Top Girls: Implications of Predominance, Wealth, and Reputation of Women

TOP GIRLS: IMPLICATIONS DE LA PRÉDOMINANCE, LA RICHESSE, ET LA RÉPUTATION DE LA FEMME

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Abstract: The present study intends to concentrate on the intersection between class, gender, capitalism and patriarchy in order to shape a patriarchal-capitalist ideology. In such an ideology working class women suffer as a result of their economic problems in patriarchal-capitalist society in *Top Girls* (1982) a famous play of by caryl Churchill, the contemporary British playwright. In this sense, The aim of this study is to show the issues of the equality of and difference among women, the social discrimination through class hierarchies among women and the capitalist forces over marginalized groups. In this regard, Marxist feminism, which focused on class in relation to capitalism, will be taken into consideration.
Keywords: Oppression; Patriarchy; Capitalism; Inequality; Marxist feminism; Class hierarchies

Résumé: La présente étude a l'intention de se concentrer sur l'intersection entre la classe, le sexe, le capitalisme et le patriarcat en vue de former une idéologie de patriarcale-capitaliste. Dans une telle ideologie, la classe ouvriere souffre a la suite de leurs problèmes économiques en société patriarcale- capitaliste dans Top Girls (1982) une pièce de théâtre célèbre par Caryl Churchill, l'auteur dramatique britannique contemporain. En ce sens, le but de cette étude est de montrer les enjeux de l'égalité et les différence parmis les femmes, la discrimination sociale à travers des hiérarchies de classe entre les femmes et les forces capitalistes sur les groupes marginalisés. À cet égard, le féminisme marxiste, qui a porté sur la classe par rapport au capitalisme, seront prises en considération.
Mots clés: L'oppression; Le patriarcat; Le capitalisme; L'inégalité; Le féminisme marxiste; Des hiérarchies de classes

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"The anger of working class women toward middle class women is justified by lifelong class oppression, and the class system will not be changed until both middle class and working class women see how oppressive it is and unite to change it". *Charlotte Bunch: Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action.* (1987)

1. INTRODUCTION

Top Girls, a famous play by Caryl Churchill was first staged in 1982 by Joint Stock Theatre group. It depicts the story of different women of the past and present who have unsuccessfully struggled against patriarchal norms.

To direct the audience's attention to issues pertaining to women and their lives, Churchill uses a theatrical technique where only females are cast as actors on stage. In employing this technique, Elaine Aston (1995, 24) argues that Churchill's technique is laudable as it places the spotlight on women and their roles. Churchill intends to highlight the role of women which has been long forgotten throughout history and to demonstrate women that has been hidden from view. It should be mentioned here that the invisibility of gender differences is obvious in this play as the play's characters are all from one sex.

The focus of my attention in this paper will, hence, be on the issue of gender oppression especially oppression because of patriarchy and class difference. One of the ways Churchill highlights this is by the 'breaking of the silence of women' in drama by including dialogues that are related to women's oppression in society.

Top Girls challenges the inequities of capitalism. It contains different references to women's social and economic status with their success and failures. Thus, it can be inferred that Churchil was inclined towards a situation where women are exploited for the benefit of others in this play (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 104). This is related to what is known as bourgeois feminism whereby a successful woman does not necessarily benefit people of her own sex. According to Wandor "bourgeoise feminism simply seeks a larger share of social power for small number of women- the women at the top syndrome (1986, 136). Meanwhile, Patterson (2003) believes that Churchill explores this notion quite well in *Top Girls*. He claims that, the play is primarily a warning to people against successful bourgeois feminists (2003). On one hand, Churchill wanted to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of women and on the other, wanted to show that "this sort of movement is useless if you don't have a socialist perspective on it" (159). Patterson also believes that she began 'broadly groping towards anticapitalist plays'[3], and eventually declared that she wanted to get beyond her 'own personal pain and anger' to embrace 'a more objective and analytical way of looking at things'[4] (159) after staging *Vinegar Tom* with Monstrous Regiment in 1976.

Top Girls also illustrates "the complexities of women's lives" (Keyssar, 1984, 204) and their relationships by focusing on class hierarchies and the authorization of some women over other women. It concentrates on the issues of a lack of success or evidence success among women within a system of class hierarchies. In the play, Churchill depicts women members of the upper classes as being able to "command more power, more prestige, and more property than the members of the lower class categories" (Lorber,1991, 2).

Elain Aston in *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1995) considers bourgeois feminism in *Top Girls* as a something that attempts to:

> … persuade the spectator of the case for improving the position of women within society without any radical transformation of political, economic, or familial structures, etc. the empowerment of women through this route is to be achieved principally via progressive legislation in respect to women's rights (65).

In a similar way, Sarah Gamble claims that Churchill displayed a Marxist feminists attitude which posits women's oppression and subordination as being a result of class systems. Hence, Marxist feminist

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[3] Patterson borrowed these sentences from a Quotation in Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution*, 281
[4] Ibid, 279, 285

generally believe that true equality between different classes cannot be achieved under capitalistic policies (167).

