

## **A Chronological Survey of Marginalization: Women in Sam Shepard's Buried Child as an implicative exemplary**

**Maysoon Taher Muhi**

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation of Universiti Sains  
Malaysia

&

**Dr. Tengku Sepora Mahadi**

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation of Universiti Sains  
Malaysia

### **Perspectives on Marginalization: Historical Background**

The concept of Marginality is originally applied to social science by explaining its effects on people of immigration, culture clash, and other transitional situations, such as status, role, or class changes. Cullen and Pretes (2000, cited in Pilar and Jo Udasco, 2004) consider the concept of marginality "an elusive concept" or a fluid relative concept since there is no clear definition of marginality as its meaning reshaped according to its use.

However, the concept of marginality / marginalization is originated by the sociologist Robert Ezra Park in five essays entitled "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" published in 1928 between the Two World Wars. Park's essays are basically concerned with migrated people to US rather than marginality. Nevertheless, the context of this concept in his essays refers to the idea that marginalization ostensibly occurs due to the sustained culture contact, like the minority group immigrants to the United States who are on the horns of a dilemma between their native and original culture and that of the new, host culture, stressing on the consequences of race, religion, and social and political conflicts. Park depended only on his personal surveillances made during his travels, and biographies of immigrants. The overall conclusion that Park presented is that being between different cultures would definitely produce the marginal personality.

Then, this concept is also fully elaborated by Park's student Everett V. Stonequist (1937) in his book *The Marginal Man*. Since then marginalization as a concept was widely used and refined in literature studies (Dunne, 2005; Billson, 2005; Deegan, 2005; Pilar and Udasco, 2004). Stonequist's interest was in European dominion and colonialism, emphasizing the prominent effects of such factors like "class conflict; and science vs. theology" (Jenkins, 2005). He uses the concept 'marginality' as an umbrella where he places another transitional situations as a panoramic view of marginalized individuals and marginal situations around the world and through history. He concluded that marginality could result not only from clashing different cultures, but also from ethnic, geographic conquest, class and role changes.

Billson (2005) in her study "No Owner of Soil: Redefining the Concept of Marginality" tries to securitize the concept of marginality in sociological literature studies since 1928. Billson comes with three types of marginality which all reflect the negative interaction between the marginalized man and his world. These types are: "cultural marginalization", "social role marginalization", and "structural marginalization". She states her belief that 'cultural marginality' develops out of a cultural process connected with race, ethnicity and religion. Accordingly, this marginalization indicates a dilemma of "cross-cultural and assimilation that

dominated classical statements". Sharing or non-sharing the values of a culture makes one either in or out of the group. 'Social role marginality' indicates that marginalization reflects the struggle created because of the social constrictions. While in the last type, marginalization as a process is mainly caused by certain segments affected by the "political, social and economic powerlessness".

Dennis (2005) in his study "The Age of Marginality", highlights the issue that marginalization is never outdated, regarding it as one of the most prominent issues of the modern world. He discusses what he called as "the dual marginality" through which he expresses the paradoxical attitude embedded in the marginality as a term, believing that marginality does not indicate only the outsiders who are rejected from the social sphere. He rather shows that marginalized people are both "outsiders as insiders" and "insiders as outsiders". They are not totally invisible, but they are merely disregarded. Being disregarded does not restrict their vital roles in the society. He attributes the reasons of marginalization to "[the] power, position, and status [that] do not view you as important to recognize, except within limited economic, political, or cultural boundaries".(p.4) Furthermore, Dennis points out the effect of "double consciousness" which reflects almost the classic case of "blaming the victim", as found in many societies like Brazilian society where practicing brutal action and "killing of marginal male street" is considered as a necessity to keep the social order. Moreover, he relates marginality to identity, stressing their close correlation for all human beings who live their lives through "'identity shelves": males-females; dominant-non dominant"(p.5). In another words, Dennis sees that we all may experience marginalization in one way or another due to the social, economic and political upheaval, but it intensifies more in the immigrants because of cultural differences.

