



DOUBLE COLONISATION IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

Toni Morrison'un "The Bluest Eye" Eserinde Çifte Sömürgeleştirme

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Abstract

Postcolonial theory, the most prominent hermeneutic theory among the 20th-century schools, is described as a literary theory or critical perspective that is concerned with literature produced in continents that are currently or formerly colonies of other countries. When empire and colonialism impaired the heritage of Indigenous people, men who were the initial advocates of postcolonial theory became preoccupied with establishing a nation which gave birth to postcolonial feminism. It decries the supremacy formed by native men after the Empire as well as the colonial rulers. This study aims to investigate the premise of Double Colonisation of African American women in Toni Morrison's remarkable work, *The Bluest Eye*. This concept refers to the way that women are treated in postcolonial nations. The paper builds on Edward Said's idea of "othering," and the lengthy history of discrimination against women in postcolonial and feminist contexts on the part of both coloniser and native male society. By the end of the paper, it becomes clear that Toni Morrison's discussion of the effects of colonialism, the patriarchal components, and the social abuse of women's rights contributes to illuminating how the identity of colonised women is still defined by these elements.

Keywords: Double colonisation, patriarchy, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison, postcolonial feminism

Öz

Postkolonyal teori, 20. yüzyıl okulları arasında en önde gelen hermenötik teori olarak tanımlanmakta ve hâlihazırda ya da eskiden başka ülkelerin kolonisi olan bölgelerde üretilen edebiyatla ilgilenen bir edebiyat teorisi ya da eleştirel bir bakış açısı olarak kabul edilmektedir. İmparatorluk ve sömürgecilik, yerli halkların mirasını tahrip ettiğinde, postkolonyal teorinin ilk savunucuları olan erkekler, postkolonyal feminizmi doğuran bir ulus inşa etme çabasına girdiler. Bu feminizm, hem sömürge yöneticilerinin hem de İmparatorluk sonrası dönemde yerli erkeklerin oluşturduğu egemenliği eleştirir. Bu çalışma, Toni Morrison'un dikkate değer eseri *The Bluest Eye*'de Afrikalı Amerikalı kadınların Çifte Sömürgeleştirme önermesini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kavram, kadınların postkolonyal uluslarda nasıl muamele gördüğüne işaret eder. Makale, Edward Said'in "ötekileştirme" fikrinden ve postkolonyal ile feminist bağlamlarda hem sömürgeci hem de yerli erkek toplumları tarafından kadınlara yönelik uzun süredir devam eden ayrımcılık tarihinden yola çıkmaktadır. Makalenin sonunda, Toni Morrison'un sömürgeciliğin etkileri, ataerkillik unsurları ve kadın haklarına yönelik sosyal istismar hakkındaki tartışmasının, sömürgeleştirilmiş kadınların kimliğinin hâlâ bu unsurlarla şekillendirildiğini nasıl aydınlattığı netleşmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çifte sömürgeleştirme, ataerkillik, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison, postkolonyal feminizm

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Introduction

Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty.... A little Black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her Blackness and see the world with blue eyes. His outrage grew and felt like power. For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles.

— Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

The concept of Double Colonization, which was introduced by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford in their collection *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Postcolonial Women's Writing*, (1986), is a component of postcolonial feminism. It tackles the problem of women's representation and the difficulties faced by female writers in a world dominated by men. The idea has endured over time as a means of characterizing imperialism and patriarchy, as well as how they affect women. Accordingly, postcolonial feminist theory is a profound critical stance or school that emerged in the 1980s with the writings of Audre Lorde³ and her followers and it is not so different than traditional (White) feminism which "canters on the advocacy of achieving equality for both men and women" (Güven, 2024, p. 135). This approach can be defined as an alternative theory that only focuses on the circumstances of Coloured women in Western societies and previous colonies. Postcolonial feminist theory builds on the foundation of the postcolonial context and aims to explain how racism and the lingering political, economic, historical, cultural, and social effects of imperialism influence women of Colour of the non-Western world or non-White women. This theory can be seen as an opposition of feminist theorists of first World countries, as it highlights the expanding inclinations of standard feminist theories and contending that women living in non-Western nations are inaccurately portrayed.

By analysing the female characters and the story as a way to apply this concept, the research aims to introduce readers to the idea of Double Colonialism as it is explored in Toni Morrison's postcolonial feminist classic *The Bluest Eye*. The primary characters' psyches and relationships with the White and male characters best capture the psychological conflict brought on by the patriarchal, male-dominated society and the colonial racial prejudice against women of Colour.

