

Paul Beatty's New Ghetto: Aversion to Ghetto

Ms. R. Maheswari @Rohini, M.A., M.Phil.

Assistant Professor/English

P.S.R. Engineering College, Sevalpatti

1/105 Ambal nagar, Vilathikulam 628907

Thoothukudi District

Tamilnadu

rohini.r@psr.edu.in

Abstract

Ghetto is a place where a group has been relegated, as because of bias, or in which a group segregate itself for various reasons. In USA, there are many African-American ghettos which are stereotyped as poor and on other hand, house for criminals. Paul Beatty is an African-American author and associate professor of writing at Columba University builds alternative ghettos in his fictions. He is the first African-American to win the Man Booker Prize in 2016 for *The Sellout*. His works are noted for his satirical and Hip-Hopical writing.

The researcher selects the works of Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996), *Tuff* (2000), and *The Sellout* (2015). The select novels are trio of Paul Beatty's 'New Ghetto' as they are set in the suburbs of African-American ghettos. This paper deals with the history of ghettos and aversion to ghettos in select novels. The word 'ghetto' is from ghetto which signifies copper foundries of 16th century Venice. The first ghetto was established in 1516 on the site of a foundry in Venice. The Jews were segregated to Frankfurt Jewish ghettos in Germany for identification ease for the Nazis. Ostracism is the key ideology for building a ghetto in Germany.

Aversion to Ghetto

The word 'ghetto' is from the word ghèto which signifies copper foundries of 16th century Venice. Cecil Roth in *The Origin of Ghetto, a Final Word*, says that "One difficulty only arises, that of the transition of ghèto to ghetto. It has already been pointed out that there is in fact nothing insuperable in this" (75). The Oxford English Dictionary's online version gives the definition for ghetto as, "A part of a city, especially a slum area, occupied by a minority group or groups." It also adds, "Early 17th century: perhaps from Italian getto 'foundry' (because the first ghetto was established in 1516 on the site of a foundry in Venice), or from Italian borghetto, diminutive of borgo 'borough'."

The Jewish Ghettos are inception for the concept of segregated living which is known well during the Holocaust. The Jews were segregated to Frankfurt Jewish ghettos in Germany for identification ease for the Nazis.

***The White Boy Shuffle* - Gunnar Kaufman**

In the postcolonial world the oppressed and oppressor dwell together but the oppressor colors differences in order to highlight his/her supremacy and glorious past. The product of this polarity is ghetto. So, the people responsible for the segregation also has memory to distinguish the oppressor and oppressed. In the global village the oppressor tries to tincture subjects with the place of living. In Gunnar Kaufman's mortification, he is considered as cool black guy fit for Whites in Sancta Monica:

I was the funny, cool black guy. In Sancta Monica. Like most predominantly white sanctuaries from urban blight, "cool black guy" is a versatile identifier used to distinguish the harmless black male from the Caucasian juvenile while maintain politically correct semiotics. If someone was planning a birthday party, the potential invitees always asked, "Who's going to be there?" The conversation would go:

"Shaun, Lance, Gunnar..." "Gunnar? Who's that?"

"You Know, the funny, cool black guy." (*The White Boy Shuffle* 34)

Aftermath of bullying her children, Gunnar's mother moves them to the hillside of San Borrachos. It is a hood with all sorts of colored people dwells but dominated by African-Americans. Gunnar had an aversion towards the hood, "'Ma, you done fucked up and moved to the 'hood!'" (*The White Boy Shuffle* 51).

Aversion works inside out in case of ghetto. Gunnar is an African- American, who believes to be man of ghetto. Gunnar sees meritocracy thus:

The hillside tribe wasn't going for no ghetto fakery. If I wanted to come correct, I'd have to complete some unspecified warrior vision quest. The gods of blackness would let me know when I was black enough to be trusted. I walked the dark streets of Hillside with my head down. Looking for loose change and signs that would place me on the path to right-on soul brother righteousness. (*The White Boy Shuffle* 65)

The antecedent for the aversion towards the ghetto is colors painted on you. Gunnar's mother is visited by the police officers and announces, "... we practice that we like to 'preventative

police enforcement.' Whereby, we prefer to deter habitual criminals before they cause irreparable damage to the citizenry" (*The White Boy Shuffle* 57). This kind of typical black experience creates ghetto as a place to forget for the dwellers.

