

# Gender Politics and Deconstruction of Patriarchy in Caryl Churchill's Selected Plays

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## Abstract:

Issues of the equality of and difference between genders have been discussed through times by different feminists. In this regard, socialist feminism focused on class in relation to capitalism which Marxist feminism inspired them and on patriarchy and gender issues and how it is socially constructed which Radical feminism affected them. In this sense, socialist feminists tried to concentrate on gender politics by exploring the intersection between race, class, and gender.

The present study intends to concentrate on the intersection between sex, race, class, gender, and capitalism in order to shape a patriarchal-capitalist ideology in which old and poor people, females, and blacks, suffer equally as a result of their loss of freedom in patriarchal-capitalist society in Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1979), and *Top Girls* (1982) in order to investigate whether applying the above gender and class politics can help deconstructing the issues of patriarchy and women's oppression or not. In this sense, the researcher concentrates on Judith Butler's idea of gender and the connection between gender and performativity as well as cross-gender casting. She also deals with Butler's argument about the "troubling" acquisition of gender and her query of the existence of a stable feminist subject. Along with Butler the ideas of some socialist feminist scholars on theatre such as Elaine Aston, Helene Keyssar, and ElinDiamond will also be taken into consideration.

## Key Words:

Gender politics, socialist feminism, patriarchy, capitalism, gender performativity, cross gender casting, socialist feminist theatre.

## 1. Introduction

Through history issues of the equality of and difference between genders have been discussed extensively. Those who defend women's rights believe that women are subordinate and secondary part of gender and always are oppressed by patriarchal system. They view women as oppressed parties. In analyzing the images of women in a

given society in general and in literary works in particular, the primary belief is that social images of women are more oppressed than liberated. It provides insights to the meaning of Elaine Aston<sup>1</sup>'s surveillance that "patriarchal oppression articulates the marginality of women" (Aston, 1995:55).

Oppression as the symbol of women's subjugation is an unfair practice as it systematically divides races and genders into two different kinds of groups: the "privileged" group and the "deprived, exploited and marginalized" group. The latter is denied any opportunity for further growth and development as they are not given many choices or options in life. (*Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories*, 2000). This is a form of practice that is prevalent in a patriarchal society where women become the ones who are deprived or disadvantaged. In Western culture, patriarchal society becomes the women's oppressor. A familiar definition of patriarchy is the domination of a man or a group of men over women in a society dominated by men. As Zalewski<sup>2</sup> points out "what gets associated with men and masculinity is generally given a higher value than things associated with women and femininity" (2000:12). In a very general sense, patriarchy is a system that benefits men so it basically oppresses all kinds of women without considering to which class they belong to. But how it oppresses women will depend on the social class the women belong to. Compared to upper class women, lower class women are in a worse off situation as their oppression is related to class issues and economics. However, the former are still oppressed in a number of other ways, perhaps, socially, emotionally, or psychologically.

The issue of women's oppression has been addressed by many scholars among these critics socialist feminists also paid a special attention to this notion. Indeed, a dominant concept in socialist feminist theory is oppression which emphasizes the discrimination and subjugation of different groups of people such as women, working class people, gays and lesbians in patriarchal societies. The definition of oppression extends beyond sex differences. Oppression as a general term refers to the intersection of its various kinds related to gender, class, and race in patriarchal societies. Then oppression and oppressive practices are social constructs. The recognition of the social construction of oppression inspires intensive connections with women. As socialist

feminism concentrates on gender, class, patriarchy, women's oppression, and women's voices. The present writer examines these issues in the light of this particular approach.

