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A Comparative Analysis of Intersectional Feminist Identities in Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine*

Caryl Churchill'in Vinegar Tom ve Cloud Nine Adlı Oyunlarındaki Birbiriyle İlişkili Feminist Karakterlerin Mukayeseli Bir Analizi

ABSTRACT

The portrayal of women in patriarchal communities and their resistance against the tyranny of men are one of the most evident themes of literary texts. Feminist writers and scholars object to the conventional premise that women are inferior, silenced, or marginalized figures, and they aim to alter the mindsets of traditionalists' by implementing and analyzing the sense of the rebellious spirit of female characters through their works. The advocates of intersectional feminist theory hold notion that the oppression from which women suffer is the result of intersecting social factors combined with the gender identity of women. In other words, gender cannot be the sole reason for tyranny, but women's social status, race, poverty, sexuality, ability, or disability are some of the crucial issues that accompany and reinforce the oppression they experience. In this regard, the purpose of this article is to scrutinize Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* in terms of intersectional feminist theory by analyzing the female characters' miserable conditions and their struggles to find their real identities since the female characters suffer from patriarchal dogmas and norms in each play.

Key Words: Caryl Churchill, tyranny, intersectional feminism, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine*.

ÖZ

Ataerkil toplumlarda kadınların toplumsal konumları ve onların erkek zulmüne karşı direnişleri edebi metinlerin her zaman en önemli konularından biri olmuştur. Feminist yazarlar ve bilim insanları, kadınların aşağılık, susturulmuş veya ötekileştirilmiş bireyler olduğu yönündeki geleneksel düşünceye şiddetle karşı çıkmaktadırlar ve kadın karakterlerin isyankâr ruh hallerini yazdıkları eserler vasıtasıyla açıkça gösterip analiz ederek kalıplaşmış egemen zihniyeti bir şekilde değiştirmeyi amaç edinmişlerdir. Bu kapsamda feminist teorinin savunucuları, kadınların maruz kaldığı kabul edilemez baskının, kadınların cinsiyet kimliğiyle kesişen sosyal faktörlerin bir sonucu olduğu gerçeğini düşünmektedirler. Başka bir deyişle, yaşadıkları her türlü zulmün tek nedeni sadece onların cinsiyetleri değildir. Kadının sosyal statüsü, ırkı, maddi durumu, cinselliği ve genel yeterlilikleri gibi önemli konular da yaşadıkları baskıya sebep olan ve onu pekiştiren diğer etkenler arasında yer almaktadır. Bu bağlamda makalenin amacı, Caryl Churchill'ın *Vinegar Tom* ve *Cloud Nine* adlı eserlerini kesişimsel feminism teorisi açısından mukayese ederek, kadın karakterlerin ataerkil yaptırımlar ile birlikte toplumsal normlardan kaynaklanan mağduriyetlerini her bir oyunda analiz etmek ve gerçek kimliklerini bulma çabalarını ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Caryl Churchill, zalimlik, feminism, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine*

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Introduction

Feminism centers on the advocation of achieving equality for both men and women. However, it has impacted many different fields and schools of thought, and the theory has become a challenging issue to evaluate in a single and cohesive ideology. In other words, it has progressed through multiple stages, intending to call for equality and object to male subjugation. The theory has caused division or split in feminism since it addresses nearly every aspect of life, including social, political, economic, literary, and sexuality. Henceforth, analyzing women's roles has given rise to several feminist theories.

The diversity of feminist approaches and notions, like other literary genres, inevitably and significantly impacts theater, too. Through political and artistic representation, women-focused theater aims to challenge conventional wisdom and facilitate or spark positive changes in the lives of women, and it "must be directly and uncompromisingly political to effect social change" (Goodman, 1993:17). Feminism in theater has grown and improved out of social and political unrest along with protests against the dominant culture of patriarchy. Susan Bassnett claims that:

> Feminist theatre logically bases itself on the established concerns of the organised Women's Movement, on the seven demands. These seven demands, of which the first four were established in 1970, and the remainder in 1975 and 1978 show a shift towards a more radical concept of feminism that asserts female homosexuality and perceives violence as originating from men. The tendency therefore is not so much towards a revaluation of the role of women within society as we know it, but towards the creation of a totally new set of social structures in which the traditional male-female roles will be redefined. (1984:447)

