

## Post-Colonial Analysis Of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* In The Light Of Edward W. Said's And Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Post-Colonial Approaches

### Alice Walker'ın *Mor Yıllar* İsimli Romanının Edward W. Said Ve Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak'ın Sömürgecilik Sonrası Yaklaşımları Işığında İncelenmesi

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**ÖZ:** Edebiyat alanında dünya edebiyatı ve karşılaştırmalı edebiyat türleri oldukça önemli bir yere sahiptirler. Bu edebiyat türlerinin her ikisi de ötekilik, azınlık ve daha alt seviye de olma gibi terimler ile ilgilenirler. Hem dünya edebiyatının hem de karşılaştırma edebiyatının bir parçası olan sömürgecilik sonrası akımı temel olarak azınlık olan toplumların ortaya çıkarmış olduğu edebi metinleri temel almaktadır. Edward Said üstün güçlerin hâkimiyet kurmuş olmasına rağmen, her metnin kendi özgürlüğü ve bilinci olduğu tezini savunmaktadır ve dünyevilik terimini sunmuştur. Onun için metin dünyevi bir oluşturmaya ve Alice Walker'ın *Mor Yıllar* isimli romanında, Celie azınlık kültürünün bir parçası olmasına rağmen, sonunda kendi sesini ve kişiliğini Tanrı'ya gönderdiği mektuplar sonucunda kazanmayı başarmıştır. Dayatılan değerlere ve hâkimiyet kuran güçlere rağmen kendini ifade etmenin yolunu bulmuştur. Diğer bir taraftan ise, Gayatri Spivak ise milletlerin harmanlanmış kültürleri üzerinde çalışmaktadır. *Mor Yıllar* isimli roman Amerika'nın Georgia eyaletinde yer almaktadır ve bu sayede okuyucular Georgia eyaleti ve bu bölgede yaşayan insanların kültürleri hakkında bilgi sahibi olmuşlardır. Roman İngilizce yazılmış olmasına rağmen, içerisinde Afrika diline ait kelimeler görmek mümkündür ve bu da bize gösterir ki Afrikalı uluslar hala kendi kültürlerini ve değerlerini korumayı başarmışlardır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** ötekileştirme, dünyevilik, alan araştırmaları, sömürgecilik sonrası

**ABSTRACT:** World literature and Comparative literature have a significant place in the field of literature. They both deal with the terms otherness, minority and inferiority in different ways. Post colonialism that is included in both World and Comparative literature takes the inferior cultures as the basis. Edward Said defends the idea that each text has its own freedom and consciousness despite being under the domain of superior powers. He brings out the term worldliness and as for him, the text is a worldly being. In Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, despite being an inferior figure, Celie succeeds in gaining her own voice and identity thanks to the letter which she sent to God. She manages to find a way to express herself despite the imposed values and dominating powers. On the other hand, Gayatri Spivak works on the blending culture of the nations. *Color Purple* takes place in Georgia and this enables the reader to have details about this area and their cultures. Although the novel was written in English, it is possible to see some African words and this shows that African nations still manage to preserve their own cultures and values.

**Keywords:** otherness, worldliness, area studies, post-colonialism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

World literature and Comparative literature are two terms introduced to the field of literature. World literature was first introduced by Goethe. By introducing such a term, he intended to bring all types of literature and cultures under the umbrella of World literature. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, World literature and Comparative literature strongly dealt with the terms such as otherness, minority, and romantic nationalism. World literature adopted the theory of synthetic approach. It describes the

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growing availability of texts from other nations, including translations from many other nations and refers to the literature from all over the world. It is more about romance, common problems occurring in the world and the problems that people expose to during their lives. On the other hand, Comparative literature is not so easy to define like World literature. However, it can be defined like that it is the study of more than two or three literatures using different languages and their influences on one another. As it can be guessed from the name of the Comparative literature, it means it is away of doing comparison between literary genres. Similar types of literary genres with different languages and how these genres are affected from one another. The main aim of Comparative Literature is to highlight the differences between these genres. Through the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible to see a shift towards the subjects of comparative literature. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century foundations of literature, we realize the changing nature of comparative literature. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, translation studies, gender, post modernism as equals to post structuralism, culture and post colonialism have been the important topics that were dealt with.

