

**ILLUSION OF HEAVEN IN NEW HAVEN TOWN IN TONI MORRISON'S
NOVEL CALLED *PARADISE****

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Abstract

The segregation and oppression on women are reflected in literary works by many women writers as Toni Morrison does in her novel *Paradise* (1997). The novel, focusing on the segregation on African American women by the patriarchal society which claims of creating ideal society and town called New Haven which is like heaven for them, puts forth issues related to racist and sexist approaches of men, especially African American men. In this context, the study will analyze these racist and sexist approaches of African American men and their illusion about New Haven town.

As theoretical background, the connection of power and illusion will be explained. Then, the qualities of racism and feminist approach which are significant in the novel will be provided. Therefore, reflection of the gender issue and racist approach of the patriarchy, power and illusion connection for such a patriarchal society and reflection of these in the work will be emphasized. Finally, the study will reveal the racist and sexist approach of men, and their illusions and realities about the town they establish.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrikalı- Amerikalı, Irkçılık, Kadın, Erkek, Yanılsama

**TONİ MORRİSON'IN CENNET ADLI ROMANINDA NEW HAVEN
KASABASINDA CENNET YANILSAMASI**

Oz

Toni Morrison'ın *Cennet* (1997) eserinde ortaya koyduğu üzere, kadın üzerindeki ayrımcılık ve baskı bir çok kadın yazar tarafından edebi eserlerde yansıtılmıştır. Erkekler için cennet gibi olan New Haven adındaki kasaba ve ideal toplumu inşa etmeyi iddaa eden erkek egemen toplum tarafından Afrikalı-Amerikalı kadın üzerindeki ayrımcılığa odaklanan roman, erkeklerin, özellikle Afrikalı-Amerikalı erkeklerin ırkçı ve cinsiyetçi yaklaşımları ile ilgili konuları ortaya koyar. Bu bağlamda çalışma, Afrikalı-Amerikalı erkeklerin bu ırkçı ve cinsiyetçi yaklaşımlarını ve onların New Haven kasabası hakkındaki yanılsamalarını analiz edecektir.

Teorik arka plan olarak, ilizyon ve güç ilişkisi açıklanacaktır. Ardından, roman için önemli olan ırkçılık ve feminist yaklaşımın özellikleri ortaya konulacaktır. Böylelikle, cinsiyet konusunun ve erkek egemen toplumun ırkçı yaklaşımının yansıtılışı, böyle erkek egemen bir toplumda güç ve yanılsama ilişkisi ve bunların eserde yansıtılışı vurgulanacaktır. Sonuç olarak, çalışma erkeklerin ırkçı ve cinsiyetçi yaklaşımını ve

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onların kurdukları kasaba hakkındaki yanılsamalar ile gerçekleri ortaya çıkaracaktır.

Key Words: African American, Racism, Woman, Man, Illusion.

INTRODUCTION

The segregation of women has always been an important issue in the social life. Woman due to her gender suffered from segregation and oppression in many different occasions and in many different countries, and this segregation, discrimination and oppression coming from patriarchal power also showed itself on the race issue. From this point, the non-white women suffer from both gender and racism. In this context, writers who are representatives of such women reflected these issues in their works. In this perspective, Toni Morrison who is an African American female writer dealing with the segregation of African American woman due to her race and gender, presented works dealing with such issues. Among them *Paradise* novel which was published in 1997 and mentions about 1960s America, points out how African American woman is segregated due to her race and gender even by other African American men thinking that they create the ideal town called New Haven which is away from white men who segregate the settlers of this town in other locations and lead them establish such a seemingly heaven but actually an illusion of paradise where these men consider racial purity is significant and therefore segregate the African women not only due to their gender but also race. In this perspective, it is significant to analyze the reflection of the segregation and discrimination of women in a seemingly heaven like world of patriarchy.

METHOD

Power and Illusion

Power is an important concept and device that provide the one who holds it realizes his aims and stops or limits others' acts. In this perspective according to Foucault, "power is what prohibits, what prevents people doing something" (Foucault, 1978: 56). As understood from the definition, power prevents and prohibits, so the one holding this can benefit from its such qualification and in this perspective, patriarchy, having the power can limit and segregate woman. In this perspective, Foucault states that "to say that sex is not repressed, or rather that the relationship between sex and power is not characterized by repression, is to risk falling into a sterile paradox" (Foucault, 1978: 8) and also adds that "sexuality in so far as it is, in very society is a good area to test what the mechanisms of power actually are" (Kritzman, 1988: 102). He points out that sex and power have significant relations and it's the fields where the power of patriarchy is tested and applied.

