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**Sexism in *Meridian* by Alice Walker
and *So Far from God* by Ana Castillo**

Başak AVCI¹ & Bülent Cercis TANRITANIR²

ABSTRACT

The concept of sexism, known as prejudice and discrimination in society, is an ideology that argues that one person is superior to another in terms of gender. This ideology, which causes women-man conflicts, is hateful. Because of this view that guides societies with prejudices similar to racism by judging by sex, some people or individuals are exposed to psychological or physical negative behaviors because they are women or men. When a person is defined as "bad, incomplete or inadequate", this situation is accepted as "Sexism". This idea, which is a result of cultural pressures, begins in the family. With the sexist generalizations and definitions used to insult the other side, pressures are made on the sexual identity in the society. Gender discrimination is seen in every society, however, it negatively affects education level and indirectly the level of development of countries. The prejudice of sexism, which is more common in backward, oppressed and excluded societies, has become a learned and stereotyped tradition applied both externally and within society itself. Taken from a deeper perspective, it is seen that these societies are experiencing the pressures they see from the outside. Societies living under the psychology of restricting and differentiating others' lives with a 'racist' perspective also reflect discriminatory perspectives on family traditions. Discriminatory views covered by the ideology of racism constitute the cause or causes of the "Sexism" ideology. In this study, the prejudice of "Sexism" in Alice Walker's *Meridian* and Ana Castillo's *Far From God* will be examined within the framework of psychological views. These novels will be analyzed by comparing the concepts of racism and sexism in the light of quotations.

Keywords: Sexism, Racism, Women, Men, Discrimination, Prejudice.

**Alice Walker'in Meridyen ve Ana Castillo'nun Tanrıdan Çok Uzak
Eserlerinde Geçen Cinsiyetçilik Teması**

ÖZET

Toplumdaki önyargı ve ayrımcılık olarak bilinen cinsiyetçilik kavramı bir kişinin diğerinden cinsiyeti yönüyle üstün olduğunu savunan bir ideolojidir. Toplumun kadın-erkek çatışmalarına sebep olan bu ideoloji nefret içeriklidir. Cinsiyetlere göre yargılayarak ırkçılığa benzer önyargılar ile toplumları yönlendiren bu görüş yüzünden bazı kişi ya da kişiler kadın ya da erkek oldukları için psikolojik ya da fiziksel içerikli olumsuz davranışlara maruz kalmaktadırlar. Bir kişi 'kötü, eksik ya da yetersiz' olarak tanımlandığında bu durum 'Cinsiyetçilik' olarak kabullenilmektedir. Kültürel baskıların bir sonucu olan bu düşünce ailede başlamaktadır. Karşı tarafı aşağılamak amacıyla kullanılan cinsiyetçi genelleme ve tanımlamalarla da toplumda cinsel kimlik üzerinden baskılar yapılmaktadır. Cinsiyet ayrımcılığı her toplumda görülmektedir ve bununla beraber eğitim düzeyini ve de dolaylı olarak ülkelerin gelişmişlik düzeyini olumsuz etkilemektedir. Geri kalmış, ezilmiş ve dışlanmış toplumlarda görülmesi daha yaygın olan cinsiyetçilik önyargısı, hem dışarıdan hem de toplumun kendi içinde uyguladığı öğrenilmiş ve klişeleşmiş bir gelenek halini almıştır. Daha derin bir bakış açısı ile ele alındığında bu toplumların dışarıdan gördükleri baskıları kendi içinde de yaşatmakta olduğu görülmektedir. 'İrkçi' bir bakış açısı ile başkalarının yaşamlarını kısıtlama ve ayrıştırma psikolojisi altında yaşayan toplumlar aile geleneklerine de ayrımcı bakış açılarını yansıtılmaktadırlar. İrkçilik ideolojisinin kapsadığı ayrımcı görüşler 'Cinsiyetçilik' ideolojisine neden ya da nedenler yaratmaktadır. Bu çalışmada Alice Walker'ın Meridyen ve Ana Castillo'nun Tanrı'dan Çok Uzak adlı eserlerinde geçen 'Cinsiyetçilik' önyargısı psikolojik görüşler çerçevesinde incelenecektir. Romanlar, alıntılar ışığında ırkçılık ve cinsiyetçilik kavramları karşılaştırılarak analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyetçilik, İrkçilik, Kadın, Erkek, Ayrımcılık, Önyargı.

