

# Doubly Colonized and Marginalized Black Women in Toni Morrison's *Home*

Zeinab Soleimani<sup>1</sup> and Bahman Zarrinjooee<sup>2\*</sup>

- 1- MA Student, Postgraduate Department of English Language and Literature, College of Humanities, Boroujerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd, Iran
- 2- Assistant Professor of Postgraduate Department of English Language and Literature, College of Humanities, Boroujerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd, Iran

**Corresponding author:** Bahman Zarrinjooee

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the formation of black women's identity in the latest Toni Morrison's (1931- ) novel, *Home* (2012), regarding postcolonial theories of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942- ) and her notion of "subaltern". Referring to such theories, this study analyzes women's situation, in particular the black women's both in the colonized or patriarchal societies. Moreover, this paper shows how Toni Morrison portrays to what extent African-American women and the other women of color have been silenced and are not heard in both masculine and colonized culture. In other words, this paper argues that the black women are considered as double colonized and marginalized entities both in their patriarchal and colonized communities. Consequently, the condition of subaltern and double colonized black women in these societies will be analyzed to trace the ways through which the dominant power oppresses the black women and deprives them from their true being and identity.

**Keywords:** Black Women; Double Colonized; Identity; Marginalized; Subaltern.

## INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison is the first African American woman writer who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Commentators on Afro-American literature all agree that Morrison is "the first woman novelist to give such full expression to the experience of black girls and women" (Lister 5) and her novels, challenge the supremacy and domination of patriarchal power in American and western masculinized societies. As Ann duCille, in her analysis of what she calls "the occult of true black womanhood" states that "Morrison has entered superstardom, becoming known as "the American and African American writer" (qtd. in Beaulieu 124). While Drefus describes her as a "woman of subversive jokes, gossip and surprising bits of self-revelation" (qtd. in Beaulieu 125). As J. Brooks Bouson in his essay, "Speaking the Unspeakable, Shame, Trauma and Morrison's Fiction", states Morrison focuses on violence and critics believe that violence is the subject matter of her novels, "dramatizing the physical and psychological abuse visited on African Americans in white America" (qtd. in Beaulieu 128). In her novels, Morrison wants her readers to ask the question about the condition of the lives of the women, especially black women in Western communities who have been deprived of their own identity.

*Home* is the story of a group of women in the white community of the United States who try to have their own home and finally; hence, their identity. One of these women is Ycidra, known as Cee, her family were forced to leave their home in Bandera County. This imposed travel is the first challenge for Cee as far as she was born on the road without any roof over her head. This is why her step grandmother, Lenore, predicted it as a "sinful, worthless life" (*Home* 44) for her future. She did not receive any affection from her mother because of her hard work on plantations from morning till night and when she grew up she fell in love with a city boy, name Prince, who abandoned her in Atlanta. Therefore for gaining money she had to work for a white doctor who did eugenic experiments on her womb and she became infertile.

*Home* is about the women like Cee and Lily, Lillian Florence Jonse, subjugated by colonial power; on the other hand, they have been deprived of their rights by male-dominated society. Even though Liliy yearns for her own house,

she has been ignored first; because of restrictions regarding her race in her desired neighborhood, and second because her husband is not able to understand her enthusiasm for having her own home. Therefore, Toni Morrison portrays marginalization and double colonization of the African American women in this novel. They have been marginalized physically and spiritually in whether colonized or patriarchal societies because of their blackness and being a woman.

One of the most important subject matters in black women writers' fictions is double-colonization and marginalization of the black women in the Western countries. They are oppressed and suppressed by the dominated power, the Whites and the black males, especially the male members of their own family including their fathers, brothers and their husbands. Like the colonized nations dominated by the colonizer countries, the women were dominated over by men too. But the status of women in the countries which were colonized was even worse and more complicated. The women of the colonized countries are not supported within the community they represent, because they can never be isolated in their experience, either as a woman or as a member of a colonized community.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### **METHOD: Gayatri Spivak and Subalternity**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' from the Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), in order to refer to the groups who are the "subject of hegemony of ruling class" (1988). Spivak, in her important article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), asks questions concerning postcolonial feminist theory and subaltern studies. She believes that "in the context of colonial production and male dominance, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (150). In this way, Spivak argues that how the colonial power silences the subaltern by representing them in the colonial discourse while they have no role.