The mutation from an urban dweller to keeper of the hood is coercive. The polarity that stands for cultural meaning is culprit for this disorientation/dissonance. The ghetto dwellers are coerced to perform ghetto's things. Gunnar Kaufman in his endeavor to become a keeper of the hood feels accomplished in the following manner: "He called me "nigger." My euphoria was as palpable as the loud clap of our hands colliding in my first soul shake. My transitional slide into step two was a little stiff" (*The White Boy Shuffle* 81). Gunnar Kaufman's aversion towards ghetto, triggers to be a ghetto nigger.

Gunnar as a Ghetto Man

The conversion of Gunnar into ghetto man is assertive. Gunnar always tries to step back from the traditional ghetto dwelling. His mother too warned him for the violence and drugs in their new place. Gunnar's mother encourages him with activities that keep him away from ghetto crimes. Gunnar Kaufman also has aversion on ghetto, but ghetto medium leaves him choice for betterment as narrated in the novel thus:

Scoby laughed and asked if my mother had given me enough money for basketball shoes. I pulled two hundred dollars from an envelope marked "Basketball Paraphernalia" and fanned the crisp twenty-dollar bills, wondering if it was enough to change my fate (*The White Boy Shuffle* 106).

We see that constant thought of relieving from ghetto is the ultimatum for ghetto dwellers.

Being an African-American does not mean to do deeds that bring stricture to them. After involving in gang activity Gunnar kills Chev-Tec security boys for revenge of his having killed niggers. Gunnar's feeling guilty for being Black is described thus:

Shooting up the neighborhood. Ma, I'm becoming so black it's a shame." I wanted to explain to her that living out there was like being in a never-ending log-rolling contest. You never asked why the log was rolling or who was rolling the log. You just spread your arms and kept your feet moving, doing your best not to fall off (*The White Boy Shuffle* 123).

The inevitability to survive leads the subjects to involve in activities that are notoriously attributed to African-Americans. This cyclic process keeps the notation of ghetto into a place of

violence, dirt, crimes and untouchable: “I mean Hillside. The entire community is a Petri dish for criminal vermin” (*The White Boy Shuffle* 188).

No one wants a violent environment. The hood also tries to revamp the ghetto dwelling. The schools offer advises/counseling to the young ones. But it fails miserably as problems becomes habits, “No matter who the delivery boy, the message was always the same. Stay in School. Don’t do drugs. Treat our black queens with respect” (*The White Boy Shuffle* 136). Gunnar Kaufman contrasts it with his personal motivator Coach Shimimoto thus:

The stereotype is that most successful black men raised by single mothers had a surrogate father figure who turned their lives around. A man who “saw their potential,” looked after them, taught the value of virtuous living, and sent them out on the path to glory with a resounding slap on the butt. (*The White Boy Shuffle* 136)

This contrast depicts the working of stereotype on ghetto: how ghetto serves as grumble for disinclined ones.

The aversion of ghetto extends to the reason for dwelling there too. Gunnar hates his father who has left him in despair. In an epithet to his sister he writes, “You know my motto: fuck that nigger. If you have boys, make sure you don’t leave them alone with him” (*The White Boy Shuffle* 171). The logical assistance for hatred kindled through the fellow officer of his father who yells, “You are not a Kaufman. I refuse to let you embarrass me. You can’t embarrass me with poetry and your niggerish ways” (163).

Gunnar Kaufman is new to hillside, colored as nigger in eyes of non-blacks. Rolf Kaufman is a product of cognitive dissonance of the African-Americans. Gunnar has aversion towards his father due to his own tribulations. This is reflected in the narration thus:

Living in the only black household within walking distance of exclusively white and predominantly redneck Jefferson Davis High, my father didn’t even know about the colored bus. He showed up for the first day of high school dressed in cuffed Levis, a flannel shirt, a Daniel Boone coonskin hat, and a Captain Midnight decoder ring. He was such a docile and meek nonthreat that the principal let him register for classes. (*The White Boy Shuffle* 27)

Gunnar accuses his father as one of the people who are “... afflicted by white supremacyosis, changed their names from Raymond to Kelly or Winfred to Megan. They walked around campus shunning the uncivilized niggers and talking in bad Cockney accents” (*The White Boy Shuffle* 182).

