



AFFIRMING POSITION OF WOMEN IN PATRIARCHY SYSTEM IN LYNN NOTTAGE'S PLAY SCRIPT *BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK* (2013)

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Abstract

The aim of this analysis is to expose the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system which is done by patriarchal in order to subordinate the women. It is also intended to find out how the contribution of dramatic elements (character, plot/conflict, setting and stage direction) in revealing the issue of affirming position of women in patriarchy system. This analysis is done through text and context based interpretation which is related to the concept of *patriarchy* by Kamla Bhasin and *beauty* by Naomi Wolf. The result of this analysis shows how patriarchy system strengthens the position of women as subordinate and less important person in patriarchal society that can be seen from limitation of career and its development as well as physical appearance.

Key words: Patriarchy System, Affirming, Domination, Women, Subordinate

A. INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy system has become the biggest obstacle for women around the world. In society where patriarchy is very strong, the women's lives will be severely restricted. There are significant gap between the men and women in society. This gap occurs because the men tend to take control in every aspects of women's life. The women are put in the lower position. The men can do their activities freely in public area, while the women stay in domestic area. Even in this period, where the men and women are stated to be equal, in fact the boundaries between them cannot be destroyed. Unlike the men, many women cannot get the higher position of job in workplace. The society even supports that the men are still better to lead a job than the women. For instance in film industry, according to Lyle, Matt, and Ilia in Polygraph (2015), most of directors, producers and writers are men involved in film making since years ago. These men can determine the role of women in film that affirm the women's position in real life as a secondary person.

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In general, the role of the women in public area tends to show the real position of them in the real life. According to SPEARA, Specific English for Academic Research Assistant (2016), the term *affirm* means to state publicly that something is true. This refers to the act done by patriarchy to strengthen the position of women as subordinate in society. The job that women get in public area tend to reflect the real women's role in domestic area. Forinstance even in film production, the women's role is related with the household work. Many directors still put the woman as subordinate in some films. The women tend to play the role as accompanying men, be a wife or girl friend. Their role is also to do the service, nurse or take care of someone, do a cleaning, cooking and feeding. Though, the women who want to be an actress is selected by many aspects. The main point to select them is based on their physical appearance. The women's skill and talent will be counted after the main point is fulfilled. They have to follow the standard of beauty based on the patriarchy system.

The biggest film production is produced in Hollywood, Los Angeles, America. America is known as one of the modern and educated country around the world. Although, America seems to be neutral in assessing anybody, the issue of skin color discrimination still take place in this country. America still do the racism and they adhere to patriarchy system in treating the women. It can be seen through how they differentiate between white women and black women in film production. There is different treatment between them. The white women can play a role as a landlord, while the black women are a maid of the white women. However, both of them are still a woman which dominated by men.

The issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system is interesting to be explored. The cunning way that patriarchal do to construct the women's position is shown in the role that they give to the women in a film and play. There are many literary works that reflect how patriarchal preserve the concept of women as subordinate in society. One of them is in play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* by Lynn Nottage. The play shows the readers how the patriarchy system takes control of the women even in film. The play exposes the actual situation of Hollywood film production that exploits the women and makes them standing behind the shadow of the men. Both of the character of the play cannot escape from their position as women who live in domestic area.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Strak* (2013) by Lynn Nottage is done through text and context based interpretation. The play is analyzed by using dramatic elements such as characters, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction. These devices are related to each other. Characters are used to reveal affirming position of women which done by patriarchy. Plot (conflict), internal and external, are used to figure out the conflict that faced by characters. Furthermore, setting has the function to shows the atmosphere, situation and condition faced by characters in the play. It gives the contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. In addition, this analysis is dealing with the concept from Kamla Bhasin and Naomi Wolf about Patriarchy.

C. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system in play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013) by Lynn Nottage. Affirming position of women in patriarchy system in this analysis refers to how patriarchy system put the women as subordinate and less important person in society. In addition, this chapter explains the victim of patriarchy system is represented by two characters, white and black woman. The dramatic elements such as character, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction are applied in revealing this issue. The concept of patriarchy by Kamla Bhasin and beauty by Naomi Wolf are used to analyze the play. There are two points to show the position of women as subordinate in patriarchal society. It is seen through career and its development as well as physical appearance.