Theoretical Background

In the 1970s, postcolonial theory entered the crucial schools, and numerous scholars cite/ed Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as its precursor, alongside the scholarly works of Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which called for the decolonization of both the physical state and the psyche. This approach advocates frequently investigate how authors from colonised nations try to express and showcase their cultural notions with prideful output in order to reclaim their identities from the colonisers' power. This theory also explores the way the colonial powers' literature perpetuates derogatory stereotypes of the colonised in order to defend colonialism. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said demonstrates the epidemic tendencies of the literature of the West and their culture to emphasise the Western perspective and glorify and caricature depictions of the East, which automatically deems those of no White or Western roots to be 'Othered.' Further, Said tackles on the stereotypes based on gender that categorise all women from the East as 'effeminate' or 'sexually promiscuous, exotic oriental females' and how they are fundamental to orientalism and, by consequently, colonisation (Said, 1978).

In this context, postcolonial feminism builds on the foundation of Postcolonialism within a feminist perspective. To put simply, the purpose of postcolonial feminism is to decolonise the feminist movement and reclaim it within a postcolonial lens, outside its Western restrictions and ideals. According to Said, orientalism is an imperialist

³ Audre Lorde's 1981 essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is one of the most fundamental works of postcolonial feminism and it brought academia's attention to the Coloured women's problems in American scholarship. Thus, helped to establish the theory of postcolonial feminism. Source for further research: Aghasiyev, K. (2024). An Exploration of Postcolonial Feminism in Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (Master's thesis). Karabük University, Department of English Language and Literature.

ideology known to build or “Orientalise” the East. Thus, feminism clearly plays a role in the way third-World women are portrayed as the indistinguishable “other” in the colonial epistemic narrative framework (1978). It can be said that academic writings within a postcolonial feminist context attempt to de-centre the White, Western and European-focused worldview through understanding and interpreting everyday occurrences from a postcolonial viewpoint. Postcolonial feminism in this case, is both an attempt to reclaim the feminist movement in a non-Western context and a critique of Western feminism's inability to address the multifaceted nature of postcolonial feminist issues. Women's struggles in the global East are an important part of the larger feminist movement, which postcolonial feminists seek to include. As third-World women are figuratively forced to exist within the world of Western women, and their marginalisation is graded on a culturally focused Western scale as a result of Western feminism's propensity to disregard or dismiss these distinctions (Mohanty, 1988).⁴

When Western feminism enters the postcolonial and political sphere, it becomes exceedingly harmful, this lies in the fact that cultural imperialism and the power imbalance between the West and the East overshadows the ability to perceive women of Colour in an unbiased perspective. In this sense, it is easy to indicate many examples in the modern feminist ideals and how they fail to see Eastern women as equal. By portraying White women as victims simply because of their gender identity and failing to hold White women responsible for their role in maintaining White supremacy when women of Colour are overlooked, White feminism ties itself with White supremacy (Moon, 2020). Various policies in Europe and America are evidence of this. For instance, in France, White feminists are incapable of viewing the hijab as more than an oppressive element that Muslim women are tied to, rather than seeing it from the viewpoint of their faith. Similarly, African women are viewed as less, ‘Othered’ and subjected to these misfit ideals of White feminism in order to universalize women (Piazza 2021). This goes along with Said's claim that the “West presents modernity as a universal reality and tries to give a universal quality to its own culture and values” (1993). Which in return, disregards the many struggles and harmful factors of imperialism, politics, social gender concepts and patriarchy in third-World countries. As dominance systems, colonialism and patriarchy perpetuate one another. The structures of dominance created for patriarchal rule might also be used in the context of colonialism (Bukari, 2008). Therefore, it can be said that regardless of the coloniser and colonised relationship, it is human nature to possess the same attitude of wanting to dominate those who are beneath them. Thus, postcolonial feminism as a theory, can be considered as a new area for interpretations that was created by the dialogue and exchange that emerged between feminism and the postcolonial theory of culture (Ryal, 2019), as both theories maintain an ongoing challenge against oppression, hence, both theories can be said to be intertwined in terms of those factors.

