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ÉDITORIAL

La parution de ce premier numéro de la revue *Perspectives Plurielles* marque une étape importante dans la création d'un espace scientifique ouvert, rigoureux et durable, dédié à la production et à la diffusion des savoirs en Arts, Lettres et Langues ainsi qu'en Sciences Humaines et Sociales. La revue est née du constat partagé de la nécessité de cadres éditoriaux capables d'analyser, de manière critique et pluraliste, les dynamiques sociales, culturelles, politiques et territoriales contemporaines, notamment dans les sociétés du Sud.

Dans un contexte caractérisé par la complexité croissante des phénomènes sociaux et l'entrecroisement des disciplines, *Perspectives Plurielles* ambitionne de promouvoir une démarche scientifique fondée sur la pluralité des regards, la diversité méthodologique et le dialogue interdisciplinaire. Elle entend ainsi valoriser des travaux originaux qui interrogent les transformations du monde social, en accordant une attention particulière aux ancrages empiriques, aux cadres théoriques mobilisés et à la rigueur des démarches méthodologiques.

Ce numéro inaugural illustre pleinement cette orientation. Les contributions réunies abordent des thématiques variées, allant des enjeux de gestion territoriale et environnementale aux questions de pédagogie, de condition physique et de pouvoir, en passant par l'analyse critique d'œuvres littéraires et des pratiques sociales. Cette diversité témoigne à la fois de la richesse des champs couverts par les sciences humaines et sociales et de la pertinence des approches croisées pour comprendre les réalités contemporaines.

Le comité de rédaction exprime sa profonde gratitude à l'ensemble des auteurs, évaluateurs et partenaires institutionnels dont l'engagement et le professionnalisme ont permis la concrétisation de ce projet éditorial. Nous espérons que *Perspectives Plurielles* s'affirmera, au fil des numéros, comme un lieu de référence pour la réflexion scientifique, un espace de confrontation d'idées et un vecteur de visibilité pour les recherches menées en Afrique et ailleurs.

Bonne lecture.

Le Comité de rédaction

COMITÉ DE RÉDACTION

Sommaire

Arts, Lettres et Langues

SORO Doforo Emmanuel

1. Experiencia personal en la narrativa: caso de *Don Quijote De La Mancha* de Miguel De Cervantes Y *El Zorro De Arriba Y El Zorro* De Abajo de José María Arguedas 2-12

Mouhamadou Moustapha SOW

2. Analyse comparée des techniques narratives dans *Isabella Von Ägypten* d'Achim Von Arnim et *Un Trou Dans Le Miroir* d'Ibrahima Sèye..... 13-31

Abdoulaye SÉRÉ et Cyriaque Yi Sur Pwen BADOMA

3. L'ethos discursif composite des chefs d'États de l'Alliance des États du Sahel au premier sommet..... 32-46

MAHAMADOU Diouf et Saliou Mbaye

4. Auslautverhärtung im Wolof und im Deutschen: eine sprachübergreifende Analyse..... 47-67

Diome FAYE

5. Resilience and Survival in The Saints of Swallow Hill (2022) by Donna Everhart..... 68-78

SORO Dolourou

6. Sectarian Ideologies on Trial in Toni Morrison's Paradise..... 79-90

Sciences Humaines et Sociales

Coômlan Charles HOUNTON

7. Conception d'un SIG pour l'identification d'un site de gestion des déchets ménagers de la commune de Parakou..... 92-103

Adam Messie AHOUO, Siaka COULIBALY, Kouadio Raymond N'GUESSAN et Cheick Habib SANOGO

8. Renforcement musculaire et capacité physique de personnes âgées de 50 à 90 ans au centre de conditionnement physique Marcory-INJS 104-114

Ablakpa Jacob AGOBE et ZRIGA Krepka Dorcas Junior

9. Territorialisation disciplinaire et production de l'espace étatique : les mutations-sanctions dans la fonction publique ivoirienne comme dispositifs de pouvoir..... 115-128

Christian Michel LATH, Henri Joël Abazé BEDA, Esaïe Sanga COULIBALY

10. Conditions pédoclimatiques et rendements cotonniers dans la sous-préfecture de Tafiré (Centre-nord de la Côte d'Ivoire)..... 129-144