Marxist feminist ideas are evident in *Top Girls* which depicts the position of different classes of women in a capitalist society. According to Goodman in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (2002) "the implications regarding class and previlege are clear" (8) in this play in its portrayal of social and familial relationships. In relation to this, the play makes the audience think if wealth, dominance, and reputation has brought success to Marlene or otherwise. Basically, the character of Marlene in *Top Girls* represents a bourgeois feminist who tries to overcome patriarchal domination by attempting to be successful in business. Based on the context of the above arguments, I aim to investigate whether being successful and having power brings social and economical benefits for women in this play.

Top Girls consists of three Acts. It opens with a 'surreal' dinner party where fictional women from different domains like history, art and literature gather to celebrate Marlene's recent promotion in her work. Like 'real' women, they eat, drink and talk to each other about the successes and failures in their extraordinary lives while Marlene just listens and sympathizes with them.

Following this Act, we witness the daily events in Marlene's "high-powered Employment Agency" (Keyssar, 1988) where Marlene's colleagues discuss her promotion in job. At the agency, Marlene and her colleagues mainly interview other women who seek better employment opportunities and subsequently hope to have better lives. This Act also revolves around Angie, Marlene's niece/daughter who escapes from her working class life in the country to join her middle class aunt/mother (Marlene) in London.

The third and final Act is told as a flashback – a year earlier before Marlene's promotion. She visits her older sister Joyce and her niece Angie after a long time. From the conversation between the two sisters we acome to know that Angie is Marlene's biological daughter who was adopted by her aunt, Joyce at a time when Marlene left the family to rescue herself from her working class life and to successfully ascend the job ladder. In this sense, Angie who was brought up by Joyce becomes a miserable working class girl herself and this becomes a subject of conflict between the two sisters. Although, towards the end "the two sisters of *Top Girls* are able to resolve their conflicts" Angie is doomed to "a miserable life in which she can achieve nothing" (Keyssar, 1983, 215).

After a discussion about Theoretical framework and methodology I will discuss the main related scenes of the play to my study namely Top Girls Employment Agency and Marlene's familial relationships in Acts Two and Three.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part I look closely at some social structural concepts of feminism which are related to marginalized communities including working class women in patriarchal and capitalist societies. Accordingly, the focus of this part is on oppression in relation to the gender and class struggles and their connections to patriarchy.

In all patriarchal societies, gender is divided into two socially accepted categories of men and women and certainly these categories are distinguishable by structuring them as dominated and subordinated groups.

The similarities between all feminist theories lie in the fact that all focus on the oppression of women in society, patriarchy, and gender inequalities. It is important to note here that "the concept of patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality" (Walby, 1992, 1). In this section I identify the theories, ideas, and principles which would help formulate the theoretical framework of this study. In this regard, I aim at investigating gender and class intersection as an indication of women's oppression in Caryl Churchill's selected plays, paying special attention to women's oppression, gender and class identities.

The feminist approach in this study which is from the perspective of issues such as empowerment of patriarchy and class differences connect the selected literary work. In this study I concentrate on those problems in the play that demonstrate patriarchy through gender representation and women's subordination via class oppression.

2.1 Patriarchy

As the theoretical framework of this study is feminism, I need to concentrate on patriarchy and its relationship to gender and class. Since there is a strong tie between the issues of gender and class, a need is felt to focus on the subject of patriarchy in order to deconstruct the dominant gender formation in society.

Since the beginning of the feminist movements, there have been different perspectives and strategies to delegitimize patriarchy and to dismantle women's historical and cultural oppression. Alison Jaggar in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983) points out that "all feminists address the same problem: what constitutes the oppression of women and how can that oppression be ended" (124). In this regard, I intend to refer to the ideas about patriarchy brought up by some critics such as Caroline Ramazanoglu (1989), Silvia Walby (1992), and Allan G. Johnson (2005).

All the mentioned critics believe that patriarchy is the cause of women's subjugation. Patriarchy is one of the sources of women's oppression and gender inequalities in which men, as a group, dominate women as another group. This patriarchal domination results in subordinating women. This patriarchal control and domination over women's lives consists of both private and public areas of women. For example, one of the social issues in relation to women is feminization of poverty in which women suffer from poverty.

Since the beginning of the feminist movements, there have been different perspectives and strategies to delegitimize patriarchy and to dismantle women's historical and cultural oppression. In *Bargaining with Patriarchy,* Deniz Kandiyoti views Patriarchy as the concept of domination by men. To her, the attempt to distinguish between genders is rooted in a system of patriarchy which tends to complicate and hide the cultural and historical basis underlying such discrimination between genders. Using "patriarchal bargains", Kandiyoti (1991) sees the consequences of patriarchy as entities which are subject to change throughout the history. The subject of the relationship between men and women is the topic of negotiation which has been continuously repeated over different eras:

> Patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of domination by men, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders…. Patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between women and men (Kandiyoti qtd. in Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell 104).