Along with oppression, socialist feminism also considers gender politics. As an example of socialist feminist theorizer Judith Butler deals with this notion in relation to women's unstable subjectivity. Butler<sup>3</sup> has argued about the "troubling" acquisition of gender and has questioned the existence of a stable feminist subject from a poststructuralist perspective. In her own words:

Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such reification precisely contrary to feminist aims? To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix? If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal. (Butler, 1990:5)

The above selection reflects Butler's position in that she criticizes categorizing women as fixed coherent identity against the opposite sex. She also puts into question the "heterosexual matrix" as a result of women's consistency. Thus she is fascinated by sexualities which differ from the heterosexual norm, such as homosexuals or lesbians, since in assuming other than male/female binaries; they depict its reductive nature. These statements then comment that gender is unstable. It is based on such view, then, that the researcher seeks for the meaning of "a new sort of feminist politics".

Assuming that feminism is the political alternative for women, the materialist perspective applies a socialist political analysis to the situation of women, considering women as a social group equal to men. Thus, the main objective of socialist feminism would not only be the equality of men and women in society, but also their union in a progressive political action. According to Aston<sup>4</sup> the political aim of socialist feminism in theatre is "to radically transform social, cultural, economic and gender based systems of oppression". (Aston, 1999: 126) From a materialist perspective, biological differences between men and women are not excessively important. However, what is of the utmost importance as Austin<sup>5</sup> mentions are "material conditions of production such as history,

race, class [and] gender" (Austin 1990, 6). Finally the predominance of the idea of the group in contrast to that of the individual is another purpose in socialist feminism.

Among those playwrights who used the elements of socialist feminist ideas such as oppression and gender politics in their works is Caryl Churchill. She is one of the first women playwrights in England and most of her plays have been staged in this country as well as some other countries. In most of her plays, Churchill considers the position of women in society. Most of her themes relate to women and their social roles. The study of women's dilemmas and difficulties in Churchill's works is significant because it concentrates on women in relation to men in the society.

## **2.Caryl Churchill and Gender Politics**

A twentieth century artist in modern era is one who defies tradition and rejects both the respectable morality and the conventions and formulas of literary success. Like such an artist, Churchill escaped from tradition and authority and entered in to herself and looked out upon life through her own being and with her own eyes. Churchill, the contemporary feminist woman playwright, wanted to deconstruct the traditional norms in every aspect of society and tried to deconstruct the traditional systems of representation based on Aristotle's ideas in writing the plays.

The traditional systems of representation have used Aristotle as the starting point from which to develop a particular patriarchal expounding of theatre-making. As Amelia Howe Kritzer<sup>6</sup> asserts:

Theories of theatre and drama generally acknowledge the primacy of Aristotle. The Aristotelian ideal is one of structural and stylistic unity based on a narrative plot that built progressively to a climax and resolution, presenting an instructive example of character development. It is one which has pervaded drama throughout its history. Challenges to it -e.g., romanticism or expressionism- have invariably carried the implication of protest against authoritarian power and assertion of a need for social change. (Kritzer 1991, 2)

Kritzer's words bring to mind the structure that many plays have followed especially since the Renaissance, when there was a revival of interest in the classical tradition. In this sense, this study can establish a parallelism with the popular five-act structure of plays at the time, which would present a dramatic pattern based on the

following steps: Preparation, when the conflict is established and that would correspond to Act One; Rising action, when tension increases and that would correspond to Act Two; Climax, a moment in the play when tension explodes, breaks loose, and that would correspond to Act Three; Falling action, when tension decreases and that would correspond to Act Four; and finally a Conclusion, when the final closure takes place and that would correspond to Act Five.

But from the socialist feminist theatre view point the Aristotelian model of dramatic structure relates to male sexuality and with phallic modes of pleasure that actually as Aston<sup>7</sup> mentions “glorify the phallus' centre stage” (Aston 1997, 6).

The realization of how Aristotle s’ model relates to phallic mode, is what Amelia Howe Kritzer refers to when she says that:

From a socialist-feminist standpoint, the Aristotelian ideal can be seen as confirming patriarchal ideology and the power of traditional elites, as well as validating a phallic paradigm of creativity. (Kritzer 1991, 2)

Socialist feminist playwrights as Aston<sup>8</sup> claims “tries to dismantle patriarchal ideology and phallic paradigm” Aston and Reinelt, 2000:1) in their theatre. Churchill as such a playwright also tried to deconstruct these traditional notions in her play, *Cloud Nine*. “Churchill is specific about the social class and gender of the communities in her plays” (ibid).