There are various discussions about what Spivak means by expressing this sentence. Some critics believe that there is no way through which the oppressed or marginalized groups, specially women, can utter their resistance; whereas others like Bill Ashcraft and Helen Tiffin state that Spivak does not mean the subalterns cannot speak but they use the "dominant voice [and make it appropriated for their conditions in order] to be heard" (219). In fact, Spivak's essay is not an assertion of the inability of the subaltern to speak but a warning against the essentialist notions regarding the identity of female subaltern created by colonial power.

Spivak uses deconstruction to subvert the systems of binary oppositions on which dominant discourses rely to legitimize their power. She believes that imperialism is central to British history and culture, and in studying British literature this point is disregarded. She notes that analysis of the role of imperialism in the literature of colonizing countries reveals the notion of worlding of the Third World countries. By using the term worlding, she describes "the way in which colonized space is brought into the world, that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Eurocentrism".

In addition, Spivak, in her essay "Three Women Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1986), criticizes the Anglo-American feminists for neglecting the Third World women. She has blamed them for concentrating on how female characters heroically consolidate their subjectivity. Moreover, she criticizes the images of women as "childbearing and soul making-the first one is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as companionate love; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission" (1986), used by feminists and for narcissistic obsession with the "individualism of strong women" (ibid 539) and neglecting imperialism and colonialism in the Third World countries.

In the colonized society, the dominant authority once colonizes both men and women of color; in turn, black colonized men colonize the black women. Spivak depicts that "the constitution of the female subject in life is the place of the differed" (Spivak 1988). The work of decolonization continues within the women's movement to understand the universal dominance that operates with the concept of hegemony.

Spivak shows the margin as the "silenced center of the circuit marked out of this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribal, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariate" (Spivak 1988). She concentrates on the marginalized person who is not presented as the result of Western structure and imperial law. She challenges and protests against controlling system of the marginalized group and double colonized women. She denies the variety and heterogeneity of those controllers speaking from the margins, and investigates for the "roots applied in essentialist view of identity that avoids diversity and differences, and she is searching for a voice to marginalized women constructed as other" (ibid).

### **Not A, Not B, but Cee: Subaltern in Society**

The aim of this paper is to discuss Morrison's novel, *Home*, regarding the identity of subaltern and marginalized groups, as argued in Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), in the western masculinized society. She

writes, in *An Introduction to Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2005) that “Can the Subaltern Speak? is about agency: institutionally validated action and unless validated by dominant forms of knowledge and politics, resistance could not be recognized (heard) as such” (xx).

Spivak discusses that “subaltern in general, and the historically muted subject of the subaltern women in particular, was inevitably consigned to be either misunderstood or misrepresented through the self-interest of those with the power to represent” (ibid). Morrison, in *Home*, has an implicit and explicit understanding of her female character, Ycidra, through a metaphorical name she selects for this character. Ycidra, known as Cee, stands for the third level of the society, as it refers to the third letter of English alphabet. Cee is considered as a person who lives in the lowest position, actually she is a doubly colonized woman who is, on the one hand, oppressed by the society, and on the other hand by her family; in other words, she lives in the shadows of the others.

Morrison wants to show the condition of living of the female characters, like Ycidra, who are suppressed and oppressed by the male-dominated power. She wants to state that they are searching for their true being or identity. The character like Cee is homeless and this homelessness has been depicted from the beginning of her birth. She belongs to nowhere with “no culture, no identity and no history” (Spivak 1986) in the patriarchal and colonized society. The unhomey situation in Cee’s life is depicted when Morrison writes about her birth condition, stated in Frank’s word:

Mama was pregnant when we walked out of Bandera County, Texas. [...] we had to leave our wheelbarrow full of stuff in order to pile into Mr. Gardener’s car, trading goods for speed. Mama cried, but the baby she carried was more important than kettles, canning jars and bedding. [...] Weeks later, when her baby, delivered on a mattress in Reverend Baily church basement, turned out to be a girl, mama named her Ycidra, taking care to pronounce all three syllables. [...] Everybody but mama calls her “Cee”. I always thought it was nice, now she thought about the name, treasured it. As for me, no such memories. (*Home* 39-40).