¹ Master Student, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, bugday65@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1300-1267

² Assoc. Prof. Dr. Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, bctanritanir@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-3276-7922

Introduction

Sexism is to define the human species mainly through sexual identity, which is seen as superior. When considered as a cultural transfer, it is seen that the foundations of sexism are laid in the family. The humiliated value of girls against boys is the greatest evidence that sexual discrimination begins in the family. Apart from that, the idea that boys cannot do what girls can do is an idea imposed in the family. Many girls who grow up without having the same rights as their brothers are not able to receive a good education, are deprived of their personal rights and freedoms in many areas of their lives and lead a struggling and passive life due to the established sexist perception. This situation directly affects the education of girls and boys and indirectly the development levels of the countries. Discourses such as "women are naive people who need to be protected" or "the house repair work is the job of men", which seem to be not negative, are directly defined as sexism.

When evaluated with a racist-like approach, sexist ideology also includes behaviors prone to physical or psychological violence or hate speech. Ideas that marginalize and humiliate with a discriminatory perspective combine from a racist perspective, causing conflicts on gender roles. The racism ideology leads to the ideology of sexism and causes the gender discrimination in societies with psychological connotations.

Parallel perceptions of women and minorities also have been described in recent research concerning the role of cognitive processes in stereotyping and prejudice. For instance, perceptual and memory processes, such as confirmation biases and selective encoding and retrieval, are used to maintain stereotypical beliefs and prejudices about both women and African Americans (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Furthermore, Black-White relations and female-male relations have been described as instances of intergroup relations. (Swim, Aikin ve Hall 199)

Alice Walker

Known as a 'womanist' writer, Alice Walker presents the existence of blacks from a woman perspective, closely related to feminism. Like other contemporary accomplished black novelists, Walker is an author who can be accessed using augmented and lyrical realism and focuses on people's dreams and failures. She focuses on the search for dignity in his work, especially in women's life. As a good stylist, the black American writer has been one of the leading elements of literature with a narrative that wants to reveal social and racist issues in her works. In her work *Meridian*, he tells the life story of Meridian, a woman who leads her life with a feminist perspective. Meridian and her decisions, in the face of the events and situations in the novel are expressed through the eyes of a woman, in the spirit of women, what happened to her on the path she chose.

She brings her travel experience in Africa and memories of the American civil-rights movement to an examination of the experience of African Americans, mainly in the South, and of Africans. A self-described "womanist," she has maintained a strong focus on feminist issues within African-American culture. Walker won wide recognition with her novel *The Color Purple* (1982; Pulitzer Prize; film, 1985), a dark but sometimes joyous saga of a poor black Southern woman's painful journey toward self-realization. (Bloom 4)

Ana Castillo

Ana Castillo, known as a Chicana novelist, is known as a poet, short story writer, essayist, editor, playwright, translator. Considered one of the leading voices of the Chicana experience, Castillo is known for his experimental style as a Latina novelist. In his book *Far from God*, he describes the lives of a New Mexico mother and her children. An enigmatic feminist writer, Ana Castillo, presents an interesting life story of Sofie and her daughters.

Alice Walker and Ana Castillo touched upon the concept of sexism by emphasizing that the male-dominated society is the source of the negativities in women's lives. Although both authors differ from each other in terms of style, they are similar in terms of the reactions of subjects and characters to events. It is seen that both authors express the struggling and strong women's stance, especially if the issues are evaluated with the ideologies of racism and sexism, and social pressure psychologies.

Sexism And Racism

Racism is essentially known as ideological thought, which defends the superiority of a race that results in hatred and hatred of societies over each other. In this idea, which does not recognize a person as a single race, people are exposed to discrimination based on their region, country of birth, and especially their skin color. Although it started especially in the 19th century, the Black race and the White race discrimination in America continues. The centuries-old struggle of African-American people who migrated from Africa to America continues even today, and these people are still humiliated and subjected to violence. Racism ideology kills thousands of people and affects world peace.

The racism ideology causes psychological effects on people. For example, in societies where discrimination, separatism and, superior vision are common, psychology is spread among families. The human mind, which hides different learned behaviors apart from consciousness, also prepares the ground for other discriminatory behaviors. Families, the smallest unit in society, reflect this discrimination to daughters and sons, creating gender differences between them. The children they raise also continue these traditional behaviors. The idea of racism indirectly lays the ground for the idea of sexism.

Just as racism legitimized itself over biological differences, sexism until the 1980s legitimized itself through the roles socially imposed on biological gender differences. In this sense, racism and sexism are fed on the same essentialist basis but are considered as two independent ideologies until the last quarter of the 20th century. It can be said that the approaches to racism and sexism emerging from the same conditions and interconnected ideologies began to become widespread, with the transformation in racism discussions in the 1970s and the conceptualization of sexism in the 1980s to a different dimension. (Keneş 62)

All societies distinguish between responsibilities for women and men. The stereotypical words and behaviors created by the society about what is suitable for men and women, what jobs they should do, what to wear and what to wear, and how to talk are the result of psychological pressures. Racism and sexism prejudices are products of the unconscious if evaluated within the framework of Freud's Theory of Psychoanalysis. According to Freud, all spiritual actions are first unconscious events.

