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Caryl Churchill'in Top Girls ve Timberlake Wertenbaker'ın "Our Country's Good" Adlı Oyunlarında Tarihin Yeniden Yorumlanması ve Kadın Kimliğinin Yeniden Yapılanması

Reinterpreting History and Restructuring Female Identities in Caryl Churchill's Top Girls and Timberlake Wertenbaker's "Our Country's Good"

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Caryl Churchill'in *Top Girls* ve Timberlake Wertenbaker'ın *Our Country's Good* adlı oyunlarında kadınların değişmez pozisyonlarını göstermek amacıyla marjinal kadın kimliklerinin ve tarihin nasıl yeniden yorumlandığını incelemektir. Bu çalışma, kadın öznelliğinin keşfedilmesiyle birlikte kadın kimliklerinin temsilini, "kişisel olan politiktir" feminizmi ve ataerkil toplumda yeni bir kadın özünün kuruluşunu tartışır. Hem Churchill hem de Wertenbaker oyunlarını yazarken tarihi konulara ve geçmiş zamana dikkat çekmiştirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler

kadın tiyatrosu ve tarihi
kadın kimlikleri
sosyalist feminizm
kişisel olan politiktir

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine representation of marginal female identities and how history is reinterpreted to demonstrate the constant position of women in Carly Churchill's play *Top Girls* and Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good*. It discusses the representation of women identities with an exploration of female subjectivity, "personal is political" feminism and the establishment of a new female self in a patriarchal society. Both Churchill and Wertenbaker draw attention to historical subjects and past time, which make the history play an important role in writing their dramas.

Keywords

women's theatre and history
women identities
socialist feminism
personal is political

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1. Introduction

Caryl Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker are two of the most recognized socialist-feminist playwrights to have emerged from Second Wave feminism of the 1960s. This was the time when women's theatre sprung to draw attention to women's issues. Both of the playwrights contributed much to the feminist theater; Churchill received critical attention in the mid-1970s and Wertenbaker in the 1980s. Churchill adopted Marxist/socialist feminism and she has reflected the historical transformations of the eighties and nineties in her plays. The purpose in this study is to examine the representation of women identities with an exploration of female subjectivity, "personal is political" feminism and the establishment of a new female self in a patriarchal society that are most often reflected as "in conflict with an authoritarianism specifically paternalistic in nature" (Rabey 1994, 1034). Our focus will be on Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good*, which is a historical play dramatizing the experiences of convicts in Australia and Carly Churchill's play *Top Girls*, which embodies "the bourgeois interpretation of feminism which had become prevalent under Thatcher" (Reinelt 1996, 179).

Churchill criticizes the existence of Thatcher-like figure, through Marxist feminist perspective when she creates a new woman image apart from a conventional woman image like her protagonist called Marlene in *Top Girls.* There is much criticism of Churchill's character called Marlene that stands for all feminists; an egoistical upper-class woman who does nothing for the other classes of women. The play also criticizes women's adaptation of stereotypical male ways of getting ahead by denying the traditional domestic woman image. This new woman image has difficulty in balancing between the professional and the private life because something is missing in the one or the other area. The career woman Marlene neglects and rejects her daughter Angie thus she never tells the truth that Angie is her daughter. Marlene does not care about the other members of her family; she leaves the responsibility of her daughter to the shoulders of her sister Joyce and walks away. She is too busy with climbing the stairs to reach the top job and thus become a "top girl". The critique of feminist ambitions is a central theme, but it depicts the predicament of modern women in the play. Under the light of this information it is important to note that Churchill adopts a Marxist/socialist feminist lens to make better the condition of collectives not individuals in the play. Individual success of a woman does not help the rest of all classes of women. There is no feminism unless it includes collectives. The basis of socialist feminism expresses the futility of individual solutions. Women should act collectively in order to be liberated from the patriarchal oppression.