LANDJERGUE Bahan et MOUTORE Yentougle

11. Lutte hégémonique autour des zones forestières dans la Préfecture de Kpendjal (Togo) entre les forces de défenses et les groupes armées terroristes 145-156

Domèbèimwin Vivien SOMDA

12. Les religions et le défi de réconciliation en Afrique : une réflexion à partir du Christianisme 157-177

N'GORAN Kouamé Fulgence

13. Résilience des acteurs touristiques face à l'érosion côtière : vers une gouvernance coordonnée du littoral dans le village d'Assouindé (Sud-est de la Côte d'Ivoire) 178-192

GUIHINI Mahamat Issaka, Moussa KABA et Mohamed Lamine NDAO

14. Analyse spatio-temporelle des dynamiques de restauration écologique dans la commune de Téssékéré, Nord Ferlo (2002-2024) à l'aide des outils de la télédétection 193-207

Affoua Marie Ange Espérance KOUMAN et al.

15. Vie religieuse et construction identitaire chez des étudiants issus de couples islamo-chrétiens à Daloa 208-219

Abdourahmane Mbade SENE et Pierre Mbar FAYE

16. Conflits fonciers et reconfiguration territoriale : l'agrobusiness comme facteur de rupture et de recomposition dans les communautés rurales sénégalaises (Cas de Ndiaganiao)..... 220-234

Alioune Badara GUEYE

17. Exode informationnel, refuge numérique et régulation attentionnelle sur les réseaux sociaux : dynamiques culturelles des usages numériques chez les adultes sénégalais 235-252

Moctar Paré et Paul Kabré

18. Intégration de la culture dans les stratégies de prévention des conflits et de l'extrémisme violent 253-269

Lucien ZAONGO

19. L'influence de la formation professionnelle continue et des moyens disponibles dans la mise en œuvre de la méthode APC dans l'enseignement secondaire au Burkina Faso..... 270-282

Arsène KADJO et Yeboua Denis KOUADIO

20. Stigmatisation familiale et expérience scolaire des minorités de genre à Agboville (Côte d'Ivoire)..... 283-293

Yéo SIBIRI

21. Innovations technologiques et communicationnelles et changement des pratiques de sécurisation face au vol des motocyclettes à Bouaké 294-308

YEBOUE Affoue Bénédicte

22. La composition musicale et le statut d'artiste à partir de Theodor Adorno 309-321

KONÉ Alimata, TOURÉ Adama et BALLÉ Ségbé Guy Romaric

23. Production légumière et insécurité sanitaire dans la sous-préfecture d'Odienné (Côte d'Ivoire) 322-335

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SECTARIAN IDEOLOGIES ON TRIAL IN TONI MORRISON'S *PARADISE*

LES IDÉOLOGIES SECTAIRES À L'ÉPREUVE DANS *PARADISE* DE TONI MORRISON

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Abstract: This article analyzes Toni Morrison's *Paradise* as a cautionary tale against sectarianism. It highlights the foundations of sectarian thinking and the inevitable risks such mentalities pose to the communities that harbor them. By examining the old Black men's plan to create Ruby, an all-Black town, the analysis reveals how sectarian ideologies ultimately lead to categorization and extremes. Leaning on postcolonial concepts such as "otherness" and "colonialist psychology", on feminist criticism and on psychoanalysis, the article demonstrates that sectarianism, which is actually a utopian project, feeds on a community's will to barricade its members within the confines of racial, patriarchal, religious and historical boundaries. And consequently, such beliefs lead incontrovertibly to violence, repression, intolerance, exclusion, psychological crisis and statelessness.

