



Destruction From Within: Exploring Internalised and Intra-Racial Racism in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Tarbaby* and *A Mercy*

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Abstract:

This abstract examines internalised and intra-racial racism in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy* as internal destructive forces, focusing on how racial hierarchies are absorbed, reproduced, and contested within Black and marginalised communities. Across these novels, Morrison reveals that racism operates not only as an external system of oppression but also as a psychological and cultural force that shapes self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and communal belonging. Characters frequently measure worth through proximity to whiteness, economic power, or dominant cultural norms, resulting in fractured identities and conflicted relationships. In *Song of Solomon*, internalised racism manifests through class elitism, colorism, and gendered expectations, particularly in the Dead family's pursuit of respectability, which alienates them from communal and ancestral roots. *Tar Baby* foregrounds ideological conflict within the Black diaspora, dramatising tensions between assimilation and cultural resistance through opposing conceptions of identity, beauty, and progress. *A Mercy* extends this inquiry to the early colonial period, illustrating how racial categories and hierarchies are being formed and internalised even before they are fully codified, fostering division among enslaved and marginalised individuals. Collectively, these texts demonstrate how intra-racial conflict sustains broader systems of domination by redirecting violence inward. Morrison critiques the ways internalised racism erodes solidarity while also emphasising moments of resistance, remembrance, and relational repair. By exposing the intimate consequences of racial ideology, Morrison calls for a reimagining of identity rooted in historical consciousness, mutual recognition, and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Internalised, Intraracial, Racism, Song of Solomon, Tarbaby, A Mercy, Toni Morrison.

Review Article

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INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison stands as one of the most influential voices in American literature, renowned for her profound exploration of African American history, identity, and psychological experience. Across her body of fiction, Morrison interrogates not only the external forces of racial oppression imposed by a white supremacist society but also the more insidious forms of destruction that emerge within Black communities themselves. Among these internal forces, internalised and

intraracial racism occupy a central place, functioning as mechanisms through which systemic racism perpetuates itself from within. Morrison's narratives repeatedly reveal how the absorption of racist ideologies and the reproduction of racial hierarchies among African Americans lead to fragmentation, self-alienation, and personal and communal devastation. This phenomenon may be understood as a form of "destruction from within," wherein characters are psychologically and socially undone by beliefs

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that deny their own worth and humanity. Despite extensive critical attention to Toni Morrison's exploration of race and oppression, the internal dimensions of racism, particularly internalised and intraracial racism, remain comparatively underexamined in literary scholarship. Much existing criticism foregrounds racism as an external force enacted by dominant white structures, often overlooking how these structures infiltrate Black consciousness and relationships, producing psychological fragmentation and communal tension.

The primary objective of this paper is to study Internalised and Intra-racial racism in the abovementioned text as interwoven concepts pervasive in Morrison's works to demonstrate the destruction of blacks by black people. This study hypothesises that Toni Morrison deliberately represents internalised and intraracial racism as mechanisms of "destruction from within" to reveal the psychological consequences of systemic racism and to critique its endurance across generations. It proposes that Morrison's characters internalise dominant racial values, leading to self-alienation, intracommunity conflict, and the erosion of collective identity. Furthermore, the study assumes that by exposing these internal conflicts, Morrison not only diagnoses the damage inflicted by racism but also gestures toward the necessity of self-awareness and cultural reclamation as pathways to individual and communal healing.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of racism as both a structural and internalised phenomenon. By focusing on intraracial conflict, the research highlights Morrison's challenge to simplified narratives of racial oppression and resistance. This approach enriches African American literary criticism by emphasizing the role of self-perception, memory, and internal conflict in sustaining racial inequality. Furthermore, the study has contemporary relevance, as issues of colorism, class division, and identity fragmentation continue to affect marginalised communities. Ultimately, examining Morrison's portrayal of internalised racism underscores the necessity of

self-awareness and communal healing as essential steps toward genuine liberation.

Methodology and Theoretical Approach

This study employs a qualitative literary methodology grounded in African American criticism to examine internalised and intraracial racism in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy*. Central to this approach is close textual analysis, through which characters, narrative structures, symbolism, and language are carefully examined to reveal how racist ideologies are internalised and reproduced within Black communities. Emphasis is placed on moments of psychological conflict, intraracial tension, and cultural alienation that illustrate Morrison's critique of internalised oppression.