She draws attention to the necessity of reviewing and reconstructing gender roles in the political context of feminist theater. To achieve an alteration of the mindsets of patriarchs, there needs to be a change in society, too. The goal of feminist theatre, thus, has been to alter cultural representations of women. To investigate the likelihood that a political consciousness will result in social shifts, revolt is regarded as a necessary step "to interrupt and deconstruct the habitual performance codes of the majority culture" (Goodman, 1993:20). In this sense, the function of feminist theater, which aims to convey the challenges of social and cultural marginalization through the adoption of various forms, styles, and methods to diverge from norms, can be thought to be well-indicated by the diversity and multiplicity of viewpoints.

While considering the issues discussed above, Caryl Churchill's two important plays will be analyzed within the scope of a theory called "Intersectional Feminism," which acknowledges the versatility of oppression that women face and attempts to alter society's conventional premises upon women. After defining intersectional feminist theory, Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* will be scrutinized in terms of the elements they pose about intersected troubles women experience and the ways they resist them. The plays have significant examples of patriarchal tyranny on women not only because of their gender but also because of the other sorts of maltreatment that accompany women's identities inseparably and simultaneously.

1. Intersectional Feminism

Intersectionality is a concept in the study of gender that can be regarded as an extension of feminist approaches. Due to the restrictions of evaluating women's struggles or troubles only within the scope of gender, intersectional feminist theory promotes the necessity of acknowledging other social factors that affect the oppression from which women suffer since there is "an integrated relationship between profit, capitalism, patriarchy, and social control" (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2018:111). As a matter of fact, it is not only the issue of gender that leads to inequality but also some crucial aspects that accompany such injustices.

Initially, the term intersectionality was used by Kimberle Crenshaw in her critique of US antidiscrimination law, and it mainly, criticizes the failure to recognize black women's experiences of racism and sexism as simultaneous and inseparable. She defines the term as a notion that is "greater than the sum of racism and sexism" to depict the reality that people's social

identities have a significant effect on behalf of others (1989:40). Crenshaw's argument centers on the premise that each woman does not experience discrimination in the same way, and it is not logical or fair to regard gender as the only premise that leads to oppression. She deems any references to women as the only category problematic.

The very notion of feminists, according to Crenshaw, undermines women of different colors whose genders and experiences are discriminated against and who are marginalized figures in society. She claims the "failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour" (1991:1252). Intersectional feminism, as a feminist approach, acknowledges that while all women experience oppression based on their gender, all the tyranny they face is not the result of an all-encompassing or universal one.

Based on the assertions above, intersectional feminism struggles to set the perspective that identity is complex and is based on versatile components. It is crucial to recognize that women experience different forms of discrimination that are based on various factors that are out of their control. Some of these factors include race, gender, sexuality, education, financial freedom, ability, or disability. The discrimination stems from those various identities, and it is deeply influenced by the power structures of society, which might probably change from culture to culture. Intersectionality recognizes regularity as a problem that sets a standard, or norm; thus, intersectional feminists aim to resist normative conventions. To eradicate discrimination from society, intersectional feminists allege the necessity that the whole premise of identity needs to be redefined and a society that is compatible with that premise needs to be created.

As literary criticism, intersectional feminism should focus on a "concrete topic that is already the subject of investigation and… find the combined effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, where before only one or two interpretive categories were used" (Collins, 1999:278). Even if dealing with numerous dimensions is a demanding task, Crenshaw suggests evaluating such conditions "within the structures of power" (qtd. in Guidroz & Berger, 2009: 70), narrowing down the analysis to a particular set of intersections, and focusing on marginalized or neglected groups that are from several social dimensions. Briefly, it is possible to resolve the elaborate layers of oppression and resistance suffered by female characters who are exposed to the wider male-dominated social structures and the complexities of identity within patriarchal systems by using intersectional feminist theory to Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine*.