As another critic, Madsen (2000) in *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* relates the phenomenon of male domination to that of capitalism which is, in turn, a consequence of the ideology of patriarchy. This way, she views gender to have an even more important role than class in that "gender oppression structures all our social relationships" (66).

Also, Johnson contributes to the feminist movement by bringing up his ideas about women's oppression in relation to patriarchy. In his book, *Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (2005), being a man himself, Johnson criticizes patriarchy as a society which ignores half of the population. In defining patriarchy Johnson claims,

> Patriarchy is not simply another way of saying "men." Patriarchy is a kind of society, and a society is more than a collection of people. As such, "patriarchy" doesn't refer to me or any other man or collection of men, but to a kind of society in which men and women participate. By itself this poses enough problems without the added burden of equating an entire society with a group of people (5).

In this regard, a woman or a group of women who dominate over other women are also called patriarchal agents. So any social class and race privileges that men benefit from also can be for women as patriarchal elements.

To name another scholar, Ramazanoglue also believe in the oppression of women over other women. Ramazanoglue states, "The clearest way in which women can be seen to be divided by class is when some women are able to own or control productive resources while other women who lack such resources work for them" (1996, 103).

Finally, to add to the related ideas, Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1992) believes that patriarchy is the cause of women's subjugation. In this regard, a woman or a group of women who dominate over other women are no exception. Tending to do so, they also contribute to the process of patriarchy. So, any social class and race privileges that men benefit from also can be for women as patriarchal elements.

Also Walby in Zalewski's *Feminism after Postmodernis: Theorising through Practice* states that,

> The concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group. (12)

Borrowing from Marxist feminism, Radical feminists argue that patriarchy, as a system of oppressing women, subordinates them economically as well. Christine Delphy, a radical feminist, whose beliefs are derived from Marxist feminism, argues that "patriarchy is the system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, that this system has an economic base, and that this base is the domestic mode of production" (Delphy qtd. in Rowland and Klein 279). This domestic mode of production through unpaid domestic duty at home is one of the major concepts of Marxist feminists in analyzing women's oppression.

2.2 Class Struggles

In addition to the role of gender as the constructing element of patriarchy, the role of social class should not be overlooked, in this respect. As a matter of fact, it is evident that according to Marxist feminist analyses, gender inequality and male domination over women are inseparable and both are derived from capitalism. Social class is another crucial term in analyzing this study. Marxist feminists argue that in a society based on class divisions only few bourgeois can benefit and most proletarian women remain oppressed. For Marxist feminists, class is the basic source of women's oppression and gender inequalities. Marxist feminism focuses on class in relation to capitalism. As Walby in Theorizing Patriarchy asserts, "men domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour. Class relations and the economic exploitation of one class by another are the central features of social structure, and these determine the nature of gender relations" (1992, 4). In other words, Marxist feminists sketched the oppression of women in relation to property and class differences. The occasion of women's oppression is conjoined to social organization of the economic procession.

Along with patriarchy as the source of people's oppression, capitalism and capitalist societies where lower class workers, males and females, are paid lower wages are another source of oppression. However, when it comes to women situations, it gets even worse. On the average, women in such societies have less participation in the labour market than men do. Thus, this kind of oppression disregards and victimizes the workers and lower class people, especially women. On the other hand, the upper bourgeoisie class, where men comprise a high proportion of workers, benefit most from the system. This sexual division of labour is another issue of capitalism. However it should also be mentioned that during eighties the situation for some white women changed. Ramazanoglue states that "Women who own capital and who directly employ labour other than on a casual basis, or on behalf of men, certainly exist, but they remain a tiny minority…with the rise of capitalism bringing individual businesses…women have had more opportunity to become employers or to control labour from managerial positions" (1996, 104). Also Ollenburger and Moor in A Sociology of Women The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Colonization note "the private ownership class system is inherently oppressive and white males hold the privileged positions within it" (1998, 20).

So, capitalism as the source of women's oppression adds more to the issue of feminism by bumping women into lower economical positions. In this regard, Marxist feminists argue that economic structure in capitalist societies should be changed. As Maggie Humm states, "Initially a classic argument was that women were second-class citizens within systems of capitalism and patriarchy. Such systems depended on the exploitation of working people and the special exploitation of women (Humm qtd. in Zalewski 17). That is why Marxist feminists opposes a society based on class divisions where only a few bourgeois can benefit while the majority of people including the proletarian women as well as the working-class men

remain oppressed. "This economic system will continue unless capitalism is replaced by communism" (Bryson, 1992, 13).

In addition, Marxist feminists have been particularly concerned with theorizing the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. They maintain that these notions work together from the perspective of class and gender oppression. Through the analysis of class, they attempt to liberate women from oppression. They encourage working-class women to fight against capitalism which tend to organize workers the social classes they are associated. Then, they persuade women workers to struggle for a transition from capitalism to communism in which they can be free from class discriminations.