The catchy phrase of the 1960s feminist slogan "the personal is political" was first coined by Carol Hanisch and central to the writings of early feminists such as Kate Millett. Women were the central actors in the 1960s social movements of Great Britain, which were related to the Women's Liberation Movement. Lizbeth Goodman(1993) states that the oppression of women in society led to the rise of women's meetings promoting consciousness raising (CR) with emphasis on the status of women (28). Similarly, Nailsmith (2005) expresses patriarchy as "a formidable obstacle to women" involving "chauvinistic attitude" (xxviii). All of those remarks contribute much in the discussion of the Women's Liberation Movement. It brought profound change in the consciousness of women as a group. It also brought identity politics into question that's aim has been for those feeling oppressed to articulate their felt oppression in terms of their own experience by a process of consciousness-raising. In her essay "How Political is the Personal?", Joan D. Mandle (2016) defined feminism, identity politics and how the political was personal, which was most significant in the plays I am discussing: "It captured the insight that many of what were thought to be personal problems possessed social and political causes, were widely shared among women, and could only be resolved by social and political change" (Mandle, "How Political").

"The personal is political" feminism challenges both male dominance and female passivity in patriarchal society. Cornut and D'Arcy (1995) express that one possible explanation of "the personal is political" feminism and all feminisms derive from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) emphasizing the female identity as "other" and inferior. As such, the term came to denote challenging female passivity. Another interpretation of the phrase "the personal is political" would be Hartmann's explanation of women's all personal problems, which stem from a collective oppression in male domination. Therefore, "the personal is political" phrase leads to a great potential for taking up an action uniting women who experience similar feelings of oppression and male dominance. Women in both plays have some personal problems because of a predominantly patriarchal society involving political and social causes. Both plays draw our attention to women's personal problems and their frustrated lives because of the oppression of patriarchy and give a message of the possibility of change.

Both sexual and cultural politics have contributed to significant social changes and to a change of individual's roles and tendencies in that social structure since 1968. The term "sexual politics" is related to the cultural representation in the fine arts, the theatre, and as well as in several different studies. It focuses on the radical critique to gender and representations of sexuality. Michelene Wandor (1981) depicts the term "sexual politics" is good for defining feminist theatre since she discusses the relation of sexual politics to post-war British contemporary theatre:

The alternative theatre has raised important questions about the way theatre is organised, produced, and distributed. Sexual politics introduced another kind of radical critique to its vocabulary by raising questions about a division of labour based on gender, and about distorted and debasing representations of sexuality. . . (xix).

Alternative politics led to alternative theatre or feminist theatre. Thus cultural politics influenced the expression of dissent and fringe theatre. Wandor (1981) develops a discussion on parallels between the situations of the sexually repressed groups like lesbians and gay men having experienced similar struggles like women for personal expression and liberation.

2. Carly Churchill's Top Girls: Struggle for a New Woman Identity

Top Girls (1982) opens with a dinner scene introducing feminist themes which echoes throughout the play. A group of women are celebrating Marlene's promotion to managing director of the "Top Girls" Employment Agency; her guests are five ghost characters drawn from history, painting, fiction and literature: Isabelle Bird, a nineteenth century Scottish lady-traveller; Lady Nijo, a thirteenth-century Japanese courtesan, later a Buddhist nun; Pope Joan, who disguised as a man legendary ninth-century Pope; Dull Gret, the subject of painting by Bruegel storming hell in apron and armor; Patient Griselda, ironically arriving late and last, long suffering heroine of Chaucer's Clerk Tale. The group represents women of outstanding achievement and courage, but interruptions as a consequence of exuberance through the overlapping narrative monologues reveal that women are egotistic and are not interested in other's stories. It points differences in ideology and practice as well since they come from different ages. Women in the play voice different visions because of their different backgrounds. For instance, Lady Nijo's passion and tolerance is interpreted as "rape" by Marlene (Churchill, 1996, p.3). Walter takes away of Griselda's children without giving any information of their fate and he labels this as a test of loyalty, which is interpreted as an act of psychosis by Marlene (p.22).

Act two opens at the office of Employment Agency where the two employment agents, Win and Nell, discuss Marlene's promotion. Nell remarks: "There's not a lot room upward", upon which Win responds: "Marlene's filled it up" (p.46). Both women agree that they would rather see a woman promoted than a man like Howard Kidd. The second Act also justifies Marlene's achievement. Then, the difficulties of the job including the clash between personal and working life is presented. Angie, Marlene's daughter, appears as a victim and ignores the one who "is not going to make it" (p.66) as a price paid for Marlene's success as promoting to managing director. The scene is Marlene's sister Joyce's house, the kitchen. She did not care about her own family and we learn about the personal background of Marlene; she left her child and left the domestic burden on the shoulders of her sister. In this way, she climbed the stairs to her top position (changing her class and becoming financially advantaged) now leaving Angie behind who is actually "a victim of monetarism and class prejudice" (Marohl, 1993, p.311). Marlene's split personality is also revealed at the end of the play.