1.1. Inhibited Female Identities in *Vinegar Tom*

Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976) is set in England in the seventeenth century and dramatizes the political, economic, and social predicament of women who are blamed for being witches and who are punished specifically for being women on the periphery of society. In her play, Churchill questions and confronts gender norms surrounding the cruel execution of women who are suspected of practicing witchcraft. Churchill draws a connection between the prejudice and mistreatment of women in the modern era and the seventeenth-century witch hunts, and she highlights the problems of class and gender in a male-dominant society. In other words, the play challenges conventional historical accounts of the marginalized and oppressed and urges a re-examination of the past.

Vinegar Tom narrates the story of women who are the direct target of professional witch-hunters Henry Packer and his partner Goody Haskins. They reach the village to exterminate the evil forces that are supposed to be carried out by these women who "are basically from lower social classes with little or no income. They are either poor, old, or vulnerable women such as Alice's mother Joan, or socially non-conforming single mothers who enjoy sex like Alice, or weak and easily frightened women"(Demirkaya, 129:2015). As a matter of fact, these women are either destitute and helpless or atypical, and, thus, they are a probable menace to patriarchal power. Within the opening chapter of the play, Alice Noakes, for instance, an unmarried mother, has a debate with a man following their intercourse, in which she depicts her unconventional morality as follows:

MAN. So you think that was no sin we did?

ALICE. If it was I don't care.

MAN. Don't say that.

ALICE. You'd say worse living here. Any time I'm happy someone says it's a sin. (Churchill, 1985:135-136)

She expresses a strong desire to move to London with the man, where there is a premise that "women speak out too" (1985:136). Alice aspires to be unrestricted by social inhibitions without ever being labeled as a sinner. However, the man refuses to take her to London and instead entitles her to be a whore. The man represents masculine power and despises Alice for not suiting the conventional so-called female identities. Likewise, French feminist Luce Irigaray puts forth that men refuse to suit women with another status than that is related to their sexuality, as she states, "[n]either as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure" (1985:187). Furthermore, Alice is exposed to torture and humiliation by Packer and Goody in their search for the marks of the devil on her body, yet she refuses to regard herself as a witch and states: "I am not a witch. But I wish I was" (175). Alice displays her suppressed discontent and resistance by wishing for demonic abilities to use against the males. In addition to resisting and challenging masculine norms and depictions, her rage, frustration, and desire for vengeance also convey the helplessness of women under the hegemony of seventeenth-century England.

Crenshaw claims that "all inequality is not created equal" by pointing out the fact that, apart from being a woman, there are some significant issues that make females a target for tyranny. (1989:71). To illustrate, Jack, Alice's neighbor and a married guy, tries to take advantage of her low income for sexual intercourse by stating, "Alice, I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man" (1985:148). However, he accuses Alice of being a witch and having detached his sexuality after failing to woo her. Similarly, Alice's mother, Joan Noakes, is an old and poor woman. Due to her circumstances, she has become violent, and irritable, and she has even started stealing small items from the neighborhood. She is branded as a witch and blamed for slaughtering her neighbor Jack's calves and buffaloes. When Joan begs Margery to give her some yeast and she refuses, Joan becomes irrational and curses the very things that give Margery a better social and economic standing than Joan. She exclaims, "Damn your butter to hell" (144). Joan emphasizes her impoverished situation while pointing out that poverty increases a woman's susceptibility to oppression. Churchill's depiction of Joan's poverty brings up the subject of class; that is, she also suffers from poverty besides being old and lonely. Joan reveals to her daughter Alice that "[i]f we'd each got a man we'd be better off" (141), and she acknowledges that the lack of male protection in their lives can be connected to their economic and social marginalization and repression. Unlike women, who have the male protection of their fathers, brothers, and husbands, they are not subject to patriarchal control and are more likely to be tortured and oppressed. Even though her husband used to abuse her, Joan's desire for male protection illustrates how weak, defenseless, and unmoored women feel in a patriarchal society.

