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Female Dominance and Men's Subordination: Gerald and Andy in *Woman in Mind*, and Dysart and Frank in *Equus*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to claim, analysing four male characters in Alan Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind* and Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, that problems caused by sex/gender discrimination are not due to men only; instead, these problems exist beyond masculinity since men are also subject to oppression, subordination and victimisation in patriarchal societies. This assertion may be justified by the abundance of subordination of men in patriarchal societies. Moreover, it may be claimed that subordination is not limited to men and women and it spreads to other minorities, which lack power prevailing anything on earth. The solution to the problems caused by not only gender but also sex discriminations may be neutralisation of what is called femininity and masculinity. This article concludes with the assertion that it may be claimed based on the analysis of four male characters in *Equus* and *Woman in Mind* that the problems based on so-called gender/ sex issues in any societies are not led by only masculinity since the victims of the subordination and any kind of oppression in societies are not only women, as some of the feminist discourses claim, but also men.

Keywords: Discrimination; Masculinity; Subordination; Neutralisation; Theatre.

1. Introduction

The reason why human beings categorise whatever or whoever they get acquainted with— even the second conjunction in the previous line stands for a categorisation, for it refers to the discrimination of being animate or inanimate - is not known for sure. Some scholars argue that human brain functions by categorising new data, and therefore it is considered to be a natural phenomenon to categorise the new data according to its characteristics. On the other hand, some studies focus on the impact of culture in categorisation. Feminists generally claim that there is clear subordination of women in patriarchal societies by men. However, this claim may be asserted to be limited since it is based on the categorisation of sexes. Therefore, it may be claimed that putting forward theories, which take their core from a discrimination of sexes, will not be a solution to the problems caused by sex/gender issues. It needs to be accepted that it is not masculinity, which creates problems in terms of subordination of the ones/things regarded as the "Other". This assertion may be justified by the abundance of subordination of men in patriarchal societies. Male characters in Ayckbourn (1986) *Woman in Mind* and Peter Shaffer's *Equus* face subordination and oppression in their patriarchal environments. Female characters in the same plays cause victimisation of male characters, whereby a dichotomy of subordination and oppression can be claimed to exist in woman-man relationships in patriarchal societies. The aim of this paper is to claim, analysing four male characters in Alan Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind* and Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, that problems caused by sex/gender discrimination are not due to men only. Instead, these problems exist beyond masculinity since men are also subject to oppression, subordination and victimisation in patriarchal societies.

Plumwood (1993) in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* examines key elements in the dualistic structure in western thought. She makes a list of discriminations in Western thought system as follows:

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|
| culture | / | nature |
| reason | / | nature |
| male | / | female |
| mind | / | body (nature) |
| master | / | slave |
| reason | / | matter (physicality) |
| rationality | / | animality (nature) |
| reason | / | emotion (nature) |
| mind, spirit | / | nature |
| freedom | / | necessity (nature) |
| universal | / | particular |
| human | / | nature (non-human) |
| civilised | / | primitive (nature) |
| production | / | reproduction (nature) |
| public | / | private |
| subject | / | object |
| self | / | other |

(Plumwood 43)

As can be seen in the list, various types of discrimination can be encountered in any field of life. Nevertheless, the discrimination between male and female is the one that will be analysed in this article. There is a great deal of knowledge about the subordination of women by men throughout history. However, it might be argued that focusing solely on the subordination of women prevents people from recognising the subordination of men in the same societies. Additionally, it may be claimed that subordination is not limited to men and women and it spreads to other minorities, which lack power prevailing anything on earth.

Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* explains the distinction of sex and gender:

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. (6)

She points to the idea that sex is regarded as destined biologically while gender is constructed by culture. Gender is claimed not to be the product of sex, but an artificial construction. Butler's claim gives ground for the fact that some gay people would not behave in the way considered feminine in a society if sex were the designator is taken into account. Considering this fact, it might be put forward that sex cannot be designator of gender in any way.

She, in the same book, clarifies that there is not any difference between the concept of sex and that of gender:

Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (7)

According to Butler the concept of sex carries out the mission of the concept of gender. It might be considered as a construction like gender. From this point of view, the construction "sex" may be claimed as an indicator of that the distinction among sexes- the plural of the word is utilized to oppose the general consensus about sex, which is divided into male and female- is based on the sexual organs. The distinction between male and female is designated taking the presence of vagina or penis with testicles at birth, and the size of breasts and the tone of voice at later phases of physical development into consideration. The core of the issue is to be able to annihilate the so-called distinction among sexes based on sexual organs and create a new discourse to accept it as a similarity. If the sexual organs are not allotted to male or female people, a deconstruction of the concept of sex/ gender might occur, whereby subordination and oppression related to the concept of sex/ gender in societies come to an end. This deconstruction may be acquired with neutralisation of the identities of sexual organs.