## **2. EDWARD W. SAID: *THE WORLD, THE TEXT, AND THE CRITIC* (1983)**

Post colonialism or in other words post-colonial theory strongly deals with the literatures of the countries that were the colonies of the other countries. Postcolonial theory might be regarded as a kind of reaction against the values and cultural imposition of the colonizing powers of the world. Edward Said proposes a new and bright perspective to the relation of post colonialism, critics and the text. In his article, “*The World, the Text and the Critic*”, he talks about a new form of criticism which should have some oppositional and against features to the dominating culture of the society. As a critic, one should take place in the process of merging the cultures together which are challenging with the dominating power of the society. Edward Said puts forward the theory of “worldliness”. Said states that a theory of the “worldliness” of a text in response to arguments for the hermetically sealed text in which meaning is only internal to the text (Said, 259). All the literary texts are worldly and they all have some historical effects or background in it in some way. They are in a way strongly related to social, historical or economical phenomena. All the literary texts have some relation to the social, historical or economic problems happening or having already happened in the world. Said states: “Both a recording and a printed object, however, are subject to certain legal, political, economic, and social constraints, so far as their sustained production and distribution are concerned; but why and how they are distributed are different matters” (Said, 261). The most important thing that critic should care is only the text itself. The text is thought to be the result of contact between author and the public. It may have written for the sake of the reader or the world, actually, there is no clear answer for this question. As to him, style of the text is the main point which makes inactive the wordlessness, and such attitude raises the interest in textuality. The text is a social and political masterpiece. It has some important points from the social background or political background of the world in it. For this reason, he objects to the ideas of New Critics. Isolating the text from the external features is not a true thing. Text is a unity and just focusing on the words and ignoring all the external effects on the text cannot be the way to analyze the text or the responsibility of the critics. To support his idea, he states:

*This is no longer the case when a text takes the place of speech...A text...is not without reference; it will be precisely the task of the reading, as interpretation, to actualize the reference. At least, in this suspension wherein reference is deferred, in the sense that it is postponed, a text is somehow "in the air," outside of the world or without a world; by means of this obliteration of all relation to the world, every text is free to enter into relation with all the other texts which come to take the place of the circumstantial reality shown by living speech (Ricoeur, 138).*

As it can be understood from these lines, if there is no connection with the outer world, the text is just a text written to be read. However, with the worldly references or effects from the other texts, texts find itself and become a living speech. Said claims: "Despite Ricoeur's simplified idealization, and far from being a type of conversation between equals, the discursive situation is more usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and the colonized, oppressor and oppressed" (Said, 276).

Actually he associates the relation between the colonizer and the colonized with the text, its inner voice and outer voice. In this place, Said's post-colonial theory comes out. In the written texts, the colonizer imposes his ideas or perspective as if the same thing happens in real world. Here, for the literary text, the voice of the book, the critic takes the position of the colonizer. Said defends that he critic must put a distance from the yields of the dominant culture. He strongly advocates the freedom of consciousness, social, political and historical values in relation to the human experience. Criticism aims to look for a way to get rid of the monopoly of the dominating class. The text should be worldly, opposing to the monetary voices. As long as the critic behaves like this, this is true criticism for him. In his discourse, Said tries to state that no culture is better or worse than the other cultures. Many critics strongly focus on the literary theories in order to serve their purposes, but the main idea is that the text should have its own self-consciousness and freedom. Said states:

*...not simply because texts in fact are in the world but also because as texts they place themselves --- one of their functions as texts is to place themselves --- and indeed are themselves, by soliciting the world's attention. Moreover, their manner of doing this is to place restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively (Said, 268).*

Texts are worldly materials, their function is to place themselves into the middle of the world and catch the world's attention and reduce the effects of the restraints placed onto the text. Ricoeur implies that texts are isolated from the world until a critic or a reader comes and interprets them. This provides to the reader the opportunity of producing different points of view about the texts. Said actually does not share the same ideas with Ricoeur or Derrida. Since speaking in other words oral use of language is strongly has been attached great importance, speaking has been seemed more close to the truth and reality. However, as to Said, texts are equipped with time, society, history and place. To prove his ideas, he gives sacred examples about the interpretation of Koran. There is no stable meaning of Koran that the reader can reach. It is not easy to get the meaning because this is a long standing process, however for Zahirites, the meaning is not in the deeper parts of Koran, it is on the surface. The main point is that whether the interpreter realizes the meaning or not. As long as the interpreter sees the meaning of the text as something which is bound to particular use, it is not so difficult to reach the stable meaning. Texts and speech try to dominate the interpreter or the reader for several reasons, such as political, social or historical etc. Since old times, as Derrida or Ricoeur mentions, speaking is seen over the writing process. However, in his article, Edward Said intends to change this common opinion. Both writing and speaking are worldly acts. They control and include some ideas then exclude others. As a critic, Said

aims to point out that the interpreter must pay attention to the controlling power. He creates a relation between the reader and the text by using the Nietzschean idea of “the Will to Power”, it means a controlling force which cannot be simply degraded to personal state. Said states:

*The critic's attitude to some extent is sensitive in a similar way; it should in addition and more often be frankly inventive, in the traditional rhetorical sense of inventive so fruitfully employed by Vico, which means finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine (Said, 281).*

Therefore, the critic should give importance to the will to power inherent in texts. The critic should try to find out what the texts does not have right to say to the readers, what the text has forbidden readers to say or to discover the way of thought the text shows us and to understand the process of forbidding. Indeed, Said advocates a more equal way of reading. This only becomes possible when authors or texts are not allowed to form their own privileged domain of speech.