Keywords*: sectarianism, myth of purity, orthodoxy, repression, exclusion, statelessness, alienation.*

Résumé : Cet article analyse *Paradise* de Toni Morrison comme une mise en garde contre le sectarisme. Il met en lumière les fondements de la pensée sectaire et les risques inévitables que de telles mentalités font courir dans les communautés qui les abritent. En examinant le projet des vieux Noirs de créer Ruby, une ville entièrement noire, l'analyse révèle comment les idéologies sectaires mènent finalement à la catégorisation et aux extrêmes. S'appuyant sur des concepts postcoloniaux tels que « l'altérité » et la « psychologie colonialiste », sur la critique féministe et sur la psychanalyse (pour aborder le traumatisme de l'intolérance et de la violence ainsi que celui de l'aliénation), l'article démontre que le sectarisme, qui est en réalité un projet utopique, se nourrit de la volonté d'une communauté de barricader ses membres dans des frontières raciales, patriarcales, religieuses et historiques. Et logiquement, de telles croyances conduisent inévitablement à la violence, à la répression, à l'intolérance, à l'exclusion, aux crises psychologiques et à l'apatridie.

Mots-clés : *sectarisme, mythe de la pureté, orthodoxie, répression, exclusion, apatridie, aliénation.*

Introduction

Paradise (1997), the final novel in Toni Morrison's celebrated trilogy following *Beloved* and *Jazz*, is mostly appraised for its insightful exploration of themes of race, community and female identity. Morrison's marked feminist posture causes most of her reviewers and critics to focus on the intricacies of female identity and the endeavors of feminist emancipation. If *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *The Bluest Eyes* and *Beloved* feature female characters who show acceptance and resilience in the face of patriarchal oppression, *Paradise* enacts rebellious and strong women who attempt to overthrow the patriarchal hierarchies, rejecting ethical rigidity. Highlighting the resilience and submissiveness of the first category, Bell Hooks states that, in *The Bluest Eyes* and *Beloved,* the female slaves "lived in constant awareness of their sexual vulnerability and in perpetual fear that any male, white or black, might single them out to assault and victimize" (B. Hooks, 1982, p.24). Parvin Ghasemi, on the other hand, emphasizes the strength of the second category as he contends: "the Convent women have managed to get secure from this fear and worry." (P. Ghasemi & Z. Torabi, 2015, p. 124).

Actually, *Paradise* functions as a cautionary tale against sectarian ideologies. Literally understood as an inflexible adherence to a particular sect, sectarianism can also be looked upon as the propensity of a community to strictly adhere a set of doctrines, dogmas and ideologies in order to build an absolutist and reductionist identity that is intolerant of other views. In this perspective, sectarianism is very closely related to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism" (L. Donna and G. Maclean, *The Spivak Reader*, 1996, p. 204) which she considers as a tactical and temporary political strategy in which the marginalized group deliberately presents a simplified and unified identity in order to achieve specific political goals. In the same way, Morrison has woven a story that denounces the attempts to live in identity absolutisms. Set in the all-Black town of Ruby, Oklahoma, the novel intricately explores how sectarian thinking – one that rigidly defines in-groups and out-groups based on perceived moral, spiritual, or racial purity – serve both as tools of cohesion and mechanisms of violence. Ruby was founded as a refuge from White oppression and a sanctuary for essentialist ideologies. But, Morrison warns that the pursuit of such ideological and genealogical purity often becomes a source of internal fragmentation and brutality, culminating in the community's violent deflagration, as shown by the Convent's destruction.

This article examines how *Paradise* exposes the dynamics of sectarian thinking within marginalized communities, particularly through its portrayal of patriarchal authority, religious orthodoxy, and historical myth-making. Drawing on postcolonial theory, feminism, and psychoanalysis, the study analyzes the ways Morrison dismantles idealized notions of unity and belonging. By placing sectarian ideologies under scrutiny, Morrison reveals how exclusionary practices within

oppressed groups can mirror the same systems of dominance they were originally created to resist.

Articulated in two sections, the study first throws light on the roots of sectarianism in Ruby, specifying that such ideologies are upheld by the community's motivation to achieve racial purity that requires conformity to tradition as well as to religious and historical orthodoxy within rigid boundaries. Then, it lays bare the dangers of sectarian practices, that is, repression, exclusion, intolerance, (self)-destruction, psychological distress and statelessness.

1 – The Roots of Sectarianism

In *Paradise*, sectarianism refers to the inflexible and often exclusionary divisions within a community, divisions which occur through its members' conformity to ideological absolutism and also because of their quest for purity and untainted identity – whether religious, racial, moral, or social. In the novel, Morrison explores how a community's need for homogeneity and control can lead to violent rejection of difference, especially when individuals or groups are considered to be a threat to that cohesion. Specifically, the novel shows that sectarian communities are built upon ideals of racial purity and tradition as well as on the will to erect rigid boundaries.