According to Freud, those who are perceived are neither another genus nor reveal a superior type; on the contrary, it is only an external feature that enters their consciousness, just as light falls on an object.

Freud encompasses the term "unconscious" in psychoanalysis, the only thing for him is that the conscious is a spiritual action, and as a result, the unconscious is an entirely other or subordinate category; on the contrary, he resolutely emphasizes the following. According to him, our spiritual power is not completely consumed by conscious mind activity, and another power behind it is as if it manages existence and thought. In light of this information, it can be understood that the concepts of racism and sexism are the results of the human mind, that is, the unconscious. Unconscious effects that are hidden in the mind and cannot be revealed and human behaviors are directed especially for psychological reasons as in both analyzed novels.

As in *Meridian*, Meridian, a young black and free woman, fights the whites by defending the civil rights movement. The novel is described as being about a woman named Meridian Hill, an activist in civil rights work in the American South in the '60s. She is a young woman who makes her meridian decisions and gives up her family and baby, fighting for their ideology. She became a 16-year-old mother, but as an abandoned woman she started her struggles at an early age. She falls in love, loses his other baby, and learns that she was murdered years later when he thought he found his son. While the Meridian struggle Civil Rights, it also struggles for life in its inner world. She broke up with her family at an early age. Especially with her mother, who has a wound and will remain in her heart throughout her life, her problems have been expressed throughout the work.

Meridian, who does not want to hurt, injure or kill anyone in the past and today, dreams of a free world where she can make his own decisions. So she doesn't stay in the places he goes to for a long time. Even if she misses the man she is in love with, she goes when she feels she has to go. When the unconscious features are examined, it is understood that the racist and feminine side of Meridian is actually fighting it. Although she thinks that she is fighting in the outside world, her real war is caused by her fears of killing, fears of being abandoned and lost.

The pure excitement in the soul of the singers, which he could really hear when he was transformed in a meridian church, always lasted in his ego, and this clean excitement would air the words of the songs, as if flying a pigeon on his music drunk head. If they are committing murder (which, in his eyes, killing a man for revolution is murder.) What is that pure music? (Walker 19)

Women who struggle against sexism while living in a racist society are insulted by both the other race and the other sex in the life war. While Meridian is a black woman, she struggles to survive while at the same time she is one of the oppressed women of the male-dominated society. Alice Walker, who handles the suffering abandoned women in her novel, mentioned the life stories of many women with Meridian. In all of them, the similarity of the suffering experienced by women whose tragic lives resulted in death is remarkable. Portraits of women who were raped, abandoned, had family pressure, had to give up.

Xenophobia and cultural superiority efforts are included in both works. In particular, gender discrimination and gender differences are made to the reader in discourses in the works. In Alice Walker's *Meridian*, where racial superiority is emphasized mutually, the hatred of blacks, as well as whites, are revealed to blacks. It is understood from the incidents of harassment and rape in the work, in particular, that the views of the white race men to the women of the black race and the men of the black race to the women of the white race are negative and malicious. The negative consequences of racism by crushing humanitarian features and in line with sexism also negatively affect societies.

... perhaps it will be my part to walk behind the real revolutionaries—those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black and therefore go right ahead—and when they stop to wash off the blood and find their throats too choked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing, I will come forward and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear. For it is the song of the people, transformed by the experience of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul. If I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all. (Walker 205-206)

In the meridian work, Alice Walker tried to explain freedom through the character of Meridian. Meridian has a character that can overcome obstacles and do not bow to the man he loves. *“For she understood, finally, that the respect she owed her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own.”* (Walker 200) She is aware of his strengths but is also aware of her weaknesses. When she is abandoned and in love again and will give birth to her second baby when she finds out that her lover is with other women, she decides to have an abortion, and in the dreams, she had with the regrets of leaving her first baby for life, Meridian is a weak woman. She experiences fear of attachment in himself with her unconscious states. These are due to his mother's indifferent and loveless attitudes.

It was for stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self, that Meridian felt guilty from the very first, though she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault. When her mother asked, without glancing at her, "Have you stolen anything?" a stillness fell over Meridian and for seconds she could not move. The question literally stopped her in her tracks. (Walker 51)

As seen in the meridian novel, *“Learning to escape from white men,”* (Walker 107) the difficulties of coming to the world as a black woman and a woman are mentioned. Meridian and other women in the novel struggled to survive the difficulties of being in another gender and were also humiliated because they were not of the white race.