Employment is the central theme in the play; work, promotion, success and money are the major topics of the characters throughout the play. The play begins in a place of consumption, a restaurant, and ends in a place of production, Joyce's kitchen. Single gendered play, which consists of only women characters, excludes active male characters, which seems unrealistic but drawing attention to women and feminism. We may call Top Girls a "women's play" because of the absence of male characters on stage and all the actors and characters are women. Here, gender appears a dramatic focal point. Churchill draws attention to women's problems and Marlene's bourgeois feminist attitude is criticized by socialist feminism. Feminism clashing with capitalism seems problematic for women who lack solidarity and sisterhood. Joseph Marohl (1993) comments on the appearance of women from different backgrounds as follows: "The first scene, in which women of different historical periods and different cultures convene to celebrate Marlene's promotion, dramatizes the lack of unity among persons of the same sex, effected by the lack of ideological unity" (p.314). Marohl continues his idea that the six women at the dinner "represent diverse cultural attitudes towards class, religion, family, ethics, and gender . . ." (p.314). Still, they have something in common: patriarchal oppression of women and their survival. Universal female experience provides a historical context for the plight of modern "new woman" image –successful at work but alone, rejecting domesticity, and adopting male way of living– like Marlene, Win and Nell in which "historical weight of women's oppression" (Brown, 1998, p.117) did not produce any individual solution for women. Still nothing has changed: the modern women like Marlene try to survive and take their place by challenging patriarchal system. This time they adopt "the new woman" identity, which is a challenge to conventional role model of women imposed by patriarchy.

In Top Girls, Churchill's concern, as Alicia Tycer (2008) emphasizes, is to "[regard] a societal emphasis on capitalist success over sisterly solidarity" (p.2). Churchill examines gender and class in the play by drawing attention to the lack of sisterhood and by placing an emphasis to the importance of social responsibility. Technically, Churchill establishes the principle of overlapping dialogue technique to demonstrate "the personal pain and damage that occurs to individuals as a direct consequence of political decisions that are made by others" (Nailsmith, 2005, p.xlvi). Churchill again emphasizes the need for socialist feminism which is for the welfare of the community of women but not the individual enterprises. It is important to note that feminism could only be successful by the help of collectives and she expresses the futility of individual successes like the protagonist Marlene in the play. Marlene's extraordinary achievement is that she took up a top managerial position in the Employment Agency by defeating her male colleague Howard Kidd. Nevertheless, Marlene's advancement helps no one but herself. Joseph Marohl (1993) interprets this situation as follows: "Because of her [Marlene's] blindness to class and ideology, Marlene persists in her naïve belief that what she individually accomplishes for herself will automatically redound to the common good" (p.320). Marlene thinks that her success should be taken as a sign of success for women collectively, but it is clear that the other characters celebrate her success as Marlene's own.

There exists the political figure Margaret Thatcher, coming from the Conservative Party in the 1970s and first British woman Prime minister, which is labeled as "Maggie" in Carly Churchill's play Top Girls. Tycer states that Churchill wrote the play "as a response to the election of Margaret Thatcher" (Tycer, 2008, p.1). Although Thatcher's rise to political power is good for women's progression in the political arena, her politics only defends some privileged minority of wealthy Britons.

Thatcherites did not improve the position of women, so it sent them back to home and the domestic sphere (as a backlash phenomenon). Marlene is similar to Margaret Thatcher who does not improve the rights and conditions of the lower class women. Marlene does not care about her working-class sister on the contrary she leaves the burden of her own daughter on the shoulders of Joyce. Churchill reveals that Marlene's economic success is not only caused by her ambition but is certainly dependent on her sister's domestic labour in Act Three. Marlene exploits her sister's labour, Joyce is unable to have her own life and baby because of Marlene's burden. Joyce states this situation as follows: "Listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby/ because she cried so much. . ." (p.81). That is why Churchill's play embodies socialist feminist ideals and criticisms which draw attention to the lack of collaboration and sisterhood concepts. Churchill draws attention to the rise of a new type of women to power like Thatcher: "She may be a woman but she isn't a sister, she may be a sister but she isn't a comrade. And, in fact, things have got much worse for women under Thatcher" (Betsko and Koenig, 1987, p.87). Marlene is a representative of Thatcher-like women; she has a great sympathy for Thatcher when she states: "She's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job" (Churchill, 1996, p.84).