Marxist feminists also challenged "gender-blind" categories. As Michele Barrett puts it "the main goal of Marxist feminists is to identify the operation of gender relations as and where they may be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism" (Barrett qtd. in Tong, 1994, 47). The processes of production and reproduction issues are related to women's domestic production and their household activities which traditionally impels them toward alienation. In this sense, Marxist feminist theory also considers the alienation of workers under the discipline of capitalism. As a result of class distinctions, working- class people are alienated "from the product of their labour…, from themselves…, from other human beings…, from nature" (Tong, 1994, 44).

The fourth types of alienation put forth by Tong (1994) can be elaborated as follows: Firstly, workers are alienated from what they produce in that it is the employer who makes profit from what the workers produce, not the workers themselves. Secondly, workers are alienated from themselves because they practically do not enjoy themselves as work appears unpleasant and sometimes dull to them. Thirdly, workers are alienated from other human beings, mainly other workers in a sense that, in a capitalist society, they see others as their competitors for jobs; thus, developing negative attitudes towards them. Finally, workers are alienated from nature because they are so much involved in the industrial world for making a living they see nature as the obstacle to their survival.

Regarding these kinds of alienation, Formen argues that alienation is even worse for women. In fact, alienation turns out to impose a double burden on them because in addition to satisfying the capitalist at the work place, women are obliged to fulfil their husbands' patriarchal needs, as well. "Thus, one of the primary tasks of Marxist feminism is to create the kind of world in which women will experience themselves as whole persons, as integrated rather than fragmented, or splintered, beings" (Formen qtd. in Tong,1994, 45).

And finally Tong brings out the concept of divisions of labour dealing with some questions like: who are the order givers and who are the order takers? Who is responsible for does the interesting job and who does the drudgery? Who has the right to deconstruct the conventional social norms and who is the "angle in the house"? Who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed? Who remains independent and who should be dependent on the others? (1994,184)

The abovementioned theories will be useful in analyzing the text. In following sub-sections I will use them in order to analyze *Top Girls*.

3. DISCUSSION

Top Girls consists of three Acts. It opens with a 'surreal' dinner party where fictional women from different domains like history, art and literature gather to celebrate Marlene's recent promotion in her work. Like 'real' women, they eat, drink and talk to each other about the successes and failures in their extraordinary lives while Marlene just listens and sympathizes with them.

Following this Act, we witness the daily events in Marlene's "high-powered Employment Agency" (Keyssar, 1989) where Marlene's colleagues discuss her promotion in job. At the agency, Marlene and her colleagues mainly interview other women who seek better employment opportunities and subsequently hope to have better lives. This Act also revolves around Angie, Marlene's niece/daughter who escapes from her working class life in the country to join her middle class aunt/mother (Marlene) in London.

The third and final Act is told as a flashback – a year earlier before Marlene's promotion. She visits her older sister Joyce and her niece Angie after a long time. From the conversation between the two sisters we

acome to know that Angie is Marlene's biological daughter who was adopted by her aunt, Joyce at a time when Marlene left the family to rescue herself from her working class life and to successfully ascend the job ladder. In this sense, Angie who was brought up by Joyce becomes a miserable working class girl herself and this becomes a subject of conflict between the two sisters. Although, towards the end "the two sisters of *Top Girls* are able to resolve their conflicts" Angie is doomed to "a miserable life in which she can achieve nothing" (Keyssar, 1983, 215).

As my aim in this paper is to investigate whether predominance, wealth, and reputation can bring success and happiness to women, in the following sub-sections, I will discuss the main related scenes in the play namely, Marlene in her Top Girls Employment Agency and Marlene's familial relationships in Acts Two and Three.

3.1 Marlene in her Employment Agency

Act Two shows a series of short scenes in the Top Girl Employment Agency, in which a number of women seeking jobs are interviewed by Marlene and her female colleagues. It concentrates on different occasions occurring to Marlene and the people around her with "different work positions" (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 103). It showcases the "systematic domination of women by [wo]men" (Bryson, 1992, 107).

It should be noted here that Marlene succeeded to become the manager of the Agency by competing against a male colleague. This can be viewed as a struggle against the male dominated society. Struggling with male domination makes Marlene an ideal character for radical feminists. However, she is imperfect for socialist feminists as she did not pay attention to working class women. According to Brown (1988), the play is a kind of "parody of feminist glorification of women's community" (125) of women. In my opinion, this glorification is related to bourgeois feminism.

It is good for women like Marlene to move up the ladder of success but the success is always in comparison with that of a man: here Marlene becomes the manager of the employment agency after winning the competition against her male colleague. Yet, she displays "bourgeois feminism" and shows little or no interest in female solidarity. Therefore, Marlene needs to oppress other women to remain on top.

Act Two, also shows the stark divisions between different classes of women. Ramazanoglu (1986) claims that these divisions are "divisions of class, work and power women" (97). Marlene has broken the stereotypical feminine role and attained success in business. As an upper class bourgeois woman who is on the top of class hierarchy, Marlene dominates some other lower class women. In other words, she exhibits patriachal forces over them.

