

The Portrayal of Patriarchal Oppression towards the Female
Characters in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy*: A Reflective
Post Feminist Critics

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**Analyzing the Portrayal of Patriarchal Oppression towards the Female Characters in
J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy*: A Reflective Post Feminist Critics**

ABSTRACT

The oppression and subordination towards woman mostly happened because of the patriarchal system which exists in the society. The purposes of this study are to analyze the portrayal of patriarchal symbols in the society of Pagford Town in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* and the patriarchal system abuse or oppression towards the female characters in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy*.

The results of the study show six symbols of patriarchy which is found in the novel. They are female as sex objects in public patriarchy, male as villain in public patriarchy, male as villain in private patriarchy, female as the faulty in private patriarchy, female as mother or angel in the house in private patriarchy and female as damsel in distress in private patriarchy. The study also shows the indication of abuse occurred to several female characters. The patriarchy system generated from the participation of the male and female is the main cause of the sustainability of female oppression and subordination in the society

Key Words: Patriarchy, Symbol, Oppression, Abuse, Victimization, *The Casual Vacancy*

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**Analisa Penggambaran Penindasan Patriarki terhadap Karakter Perempuan di novel
The Casual Vacancy oleh J.K. Rowling: Sebuah Refleksi Kritik Post Feminist**

ABSTRACT

Penindasan dan subordinasi terhadap perempuan sebagian besar terjadi karena sistem patriarki yang ada di masyarakat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis penggambaran simbol patriarki dalam masyarakat kota Pagford di novel JK Rowling yang berjudul *The Casual Vacancy* dan kekerasan sistem patriarki atau penindasan terhadap tokoh perempuan di novel *The Casual Vacancy* oleh J.K. Rowling.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan lima simbol patriarki yang ditemukan dalam novel. Hasil dari penelitian adalah perempuan sebagai obyek seks di patriarki lingkup publik, laki-laki sebagai penjahat dalam patriarki lingkup publik, laki-laki sebagai penjahat dalam patriarki lingkup pribadi, perempuan sebagai yang patut disalahkan dalam patriarki lingkup pribadi, perempuan sebagai ibu atau malaikat di rumah di patriarki lingkup pribadi dan perempuan sebagai gadis dalam kesulitan di patriarki lingkup pribadi. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan adanya indikasi penyalahgunaan terjadi beberapa karakter perempuan. Sistem patriarki yang dihasilkan dari partisipasi pria dan wanita adalah penyebab utama keberlanjutan penindasan perempuan dan subordinasi dalam masyarakat

Kata Kunci : Patriarki, Simbol, Penindasan, Kekerasan, Korbanisasi, *The Casual Vacancy*

Introduction and Theory

The Casual Vacancy is a novel written by a phenomenal fantasy novel author J.K. Rowling. After she finished her legendary series Harry Potter, she started writing an adult novel; a totally different genre compares to Harry Potter. In *The Casual Vacancy*, J.K. Rowling depicts conflicts of real life situation instead of fantasy into this novel. Society issues such as parental problems, sexual abuse and politic are portrayed in the novel. *The Casual Vacancy* discusses depiction of society problems, including problems faced by female characters.

As far as my observation, there is still no research on the female issues of *The Casual Vacancy* being conducted among the academic researcher. That is the reason why this research is worth to be conducted. Another reason is because the novel shows oppression and subordination towards women in the modern time. The oppression and subordination towards woman mostly happened because of the patriarchal system which exists in the society. The issues of woman's oppression can be found in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* novel.

The purposes of this study are to analyze the portrayal of patriarchal symbols in the society of Pagford Town in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* and the patriarchal system abuse or oppression towards the female characters in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy*.

Patriarchal theory by Allan G. Johnson is being used as the main theory to examine the symbols of patriarchy and the patriarchy system in the novel of *The Casual Vacancy*. Allan G. Johnson's theory of patriarchy principle and also the explanation why patriarchy system continue to exist in the society will be the foundation of this research. Johnson

explains that the core reason of female subordination and oppression comes from the patriarchal society. In order to unravel ourselves from the patriarchal society, we need to be aware of the patriarchy system and unravel ourselves from it. The process of maintaining the system enforce from two ways which are through socialization and path of least resistance (Johnson 29). By being able to socialize and choose a path which is not patriarchal oriented, we will be able to unravel ourselves from the patriarchy system.