1. Limitation of Career and its Development

The first point to show the position of women as subordinate in society is through career and its development. There are two different color of characters that become the victim of patriarchy system which is represented by the director, producer and presenter in this analysis. The first character is Vera Stark, black woman. While the second character is Gloria Mitchell, white woman. Though, the two characters are Hollywood actresses, they get a different treatment in playing a role on film. The black woman tends to play a role as a slave or maid. Meanwhile, the white woman can play a role as a mistress. However, the role shows that they are dominated by patriarchy system.

The first character is Vera Stark, the black woman. She is a subordinate in patriarchal society since she tends not to get a chance to improve her career. She often plays the role as a slave or maid. The following statements support this argument:

“MAX. You see that! People want the truth. They want real life, like this woman here. What is your name?”

VERA. Vera, suh.

MAX. You see, she is not actress, she is woman who wears her miserable life like blossom about to flower and it is beautiful. And why can't we celebrate that beauty on the screen?

SLASVICK. People want to laugh, they want to cry and they want a little song and dance in between. And I don't think that's so fucking awful. But the one thing they don't want is to feel bad about themselves. Not now, not while the economy is dying and good folks are being forced out of their homes and into the fucking gutter. People need the past, need their history to seem heroic, glorious and romantic. That is what we do, erase their pain for ninety minutes. And let's face it, slavery ain't

exactly a pick-me-up. All i'm asking is that if you're gonna give 'em slaves, give 'em happy ones. (*Vera and Lottie out involuntary gaps of surprise.*)” (p. 34)

The quotation above shows that the director and producer have a different way to exploit the black woman on film. It seems that the director wants to persist the black woman's position as a the real one as in society. On the other hand, the producer wants to entertain the audiences by giving the black woman a role as a happy slave. Since in his perception, the audiences need to be entertained rather than knowing the truth. In fact, both of them are looking for the profitables by utilizing the black woman. The sentence *That is what we do, erase their pain for ninety minutes* means that the producer wants to take the advantage from the black woman by exploiting her in film. In addition, the phrase *give 'em happy ones* shows that the black women themselves seem to like and want to be a slave or maid. It means that there is no different for them to work in domestic area and public area. This condition shows the domination of the director and producer to control the black woman. The stage direction on the text depicts that the black woman does not expect what she had heard from the producer. Both of the men are adhere to patriarchy system. They try to strengthen the position of black woman as the subordinate and less important person in society by exploiting her on film.

Another statement that shows the black woman gets a role as a slave or maid on film and do the service for one family can be shown in following quotation:

“GLORIA. Don't leave me.
ANNA MAE. Rest. (*Anna Mae leaves. Gloria weeps.*)
VERA. Don't worry, Mis', Tilly gonna take good care of ya. Sho'nuff is. You gonna get through dis' and soon you be back out dere. Madame Grace nearly finish wit' ya gown, and come Friday ya's gonna put it on and be the pretties thing dat ever dun danced the quadrille at de Magnolia Ball.” (p. 40)

The statement above proves that the black woman play a role as a maid of white mistress as the same as the reality. The black woman persistently play her role as a maid. The different roles that the two woman get on film shows the racism. The role is not determined by the talent and skill, but it is based on their color. Even though in film the black woman's role is a slave or maid, the black woman character in this play gives her good acting in order to show her professionalism as an actres. She plays her role as a good maid. Ironically, when the black woman plays her role as a professional, but according to patriarchy her role is just the same as the real one. From that statement, *Tilly gonna take good care of ya*, it can be said that the black woman not olny takes care of children and old people, but

she also gets the responsibility to nurse all the family members. The sentence *Madame Grace nearly finish wit' ya gown* explains that she also handles the important thing for her mistress. She is trusted to prepare the big event. It means that she does not only do the household matter, but she also works an extra job outside the house.

The second character is Gloria Mitchel, the white woman. There is a different role that she and the black woman get. She can play the role as a mistress, however she is only an accompanying men as girl friend or wife. Even though, she does not play a role as a slave, she still becomes the secondary person to the men. This issue is portrayed in the texts below:

“GLORIA. . . . These words. “Sweater.” “Cardigan.”
Who gives a goddamn? The woman is dying, why
does she have to make so many speeches about it?

VERA. Because that’s what’s written, honey. And
as you know, the writer likes for you to say what’s
written. That’s how it works.