Deegan (2005) in her study, "Transcending 'The Marginal Man': Challenging the Patriarchal Legacy of Robert E. Park", criticizes Park for his using what she called, "men's standpoint" as a gauge for every marginal experience. Thus, she sets for re-organizing the term 'marginality' from a feminist point of view to correct what she called "Park's biases". Her objection to the unfairly use? of the term stems from her belief that women are suffering from marginalization more than men owing a lot to men's freedom and hegemony and women's limited opportunities and their submissiveness. Accordingly, she sees that using this term "the marginal man" to refer to both genders is not totally accurate, since women's values and images are created by men, and since they are confined and controlled by men's rules, as "strangers in [their] own society", "the other" (p.217). She may go too far in her assumption that women have no place at all in this world, they belong to nowhere, while men even if they are marginalized belong to "somewhere". Women have been deceived and convinced to believe that they are lower than men who are in turn "superior to women". Furthermore, she concludes that white women experience of marginalization might be harsher than that of women of colour. If the immigrant women and women of colour are marginalized due to their gender and colour, they might find a consolation in their own heritage. While the white woman who lives in a dominant society, "has one heritage...[that] defines her as outsider"(p. 218) . So the process of marginalization is commonly shared by all women, but with different degrees. Moreover, the experience of marginalization for women is seen as a "cross-cultural", i.e. women in both modern and non modern worlds are marginalized by one way or another. They are "invisible to men in all cultures."(Deegan, 2005, p.219).

### **The margin and the centre/ theories and ideas**

In the attempt to display how the studied playwrights portray woman in their plays, it is necessary to discern and conceive the parameters of identifying the marginal and the centre, reconstructing the theories of margin and centre.

The terms centre and margin are most explicitly explicated from a philosophical point of view by Derrida. Accordingly, it is believed that the works of the French philosopher and socialist Jacques Derrida are the steppingstone in illustrating the position of centre and the margin (Kawashima, 1993). Derrida's vision of the state of the margin in his strategy of 'differance'—a term combines both "difference" and "deferral"—"challenges the possibility of an identity, sameness, or inside that could be conceived of independently of the altering power of its difference, its other, or its margin....". He assumes that the presence (=centre) implies immediacy or self-presence of being as a principle of "Western metaphysics" where the binary oppositions, such as speech/writing, presence/absence, subject/object, centre/margin, are constituted in "violent hierarchy"( Morgan and Leggett, 1996, p.3). The first term of each of these dualisms is regarded as the "central term of the metaphysical system" and it is superior to the other (Ryan, 1982, p.9, cited in Morgan and Leggett, 1996 p.3). While the second term has no entity by itself, it is merely defined by the existence of the former. Derrida sees the relation between centre and margin as natural and given, as "centrism" is related to the desire for unity, order, and self-presence. Yet, Derrida exerts his effort to reverse and displace the binary oppositions. In most studies the common use of the term "centre" is assumed to be both dominant and defining. In this case Derrida suggests that the term "presence" indicates both what is desired and legitimate and what delineates the status of "absences"(Morgan and Leggett, 1996, p.4). Accordingly, in using the centre/margin distinction to typify unequal power relations, the oppressor is often situated at the centre and the oppressed at the margin of hierarchies. Such view tends to articulate a kind of an inherent and objective connection between centrality and authority on one hand and marginality and powerlessness on the other hand. This view is partly short sighted since it reflects an ignorant fact related to the complexity and the contradictory sites of human subjectivity of both centrality and marginality.( Morgan and Leggett, 1996, p4)

Although the centrality is a dominant, it is not necessarily a defining factor, because it is sometimes seen as a site of oppressive acts which make it undesirable and unemancipatory. Partha Chatterjee (1990, cited in Morgan and Leggett, 1996) argues in her essay "Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" , that nationalist discourse provided a stringent dichotomy between public and private, outer and insider, and center and margin, where male domain is marked with the external, public, and centre, while women are confined by the private and marginal sphere. The women's home is regarded as a dominant and superior to the public sphere, consequently even if the women occupied a space superior to that occupied by men, they wouldn't allow defining or choosing it in relation to the public sphere. In other words, the centrality that is given to women in the modern society is not absolutely real or authentic, as it creates "new forms of domination" that "bound [women] to a new and entirely legitimate, subordination". The women are marginalized in spite of being within the nation space. Hence, the need to reconstruct the term "centre" and "margin" in terms of a more complex notion of position. In other words, the position of that centre and margin is the most significance in understanding the cultural processes through which this binary opposition connected with different histories, identities, and social formations.