In addition, Jill Dolan<sup>9</sup> in “Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?” asserts that “The stage is a mirror that reflects cultural and social organization... scholars with a feminist perspective are tracing the mirror’ images through theatre history and defining more specifically just what kind of mirror reflected what kind of image. ” (Dolan, 1992,:3) Dolan also extends “the analogy between the social mirror to the stages mirror of sexual difference. Sexual difference and its concomitant gender identification are embedded in both Western civilization and the stage that has reflected it. (Dolan, 1992,:4) Dolan also brings Gale Rubin’s idea on gender. She sees gender as “an arbitrary construct that has historically become the founding social principle” (Dolan, 1992,:3) This subjugation can be seen in theatre,

which “as an institution of Western society has historically placed women in a subversive position, as silenced, fringed, and appropriated by a male model.” (Dolan, 1992,:3)

Churchill seems to be a bit reserved about the use of elements in her work or her personal position in life. However in her interview with Kathleen Betsko<sup>10</sup> and Rachel Koeing she claimed that "Of course, socialism and feminism aren't synonymous, but I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other" (Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koeing in Worthen, 1993:787). In all the three selected plays of this study one can find elements that support Churchill's adherence to socialism and feminism. “She is seen as a representative of social group, gender, race, or class issues”. (Aston and Reinelt, 2000:2) therefore, what this study proposing is a practical exploration that discusses the feminist possibilities through a socialist feminist theatre practice. In doing so, here are Churchill’s theatrical devices as subversion of some of the patriarchal and conventional assumptions implicit in traditional theatre.

### ***2.1 Churchill’s theatrical devices***

Churchill is one of the first women playwrights in England and most of her plays have been staged in England as well as some other countries. Churchill is recognized as Britain's leading woman dramatist. She is best known for her political prospective and her experimentation with radical theatrical forms. The innovative approach to feminine writing in theatre and making innovative theatrical devices positioned Churchill within a place of both the canon of contemporary women's theatre, and in the "male stream" of the modern British stage. Through her innovative approach, Churchill delights her audience by projecting gender issues and innovative theatrical styles, such as radical use of language, overlapping dialogues, innovative characterization, and cross-dressing techniques. These terms will be elaborated later. All these make her one of the most important contemporary female in Britain and the world.

In the form, as well as in the content of her works, Churchill utilized freedom and innovation. Using her innovative techniques, she has managed to change the structure of performances. Indeed, none of her plays follow the traditional pattern which is related to Aristotle’s model in writing plays. Churchill’s experimentation with form is a way of

exploring the possibilities of feminist aesthetics and her unusual use of theatrical structure always aims to reveal inequality of social orders. Specifically, she focuses on the unequal position most of the women characters hold. Most of Churchill's plays examine some form of social control. She describes different systems with different forms of observation. She illustrates clearly the coercion that was caused by patriarchal force that oppressed men and women in society. Churchill also depicts how the standards of behavior was motivated by social systems that in society often manipulate the issues of racial, sexual and economic elements.

Churchill is a playwright who is distinctive in her own way. She is different from Anton Chekhov or George Bernard Shaw who worked within the scope of realism and male-stream canon of playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard and Eugene O'Neill whose plays are basically male-dominated and patriarchal. She is a prominent figure of the modern canon that attempts to dismantle the notion of patriarchy and sexism through using her unconventional and innovative theatrical techniques in her works. Using her theatrical devices, Churchill depicts women struggle in the modern era. Several critics have recognized Churchill's ability to dismantle the tradition of theatre diversion by combining the realist aspects and social criticism in her work.