The analysis is informed by key concepts in African American critical thought, particularly W. E. B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness, Frantz Fanon's insights on internalised colonialism, and Black feminist criticism as articulated by scholars such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. These frameworks enable an intersectional reading of race, class, gender, and colorism in Morrison's fiction. The study also engages Morrison's own critical perspectives on Black identity, history, and storytelling as articulated in her essays and interviews.

A comparative and historical approach is adopted to trace the evolution of internalised racism across different temporal settings, from the proto-racial formations in *A Mercy* to the modern intraracial conflicts in *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. By situating the texts within African American literary traditions and cultural memory, this methodology foregrounds Morrison's role in challenging dominant racial narratives and illuminating the internal dimensions of racial oppression. Internalised and Intraracial racism are important critical concepts under African American Criticism, as illustrated in Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today*. African American criticism, as explained by Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today*, provides a vital theoretical framework for examining the representation of race, identity, and power in African American literature. Tyson emphasises

that this critical approach centres Black experiences while interrogating the cultural, historical, and ideological forces that shape those experiences. Rather than treating race as a peripheral concern, African American criticism foregrounds it as a central organising principle in both literary texts and social life. Tyson explains that this approach examines how racism operates not only through overt oppression but also through internalised beliefs, cultural norms, and aesthetic standards that privilege whiteness and marginalise Blackness. As such, African American criticism is particularly attentive to issues of self-definition, double consciousness, colorism, and intraracial conflict. Tyson further notes that African American criticism challenges Eurocentric literary standards that have historically excluded or misrepresented Black voices. It seeks to reclaim African American cultural traditions, language, and communal values as legitimate and powerful modes of expression (363). This perspective is crucial for analysing works like Toni Morrison's, which deliberately resist dominant narratives and employ African American oral traditions, folklore, and collective memory. Moreover, African American criticism examines how historical realities such as slavery, segregation, and systemic racism leave enduring psychological and cultural traces on individuals and communities.

Internalised racism occurs when individuals from racially marginalised groups absorb and accept negative beliefs, stereotypes, or values about their own racial identity. These beliefs often originate in dominant social narratives that associate whiteness with superiority and non-whiteness with deficiency. Internalised racism manifests psychologically through diminished self-worth, self-policing, and the desire to approximate dominant cultural norms in appearance, language, or behaviour. For example, an individual may devalue their own physical features, cultural practices, or community in favor of traits aligned with dominant racial standards. This internalisation can also influence aspirations and relationships, leading individuals to measure success and respectability through frameworks that implicitly reject their own racial heritage (383).

Intra-racial racism, by contrast, refers to discriminatory attitudes, behaviors, or hierarchies enacted within the same racial group. While it often draws on internalised racist beliefs, intra-racial racism operates at the interpersonal and communal level. It includes practices such as colorism, class-based exclusion, and the policing of "acceptable" ways of being within a racial group. For instance, privileging lighter skin over darker skin, valuing wealth and proximity to dominant institutions over communal solidarity, or stigmatising those who do not conform to respectability norms are forms of intra-racial racism (Tyson 385). These practices replicate the logic of external racial oppression by creating internal divisions and unequal valuations of worth. Both internalised and intra-racial racism function to fracture collective identity and weaken resistance to systemic injustice. When individuals internalise racist ideologies, they may unconsciously participate in reinforcing them, directing frustration or judgment inward rather than toward oppressive structures. Intra-racial racism further entrenches this dynamic by normalizing hierarchy and exclusion within marginalised communities, often presenting them as natural or deserved. Importantly, neither concept implies moral failure on the part of individuals or communities. Instead, they highlight the pervasive and enduring effects of structural racism on consciousness and social relations. Critical awareness, historical knowledge, and collective dialogue are essential to challenging these internal processes. By naming and examining internalised and intra-racial racism, scholars and communities can work toward forms of identity and solidarity grounded in affirmation, equity, and mutual recognition rather than inherited hierarchies. Lois Tyson further demonstrates this in *The Bluest Eye* through the character Pecola Breedlove. Pecola believes she can only be more beautiful and loved if she has beautiful eyes. Besides, some blacks see themselves as naturally inferior to whites and bear no shame in subduing and denigrating themselves before whites. Richard Wright satirises this through his character Shorty, in *Black Boy*, known for accepting whites' curses and abuses in exchange for money. The 1960s brought the African American civil rights struggle, which led to the

assertion of black identity through statements such as “Say it loud; I’m black and I’m proud” (*American Journal of Sociology*, 868).