However, many feminists and postcolonial theorists have stressed the importance of 'positionality', assuming that being in a margin is a matter of position instead of being a "pregiven" or natural. Moreover, it is a space of cultural resistance and struggle. The feminists have struggled to validate experience of marginality as a site for the production of counter-hegemonic knowledge and resistance monolithic (Hooks, 1990; Fuss, 1980, Morgan and Leggett, 1996). Hence, marginality is neither stable nor monolithic.

Ferguson (1990, p.9) raises an issue about the nature of the centre and the norms or the yardsticks through which one can be judged as margin. He says, "when we say margin, we must always ask, marginal to what?". He concludes that the condensed power exercised by the centre is hidden and an elusive, and not an essay to be recognized. Yet no one can gloss over or refuse to acknowledge centrality and its effect on the whole cultural and social strands and currents. Lorad (1990) gives this 'centre' a mythical norm, defining it as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure." (Cited in Ferguson and et al 1990, p.482).

Ferguson states his belief that the power and the enforced values of centre are merely ostensible. Though they are alleged to be "natural", they demonstrate the centre insecurity. That perhaps partly explains the violence actions of the male characters in Sam Shepard's and Tennessee William's plays. Their male characters are afraid that autonomous women might confiscate their claimed privileged position; hence, they show their fear of losing their centrality. Fiedler (1966, cited in Pearson and Pope, p.7) perhaps follows this wave saying that the "absence of realistic female characters from many American [and British] works is a result of male fear of women." "Manliness," Bourdieu (2001) points out, "is an eminently *relational* notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself."

However, Bourdieu tends to establish his belief that women are underestimated through 'cultural practices' of the everyday life. Bourdieu in his book *Masculine Domination* points out to the dominated position of women in society as something not natural but rather *naturalized*. Domination in its broadest sense is a result of "social arbitrary" (Bourdieu, 2001) and not of the existence or the absence of the 'phallus' as Freud believed. So, men's domination over women shouldn't be seen as a biological; rather it is the incarnation of social practices and traditions. Bourdieu interprets masculine domination as being rooted in unconscious structures that are centered on "phallonnarcissism."

Bourdieu trenchantly criticizes Marxist analyses that give a primacy to the effect of economy in the production of social structure, stressing on the significance of the cultural production and symbolic systems in playing a crucial role in the production of social structures of domination (Lane, 2000: 15). Moreover, to sketch the strategies that people adapted in their struggle to get the centre, and the dominant position, he sees that the modern social world is divided into what he calls as "fields." For him this field is field of forces which contain people who are dominant and others who are dominated. All individuals, Bourdieu argues, in this universe involve in many social conflicts and bring to competition. Accordingly, the stage as a field of social space operates to show how men are dominators and women seem dominated by the power of culture and patriarchy that give men the upper hand over women.

#### **Marginalization, Gender and Patriarchy**

Undeniably, a certain ambivalence concerning the issues of marginalization, gender and patriarchy, long in conversation with each other, have emerged as causes

of women's predicament. The tendency of equating the 'margin' with 'woman' reveals the polemic relationship between marginalization and gender. This universal canonization is reexamined in an attempt to bring attention to the status of women.