The scientific discourse is stable to create discrimination among people based on their sexual organs. This unjust discrimination serves to the benefits of the people who have power in societies. The support of the scientific discourse to the scattered power in societies normalises and naturalises any sort of subordination and oppression. Marilyn Frye in *The Politics of Reality* associates subordination of individuals in societies to effective naturalization of the subordination of the one by the other:

For efficient subordination, what's wanted is that the structure not only not appear to be a cultural artefact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear *natural*—that it appear to be a quite direct consequence of the facts about the beast which are beyond the scope of human manipulation or revision. It must seem natural that individuals of the one category are dominated by individuals of the other and that as groups, the one dominates the other. (Frye, 1983).

As seen in the excerpt, Frye asserts that the subordination of the people of one category is efficient when the subordination is shown as natural. Mostly feminists utilize this discourse since the subordination of women is considered natural in patriarchal societies. The subordination or the oppression is not peculiar to women only, though. It is applied to LGBT individuals, some specific ethnicities, the disabled, the old, nature, animals, inanimate objects and men, who do not conform to the ideals of masculinity in patriarchal societies. Therefore, the idea that the subordination or oppression is carried out towards women solely cannot be justifiable.

It is easy to get to the conclusion from the research on feminist matters that feminists impose the whole of the burden of subordination or the oppression they faced in societies on the shoulders of men. For instance, Butler in *Bodies that Matter* reveals, one of the most outstanding feminists of contemporary period, Beauvoir's approach to men in terms of advocacy of women rights, which may be evaluated as an indication of misandry:

The relation between masculine and feminine cannot be represented in a signifying economy in which the masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified. Paradoxically enough, Beauvoir prefigured this impossibility in *The Second Sex* when she argued that men could not settle the question of women because they would then be acting as both judge and party to the case. (Butler, 1993).

Feminist theoreticians argue that men cannot understand the situation of women since they are regarded as the creators of oppression and subordination towards women. However, this time, men are exposed to otherisation, which might be regarded as a kind of subordination of men or the oppression over them from women.

2. Materials and Methods

Under the light of the subject matters discussed above, the subordination and the oppression encountered by men in patriarchal societies, will be analysed in this article examining the roles and lives of four male characters; Andy, Gerald, Frank and Dysart in two twentieth-century British plays: *Woman in Mind* and *Equus*. The analysis will be text-based since the texts are considered only sources to comment on the main subject of this research. Features of the period, when these two plays were produced, will be out of the scope of this research. Additionally, the lives of the playwrights will be excluded from the research. The attitudes of male and female characters in both of the plays will be focused on to comprehend the situation of men in patriarchal societies. The plays will function as a mirror to comment on the subordination and oppression men face in patriarchal societies.

Male-female discrimination and the problems caused by the alleged discrimination in the West are examined in detail. The examination consolidates the main claim of this research. Additionally, some feminist circles are criticised due to their unjust blame of men in general for the problems that women face. The fact that patriarchal societies oppress and subordinate both women and men will be put forward based on text analysis of *Woman in Mind* and *Equus*.

3. Results

In *Equus*, Shaffer (1973) presents Frank, who might be considered obsessed due to the character's persistent usage of the sentence "If you receive my meaning" throughout the play and oppressed under the expectations of his partner Dora, who is an ardent Christian and blames her husband about the psychological problems that her son faces. The following excerpt from the play highlights the abovementioned oppression that Frank faces:

DORA: I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. That his task was to prepare himself for the most important happening of his life. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still... I simply... don't understand... Alan!...

[She breaks down in sobs. Her husband gets up and goes to her]

FRANK [embarrassed]: There now. There now, Dora. Come on! (*Equus*, 35)

When Dora speaks to Dr Dysart about how she educated her son on sexuality based on the doctrines of her religion only, she bursts into tears suddenly, which can be evaluated as a hysterical behaviour. Frank, embarrassed to see her sobbing, tries to comfort his partner with an affectionate manner. It may be argued that men in general are tortured by the expectation of being emotionally stronger than women to take care of other members of the family. The situation is same for this part of the play because Frank is not capable of experiencing his own emotions even though he feels sad for his son's mental problem due to the role tailored by his culture.