African American criticism is essential to a study of internalised and intra-racial racism in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy* because it provides the theoretical and historical frameworks necessary to interpret the complexities of Black experience represented in these texts. Grounded in the intellectual traditions of Black thought, African American criticism prioritises race, history, culture, and power as central categories of analysis rather than marginal concerns. This approach enables a reading of Morrison’s novels that recognises racism not only as an external system of oppression but as a force that shapes consciousness, relationships, and community life from within. Drawing on scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., African American criticism elucidates concepts such as double consciousness, internalised oppression, respectability politics, and signifying. These critical tools are indispensable for understanding how Morrison’s characters negotiate identity within racial hierarchies and how intra-racial conflict emerges from unequal access to power. Without this framework, class tensions, gendered violence, and ideological clashes within Black communities risk being misread as personal failings rather than systemic effects. Moreover, African American criticism foregrounds oral tradition, ancestral memory, and communal ethics, all of which are central to Morrison’s narrative strategies. It allows the study to account for culturally specific forms of resistance and survival that challenge dominant literary norms. By centering Black epistemologies and lived experience, African American criticism ensures that Morrison’s exploration of internalised and intra-racial racism is analysed with historical sensitivity, ethical depth, and cultural specificity, making it indispensable to this comparative study.

Literature Review

Several scholars, like Tyson, have extensively explored the works under study and from similar perspectives. Aimee L. Pozorski explains that Morrison’s novels handle the

issues of race as an important factor in American Literature. Morrison demonstrates in her novels that it is impossible to talk of American Literature without using the language that raises the issue of race and black oppression. Intra-racism, on the other hand, is a form of discrimination between African Americans of light skin and racial tampering and those of dark skin with more African features (*Critical Theory Today*, 383). Because the light-skinned bear some features of whites, they are often looked upon as more refined and superior to other blacks. African Americans of light skin occupy a superior rating in the black community, which leads to division and destruction within the black community (277).

Gary Storhoff, in her online essay, argues that *Song of Solomon* reveals Morrison’s criticism of “parents who enmesh themselves in their children” (“Anaconda Love Parental Enmeshment in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*:’ Family Systems, Psychotherapy and Literature/Literary Criticism” Par 1). He studies De Beauvoir’s notion that family is not a solution in an evil society. He thereby uses psychoanalysis and specifically the Oedipus complex to analyse Milkman’s relationship with his family and his incapacity to be loyal to one woman. Through this, he demonstrates how *Song of Solomon* is a novel that fully demonstrates the “enmeshment” in family relationships: what he calls “the suffocating bond parents occasionally create with their children” (Par 3). He says Morrison calls this “Anaconda Love” on page 137 of *Song of Solomon*. Storhoff explains that Morrison brings out a contrast between Macon Death’s family and Pilate’s to show why they struggle to impose themselves one way or the other on Milkman’s life. He further explains that Morrison does not privilege Pilate’s lifestyle over Death’s as critics often claim, for neither family functions correctly. Anniina Jokinen, in her essay “The inauthentic *Tar Baby*,” sees *Tar Baby* as a text which treats conflict at the level of race, gender, and class. However, she sees the greatest form of conflict as that which is within Jadine. Jadine appears as a woman who has discarded her origin and culture by adopting another. She begins with the issue of race and quotes John Irving in the New York Times, who

says 'Miss Morrison uncovers all the stereotypical racial fears felt by whites and blacks alike'. Jokinen explains that there is a lot of prejudice in the house between the black people of the house, but also between the black people of the house and the natives of the island. She points out that the servants (Sydney and Ondine) are proud of their status and feel superior to the other blacks in the village (Par 1-2).

Anita Sethi reviews Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* as a novel that demonstrates a world of human subjugation at the level of race, religion, and class. In the first paragraph, she highlights the ambiguous situation of Sethe's action in *Beloved*, and poses the popular question "Is it an act of compassion or cruelty for a mother to murder her baby to save it from the living death of slavery....?" Anita Sethi sees Sethe's story as that which repeats itself in *A Mercy*, set much earlier than *Beloved* in the 1680's and 1690's. Here she is relating Sethe to the mother of Florens in *A Mercy*, who quickly gives her daughter to the white farmer Vaark, because she believes he is softer-hearted than others of his race. She has the conviction that Vaark will treat her daughter better than if her daughter remains on Sir Oregon's plantation.