Tuff

Paul Beatty in *Tuff* (2000) sees ghetto from the perspective of a Brooklyn African-American. Winston Foshay, a drug dealer of Brooklyn, lives with his wife Yolanda and his son Jordy. His nick/hood/ghetto name is 'Tuff.' Paul Beatty onsets the narration with Tuff explaining the phenotypes of ghetto thus: "Scattered about the small Brooklyn apartment were three other ghetto phenotypes, soulless young outlaws posed stock still, mouth agape, eyes open, like figurines in a wax museum's rogues' gallery (2)." Winston is not prolific like his father. His father is a panther poet. His father leads a blessed life while Tuff is down with ghetto living. All he has is a wife and son. Winston do drug dealing for the living of his family in the 109th street Brooklyn apartment. Fariq Cole his friend when arguing with Yolanda adumbrates why African-Americans need a gradient. Fariq gives an example such as, "When Lincoln gave the slaves their freedom, singular, could they vote? Own property? Fuck who they wanted to fuck? No. so it must be more than one freedom" (Tuff 55). Political freedom is essential of it. Winston tries to pursue that but faces virulent political games that ceases improvisation of the African-Americans in politics.

Winston expresses the hatred in ghetto. Ghetto is not the place for criminals and drugs only but a place where cold blood animals dwell. Winston mentions the cold bloods as people from politics in Brooklyn. He abhors them as, "All this empty election bullshit- if crime is down its only because niggers killing other niggers. Like when food gets scarce, alligators eat other alligators, trimming the population" (Tuff 3). Winston is on his feet for years and he fed up with his drug dealing business. This discontent happened due to sick politics of ghetto. The politics of ghetto never bring any good to that place. So, Winston feels, "Goddamn, I hate Brooklyn" (Tuff 4).

Winston feels satisfied by reciprocating for his suffering by doing drugs. Winston modules drugs with the burden of being a nigger. When Fariq asks why he resists Yolanda from work: "Because addicts is looking for a reason to get up in the morning. And crack, heroin, whatever, is the reason. Lipping that pipe like falling in love everyday maybe a little better. Can you imagine what it's like waking up in the morning and knowing that soon as you hustle up ten dollars, you going to be in always- and-forever love? To do that you can't wake up already in love. You got to get up in a cold room, mad as fuck you been sleeping on a flat pillow, or without a pillow, convinced that life hates you, and you hate life. Then you can cherish the high. You want the high to last, but not forever, yo." (Tuff 19).

Winston's heart is for living with his lovable family. Winston illustrates the problem of running family in ghetto in the above occurrence and how abusing drug in order to fancy up their living in the streets.

The life in ghetto is metaphorically mentioned by depiction of goldfish pet.

Winston has a goldfish pet. Winston doesn't care about the container of the goldfish as it "... was swimming in water murkier than Winston's alcohol-laden urine" (Tuff 31).

Though the goldfish is a premier one the environment sabotages its dwelling. Tuff self-scrutinizes himself by asking "Is it Safe?" (Tuff 31)

The non-blacks' misogyny towards the ghetto and its dwellers are pointed out in Tuff (2000). In a Christmas Eve boat tour, Rikers Island guard towers is mentioned as,

"Ladies and gentlemen, I know it's a cloudy night, but those of you with binoculars can see the Rikers Island guard towers just past the Triborough Bridge. Commissioned in 1936, Rikers Island jail is the former residence of nefarious felons such as the Son of Sam, alias David Berkowitz, child-killer Joel Steinberg, the Cosa Nostra don John Gotti, and Harlem drug lord Nicky Barnes." (Tuff 38).

The Harlem mentioned with drug lord and other criminals were prefixed with their respective crimes. So, is it a crime to live in an African-American settlement? This abhorrence from the others leads to construct a picture of ghetto with crimes, drugs and gangsters.