It must be noted that equality has been one of the things that lower class women as a group had fought for, throughout history. In other words, the women and feminists of previous decades had contested for their rights and fought for gender equality. However, in this play which occurs during the eighties, the situation is shown to have changed. Women are shown to be dominating other women and depriving them from their "equal pay and equal civil rights" (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 11).

Indeed, it can be safely assumed that this play is about the discriminations among the people of the same gender. So, it contravenes the concept of sisterhood and issue of women-unity: "women's common sisterhood is subverted by class differences" (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 112). An example of this subversion is evident in Scene One of this Act, where Marlene, the upper- middle class employer interviews Jeanine, the working class job applicant who is searching for a better job with a "better prospects" as she wants to gain money to get married. However, asserting dominance over her, Marlene suggests a job with a slightly higher salary in comparison to Jeanine's current job and hence, cannot help her to change to a much better job and live a more comfortable life. Marlene believes that in order to be on top marriage and children should not be mentioned as in her own case she leaves these two elements to be on top.

Although Marlene's origin is the same as Jeanine's, she does not help her to get a better job and only offers her a job like the previous one. In this sense, Marlene is regarded as a stereotypical male oppressor.

Two other characters that is, Nell and Win who also interview job-seekers at the agency also exhibit similar charactersitics to Marlene. Coming from the same social class as Marlene, they, too, exploit the

dominated interviewees from the lower class by offering them jobs of low status and "reveal "women's power over each other" (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 96).

In the interview between Win and Louise we are made aware that Louise is searching for a better job as she spent her twenty years of her job time in the same position and without any promotion. Although her salary is high, she is searching for better opportunities and higher social status as she had always been sidelined to her male colleagues. Louise says to Win, "I've lived for that company, I've given my life really you could say because I haven't had a great deal of social life… I've spent twenty years in middle management. I've seen young men who I trained go on…to higher things. Nobody notices me, I don't expect it" (Churchill, 1990, 106).

As Louise mentions, for her, "social life" is important. She cannot see other male colleagues who were lower than her, gain promotion while she remains in the same position without any promotion. She compares herself to newly promoted men colleagues and wants to get rid of these sex inequalities. She desires a shift to a higher social class. Indeed, she expects respect from others in her office. As Beverley Skeggs (1997) in *Formations of Class and Gender* points out "to not be respectable is to have little social value" (3). So she searches for social value and in this sense money is not important to her. This is noted in the scene when she accepts a job that is relevant to her experience but with a lower salary as she rather get away from her previous workplace with male competitors.

The last interview in Act Two is between Nell and Shona, a young girl who tries to lie in order to find a job but like other interviewees is unsuccessful. Shona pretends that she is not a working class woman by lying and making up stories to convince Nell that she is an experienced and prosperous girl who is searching for a higher position. She associateas herself with upper class people who do not consider working class people's needs.

For all three interviewees promotion and money are important. However, the interviewers prevent them from achieving their goals. For Jeannine, money and success are very important but she cannot be promoted in the patriarchal milieu, working in a lampshade company owned by a man and his two sons. So, to encourage Jeanine to accept the suggested job, Marlene tells her, "the job's going to grow with the concern and then you'll be in at the top with new girls coming in underneath you" (Churchill, 1990, 86). However, reality is different and Jeanine who wants a promotion in her job realises that imagining being a top girl is not the same as gaining her goals.

Louise, in her quest for a higher position is able to endure working with men although they are more likely to be promoted than her. It reveals that in the society Louise is working, she will not be successful in the business field as it is still a male dominated in which she needs to be dependant on men in network.

Shona, the third interviewee, had a narrower chance in finding a job as she is an illitrate unexperienced working class woman. When Nell asks Shona to write and present what she has done in her previous job, she refuses and claims that everything has been explained in the documents given to Nell. She later lies about her sales experiences, and Nell is sure that she is lying. This reveals the fact that Shona would not be successful in business field.

All the three interviewees are recommended to take up lower professional or unimportant posts (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 104). Although, all the three of them want to be a 'top girls' by changing their jobs and gaining promotion, they are unsuccessful as in a patriarchal society "women are marginal and hence disadvantaged group within the labour market (Walby, 1992, 37).

Women who belonged to the working class did not fit into the system. Indeed, the interviewees in Act Two of the play are victims of Marlene's policies which did not create any good job opportunities for women. In other words, women victimised other women in the play.

Marlene is a typical patriarch in a male dominated society. To succeed in such a society, she ignores matriarchy and enters the world of male domination and patriarchy. She attempts "to make herself conventionally identifiable with a system for whom the masculine woman is deviant" (Solga, 1997, 43).

On the surface, Marlene is a woman and typifies feminine habits as evident in her assertion at the dinner party when she tells her guests, "I don't wear trousers in the office./ I could but I don't" (Churchill, 1990, 62). However, in essence she is a patriarch with masculine characteristics and behaviours. Marlene can be

described as an anti-woman character who suppresses women of the lower classes and hence do not attempt to offer better jobs to the interviewees.

