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Naskah masuk	Direvisi	Diterima	Diterbitkan
30-Januari-2024	28-Peb-2024	30-Mei-2024	20-Juni-2024
DOI : https://doi.org/10.58518/equality.v2i1.3309			

Patriarchal Discourse as Seen in Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

L. Dyah Purwita Wardani
dyahpw.sastra@unej.ac.id

Intan Permatasari
Yanuaresti Wardhani
Universitas Jember

Abstract: *This study analyzes Christina Dalcher's Vox using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall 1997 and the discursive approach by Michel Foucault as an effective means of comprehending meaning through conversation. This theory analyzes patriarchal discourse experienced by female main characters. This study is categorized as qualitative research. This thesis has two kinds of data to support this research, primary and secondary. The primary data are collected from the dialogues and narration in Vox novel that represent the patriarchal system through the female characters. The secondary data are collected from various journals, books, and internet sources. In Vox novel, women always experience oppression and violence. It makes women's lives miserable. The result of this study found four patriarchal discourse which cover patriarchal culture, patriarchal sexuality, patriarchal household production, and patriarchal state. Women experience psychological oppression carried out by President and Pure Movement. It begins with President and Pure Movement who control women's life. This causes gender inequality which can give birth to subordination, marginalization, double burden, and violence. The last result is the ideological position of the author. The ideological position of the author does not support patriarchal system. Dalcher paints an original depiction of the current state of society by implying that women must be granted equal rights in society. Women have essentially the same rights as men, including the right to live an honorable life, to be free from fear, and to have the ability to choose their path in life.*

Keywords : Patriarchal discourse, *Vox*, Christina Dalcher

INTRODUCTION

Christina Dalcher's *Vox* talks about the presidential decree in the 21st century that women are not allowed to speak more than 100 words each day. If they have spoken more than 100 words in the day, they will be punished (Dalcher, 2018). This novel sets in the Washington, D.C. a city of government in America. There is a movement known as the pure movement that supports presidential decree. A political organization that adheres to the extreme Christian ideology is known as the Pure Movement. This movement will serve as the basis for the decision that will be made. In terms of religious protection, the purity movement wants women to revert to their traditional roles of cooking, cleaning, and childbearing, and they do not want them to have any opinions of their own. Every woman and girl has been given a bracelet made of metal to wear so that she can keep track of the words. If they have spoken more than 100 words of the day, they will be delivered an electric shock by their metal bracelet. Jean is an American linguistic scientist who is surprised by how ready people are to comply with the new limits in America. Jean concerns about the future of her children as they adapt to the new restrictions. Jean's youngest daughter, Sonia has welcomed the challenge of remaining silent and has even won a school contest for uttering the fewest words. Jean wants Sonia to grow up with a diverse vocabulary, something that America's present leader rejects. It shows the patriarchal system in the novel. A patriarchal system is one in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Walby explains that patriarchy is made up of six interconnected points. There is patriarchy in the state, patriarchy in culture, patriarchy in household production, patriarchy in paid employment, male violence, and patriarchy in sexuality. This study seeks to find out what patriarchal structures exist in the novel.

This study uses the representation theory written by (Hall, 1997). Representation theory is suitable for *Vox* novel which will be analyzed the representation of patriarchal discourse of female characters. This shows the relationship between text and contextual background of women in the 21st century was still under the dominion of men. Additionally, revealing the author's position regarding the issue of patriarchal discourse is also important because the author, who is part of her society, will bring her ideology, which is influenced by her social background in the novel. This study also presents previous studies to show that this research is original, and provides a theoretical overview to show clearly and concisely how the theory is applied. The first previous research was written by Gunawan (2020). She discussed patriarchal system in Marie Benedict's *The Other Einstein* using the representation theory by Stuart Hall (1997). This study told about discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of women in Eastern European countries. Discrimination was carried out by the European government which distinguished education between women and men. Oppression occurred in Mileva's environment who did not agree with Mileva's decision to study, they