Every father's requisite list will include a good living for his kids. Tuff is no exception to that. Tuff tries to create a good lifestyle for Jordy at least by drug dealing. Tuff, fed up with the ghetto life, wishes good fortune thus: "Boy, your father going to be one of those pipe-smoking, Wall Street Journal-reading motherfuckers, because I'm tired of being one of these bummy Raisin in the Sun niggers" (Tuff 51). Tuff did not reckon to imagine his son in ghetto. He wants to bring him up outside ghetto.

Disincline towards ghetto is the polarity of ghetto as African-American place. The Bonilla triplets is an example in the narration:

"The triplets were, however, united in their hatred for Winston. The animosity between him and the Bonillas started in elementary school. One day Tuffy noticed Enrique's face looked like a beginner's jigsaw puzzle of a map of the United States" (Tuff 67).

The Bonilla triplets detest Tuff only for his race.

The ghetto dwellers are stereotyped as criminals, niggers, drug dealers ... etc. People who are interested in welfare for ghettos itself denies to accept it as it is. Once Winston asks Inez,

"Ms. Nomura?" "Yes, Winston?"

“You like Cap’n Crunch idea?”

“It’s ingenious, but impractical and scary. When are you going to call me Inez?” “Inez? What kind of name is that for a nigger?”

... “I’m not a nigger,” she said. “You used to be.” (Tuff 80-81)

The identity given is not always subservient to the bearer. Sometimes it is a burden. The polarity or color painted for one without consent.

There is no condonation for scaling people with their races. Rabbi Spencer Throckmorton is an African-American who adopted Judaism for the sake his girlfriend who faced racial aversion. Spencer was brought up with silver spoon and had no traces of ghetto activity but was disdained as ghetto dweller, which is revealed in the following exchange:

“Spencer, you’re black?” “Yes, sir.”

“Well, you know what they say: ‘If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem’.” (Tuff 99)

Spencer is a firm man of the world as revealed in the narration thus:

“Spencer was the only black friend of many of the city’s political organizations. And since there was only one degree of separation between him and the Manhattan activists, but an immeasurable distance between them and the rest of mysterious black America” (Tuff 102).

He had good education, behavior but that does not make him immune to suspicion. On the other hand, he is alien to ghetto but judged by the world as ghetto man.

The conundrum did not cease at any instant. Counter-Aversion is the upshot. Due to the inability of Spencer, he cannot concentrate on the financial crisis and the education. The grades are dropped. The financial crisis led him to make short of three year fee payment for his education. Spencer does not leave for other law schools,

Spencer thought of appealing the decisions but knew no admissions board in the country would be willing to acknowledge the mind-numbing rigors of a black male in an inter-racial relationship. “But you don’t understand, dating a white girl is an extracurricular activity!” (Tuff 101)

Even though Spencer opts for the path away from ghetto living, the polarizing world always polarizes him as ‘nigger’ or ‘sellout’. The non-blacks for their part of detest towards African-Americans engage themselves in depriving: “...Various organizations would ask Spencer to recommend like-minded and like-tempered black folks for those high-paying display-window positions for which qualified black candidates were invariably hard to find” (Tuff 101). On the other hand, Blackness devotes plurality. When Tuff and Spencer stroll in 110th street of East Harlem, Tuff asks Spencer whether the place got Jew population and Fariq says racial jokes on Jews which made Spencer to hang his head. In retort Tuff explains how Black activists like Fariq, “... insuring the public against the crimes of colored boys like these, then defending the same kids after they’d committed the crimes.”

“Rabbi, take your hands out your pockets,” Tuff whispered. “And lift your fucking head up” (Tuff 266).

Essentialist ploys are plans of action to cherish polarity. Once Spencer consternates on a statement with his editor. The editor remarks African-American writers has language that, “perverse ghetto mentality in a vernacular (102).” This racist comment brings disparity in front of Spencer before the editor clamors Spencer, “I’m just keeping it real, homeboy” (102). False inculcation is not fair for any dimension.