Butler (1990: 22-23) stresses on the correlation between 'sex' and 'gender', arguing that "the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is different from a feminine term." She insists on the "performative nature of gender" and its ability to re-constituting itself; hence there is no fixed and preexist gender identity. Butler's ideas concerning the continuous constructing of the female/male gender binary and the nonexistence of a fixed gender category might help in explaining that the centre/margin binary "can also be conceived as a proformative construction of identity in which there are no preexisting categories—the categories are constantly produced and re-produced through the expressions of marginalization" (Kawashima, 1997: 15)

Scholars in psychology and sociology have shown that one cause of women's marginalization may lie in their gender. However, 'gender' as a concept is defined variously depending to some extent on the purpose of its applying and the different epistemological goals of its study fields. In this respect, the researcher finds Sally Haslanger's definition of gender useful in providing a good starting point to sketch a brief account of gender. Haslanger (2000) defines gender in terms of the social position that both men and women occupy. A person is the product of her/his society, of the interaction between her/him and the different dominant powers. A woman belongs to gender because she is taught and thought to have certain distinctive bodily features that reveal her productive capacities and evaluate her individuality and assess her social position. Haslanger agrees with others that gender is a social institution or category as opposite to the biological category 'sex'. Along with this view is Simone de Beauvoir's (1908-1986) well known phrase that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

Similarly Gayle Rubin (cited in McCann and Kim, 2003) in her essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", emphasizes the interrelationship between gender and sex as a production of cultural processes. She says:

Gender and sexuality are produced as features of cultures, bodies and identities. This sex- gender system takes the raw material of human babies/ bodies and produces gendered beings whose skills and personalities complement each other to such an extent that the social and sexual bonding between them in marriage produces the basic social unit of human groups. She further argues that women are positioned as subordinate within in such kinship systems in as much as they are exchange between men. (p.14)

Accordingly, the position of women to gender is similar to her position to centre. They are usually judged by certain social and moral norms and they are sanctioned by the contempt and marginality of others if they violated these norms. Studies show that gender norms impose codes of masculinity and femininity, and of what is appropriate and normal. In other words, gender shapes and prefigures man's and woman's identity and its relation with the outside world. The distribution of wealth and power is largely affected by gender norms, because these norms of success in position of authority have a collision with norms of femininity. Whereas the position of authority asks for certain decisiveness and assertive behavior, the norms of femininity put clear limits on how assertive women can be before they are considered

aggressive and thus evaluated negatively. So, women suffer from this duality and they feel that they are in "a no-win situation"(Browne, 2007: 57). If women behave according to the social norms regulating leadership position, they will be judged as masculine and aggressive and if they confirm the regular social norms which specify how women have to behave, they will be seen as too passive and insufficiently ambitious to be able to succeed in the positions of the male world. Bourdieu (2001: 67) points out the difficulty that women face and the power imbalances between the two genders as femininity norms make it much harder for women than men to gain power. He argues that:

access to power of any kind places women in " a double bind", if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of "femininity" and call into question the natural right of men to the positions of power; if they behave like women, they appear incapable and unfit for the job.

For feminists, gender as a subject, however, is the crucial code that refers historically to a position unavailable for women to occupy. The male subject has been regarded as the traditional subject that everyone must identify with. Scanning some of the "masterpieces" of the theatre, where their focal point is the male subject, one can see that women are unevenly called upon to be identified with certain characters that are considered "universal" like Hamlet, Oedipus, Faust and other male characters. This matter has projected "the dominance of the self as male has taken its historical toll on women."(Goodman and Gay, 1998: 145).

Gillan Hanna, a founding member of the socialist-feminist theatre company, objected the role of woman in theatre and her "theatrical identity", on the basis that woman is not portrayed for her own but only as an accessory to complete men's social image; she is one's wife, mother, daughter or lover . Woman's existence depends only and merely on her attachment to man (cited in Aston, 1999)

Moreover, women and men are typified by "gender stereotypes" which have far-reaching effects on the conceptions of oneself. Studies held in psychology and sociology aim to explain why women achieve less than men in the profession, when there is no indication of overt discrimination. In such cases gender stereotypes play a central role in shaping women's and men's achievements. In this respect, the definition of stereotype may help to understand women's position: "Stereotypes are cognitive devices that operate at the non-conscious level, and help us to make sense of the staggering amount of information that our brain constantly has to process"(Browne, 2007, p.58). Studies have shown that women still lag behind men in terms of employment in key creative positions.