According to Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "women with disabilities have been cast in the collective cultural imagination as inferior, lacking, excessive, incapable, unfit, and useless" (2005:1567). In this regard, Joan tells the witch hunter Packer that she is pregnant, obviously thinking he may let her go, after he searches her body for signs of the devil and forces her to confess that she is a witch. Joan's attempt to use her pregnancy as an excuse to flee Packer's grasp can be interpreted as another indication that a woman in a patriarchal society is only valuable as long as she can bear children. The assistant witch hunter Goody's uncivil comment, "Who'd believe that?" (141), as she is not young enough to bear a child, illustrates that an elderly woman loses value in the patriarchal system and is more vulnerable to oppression. Joan Noakes' misery and sorrow stem not only from poverty and a lack of male presence in her life but also from her old age.

Susan, another female character who is in her early twenties, is the only married woman accused of witchcraft. She has already given birth to two children and is expecting the third. She is timid and subservient in comparison to Alice's fearlessness and independent-mindedness. She finds

solace in the fact that her husband does not physically abuse her, but she does not realize the damage that repeated pregnancies and miscarriages have caused to her body. She is led to believe that women are punished for their sins by God by sending them pain, as she states, “They do say the pain is what is sent to a woman for her sins” (146). In addition to exposing the pervasive misogyny and prejudice found in Christian doctrines that have been used by patriarchy as an expedient means of subjugating and oppressing women, Churchill also exposes the long-standing practice of placing the blame on the poor victim herself.

Rather than empathizing with Susan's suffering during her pregnancies and miscarriages, her husband absolves himself of all responsibility, including the act of getting her pregnant, and provides historical and scriptural justification for her suffering. At this point, Adrienne Rich claims that “[t]he woman’s body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected” (1977:55). Susan is confused and unsure of the social ramifications of her decision because she does not dare to decide on her own body. Ellen’s attitude to Susan’s fear can be interpreted as a stimulant for destitute groups like women to take action and fight against being exploited.

Ellen, a thirty-five-year-old midwife, is also a victim of the witch hunt. She uses charms and herbs in her healing methods. Since Ellen is not a licensed physician, witch hunters punish her for engaging in witchcraft. Her ability to either heal or hurt may also put the male hierarchy in danger. In this regard, Janell Reinelt claims that:

> *Vinegar Tom* treated the witch hunts of the seventeenth century as manifestations of a historical conjecture where the professionalisation of the health industry clashed, with midwifery and ‘cunning woman’s curative practices. Combining religious misogyny with emergent capitalism to construct poor women, unmarried women, and old women as scapegoats for this historical enactment of new power configurations, the authorities in this play confine, torture, and ultimately hang women whose unruly bodies/behaviour they cannot control. (2000:175)

Ellen appears to be a threat to the patriarchal socioeconomic order because of her single status, her healing methods, which require no payment other than a small gift, and her increasing popularity among the villagers. Since power can subvert the patriarchal binary opposition of empowered men and disempowered women, Packer's weird description of power in the hands of women as an infection expresses the insecurity of a misogynist mind and calls for its containment and curtailment.

Likewise, Betty and Margery are spared the critical eye of society. The wealthy landowner's daughter, Betty, declines to wed the guy her father has recommended. Because she is the daughter of a wealthy landowner, her social rank leads to the conclusion that her revolt against patriarchal authority can be interpreted as a clear indication of non-conformity. When the doctor examines her and recognizes the illness as hysteria, she becomes easily convinced and tells Ellen that: “He says I’m not a witch” (169). Betty eventually concedes to marriage, believing that it can spare her from the suffering endured by the other women in the play. In other words, Betty’s wealthy state saves her from being tortured like the poor women in the play.

Along with Betty, there is another woman named Margery, who, albeit not being charged with witchcraft, illustrates the widespread tyranny of women. Jack's wife, Margery, endures a life of everyday misery as she strives to keep her unfaithful husband pleased by working relentlessly. Rather than expressing her disapproval, she conceals her pain and immerses herself in domestic duties to uphold her expected role. To thrive in a patriarchal society, women like Margery are expected not only to carry out their household and wifely responsibilities with decency but also to absorb the prejudice and bias of society towards marginalized women. Andrea Dworkin asserts, “Women internalize patriarchal values to perfect their obedience; they conform to the stereotypes, they display unwavering loyalty, they do not betray any sign of dissatisfaction or resistance to male control — all to avoid violence against their persons” (1983:20). Women, who are restricted to their houses and dependent on their husbands, have no choice but to endure the oppression

since "the role of a woman is bound strictly to the household and a man; she is either a wife or is about to become one" (Ognjenović, 2020:65). Even though they are not satisfied, they cannot overcome such harshness as they do not have economic freedom. Margery's poverty and helplessness accompany her gender identity during the oppression she experiences.