Churchill is unique in her own way in illustrating the position of women along with their struggle to social oppression. Focusing most of her plays from women experiences, Churchill vividly retells the representation of women and the realities of their living in a patriarchal society. To seek insights into the patriarchal society's treatment towards women, this study will take its corpus in two of Churchill's plays *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* that directly and thoroughly illustrate the representations of female characters.

### **2.1.1 Theatrical Devices in *Vinegar Tom* *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls***

Churchill's earlier plays are essentially conventional socialist-feminist dramas. She began to experiment with modes of theatricality around the time when she wrote *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*. Following are some unconventional theatrical devices used by Churchill in these selected works but before a plot summary of each play is necessary.

When Churchill wrote *Vinegar Tom* (1976) her main preoccupation was with saying that it is inevitable for the personal to become political. Set in England during the Puritan witch hunts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the play depicts the religious persecution of women who have been oppressed by patriarchal society. The women of the play are on the fringes of the social and economic order, individuals who cannot conform to any accepted role. Churchill wanted "to illustrate that modern women \_women who curse, women who enjoy sex and feel no need for relationships, women brave enough to make their own choices regarding pregnancies, women who are old and alone\_ would have been hanged, burned or tortured as witches a few centuries ago" (<http://lubbockonline.com/stories/030198/vinegar.shtml>). Churchill shows the reader that, though the methods by which women are culturally erased have changed; they are still scapegoated and forced into subservient social roles. *Vinegar Tom* presents the demonization of women as an ongoing cultural activity, one that is rationalized and perpetuated by the very definition of women.

*Cloud Nine* (1979), Churchill's play about sexual politics and social power systems sets Act One in Colonial Africa in the late 1870s and Act Two in London one hundred years later, though for the characters only twenty-five years have passed. Actors are cross-cast according to race and gender to show a dichotomy between who they are and who they want to be, or who they are supposed to be and who they are.

The white patriarch father of the family is married to a woman who happens to be played by a man. Their black servant is played by a white actor, the son is played by a woman, and the daughter is played by a stuffed doll. Churchill makes use of cross-gender, cross-race and the double casting techniques to destabilize sexual identities determined by dominant sexual ideology.

Two different settings of the play, that of Victorian English colonies and modern Britain helps to emphasize the theme of sexual and racial discrimination present in the play. The play stresses the marginalized lives of women as well as homosexuals.

*Top Girls* (1982) opens with a dinner-table scene with several historical female figures gathered in a celebration ceremony. These figures include a legendary Chinese

woman, a woman taken from a Brueghel painting, a Chaucerean tale figure, a tenth-century papal character, and a modern female top executive manager. To celebrate her promotion to the executive suite, the ambitious businesswoman summons this group of "high achievers" to a dinner party. The story of her life, and theirs, give a painful reckoning of the choices, sacrifices and compromises that women made in their quest to reach the top.

By gathering all these women at a modern dinner table and letting them tell her individual tale of oppression, Churchill tried to show that actually women's place\_ after all those feminist movements\_ has no changed much during history, and the modern women are still being oppressed by the patriarchal society. Set in the 1980s, in Margaret Thatcher's London, *Top Girls* takes a clear-eyed look at the price of success, traced through one woman's climb to the top of the corporate ladder.

Below are the theatrical devices of all three plays:

### **Manipulation of Time**

In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill attempts to "not only deconstruct the subjugation of women, especially with respect of class issues, but also create a psychological realism and multiple subjectivities for her female characters. One of the ways she does this is through the structural manipulation of time frames." (<http://www.el.net/~alexis/thesis/structure1.html>) She recognizes the structuring of time as a symbolic social act, where the perpetuation of linearity and causality mystifies the authorship of history and gender. This manipulation serves to alienate the spectator.

Historical open-endedness is also emphasized by *Vinegar Tom's* episodic structure, which suggests non-consecutive, non-linear time; a history which can be rearranged and reinterpreted. *Vinegar Tom* dramatizes an event in the past which is generally considered to be removed from present experience due to its temporal frame. Churchill manipulates this time frame in order to reveal that the " personal is political".