The historical figure of Margaret Thatcher appears in the text highlighting her normalization of female success and transgression of class and gender boundaries. As in Marlene's case Thatcher's success as becoming the first British women prime minister is shadowed by her fall from the political grace. The play emphasizes that the patriarchal system does not offer clever women such as Margaret Thatcher and Marlene a reliable way up the political ladder. Thatcher and Marlene were exceptional women who climbed on the top by adopting patriarchal norms. Both of them were alone on the top and brought nothing for the improvement of the other classes of women collectively. Marlene embraces the 'enterprise culture' encouraged by Thatcher and Thatcher's government support monetarist policy regardless of the social consequences. Thatcher and her policy explicitly appear in the text when Marlene states "Monetarism is not stupid" (p.84) and "First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote". (84) That policy divides women into camps as Joyce says: "What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms. Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. . . " (p.84) Thatcher has often been criticized for being an anti-feminist model, because only a few privileged women profited her policy and the majority were send back to home and the domestic sphere.

Thatcher's policy brought "backlash" phenomenon into question. In the play, "backlash" promotes bachelor women at work. The presence of such modern working women is a protest to "backlash" which imposes women to adopt some sort of domestic life. For instance Nell, a modern woman who works for Marlene, in Act two rejects the traditional role of women by saying to her colleague Win that "I could go on working and not marry him" (48). Nell and Win express themselves as "high flyers" (47), "though birds" (48) and explain that they are "plenty" (p.48). Nailsmith (2005) states that it is almost impossible to get a top job with family responsibility: "access to the top jobs is easier for those women who have few or no family responsibilities" (p.xxxiv). Marlene says that she is alone producing no child anymore: "I've been on the pill so long/ I'm probably sterile" (Churchill, 1996, p.81). She may now be infertile after years of taking oral contraceptives, as Mary Brewer points out, reveals "her susceptibility to backlash propaganda more than to soften her character. In addition to appearing as the castrating career woman, . . . a member of the "sisterhood of the infertile" (Brewer, 1999, p.79). The new successful managing woman on the top should not have any family connection and be a single woman. This also creates problem for women with careers ending up alone and miserable; being "not natural" (Churchill, 1996, p.59) as Mrs. Kidd states in Act 2, Scene 3. Christine Bimberg (1997) states that while twentieth-century women define themselves by profession; it also brings frustration in their private lives. According to Bimberg (1997) "Female identity in Top Girls is achieved at a high risk, with great efforts only" (p.404) and women are "entrapped in a different way than the women from the past were because of mastering 'the men-made system' and 'adopting a male power behavior'" (Bimberg, 1997, p.404). Bimberg points out that Churchillian women "sacrifice that potential of female identity" (1997, p. 404) there is no clear answer to the dilemma of women who wants to balance family and professional life. Verna Foster (1998) points out that women's adaptation of "stereotypically male ways of getting ahead" (p.3) brings no resolution since individual as well as communal solution would be more effective. Motherhood and domestic duties hinder women from "getting ahead" like men. Women's adaptation of "stereotypical male ways" as observed in the play does not work unless patriarchal ideals change.

Marlene, who rejects domesticity, is an example of a modern woman figure of the 1980s that has powerful positions with personal initiative; nevertheless Churchill emphasizes the selfishness and loneliness of those figures. Marlene's need to celebrate her success entitled as "promotion" with imaginary women from different cultures and different ages demonstrates that she has no close friends to invite over her dinner party and even share her happiness. However the guests are not as lucky as Marlene since all of them have to put up with the oppressive patriarchal system of their own age. Even Marlene's working-class sister Joyce tried to survive in patriarchal oppression. The play starts with the presence of the oppressed women on one hand and "top girl" like Marlene on the other hand. Tycer (2008) points out that Thatcherite politics gave "no guarantee of equal opportunity" (p. 21) for all women, only the upper class powerful women benefitted from Thatcherism. There emerged a new type of woman: "The 'new woman' or 'working woman' was meant to aspire towards the career ladder, pursuing an ethic of individualism" (Tycer, 2008, p. 21). There is an exposition of history of sexual oppression and universal female resentment of women through different ages – Nijo and Griselda were essentially slaves in their time, albeit willing in their service, Joan was forced to adopt a disguise in order to satisfy her aspiration of knowledge later became Pope and was killed upon discovery of her sex, Isabella was expected to lead the life of a clergyman's daughter later became a traveler, Gret had to fight with the