To summarize, Churchill depicts the female characters as the victims of patriarchy in her masterpiece and she "attempts to criticize the repression of women's rights by showing how they have been made scapegoats and are accorded subjugated social roles then and now in *Vinegar Tom*"(Ravari, 155:2010). The tyranny they face relates not only to their female identity but also to social roles like being divorced, poor, wise, or religious. The twenty-one scenes in the play convey oppression, cruelty, torture, and the hanging of witches as a result of religious intolerance, economic inequality, and patriarchal views. Churchill elevates her audience to a new level of consciousness toward a socialist feminist perception of the world in her retelling of the myth of witchcraft by demonstrating her dedication to feminism and feminist theater. This retelling of the history of the witch-hunting hysteria exposes the repressive forces of capitalism and patriarchy against women and is a step in the right direction towards women's empowerment, which will be more fully realized in her other play, *Cloud Nine.*

1.2. The Women's Quest of Liberty in *Cloud Nine*

Cloud Nine (1978) examines the connections between oppressive patriarchal ideology, gender roles, and sexual politics. A strict patriarchal sex and gender structure is shown in the first act, while an image of a sexually liberated society in which the conventional sex and gender system has collapsed is presented in the second act. The play examines the relationship between sexual repression and sexual imperialism on the one hand and economic repression and political imperialism on the other. Clive, as the representative of patriarchy, introduces his family members with a song:

> Betty, *his* wife, played by a man
>
> Joshua, *his* black servant, played by a white
>
> Edward, *his* son, played by a woman
>
> Victoria, *his* daughter, a dummy
>
> Maud, *his* mother-in-law (Churchill, 1985:248).

In the introduction part of her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir clarifies and defines women as follows: "A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man" (1981:15). In interpersonal connections, a male defines himself as a subject against the woman, according to Beauvoir. Women are depriving themselves of their own identities when they display male characteristics. As demonstrated by Churchill in relation to Clive, each of the above-named figures demonstrates Beauvoir's idea of otherness and loses some of their uniqueness. The characters in these plays, ruled by Clive, have no idea about who they are or what makes them special, in that, they just use his words to define themselves. Betty, for instance, talks about herself as: "I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life" (1985:251). Except for what her husband forced upon her, Betty has no idea who she is. In essence, she is Clive's creation. Interestingly enough, Betty does not think of herself even as a lady.

Kerry Mallen puts forth that "the warring male body signifies the masculine ideal of control, dominance, and mastery" (2002:18). This premise is so apparent in the play that a dummy plays the part of Clive and Betty's daughter Victoria. In this respect, Neslihan Yılmaz claims that "Churchill contests the naturalized notions of an abiding gendered identity by subverting the linear relationship between one's physical appearance and one's gender"(2012:59). This highlights how frivolous daughters are and how invisible women are in patriarchal cultures. Clive's deliberate attempt to minimize her existence by associating her with two marginalized women: Maurad, Clive's mother-in-law, and Ellen, Edward's governess. He unveils this lack of significance when he states, "No need for any speech by the rest. My daughter, mother-in-law and governess" (1985:252). On the other hand, this negligence is contrasted with Clive's

introduction of his son Edward, as he states, “I’m doing all I can/To teach him to grow up to be a man” (1985:252). Clive's statement makes it very evident how proud he is to be a father and how much effort he has put into raising his son to be a man. In an attempt to mold his son into a man, Clive tries to instill in him the values of patriarchy. In patriarchal societies, heterosexuality is regarded as normal and the only authentic kind of sexuality. All other types of sexual desire are considered aberrant and deviant.

