

## **Analysis of Radical Feminism in “Tomboy” Movie (2011)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Woman has been thought as the second sex who is considered lower than man. This is part of patriarchal hegemony. Gender and sexuality are regulated in a patriarchal society so that each individual must comply with the general agreement. Woman must be feminine based on patriarchal gender political oppression. “Tomboy” movie tells a child who dared to break the patriarchal values of femininity. The issue of gender and sexual identity of child became the main theme of the film. This study tries to see the gender politics happening in the “Tomboy” movie through the characters presented.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, patriarchal, gender politics

### **Preface**

Gender is believed as the reason human experienced injustice. Gender, those are male and female, which determined the role, right, obligation, value and norm of what human will have; as if a human being has been determined his/her destiny by the gender he/she has. Gender that is seen from the characteristics of the sexual organ, it seems to be a benchmark for a person identity, thus if a person has a vagina and breasts then she is female and she must have a female character

namely feminine, while if someone has a penis, scrotum, and Adam's apple then he is male so he must have a male character namely masculine. Furthermore, gender also determined a person sexuality, it means that woman must be in couple with man and vice versa.

The sex idea determines the gender and sexuality of a person, it was born and formed in society, heterosexual society precisely. If there is a woman who is not feminine and man is not masculine or woman loves woman and man loves man they will be considered as

an anomaly with the consequence of being treated unjustly. The idea which rule human life regarding gender and sexuality are clearly formed by human, but it is not like inherently attached to the human body, namely gender.

As stated above, gender also causes the differences in role, right, obligation, value and norm that will apply to a person. One sex is considered higher than the others, so it is the dominant one. It means male. Related to power relation, in general between man and woman, it looks that man is considered more dominant than woman. Man considers himself to be subject and sees woman as object. Finally, Woman is oppressed by man because the norm applying in the society is patriarchal norm.

Injustice against woman creates a resistance movement that is known as the feminism movement. The movement emerged in the 19th century and tried to voice equality in marriage and equality in the right to education. The movement develops along with the time and divided into various forms of feminist movements including feminism which has many

forms including liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism.

One of the form of feminism that is considered modern and revolutionary is radical feminism which believes that gender equality will not succeed if there is no change in the system (Tong, 2010: 67). The system which means a system created by a patriarchal society that oppresses woman's rights. The treatment and woman right is limited in various fields, for example, in politics, man has the right to be elected, choosing and making policy that must be obeyed while woman has started to have right in the 20th century; in economic, man can have a career, it is very reasonable while woman is only struggling in domestic concern; in religion only man can interpret the holy book while woman only needs to study from the interpretation result; even in the most basic institution namely family, father has the right to make decision for all family members. The system which is said by radical feminist, it must be omitted.

Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg in Tong (ibid: 69) stated

that woman is a group experienced the first oppression historically and suffered the most harm; that oppression exists in every culture throughout the world and it is the most difficult to omit; and other oppression will arise based on oppression to woman. Furthermore, Tong (ibid) said that feminist conceptually agreed with the above opinion that gender differentiation is the main problem in the oppression to the woman. This oppression happened due to the result of the thought that differentiation must be made if you wanted special treatment. Man must 'conquer' woman to get his privilege. If man is equal to woman, man is no longer special, which has the consequence that man must share his prestige with woman and lose his special treatment.

One feminist who adheres to radical feminism, Kate Millett, believes that the oppression of woman coming from a patriarchal gender system (Neeru, 2008: 14). The system regulates how woman should act based on the rules and norms in society that have been made by man. Millett has analyzed

various literary works of the romance genre which she thought as a form of manipulation to woman. In romance novels, woman is described as object that will be happy if she marries a man. Man seems to be the only best choice for woman to achieve happiness. This make woman does not have power over her own happiness because the happiness will only get from man. Romance story eventually becomes the ideal form in society and it becomes a principal to hegemony woman to do the same thing with female characters in the text that is surrender or giving herself to the man.

In 2011 a French female director, Celine Sciamma, released a movie entitled "Tomboy". The movie tells about a girl named Laurie who wants to create her own gender identity and sexuality but she experiences oppression from the surrounding social society. Researcher will use the radical feminism approach of Kate Millett character regarding the patriarchal gender that creates a gender character in analyzing the "Tomboy" movie by Celine Sciamma.

According to Millett, woman

experience oppression by man is caused by male power through patriarchy. Sexual politics can be said as the result of the hegemony of patriarchal policy toward all behaviors, role and status where man has guaranteed to be more superior than woman (Millett, 2000: 26). Patriarchal policy in behavior can be seen in the idea that man is the dominant group and woman is subordinate group which is moreover related to gender stereotype related to someone's masculinity and femininity. Gender stereotype is a belief that man and woman differ in their characters, interests, and behavior (Kail, 2007: 398). Whereas gender stereotype is generalized opinion (Papalia et al, 2002: 270). Public opinion which is controlled by patriarchal society.

Male stereotype is identical with intelligence, aggressive, and having energy; whereas woman is passive, having no will and obedient, these are evidences of patriarchal policy. This stereotype gives emerging to a gender role that woman must take care of domestic activity which does not have an element of competition in it while

aggressive man will do more challenging work with high competition element. Gender role is a set of presumption that explain how woman and man should think, act, and feel (Santrock, 2001: 396). This gender role makes woman has no power in term of status because status is obtained from winning an award (achievement).