GLORIA. Oh, I know that. Don’t you think I know
that? (*Vera snatches the glass out of Gloria’s hand,
and sniffs it.*)

VERA. Gin? Now, let’s do it again. (*Gloria snatches
the glass back.*)

GLORIA. The indignity, really! Why should I have
to screen test for this film? I’ve played this role, I
practically invented it. Tragic Jane with
consumption, Lydia with the hole in her fragile
heart, and who can forget poor stupid little Maybelle
who was slowly being poisoned by her diabolical,
but “winsome” husband.” (p. 8-9)

The text shows that the white woman has played the role as a girl friend and wife for many times. There is the internal conflict that she has. She is bored with her role as an accompanying men, though she cannot avoid what is ordered by the men that involved in that film. This is shown from the phrases *that’s what’s written* and *say what’s written*. It means that the woman can do nothing besides what is arranged by patriarchy for her. She must behave like what is ordered for her and obedient to the men who have control over her. It also explains that the patriarchy has a control to determine her career as an actress. The patriarchy itself looks down on the woman. This is mentioned from the phrases, *consumption, fragile heart, poor stupid, being poisoned by her diabolical*. These words are used in degrading the woman. By giving her this role, it strengthens that the white woman cannot be trusted. The woman is pictured by patriarchy as a bad woman and has bad behaviors, however luckily she has a good man in her life. It is seen from the phrase “winsome” husband. This explains that the woman must be fostered by the man.

She even plays the role as an object sexual, prostitute. It can be seen in quotation below:

GLORIA. (*With Southern accent.*) Yes, sugar, but how do you see the little ole role of Marie, the octoroon?

MAX. She has lived life! I want the lines and the creases in the faces of the prostitutes in my brothel to tell their story.

SLASVICK. Whores? I didn't realize that there were any whores in the script.

MAX. It is set in brothel.

SLASVICK. Couldn't we make them something else, something less objectionable?

MAX. Like?

SLASVICK. I don't know, something less, prostitutey, but equally distasteful like a, a night club singer or ... or an actres. Von Oster, I want to be clear, we can't have whores, not as long as the studio is making this picture. When you came to me with a book about slave woman in New Orleans, I didn't balk, I said let's do it, I was even willing to keep the lead as an octooroon, as long as she's played by a white woman and there's no mention that she's colored. I don't wanna make a federal case out of this, but, but if our lead is a whore and we have a bunch of Negroes running around selling misery, we won't even able to open the picture in New York City." (p. 33)

The quotation above shows that the producer and director want to give the role as prostitute to the white woman only. The setting in the quotation refers to how the patriarchy system in assessing the woman. The words *prostitutes*, *whores*, *prostitutey*, *night club singer*, and *actress* mean that she is just a sexual object based on patriarchy system. This explains that it is easy to put the white woman as prostitute on film. From the phrase *as long as she's played by a white woman*, it exposes that whoever the woman is, even if she is white, she is still looked down and subordinated by the man.

To conclude, the role that the two caharcters play on film is not different from their real life. The character and setting are very helpful to disclose how patriarchy system strengthen the position of the women as the less important person in society. The internal and external conflict that experienced by two characters also give the contribution to uncover this issue. They cannot fight to be free from her image as a girl freind or wife and servant or maid. They are forced to obey and follow the orders from the the men in order to get a job as actresses in

public area. It shows that the patriarchy system dominates the women in workplace. The two characters want to develop their career, though they cannot do that since they are stuck in these roles

2. Physical Appearance

The second point concerns with physical appearance. The dominance of patriarchy system can be seen through how its system differentiates the treatment between the black and white women in playing the role on film. The black woman must wear the maid uniform in order to show her position as the unimportant person. Meanwhile, the white woman wear the costume like a dress to support her performance as the secondary person. However, both of them are under the control of this system.