Ngantu Judith's critique of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise* presents a rich, Afro-American critical perspective that highlights how Morrison's fiction engages with the enduring impact of systemic oppression, cultural resistance, and social hierarchies in Black life. The first article, "The Other Side to the Genre of Resistance: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," analyzes the multiple forms of resistance portrayed in Morrison's seminal novel *Beloved*. According to Ngantu, resistance in *Beloved* cannot be reduced to a single category but must be understood across physical, psychological, verbal, civil, and even supernatural dimensions. She argues that while some forms of resistance—such as psychological and verbal defiance—effectively counteract oppression, violent resistance often ends up being self-destructive or insufficient in achieving genuine liberation. This nuanced approach reveals Morrison's deeper insight into how enslaved and formerly enslaved people

navigate trauma and reclaim their agency: freedom is not merely physical but also psychological and cultural. Ngantu emphasizes that African American history, cultural practices like song and orature, and community memory significantly shape the characters' strategies of resistance, revealing Morrison's artistic and critical engagement with collective trauma and the possibilities for healing and self-assertion.

In her second article, "Hegemony in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," Ngantu addresses how Morrison's novel portrays hegemony—not only as racial domination but as a complex interplay of race, gender, and class that shapes individual and collective fates. Through her analysis, Ngantu shows how Ruby, an all-Black town, reflects the challenges of Black self-determination when internalized racial hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and class divisions infiltrate community identity. This critique situates *Paradise* within African American criticism to reveal how hegemony continues to stratify society even after legal barriers to equality have fallen. By unpacking how these systems operate within and against the community, Ngantu's work underscores Morrison's exploration of the paradoxes in post-Civil Rights Black life: struggles for autonomy and unity coexist with the reproduction of exclusionary practices that mirror the very oppression the characters seek to escape.

In this paper, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy* collectively illuminate internalized and intraracial racism as deeply destructive forces that operate within Black communities, shaping identity formation, interpersonal relationships, and generational continuity. Through distinct historical contexts and narrative frameworks, Morrison demonstrates how racial hierarchies do not merely impose external constraints but infiltrate the psychological and cultural spheres of her characters, thereby perpetuating self-alienation, communal fragmentation, and enduring emotional harm. These works reveal that racism's most insidious power lies in its capacity to alter how individuals value themselves and one another, ultimately reinforcing oppressive structures from within.

DISCUSSION

Toni Morrison's fiction persistently exposes the psychological and cultural consequences of racism, moving beyond its overt manifestations to examine how racist ideologies become internalised within Black communities. Rather than portraying racism solely as an external system imposed by white supremacy, Morrison reveals its insidious capacity to infiltrate the minds of the oppressed, generating intraracial divisions and self-destructive behaviors. In *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy*, Morrison dramatises how internalised racism, colorism, class hierarchy, and cultural alienation fracture Black identity and community. These novels, set across different historical periods, collectively demonstrate that the most enduring damage of racism occurs when it is absorbed and reproduced by those it oppresses, leading to a form of "destruction from within." The primary objective of this section is to explore how Morrison represents internalised and intraracial racism and to analyze the ways these forces shape identity, relationships, and community structures in the selected novels. In *Song of Solomon*, characters such as Milkman Dead and Hagar illustrate the corrosive effects of class privilege, misogyny, and Eurocentric beauty standards within the Black community. *Tar Baby* foregrounds ideological conflict between cultural authenticity and assimilation, revealing how proximity to whiteness creates divisions among Black characters. *A Mercy* traces the early formation of racial consciousness, showing how internalised hierarchies develop even before race becomes fully institutionalised. By examining these texts comparatively, the study seeks to reveal Morrison's critique of racism as a psychological and cultural system that perpetuates itself internally.