believed that women should marry when they were twenty years old, not for education but to become housewives. The second previous research was written by Khoma (2018). He focused on analysing women's oppression of the female main character in Suzanne Collins's *Catching Fire* using theory of representation by Stuart Hall (1997). This previous research used a discursive method, this prior study examined the narrative of women's oppression of the female main character, Katniss Everdeen. In this study, patriarchal ideology is also employed to discover man's dominant power in suppressing the female character. Katniss experienced the oppression of President Snow's authoritarian government because she is a woman who belonged to the working class. Katniss experienced bullying from the media as well. By disclosing her private life to the public through television shows, the media used itself as a tool to represent the reality of the President's authority. Those previous research are chosen because it has similar issues with issues in *Vox*. Through previous researches, the researcher can study and understand more about how patriarchal discourse occurs and it is experienced by women to analyze how patriarchal culture occurs in *Vox*. These previous researches are discussing the same problem.

METHOD

This thesis is qualitative research because this research uses words as data to be collected and analysed (Braun, 2013). The collected data are in the form of words, sentences, and dialogues that show the patriarchal discourse in *Vox* novel. This type of research is chosen to analyse the collected data using Hall's representation theory to find the representation of patriarchal discourse in the novel.

The data source of this research is *Vox* by Christina Dalcher, published in 2018. This thesis has two kinds of data to support this research, primary and secondary. The primary data are collected from the dialogues and narration in *Vox* novel that represent the patriarchal system through the female characters. There are several steps to collect the primary data. The first step is comprehensively reading the *Vox* novel several times to have a deep understanding of the written words in the novel. Comprehensive reading is done to ensure that no words are skipped and misunderstood. After reading the novel, the second step is highlighting the dialogues and narration related to the topic. To keep the data organized, the third step is to type the data in the table using Microsoft Word. The secondary data are collected from various journals, books, and internet sources such as video and digital news related to patriarchal discourse in the United States in the 21st century, Christina Dalcher's social background, and her interview. There are several steps to collect the secondary data. The first step is comprehensively reading journals, books, and digital news and watching the video several times to understand the content better. The second step is highlighting the written words about the context and Christina Dalcher.

After collecting the data, the next step will be processing the data. There are several steps to process the data. In the first step, the collected data will be categorized according to the research questions. The data will be categorized into two categories. The first data category is about patriarchal system through female characters, which will be divided into six structures such as the structure that shows the patriarchal household production, paid employment, patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal sexuality, and patriarchal culture in the novel. The second category is data about Christina Dalcher's social background and interviews related to the topic of this research. The second step is to highlight specific words, phrases, or sentences that describe the patriarchal household production, paid employment, patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal in sexuality and patriarchal culture from the collected data.

After processing the data, the next step is analyzing the data. There are several steps to analyze the data. To answer the first research question, the first step is to describe the data of patriarchal culture, patriarchal sexuality, patriarchal household production, and patriarchal state that occurs in the *Vox* novel. The representation theory by Stuart Halls 1997 utilized to analyze the language used in each datum to find how the data represent patriarchal system experienced by women in the novel. Hall (1997) states that each period will produce different knowledge of discourse. Thus, the second step is to analyze the description of the data from the first step by relating it to the context of the 21st century of the United States using the discursive approach of representation theory. This analysis aims to know how the patriarchal discourse is constructed in the novel. To answer the second research question, the third is to describe Christina Dalcher's social background and her answer in an interview related to the issue of patriarchal system. The fourth step is to analyze the description in the third step and the context of the United States in the 21st century, and to connect the analysis to the patriarchal discourse in the novel. By doing this analysis, I will find whether Christina Dalcher is supporting, rejecting, or in-between supporting and rejecting the issue of patriarchal system to reveal her critical position related to the topic of this research. After all research questions are answered, the fifth step is to conclude from the whole analysis of this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Patriarchal Discourse As Seen In Christina Dalcher's VOX

a. Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchal culture refers to a social system that gives power and dominance to men in various aspects of life, including education, religion, and traditional norms (Walby, 1990). Patriarchal culture develops discriminatory discourse against women in various aspects of social life. The attribute of gender in every aspect of

social life starts from birth. It is considered normal for women to cry, while men are not allowed to cry because they are considered weak (Gitalia, 2021). Education has contributed to differentiating women and men where men often get privileges. Education is understood as a continuation of this process, boys and girls usually study different subjects (Walby, 1990). As described in *Vox* novel:

“Here’s the sewing room,” our group leader said, opening a set of double doors and motioning us inside...Today, she’ll be in a room with twenty-five other first graders, all girls. She’ll listen to stories, practice her numbers, help the older students in the kitchen as they cut cookies and knead dough and crimp pies. This is what school is now, and what school will be for some time. Maybe forever. (Dalcher, 2018: 94-95)

In the quotation above Sonia gets the impact of the presidential decree. Sonia lost her freedom to learn common things in her school. Sonia can only take sewing and cooking lessons. It illustrates how Sonia has been treated unfairly. The president limits girls’ opportunities to get the same rights as boys. Sonia cannot fully develop due to limited education. Sonia does not get equal rights in the realm of education. Inequality of opportunity between men and women will place women in a position inferior to men. The statement illustrates that boys are treated more favorably than girls. The goal of creating a separate class from boys is to require girls to always be able to do housework such as cooking, sewing, washing, and cleaning. The demands of domestic work on women are still ingrained in society. The dynamics of classroom interaction are set in such a way as to oppose women who tend to be more self-conscious. In the same way, Deem also argues, if boys tend to study science subjects while girls take domestic subjects, they are prepared for their adult roles within the sex division of labor (Deem, 2012).

In the real condition, it shows in America, There is a significant gender gap in the number of women who pursue careers in math and science. Khazan (2018) states that in the United States, just 27% of students who take the Advanced Placement (AP) exam in Computer Science are female, even though their numbers are increasing. The disparity between the sexes widens from that point on: Women get only 18% of computer science degrees awarded by colleges and universities in the United States.

In the realm of religion, women must also obey orders from their husbands. All religions are naturally patriarchal, that's why the patriarchal system is practiced. Religion has consoled women to accept their destinies as the will of God by acting as a societal anesthetic and playing the role of a lullaby that calms, assuages, and restrains revolutionary aspirations (Mligo & Shabani, 2019). Throughout history, religion has been one of the contributing factors that have led to the subjugation of women. This can be seen in the quote below:

We are called as women to keep silence and to be under obedience. If we must learn, let us ask our husbands in the closeness of the home, for it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership."...“When we obey male leadership with humility and submission, we acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ, and that the head of every woman is the man.

(Dalcher, 2018: 104)

This quote teaches women to obey their husbands because if women disobey their husbands, they are disobedient to God. It is based on the belief that women have a naturally assigned role of being passive and submissive in their life. This statement rises in patriarchal culture because men assume women are weak creatures and inferior to men. Men think that they have the supremacy to control women in all aspects. This domination is used to make women obedient. Therefore, according to this matter, it is simple for men to exert their authority over women because they inherently hold the power to dominate women which cannot be avoided.

The phrase “we acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ, and that the head of every woman is the man” demonstrates how a woman's body can be reduced to a helpless object that is always reminded of God. Therefore, men will have the authority to give instructions to women. In this case, Reverend Carl pointed to the Bible as the origin of the notion that women are inferior to men and described how the concept was utilized by the church to justify women’s submission to men. He did this by citing the Bible as the root of the notion. This idea is supported by Stanton’s statement that Church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man (Stanton, 2006). Stanton’s statement indicates that the Bible and its tradition have held a patriarchal point of view since their inception. It contains an understanding that men have a role as head and leader in the family, society, and state, while women should accept the role of being their subordinates.