Meanwhile Northrop Frye's Theory of Symbols and Sylvia Walby's Patriarchal theory are being used to support the main theory. Frye's theory will justify the symbolization of society nature in literary works. In his works entitled *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye argues that the works in literature might reflect the nature of the society in real life. By isolating a certain unit and refers it to the principle of the nature, we will be able to see the symbolization of the nature in literary works (Frye 82).

Sylvia Walby's patriarchal theory will be used to classify settings and forms of patriarchy. Patriarchy is divided into two forms which are public patriarchy and private patriarchy. And the last one is the victimization theories from several references which are being used to examine the indications of abuse and victimization towards the female characters in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy*.

Research Methodology

This research is categorized as a literary criticism research. According to Peck and Coyle, literary criticism aim to analyze, evaluate, justify, or judge a literary works (qtd in Fauziyah 2008). This study focused on the analyzing aspect of the literary criticism. The

symbols of patriarchy and how does it create abuse towards several female characters will be analyzed in this research. Meanwhile descriptive qualitative method is being used in this research. Jones and Bartlet explain that a descriptive qualitative method is a research method that investigates the experience, social processes and subculture of the research object. Furthermore, the result of the data is presented in forms of words and sentences instead of numerical data.

Patriarchal Images in Public and Private Sphere

The findings answer that the existence of patriarchy system in the society of Pagford town can be found whether it is in private or public sphere. Several symbols are presented in forms of narrative and dialogues which shows the behavior or attitude of the character which symbolized several symbols of patriarchy. The symbols of patriarchy which are found in the public sphere are; female as object and male as villain. Meanwhile the symbols of patriarchy which are found in the private sphere are; male as villain, female as faulty, female as mother or angel in the house and female as damsel in distress.

In The Casual Vacancy novel, the symbolization of female as sex objects exists at school. The symbol is presented in narrative forms which contain the attitude or behavior of a person. The attitude or behavior of Krystal in this narrative will be analyzed. In the narrative, Krystal Weedon is depicted as letting male students to touch her breast during teaching and learning process.

How it had been initiated, Andrew (among the last to finish his maths, as ever) had no idea, but he had reached the plastic boxes of worksheets, neatly lined up on top of the cupboards at the back, to find **Rob Calder and Mark Richards taking it in turns to cup and**

squeeze Krystal's breasts. Most of the other boys were looking on, electrified, their faces hidden from the teacher by their upstanding textbooks, while the girls, many of them flushed scarlet, were pretending no to have seen. (27)

This scene delineates women as an object. The depiction of Krystal being sexually harassed by her classmates in turn, symbolized the sexuality of female as a prize of male sexual desire. This situation is the core reason of Krystal being devalued by most male in her class. She is being devalued because she becomes the object of male sexual desire. Krystal situation is considered as male identified since her feminine identity has been devalued and controlled by male. According to Allan G. Johnson, in a society of male identified “women are often prized for their beauty as objects of male sexual desire” (Johnson 7). However, this particular feminine value is often controlled and possessed by male. Thus it was considered as inferior compare to male identity.

Each symbol has the probability to occur along with another symbol. For example, the symbolization of female as sex object has the possibilities to occur along with the symbol of male as villain. Male can be symbolized as an aggressor who takes advantage of female sexuality by objectifying it in many harmful ways such as sexual harassment and even rape. In this circumstance, we can find two symbols which is female as sex object and male as villain.

The patriarchy principle has shaped and influence the condition of the society which can be reflected from the symbols of patriarchy found in the novel. The isolated unit which is in form of narratives or dialogues is showing the indication of patriarchy principle such as; male domination, male centered and male identified. The patriarchy principle found in

dialogues and narratives indicates several female subordination which gives advantage to the male in the society. Several female characters are being depicted in lower social standing in the society like Krystal who is seen as a mere sexual object. The principles contained in the data prove the credibility of the symbols as patriarchy symbols. Through the symbols of patriarchy which are found in the novel, we can conclude that the existence of patriarchy system exist from the small community until large community level.