1 – 1 *The Belief in Rigid Boundaries.*

In *Paradise*, Morrison interrogates the destructive consequences of a community's reliance on rigid boundaries to define identity, morality, and belonging. The novel opens with a stark declaration, "They shoot the white girl first" (p. 3), which immediately imbues the narrative with an undertone of racism, communalism and exclusion. This deliberate announcement sets the stage for Morrison's deeper critique of boundary-making as a tool of control and exclusion. The town elders pride themselves on their "8-rock" bloodline, a term denoting racial purity that elevates them above other black communities, thus setting boundaries. By establishing classes based on the color of the skin, the leaders of Ruby sort of draw a color line between different categories of inhabitants. This recalls Harold Cruse's notion of "domestic colony" (H. Cruse, 1968, p.5) by which he highlighted African Americans' condition in the United States. Unlike all the other colonized people who needed geographical boundaries to determine their colony, he contends, "the Negroes' natural boundaries are the color of his skin" (H. Cruse, 1968, p.5) This racial essentialism operates as what Judith Butler terms a "boundary-producing discourse" (J. Butler, 1993, p2) wherein identity is defined through exclusion, and the other is regarded as an outsider. Curiously, the town of Ruby, founded by descendants of freedmen who once experienced exclusion, and who vowed to establish an egalitarian community, becomes a microcosm of

categorizations and marginalization. It is now a community in which some define themselves in opposition to others because of their light skins.

The struggle around the Oven, a literal and symbolic structure at the heart of Ruby, exemplifies another fixation on boundary-drawing. Originally a communal artifact, the Oven becomes a site of generational conflict when its meaning and ownership are contested. Older residents insist on preserving the original inscription – "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" – as a warning against divine wrath and a signal of moral absolutism. Younger residents, on the other hand, advocate for a reinterpretation – "Be the Furrow of His Brow" – suggesting a more progressive, agentic relationship to faith and justice. This conflict over interpretation demonstrates that there are two blocks: that of the elders with their conservative views and that of the youths who are rather modernist and progressivist. All this underscores the sectarian logic of Ruby where the inhabitants live in concentric circles

The men in Ruby also enforce social and racial boundaries through exclusionary practices. The town's founding myth, which celebrates its 8-rock lineage, lays bare a penchant that equates virtue with genealogical purity. In this context, blackness is not a unifying identity but a stratified and regulated category. The Convent women – outsiders and eclectic in their backgrounds – become targets of violence precisely because they refuse the exclusionist logic upon which Ruby's moral order depends. They are perceived as threats not simply because of their alleged immorality, but because their very existence destabilizes the town's illusion of ideological and cultural coherence.

As a result, it can be said that Toni Morrison constructs a narrative architecture in which the enforcement of rigid boundaries – be they physical, ideological, racial, or spiritual – manifests as a central mechanism of sectarianism. Morrison thus presents sectarianism not as a byproduct of religious zealotry alone, but as a broader sociocultural phenomenon grounded in fear of contamination and loss of control. Rigid boundaries, whether drawn around belief systems, bodies, or histories, become tools for enforcing a narrow vision of communal survival. Yet *Paradise* also gestures toward the cost of such rigidity: the erosion of empathy, the silencing of dissent, and the eventual collapse of the very structures intended to protect the community.

In foregrounding these dynamics, Morrison critiques the seductive logic of purity and the violence it necessitates. She compels readers to consider how boundaries, when mistaken for moral imperatives, can become instruments of exclusion more devastating than external threats they purport to guard against.

1 – 2 *The Myth of Purity*

One form of Ruby's sectarian posture is unveiled through its myth of racial purity. Ruby is established as a utopian space, a refuge from the racism and rejection its founders experienced. However, its founding principles evolve into a rigid

doctrine that privileges bloodline, history and "uncontaminated" blackness. The town's motto – "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" – serves as both warning and a code of orthodoxy. Ruby's leaders, especially the old men, believe in maintaining racial purity as a moral imperative. Those with lighter skin or ambiguous ancestry are seen as threats to communal integrity.