Satan metaphorically men to save her children, still they were murdered– in Act 1 and feminist themes in the contemporary politics through Marlene's story. In both cases, women have to pay the prices throughout history: historical characters are oppressed and career women are left alone, which brings no resolution for women's condition.

Marlene obtains power by interviewing all workers, as a competition, exploiting her working-sister Joyce's domestic labour by leaving her child behind. She does not care about the members of her own family. It is most significant that Marlene denies her being a mother and never reveals this fact in the end of the play. Angie, Marlene's biological daughter, is a victim who pays the price by being deprived of her mother and having better life conditions. On Marlene's side, she pays the price by leaving her own child for becoming a "top girl" in the competitive world of business. According to Nailsmith (2005), there is no sentimentality in the presentation of Angie, moreover she is "shown to be affectionate and possessed of a vivid emotional life" (xxxvii). Churchill clearly draws our attention to women who have always had to pay the price for their own success. Suffering and sacrifice is left to the other women's shoulder like Joyce (losing children, lovers, and her own life) who had to put up with this situation. Actually Marlene introduces herself to her daughter Angie as an aunt and looks down upon her, most probably seeing her as a threat to her success: "She's not going to make it" (Churchill, 1996, p.66). When Joyce in Act 3 implies that Marlene would not be able to climb the stairs to a managing position, if she had raised Angie, Marlene most egoistically points out a new type of modern woman – an imaginary one like the five guests in the first Act because she does not even call her by name – with a career:

> MARLENE. I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money (Churchill, 1996, p.80).

The superwoman figure sounds like a utopia creation, not realistic. How many women would financially afford such domestic help? If it rarely does, it leads us to think on the backlash phenomena, generated by successful women in the workplace. It meant balancing work and family life in the 1980s, which was an important dilemma for women. There is difficulty in reconciling a career with a family. Goodman explains that the play *Top Girls* is a good feminist theatre drawing attention to the plight of working mother and career woman, without suggesting an easy answer or that everybody trying to be a superwoman (Goodman, 1993, p.227).

The critic of feminist ambitions is a central theme in the play. There is an open-ended plot –having no definite ending–, which offers any solution to the problems of women unless they act collectively. The future seems vague and "frightening" (Churchill, 1996, p.87) as Angie cries at the end of the play. The biological mother Marlene has to comfort Angie when she is awake from a nightmare. Tycer states that the word "frightening" implies that the real world Angie (as a representative of a new generation) has to face is disturbing and frightening. Angie has the last word to make the audience aware of the fact that how the next generation would be affected by the political conflict and outlook for the future. (58) As Cohn Ruby (1991) emphasizes the play starting in a dream and end in a nightmare (131) and that the audience is left "with a sense of despair" providing no positive inspiration stating that struggles towards change are futile (Keyssar, 1984, p.98-99). Tycer analysizes the end of the play as the "potential for social change" (68) whereas Innes (2002) points out that the open-ended conclusion can be considered as a promoting social action (519). I would agree with Innes considering the end of the play as a promoting of social action because Churchill draws the reader's attention to the women's case and their struggle. In the light of this view, the play attempts to raise consciousness of women by reinterpreting history and restructuring female identities. Churchill also draws our attention to the frustrations and successes of women in the past, victories and sacrifices of women in the present. According to Bimberg, Churchill exhibits socialist feminist criticism: "Churchill displays a critical attitude towards social progress as far as feminist issues are concerned" (Bimberg, 1997, p.406). My interpretation would be, the change is not possible through individual efforts but it would be realized through a collective social action by women of all social classes. Churchill points out that without socialism there is no affective development in feminism because there arises enmity and selfishness among women without any collaboration (Ülker Erkan, 2010, p.194-95). In this case the play is a critic of socialist feminism, in which feminist struggle should target a social change, then it may create an interactive dialogue among women. Even if the play ends open-ended, still there is a hope for change at least such ending "is designed to promote social action" (Tycer, 2008, p. 69), which seems as the perlocutionary act of the theater: taking up an action. I totally agree with Keyssar when she points out that Churchill's drama "revises the history of the past and the present she makes a new kind of history – of the theatre and of society – appear not just possible but necessary" (Keyssar, 1984, p. 100-1). Thus, sisterhood is an initiation for a social change as it is portrayed by the friendship of the next generation representatives Kit and Angie.