Later on, we witness how Marlene behaves in a dominant manner with Mrs. Kidd, Marlene male competitor's wife when she comes to Marlene to ask her to give up her job and to give it to her husband. Although Mrs. Kidd's demand is sort of expected, Marlene is cold and rude to her and receives "a quick and harsh dismissal (Kritzer, 1991, 145). In response to her demand, Marlene says, "If he doesn't like what's happening here he can go and work somewhere else" (Churchill, 1990, 113).

Here, we can assume that Mrs. Kidd is a symbol of women who believe that they are inferior to men as reflected in her statement to Marlene:

> What's it going to do to him working for a woman? I think if it was a man he'd get over it as something normal….It's me that bears the brunt….I put him first every inch of the way….It had crossed my mind if you were unavailable after all for some reason, he would be the natural second choice I think, don't you? (Churchill, 1990, 112-113)

Marlene, rejects Mrs. Kidd's demands. This reminds me of Ramazanoglu's assertion that "women in different working situations do stand in different relationships to each other" that is, "some women do have power over others" (1986, 113). Marlene in a patriarchal world exerts power over other women around her.

The rest of the act deals with a conversation between Win and Angie who had gone to the Employment Agency to meet her aunt. Angie wishes to work in Top Girls, however, when Win conveys this wish to Marlene, she replies, "she's not going to make it" (Churchill, 1990, 120).

I will now look at the Marlene's relationship with her family members.

3.2 Marlene's familial relationships

In some parts of Act Two, we are exposed to Marlene's familial relationships. This is also evident in the whole of Act Three. It is in Act Two that we are first introduced to Marlene's "ordinary housewife" (Aston) sister, Joyce, and her niece/illegitimate daughter, Angie, who is raised by Joyce. In comparison to Marlene, Joyce and Angie are inferior, poor and belong to the lower class. Marlene sacrifices these two women in order to achieve success. So, in terms of family contrasts, we can observe that Marlene exhibits the qualities of a typical patriarch while her family members are depicted as typical marginalized feminine characters. In comparsion to her mother and her sister who are relegated to the domestic realm, Marlene supports the labour market and selects a job outside the house similar to men.

Marlene challenges the typical male notion that the domestic sphere is the domain of women who should stay at home and raise their children. In addition, Marlene is also not sympathetic to her mother and sister, Joyce. Since the time she moved away from her family, Marlene does not help them financially nor give any money to her sister for her own daughter Angie. So the three had to live in poverty especially after the "loss of economic support" (Ollenburger and Moor, 1998, 100) that is, when Joyce's husband ditches her and Angie. All these point to the fact that Marlene as a working class woman with an illegitimate child, had left both her family and ditched her class in her struggle to succeed in a patriarchal dominated society.

Basically, Marlene ditches her family responsibilities for work opportunities. Joyce, on the other hand, becomes "unpaid labour and ideological resources for the bourgeoisie within the family" (Ollenburger and Moor, 1998, 32). In fact, career was more important to Marlene than family relationships. With such a behaviour, Marlene contributes to the "breakdown in familial relationships and in class solidarity" (Toynbee 4). When she becomes successful financially, she tries to distance herself from her working class background and she is hown to isolate herself from her family.

Also, instead of supporting the members of her family who are working class women, she oppresses them and distances herself from them in pursuit of her own success. Her actions lead to Angie despising her mother/aunt, Marlene. This is evident in the short conversation between Angie and her friend Kit in the beginning of Act Two. In fact, the conversation reveals Angie's hatred towards her mother: "I'm going to kill my mother and you're going to watch" (Churchill, 1990, 90). At the same time we also witness Angies different points of view towards Marlene when she tells Kit that she wants to go to London to visit Marlene and to become successful.

In London, we see how Marlene behaves in a proud, irresponsible and rude manner with Angie. Indeed, Marlene's lack of respect to her is obvious in her conversations between them. Marlene treats Angie who had come to stay with her coldly. Her coldness towards Angie is apparent in the very beginning itself when Marlene sees her. She does not recognize Angie when she acknowledges her. In fact, Marlene enquires from Angie if she has an appointment and expresses a sense of surprise that she managed to get pass the receptionist.

Marlene's attitude reveals that she does not care for Angie as her family member but treats her as a stranger who should get an appointment officially to see the manager. She even attempts to get rid of Angie and to dissuade her to stay with her by pretending that she does not know why Angie is there and asks her, "What have you been doing? Shopping? Tower of London?" (Churchill, 1990, 108). She also tells her, "Unfortunately you've picked a day when I'm rather busy, if there's ever a day when I'm not, or I'd take you out to lunch … we could go shopping. What time do you have to be back? Have you got a day return?... who are you staying with? Do you want me to put you up for the night, is that it?... I haven't got a spare bed" (Churchill, 1990, 109).