... though the concept of One Life motivates Meridian in her quest toward physical and spiritual health, the societal evils that subordinate one class to another, one race to another, one sex to another, fragment and ultimately threaten life. The novel Meridian is built on the tension between the African concept of animism, "that spirit that inhabits all life," and the societal forces that inhibit the growth of the living toward their natural state of freedom. (Walker 91)

In her novel *Far From God*, writer Ana Castillo, like Alice Walker, described a strong woman through the character named Sofia, that she was able to live independently from the men's world, without her need, and after her abandoned by her husband, her life struggle with her four daughters as characters. Sofia is an abandoned mother and a strong woman. Like *Meridian*, there were moments when she was weak and tired, but despite everything, she managed to survive for her children. Unlike the Meridian character, Sofia struggles for her family to survive. He never gave up on his life stance and the male-dominated world does not accept. As in *Meridian*, place and time do not change. The work called *So Far from God* is a novel that tells of extraordinary and sometimes surreal events that happen to a family living in a small settlement.

We have found that in these female-authored works women exhibit the same heroic qualities as men, (....). The «dragons» challenged by women are the conventions created in a male-dominated world. Perhaps the foremost heroic achievement resides in the assumption of those heroic qualities, possible only in the conscious deviation from the traditionally feminine characteristics imposed by men. Our women heroes do not, however, seek superiority and dominance but rather parity and equality of stature, respect, and opportunity. Clearly, they are neither the traditional heroes in positions of power nor the traditional heroines whose roles support the heroic achievements of men. (Herrera-Sobek 59)

Sofia acted like a boy for her four daughters, who experienced different destinies throughout the novel. It is a mother who guides the lives of her daughters whose father has left. Castillo criticizes the male-dominated society in his novel. When her husband returned after many years, she did not treat her like a member of the house, setting some household chores to stay there. Through Sofia, who thinks that *"I can fire her if he can't fix it!"* (Castillo 119) Castillo criticized sexism by emphasizing the idea that women can do everything men can.

have been forced to believe that we, as women, only existed to serve man under the guise of a serving Father God. Furthermore, our spirituality has been thoroughly subverted by institutionalized religious customs. The key to that spiritual oppression has been the repression of our sexuality, primarily through the control of our reproductive ability and bodies. (Castillo 13)

Considering Sofia and her daughters as examples of women in society, each of them has different stories with their tragic endings and different character traits. Caridad, Fe, Esperanza and especially Loca are women with four mysterious lives. With her surreal powers, Loca always wanted her sisters' well-being to death. Loca represents religious unity in the novel. Caridad is a young woman whose life changed with mystical powers and mysteriousness after the attack of unknown people.

It was a funny thing because you might figure that after what happened to her, not only with Memo, but especially because of the nightmarish night in Caridad's life, she might have become an embittered woman, who hated men for having served little purpose in her life but to bring her misery and shame. But she didn't. Caridad was incapable of hating anyone or anything, which is why doña Felicia had elected her heiress to her healing legacy. (Castillo 77)

Fe is a character who has died of cancer and died because of exposure to toxic chemicals in the company where she works after suffering as an abandoned woman. Castillo drew attention to people who struggle with this character in the same living conditions. Esperanza is also the daughter of Sofia's war victim. Sofia is a mother who has tried to protect her daughters from male bullying throughout her life but has failed and has experienced the pain of four children. Despite everything, the abandoned woman, Sofie, forgives her husband, found a partner in the suffering she experienced.

"Look at me, Domingo!" [...] It was the first time they had looked directly at each other since his return. Then Domingo lowered his eyes again and suddenly with three quick steps he was at Sofi's feet, his head on her lap, *"I'm sorry, Sofia. Perdoname, honey, for all the grief I've caused you."* (Castillo 111)

In both novels, the signs of the male-dominated society are given, the negative stance against women is clearly stated, and the stance of the people with socialist and sexist views against women is criticized by indirect messages. The *Meridian* describes the struggles of Meridian and other women in male-priority society, and in *So Far From God*, the struggles of a mother and four women against the logic and attacks of men.

Conclusion

The prejudice learned by the societies living with racism unconsciously led to the emergence of the idea of 'sexism' for humans. Ideology, which separates people from race, language and, skin color by separatism, and the same distinction between men and women, prevents the development of societies. Psychological and physical violence are also included in this idea, which does not accept people as they are. With the Sexist approach, the woman's belief in the future has been exploited and has caused her to fall behind in many societies. As a result, men and women are also strong. Its existence does not depend on the existence of another. The trust that every work is done without any gender discrimination can be done by a woman who has also disappeared from the societies. The main reason for this is irrational traditions. Two works by Alice Walker, *Meridian* and, Ana Castillo, *So Far From God*, were analyzed in terms of sexist bias. Similarities and differences were reviewed in both novels and the behavior and discourses were evaluated and the pressure of the idea of sexism on women was discussed. It was concluded that the characters of Meridian and Sofie, which are mirrors of women in the society in the novels, were written indirectly by the two women writers with criticism against society.

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