First, the black woman is accepted to become an actress because of her appearance. The producer recognises the physical beauty of her. This appears in the quotation below:

“SLASVICK. Thank you. (*Slasvick sits.*) What’s your name?
VERA. Mine? Vera.
SLASVICK. Vera, you’re a very pretty colored girl.
VERA. I suppose I should say thank you.
SLASVICK. I don’t want you to think me forward, but it’s my job to notice these things. You ever thought about being in pictures?
VERA. Yes, sir, who in this town ain’t.” (p. 28)

The quotation above shows that the producer is looking for a beautiful woman to join in film production. The setting in the text refers to how the patriarchy system looks over the physical appearance of the woman. The phrases *pretty colored girl* and *my job to notice these things* means that the black woman is recognised by the producer if she has the pretty face. The word *colored* in that statement explains that the producer seems to praising the black woman’s beauty. In fact, it is an insult for her because she is just the color woman as the producer’s view. It means that even when she is a beautiful woman, it does not mean that she is treated well by the man as same as the white woman. She is accepted for playing a role, though she still gets a role as a servant. This shows that the patriarchy system subordinates the woman.

The Black woman must wear the costume, maid uniform, that does not have a good designed. She must wear that costume in order to reflect her role as a maid or slave. it is seen from the next quotation:

LEROY. Vera. Vera Stark. Mmmm. She was beautiful. and a damn good actress. A lot of folks

don't know that. Wanna hear a little story about Vera? She was making a film with that, um, that um, German actress, you know with the deep voice. And ofcourse, Vera was playing a maid. The costume designer had dressed her up in this ridiculous maid's uniform, made her look like a pickanniny for Ole Virginny. But, Vera had the costume mistress take in the dress two inches around the waist and hips, so it looked real sexy. And I could tell the director dug it, 'cuz when you see the film, there are all these wonderful close-ups of Vera bending over to pick up laundry. She knew how to work all angles, get a little more than they was willing to give her. (*Leroy demonstrates for the camera.*) She was something else back then. Beautiful. Smart. Knew it. Let me tell you something real, I loved that woman, but Hollywood, it didn't treat her right. You want the truth? Ask Vera about Gloria Mitchell, if you really want to know about the Hollywood game? Can you get that damn light out of my eyes." (p. 50)

The quotation above proves that even though the black woman is fulfil the criteria for being an actress, she is just given a role by the men as a slave on film. The setting in the texts refers to how the patriarchy system put the black woman as nothing rather than a servant that serves her master and misses. The phrases *ridiculous maid's uniform* and *pickanniny* expose that she wear the costume to show that she is messy and not classy as a woman. The men want to persieve this image to keep her stuck in the lower position in society. From the sentence *Hollywood, it didn't treat her right* has proven that there is a discrimination and exploitation to the black woman. It also points out that America is adhere to patriarchy system in turtoring the black woman.

Second, the white woman also tends to wear the costume based on patriarchy's decision to support her performance in film. The costume is worn to show he shape of body. It is reflected from the quotation below:

“LEROY. . . . And of course, Vera was playing a maid. The costume designer had dressed her up in this ridiculous maid's uniform, made her look like a pickanniny for Ole Virginny. But, Vera had the costume mistress take in the dress two inches around the waist and hips, so it looked real sexy. . .” (p. 50)

From the quotation above, it shows that the white woman wear the dress to show her beautiful shape of body. The setting in the text refers to the how the patriarchy sytem arranges the standard design of the costume that worn by the white woman as a mistress on the screen. The phrase *dress two inches around the waist and hips* proves that she is just an object to please the audiences by her performance on film, especially the men. The word *sexy* strengthens the position of the woman as an object. It means that she must have a good shape of the body. The costume like a dress which are open and tight worn to support her appearance in playing her role as an accompanying the man. This also proves that she is exploited through her physical appearance.

Another quotation that shows the white woman is utilized her sexiness in order to gain the profitable for the producer and director. This issue appears in the next quotation:

“SLASVICK. . . .When you came to me with a book about slave woman in New Orleans, I didn't balk, I said let's do it, I was even willing to keep the lead as an octooroon, as long as she's played by a white woman and there's no mention that she's colored. I don't wanna make a federal case out of this, but, but if our lead is a whore and we have a bunch of Negroes running around selling misery, we won't even able to open the picture in New York City.
MAX. That is little detail. It is the truth that I'm after.
SLASVICK. Fuck the truth, I signed on for a romance and with pretty gals in corcets and hoop skirts.” (p. 33-34)

From the quotation above, it proves that the producer wants to take the advantages from the white woman by exploiting her body. The setting in the dialogue is very strong which states the white woman as an object that could easily to utilizes her. The sentence *I signed on for a romance and with pretty gals in corcets and hoop skirts* means that the producer wants to produce the film with the concept of romance and put the woman to be a partner of the man. The words *corcets* and *hoop skirts* shows that she must have the beauty standard based on patriarchy system. She must be a feminine. She must have the beautiful body shape which is slim, has a proprtional body, and long legs. She must keep her body shape in order to get the role as a mistress.