The citizens of Ruby pride themselves on their dark skin and "untainted" bloodline. This leads to a form of Black sectarianism, where they exclude lighter-skinned or and those who do not share their history. In the novel, one of the most evident icon of the myth of purity is Save-Marie Morgan, the daughter of Deacon and Soane Morgan. She is idealized by the community of Ruby as a symbol of innocence, holiness and racial purity. Although she has died young, she is celebrated as a model of racial and genealogical cleanliness, as a figure whose values equate with Ruby's older generation's obsession to maintain the 8-rock standard, a notion of unmixed, perfect black ancestry. Clearly, her early death has preserved her from the moral sins that might have stained her reputation. Unlike Save-Marie, Gigi, Mavis, Seneca, and Patricia Best are viewed as moral foils to Ruby's expectations because of either their past (Mavis) or their mixed heritage (Patricia Best). This is a clear form of intolerance that mirrors the kind of racism they once fled.

This excessive quest for purity is a direct expression of sectarianism, a worldview that divides the world into insiders and outsiders, worthy and unworthy, often also caused by the community leaders' propensity to impose dogmatic traditional and religious perspectives to its citizens.

1 – 3 *Tradition, Religion, Morality and Sectarianism.*

In *Paradise*, Toni Morrison successfully shows that sectarianism can be disguised as tradition, religion, and moral righteousness. Rather than presenting outright bigotry or overt extremism, Morrison reveals how the most insidious forms of division and violence often stem from beliefs that are culturally sanctioned, historically justified, and spiritually cloaked. In Ruby, these forces combine to form a powerful social orthodoxy that defines community boundaries – and punishes those who transgress them.

Obviously, tradition operates as an instrument of exclusion in the novel. Ruby is a town founded on the memory of trauma and rejection. The original families, which are descendants of freed slaves who were shunned by lighter-skinned Black communities, forge a new town in the name of self-preservation and purity. Over time, this origin story becomes mythologized into sacred tradition. This is seen through the town founders' attitude which consists in clinging to rigid customs and hierarchies, which are framed not just as cultural necessities, but as essential to survival. These traditions take a form of dogmas, creating a culture where conformity equals virtue, and difference is equated with danger. The conflict over the Oven is an illustration of how questioning tradition can cause one's rejection.

The most committed youths are seen by elders as a threat to the future of the community. This conflict underscores what Stuart Hall calls the "the struggle over meaning" (S. Hall, 1997, p. 8), where cultural symbols become arenas for contrasting visions of identity and authority. The elders' refusal to allow alternate readings of the Oven's inscriptions reflects a profound sectarian impulse to keep a fixed meaning, to resist the polyvocality that threatens communal cohesion. In a nutshell, sectarianism is camouflaged as loyalty to history. For the elders of Ruby, to dare question the traditions of Ruby is offense and ingratitude towards the suffering of the ancestors, a strategy that is used to shut down dissent and legitimize authoritarian control.

Like tradition, religion is also used as a channel for sectarian feelings. Religion in *Paradise* is omnipresent but deeply tarnished by patriarchal and doctrinal inflexibility. Instead of the standard church practices that abide by dogmas, religion is depicted by Morrison as a power shaped by those in control, especially the town's male elders. Consequently, those elders conflate Christian principles with moral surveillance, using religious rationalization to monitor behavior, especially that of women. And that is partially why the Convent women, whose religious practice and spiritual expression, are outside Ruby's customs, are viewed as blasphemous or even demonic. In this way, religion becomes sectarian, not spiritual for it no longer offers grace or community, but rather draws hard lines between "us" and "them", the saved and the damned. This echoes Edward Said's argument about sectarian identities. As he argues, they often thrive on "the authority of exclusion," producing solidarity through the demonization of the outside. (E. W. Said, 1978, p. 40) In Ruby, this logic culminates in violence, as the men annihilate what they cannot control (the women at the Convent) with the pretense of communal preservation.

