

Third Space in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*

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Abstract

The White Boy Shuffle is a novel about an African-American demagogue. His new approach towards protesting against the White supremacy becomes viral when he announces mass suicide. The whole novel tries to project a new world of African-Americans. It tries to build a new perspective of Blacks. This new world is an articulation or announcement of new sensibility towards the African-Americans. Also the work evaluates the new sensibility of the Post-Black liberation movements. The Post-Black liberation movements give rise to unmitigated Blackness. From the researcher point of view this new sensibility is an enunciation of new order of the African-Americans. This paper views the novel in the goggles of Homi K. Bhabha's Third space. The paper tries to unearth the perspective which replicates the third space in the novel.

Keywords: African-American, Third Space, New Order, White supremacy, Blackness

Introduction

The White Boy Shuffle is 2016 Man Booker prize winner Paul Beatty's debut novel in 1996. The fiction focuses on the character Gunnar Kaufman, a demagogue. The novel opens with the account of Kaufman's family tree where the family name suggests the slave past of Gunnar's ancestors.

Gunnar lives in Santa Monica, California with his Mother and two Sisters. His father and Mother are separated. His father, Rolf Gaufman is an ex- US military and now serving to LAPD. Gunnar's life in Santa Monica is filled with memories with the White kids as the place is white dominant. Once Gunnar's mother comes to know that her son and daughters suffer bullying from the whites, she migrates to the hillside or ghetto.

Gunnar starts his schooling in the hood where he exposed to the black pride. The black pride in the hood is to handle guns, joining gangs, fighting for the gang and rapping. Gunnar got a friend from the white named Nicholas Scoby, whom a basketball player. Gunnar starts practicing with Scoby and well versed in dunking, dribbling and shuffling of basketball. On the other hand, he also well verses in writing poems too. This made him recognized among the other hood members.

Gunnar exposes himself to Psycho Loco, a gang member of Gun Totin' Hooligans. Gunnar involves him in the revenge for Pumpkin, the gang leader by Chev-Tec boys. Then with Psycho Loco he involves in the theft of a safe caught red hand by his father. His father didn't press charges on him. This incident created a grudge between the father and son.

Gunnar marries a Japanese Yoshika and waiting for his first baby. Though Gunnar is happy with his marriage for some time he realized Yoshika married him for the American citizenship. Day by day his skill of writing poems and basketball increases. Gunnar becomes the noted poet from the black.

In a media encounter Gunnar accidentally announces who are ready to die for South African Blacks. Which become a media sensation and people starts to suicide with the death note to Gunnar. Once Scoby feels nothingness of his life and he commits suicide with his own death note. The media keep on prompting Gunnar for his suicide which he stages in front them. The novel ends with the epilogue from Rolf Kaufman announcing he is not brave as his son. The paper focuses on reading the novel post colonially and tries to unearth the third space in the novel.

Discussion

Homi K. Bhaba (1990) explains the third space as new moment or phenomenon or hybrid creation (207-221). Bhabha notes third space "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (211). In *Location of culture* (1994) Homi K. Bhabha states,

The theoretical recognition of the spilt-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of

multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is in in between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves (38).

A new structure of resistance is prepared to fight against the incongruences. The narrator is a victim of the illegitimate segregation of the Blacks even after the so many voices against it and numerous Civil and Equal Rights acts. So the narrator tries to bring in a new strategy that is,

In the quest for equality, black folks have tried everything. We've begged, revolted, entertained, intermarried, and are still treated like shit. Nothing works, so why suffer the slow deaths of toxic addiction and the American work ethic when the immediate gratification of suicide awaits? In glorious defiance of the survival instinct, Negroes stream into Hillside, California like lemmings. Every day they wishfully look heavenward, peering into the California smog for a metallic gray atomic dot that will gradually expand until it explodes some one thousand feet over our natural and processed heads. It will be the Emancipation Disintegration. Lunch counters, bus seats, and executive washrooms be damned; our mass suicide will be the ultimate sit-in (Beatty 2).

The inevitability of being a subordinate in the free country leads to the suicide of the narrator. The statement that is made is better die for a reason not for racial games of the Whites.