Joshua, the black servant of Clive, also completely submits to Clive's imperialist demands and conceals his identity. He is introduced by Clive in these words: “My boy’s a jewel. Really has the knack” (1985:251). It is evident from Joshua's speech that Clive lacks a soul, head, or roots because of his authority and power. Clive attempts to use his repressive power over every character to suit a true representative of patriarchal and imperialist forces in the first act. He confines Betty under his control while having extramarital affairs with Mrs. Saunders, the widow of a friend and coworker of Clive's. He must put an end to any challenge to his authority, such as Betty's obsession with explorer Harry Bagley, as revealed to him by his obedient servant Joshua. The strict norms of patriarchy must be followed by women in the interest of the family and home.

Audre Lorde avers that “men deny themselves their own essential humanity, becoming trapped in dependency and fear” (1984:74). Within the play, it is made clear that any deviation from the norm is unacceptable and can result in discipline or family suspension. Clive's authority is threatened by female sexuality. Clive is informed by Mrs. Saunders, an independent woman who does not belong in a patriarchal environment. He is threatened by the incredible spirit of Mrs. Saunder, who displays no emotion or dependence other than sexuality, as he says, “You terrify me. You are dark like this continent” (263). Unlike the women in Clive’s house, Mrs. Saunders displays a powerful image that derives from her sexuality, through which she can also resist patriarchy. As a dominant male character, Clive is used to taming women, yet Mrs. Saunder’s unconventional identity puzzles him. It can be stated that gender consciousness is more apparent in social hierarchies. Gender is subordinated in the social hierarchy, as demonstrated by Clive and Joshua's exhibition of male solidarity at Betty's expense.

The patriarchy, with its central tenet of required heterosexuality, turns Harry and Ellen's marriage into a forced union in the last scene of the first act. The scene calls into question colonialism as well as concerns about sexual and gender inequality. There is a confrontation between Betty and Mrs. Saunders right before the bridegroom gives his marriage speech. Betty, who is envious and insecure, attacks Mrs. Saunders. After engaging in an extramarital affair with Mrs. Saunders, Clive gets defensive of his wife Betty and questions Mrs. Saunders: “How dare you touch my wife?” (1985: 287). Clive promptly demonstrates to Mrs. Saunders that no challenge to the patriarchal structure, which is embodied in a family, can be accepted once he declares his dedication to the family.

The play's second act, which is set in a London Park in 1979, is very different from the first one. Churchill jumps forward nearly a century to depict a completely different and more modern world, but the characters only get older by twenty-five years. The first act, which portrays Victorian society and its traditional values, is strongly structured and dominated by men. However, the second act, with its contemporary, nontraditional society, takes more energy from those who are transgender and free women. The sexual unconventionality of gays and lesbians comes out explicitly without being censured and suppressed. The characters in this play challenge the norms of forced heterosexuality and patriarchal marriage, as social taboos have lessened. With the removal of the patriarch, the majority of the first act's characters have matured and undergone some changes. Betty moves to London after divorcing her husband. The rag doll from the previous act, Victoria, is now a married young lady. The majority of the action in this act takes place in the same park where Edward, who is currently living with his lover Gerry, works as a gardener. Additionally, there is Lin, a white lesbian who is divorced from her husband and she lives with her five-year-old daughter, Cathy.

According to Margery Hourihan, women need to have the traits that men do, and "they must become as much like men as possible" (1997:95). Female characters' improvement and having rights for their own lives depend on attaining their freedom and leading a life like men. In the play, the most notable character development is that of Betty, even though the majority of the characters have evolved and matured, as previously mentioned. Betty gradually gains a sense of her own identity by moving from being the most reclusive character in the first act. However, her character is most affected by the oppressive past for a while until she overcomes it and becomes a new woman who is content, self-assured, and confident. In the very first scene of the second act, Betty tells Victoria, "I'm finding a little flat, that will be fun" (1985:295). It takes Betty some time to accept her new identity as a woman, apart from her previous one as a wife. She spends years hiding herself beneath a patriarchal role, but she eventually gets over this identity crisis and discovers who she is in reality.