Double colonisation as a notion, stemmed from how women are treated in postcolonial societies. This concept refers to the way many nations continue to mistreat women long after they gained sovereignty according to postcolonial women thinkers. This notion can be considered due to two factors, patriarchal and colonial authority. Both of these components lead to women being double oppressed and ‘Othered’ by men and the colonisers. According to Edward Said, “in male-dominated societies, women are doubly marginalised since men are regarded as superior while women are regarded as inferior” (1978). The idea of double colonisation, hence, became essential when it comes to discussing postcolonial women's writing. The notion itself was initially coined by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford in 1986, in their anthology *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Postcolonial Women's Writing* (Aghasiyev, 2024), they first addressed the issues of how women are represented, voiced and the challenges they go through in a largely male-dominated society. The struggle from being doubly oppressed consequently resulted in analogies, images and stereotypes that are produced and spread within the realm of the colonisers, this includes seeing postcolonial women as the lower races, and the ‘lesser other.’ The challenges created by such widely spread perceptions automatically became a means to oppress and double the tormenting reality of theirs. For instance, women of Colour did not only become objected to colonial discrimination but also viewed as a sexual product that is easily accessed, both by the colonisers and the men of society.

Ultimately, this reduced their values and dehumanised them to the most extreme level, these women are described as the ‘Subaltern’ as Spivak referred to them, she indicates that “such women who suffer amidst double colonisation lack both the past and a voice to speak” (Spivak, 1988). Those women were stripped from

⁴ Source for further research: Aghasiyev, K. (2024). An Exploration of Postcolonial Feminism in Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (Master's thesis). Karabuk University, Department of English Language and Literature.

the ability of having a past pre-colonialism and further restricted from accessing a life that is not tormenting while being surrounded by a predatory society. Being devalued by both society and the colonisers, further led to painting the full struggle of women of Colour in the sense that the White standards of being a woman thereby became more desired. As Eastern women became an 'easy access' and domesticated as 'lesser.' It deliberately resulted in the colonised desires to be with the 'superior' kind of women. In other words, non-White women were disregarded as the extreme inferior 'other' by both those oppressing factors and White women themselves. Hence this type of devaluation means they're excluded from the universal idea of women in the feminist sense. As asserted by Gandhi "ethnocentric myopia disregards the enormous material and historical differences between 'real' third-World women, and the fused Othering" (1988). In other words, White Western women are equally responsible for the process of double-othering women of Colour, which ultimately stripped them from their ability to voice their struggle, to be visible and to be heard.

DISCUSSION

The Bluest Eye, Morrison's debut work, is a story of initiation about a victimised juvenile Black girl who is fixated on White ideals of beauty and yearns for blue eyes. Following her debut work, Morrison published her second book, *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), and her most acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1987), based on the true account of a runaway slave who murders her new-born daughter to prevent her from being recaptured and being forced into slavery. For 25 weeks, this novel was on the bestseller list, and it received numerous honours, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, making history as the first Black woman to do so. In her 1974 essay, the author indicated that, like many other Black Americans of her generation, the idea of growing up believing in Black success was perceived as some sort of legend, an oral tradition that was handed down with dignity: "I am not sure what the project meant to the authors. But for me, it was like growing up Black once more" (Morrison, 1974). While the novel unfolds before the Civil Rights Movement acquired traction, *The Bluest Eye* was composed at the peak of the movement in the 1960s, and many of its concepts examine the concerns Black people were struggling with at the time. A different campaign known as the Black is Beautiful Movement started during the Civil Rights Movement. The Black is Beautiful Movement sought to dispel the myth that Black people are fundamentally unattractive due to their skin tone, facial characteristics, and hair (Ford, 2020). The movement aimed to disprove the widespread notion that White people were more attractive and desirable than Black people at the time.

The narrative of a little African American girl called Pecola who lived in Lorain, Ohio—Morrison's hometown—during the Great Depression is relayed in the novel of discussion. She is frequently thought of as "ugly" because of her demeanour and dark complexion in the 1941 novel. In her analysis of the book, reviewer Doreatha Mbalia claims that Toni Morrison highlights racism in *The Bluest Eye*. She specifically looks into how the dominant culture's beauty standards affect the sense of self-worth of African female adolescents. The principal means of oppression endured by Africans is class, in this case (1991). The story of the book isn't conveyed in a linear fashion. In reality, the novel's opening section doesn't seem to have been composed by Morrison at all; rather, it reads like it was lifted verbatim from a first-grade initial that was used for years to teach both White and Black children to read by giving them brief phrases about a flawless, all-American White family. Moreover, as asserted by Leonard John's review of the novel:

I have said "poetry." But "The Bluest Eye" is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music. It is one thing to state that we have institutionalized waste, that children suffocate under mountains of merchandised lies. It is another thing to demonstrate that waste, to re-create those children, to live and die by it. Miss Morrison's angry sadness overwhelms (Leonard, 1970, n.p.).