### **3. GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK: *CROSSING BORDERS (2003)***

In her article, Gayatri Spivak does not just talk about crossing national boundaries but also she talks about how to build a bridge between the divided international society, North and South. As I have mentioned in the beginning of my paper, Comparative literature is deeply interested in the other literary traditions in order to observe and display the relationship between the literary genres. As for Spivak, Other is a key term. She strongly believes that global Southern language should be analyzed attentively in order to understand the meaning of “other”. The term “other” should not be reduced to a single category. She states: “Comparative social studies, as represented by Area Studies, were undergoing their own transformation” (Spivak, 382). As she mentions, Area studies should be reinforced with linguistic skills and literary efficiency. Spivak tries to explore the structures of imperial domination and their material impact on the lives of the colonized subject as represented “other”. She states: “Area Studies related to foreign “areas.” Comparative literature was made up of Western European “nations.” This distinction, between “areas” and “nations,” infected Comparative literature from the start” (Spivak, 386). While Area studies strongly deal with the areas in general terms, Comparative literature deals with the events that have relationships with these certain areas. The language of other actually is an important supplement for Area studies. The language of other should not be observed just as a field or an object, it should be analyzed as an active cultural being. Spivak suggests something challenging by stating these lines:

*We cannot try to open up, from the inside, the colonialism of European national language-based Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area Studies, and infect history and anthropology with the “other” as producer of knowledge (Spivak, 387).*

What Spivak proposes here is a quite challenging task. The first step is to invoke the image of other in terms of collaboration and then to transform the old disciplines. The existence of other should be admitted as the producer of knowledge and this leads to question our positions as a kind of researcher. By doing this, actually the aim is not to bring the other into the center of our universe or judge others from the views of ours. The main point is to come together with the others in the process of coexistence. Literatures of past, present and future should be blended. The literary outputs in English

produced by the British colonies should be studied. Because studying only present products or their future results will not be sufficient. Studying the past ones should be also really important. With the help of such study, crossing the borders which are unified together might become easier.

#### 4. POST COLONIAL ANALYSIS OF ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Post colonialism is thought to be a new postmodern discourse in literature. First of all, post colonialism observes the reactions and analysis of the colonialism. The main goal of this theory is to fight with the effects of colonialism and how the others in other words inferiors survive and find a new way of understanding the world. Edward Said is an important figure in post-colonial area. He points out that the West and the East are always in a kind of battle. He introduces the term "Orientalism". Orientalist is used by European powers to prove their strength and superiority over the others or inferior ones. The Western powers regard themselves as a model and superior over The Eastern cultures. However, Eastern cultures actually have enough strength and power to find a way of survival in the world. They may have their own freedom to think about the ways of survival over the superior powers of Western cultures. *The Color Purple* written by Alice Walker is an important example of this postcolonial theory showing how the others or inferior ones are repressed even by their own culture and the postcolonial way of reading this book focuses on the ways in which communities and the people with them were affected by the imposition of different cultures, religions belief systems which were imposed on them by the dominating powers. The book is mainly about the repressed and isolated character of Celie and how her life changed after she met Sofia. Throughout the book, she undergoes a significant change and with the help of this change, in the end she is able to gain her own voice and freedom. As a colonized figure, Celie is thought that she does not have any right or strength to manage and run her own culture and identity. The unnamed father keeps all the letters from Nettie, Celie's sister. After a long time, with the help and support of Shug, Celie's friend, Celie discovers the reason of her sister's silence. When she finds these letters which were sent to her sister, a new world opens its gates for Celie. Instead of being submissive and oppressed, she realizes the harsh and inferior conditions she is living in. This awareness and knowledge gives her power to leave him and have a superior life. As Edward indicates knowledge and power are two inseparable terms. For this reason, when Celie gains knowledge, she finds enough power to leave her oppressor or colonizer behind. Actually, the place of these letters from Nettie is really important. In this place, letters stand for a way of communication between these two sisters. Through the letters these two sisters find a way of expressing themselves freely without any dominating power. These letters can be regarded as the literary texts. There is no colonizing power or there is no suppression. They are free to articulate their ideas, opinions or dreams. They have enough freedom to express themselves. Such a powerful and free expression gives power to Celie to start a new life. Nettie's letters changes the way Celie sees the world. Throughout the novel it is emphasized that the ability of expressing one's thoughts and ideas is really crucial to develop a sense of self and freedom. She is so passive that she cannot share her submission with anyone but just with God. Therefore, sharing her ideas and experiences with God by writing letters is really important for her, by doing so; by articulating herself using letter gives her power of self-independence. With these lines, it is very clear to understand the self-voice of Celie: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Walker, 214). With these lines, it is possible to see that Celie as an object knows that she is inferior, but she believes that she has voice and right to talk, think and express herself against the superior powers over

her. In her article, Ecaterina Pavel points out that there is no single culture or no superior domain which others are thought to be exposed to with these lines:

*There is no immutable culture, especially when articulated on another culture. Social and cultural change implies evolution or erosion, what is now endoculture can become apoculture, to end up as what yesterday was exoculture and so on (Pavel, 7).*

The integration of the cultures between both the colonized and the colonizer ones may lead to the unity of the culture, speech and society. In this case, Said's idea of orientalism carries importance for the book. As I have mentioned in the previous pages, Said introduces a term "orient", Europeans see the others as people or community that they can shape and impose their own language, values and culture. As it is stated above, Said states that both speaking and writing deserve same importance, one is not superior to the other. To support the relationship between writing and speaking, Maria B. Jorgensen states:

*Writing is a means of survival in The Color Purple as well, but Celie is not a prisoner of hostile strangers. Celie is a prisoner of her own broken spirit: Nettie, Sofia and Kate all urge her to fight against Albert, because she is the only one who can save herself. Their struggle between Celie and the men who abuse her is not a matter of identity, because they are all of the same "nation": Celie does not stand to lose her identity at the hands of aliens, because it is her own people that represses her. Celie's freedom comes the moment she can articulate her own existence out loud, to the people who controlled her by refusing to acknowledge her as an individual (Borgenson, 74).*

Celie's expression of herself is the moment when she attempts to gain her own voice and freedom, because she is repressed by the superior forces or powers, but that does not mean that she has to behave other or inferior, she should realize that she is an individual, she does not have to take the dominating powers as a model or ruler. The colonizer and the colonized ones all belong to the same nation. She does not have to undergo the domain superior powers; she does not have to lose her own identity. Therefore, in this case, the letters become the great helper for her. She does not lose her voice, identity with the help of letters. In the beginning of the book, she is writing to God, and then she starts getting letters from her sister Nettie. By expressing herself, writing letters, she proves that she is not completely colonized; she still has some freedom to articulate herself. When Celie finds the letters of her sister, her transformation from a writer to a reader starts. Despite being an inferior, she has voice, she has ability to write and express herself. She can have her own literary world and literary freedom. Spivak's theory is crossing the borders. She offers a new field of study; "area studies". She focuses on blending and coming together all the different cultures. Different cultures, different styles should be brought together under one common point. Spivak identifies these terms as "otherness", "other". The language of other should not be excluded, on the contrary it should be observed carefully in order to get a common point between the superior ones and inferior ones. Throughout the novel, we encounter with some African words that are written in Celie's native language. The book was actually written in English, but it is possible to see some words that are generally used and known in African native language. Therefore, here it is possible to apply Spivak's theory of blending the cultures together. The dominating power is the American power, however, under the domain of this power, some African in other words "other" words and expression are used in the novel. Moreover, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* provides us a way to explore the area studies. This novel commonly takes place in Georgia, southern part of the USA. Therefore, this provides details about mainly this

area. Such details help the reader observe the area closely, realize their own literary styles. Instead of excluding the traits of colonized ones, there should be a combination of all nations and cultures to build a stable interaction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Edward Said indicates that each text should have its own freedom and consciousness. The text should not be excluded from the outer effects, because it is a worldly being. It is possible to see the traces of Said's post-colonial theory throughout Walker's masterpiece. Critics should not be affected by the dominating powers while observing the text. He should put a distance between himself and the dominating powers. For this reason, we see that in *The Color Purple*, Celie is actually depicted as an inferior voice, however she realizes that she has voice and power to express herself. The letters she wrote to God and received from her sister helped her end her expressional captivity. Despite her being captured by the domain of superior powers, she gains her own consciousness and voice through the letters. The letters can be seen as the literary texts and Celie can be regarded as a critic or the author of the text. Therefore, according to the ideas of Edward Said, Celie is aware of her own position in the real world, she does not exclude herself from the outer world, on the contrary, the ability of writing and reading the letters gives her enough power to gain her own self-consciousness and voice. The appearance of African words in an English written novel is a good example of the blending culture theory of Spivak. The novel takes place in a specific area, Georgia, so it is possible to carry out an area study on this specific area to observe and apply her theory. For further studies, it is highly suggested that Edward W. Said's and Gayatri Spivak's theories can be applied to other novels to highlight the post-colonial elements included in the novel.

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