3. Timberlake Wertenbaker's Our Country's Good

Timberlake Wertenbaker discusses the civilizing effect of theatre and definition of civilization through the convicts in her historical play *Our Country's Good* (1988). The play dramatizes the experiences of convicts who are taken from England to Australia as a punishment in the late 1700s. When analyzing the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the playwright emphasizes the redemptive power of art when the convicts make rehearsals to perform George Farquhar's play *The Recruiting Officer*. In the play there is a relationship between the oppressor (the officers) and the oppressed (convicts) in which Wertenbaker emphasizes the need for "an inclusive idea of community in society at large" (Gömceli, 2010, p.72).

The playwright emphasizes the redemptive power of art when the convicts become civilized human beings by the reforming power of education. Apart from focusing on the idea of British colonialism, the main focus in this study is given to the female convicts who have been exploited and oppressed more than male convict because of their gender.

The writing in all of Wertenbaker's drama consists of "feminist concerns and "problematisation of the global politics of identity" (Carlson, 1993, p.134). Verna Foster (1998) points out both colonizers and colonized are developing new identities cutting across (254) the "old social, moral, professional and ethnic identities" (Bimberg, 1997, p. 412). I would agree with Foster drawing attention to the efforts of formation of a new identity in that small colony. Actually the convict actors like Wisehammer and Dabby and the stage manager Ralph Clark question old traditions of their former society and gender. A new self-confidence develops with a power of a play which leads its participants to survival and liberation. Metatheatre –play in play technique– in this play symbolically represents quest for change and form a new identity because theatre encourages its actors their existence in the society thus questing social values that places them in inhuman conditions. For example, Wisehammer claims his equality with Ralph's Captain Plume, Ralph takes Mary as a mistress when he sees that Mary behaves like a lady in performing her role as Sylvia, Liz plays the role of a rich lady –she has no idea how she can act like a lady she once robbed one–, Dabby wants to play the recruiting officer Kite transcendending her gender roles, the hangman Ketch wants to be an actor rejecting his "real-life role" as a hangman. It is clear to see in the play that the convicts and Ralph psychologically feel better when they deal with their rehearsal. Bimberg (1997) supports the idea of convicts breaking the old traditions while acting in the play: "the absurdity to transform Englishness, to export, imitate and copy British culture . . . British upper middle-class culture, for the good of mankind" (413). It is important to note that the majority of the officers representing the hegemonic power in the colony do not tend to undergo any change disapproving the play to be performed from the very beginning. It is not clearly mentioned in the play that any social change occurred, still the existence of a quest for new-identity fill our heart with a possibility of social change in the play.

The feminist concerns together with developing a new-woman identity are dramatized in such a way that they depict the unofficial female history of Sydney Cove, Australia in 1787. Bimberg sees Wertenbaker's play questioning a kind of "historiography by writing" (406), like Carly Churchill did, thus writing "an unofficial, 'female' history as a personal and subjective form. It is a history written from inside, not so much from the viewpoints of the rulers, . . . but rather from those of the convicts" (*ibid*.). Like in *Top Girls,* again "the personal is political" in the play. There is a lack of women's history and writings on women if there are any writings, they are in the periphery. By contemporary women playwrights such as Carly Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker turning their subject to "history and rewritten historical events and characters from a feminist perspective" (Foster, 1998, p.256) shed light on the neglected feminist writing and "explore contemporary issues" (*ibid*.). I suppose both playwrights turn their subject matter to women and history to depict the plight of modern women since universal experience of women did not change. Women's struggle to exist in the patriarchal society is always on the agenda when we pay attention to the history of women.