Perhaps, the most chilling aspect of sectarianism in *Paradise* is how morality becomes a means of stratification. Actually, it is a way for the town's leaders to assert dominance while presenting themselves as righteous. The patriarchs of Ruby, especially figures like Steward and Deek Morgan, position themselves as moral guardians, despite the fact that their acts betray profound cruelty. The men's sense of moral duty takes the shape of moral absolutism that erects along rigid demarcation lines. This moral framework is not flexible; rather, it functions to protect power and silence critique.

What *Paradise* provides as grounds for exclusion, especially racial (color skin) exclusion, is summarized through Stuart Hall's explanation in his work entitled "The Spectacle of the Other" as follows:

> People who are in any way significantly different from the majority – "them" rather than "us" – are frequently exposed to this *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good / bad, civilized / primitive, ugly / excessively attractive, repelling-because-different / compelling-because-strange-and-exotic (S. Hall, 1997, p. 229).

Stuart Hall's words provide a foundation to understand the rationale behind the categorizations that unfailingly set in motion sectarianism. Religion, tradition and morality often provide the scales to gauge people and establish distinctions between insiders and outsiders. All these antisocial attitudes and ideologies do indeed unfortunately pose serious risks to society, which ultimately has to face the unexpected effects.

2 – The Harms of Sectarian Ideologies

Perhaps, Toni Morrison's key message in *Paradise* is to highlight the dangers of building sectarian communities. From repression and violence to nihilism via exclusion and intolerance, Morrison is unambiguous about the pessimistic outcome of such ideologies.

2 – 1 *Repression and Violence*

Paradise clearly connects sectarianism to violence and repression. The novel shows that violent practices that stem from bigotry are permanent and inescapable. The most harrowing example is the violence enacted upon the women living in the Convent. These women – outsiders who have found refuge and healing together – represent diversity, spiritual fluidity, and personal freedom. Having opted for a lifestyle that is not governed by the rigid codes of Ruby, they become the target of the town's collective anxieties and plans of destruction. Derrida acknowledges that between binary oppositions like Us/Them, "we are not dealing with…peaceful coexistence, but rather with violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs…the other or has the upper hand." (J. Derrida, 1972, p. 41)

Actually, this raid on the Convent, led by a group of Ruby's men, is a literal and symbolic act of violence driven by the town's need to police its ideological and moral borders. The women are perceived as a threat not because of any harm they cause, but because their very existence challenges Ruby's social order. The Convent is perceived as a counter-model to Ruby's sectarianism, because of its fluidity and openness. The space of the Convent is what Bell Hooks calls a "location of radical openness and possibility" (B. Hooks, 1990, p 23), that is a place where there are no restrictions. The community's belief in its own exceptional racial and moral purity requires constant policing, and because this ideal is impossible to sustain peacefully, the work of maintaining it inevitably takes violent forms. Each act of violence in *Paradise*, whether domestic or communal, reveals how deeply the town's identity depends on the capacity to exclude, punish and control.

In *Paradise*, violence does not merely erupt sporadically. It is instead the structural language through which Ruby enforces its founding myth of purity and order. It becomes the tool by which the men sustain their obsession with genealogical 8-rock purity. A few cases attest to the permanence of violence in Ruby. The assault of Arnette by K.D. followed by the nine men's attack on the

Convent which results in the massacre of the women living there. Several of these violent episodes highlight Ruby's intent to purify itself by discarding anything that does not fit in its self-image.

Another effect of sectarian thought and practice is repression within the community. Beyond outward violence, sectarianism in *Paradise* manifests as internal repression. The town enforces conformity through social surveillance, silencing dissent and maintaining strict gender roles. Women in Ruby are expected to be subservient, and younger generations who question the town values find themselves alienated. This repression extends to spiritual and emotional life as well. Ruby's church leadership enforces a religious orthodoxy that leaves no room for alternative forms of worship or belief.

2 – 2 ***Intolerance and Exclusion***

Two of the key threats of sectarian thought that Morrison underscores in his novel are intolerance and exclusion. Intolerance, as she suggests, appears in three paradigms: gendered, religious and moral, and racial intolerance.