The Oppressed Female Characters' Participation in the Patriarchy System

The findings of the research also show the participation of the female characters that experience abuse from the patriarchy system. There are five characters that showed indication of experiencing abuse in this novel. They are Ruth Price, Sukhvinder Jawanda, Krystal Weedon, Terri Weedon and Kay Bawden. Each of them experienced different kind of abuse from physical, psychological, sexual until economical abuse. The oppressed female characters experienced systematic oppression from the patriarchal culture rooted in the society. Male domination creates subordination and sustains the existence of abuse within them. The perpetrators mostly are male who physically assault, sexually exploit or economically disadvantage the female characters.

Each of characters faced their own oppression and experienced different kind of abuse. Sukhvinder experienced psychological abuse due to her ugly appearance as a female meanwhile Krystal experienced physical abuse because of her sexuality is being objectified. Both experienced abuse due to their identity as a female, the only different is one is ugly and the other one is sexy. Patriarchy system oppressed and controlled identities, the ugly

and the sexuality. The system controlled the identity of the female by oppress or take advantage over it.

Meanwhile Ruth, Terri and Kay experienced abuse from their relationship. For example Ruth who gets beaten by her husband often times.

“He ran at her and **hit her in the face**, exactly as he had wanted to when he had first seen **her silly frightened expression**; her glasses spun into the air and smashed against the bookcase; he hit her again proudly with her first month’s wages from South West General” (Rowling, 283)

Their boyfriend or husband has tried to dominate and control the relationship which results into psychological and physical abuse. Ruth and Terri experienced similar condition where both characters are dependent towards their partner and let them being oppressed in the system. Meanwhile Kay is a victim of psychological abuse from her boyfriend due to her independent and strong-willed characteristic. Unlike Ruth and Terri who is being controlled by their partner, Kay is not. As the consequences, she lost the love she wanted from her partner. But in the end, she is able to resolve and free herself from the problematic relationship with her boyfriend.

However, the existence of the abuse also maintain by the participation of the oppressed female characters. The female’s socialization and path of least resistance showed indication of patriarchy principle in their participation in the society. For example, Ruth’s socialization who showed her dependency towards her husband which indicates male identification principle or Terri’s path of least resistance who choose the path to believe and continue to involve in crime with her boyfriend Obbo. The female characters are proven to contribute in generating and maintaining the patriarchy system in their society.

By proving the participation of the oppressed female characters in generating the patriarchy system does not necessarily intend to show them as unworthy victim or worth to be blamed. The intention of showing the female participation is to prove that by unraveling the condition, we can show that each contribution and participation from the victim might bring change to their life. By unraveling the victim from the patriarchy principles, they might socialize or choose a better path in order to bring a better change for their lives. Understanding how individual's stance might bring change to the society hopefully will awaken the sense of the victim who experienced abuse to participate in their abusive society.

Each oppressed characters has their own way of facing the problems they encountered. Several characters are shown to have significant development and achieving enlightenment in the story and several characters are not. Rowling made Sukhvinder and Kay as female characters who finally able to release themselves from the patriarchal oppression in the society. Sukhvinder and Kay are the characters who are finally able to overcome the core reason of their sufferings. Sukhvinder gained her confidence by helping people. She realized that helping the people who are in needs will help her to be more grateful towards the world. She is able increase her self esteem and gives positive enforcement to her surroundings. It also affects her parent's treatment toward her.

Meanwhile Kay is able to detach herself from Gavin who has disadvantaged her and her family. Kay finally moved on and realized that she deserves to be treated better. She is an independent woman and does not have to lean her life to Gavin. Both characters are

depicted to experience suffering and bitterness of the patriarchy system until finally they are enlightened and decided to unravel themselves from the patriarchy system.

Meanwhile Ruth Price, Krystal Weedon and Terri Weedon experienced regrets and lasted in the patriarchy system. They are hardly able to release themselves from the patriarchal oppression. The inability to realize the power they had and the continuous oppression from the patriarchal system made them trapped in the circle of suffering. Krystal commit suicide and unable to solve her condition under the oppression. She chose the shortcut to end her pain and finally left her mother Terri alone. Terri experienced depression and deep regrets after the death of her children. On how she finally resolved her condition is not being told by J.K. Rowling in the end of the story. Meanwhile Ruth Price stayed loyal to her husband and move away together from Pagford.