A similar situation welcomes the audience in the fantasy world of the character Susan in Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind*. Susan creates an imaginary world for herself, in which she is married to Andy, a partner designed according to her wishes and expectations. In this part, Andy overreacts to Susan's fall to the ground, which pleases Susan:

ANDY: (Sitting beside her, immensely concerned) Darling, what on earth happened? I can't leave you for five minutes, can I? What happened? He said you knocked yourself out...

SUSAN: I just- banged my head. It is nothing, Andy, really. You mustn't fuss...

ANDY: Of course I fuss. You are my wife. I love you. How on earth did you do it? (*Woman*, 12-3)

As might be seen from the dialogue between Susan and Andy above, Andy seems devoted to his partner and he volunteers in doing his best to take care of his partner. The oppression on men is visible in this part since the male character here is expected to care for and worry about the female character. Susan in her imaginary world idealises a man stronger and caring all the time without any exception and not taking possible needs of a man in difficult situations into consideration. This assertion is fortified when it is considered that she has created that world of fantasy to have her ideals, which she does not have in the world that she senses.

Susan's behaviour continues to support the thesis statement of this article, which is that subordination and oppression are not peculiar to women; on the other hand, men may also face subordination and oppression:

ANDY: Maybe. I don't know. Perhaps (Returning to her) If we do, I will tell you why it is. Because we'd all be lost without you. There is only one of you, you see. (Smiling slightly) Unfortunately. And we all need you very much. Me most especially. I mean, after all, what does Tony stand to lose? Just a big sister. So what? Plenty of those. Ten a penny. And Lucy? Well- girls and their mothers. We all know what they are like. She'd soon get over it. But me? I'd be losing a wife. And that I'd never get over. Not one as dear and as precious as you. (He kisses her tenderly.)

Whom, incidentally, I love more than words can ever say ... (Woman, 16)

In the excerpt, Andy exemplifies the ideal role of being a husband in the eyes of Susan. The dialogue between these two characters pinpoints the subordination of masculinity since there is an apparent exaggeration in Andy's attachment to his partner. He claims he would be nothing without her as if he does not have an identity detached from his female partner. This infinite attachment also seems related with the notion that men should be chevalier in relationships with women, whereas a woman is not supposed to have or do much apart from household chores and the traditional parental obligation. This might be considered as a sort of oppression on the shoulders of men in general.

It may be claimed that there is a great deal of oppression on men since they are regarded as the constructor of the rules in patriarchal societies. Though, they are distressed under these same rules. That is, men are victims like women of the rules set on the basis of the concept of sex/ gender in patriarchal societies. In *Equus*, Frank reveals that he is oppressed by the rules in societies:

FRANK [stiffly]: I'd like you to know something. Both of you. I came here tonight to see the Manager. He asked me to call on him for business purposes. I happen to be a printer. Miss. A picture house needs posters. That's entirely why I'm here. To discuss posters. While I was waiting I happened to glance in, that's all. I can only say I'm going to complain to the council. I had no idea they showed films like this. I'm certainly going to refuse my services. (Equus, 94)

He goes to watch a pornographic film in a cinema, where he comes across his son, and feels guilty. It is implied in the play that he does not have a satisfying sexual life with his partner and therefore he prefers to go to such places. The guilt that he feels is understood from several lies that he uttered to avoid ruining public opinion about him. His attitude shows that the features of the culture of the society, of which he is a member, oppress him.

The double-sided feature of oppression in societies- whereas one side is oppressed, the other side is also oppressed due to similar or same constructions or rules- is exemplified in *Woman in Mind* through the statements of Gerald, who is the husband of Susan in real life:

SUSAN: Perhaps it's because I am not very happy, Gerald.

GERALD: Well, who is? These days. Very few.

SUSAN: You seem happy.

GERALD: Do I? Maybe I am just better at hiding these things. Who knows?

SUSAN: At least you sleep at night.

GERALD: Only because I'm exhausted from a full day's work. I give my body no option. (Woman, 23)

When Susan complains about her mood being all the time negative and claims that Gerald seems happy on the contrary, Gerald speaks in a way, which points to the ignorance of the oppression towards men. Gerald pinpoints the possibility that men can also be unhappy. The significant matter in his speech is that he asserts the probability of hiding his emotions due to the "husband role". He does not have a chance to resign from his job since he has to look after his wife and his child in financial terms. Furthermore, this complaint of Gerald about the situation of masculinity in patriarchal societies sheds light on the other side of the coin. The fact that whereas women complain about the oppression of men towards themselves when they carry the title "housewife", men do not even have a chance to have a similar title such as "househusband" since they are obliged to work and earn money in the societies, where the presence of the subordination of and the oppression towards women is claimed. This fact might be related to the one part of the thesis statement of this article: men or masculinity cannot be the designators of the oppression or subordination, which women are asserted to face, since they are under similar oppressions or the subordination.