Class and Eurocentrism

In *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison offers a sustained critique of internalised and intra-racial racism, revealing how white supremacist values infiltrate Black communities and shape identity, relationships, and social hierarchy. Rather than presenting racism solely as an external force, Morrison exposes how its logic is absorbed and reproduced within African American life, often through classism, colorism,

patriarchy, and respectability politics. These internal divisions fracture communal bonds and distort self-understanding, contributing to spiritual and cultural alienation. The Dead family exemplifies internalised racism through its pursuit of wealth, property, and social status as markers of worth. Macon Dead Jr. equates ownership and economic success with dignity, measuring himself and others by standards rooted in white capitalist ideology. His contempt for poorer Black communities and his emotional detachment from family reflect a belief that distance from Blackness, coded as poverty, collectivity, and vulnerability, ensures power and safety (80-81). This worldview alienates him from his sister Pilate, whose rejection of materialism and embrace of ancestral knowledge positions her outside respectability norms. Pilate's marginalisation within the Black community underscores how intra-racial judgment mirrors dominant racial hierarchies.

Internalised racism also manifests through gendered expectations that devalue Black women. Characters such as Ruth Foster Dead and Hagar experience profound self-erasure as they seek validation through male approval, shaped by patriarchal and racialised standards. Hagar's tragic obsession with Milkman is intensified by her belief that she is inadequate because she does not fit the ideals of beauty associated with whiteness and male desire. Her internalisation of these values leads to self-destruction, demonstrating how racialised beauty standards operate violently within the community itself. Milkman Dead's early detachment from Black communal life further illustrates intra-racial alienation. His sense of entitlement, emotional indifference, and lack of accountability reflect his inheritance of his father's values. He initially perceives other Black people instrumentally, reinforcing class-based divisions within the race.

However, Morrison positions Milkman's journey south as a process of unlearning internalised racism. Through engagement with oral history, collective memory, and communal labor, he begins to recognise the costs of intra-racial disconnection and the importance of shared heritage. Morrison ultimately contrasts destructive internalisation with models of

resistance grounded in cultural memory and relational ethics. Pilate embodies an alternative epistemology rooted in ancestral knowledge, communal responsibility, and spiritual wholeness. Her refusal to measure worth through material success or dominant norms challenges the internalised hierarchies that fracture Black life. By foregrounding intra-racial conflict, *Song of Solomon* exposes how racism sustains itself through internal division, while also affirming the possibility of healing through reconnection with history, community, and self-knowledge.

Assimilation and Identity Conflict

Another character through whom Morrison unveils the dynamics of race is Jadine, Ondine's niece in *Tar Baby*. Though black, she was brought up by the Streets family, who financed her education right up to her studies in Europe. In Europe, she is so much into European culture and art that she integrates into the white society and forgets her roots. In an incident where she meets a naturally beautiful black girl who spits at her fake personality, she is traumatised, caught between the need to further explore the richness of white culture or rediscover her roots by staying with her aunt, Ondine, on the island. As she stares at the dark natural environment outside, she visualises the mythic descendants of the blind black slaves—one hundred and one horses. This aspect reveals her uncontrollable interest in her race. She imagines them because she cannot see them, and their image reminds her of the natural black woman in yellow that challenges the authenticity of her identity.

Like Margaret, Jadine is scared of Son and believes he might want to rape her. Her white education gives her that mentality (121). When Son calls Jadine a white girl, she feels hurt as her nightmare about being a fake black woman is awakened. She feels insulted as though she is trying to impersonate the white identity. This reflects the effects of her integration into the white society. Like other whites, she believes that a relationship between a black man and a white woman could only be rape. Being a light-skinned black, she is called a "yallas" mulatto by the natives of the island, Therese and Gideon. They are aware of her

dilemma of which race to belong to (155). Once more, we see the dilemma of mulattos in the black society. Like Maureen Peal in *The Bluest Eye*, we meet another character who loves being white. Jadine loves white art and, consequently, white beauty. She sees this as a simple matter of taste for art and not racism.

However, she enjoys the privileges of being treated as a white and being accepted into the white society. She has decided not to spend her life with her aunt Ondine, a servant to white people. Jadine receives a luxurious coat from her white boyfriend, Ryk. This coat represents not only the prestige of wealth but also the comfort within the white race. We see the opportunities available for Jadine as a wealthy white man's wife. Unlike Jadine, Son represents authentic blackness and, though he is aware of the fact that they are from different worlds, he falls in love with her. Jadine's attraction to Son is not only a symbol of her divided identity but also of her curiosity toward the black culture she has not been exposed to. Through Son's stream of consciousness, we see his disgust toward blacks who seek to escape the reality of their race. On the streets, some blacks transform themselves into homosexuals, getting rid of their sexual organs to become prostitutes; others try to imitate white people or the usurpation of white identity on TV to feel integrated into American society.