Intolerance on a gender basis, which appears as an offshoot of patriarchal thinking, has taken shape with the Convent women. They reject the rigid gender roles and moral codes upheld in Ruby. Instead, they have clearly opted for autonomy, therefore representing nonconformity. The women's choice to live outside male control is sensed as an intolerable menace because for the men of Ruby, especially the town's patriarchs, this independence is seen as subversive and dangerous. Actually, the Convent, which authorizes the emergence of female solidarity, thus becoming a symbolic space for female empowerment, is seen as a threat to Ruby's patriarchal and religious codes. From the sectarian posture of Ruby's men, this deportment is unacceptable and is reason enough to lead a raid on that space. The mass killing of the women is an extreme act of sectarian cleansing disguised as moral righteousness.

Beside the gender-based intolerance, there is also a religious and moral one. Ruby's ideology is deeply shaped by a rigid, self-righteous interpretation of Christianity. Consequently, the men justify their intolerance, violence, and exclusion in conformity to the religious principles of the community. The town leaders see themselves as moral guardians. They perceive the Convent women as witches or sinners, framing their own actions as divinely sanctioned. Appearing as a secular sanctuary, the Convent offers a more syncretic, open space with some degree of spirituality that eschews dogmatism. This contrast creates a theological and moral tension that fuels Ruby's intolerance. This illustrates how sectarian ideologies often use religion to justify violence and exclusion.

Accounting for most of Ruby's unrest is the uncompromising racial issue. Indeed, the novel does emphasize many racially-based rejections even though this intolerance is not the usual Black-White racial one typical of much African American literature. Instead, Morrison displays intra-Black racial intolerance,

rooted in colorism, genealogy and the myth of purity. The community of Ruby defines its core identity as 8-rock blackness, that is, the families whose lineage is entirely light-skinned and unmixed. Therefore, lighter-skinned black people, mixed race people, and those without the 'correct' ancestry are merely rejected.

2 – 3 ***Fragmented Communities***

Morrison attempts to demonstrate that the communities where people practice exclusion, erect barriers and use repression and brutality as a means of governance often ultimately disintegrate. Chaos prevails over cohesion and order. By emphasizing Ruby's chaotic ending, the author forcefully argues that sectarianism is not a viable option for any given community.

In fact, Toni Morrison's novel unveils diverse fractures the first of which is the generational divides between elders and youth. Elders are conservatists who struggle to ensure that the community follows the paths of the ancestors. But they find it difficult to submit the youths who look for other perspectives. And the more the elders try to enforce their world views, the wider the gap becomes.

There is equally a gender-based fracture that results from the elders' will to police women's life. Whether it is the women at the Covent or those in Ruby, patriarchal thinking relegates them to an inferior position. Many of these women feel both psychologically and socially trapped within the confines of patriarchy. It is that distress which accounts for the absconding of some women like Mavis, Seneca and Gigi. Even most of the women who have chosen to remain in Ruby feel destroyed from within.

The worst fractures are also often psychological, as evidenced by the frustrations experienced by a category of Ruby's citizens. The case in point is Patricia Best. She is one victim of that nonsensical adventure. Although her maternal ancestry connects her to the town's founders, she was never fully adopted by Ruby's elite families because of her father's light skin and because he is considered to be from less 'pure' line. She becomes a symbol of impurity and her ancestral legitimacy is erased (as shown by her investigations) even though she has deeper roots and a more valuable contribution to the community's welfare than many others. This groundless racialized rejection makes Pat feel alienated from the town she should, by heritage, belong to.

Racially excluded, socially sidelined and emotionally trivialized, Pat's character exemplifies the tragic figure in bigoted communities, who, despite shared blood and history, are made to feel like outsiders in their own homes.

Another fracture concerns class and ideological tensions. Through *Paradise*, Morrison critiques the dangers of insularity and ideological absolutism in any community, even those forged in the name of resistance. The novel resists simplistic barriers of good and evil; instead, it explores how the desire for safety can morph into exclusion, and how the pursuit of purity can turn violent. Sectarianism, she

suggests, may begin as means of survival but can end in destruction if it demands rigid uniformity and rejects compassion, plurarity and change.