Additionally, in *Equus*, Frank's behaviours underline the fact that not only some women are submissive in their role of being a wife and consequently oppressed, but also some men are submissive and oppressed in the same way; in other words, it may be asserted that both men and women in patriarchal societies experience oppression:

FRANK: My wife does not know I am here. I'd be grateful to you if you did not enlighten her, if you receive my meaning.

DYSART: Everything that happens in this room is confidential, Mr Strang.

FRANK: I hope so... I hope so...

DYSART [gently]: Do you have something to tell me?

FRANK: As a matter of fact I have. Yes.

DYSART: Your wife told me about the photograph.

FRANK: I know, it's not that! It's about that, but it's- worse... I wanted to tell you the other night, but I couldn't in front of Dora. Maybe I should have. It might show her where all that stuff leads to, she drills into the boy behind my back. (Equus, 49-50)

Frank explains that he fears his wife and therefore, he cannot state what he likes to clearly when his wife is around. In addition, he does not react to that his wife drills into Alan behind his back, probably because of the timidity and the submissiveness. This situation explicitly shows that the power to oppress, which is attributed to men in feminist discourses, might be encountered towards men. Seeing the other side of oppression or subordination may be capable of destructing the consensus on the matter.

In addition, in the same play by Peter Shaffer, the character Dysart draws the attention of the audience to his imprisonment by gender/ sex roles in his family, a culture-construction:

DYSART: Is it? ... I go on about my wife. That smug woman by the fire. Have you thought of the fellow on the other side of it? The finicky, critical husband looking through his art books on mythical Greece. ... I settled for being pallid and provincial, out of my own eternal timidity. The old story of bluster, and do bugger- all... I imply that we can't have children; but actually, it's only me. I had myself tested behind her back. The lowest sperm count you could find. And I never told her. That's all I need- her sympathy mixed with resentment... I tell everyone Margaret's the puritan, I'm the pagan. Some pagan. Such wild returns I make to the womb of civilization. (Equus, 82)

Dysart declares his imprisonment due to his role of being a husband. The audience get to know that he is not happy in his relationship and feels obliged to sustain his status. In terms of having children, he asserts to deceive people to avoid giving the impression of unhappiness to the others. As can be seen in the relationship of Dysart and his wife, not only women but also men are confined to gender/ sex roles. Therefore, a one sided freeing may be claimed not to be a concrete solution to the problems of subordination and oppression in societies since the problems are not caused by masculinity, but something beyond a specific majority or minority of people.

4. Discussion

It may be claimed based on the analysis of male characters in *Equus* and *Woman in Mind* that the problems based on so-called gender/ sex issues in any societies are not led by only masculinity since the victims of the subordination and any kind of oppression in societies are not only women, as some of the feminist discourses claim, but also men. The subordination and oppression are also encountered by LGBT people- if the general definitions are taken into account. Furthermore, it may be claimed that the subordination and the oppression in societies are consolidated by the divergence between masculinity and femininity- these three terms are used to clarify the subject matter here, but the usages should not be utilized since the aim of this article is to assert that the neutralisation of the significance of sexual organs of human beings and the destruction of the idea that human sexual organs designate what is assumed to be sex. The "doer behind the deed" concept in feminist theories and literature seems to be an explanation to why human beings in general endeavour in drawing borders among themselves. Ironically, individuals "are objects of these regimes as they are configured and deployed within the system, yet they are also the agents because they internalize mainstream identity politics and impose them on others" (Ertin, 2012). However, feminist circles insistently blame masculinity for causing the subordination of women and the oppression towards women again. With this claim, they fail in noticing the fact that men are also under the oppression and they are also subordinated due to similar reasons as in those of women. Foucault's description of power and the function of it can shed light on the fact that masculinity only is not responsible for the subordination and the oppression. Additionally, if the assertion that "power ... cannot be divided into those who 'have' it and those who don't." Halperin (1996) is taken into account, it will be futile to regard solely masculinity responsible for the problems in a society.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results part of this research justifies the main assertion of that research that not only women but also men face subordination, oppression and victimisation in patriarchal societies. Men in these sorts of societies have "must" duties and attributes like women. These duties and attributes force men into difficult situations to overcome. Gender/sex discrimination is the only problematic phenomenon in this respect. Solutions to the problems caused by this discrimination can only be found when it is accepted that masculinity is only an agent through which

women are oppressed and subordinated. Additionally, it must be accepted that men also suffer from the imposed-rules of society.

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