Marlene was also surprised as to how Angie could find her and how she could come to her agency by herself as she thinks that Angie is incapable and incompetent. "You came up by yourself, that's fun" (Churchill, 1990, 108), she says when she met Angie. She also does not think that Angie has a future in her agency. Indeed, other characters around Angie also do not believe that she has a future as a career woman and consider her "useless". For example, Joyce calls her "a big lump" (Churchill, 1990, 121). She also believes Angie will have a hard time finding a job and her best decision in life will be to get married (Churchill, 1990, 140). Similarly, Marlene tells Win that "she's not going to make it" (Churchill, 1990, 120) and predicts that Angie's future job will be a "Packer in Tesco," (Churchill, 1990, 120). Kit, Angie's only friend tells her, "I hate you…You're horrible" (Churchill, 1990, 90). These comments, according to Marohl (1987) in "De-Realized Women: Performance and Identity in Top Girls" (379), in a way, foreshadow Angie's "own miserable future".

Act Three which is a flashback of the events that happened one year before Act Two shows Marlene visiting her sister Joyce and her niece/daughter Angie in their home town. She is invited by Angie without Joyce's knowledge. Hence, she is surprised with her sister's visit. When Joyce asks Angie why she did not inform her about her invitation to Marlene, she replies "I thought you'd like to see her… She hasn't been here since I was nine" (Churchill, 1990, 125). This statement shows that Marlene has not visited her family or her daughter for a long time.

From the beginning, Marlene is depicted as a dominant, wealthy, well- known and successful middle class woman in comparison to her sister who is a poor working class woman who has to earn a living by working for others. Tong's comparison that "there is the class of wealthy, property-owning employers; on the other hand, the class of poor, propertyless workers. Whereas the employer lives in luxury, the worker lives in squalor, receiving only a subsistence wage for labouring to exhaustion under inhumane factory conditions" (1994, 42) mirrors the situation between the two.

Tong's claim is evident during Marlene's visit to her family: she shows her wealthy characteristics by bringing gifts, a perfume for her sister and an unfit dreess for Angie. In relation to this, the sub-text as Aston asserts is the inability of Angie to become part of Marlene's world: "Angie in her ill-fitting dress reflects her inability to fit into Marlene's life and world… Marlene's inappropriate present buying demonstrates the middle and working class economic and cultural clashes" (1999, 135).

In Act Three, we are also exposed to the past and present lives of the two sisters. Their conversation which leads to a quarrel between the two consists of such topics like their parents, Angie, job, and politics. It is also through their talk that we begin to understand that they are from a working class family with an alcoholic father and a poor mother. In a conversation between the sisters Marlene blames their father for their mother's wasted, unhappy life. Joyce responds that their father was equally oppressed as he worked "in the fields like an animal" (Churchill, 1990, 138). This reminds us of Marlilyn Frye's argument that oppression can be oppressive to both the oppressed and the oppressor. Frye also argues that oppressed people who are faced with oppressed situations every day become insensitive to them, that is, the oppression that they face becomes invisible to them. So, in this context, the father is equally oppressed as the mother.

Marlene could not bear the miserable situation she was in: where both her parents were in an oppressed state. So, after giving birth to an illegitimate child, she gives the baby to her sister and leaves the family. Given such a circumstance, Marlene had to make a choice between business and family. Her choice could be seen as either being typically masculine or typically feminine and as I have discussed, her choice reflects that of a typically masculine woman. In relation to this, she enters the patriarchal society and climb the social ladder. Marlene sister, meanwhile, remained in the same wretched working class situation while raising Marlene's daughter. The relationship between the two, thus, can be also viewed as a husband-wife relationship, with Marlene dependent on Joyce to take care of the domestic sphere and raising her child.

It must be noted that Joyce censures Marlene for her inconsiderable behaviour towards their parents and wonders how Marlene could leave her own child and angrily says: "you didn't want to take her with you" (Churchill, 1990, 133). It should be mentioned here that Marlene's distancing from her own child is symbolic of her attempt to distance herself from oppression. Indeed, in Marlene's life the presence of an illegitimate child signifies the presence of a male oppressor: Marlene was a victim of sexual harrasment. In order to free herself from this stigma, Marlene leaves her daughter to her sister and enters the patriarchal male-dominated world to achieve a high position in society.

There is also much to be gleaned from Marlene offer of money to her sister during her visit which Joyce does not accept. This act -offering money reveals the economic disparity between the two sisters and highlights "the relationships between class positions and work" (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 103) in which Marlene is depicted as belonging to a higher class with a better work situation.

The conflict between the two sisters continues until Marlene starts crying. So, they become quiet when they see they sadden each other, and the conversation becomes friendly. However, Marlene's attitudes are against Joyce's working class status as Marlene searches for "economic independence at a time of capitalist crisis" (Bryson, 1992, 107). Marlene has a private agency and becomes rich and elevates herself to a better social class than before.

One of the common types of oppression that occurs in a patriarchal society is based on economy where women workers are paid lower wages. This kind of oppression relates to the notion of capitalism which victimizes the workers. Capitalist government believes in private ownership of people and emphasises individualism and property rights. Women, and in this context Joyce, are socially and economically disadvantaged. It is only the bourgeoisie upper-middle class Marlene who is searching for wealth and success who benefits from these kinds of oppression.