Basically, *Tarbaby* complicates these dynamics by presenting intraracial conflict as a consequence of divergent responses to racial conditioning. The tension between Jadine and Son highlights how class privilege, Western assimilation, and cultural displacement produce conflicting visions of Black identity. Jadine, educated and socially mobile within predominantly white spaces, embodies a form of internalised distancing from traditional Black communal values, while Son represents a rootedness that resists such assimilation. Their inability to reconcile these positions reveals how internalised racism can manifest as suspicion, resentment, and ideological opposition within the Black community. Morrison illustrates that these intraracial tensions are not merely personal but structural,

arising from racial hierarchies that compel individuals to negotiate identity through oppositional frameworks shaped by oppression.

Internalised Racism in Pre-Institutionalised Racial Era

Toni Morrison situates the origins of internalised racism in a pre-institutionalised racial era, revealing how racial consciousness begins to take shape even before race is formally codified as a rigid social system. *A Mercy*, set in seventeenth-century America, depicts a world where hierarchies are still fluid, yet already shaped by emerging ideologies of difference. Through characters such as Florens, Lina, and Sorrow, Morrison illustrates how displacement, enslavement, and cultural dislocation foster feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and internalised subjugation. Florens's longing for acceptance and her perception of herself through the gaze of others demonstrate the early psychological absorption of racial hierarchy. By foregrounding these inner conflicts, Morrison suggests that racism's most enduring power lies not only in legal or institutional structures but in its gradual internalisation within the psyche. *A Mercy* offers a crucial means of understanding how internalised racism precedes and prepares the ground for fully institutionalised racial oppression.

In *A Mercy*, although racial categories are not yet fully institutionalised, characters already begin to measure their worth through emerging ideologies of difference. Florens, an enslaved African girl, embodies this internalisation most vividly. Her fragmented self-narration reveals deep feelings of inadequacy and dependency, particularly in her obsessive attachment to the blacksmith, whom she perceives as a source of validation and humanity. Florens's belief that love must be earned through submission reflects her absorption of a racialised logic that devalues her selfhood. Similarly, Lina, a Native American survivor of genocide, internalises colonial judgments about savagery and civilization, distancing herself from other marginalised figures to assert a fragile sense of superiority.

Her distrust of Florens exposes how internalised racism produces intraracial suspicion rather than solidarity. Even Sorrow's fractured identity illustrates how sustained marginalisation results in self-alienation. In a conversation between Vaark and Downes, the imagery of intraracial destruction is vividly expressed:

"Still, the risk is high," countered Jacob. "I've heard of whole estates cut down by diseases. What will happen when labor dwindle, and there is less and less to transport?"

"Why would it dwindle?" Downes spreads his hands as if carrying the hull of a ship. "Africans are as interested in selling slaves to the Dutch as an English planter is in buying them. Rum rules, no matter who does the trading..." (35)

The slave market is promoted by black people who are eager to make money out of the sale of their brothers. Downes tells us that both the Dutch buyers and the African slave sellers had the same anxiety to carry out this business, expressing intraracial oppression. In other words, Morrison debunks the black sainthood and victimization; for blacks turn out to have a role to play in the enslavement of black people. Moreover, she demonstrates how their implication in slavery facilitates the white involvement and expansion in the business. Downes' explanation is not only aimed at reassuring Vaark on the availability of slaves but also at portraying blacks as equally responsible for slavery. The excerpt below demonstrates even further intraracial oppression:

The men guarding we and selling we are black. Two have hats and strange pieces of cloth at their throats. They assure we that the whitened men do not want to eat we. Still it is the continue of all misery. Sometimes we sang. Some of we fought. Mostly slept or wept. Then the whitened men divided we and placed we in canoes. We come to a house made to float on the sea. Each water, river or sea, has sharks under. The whitened ones guarding we like that as much as the sharks are happy to have a plentiful feeding place. I welcomed the circling sharks but they avoided me as if knowing I preferred their teeth to the chains around my neck my waist my ankles. (193)