*Cloud Nine*, Churchill's play about sexual politics, gender issues, and social power systems has been selected to examine the position of women as society has

constructed it. Churchill sets Act One in Colonial Africa in the late 1870s and Act Two in London one hundred years later, though for the characters only twenty-five years have passed. This technique is called manipulation of time. Churchill<sup>11</sup> cites the reason for this confounded time scheme: "I thought the first act would be stronger set in Victorian times, at the height of colonialism, rather than in Africa during the 1950s" (Churchill, 1985:240). Through the deconstruction of linear time, Churchill further explores the forced, false nature of discrete sexual identities. The gap between personal time and actual time provides the necessary space in which issues of sexuality and gender identity are examined.

Along with *Cloud Nine*, another Churchill's argumentative play with the equivalent challenging innovative theatrical devices is *Top Girls*. *Top Girls* opens with a dinner-table scene with several historical female figures gathered in a celebration ceremony. These figures include a legendary Chinese woman, a woman taken from a Brueghel painting, a Chaucerean tale figure, a tenth-century papal character, and a modern female top executive manager. To celebrate her promotion to the executive suite, the ambitious businesswoman summons this group of "high achievers" to a dinner party. The story of her life, and theirs, give a painful reckoning of the choices, sacrifices and compromises that women made in their quest to reach the top.

By gathering all these women at a modern dinner table and let them tell her individual tale of oppression, the researcher strongly believes that Churchill criticizes women's position in society and that feminist movements has not changed much through history and that history and class are repeated through ages. Hence, the modern women are still being oppressed by the patriarchal society. These statements introduce manipulation of time as a device to show that this problem repeats through history. By dismantling the linear time, Churchill wants to stress that through history women have been oppressed by patriarchal norms. Focusing this technique, the researcher can underscore women's troubles through different periods of time. Set in the 1980s, in Margaret Thatcher's London, *Top Girls* takes a clear-eyed look at the price of success, traced through one woman's climb to the top of the corporate ladder.

### **Cross-gender/ Cross-race Casting**

The actors in *Cloud Nine* are a cross-cast according to race and gender to show a dichotomy between whom they are and who they want to be, or who they are supposed to be and who they are. Two different settings of the play, those of Victorian English colonies and modern Britain help to emphasize the theme of sexual and racial discrimination present in the play. The first act illustrates the sexual oppression that both women and men faced with. It also depicts the racial inequality of the Africans in British colony.

Thus, by presenting the character of Betty as played by a man, the ideological value of this character is completely subverted. We can say therefore, that through the use of cross-gender devices, "how exactly gender was encoded". (Aston, 1995:17) The playwright is emphasizing the construction of gender roles. According to Elaine Aston: "The 'offside' body which disrupts the symbolic ... is a key focus in the sexual politics of *Cloud Nine* which takes the body as a critical site of gender representation" (Aston, 1997: 31). Through not showing bodies, or through the invisibility of some of the bodies in the play, Churchill is disclosing the structures that make these bodies unseen, she is offering "a way of representing the marginal and the absent in dominant systems of representation" (Aston, 1997a: 2). This takes us to theorist Judith Butler<sup>12</sup>, who establishes the connection between gender and performativity. According to her,

Gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject that it appears to express ... [its] performance constitutes the appearance of a 'subject' as its effect. (Butler in Fuss 1991, 24)

Butler, as a poststructuralist, problematizes the existence of such a subject. If there is no stable subject, there can be no equivalent notion of gender. She explains this further in relation to drag:

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.(Butler in Fuss 1991, 21)

If there is no original for gender, the subject that appears as a consequence of the process of imitation will be an effect for which there is no original, and thus the

artificiality of gender will be emphasized. In the play, by having Betty played by a man in drag in Act One we see a clear disconnection between Betty as a biological woman and the effect her being impersonated by a male actor produces, and thus the critique of traditional "feminine" ways of behavior is conveyed. "The attraction lies in the subversive potential of the male impersonator, the most highly changed and disturbing of theatrical devices, to cross the gender device. (Aston, 1995:34) By seeing Edward played by a woman in Act One, and thus emphasizing an "effeminate" behavior, we are also able to see the gap between the two genders and the corresponding foregrounding of their artificiality. Finally, by seeing Cathy played by an adult man in Act Two, we see the lack of symmetry between a child's behavior and an adult one, and this also emphasizes the strangeness of the overall effect. In all cases, we can see the performative element of gender. None of them are real; all are using it as a construct.