Betty's new job, which offers her financial independence, is the first step toward her freedom. She tells Cathy with evident excitement at this accomplishment, "Betty's been at work this week, Cathy …. And the money. I feel like a child with the money " (1985:313). As Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* asserts that women need "power to think for oneself" (1989:106) for financial freedom, Betty's enslavement vanishes thanks to her ability to earn money. Her realization of her own sexuality is a crucial step on her journey of self-discovery. According to Betty, she has either lost her identity or, more accurately, has never developed one in her position within a traditional patriarchal system. Betty finds her joy and, more importantly, her separateness in her defiance of convention and patriarchy. Betty is in a better condition to judge beyond traditional sexuality because of this new awareness, which makes her feel victorious. This enables her to comprehend and accept her children's sexual choices, too. Betty now acknowledges her son's homosexuality after forbidding Edward from playing with dolls in the first act and asking Gerry directly, "So what I'm being told now is that Edward is 'gay' is that right?" (320). She even offers them money to buy a bigger house where they can all live together. This defies the conventional norms of a nuclear family.

The first act depicts Victoria, Betty's daughter, as a rag doll. She is married to Martin, who attempts to control her. In the first two scenes, Victoria, like her mother, struggles to find her voice and build a new relationship because she does not have a satisfying affair with her husband. Victoria and Lin, a lesbian couple, develop an alternative sexual dynamic in their liaison. At first, Victoria rejects Lin's proposal to leave her husband and would rather investigate this lesbian relationship within the security of her marriage. However, she soon gets over her fears and breaks social norms to move in with Lin who "demonstrates manly attitude through her aggressive and savage personality"(Fırat, 2005:40) since she has experienced abuse from her husband. She shows her distaste for men when she states, "I hate men … I just hate the bastards" (292). Due to Lin's stance, it is unclear if her lesbianism is a conscious decision or the outcome of an abusive marriage, which connects the problems of gender and violence.

Through Lin and Cathy, the author of the play unfolds the artificiality of gender norms. Cathy, for instance, wants to become more feminine, so she gets her ears pierced. She refuses to wear pants to school because she is treated like a boy there. In other words, "she is frequently scolded and mocked by her schoolmates who call her a boy" (Joodaki, 2013:101) because of her male-oriented upbringing. Similarly, the way Lin exposes Cathy to war toys raises important questions about violence once more. Lin's suggestion to her daughter to "paint a car crash and blood everywhere" suggests a deeper implication (289). The violence that Lin and Cathy experience highlights how even women are immune to brutality and how it has penetrated all spheres of society, in stark contrast to the scene in the first act where women are ordered to stay indoors and busy with chores.

In the second act, the only heterosexual male is Victoria's husband, Martin. Even though he is a progressive man, he attempts to control Victoria in a stereotypically patriarchal manner. Martin becomes perplexed about his place in this new structure as he finds himself caught between the chaos of emerging sexualities and the pressure of patriarchal roles. In an attempt to get over his

fixation with heterosexual masculinity, he shows growth and development by accepting his wife Victoria's relationship with Lin: "You're the one who's experimenting with bisexuality, and I don't stop you" (301). Martin finds a new role for himself in this new world where conventions are being questioned.

Churchill, undoubtedly, challenges patriarchal values and advocates for a shift in conventions and the development of new relationships through unaccustomed lifestyle choices. With the acceptance of all races and all sexual orientations, the play can be regarded as a utopia that transcends power structures. The playwright conveys a society in which freedom leads to happiness, especially for women who are silenced or marginalized. The very premise of the play reveals the reality that women's oppression stems from intersecting reasons. Race, financial condition, sexual preferences, or class are such issues that lead to inevitable inequality among women.

Conclusion

It is an inevitable fact that any significant changes in the structures of society affect the mindsets of people and their behavior, and feminism, as a literary theory, is not an exception. Since it has undergone multiple shifts and developments, it becomes impossible to restrict its basic notion to a gender basis. Apart from the advocation of equality of genders, feminism evolves and includes many social factors that are regarded as having impacts on women. The selected plays of Churchill reveal such multiplicity by exposing different sorts of tyranny that female characters experience. These female characters in *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* are the victims of such versatility due to their sexuality, ability/inability, class, gender, or religion, along with their gender. Those issues, unfortunately, reinforce their sufferings, and as an encompassing theory, intersectional feminism is of the idea that they cannot be regarded separately.