The crisis of the new recognition and negotiation is depicted in the select novel. The new recognition is the situation of Blacks after the Harlem renaissance, "Black was being a nigger who didn't know any other niggers (Beatty 44)." Paul Beatty tries to build a new ghetto where the given identity of poverty, crime, and niggers are no longer exists but a forceful African-American reprinting of their identity by poems, athletics, politics, suicides ...etc.

The novel tries to build a new identity which is not given but self-determined. Beatty defines the black identity as "Black is a repressed memory of a sandpapery hand rubbing abrasive circles into the small of my back, my face rising and falling in time with a hairy

heaving chest (Beatty 44).” The identity is the recognition of the Blacks against Black` incognito. The novel depicts the problem of hypocrisy in the Black liberation movements.

Beatty notes the anxiety of the third space African-Americans over the traditional Ghetto of crimes, drugs and corruption. Gunnar’s Mothers reflects that saying “Seriously, son, judging by your previous nefarious history, we feel that you have proclivity for gang activity. Do us all a favor and come clean (Beatty 59).” Though the Ghettos are depicted or comprehended as a crime area the dwellers especially the people at stakes of the violence, crimes and drugs has hatred towards the Ghetto’s given culture. This hatred is a demarcation of the new culture which the third space dwellers opt for. The African-American’s dream for a new life, identity which they were capable of, meanwhile they try to erase the memory and stamps of the given inappropriate identity.

One will have influence over their place of dwelling. Sometimes it is with consent, sometimes forceful or coercive. Gunnar fails and announces “Shooting up the neighborhood. Ma, I’m becoming so black it’s a shame ... I awoke recalling that it hadn’t been long ago when I was the only black person in my dreams; now I was shooting white kids in the street(Beatty 123-124).” Gunnar starts to be a man of Ghetto by the influences from his new school. Where he tries to establish himself as a Black, he is no more an ex-dweller of White hoods. This transformation as announced by Gunnar is of ambivalent in nature of being a new member in the traditional Ghetto.

The new political initiative is the reflection of the quest for new political determination. This new political discourse forms new repression because ideologies always repressive. Ghetto is the place completely refutes not only white supremacy but a powerful repressive black supremacy culture. It unveils in the novel, “The people of Hillside treat society the way society treats (Beatty 64).” The whole depiction of Ghetto is in the light of its neo-repression over the subaltern others or the powerless one’s in the Ghetto. Power in Ghetto seems as the level of ‘blackness’. Blackness is the unmitigated supremeness.

The history of Manischewitz Junior High is depicted through the photograph of class of 1923 and 1986,

CLASS OF 23: Scads of white students and teachers dressed in pleated flannel skirts and pants. A Young colored custodian with a mop in his hands next to a metal bucket.

The name tag on his overalls reads 'Melvin Samuels.'...CLASS OF '86: The last photograph in the series. The number of students in the picture is smaller than ever before. The faces, including those of most of the staff, are latino and black, with sprinkling of Asians. A man in gray overalls whose name tag reads ' Mr. Samuels Jr.' is standing in the back, mopless and sharing a joint with a couple of kids (Beatty 71-72).

From the above narration it is novel that the fiction tries to traces the history of the Ghetto. The history of the school shows how the African-Americans and Non-Whites in America evolved in the 20th century. It also marks that the Black Liberation movements which is dominant from 1920's is responsible for this transformation.

Summation

Paul Beatty tries to depict a third space in the novel as the ghettos are no longer filled with dirt, crimes and drugs. But a forceful African-American tries to build a new identity which is not given. The process of this building is carefully noted in the novel. The politics of this new space is the embodiment of universalness of approach in the third space dwellers. The subjects of the third space is no longer a subaltern subjects but a new community with a unique way of approaching the world with their own self-definition.

The author tries to project this new space consciously or unconsciously. But the interpretation in light of Homi K. Bhabha depicts the ways of third space in the novel. The author tries to satire the inconsistencies among both Whites and Blacks: Racial Blacks and Rebellious Whites. This is the in between space of being 'guilty' and 'innocent'. This sensibility of being in ambivalence and state of amalgamation states the influence of decentered universe in the novel or the implied community.

Works Cited

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