Jill Dolan in "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" claims that "our socially constructed gender roles are inscribed in our languages and in our bodies. The stage then, is a proper place to explore gender ambiguity, not to expunge it cathartically from society but to play with, confound, and deconstruct gender categories. If we stop considering the stage as a mirror of reality, we can use it as a laboratory in which to reconstruct new, non-genderized identities" (Dolan, 1992,:8)

### **Double- casting and Role-reversals**

An innovative technique in *Cloud Nine* is when Churchill introduces the practice of double-casting. The white patriarch father of the family is married to a woman who happens to be played by a man. Their black servant is played by a white actor, the son is played by a woman, and the daughter is played by a stuffed doll. These characters define the notion of cross- gender casting and undermine the concept of gender in a patriarchal society. Churchill makes use of cross-gender, cross-race and the double casting techniques to destabilize sexual identities determined by dominant sexual ideology. In my opinion, such depictions underline the fact that the characters in the play are not real but social constructions of patriarchy which are part of reality. In addition, the actor who plays the role of Clive, the father of the family and the representative of patriarchy in Act

One also plays the role of Cathy in Act Two. Hence, the concept of double role playing reverses the notion of gender. Furthermore, the main objective of the play in using such techniques is to illustrate the political messages of the play such as gender relations, class struggle, and sexual oppression, and the notion of patriarchy. By the use of cross-dressing, cross-racial, and cross-gender casting which invite men to play the role of women and women to play the role of men, and by the use of role reversals, that is, double or triple role playing which is the element of acting style character, this study wants to deconstruct the notions of gender and class. Using these issues the researcher wants to make clear that women have always been oppressed and that by the existing systems of representation women have been and still are defined and socially constructed. According to this position, it appears that "the female has [always] been constructed as a man-made sign in her absence" (Aston, 1995: 16). In this case, this study attempts to confirm that Churchill's plays which belong to feminist theatre try to eliminate the socially constructed gender by breaking the masculine/feminine binary oppositions in order to disrupt socially constructed woman. In addition, class in Churchill's plays indicates female characters' marginalities which construct their identities. By using multiple-role casting Churchill demonstrates the contrast between working-class characters and upper-class ones.

Churchill also used role reversals and double casting in *Top Girls*. With these devices she explores the complexity of relationships between men and women, sometimes questioning the constrictions of gender stereotyping and the division of labour according to sex, sometimes illustrating the absurdity of any attempt to dissolve the difference in sexual identity. Her inventive casting sixteen characters played by seven actresses force the audience to examine the similar class community of women through past and present. This innovative casting also questions the social and economic structures that hold different classes in place. Multiple roles played by same actresses, connect the different contexts and subtly suggest a continuity in women's history. In addition, role reversal shows the concept of class differences among women. For example, the actress who played the role of Isabella Bird, an educated upper class woman in Act One, also played the role of Joyce, an illiterate lower class woman in Act Three.

So in this study the concept of double role playing as an innovative theatrical device illustrates class differences.

### **Dialogue and songs**

Finally, the two last innovative techniques used by Churchill in *Vinegar Tom* are dialogue and songs. In the play the plot is constantly interrupted and subverted by songs. These songs are contemporary and are sung by actors in modern dress. They are not part of the action and not sung by the characters. These interruptions, as Alexis Lloyd notes, "serve several purposes. The songs disrupt the unity of identity that is the premise of realist theatre. This separation between performer and the performed identity reflects conception of acting as a deliberate presentation". (<http://www.el.net/~alexis/thesis/structure1.html>).