A Reflective of Post Feminist Critics

Post feminism appeared in the 1980s era and originated from the media who tried to liberate the people from the outdated feminist movement (Gamble 37). Post feminism believes that the problem for female regarding the equality of gender has been solved during the first and second waves of feminism. Thus, female has no longer face serious

problems that needs to be solved by the feminist. In the era of 1980s and after, the many feminist argue that the post feminist is the rejection or the anti of the results gained from the previous feminist struggle (Gamble 37)

In this context, the post feminism views do not realize that there is a persistent problem which exists from the first waves until the era of post modernism. Patriarchal oppression is a persistent issue which is rooted and hard to be solved by the feminist movement in any background. It is an undeniable truth that female subordination and oppression is the problems which is by female that continue from time after time. This problem is still exists in the era of post feminism where law has given equal protection to all citizens despite of the gender differences.

The Casual Vacancy novel by J.K. Rowling confirms the problem of women in the era of post feminism where the post feminist believes that the equality and freedom for women has been achieved. The findings in this results shows that the female issues regarding to equality or subordination still happened in the post feminist era. Even though many of the female issues in first or second wave feminism has been overcome but another form of oppression comes in a patriarchal society. It means the struggle of the feminist movement is not over yet. There are still problems in regards to female subordination which needs to be solved, such as female objectification or female as damsel in distress.

As Allan G. Johnson stated that in order to unravel ourselves from the patriarchal oppression, we might also start to make changes from ourselves by firstly understanding the patriarchal legacy (4). To empower and change the mindset of the society to unravel

themselves from the patriarchal oppression is one big project for the feminist movement to end the continuing abuse and subordination that happened towards female in a patriarchal society

Conclusions

The results of the first research question which examines six symbols of patriarchy and the second research question which examines the participation of the oppressed female characters in maintaining the patriarchy system are intertwined and supported each other. In order to thoroughly examine the portrayal of patriarchal oppression in the novel of *The Casual Vacancy*, the findings of patriarchy principle in the society is important to be found. By isolating the data which indicates the patriarchy principle, the symbols of patriarchy nature in the society can be reflected in the novel of *The Casual Vacancy*. Furthermore, the existence of abuse or oppression can be examined from the results of the findings in symbolization of patriarchy.

This study has tried to prove the existence of patriarchy system which is reflected in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* through several symbols found in the novel. Through the findings of the symbolization of patriarchy in the novel, the existence of patriarchy system in J.K. Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* can be concluded. There are six patriarchy symbols found in the novel of *The Casual Vacancy*. The symbols are found in the private sphere and public sphere of the society in Pagford Town. The symbols are divided into two settings, public patriarchy include; female as sex objects and male as villain. Meanwhile in

private patriarchy include; male as villain, female as faulty, female as mother or angel in the house and female as damsel in distress.

Six different symbols of patriarchy depict the representation of patriarchy systems in *The Casual Vacancy* novel. The symbols give description on how the existence of patriarchy principle subordinates the female and advantages the position of male in the society. The patriarchy principles contained in the symbols serve the personal or collective interest of the male in the society.

The result of the findings which answer the first research question becomes a helpful insight in examining the participation of the oppressed female characters in chapter five. Each patriarchy symbols become the foundation in determining and examining the characters that experienced abuse and oppression from the patriarchy systems. The symbolizations of patriarchy in each setting give a clear distinction of the oppressor and the oppressed characters in the novel.

The findings also answered that the patriarchy system creates abuse and oppression towards five female characters in the story. All five characters take part in generating the patriarchy system that oppression. They are Ruth Price, Krystal Weedon, Terri Weedon, Sukhvinder Jawanda and Kay Bawden. Each of them has the chance to change their situation through their socialization and path of least resistance. However, it has been shown that not all characters able to unravel them from the patriarchy system. They keep generate and maintain the patriarchy system in their society through their socialization and path of least resistance.

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