The homeless condition of Cee’s life is completely clear from the beginning of her life when she has no roof over her head even in her birth time. Then she received no affection from her parents, especially her mother, because they had to work in plantations from morning till night, like slaves. Actually, they worked so hard to earn money and by saving their wages would be able to buy a home for themselves in order to leave Lenore’s. On the contrary, they left their children and did not pay attention to them, in particular Cee whose mother did not pay attention to her and had no affection for her: “their parents were so beat by the time they came home from work, any affection they showed was like a razor-sharp, short and thin. Lenore was the wicked witch. Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked their hands to imagine a future” (*Home* 53).

Cee grew up but when she reached fourteen and started talking about boys, “she was prevented from any real flirtation because of her big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off limits of him” (*Home* 47). That is why when Frank and his two best friends enlisted and left the town, “she fell for what Lenore called the first thing she saw wearing belted trousers instead of overalls” (*Home* 47). Additionally, there were other forms of limitations for her in Lotus as she believed that if she had not been so ignorant living in a “no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do, she would have been better. Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks, or indoor plumbing, just fifty or so houses and two churches, one of which churchwomen used for teaching, reading and arithmetic” (*Home* 48).

Because of these confinements in Lotus “she ran off with a rat”, his name was Principal but he called himself Prince. He loved himself “so deeply, so completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction. So if Prince said she was pretty, she believed him. [...] And if he said, I want you for myself, it was Lenore who said, ‘Not unless y’all are legal” (*Home* 48). These events, portrayed by Morrison, unveil the condition of living of black women in the patriarchal society which means subjugation and marginalization by the dominant power as Spivak believes the black or colored women are deprived of their identity and do not have any independent definition of identity in the white society (1986: 89).

Moreover, one might refer to the moment when Cee learns that “Principal married her for an automobile” (*Home* 49). This automobile belonged to Lenore, since Salem could not drive; “Lenore gave her old Ford to Luther and Ida-with the caution that they give it back if the station wagon broke down. A few times Luther let Prince use the Ford on errands: trips to the post office in Jeffrey for mail to or from wherever Frank was stationed, first Kentucky, then Korea” (*Home* 49). It was natural for Luther to let the couple drive it to Atlanta, where Prince belonged, since they promised to give it back in a few weeks but it never happened. This part of the story also shows that Cee was treated as an object by a person like Prince who might be considered as the representation of patriarchal society.

Morrison in most of her works shows this issue as an important problem that women, especially the black women, are considered as tools or properties. They are subjugated both mentally and physically. In this novel, when Prince bought a dress for Cee, she found that it was not from his “generosity but because he was ashamed of her countrified clothes” (*Home* 54). Morrison narrates the story of loss in Cee’s life. Cee remembers a song under the influence of

the swallows she watched and thought about its meaning; therefore, this is what they mean in those sad, sweet songs; "When I lost my baby, I lost my mind, except those songs were about lost love. What she felt was bigger than that. She was broken. Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts" (*Home* 54).

Cee accepts this truth perhaps she has been a worthless person as her grandmother had said when she was a child. This condition is a great challenge for her and she remembers her mother's indifference to her; because her mother did not pay much attention to her. She thinks about this situation and finds her life as a "gutter child" who will be worthless because her mother did not like her at all:

Branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated "gutter child" by Lenore, the only one whose opinion mattered to her parents, exactly like what Miss Ethel said, she had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless. Ida never said, "You my child. I dote on you. You wasn't born in no gutter. You born in my arms. Come on over here and let me give you a hug." (*Home* 129).

When the reader encounters Ycidra who she finds a job after being abandoned by her boyfriend, Prince in Atlanta in a white doctor's office names Dr. Beauregard Scott, Morrison shows Cee's naivety in a short scene when she looks at Scott's books with titles such as "*The passing of the Great Race and Heredity, Race and Society*" (*Home* 65) and then thinks over the meaning of eugenics. The doctor has two daughters as Sara talks about them:

Well, remember those daughters I mentioned being away? They're in a home. They both have great big heads. Cephalities, I think they call it. Sad for it to happen to even one. But now? Have mercy. Oh, my Lord. What a misery, said Cee, thinking, I guess that's why he invents Things- he wants to help other folks. (*Home* 63).