In the production of *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill used the Brechtian technique to present a situation the audience is meant to contemplate from a distance and which is used to "break down conventions of regular and acceptable dramatic form," (Hanna, 1978:9) in the interests of exploring a counter-cultural, feminist style of performance.

*Vinegar Tom* creates an explicit meta-text through the contemporary rock music and songs which provide modern commentary on the actions, themes, and issues of the bygone era. They also help link the events to modern times and force the spectator to see present, personal experience as shaped and influenced by the past. By juxtaposing a time of seventeenth century witch trials with contemporary judgment of women, Churchill wants to illustrate for the audience that women are still persecuted in the present day. Today's "witches" are any women who do not fit the norm of what the society dictates. The songs are also subversive in that they assume a female spectator through presumptions of a shared frustration and rage. The songs also act as an impetus for liberation, demonstrating that women's choices were never really a choice at all.

Songs in *Cloud Nine* highlight the dialogues. They illustrate different dialogues of each character which illustrate his/her characteristics. Joshua's singing of an English carol shows that colonization is a kind of identity which deprives him of any native

culture. The song also demonstrates Joshua's identity as a racial agent. Moreover, this song creates audience awareness of how culture even prescribes the language that is appreciated for male and for female. It is unusual to have a song within a dialogue which is not a musical performance. However, Churchill used a number of songs through Act one and Act two of *Cloud Nine* (which is not a musical performance) in order to strengthen her performance. She used song as an innovative device to highlight her point, that is, how different she is from the others in creating innovative devices.

Reinforcing the accelerated scene of time is Churchill's deliberate use of overlapping voices in *Top Girls*. As Churchill notes in the introduction of the play, this happens in three forms: a character may start speaking before the other has finished; a character may continue to speak right through another's speech; or a character may pick up the thread of an earlier speech to continue her story. The overlap blurs sequential action and underscores the scene of synchronicity, much the same as a montage or a dissolve in film technique.

The three plays chosen exemplify Churchill's span as a feminist dramatist. She is seen as a representative of feminists who consider gender, race, and class issues in relation to women's oppression. The selected plays in this study contain in themselves some of the topics that pervade her work, namely the struggle against systems of oppression the individual and the community have to face and the establishment of alternative ways of living by oppressed people. Churchill also tried to critique the dominant male discourse by subverting the traditional dramatic forms. She deconstructs the old patterns and creates new model. Chronological disruption, lack of the linearity of time, and manipulation of time are some examples of her new pattern in writing plays.

### **3. Conclusion**

The above mentioned theoretical and theatrical devices illustrate the intersection between sex, race, class, gender in order to challenge patriarchal-capitalist ideology. The analysis of this study dedicated to discuss the portrayal and experiences of female characters and the roles they play in Churchill's selected plays. This study demonstrated how Churchill as a feminist woman playwright contested against patriarchy and tried to represent woman as subject through her innovative theatrical devices. In addition, this

study attempted to analyze the roles and representations of female characters in Churchill's selected plays.

In addition, by the use of gender performativity, gender trouble and gender impersonation this study emphasized to the fact that no stability can be defined for genders in both theory and practice as Churchill's use of cross- gender casting is an example of such a notion. As the playwright shows this kind of gender politics deconstructs patriarchy.

It is important to note that this study is carried out with the hope to illuminate discussion about a contemporary British woman playwright and with the intention to add up varieties to academic research in Malaysia. Even if there were any discussion on British drama, only the names of well-known men playwrights repeatedly consider in world of literature courses. This study aims to include Caryl Churchill a woman feminist playwright as significant to the contemporary literary studies. Moreover, Caryl Churchill's innovative theatrical devices along with her feminist crusade to bring awareness about the position of women in modern society have less highlighted or researched by researchers. Thus, this study is hoped to add to the existing researches on her works.

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