The real condition also occurs in the United States, since the nation's founding, men have held the majority of leadership positions in the United States. Even now, when the United States already claims the title of the country with the oldest democratic system, women have never sat in the top seats of government. This is despite the fact that women make up around half of the population. Indeed, women have started to sit in government seats. In the United States Congress, for example, 20 percent of them are women (Saramo, 2017). However, they were never in the top position.

b. Patriarchal Sexuality

In the realm of patriarchal sexuality, women are more likely to be treated negatively (Walby, 1990). Women are subjected to discrimination due to the perception that their bodies are distinct from those of males. This means that women no longer have the right to exercise control over their bodies, so women's bodies are considered as other. Patriarchal sexuality still views women as sexual objects (Fujiati, 2016). Patriarchal control over women's bodies resulted in women being seen as the source of problems if something happened to them related to their bodies.

In *Vox* novel, Jean has bad experiences every day, his son Steven comes to his home to announce that he is joining Pure Movement. A few days later, Steven is crying because he "did something terrible". Steven had sex with Julia before marriage. That night, an armored car pulls up to the house next door - and the girl, Julia, is dragged away. Her hair was cut, she was paraded around the TV in a gray dress, and she was shamed for having premarital sex which is now a crime. Julia was sent to a labor camp, with the counter on his wrist set to zero instead of one hundred. She would spend the rest of her days as a mute slave. Julia is punished for having sex before marriage, but Steven is not punished. The phrase "What if you told them it was Steven's fault? Can you do that?" "That would be a lie," Steven says before Patrick can answer. "I don't care" (Dalcher, 2018: 181). It is clear that Julia as a woman is belittled and treated as a sexual object in patriarchal society, not as a whole and equal human beings. It is an example of objectification include sexual harassment, catcalling, rhetoric that objects to women, and even physical violence against women. The fact that the government handles women and men differently demonstrates that Julia has been objectified. Julia was a young woman who was subjected to gender discrimination and was made to feel ashamed by the media. As far as most people were concerned, Julia was nothing more than a prostitute, which is a woman who existed for the only purpose of pleasuring men. If a woman experiences a problem that befalls her body, then this happens because of the woman's fault (Fujiati, 2016). The problem faced by women related to their sexuality is that the body is reduced to submission and tamed and then it is impossible to gain freedom (Sawicki, 1998). Women's body as something subordinate to power relations makes it not much to analyze patterns of resistance in the world of oppression. Subjectivity presupposes within itself the ability and power to resist these power relations (Foucault & Sheridan, 1995).

c. Patriarchal Household Production

In patriarchal household production, the work that women do is frequently devalued, and their contributions to the economic well-being of the household are either ignored or taken for granted (Walby, 1990). It is common for women to be the

ones in charge of unpaid household labour including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children, among other responsibilities. This division of labour contributes to the maintenance of gender inequality by reinforcing the traditional gender roles that exist in society. Time budget review and other studies on the domestic division of labor show that the number is different from household work and even the overall working time carried out by married couples. The patriarchal structure of the family places a significant emphasis on the division of labor as an essential component.

“You know, like about how hard it is on kids when both their parents work, how we’ve gotten to this place where people forget about simple things.” “How about you save some of this for your brothers’ breakfast? And what simple things?” The only people who aren’t out at work are women.

(Dalcher, 2018: 43)

The quotation above illustrates how Jean has to take care of her children, husband, and other matters as a mother. In the patriarchal mode of production, there is a division of work that involves a husband and wife in marriage and household relations. It is the wife who takes care of the children and household chores, while the men make a living. The household work that Jean has to do is involved in the production of labor. However, the labor she produces is owned and controlled not by Jean, but by her husband. The household chores that Jean does are not paid for by her husband. It can be stated that Jean is exploited, because housewives usually work longer hours than their husbands. Walby (1990) also explains that the division of domestic work is the main form of difference between men and women. The division that occurs has a significant effect on other aspects of social relations and then automatically this is a significant form of inequality.