The Bluest Eye depicts double colonisation and oppression of women in a very delicate way. The novel particularly examines how women of Colour are marginalised and subjected to both racism and patriarchy by both the Black and White communities. they consequently endure double oppression. Particularly in America, Black women are subjected to sexism and racism, which constitute a double form of oppression (Hamilton, 2003). These gendered, racial and class difficulties were generated by the Western world and led to the painful

circumstances they encounter. The novel demonstrates how the conditions of living for the female Black characters were tormenting and traditionally harsher. The author illustrates the struggle of all her female Black characters in different pictures, specifically in an explicit way when it comes to Pecola and Pauline. This is drawn in detail in the way those women were frequently assaulted physically and psychologically by the male characters. Morrison showcases how the male figures in the story oppress the women in their lives through forcing themselves upon them. Their notions about the value of their own women became their own provocation to satisfy their twisted sexual urges. This is immediately shown through Cholly's character; his first sexual encounter was the roots of his twisted idea of his own race, women, and his sense of worthiness. It was a mixture of humiliation and hatred as he was forced to rape someone in submission to two White men' domineer. In this sense, this instance can be seen as what Fanon described as the culmination of colonisation effort being the coloniser's acquiescence that the values of the White man are enlightened and superior (1967). Such concepts stemmed from the way White men used rape women of Colour as a kind of retribution for the colonised men, thus, women who live in colonised nations experience double colonisation due to the imperialist and patriarchal notions. Furthermore, sex becomes the distinguishing characteristic of the transition into womanhood for younger protagonists in *The Bluest Eye*. They have idealistic conceptions of what Sex is and relate it to love and women's perception of value. This plays an essential part in how the plot develops. This premise is used by Morrison to show how society views women as just sexual objects. It is shown in a number of overt occasions, such as Frieda's first forced sexual encounter with Mr. Henry. The young character feels "ruined" and insignificant as a result of this particular experience:

Miss Dunion came in after everybody was quiet, and Mama and Daddy was fussing about who let Mr. Henry in anyway, and she said that Mama should take me to the doctor, because I might be ruined, and Mama started screaming all over again." "At you?" "No. At Miss Dunion." "But why were you crying?" "I don't want to be ruined!" (p. 84).

Throughout the novel Morrison showcases that the only means to escape this sexual oppression is to either surpass the threshold of sexual attractiveness or utilise it against men. These cases, however, serve as a significant impact on the psychological state of the characters. For example, the elderly ladies in the neighbourhood feel liberated because they aren't coveted as sexual objects anymore. But these women are resentful, worn out, and content with their agony. On the other hand, the three prostitutes presented in the novel use their own libido as leverage to control men, but that only causes them to drown in self-hatred. The story's climax provides the main illustration of this subjugation. Pecola's rape, which she ultimately dies as a result of. Pecola personifies the catastrophic impact of sexual violence and the tyrannical influence of sex in these women's lives through her experience. Pecola's viewpoint during the rape scene illustrates the oppressive nature of men towards women, and the way these instances serve as a means to silence women and strip them from their strength and voice: "His soul seemed to slip down into his guts and fly into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon" (p. 134). In all these exhibits, the women suffer under the influence of the social patriarchal rules, and it doubles with the impact of imperialism. Morrison demonstrates the silencing effect of this oppression's nature upon these Black women by the lack of usage of the perspective of Pecola in that scene to further intensify the effect of double colonisation.

Furthermore, the Western culture's ideals for beauty fall prey to women in the story. *The Bluest Eye* gives a detailed account of the ways that Black girls' and women's lives are distorted by internalised Whitewashed standards of beauty. With the Implication that Whiteness is superior to Black. Many instances are tackled upon throughout the narrative, in the first chapter, Claudia's perspective of when given a White doll serves as an instance and an opening for the further narrative that Morrison investigates:

From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked. (...) I was physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orange worms hair (P. 23).

These scenarios are employed by Morrison to demonstrate how imperialism also extends to the colonial power structure's view of beauty. In this way, the Western criteria of beauty and self-worth—a coherent representation of the attributes of a White woman—were all that mattered. The colonised women are ultimately influenced by this, which lowers their standards and further exposes them to oppressive lives, and consequently, internalised self-hatred and racism. Bivens emphasised that internalised racism has an adverse effect on the private lives of people of Colour. They are given a very constrained sense of who they are by race, which is a social and political construct based on the experience of oppressor-subject relationships based on physical features. This constrained sense of self-worth, especially paired with internalised racism, can diminish people of Colour's trust in full humanity and cause destabilise the comprehension of the interior existence of people of Colour (1995). Pauline, the mother of the protagonist, is a perfect showcase of how the effect of imperialism on beauty standards altered her sense of worth and further, the way she viewed her own daughter. As the adult female characters were incapable of lovingness, they displaced these negative emotions outwardly on their children. This led to the most explicit victim in the novel Pecola detesting her Blackness and later becoming mad.