Like power's relation to sex, it has got relation to illusion as well. R. A. York describes that as a definition "illusion is in the eye of the beholder, it is the act of seeing that

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produces error, not the concrete world" (York, 2007; 23). From this point, in the context of power and illusion relation, he states that *"where there is power, there is illusion"* (York, 2007; 160). The ones who hold the power try to cover their wrong doings and cheat themselves and others. In this perspective, the good examples of literature aim to present this illusion and power connection and put forth reality. In this perspective York points out *"the story of the novel is dissolution of the illusion"* (York, 2007; 22). Therefore, he emphasizes that the story of the literary work reveals this illusion and wrong doings.

Power, Gender and Race

Like power and illusion relation, there is a strong relation between race and gender which determine the social relations and position of the individual in the society. In this perspective, Linda Martin Alcoff states that *"gender systems are not the legacy of nature, they are the legacy of a power struggle"* (Duncan, 1996; 21). Therefore, she puts forth that gender systems, the determinations and categorizations constructed according to gender are result of a power struggle between socially structured gender roles. Similarly, Judith Butler points out that gender is *"performatively constituted by the very expressions"* and maintains that *gender is a socially constructed entity* (Butler, 2002; 25). In this perspective, Simone de Beauvoir claims that *"one is not born but rather becomes, a woman"* (Beauvoir, 1974; 301). Therefore, she refers to the power relations of the society and how the powerful side defines or shapes the other as it happens in the case of woman.

In the perspective of the relation between power and gender, there is a similar and significant relation of power and race and the connection of all these three. As an explanation of the term, according to Siobhan B. Somerville, *"the term 'race' has always been contested. In nineteenth-century scientific usage, it might refer to groupings based variously on geography, religion, class or color"* (Somerville, 2000; 21). She states that at the beginning race has been a means of categorization and definition of people according to their color, class or geographical location. However, over the time, the focus changed and turned on ideological references of race and as a result race turned out to be a means of social construction for the use of powerful ones as emphasized by Somerville. In this perspective, she states that in recent times race is *"a historical, ideological process rather than to fixed transhistorical or biological characteristics"* (Somerville, 2000; 7). Understood from his words, in recent times race has been a device or mean to be utilized in favor of the ideology of the powerful one.

From this perspective it is obvious that there is a strong connection among gender, race and power relations. In this context, Rashmi Varma points out that *"over the past fifty years, at least since the era of civil rights and women's rights struggles in the 1960s, race and gender have been variously represented as being parallel, intersecting, and overlapping systems of identity formation that structure social relations"* (Rooney, 2006;

232).Varma points out that race and gender have always been used to structure social relations which are constructed in favor of the strong, powerful one as it is seen in the era of civil rights when women rebelled for their rights and against these structured relations of race and gender applied on them in 1960s America. From this point, it is obvious that African American woman whose race and gender are more different than the patriarchy who holds the power to construct social relations in favor of itself is significantly affected by the relation of power, race and gender.

DISCUSSION

It is certain that the novel mainly focuses on the segregation of African American women, the suppression of them by the patriarchy, and the illusion of men thinking they create paradise like town but in reality just segregation and oppression. From this point, it is significant to explain how an illusion town was created by the African American men. In this perspective the story of the founders of Haven town is crucial.

There were nine large intact families who made the original journey, who were thrown out and cast away in Fairly, Oklahoma, and went on to found Haven. Their names were legend: Blackhorse, Morgan, Poole, Fleetwood, Beauchamp, Cato, Flood and both DuPres families. With their siblings, wives and children, they were seventynine or eighty-one in all (depending on whether the two stolen children were counted). Their horror of whites was convulsive but abstract. They saved the clarity of their hatred for the men who had insulted them in ways too confounding for language: first by excluding them, then by offering them staples to exist in that very exclusion (Morrison, 1999; 188)

Understood from the words of Morrison, founders of Haven town, who were displaced in 1890 before they established Haven, were looking for a place to live as free people but wherever they go, they suffer from racism and segregation. Therefore, they find an empty location in Oklahoma state and establish Haven town not to suffer such things again because they receive aggression even from other African Americans in other places.

On the journey from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to Oklahoma, the one hundred and fifty-eight freedmen were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from Negro towns already being built (Morrison, 1999; 13).