It is the same similarity in the real life which is faced by women in the United States. Brennan (2020) stated that 62% of the decision making in terms of home decoration is made by the wife. This means that apart from washing, cleaning, and cooking, women are also responsible for making these decisions (Brennan, 2020). Wives also take care of the children more, cooking, washing, and cleaning the house which is done every day than their husbands. Wives get a greater division of responsibilities than their husbands. This happens because in gender equality both women and men do have not the same opportunity in reaching a career. However, for women, they must be prepared to have additional burdens if she is bound in marriage. This is where capitalism exploits women.

d. Patriarchal State

The study provided by (Walby, 1990) sheds insight on the ways in which patriarchy intersects with other hierarchies and power structures, such as capitalism and racism. She strongly emphasizes the fact that gender inequality cannot be

comprehended in a vacuum but rather needs to be investigated within a more comprehensive framework that takes into account the interconnections of many types of oppression. The patriarchal state refers to a social or political system in which men hold the ultimate power and authority, both in public and private spheres. Women are generally subordinated and have limited access to decision-making positions. The state can inherently oppress women through policies and laws. Society is inherently biased against men. This is described in the *Vox* novel when women are not allowed to speak more than 100 words a day. Women in the novel often experience discrimination and oppression, such as restrictions on freedom of speech, and restrictions on decision-making that govern their lives.

I wouldn't say a thing. I've become a woman of few words.... It's a light touch, as if he were sharing the pain, or perhaps reminding me to stay quiet until the counter resets itself at midnight. This magic will happen while I sleep, and I'll begin Tuesday with a virgin slate. My daughter, Sonia's, counter will do the same. My boys do not wear word counters.

(Dalcher, 2018: 1)

The quotation is taken from a case in which all women and girls in America were fitted with a metal bracelet that delivered an electric shock. Jean and all of the women spend their time in almost complete silence. Women in the novel use an electric bracelet to regulate speech, the bracelet only manages 100 words each day. When women have reached 100 words, then they can only wait for the turn of the day to return to zero to speak again. Women are given restrictions to speak, it is the same with women are not allowed to freely express opinions, express thoughts, or speak openly about issues important to their concerns. This phrase reflects a situation where women are not given equal opportunities to participate in conversations and decision-making. This is gender inequality and unfair enforcement of women. By suspending government regulations, women's bodies are objects of orders but also interpreters capable of interpreting orders. It means that a woman's body becomes an element that can be placed, transformed, and used so that the body can be directed according to norms, rules, and goals (Foucault & Sheridan, 1995).

It can be defined in the case of Jean and women in America that women's bodies become "tame." They are constantly regulated and controlled to communicate in a limited manner. The body operates social and patriarchal norms, causing the construction of femininity through certain disciplinary practices. In the same way that Foucault & Sheridan (1995) defines the body as a place where something can be inscribed, he emphasizes the power relations within society that determine subjectivity and body awareness. For Foucault & Sheridan, (1995) the classical age discovered the body as an object of power. This manipulated body, which is a tame body, is "subdued, used, molded, trained, obey and transformed"

(Foucault & Sheridan, 1995). Currell argued that this was caused by the problems faced by women as the sex that had to give birth to children and different socializations that made women more passive and submissive than men (Walby, 1990).

1.2 The Critical Position of the Author

Vox was written during the presidency of a totalitarian leader who was elected after the term of America's first black president. This novel has a critique to presidential regulation in the United States, because *Vox* novel was written on the topic of gender inequality. Trump's attitude which differentiates women and men, is also the same as President Sam Myers in the *Vox* novel. In the era of Donald Trump, America's 45th president, he often implied in his campaign that women are not equal to men. Men are more powerful and entitled to a bigger role than women. This is evidenced by how Trump mentioned his plan to abolish healthcare and abortion (Erythrina, 2022). Trump's perspective is summed up in one sentence "The world is a cruel place, and we must respond with ferocity." This was reinforced by his personality, which was recently revealed that Trump likes violence. Meanwhile, according to BBC (2016) women do not like violence and the survey results show that 53% of men support Trump. So far, women have often experienced violence, discrimination, and have even been used as "objects".