The play demonstrates that "[p]articular attention is given to the female convicts" (Bimberg, 1997, p. 406) in the play, because there is a double burden in the position of women: being convict and women. The male convicts are only oppressed by the hegemonic power, whereas the women are oppressed both by the hegemonic power and patriarchal power in the society. Gömceli (2010) clarifies the position of women convicts in the play that they are "reduced to sex objects, experience both physical and sexual exploitation" (77). Ralph in Scene four depicts the object position of women as "these women are sold before they are ten. The Captain says we should treat them with kindness" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p.192). For instance, Liz Morden, although she has been accused of stealing which would cause her being hanged, refused to defend herself stating that she was not taken seriously and her speaking "wouldn't have mattered" (271) because of being a woman and a convict. The "silenced woman" figure Liz draws reader's attention to women's conventional condition as being "silenced" by patriarchy. Duckling was taken out of the women's camp, where prostitutes were sent, by Harry. Still Harry colonizes Liz as a prisoner. He wants her to do whatever he likes. Harry regards female convicts as sex objects when he states that women had to sell their bodies in women's camp just for a piece of bread or biscuit (213). Harry has always doubts about Duckling and accuses her of wanting to do prostitution and cheating on him whenever she says she missed her friends in the women's camp:

> HARRY. It's not the women you're after in the women's camp, it's the marines who come looking for buttock, I know you, who do you have your eye on now, who, a soldier? Another marine, a corporal? Who Duckling, who?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> You've found someone already, haven't you? Where do you go, on the beach? In my tent, like with Handy Baker, eh? Where, under the trees? (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 212)

Harry looks down upon Liz calling her a "filthy whore" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 212) having no identity. He sees Liz as his object and imposes patriarchal control on her. The woman has no chance but to obey her master in the play. Liz tries to comfort Harry ignoring her female identity and women are reduced to sex objects for male consumption when she states: "Why are you so angry with your Duckling, Harry? Don't you like it when I open my legs wide to you? Cross them over you – the way you like?" (213). Liz also voices the idea of the "male gaze" through Harry who controls and oppresses her most of the time in the

play. Duckling says she is disturbed by being watched all the time: "I don't want to be watched all the time. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. What do you think I'm going to do in my sleep, Harry? Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME" (213). The phrase is capitalized putting an emphasis on the "male gaze" throughout the play. Actually Harry's "gaze" is because of lack of his self-confidence. He is jealous of Liz and tries to control her all the time. The male gaze repetitively appears in the text when Harry opposes Duckling's taking part in the play: "I wouldn't want her to be looked at by all the men" (194). Harry's opposes to Liz being an object of other male gaze. According to him a woman is displayed as sexual object, which is a reflection of patriarchal control over the female body. Women are the objects of male gaze and possession who are totally repressed by patriarchal power. For instance, Duckling wants to get rid of the male gaze and only asks for a limited "freedom sometimes" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p.213) in which Harry responds she could get freedom "with good behavior" (*ibid*.). The playwright emphasizes the patriarchal ideology as it is seen in the relationship between Liz and Harry. Women are no better than children in the patriarchal society; they have to obey men as their masters. Still, Liz has a secure position if compared to the other women in the play. She is under the protection of a male having no threat of being hanged or sent in a women's camp where hard living conditions await women. There is not much "male gaze" in the play, except for Harry's, so the playwright slightly touches the patriarchal view of woman as an object.

Wertenbaker emphasizes different aspects of feminist issues such as the "silencing" of women. The male gaze left aside on the deathbed of Harry leaving its place to the subject of women's silence, which is another form of patriarchal control. On the deathbed of Harry, in Scene eight, Duckling makes vows to obey her master completely by saying that she will never again "punish [him] with [her] silence" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p.265). All women can do, just like Liz did, is to keep silence: women's voice is unheard. Harry is like a harbor for Liz; when she realizes that the moment he died, Liz is puzzled: "I hate you. No. I love you . . . How could you do this to me?" (*ibid.*). Liz's secure position disrupts with the death of Harry and she informs her friends Mary and Liz that she will be taken out to the women's camp emphasizing women's invaluable position in the colony: "Major Ross said a whore was a whore and I was to go into the women's camp. They've taken all of Harry's things. She bursts into tears" (273). This is the fate of all women in the colony; still Liz had the chance to perform on stage.