Marlene also does not have a sense of sisterhood towards Joyce and does not pay attention to her situation as a working class woman although she is in a good situation and belongs to the middle class. Besides, when Marlene labels her as being jealous, Joyce reveals her hatred to her sister and all higher class people:

> Joyce. Jealous of what you've done, you're ashamed of me if I came to your office, your smart friends, wouldn't you, I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself, you've got on, nothing's changed for most people/ has it?... I spit when I see a Rolls Royce, scratch it with my ring/ Mercedes it was.
> Marlene. Oh very mature-
> Joyce. I hate the cows I work for/ and their dirty dishes. (Churchill, 1990, 139-140)

These statements reveal that Joyce has a dependent social position (Ramazanoglu, 1986, 104) and spends her hard life by working for other rich people, those who are disgusted creatures for Joyce. In response to Joyce statements, Marlene confesses that she also hates the working class people including her sister:

> Marlene. And I will not be pulled down to their level by a flying picket and I won't be sent to Siberia/ or a loony bin…just because I'm original… If they're stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help them get job, why should I? (Churchill, 1990, 140)

These statements mark Marlene's attitude about working class people nor think about giving them jobs.

According to Aston, *Top Girls* "directly critiqued the superwoman ethos by demonstrating that the success of top girl, Marlene is achieved at the expense of oppressing her working- class sister Joyce, who

has care of Marlene's daughter, Angie" (1995, 76). So, Churchill depicts Marlene as a woman (of a minority group) who transcends class boundaries, moves up the social ladder and attains success.

We can also witness the gender division of labour between the two sisters in the play. According to Tong (1994) the various divisions of labour are: giving order, stimulating work, deconstructing the conventional norms, being the oppressor, and becoming independent. This can be seen in *Top Girls* via Marlene who gives order, while the women around her take the orders. She stimulates work, while her working class sister, Joyce does the drudgery work. Marlene also deconstructs the conventional social norms such as motherhood and sisterhood while, Joyce "remained within traditionally feminine patterns" (Kritzer, 1991, 146).

Marlene is also depicted as an oppressor of other women such as the interviewees, Mrs. Kidd, Angie and her sister. Finally, Marlene is financially independent while the others are financially dependent.

The conversation between the two sisters shows that even if Marlene is successful in business, she is not successful in familial relationships. As regards to this, Aston asks, "is she socially empowered or disempowered in a particular location" (1999, 164) and the answer is obvious: she left her parents, her daughter, and her sister and for a long time did not contact them and hence, is alone. She could not show her dominance to her working class sister as she neither accepts her money, nor believes her capitalist ideas. Even outside the enclosed familial relations, Marlene is alone and is not very successful in finding any friends as Mrs. Kidd tells her, "Miserable and lonely. You're not natural" (Churchill, 1990, 113). Her guests in Act One reveal her loneliness as the guests are 'surreal' characters – not real people. In fact, Marlene does not have any friends in her real life to celebrate with her promotion. She is alienated from real women. So, she has to celebrate her promotion with fancy guests, not with the real people as her promotion is not a great thing for real people.

Indeed, Marlene's pride and her class differences drive her away from her own gender. Although she is portrayed as a dominant and successful woman, she is such a miserable woman who is withdrawn from the society as at the beginning of the play on her promotion dinner party she says, "oh God, why are we all miserable" (Churchill, 1990, 72).

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, I evaluated oppression of middle class women over working class ones. I showed how these middle class people dominate the lower classes by discussing the various relationships depicting the oppressor/oppressed the exploiter/exploited in Top Girls.

To recap, *Top Girls* is a play about the different classes of women in society and how middle class women oppress working class ones. The play illustrates a community of marginalized working class women who are confronted with a situation where an upper class oppresses them in a patriarchal/ capitalist society. The play shows that the oppression of women is rooted in the fact that we live in a class hierarchies. So, some women who are successful within class hierarchies had to 'sacrifice' the members of their own gender. This class hierarchy had an impact on women's social and familial relationships. Although class brings women wealth, predominance, and reputation in society, it breaks the familial relationships especially when the upper class ones do not pay attention to lower class members.

There are class hierarchies between Marlene and other women around her. She is an upper class woman and other women are lower and lower in such class hierarchies. Marlene is on the top of hierarchy, Nell and win are lower than Marlene in the hierarchy, Mrs. Kidd is lower than Nell and win, interviewees are lower than Mrs. Kidd and finally Joyce and Angie are in the bottom of hierarchy. Indeed, Marlene, her sister, and her daughter are on the two extremes, on top of hierarchy and on bottom of hierarchy.

In the play, Churchill demonstrates that class is the source of oppression of marginalized community, here, the working class women. Consequently, working class women are dominated and repressed by middle class ones who benefit from the society's strategies which discriminate different classes. She tends to show how working class characters were trapped in a system of economical and familial relationships and that "Great majority of women in society…have no chance of rising to the top (Kritzer, 1991, 150).

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