The race precision is fundamental to the illustration of betrayal. In the excerpt, black slave overseers dressed like whites showcases the assimilation of white culture. Moreover, it is obvious that their tasks to them is synonymous to superiority. A greater proof of this is seen when the speaker makes us understand that these blacks loved being them lashes. Their pleasure in maltreating and terrorising their own is derived from the power this gives them. Maltreating their own makes them feel more like they belong to the white community and renders them incapable of perceiving their proper exploitation by their white masters, who do not consider them better than the other slaves. So, Morrison, in *A Mercy*, traces the psychological roots of internalised racism to an earlier historical period, revealing that racial self-perception was already being shaped long before racial classification became legally codified. The Slave overseers, whose sense of worth is shaped by their status, internalises the belief that they are inherently disposable. Their desperate longing for power, reflects the psychological impact of early racialised oppression, manifesting in power thirst and self-loathing. The novel illustrates how racial hierarchies, even in their formative stages, produce profound psychological consequences that alter communal relationships.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *A Mercy* reveal a sustained and evolving examination of internalised and intra-racial racism as mechanisms through which racial domination is reproduced across historical contexts. While each novel is situated in a distinct temporal and social landscape, from the post, Civil Rights era to the early colonial period, Morrison consistently interrogates how racial hierarchies infiltrate marginalised communities, shaping identity, relationships, and systems of value from within. In *Song of Solomon*, internalised racism is most visible in the adoption of white capitalist and patriarchal standards as measures of worth. The Dead family's fixation on property, status, and

respectability reflects an internal acceptance of dominant ideologies that equate power with ownership and emotional detachment. Macon Dead Jr.'s disdain for poorer Black communities exemplifies intra-racial hierarchy rooted in classism, while gendered dynamics expose how Black women disproportionately bear the consequences of these values. Morrison contrasts this internalisation with Pilate's alternative epistemology grounded in ancestral memory, communal responsibility, and spiritual continuity. Through Milkman's eventual reconnection with collective history, the novel suggests that healing requires the unlearning of internalised hierarchies and a reorientation toward shared cultural roots. On the other hand, *Tar Baby* shifts the focus from intracommunal hierarchy to ideological conflict within the Black diaspora. Internalised racism here manifests through competing responses to Western modernity and whiteness. Jadine's embrace of cosmopolitan success and assimilation reflects a belief in individual advancement through proximity to dominant cultural norms, while Son's rejection of these values affirms communal memory and cultural resistance. The resulting tension illustrates intra-racial racism not as overt hostility but as a clash of value systems shaped by unequal access to power.

Morrison refuses to offer a simplistic resolution, instead exposing how both positions are constrained by the pervasive influence of racial ideology. In this novel, intra-racial conflict emerges as a symptom of structural inequality that fragments solidarity while obscuring the systemic roots of division. Lastly, *A Mercy* extends Morrison's exploration of internalised racism to its historical origins, depicting a world in which racial categories are still forming but already being absorbed. The novel illustrates how early colonial hierarchies foster division among enslaved Africans, Indigenous peoples, and European indentured servants. Characters internalise emerging racial distinctions as strategies for survival, often aligning themselves with proximity to power even as it undermines collective bonds. Florens's

longing for belonging and validation reflects an early psychological internalisation of dispossession, while the fragmented relationships among the women on the farm demonstrate how racial ideology disrupts potential solidarities before race is fully codified. Intra-racial and intergroup tensions in *A Mercy* thus appear not as anomalies but as foundational to the development of racialised social order.

Across these three novels, Morrison demonstrates that internalised and intra-racial racism are not confined to any single historical moment but evolve alongside systems of domination. In each text, characters replicate dominant hierarchies through classism, colorism, gendered oppression, or cultural exclusion, often mistaking these structures for natural or necessary. Yet Morrison also foregrounds resistance through memory, storytelling, and relational ethics. Figures such as Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, the ancestral presence in *Tar Baby*, and the fragmented yet resonant voices in *A Mercy* offer counter-narratives that challenge internalised oppression by affirming alternative modes of belonging.

Taken together, these novels suggest that racism's most enduring power lies in its capacity to reproduce itself internally, redirecting violence inward and fracturing communal ties. Morrison's comparative vision exposes the psychological and social costs of this process while insisting on the possibility of repair through historical consciousness and collective reimagining. By tracing internalised and intra-racial racism across time, Morrison underscores their centrality to understanding not only racial oppression but also the ethical labour required to dismantle it.

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