The extension of feminist approaches has led to an embrace of intersectionality which mainly argues that gender cannot be an overall reason for women's oppression. The theory strives to establish that identity is multifaceted and composed of several elements. It is significant to comprehend that women face a variety of forms of discrimination that originate from a range of uncontrollable variables. Race, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, independence from finance, and ability or disability are some of these determinants. Discrimination is rooted in those divergent identities, and it is heavily impacted by societal power structures which may vary from culture to culture.

Within *Vinegar Tom*, the author emphasizes the reconsideration of the past and questions conventional historical interpretations of oppressed and marginalized women. The plot depicts the miserable conditions of women who are accused of being witches as they do not conform to patriarchal norms or because they tend to be humiliated due to their helplessness and their gender identities in the eyes of male hegemony. Alice Noakes, as an unmarried mother, is despised and labeled as a whore when she resists fulfilling the sexual desires of males. She struggles to live her life freely, yet she faces slander because she is lack of male protection. Likewise, Alice's mother is subject to being misused, as she also suffers from the inexistence of male guards and financial independence. She is such a desperate woman that she applies lies and tries to arouse a feeling of pity to be safe from witch hunters. Their female identities and deficiency in financial freedom make them more vulnerable to being abused.

Further, the other female character, Susan, is also the target of patriarchy. Even though she is married and has male protection, her husband abuses her, and she cannot resist because of religious beliefs. She has the idea that she has some sins that are the source of her hardships. Additionally, Betty and Margery suffer from the intersected elements under the hegemony of males. Even though Betty is a wealthy woman and has financial freedom, she is forced to marry a man that she does not love. Betty's resistance against her father cannot be tolerated within the conjecture of male hegemony, and she is labeled with an improvised illness, which compels her to get married. Even though Margery is not charged with being a witch, she illustrates a common

woe of women. She is obligatorily used to endure a life of misery and endeavors to please her disloyal husband. She hides her agony to be an expected wife in the society of patriarchs.

Similarly, *Cloud Nine* also centers on patriarchal society, gender issues, and sexuality. Different from the previous play, it depicts the women's success in becoming free after the elimination of a patriarchal father figure. In the first act of the play, the father, Clive, is conveyed as an overcontrolling man whose death leads the women to break their chains. His pressure is so apparent that readers can only recognize female characters through his introductions. The most significant change is observed in the development of Betty, who is portrayed as the silenced and oppressed wife of Clive. She shapes her life in a way that is incompatible with Clive's wishes in the first act. However, after gaining her financial freedom, she recognizes her femininity and becomes more tolerant of her children's sexual preferences. As previously mentioned, Betty does not object to her daughter and son's transgender traits, which she cannot tolerate in the first act. The author explicitly depicts the female characters' happiness because they are safe from the pressure of males.

In the same way, Victoria endeavors to find her identity by having an affair with Lin. Their unhappy marriages represent male hegemony, and they resist such oppression by developing a relationship that is free from males. The author's depiction of women who lead more peaceful lives can be interpreted as a clear sign that a shift in norms or dogmas of the patriarchal point of view is the only solution that leads oppressed and marginalized women to establish their desired society and identity. The main premise of the play highlights the fact that women's miserable status cannot be merely restricted to their gender identity. Those who are economically free or do not suffer from any other social factors like ethnicity, race, or sexuality, are not affected by the tyranny of the patriarch in the same way.

All in all, it is crystal clear that conventional expectations or assumptions about women have the utmost impact on their lives in the selected plays, and they are intersected. Those who are not compatible with such hegemonic expectations are more likely to suffer from male tyranny. Along with their gender identity, women are exposed to oppression that originates from the power structures of patriarchs, and any inconvenience is regarded as a menace to their hegemony. In this regard, it becomes a necessity to evaluate the circumstances of women within a more extensive context to highlight their positions and rights in a more equal society that respects every gender.

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