The cognizance of being divided works as keepsake or doghouse. Fariq Cole’s visit to Harlem is hostile. Fariq feels the changes that happens to the city. Fariq also remarks the essentialism over him, “You big, black, and ugly. You everything they’ve ever imagined Harlem to be” (Tuff 160). Here the place is averted over the dwellers. The generalization of Harlem as a ghetto results in defining it as place that can be vulnerable.

The Sellout

Paul Beatty’s *The Sellout* (2015) is a Man Booker prize winner, opens with veto towards African-American stereotype thus:

“This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I’ve never stolen anything. Never cheated on my taxes or at cards. Never snuck into the movies or failed to give back the extra change to a drugstore cashier indifferent to the ways of mercantilism and minimum-wage expectations. I’ve never burgled a house. Held up a liquor store. Never boarded a crowded bus or subway car, sat in a seat reserved for the elderly, pulled out my gigantic penis and masturbated to satisfaction with a perverted, yet somehow crestfallen, look on my face. But here I am, in the cavernous chambers of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, my car illegally and somewhat ironically parked on Constitution Avenue, my hands cuffed and crossed behind my back, my right

to remain silent long since waived and said goodbye to as I sit in a thickly padded chair that, much like this country, isn't quite comfortable as it looks". (The Sellout 3)

The African-Americans in USA face hardships due to the stereotypes they face every moment. The narrator in the very first inception denounces the stereotypes faced by the African-Americans. The polarization is a strategy to sabotage any group with the essentialist notions.

The narrator of the fiction is in deep abhorrence on ghetto. The narrator of *The Sellout* (2015) is reprehensible towards the people of ghetto where he lives, and their blank out memory of whom they are and how they become themselves. He picturizes in front of Lincoln Memorial that if Lincoln statue resurrected,

"... somehow managed to lift his bony twenty-three-foot, four inch frame from his throne, what would he say? What would he do? Would he break-dance?"

"Would he pitch pennies against the curbside? Would he read the paper and see that the Union he saved was now a dysfunctional plutocracy that the people he freed were now slaves to rhythm, rap, and predatory lending and that today his skill set would be better suited to the basketball court than the White House? There he could catch the rock on the break, pull up for a bearded three-pointer, hold the pose, and talk shit as the ball popped the net. The Great Emancipator, you can't stop him, you can only hope to contain him." (The Sellout 4)

The narrator illustrates how activism of Black wellness has mutated into Black supremacy. The narrator abhors the present ghetto. The present ghetto is a stereotypical ghetto which upholds the essentialist charges pressed on it and serves as containers of racialism. So, the aversion towards the ghetto is accretive.

Baraka a woman in a zoo remarks she had best monkey friends to a chimpanzee, "some of my best friends are monkeys," she said accidentally. It was my turn to laugh. I understood where she was coming from. This whole city's a Freudian slip of the tongue, a concrete hard-on for America's deeds and misdeeds."

"Slavery? Manifest Destiny? Laverne & Shirley? Standing by idly while Germany tried to kill every Jew in Europe? Why some of my best friends are the Museum of African Art, the Holocaust Museum, the Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of Women in the Arts. And furthermore, I'll have you know, my sister's daughter is married to an orangutan" (The Sellout 5).

By contrasting the museum of Holocaust, American Indian Women the narrator mentions the subalterns of the ghettos who are stereotyped as extinguished animals.

Stereotypes is a collective consciousness and there are always alternatives who reprimand them. The unnamed narrator's father executed in a brawl with white policemen is atrocious and expressed thus:

“You're supposed to cry when your dad dies. Curse the system because your father has died at the hands of the police. Bemoan being lower-middle-class and colored in a police state that protects only rich white people and movie stars of all races, though I can't think of any Asian-American ones. But I didn't cry. I thought his death was a trick. Another one of his elaborate schemes to educate me on the plight of the black race and to inspire me to make something of myself, I half expected him to get up, brush himself off, and say, “See, nigger, if this could happen to the world's smartest black man, just imagine what could happen to your dumb ass. Just because racism is dead don't mean they still don't shoot niggers on sight” (The Sellout 43).