Consequently stereotypes are formed as part of the socialization processes, which are not wholly inaccurate but they are over generalized since people, especially women, are judged not only on their own performances and abilities but in part on the stereotypes of their gender. So under the effect of the stereotype the behavior associated with being a good professional is typically valued negatively for women and positively for men. Apparently, marginalization of women due to their gender is quite normal in social modern life. The pay gap, for instance, has long been used as a simple but telling indicator of gender and sex discrimination in the labor market and, by implication, other areas of life. Till recently, women's pay in Britain and USA is less than men due to the difference of their gender (Hakim, cited in Brown, 2007, p.191).

McCann and Kim (2003:13) stated that the concept of gender introduced in the early 1970s to distinguish the acquisition of social attributes from biological ones.

Before that the concept of gender had merely a feature of grammar without any "social meaning." So, in the 70's feminist theories began to use the concept as follows:

Biology (sex) is not destiny, and to assert, instead, that meaning attributed to sex difference (gender) are defined in historically specific ways through culture and politics and, as 'man-made' interpretations, secure male dominance over women. (p.13)

Arguably, women, in patriarchal society, are often perceived as the weak sex and constructed as marginal figures; they suffer a lot from men chauvinism. Patriarchy refers to the male domination nourished by the culture norms, religious attitude and social constructs. Thus, women, based on patriarchal practices and structures, are limited in rights and entitlements which consequently lead to a situation where women remain powerless and dependent on men. Richardson (1993:52) examined the concept of patriarchy, seeing it as "an important concept for the theorization of how and why women are oppressed". This concept 'patriarchy' has been used by feminists to explore the systematic manners that structure men supremacy and female subordination. The researcher aims also to analyze how patriarchy contributes to marginalize women and what is the reaction of women to resist the patriarchal attempts to marginalize them.

### **Marginality and Feminism**

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1952:xxii) argues that men have appropriated the "center," with women's consent: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other". The most importance here is not only the male domination, but also the constructing of identities. In the case of male/female relationships, Beauvoir asserts that women have always been regarded as "the absolute Other," as the irrational, tied only to her body, and therefore have been subordinated as inferior, a situation which is "validated" historically in patriarchal culture in which "the dominant class bases its argument on a state of affairs that it has itself created" (xxx) and then unremittingly presents as evidence of "absolute truth." Beauvoir provides many different patriarchal definitions of female "otherness," from "flesh" to "nature" to "mediatrix" to "mystery," concluding that each patriarchal society and each male individual ratify its/his own self-image first, then reduce the female into a correlative meaning of the "other", denying female existence for herself. Most significantly, in every case women's identity and significance are decided by another, never self-defined, her identity is mainly men made (Mulvey and et al, 2006:16; Skredsvig, 2002).

In retrospect, women were also underestimated as playwrights since dramatic literature has been authorized as "masculine, scientific, vital, and dynamic", where women are bereft from writing in this genre, on the excuse that "women are likely to have only a definitely limited knowledge of life" and are also "deficient in the faculty of construction" (Matthews, 1916: 124, cited in Smith, 1998). Hence, women experience marginalization not only as *per se* women but also as writers. They undergo a lot of difficulties to prove themselves and their merits. In several lectures she gave during the 1930s and later, the writer Virginia Woolf reflected upon the challenge she and her fellow female writers faced at the beginning of the century—Woolf noted that although women had been writing for centuries, the subjects they had written about and even the style in which they wrote was often dictated not by their own creative vision, but by standards imposed upon women by society in

general. Advances in women's issues, such as the right to vote, the fight for reproductive rights, and the opportunities women gained during the first half of the century in the arena of work outside the home were major developments.