Another quotation that mentions how patriarchy differentiates the treatment to the both of the women in Hollywood. It appears in the following quotation:

“BRAD. Gloria, what brings you back to Los Angeles?

GLORIA. Oh nothing, I’m just being honored with the United Motion Picture’s Medal of Honor.

BRAD. That’s fantastic! (*Appause. Gloria acknowledges the audience.*)

GLORIA. (*Whisper.*) Thank you.

VERA. Congratulation, forty years in this business, you get a medal of honor, and I get a two-week engagement in Vegas. Miss Gloria Mitchell, folks.

GLORIA. You joke, but I welcome every opportunity I get to come back here, because this town has been so very good to me. Even though I couldn’t get work here for many years. They’ll give you awards, but they won’t give you a job. . .” (p. 54)

From the quotation, it shows that the two women are really frustrated about their career of being the actresses in Hollywood. The internal conflict of these women is they cannot do something to improve their career. Although, the white woman gets the award, she cannot play a role in film anymore because she becomes older and cannot keep her body shape. Meanwhile, the black woman is still playing a role until she is seventy years old. However, her role is stuck on being a slave or maid. This proves that the black woman can play her role as a maid since it is not important for her to have a good physical appearance. In other hand, the woman cannot join the film and play her role as a mistress, girl freind or wife since her body is no longer in a good shape. It means that the patriarchy system control the women life and career.

To conclude, the women is accepted to be an actress because of their physical appearance. It is the main point in order to get a role on film rather than their talent. The setting plays a crucial role in revealing the meaning of the issue. In addtion, the conflicts that the two women faced during their career as the actress also give the contribution to disclose the meaning from the play. The patriarchy system creates the standard of beauty for the women. They must show their sexuality in order to entertain and satisfy the audiences. They become the object sexual. The women cannot stay longer in film production since their age is getting older, besides for the black women. The black women are able to play the role as maid until the rest of their life. They cannot determine what they like to do. They are entirely controlled by the men.

D. CONCLUSION

The issue affirming position of women in patriarchy system can be revealed in a play written by Lynn Nottage *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013). The dramatic elements such as character, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction contribute in uncovering the meaning beyond the play. Text-based and context-based interpretation also have the crucial role in discovering the issue affirming position of women in patriarchy system. This analysis also deals with the concept of patriarchy by Kamla Bhasin and concept of patriarchy and beauty by Naomi Wolf. Affirming position of women in patriarchy system in this analysis refers to how patriarchy system dominates the women and strengthens their position as subordinate, secondary person and less important person in society. Through the character, conflict, setting and stage direction, it can be revealed that there are two ways done by patriarchy in order to affirm the women's position. They are through career and its development as well as physical appearance.

Through the career and its development, it can be concluded that the women cannot improve their career. The character and setting are taking the big part in revealing the issue. The setting shows the situation and culture dominated by patriarchy system in order to exploit the women. The women stuck in their career as the less important person in film. Their roles that they play in film reflect their real roles in reality. It is what Kamla said in her book that the role of the women in public area is the extension of their role in domestic area. They try to change the image that created for them as subordinate person, though they cannot escape from that role. The media also supports the ideology of patriarchy to dominate the women.

It is true what is said by Naomi in her book about the physical appearance of the women in order to assess them. It is also proved from this analysis that the women are valued by their physical appearance. They must obey and follow the beauty standard of the patriarchy in order to get a role and career. However, they cannot keep their career stays longer, since their physical appearance becomes unattractive. Furthermore, they do not get the same treatment because they are different color.

The women have to show their intellectual and talent. They have to work harder in order to prove that they are valuable as human being. They have to upgrade their knowledge and skill to compete with the strong patriarchy system. They have to be aware that they can do more in order to escape from the image as less important person which created by patriarchy system. It is true that Naomi says in her book the women's beauty is seen from their brain and heart, not from their physical appearance. This is what women must have in order to stand up in public area and against the patriarchy system.

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