With the existence of gender inequality in Trump's leadership, women in the United States created a new movement called Women's March. The Women's March, which was held on January 21 2017 in Washington D.C., was a protest action that was deliberately raised to welcome the inauguration of the new 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump (Rafferty, 2017). This action raised the issue of the importance of paying attention to women's rights. This issue is developing not without reason, it is triggered by Trump's attitude which often makes discriminatory-aggressive statements and deliberately ignores human rights, especially in women's issues. In several chapters, Christina Dalcher presents narratives about women's solidarity against gender injustice. Based on the contextual background in America and several narratives in *Vox* novel, Christina Dalcher does not support the patriarchal discourse. Dalcher said that her novel is a feminist story. A lot of readers are probably going to think of *Vox* as a feminist story. In many ways, it is. But I hope people also see this as a tale about oppression (Dalcher, 2018). Dalcher gave a warning that gender inequality has an impact on women, both in terms of career, the right to equal opportunities, and affects the welfare of society. She packaged *Vox*'s story with a patriarchal system which is the main cause of the birth of feminism in women's thoughts. It can be seen that Dalcher indirectly does not support the formation of patriarchal discourse. It is the same with the main character in the novel *Vox*. "You can start small, Jeanie," she said.

“Attend some rallies, hand out flyers, talk to a few people about issues. You don’t have to change the world all by yourself, you know” (Dalcher, 2018).

In addition, Dalcher also has her views about female figures that she described through the female character she made. Jean wants to fight against gender injustice. Jean is confused and doesn't know how to challenge President Sam Myers and the Pure Movement, but Jean's friend, Jackie orders her to attend several rallies. Jackie said that you don't have to face it alone to change the world. Based on the contextual background, this has been done by women in America which call Women's March to oppose President Donald Trump's rules. It can be concluded that Dalcher indirectly gives an original picture of the actual condition of society that women must get equal rights in society. In essence, women also want to have the same rights as men. The right to live free from rules that make women feel unappreciated and free to make life choices.

CONCLUSION

Vox by Christina Dalcher, the discrimination has been described within the novel in the form of sexual harassment and the government regulations that eliminate women's rights in the world of work, in the realm of education, religion, and even in the state. Set in America, in the 21st century women has been silenced and returned to their home. Women are not allowed to speak up about their opinions, not allowed to work, and even education is made different from men. Women are considered lower than men. It happens because President Sam Myers and the Pure Movement govern all aspects of women’s lives.

Representation theory is used to find patriarchal discourse and its influence through the life of the main female character and social conditions in the story. The representation of patriarchal system in the novel is experienced by the women character in the United States. Four kinds of patriarchal system that occur in the novel, namely the patriarchal culture, patriarchal sexuality, patriarchal mode of production, and patriarchal state. In patriarchal culture, Sonia can only take sewing and cooking lessons, because she does not get equal rights in the realm of education, while in the realm of religion, women must obey their husbands because religion is created as an excuse to oppress women. Patriarchal sexuality describes women are passive objects that have no control over themselves. Patriarchal household production describes household work done by women who do not get paid by their husbands because it is a consequence of marriage. In the patriarchal state, women voting rights are abolished by limiting conversations to 100 words per day.

The last result is the ideological position of the author. *Vox* is a literary work that represents the author’s purpose, Christina Dalcher. The ideology revealed in the *Vox* novel proves that Christina Dalcher opposes patriarchy. Dalcher said that her novel is a feminist story. Based on contextual background in the United States, women formed a movement called the Women's March in 2017. The Women’s

March supports gender equality, civil rights, and other issues that are expected to face the challenge of the newly appointed President of the United States. The movement was initially held only in Washington DC, but "sister marches" emerged in the United States. Dalcher indirectly gives an original picture of the actual condition of society that women must get equal rights in society. In essence, women also want to have the same rights as men. The right to live free from rules that make women feel unappreciated and free to make life choices.

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