### ***Women in Sam Shepard's Buried Child***

Hailed as one of the most significant playwrights, Sam Shepard is regarded as one of the United States' most prolific; most celebrated, and most honored playwrights. Critics examine Shepard's plays extensively, reconsidering his plays as "a recorder of the lost American dream and the deficiencies of our [national] theatre" (Blau 1984, cited in Williams, 1997). Critics posit that nearly all Sam Shepard's plays examine the functions and dysfunctions of the relationships between individuals that constitute either family structures or social structures that approximate family structures-, close friendships, or the struggle of haves like brother and brother, and father and son, or tight-knit business alliances. The theme of family dysfunction , which is so obvious in his plays, may stem from his conviction that family is the core of the whole life and everything in the world whether positive or negative could be attributed and traced back to the family. Shepard, himself stresses this, saying:

What doesn't have to do with family? There isn't anything, you know what I mean? Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other - everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It's an endless cycle (Cited in Bigsby, "Born Injured":p. 21)

McDonough (1997) joins in the chorus, stressing Shaperd's careful characterization of the crisis of man's identity and the "mystery" between his male characters, whereas his female's characters are degraded to be the "sidelines of his plays". Critics believe that Shepard has no interest in portraying his females as their issues are not that of significance for him. His tendency of pushing his females off the stage, obliterating their individuality let critics detect misogynic treatment of women. Along with this term, Lynda Hart (1988, cited in) argues that Shepard's objectification of the females in his plays is ultimately "pornographic." Other critics like Londre (1987) Wilson (1987) Williams, (1997) and L Podol (1989) suggest that Shepard's search for masculine landscape and his concentrating on the reviving of the American Dream victimizes women.

In *Buried Child* (1979) Sam Shepard creates a world that woman not only marginalized but also attributes as the reason behind disturbing the "familial equilibrium". The play demonstrates that the patriarchal system represented by the law of the father is oppressive where the created family is dysfunctional and violent.

Set in rural Illinois farm, the play is a macabre look at an American family, suffering from a terrible secret. There is a strong hint that the mother, Halie has committed an act of incest with her elder son Tilden. Tavv (2000: 52) states that Tilden represents "one aspect of the Oedipal impulse, the mother is seducer." However, Halie has been portrayed as an sexual object for men, a woman of uncontrolled and repressed sexual appetites due to the fact that her husband Dodge is "old, feeble, and impotent" (Hall, 1993). Such marital deterioration might indicate, Hall states, "the threat feminine sexuality poses for patriarchy:"

Halie: I went once with a man.

Dodge: (mimicking her) Oh, a "man".

Halie: A wonderful man. A breeder.

Dodge: And he never laid a finger on you, I supposed.

(Long silence) (*Buried Child*: 2)

And that may explain her passionate love to her son as seen by May (1988: 97) who states that "sexually frustrated mothers whose husbands were not in command might turn their perverted desires toward their sons." The fruit of this intense relationship is a child killed and buried by the father expressing his power over the women and that anything created outside the patriarchal system is terminated.

Halie, during most of the play's opening scene, remains upstairs, away from a husband she neither loves nor respects. She is even referred to as "Halie's voice" at the beginning of the play. However, she left her house in favor searching for "phallic economy". That means she cannot live without a man and she clings to men's world that identifies her as human being.

Shelly, a girl friend of their returned son Vince, is another female character in this play. Shelly is put under the men's gaze. Nevertheless, she is given the status of the spectator at the same time. She observes and objectifies the action of the play and the power of men. Yet, that does not give her a privilege as she by herself is merely a spectacle. Ironically, to defend herself from her odd and dead system surroundings, she uses what women conventionally were usually brought up to do, that is the domestic activities. When Vince turns to her for comfort that his family cannot provide, Shelly deflects his desire by saying: " You're the one who wants to stay. So I'll stay. I'll stay and I'll cut carrots. And I'll cook the carrots. And I'll do whatever I have to do to survive" (94). It seems that these 'feminine' activities which provide Shelly with the substance of existence. Throughout the play, Shepard fully portrays men, giving a full characterization for their psychology, emotions and masculinity while women appear as tools to prove their patriarchal power and agents to clarify their masculinity.

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