This situation shows another kind of violence and racism against the black people, in particular, the women of color, as the colonized individuals whom the imperial power ignores their life. The dominant power is trying to save its own self and its own race, as the superior power. Doing the eugenics experiments, on the one hand is a solution to rescue the life of the Whites, and on the other hand, is barrenness for the Blacks through the infertility of the black women when these experiments are done on their wombs, similar to what happened for Cee when her country women of her community said her "Your womb can't never bear fruit" (*Home* 128).

Morrison challenges this condition of omitting the black identity through performing these violent actions. She encourages the black people to gain their freedom and be aware of their talent to try more and have a better life in future, especially the women should know their "inside" person; know their home and identity. As it is clear in these words:

"see what I mean? Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her to do some good in the world." Cee put her finger in the blackberry jar. She licked it. I ain't going nowhere, Miss Ethel. This is *where I belong*." (*Home* 126, my emphasis).

In the same line of interest like her postcolonial counterpart Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Morrison wants to question the "oversimplifying and essentializing" (Parker 258) notions regarding definition of identity imposed on African American women, Indian women or any subaltern group in the male-centered societies. Consequently, Morrison's gaze at women's identity, particularly the black women's is a critique of slavery, subjugation, racism and violence through remembrance and recurrence of the past events. In her recent novel, *Home*, she depicts the black women's identity through stream of consciousness technique. She depicts, on the one hand, subjugation and violence on these people, and on the other hand she shows their assiduous attempts to show that they are still concerned about their identity and they try to build their own identity. For instance, Lily, Lillian Florence Jones, is a woman who is working to buy a house for herself in a good condition. She had to work so hard that she could do that anyway as the writer states:

The pay was less at Wang's Heavenly Palace dry cleaners and there were no tips from actors. Yet working in daylight was an improvement over walking in darkness to get from her tiny rented room to the theater and back. Lily stood in the pressing room, recalling a recent irritation that had blossomed into anger. The response she had recently gotten from the real estate agent had her seething. Frugal and minding her own business, she had added enough to what her parents left her to leave the rooming house and put a down payment on a house of her own. She had circled an advertisement for a lovely one for five thousand dollars and, although it was far from her work at the cleaner's, she would happily commute from so nice a neighborhood. The stares she had gotten as she strolled the neighborhood didn't trouble her, since she knew how neatly dressed she was and how perfect her straightened hair. Finally, after a few afternoon strolls, she consulted a Realtor. When she described her purpose and the couple of houses on sale she had found, the agent smiled and said, "I'm really sorry". "They're sold already?" asked Lily. The agent dropped her eyes, then decided not to lie. "well, no, but there are restrictions."

"On what?"

The agent sighed. Obviously not wanting to have this conversation, she lifted her desk blotter and pulled out some stapled papers. Turning a page, she showed Lily an underlined passage. Lily traced the lines of print with her forefinger: No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay or Asiatic race excepting only employees in domestic service.

"I've got rentals and apartments in other parts of the city. Would you like..."

"Thank you," said Lily. She raised her chin and left the office as quickly as pride let her. Nevertheless, when her anger cooled and after some mulling, she returned to the agency and rented a second-floor one-bedroom apartment near Jackson Street. (*Home* 72-4).

This is an example of making a hybrid identity of the colonized people and their attempts to assimilate themselves to the community in which they live to relate themselves to the white or dominant community, especially the women who try to make themselves similar to those people and have their own identity. As far as this mimic behavior is obvious in Lily's manner toward the other people watching her. "The stares she had gotten as she strolled the neighborhood didn't trouble her, since she knew how neatly dressed she was and how perfect her straightened hair." Having straight hair instead of wavy hair that shows assimilating in appearance and affixing themselves to the white society, in spite of the fact that they cannot change their race identification; therefore, they try to reconstruct a new identity.

The people in this story live in the daily reality of racism, violence and injustice endured in the 1950s. Many restaurants and restrooms in parts of the country are still segregated as in aforementioned sentences it is clear that Lily is forbidden from buying her "lovely" house in such a "nice neighborhood" just because of her race. "Hebrew", "Ethiopian", "Malay" and "Asiatic" refer to the non-native communities. The underlined passage points to the condition in which the Blacks' identities are formed based on their color, race and class. They encounter many obstacles for negotiating lie in the oppressive environment they inhabit. They are marginalized in this hierarchy as Bhabha argues the "strategies of hierarchization and marginalization are employed in the management of colonial societies" (qtd. in Baradaran Jamili 262).