Another woman character Mary was sold to men by another female convict, Dabby, as Mary states this situation as follows: "You sold me that first day so you and your husband could eat!" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p.216) Here, Wertenbaker emphasizes the lack of sisterhood drawing the reader's attention to socialist feminist criticism like in *Top Girls*. Dabby emphasizes the importance of unity of women and sisterhood in the following lines: "We women have to look after each other. Let's learn the lines" (216). When Mary plays the role of Slyvia who is brave and strong, just the opposite identity of hers, she decides to adopt her characteristic traits to hers: "No. I have to be like her" (217). She is on the way of forming a new feminine identity through the support of Slyvia. She realizes her femininity by playing the strong woman type.

In Scene eleven, in the first rehearsal, women adopt more humanized roles while they are playing their part in the rehearsal. The women change their identity through acting out their roles and this gives them freedom in the formation of a new woman identity –more independent and undomesticated– apart from their real identities. The women in the play realize their potential as a woman for the first time which only becomes possible through performing art. For instance, Dabby becomes "somebody" in performing her role and she says "We're ladies now. Wait till I tell my husband I've become a lady" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p.227). Dabby is amazed and could not express anything when Sideways refers to her as Mrs. Bryant. She ironically asks, "Who's Mrs Byrant?" (ibid.), trying to get used to her female identity as Mrs. Byrant. The other woman convict, Liz, plays the role of a rich lady. Ralph informs Liz that she is playing a rich lady and tells her to stand like a rich lady "with a certain assurance" (234). Liz is not sure how to act when her friends ask her if she has seen rich ladies. Liz says she "robbed a few" (234). Everything is possible in theatre it gets somebody to a different world. Ralph points out the world of theatre as: "When acting, you have to imagine things. You have to imagine you're someone different. So, now, think of a rich lady and imagine you're her" (235). Philip says "a play is a world in itself" (247). Finally, each character in the play finds a newly awakened identity in pursuit of liberty apart from the oppressive patriarchal and colonial power while they are performing on stage.

4. Conclusion

Both plays emphasize history and historical characters to depict the conditions of past and present women from a feminist perspective. As Foster states, Churchill and Wertenbaker turned their subjects to "history and rewritten historical events and characters from a feminist perspective in order to explore contemporary issues" (Foster 1998, 260). In fact, both plays use history and historical characters to examine how gender and class identity is created in a modern society. The modern woman has to sacrifice her feminine identity and master/adopt to a men-made system, like Marlene did in *Top Girls,* emerging a new woman identity. It is impossible for contemporary women to balance the working life and family life at the same time, which seems a burden giving few possibilities of self definition and liberation. In this case, both plays depict that a woman "is trapped in a different way than the women from the past were" (Bimberg, 1997, p.404) by creating emotionally poor, egoistical and non-productive women type like Marlene. She has no family/children because she has to adopt male power and the hegemony to become a "top girl". In *Our Country's Good*, redefinitions of identity are put into question: a new self-confidence, a new identity fighting the dominant patriarchal culture. Women form their own identities in the Colony by having different multicultural backgrounds. This is in fact the land of aboriginals who have to put up with Colonialism. In Wertenbaker's play,

the convicts form a denationalized identity which emphasizes the presence of a multicultural heritage. It is important to note that both playwrights point out the need for socialist feminism to improve the place of women in patriarchal society. There is a need for social reformation on the side of women because neither the women in the past nor the contemporary women can be liberated unless there is an improvement. This can only be achieved through collaboration. That is why I tried to read both plays from a socialist feminist standpoint which emphasizes the lack of collaboration and sisterhood in both texts.

Both playwrights developed their vision related to historical subjects. The focus on the past is important in feminine writing because both playwrights reinterpret the position of women in the past in order to explore the position of contemporary women. In other words, the plight of women is no different than the women in the past therefore there is a need for socialist feminism, which may bring welfare to the position of women. Both plays are contemporary women's drama taking their subject from the production of the past and past characters to depict the gender bias images and interpret the history from a female perspective. Wertenbaker mainly sets her plays in the past "to explore the present" (Stephenson and Langridge, 1997, p.143). Wertenbaker, as well as Churchill, presents a critique of patriarchal hegemony when she makes her women characters aware of the fact that they are not submissive subjects in male dominated society. Wertenbaker's plays mostly dramatize geographical and cultural dislocations by exploring cultural identity and searching for a female identity. Wertenbaker's convict women characters build up a new woman identity apart from their own, both as a convict and a slave of patriarchy.

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