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As Morrison states, whites discriminates these African American community as usual but, they were ignored, pushed away and not welcomed even by other African Americans who also suffer from racial discrimination like them.

However, this discrimination and unwelcomed situation reoccurs by time in Haven where they believe they set a heaven where such segregation and past injustices will not be repeated.

Pat was convinced that when the subsequent generations of 8-rockmales did scatter, just as Zechariah feared, into the army, it could have been over and done with. Should have been over and done with. The rejection, which they called the Disallowing, was a burn whose scar tissue was numb by 1949, wasn't it? Oh, no. Those that survived that particular war came right back home, saw what had become of Haven, heard about the missing testicles of other colored soldiers; about medals being torn off by gangs of rednecks and Sons of the Confederacy – and recognized the Disallowing, Part Two. It would have been like watching a parade banner that said war-weary soldiers! not welcome home! So they did it again. And just as the original wayfarers never sought another colored townsite after being cold-shouldered at the first, this generation joined no organization, fought no civil battle. They consolidated the 8-rock blood and, haughty as ever, moved farther west. The New Fathers: Deacon Morgan, Steward Morgan, William Cato, Ace Flood, Aaron Poole, Nathan DuPres, Moss DuPres, Arnold Fleetwood, Ossie Beauchamp, HarperJury, Sargeant Person, John Seawright, Edward Sands and Pat's father, Roger Best, who was the first to violate the blood rule. The one nobody admitted existed. The one established when the Mississippi flock noticed and remembered that the Disallowing came from fair-skinned colored men. Blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits. They were kind, though, as the story went. Gave them food and blankets; took up a collection for them; but were unmoving in their refusal to let the 8-rocks stay longer than a night's rest (Morrison, 1999; 194).

Understood from the words of the story, the sons of Haven town's founder fathers return from the World War II. These are the sons of those fathers who suffered from the disallowings of whites and African Americans who were fair skinned men excluding these fathers and leading these sons embrace the racial purity claims which refer these sons as members of 8 Rock Blood and accept the ideology of dark skinned ones against the light skinned ones. However, these sons in Haven town which was established with ideals of preventing future disallowings were disallowed by whites and these founder fathers' society which was against the war and these young men experience second part of disallowing resulting from the whites and disallowed

African American founding fathers. Therefore, for their ideals and like their fathers who moved to set ideal town in Haven, they move and set a new place they call New Haven which is also called Ruby later. *"For three years New Haven had been the name most agreed to, although a few were loud in suggesting other names – names that did not speak, they said, of failure new or repeated"* (Morrison, 1999; 17). Therefore they set a new ideal town like Haven which was established to be ideal but becomes the one they had to leave behind. *"From Haven, a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory, to Haven, a ghosttown in Oklahoma State"* (Morrison, 199; 5). As Morrison states they leave behind the first ideal town which turns into a ghost town in contrast to dream and ideals of the founding fathers, and this next generation's founding fathers set New Haven town with new ideals such as no disallowing or segregation.

In this perspective these veterans of World War II as new founding fathers have ideals similar to Haven's establishment.

But he and the others, veterans all, had a different idea. Loving what Haven had been—the idea of it and its reach—they carried that devotion, gentling and nursing it from Bataan to Guam, from Iwo Jima to Stuttgart, and they made up their minds to do it again. He touched the stove hood admiring its construction and power. It was the same length as the brick oven that once sat in the middle of his hometown. When they got back to the States, they took it apart, carrying the bricks, the hearthstone and its iron plate two hundred and forty miles west—far far from the old Creek Nation which once upon a time a witty government called "unassigned land." (Morrison, 1999; 6)

Understood from the lines, these veterans, New Haven's founding fathers and also sons of the founding fathers of Haven, like Haven's non-segregating principle which was its establishment principle but turned into segregation of war veterans in 1949, aimed similar principles and ideas. But even the definition of these families for themselves initiates a segregation. *"All of them, however, each and every one of the intact nine families, had the little mark she had chosen to put after their names: 8-R. An abbreviation for eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Eight-rock. In 1890 they had been in the country for one hundred and twenty years"* (Morrison, 1999; 193). Even from the very beginning of the new establishment, these founding families segregate themselves as dark skinned and claim that they are racially pure which collapses heaven like town establishment idea in New Haven and which leads merely to an illusion.