Another point in this novel is that Toni Morrison has a metaphorical use of the names of the characters. These names are abbreviated and shortened forms of their real names; Lily instead of Lillian Florence Jones and Cee instead of Ycidra. This shows that the female characters have been suppressed even by omitting some parts or syllables of their names. Abbreviating and omitting their complete names might have been accentuated that their being is ignored as a complete human being in the male-centered and dominated by imperial power societies. They have been considered as half of the male characters as Frank Money has his complete name besides his "nickname as *Smart Money*" (*Home* 67).

When Morrison describes the relationship between a man and a woman, like Lily and Frank, she declares that Lily is an ambitious seamstress who wants to open her own dressmaking shop and she desires to buy her own house; on the contrary, Franks makes her angry by his lack of enthusiasm for her dream of buying a house of her own. Lily grows impatient with his inability to cope with "the small mechanics of life"; dealing with "unpaid bills, frequent gas leaks, mice and quarreling neighbors" (*Home* 75), as the Morrison states:

Meantime the small mechanics of life needed attention: unpaid bills, frequent gas leaks, mice, runs in her last pair of hose, hostile, quarreling neighbors, dripping faucets, frivolous heating, street dogs and the insane piece of hamburger. None of these irritations did Frank seriously, and in all honesty she couldn't blame him. She knew that buried underneath the pile of complaints lay her yearning for her own house. It infuriated Lily that he shared none of her enthusiasm for achieving that goal. In fact he seemed to have no goals at all. When she questioned him about the feature, what he wanted to do, he said, "Stay alive".

(*Home* 76)

Lily has been frustrated, first because of the restrictions regarding race in the neighborhood she desires; second because Frank is not able to share her desire for buying house. Instead of sharing her passion to find a home he tells her all he wants to do, which is "stay alive". Being "alive" refers to physical existence which shows that there is only a physical relationship between them while they are spiritually far apart. Lily behaved just as a partner for her husband, Frank haunted by terrors of war, and he confesses that his nightmares disappeared when Lily is beside him. On the other hand, the loneliness and solitude of which Lily suffers was not ended, because she learns that Frank is an "indifference" man. Therefore her "resentment was justified by his clear indifference, along with his combination of need and irresponsibility" (*Home* 79).

Toni Morrison indicates that the imperial power deprives the Blacks from their true being by violence against them. The black women are double colonized entities in this process and they have to tolerate all kinds of subjugation and violence not only from their society but also from their own family. They have no good relationship with their husbands based on love; in this way, they are surrounded by a thick fog of displeasure. As in this novel Morrison has depicted in Lily and Frank's Life, "their bed work [...] became a duty" (*Home* 79). This shows victimization and double

colonization of the black women and women of color, physically and mentally in the colonized and masculinized societies.

### CONCLUSION

Regarding Spivak's notion of subaltern, Morrison, in *Home*, portrays the situation in which the female characters of this novel are physically and spiritually victimized in both their male-centered societies and by domination of the colonial power. In fact, she wants to revive the forgotten parts of the Western history during which women were subjugated, objectified and silenced by the patriarchal society, on one hand, and the dominant imperial power on the other hand. She portrays a situation in which these female characters are deprived of their identity and their true being in the male-dominated and patriarchal society as the double colonized individuals.

Morrison in her latest novel, *Home*, has chosen many different female characters with different situations and has shown that each of them tries to have her own home or identity. This novel shows to what extent the subaltern characters' lives indicates the colonized and marginalized groups of society who they have no being and identity, as Spivak stated, they are oppressed by the dominant power and the patriarchal society (1988: 271).

Accordingly, Morrison as a black woman novelist resists and challenges the male-dominated society; thus, she encourages the women of her society to know their own inside "free person" (*Home* 126) and do not let anybody decide "who" they have to be (*Home*, 126). These female characters should try to search for a definition for their identity and find a position in the masculinized society to announce their being. In this way, Toni Morrison deconstructs the essentialist notions of the Euro-American male-centered power regarding the identity of women, particularly the black women. She hopes the Western patriarchal society will "learn to read the words of talk" (Spivak 1988: 160); consequently, there will not be any subjugation and objectification of women so that all the women will be "free" (ibid 161).

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