The above utterance shows the need for economic wealth to stay safe from power hands. The incident shows the condition of African-Americans caught between racial hatred.

If you are subordinate to one it is not mandatory to subordinate others. This kind of subordination remarks the problems of alienation in dwelling which is not excluded in ghettos. In the Donut Dum Dum Intellectuals meetup they call the Asians as alien to the ghettos. The Black activist claims Asians are ‘faggots’ because they are powerless. Here the power is substantiated with manliness. They extrapolate that, “Asian men have no power” (The Sellout 47).

If forfeit is inclined, the woe will be on the burdened. The novel *The Sellout* is a prime plot on the disappearance of ghetto. Dickens is the place that vaporized and the narrator attempts it to revitalize. The reason for the disappearance of Dickens is “...part of a blatant conspiracy by the surrounding, increasingly affluent, two-car-garage communities to keep their property values up and blood pressures down” (The Sellout 57). The outcry shows the Non-Blacks' aversion towards the ghetto which leads to the vaporization of the ghetto with forfeiting power.

Detest over ghetto and it's desorb leads to evanesce its dwellers too: “...they think Dickens is too black. I believe ‘Them backward American niggers ain't ready!’ is how they put it” (The Sellout 147). Hominey Jenkins a famous uncredited actor of Foy Cheshire media also dematerializes from the remnant, “... in America Hominey is no source of pride: he's a Living National Embarrassment. A mark of Shame on the African- American legacy” (The Sellout 76). Though the nation deprives the old man his heart is for the place of his identity: ghetto. He wants to kill himself and is saved by the narrator and he replies,

“Why, Massa? Because when Dickens disappeared, I disappeared. I don’t get fan mail anymore. I haven’t had a visitor in ten years, because don’t nobody know where to find me. I just want to feel relevant. Is that too much for an old coon to ask, Massa? To feel relevant?” (The Sellout 77).

The question of relevancy applies when something is under erasure. Here ghetto is in erasure and the dwellers too.

Even though the erasure is not the end. To be a top notch you need tush end. Even after the erasure of Dickens from Thomas Guide the ghetto stereotype is upheld by the racialists. The sign board in the 110 freeway for Dickens removed but the signs do not cease to signify the ghetto in its polarized way,

“... if you find yourself hurtling southbound on the 110th freeway, speeding past two yellow-and-black blurs that read WATCH OUT FOR FALLING HOME PRICES AND CAUTION-BLACK ON BLACK CRIME AHEAD, you’ll know whom to thank for that roadside warning” (The Sellout 89)

The aversion towards the ghetto is constantly lit as a part of caveating that economy is the base that can affect the superstructures and can change it.

Abhorrence sometimes is with the person or community on the basis of anxiety too. The narrator details the racialism towards the African-Americans in the buses of RTD. The Racialism is the product of stereotypes that carries with and within the ghettos. The narrator exemplifies the questions asked if he has to share seat with non-African- Americans,

“• Where do you live?
• Did you see (insert sporting event or black-themed movie)?
• I don’t know where you from, homie. But you see this knife/gun/contagious skin rash? You don’t fuck with me and I won’t fuck with you, cool? (The Sellout 118)

Despisal stretches into literature as tool for polarization. The narrator in a discussion brings out the racial color codes for African-Americans. The narrator brings out the bereavement, “I’m so fucking tired of black women always being described by their skin tones! Honey-colored this! Dark-chocolate that!” (The Sellout 143). The push back in this colloquy is between the narrator and Marpessa about ‘black literature’.

“How come they never describe the white characters in relation to foodstuffs and hot liquids? Why aren’t there any yogurt-colored, egg-shell-toned, string-cheese-skinned, low-fat-milk white protagonists in these racist, no-third-act- having books? That’s why black literature sucks!”

“I said ‘Black literature sucks’?” “Yup, and I was head over heels”

“Shit, white people got complexions, too.” (The Sellout 143)

Aversion is a product of fundamentalism. The issues of the select novels are aversion based on stereotypes. Tolerance is needed for the erasure of aversions. Acceptance of counter arguments envisages deeper signification. In order to rip off the aversion on ghetto care, consistent and performance of counter arguments is needed.

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