2 – 4 ***Ostracism, Statelessness and Alienation***

Perhaps the most profound consequence of sectarianism in *Paradise* is statelessness, both literal and symbolic. Ruby was founded by people who were once stateless, descendants of freed slaves denied space in other black communities because of their dark skin. Ironically, in establishing Ruby as a pure refuge, they recreate the same exclusionary structures they fled, now excluding those who do not fit in their ideals and thus turning them into stateless individuals. Beyond the Convent women whose statelessness is patent, some families become so because their history and skin color does not match Ruby's framework. The threat of statelessness is actually laid bare by Patricia's history project, a sort of inquiry on the families' history: "a collection of family trees; the genealogies of each of the fifteen families." (p. 187)

What she finds out is astounding because there is a stern categorization project underway:

> There were nine large intact families who made the original journey, who were thrown out and cast away in Fairly, Oklahoma, and went to found Haven. Their names were legend: Blackhorse, Morgan, Poole, Fleetwood, Beauchamp, Cato, Flood and both DuPres families. (…) Along with them came fragments of other families. With their siblings, wives and children, they were seventy-nine or eighty-one in all (depending on whether the two stolen children were counted (p. 188).

So Patricia's investigation through the town's oral records reveals the subtle classification that was underway. Through the talks indeed (since formal written records are not available), she understands that the families are ranked in proportion to their degree of darkness. Thus, the nine families are stamped 8-R, "an abbreviation for eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really thought of those who weren't 8-rock like them." (p.193) This is a clue for Patricia to understand why she has been undergoing so many trials. She is fair-skinned, which is a result of her odd family lineage. Her father, Roger Best, married Delia, a light-skinned woman from Demby, not an 8-rock. Roger Best, who is not from one the eight-rock founding families, logically undergoes marginalization that goes so far as to involve his offspring and his economic activities. This exclusion is what drives Patricia to compile her secret genealogical notebooks, trying to understand and document the social logic of the town.

To recapitulate it, her sense of belonging is deeply flouted by the sectarian standards of the community, especially its rigid views on race, lineage, and gender. As a woman of mixed heritage, Patricia finds herself caught between identities,

never fully accepted by the community she belongs to by blood, nor by the outsiders she might identify with emotionally or intellectually.

In the novel, the theme of statelessness not only appears in the legal or national sense, (that is, not being a citizen of any country or having no nationality), but also symbolically, standing for social exclusion, lack of belonging, and disconnection from identity, history or place. Morrison discusses statelessness as a tragic outcome of sectarian logic by displaying a number of characters' failures to integrate the mainstream community of Ruby.

One patent case of statelessness is shown through Consolata. She is both literally and figuratively stateless. She is a displaced immigrant from Portugal, taken from her home as a child by a nun, Mary Magna; a fact that removes her from her homeland, culture and identity. As she permanently establishes in the Convent, she becomes definitely disconnected from both her origins and the Ruby community. Consolata's autarchic lifestyle eventually turns her into an individual that is alienated from any structured society and any organized religion.

The women at the Convent are quintessentially "stateless": they have no fixed place in society, no communal ties, and no familial support. Sectarian ideologies, contrary to its ideal of community life, are rather exclusionary because they function on too rigid principles.

Pallas Truelove is perhaps the most literal representation of statelessness among the Convent women. She loses every form of social, familial, emotional and cultural base that would anchor her to a stable identity. When her mother betrays her by having an affair with Trey, her boyfriend, she cannot take it and quarrels with her mother. She is then expelled from her family and becomes unhomed, having no family structure to return to.

Conclusion

This study offers to understand how sectarianism operates in a community on the one hand, and how it can be harmful and despicable, on the other hand. As a matter of fact, sectarianism, a feeling grounded in pride, fear and purity, often takes shape out of the community members' will to set rigid geographical and historical boundaries that demarcate insiders from outsiders. Sectarian attitudes are also often the result of individuals believing in their racial or ethnical purity; their moral, religious and traditional superiority. Such feelings, once in place, unfailingly pave the way for intolerance, violence, the erosion of communities, statelessness and ultimately communal disintegration. In other words, Morrison's work allows the reader to understand that sectarian feelings grow from the impulse to erect uncompromising racial, moral, traditional and religious walls, which ineluctably set in motion a chain of disruptive deportments, repression and fragmentation. In doing so, *Paradise* offers a powerful meditation on the dangers of ideological absolutism and the necessity of pluralism in reimagining community.

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