In this perspective, in order to reveal these illusions and realities that put forth the segregation, sexism and racism in New Haven, the experiences of female characters are told in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* novel. Morrison mostly focuses on black women of the first world. At the same time, Morrison aims to narrate the stories of many women so she tells the stories of nine women, and that's why she divides the book into nine

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chapters each of which bears the name of a woman. *"The process of each woman speaking the painful experiences of her past and, at the same time, listening to the different, individual past hurts of the other women creates a caring, communal space for each woman to (re)construct an identity with greater possibilities for agency"* (Michael, 2002; 656) As it is stated by Michael, each women tell their own story and these stories are common stories of the African American women. Through the perspective of these stories, the novel also provides the reader with powerful female portrait in such a patriarchal society. *"Consolata learned to manage any and everything that did not require paper: she perfected the barbecue sauce that drove cattle – country people wild; quarrelled with the chickens: gave a hateful geese a wide berth, and tended the garden"* (Morrison, 1999; 242). Here Morrison portrays image of an empowered woman who is strong and capable of doing many things in contrast to the patriarchal society's women image in which woman is a weak character. Thus, the work reflects a contrast image to such societies and exemplifies the power, resistance of woman by the act of Mavis who is accused for letting her children die in the car and left in desperation. *"During the wait, in which no car or truck or bus approached, she dozed, woke to awful thoughts, dozed again. Suddenly she sat up, wide awake, and decided not to starve. Would the road girls just sit there? Would Dusty, Bennie?"* (Morrison, 1999; 37). The author puts forth a strong woman character and exemplifies and multiplies these brave women by giving each of their names to the different chapters of the work. Besides, within the feminist perspective, she reflects the discrimination on women due to her gender as Peter Widdowson emphasizes. *"That the identity of the white girl in Paradise remains a mystery merely emphasizes that here it is gender rather than race which is the key defining characteristic and the crucial potential source of destabilizing change"* (Widdowson, 2001; 329). As Widdowson states, there is a white girl in the novel but throughout the story, the writer never gives her name aiming to refer to the discrimination women suffer especially due to their genders. In this perspective, Morrison deliberately points out the gender issue and begins her novel with the statement as *"They shoot the white girl first"* (Morrison, 1999; 3). The author states that there is a strong connection between the violence, discrimination of man and gender. Thus, she puts forth the problems that gender issue lead. Because throughout the novel, as it is not clearly and deliberately defined, the reader can't be sure who the white girl is, but it is made sure for the reader that there is an attack on women by men.

However, these men begin their journey from Haven to this town which they call New Haven to make a paradise like a place different from previous ones where they as African Americans will not face any discrimination, their women are not led to die and they are not all pushed out of the towns by the patriarchal white men or light skinned African- American men. In this perspective, these founders who seem aware all of these tell their stories and loss in the novel.

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That sweet, modest laughing girl whom he and Steward had protected all their lives. She had gotten sick on the trip; seemed to heal, but failed rapidly again. When it became clear that she needed serious medical help, there was no way to provide it. They drove her to Demby, then further to Middleton. No Colored people were allowed in the wards. No regular doctor would attend them. She had lost control, then consciousness by the time they got to the second hospital. She died on the waiting room bench while the nurse tried to find a doctor to examine her. When the brothers learned the nurse had been trying to reach a veterinarian, and they gathered their sister in their arms, their shoulders shook all the way. Ruby was buried without benefit of a mortuary, in a pretty spot on Steward's ranch, and it was then that the bargain was struck (Morrison, 199; 113).

Here, the author tells about how this young African American group was pushed away from the towns of the white people, how even their little daughter, whose name is also given to New Haven town signifying what is done on women and shouldn't be forgotten and repeated, were left into death and these people had to find a place away to live.

Furthermore, author tells that these people who were segregated had to establish New Haven which signifies a paradise like place where men and women won't suffer from all these again. Therefore, the author points out that these segregated families, who travel to find a new place where their daughters and they won't be segregated, establish New Haven. *"It was 1954, People were building houses, fencing and plowing land, some seventeen miles south of Christ King. They had begun to build a feed store, a grocery store, and to Mary Magna's delight, a pharmacy closer than ninety miles"* (Morrison, 1999; 225). But all these relatives, the ones who know each other and establish the town begin to segregation even among each other by the time. In this perspective, the novel tells about a play which tells about the founders of the town and emphasizes how the plot of the play changed and then number of the founding families were reduced to seven from nine families.

Why do they change it? There used to be nine families in the play. Then eight for years and years. Now Seven.

What are you talking about?

You know.

No. I don't know.

