This conduct is intricately linked to the influence of American exceptionalism, and the internalization of discriminatory practices is vividly depicted in Toni Morrison's novel, *Paradise.*

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