Over the length and breadth of the novel, Pauline views her daughter Pecola as ugly and degrades her constantly. Pecola is both physically and emotionally abused by her mother's displacement and hatred and that ultimately led the young girl to feel a sense of worthlessness and misfit. Morrison utilises this relationship between the mother and daughter to its peak. She even showcases how Pauline's hatred of her daughter's appearance started from the day she gave her birth. Both these characters were victims of the Whitewashing of beauty standards and double colonisation. This is expanded on throughout the novel, as Pauline is in a constant fight with the White society and her husband. On the other hand, Pecola's life takes the most tragic turn as she is not only neglected by her own mother, but the entire society. She constantly faces unjust treatments and is consequently isolated and devalued. Nonetheless, the most primary example demonstrated is when she gets raped by her father. In the aftermath of the sexual assault, Pecola is not believed by her mother, and further is faced by victim blaming. Pauline's behaviour and incapability to support her daughter clearly stems from the social values placed on her and her daughter, therefore, her self-hatred and delusion shadow her judgement and make her take an oppressor's role in her daughter's life: "Ought to. She carries some of the blame." "Oh, come on. She ain't but twelve or so." "Yeah. But you never know. How come she didn't fight him?" "Maybe she did" "Yeah? You never know" (p. 155).

Pecola lived in a perpetual state of hysteria and paranoia due to her mother's abuse, ostracism by society, and her father's relentless sexual harassment of her. She was therefore led to doubt her own value and worth, while also desiring the 'accepted' traits of society, leading her to conclude that having blue eyes would be the key to solving all her issues and the terrible events in her life. She hated being Black and attributed all her traumas to her peculiar appearance: "The distaste must be for her, her Blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her Blackness is static and dread. And it is the Blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in White eyes" (p. 46). Pecola's fixation with blue eyes drives her insane as her life grows increasingly harsh, and in the solitude of that craziness, she starts to think that she does have blue eyes. The novel ends with Pecola having a conversation with an imaginary friend, through the scene, Morrison illustrates the way Pecola's obsession with the shades of blue aligned with her sense of value. Pecola's fear of someone else having bluer eyes than her drove her further into madness and the inability to see beyond her delusions:

If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world. That's just too bad, isn't it? Please help me look. No. But suppose my eyes aren't blue enough? Blue enough for what? Blue enough for... I don't know. Blue enough for something. Blue enough... for you! I'm not going to play with you anymore (p. 167).

Morrison's thesis in this sense, is that beauty and ugliness are neither harmful nor perilous in and of themselves. Instead, the internalisation of the notion of what constitutes beauty has a tremendously detrimental effect. The concept developed by Roland Barthes can be linked to the fabricated idea of "Whiteness" in the imaginations of

the female characters. Since myth is a sort of speech, anything that is given through discourse qualifies as a myth, according to Roland Barthes “it can be seen that to purport to discriminate among mythical objects according to their substance would be entirely illusory” (Barthes, 1957, p. 109). Ultimately, it is understood that throughout the novel, the Black women are doubly ‘Othered’ and seen as the inferior gender and are ultimately used, objectified, and further silenced into submission by both the dominating societies of the imperialists and the men of their nations. Morrison reflects these traumas of third world women through her female characters’ struggles and lifestyles, and consequently, demonstrates the brutal and dehumanising events they undergo as potential prey for both men and the White power for being the ‘lesser’ sex.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the centuries, the concept of Double Colonization, coined by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford in 1988, has been used as part of postcolonial feminism to describe how patriarchy and imperialism oppress women. The notion examines the way women in colonized countries experience double oppression because of both their gender and race. It highlights the issues of Indigenous minorities, women with a history of continuous persecution, and women who belong to marginalized groups in postcolonial cultures. By applying this theory to evaluate the female characters and the story, this study aimed to introduce readers to the concept of Double Colonialism as it is explored in Toni Morrison's postcolonial feminist classic *The Bluest Eye*. The psychological turmoil caused by the patriarchal, male-dominated society and the colonial racial prejudice against women of Colour was best portrayed by the psyches of the main characters and their relationships with the White and male characters. The paper also argued that Toni Morrison's exploration of colonialism's consequences, patriarchy's components, and social abuse of women has helped to shed light on how colonized women's identities are still shaped by these factors. In this fashion, Toni Morrison's novel depended on the concept of double colonization since it depicts the larger picture of the continual struggle that women of Colour endure, particularly in postcolonial and male-dominated countries.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author/authors of the article have no personal or financial conflicts of interest within the scope of the study.

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