The play. How the holy families get fewer and fewer.

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Kate does all that. And Nathan. Picking the children, I mean.
Maybe they didn't have enough for the usual size.

Daddy. He must have heard the doubt in her tone.

What. If he did, it didn't show.

It was skin color, wasn't it?

What?

The way people get chosen and ranked in this town (Morrison, 1999; 216).

This dialogue reveals that even the founding fathers are segregated in the play about the establishment of New Haven due to their skin colors which are lighter than other seven families. The novel points out the importance given to racial purity even among the African Americans. But as a result, even light skinned ones are segregated by the dark skinned ones in this African American society which establish their new town to stay away from those old mistakes.

From this point, in this seemingly heaven of the patriarchal African Americans, who think that they created a paradise but just an illusion and segregation as it was done to them before, women are segregated and forced to do the things which are expected from them in the novel. *"You can't expect a man to come home from that kind of work and have to watch over babies while I go get something decent to put in front of him"* (Morrison, 1999; 23). Mavis, as a woman, talks about the codes of gender and the men's, patriarchy's expectations from the women whose gender and gender roles are constructed by men. But, as the stories evolve, Mavis doesn't obey this and leaves her husband and children which is quite extraordinary for a woman at that time but also an example of women rebellion in the 1960s Civil Rights Movements. She resists the segregation and oppression of the patriarchal society.

In the context of segregation and oppression, Morrison also points out racism issue in the novel. In this perspective Richard Schur states that *"Paradise exemplifies and contributes to these new discourses on race and otherness by narrating the complementary histories of an all-black town in rural Oklahoma and the nearby convent that became a refuge for young women"* (Schur, 2004; 277). The author talks about the black town which embraces a racist attitude against light skinned women and applies otherization on women. *"The two white men turned away from unconscious Negro woman sprawled on the pavement"* (Morrison, 1999; 94). The author points out the cruelty of men in this seemingly paradise town, as they don't help a woman as that human is a woman and African American. Therefore, Morrison points out two handicaps of ethnic woman as it is reflected in this event. However, the establishment of the town was based on the ideals that no African American was going to be segregated due to her race and there

wasn't going to be similar pressures and discrimination which those attacking African - American men suffered from and leading them to move and establish New Haven town signifying the paradise for all these segregated black people. But, the contrasting events of those ideals occur, past events and experiences are forgotten; people begin to repeat what other do them before and turn such an imaginary heaven they establish just into an illusion. The paradise becomes a nightmare for people, especially for African American women who suffer again. The woman is segregated due to her gender and race and in such a condition, ethnic woman is less luckier than white woman whose problem is mostly gender when ethnic women's problem are gender and race. From this point it could be said that Morrison aims to emphasize the unimportance of racial characteristics of human in social relations and life. In this perspective she points out that *"I wanted the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter"* (Widdowson, 2001; 329). From the very beginning of the story to the end, there are no obvious signs and references about the race of the convent women who are attacked by the dark skinned men of the town. Morrison points out that there is no importance of the race and it shouldn't be a problem and that's why she doesn't specify the race of the women characters, still she puts forth the racist acts of patriarchy, who aims segregation, and the failure of heaven dreams of patriarchal society as it is stated in the novel.

Bewildered, angry, sad, frightened people pile into cars, making their way back to children, livestock, fields, households chores and uncertainty. How hard they had worked for this place; how far away they once were from the terribleness they have just witnessed. How could so clean and blessed a mission devour itself and become the world they had escaped (Morrison, 1999; 292)

At the end of the novel, town men attack the convent women who are rebels and threats to their patriarchal, pure racial society system. By making those women run away or lose their lives and these men turn their idealistic town into a violent one. Therefore, they create the world they escaped again and like the world they leave behind, they bring up a segregationist, oppressive society, thus not a paradise but just an illusion.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the novel, focusing on gender and race, points out how African American women are segregated, not only by the whites but also African American men. In this case, African American woman is in a more disadvantageous condition when compared to white woman as African American woman is segregated both due to her gender and race. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that this segregation comes even from the African American man who is also segregated and must have known

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how it feels. But past is forgotten and African American men who think that they are not like the white men who segregate them, consider that they set the ideal town New Haven where they won't segregate and be segregated. But they become like the people from whom they escape and apply same rules in the town. Therefore, the African American men as the representatives of patriarchy turn the seemingly heaven town called New Haven into an illusion by the segregation, oppression and attacks they have done to women, especially the ones in the convent.

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