Millett said that the gender differentiation of man and woman is based on biological characteristic and it is very popular to tell in religion, social society, even patriarchal science (Millett, *ibid*: 26). Millett continued, based on that matter, it can be seen that the place where culture is obtained as a form of behavior that is regulated more than things related to nature. According to Millett, the amount of muscle in man is not solely because of natural result but it is related to culture through controlling of diet and exercise. Gender is more related to psychological and cultural matters than biological (Stoller in Millett, *ibid*: 30). It can be said that gender is a socio-cultural dimension to being female or male (Santrock, *ibid*: 396).

Patriarchal sees woman must be feminine and obedient to man because she needed man. Woman is considered unable to be independent, weak and illogical so it is appropriate to depend on man. This opinion is in line with Freud's opinion that woman hold jealousy towards the male penis which is a symbol of masculinity and patriarchy. Millett disagrees with this and she says that woman is not jealous of the penis but woman is pressured to accept the hegemony that woman is passive, oppressive, nonintellectual, weak, imperfect, and low because woman is patriarchal (Millett, *ibid*: 203).

This patriarchal opinion hegemony someone's thought since he/she was child. Serbin in Kail (*ibid*: 299) says that children have never lived in a gender neutral world, gender has been stereotyped for example through toys that are given to the children. Children are exposed to gender stereotypes from an early age so they will grow up by indicating someone's gender and sexuality based on biological physical characteristics. It should be remembered that gender stereotype itself looking through

heteronormative term.

Then what about tomboyish woman? Tomboy is a girl who has behavior that similar to maleness (Herbst, 2001: 300). For some women being a tomboy is one of the ways women fight the conventional idea of femininity (Less in Herbst, *ibid*). Woman who shows masculinity in the view of the patriarchal that is smart, strong, and aggressive make it an anomaly in patriarchal view. This kind of woman is a 'mistake' and must be 'returned' to the true identity of being feminine. Whereas 'back to femininity' is just another word for the weakening of woman because femininity is nothing more than a stereotype formed by man.

From what has been explained above, the main idea about Millett's thought can be summarized as follows:

1. Gender and sexuality of man and woman are ruled by patriarchal society femininity and masculinity, it is the result of patriarchal sexual politics. Woman must be feminine in accordance with what is hegemony in a patriarchal

society that is weak, powerless, limited sexuality, and need man.

2. Woman who does not show feminine characteristic must be 'returned' to her origin because she does not reflect ideal woman.

## **Describing “Tomboy” with Kate**

### **Millett Radical Feminism**

#### **Approach**

#### **1. The Role of Woman in the**

##### **“Tomboy” Movie**

Millett states that woman gender and female sexuality are ruled by patriarchal society. Woman must be feminine and not masculine, it is a form of sexual politics in order to weaken woman. Woman who is considered anomaly need to be returned to be feminine. Millett's main idea appears in the “Tomboy” movie through the female characters presented in it.

#### **1.1 Gender and Female Sexuality are Ruled**

The main character in the “Tomboy” movie is Laurie, a

little girl who likes to play soccer, short hair, and as a guardian of her younger sister. Laurie is come into the definition of a tomboyish girl, but actually Laurie figure is complexer than just a tomboy label.

Laurie, who has just moved to a new neighborhood, she meets a girl named Lisa. Laurie introduces herself as Mikael to Lisa which automatically makes Lisa thinking that Laurie is a man. Lisa also introduces Laurie into her playgroup and she can be accepted as a boy.

Laurie character is an example of a woman who opposes gender stereotypethat apply in her environment. She breaks the stereotype of woman as weak creature and the notion that protecting can only be done by man when he fights and wins against his male friend who disturb his younger sister. In addition, Laurie's attitude describes the aggressive nature which proves that aggression is not always doing by man. Woman is described as being

more talkative and smarter in expressing her feeling not entirely true. Laurie is described as not being very good at talking, even in a group of boys in this movie it is described as being humorous and talkative.

Woman body is limited by men so far. Biological characteristic of woman is considered as the basis for woman to be treated differently and breast (more specifically nipple) is the symbol of this distinction. Man can be shirtless and free to show his nipples in public without being seen as an oddity, but not with a woman's nipples. Women's nipples are not suitable to show in public. Woman who shows her nipples in public area will get a negative thinking. Interestingly, Laurie does not feel that woman's nipples are something to be covered because they are a natural gift that man also has. When she invited to swim with friends of her, Laurie actually cut her one-piece swimsuit to be used as swimming trunks and without any sense of inferior or

inferiority she swims with her friends, both woman or man, with bare chest. Laurie is also not bound by stereotypes that woman must like man. Laurie consciously likes Lisa, who is also a woman. It can be seen in the scene of Laurie who kissed Lisa's lips while in the forest. She determines her sexuality without looking at sexuality according to society.

As Kail has said, children tend to live in a world that is no longer neutral. Their gender and sexuality are determined by parents and their environment even at an early age. Then why does Laurie grow up with awareness in a patriarchal society? This is related to Laurie's family which tends to be egalitarian. According to Papalia et al (ibid: 274) father plays an important role in gender socialization. Non-authoritarian father, like Laurie's father, will give a freedom to his children in developing their own understanding of gender and sexuality. The role of father is considered influential because

father has the responsibility of making their children adapt to the existence of cultural norm (Santrock, *ibid*: 400).

Laurie's father actually became a male figure who is not followed on patriarchal values. Laurie's father gives her freedom to do what Laurie wanted regardless of gender stereotype. In the early scene of the movie, where Laurie's father teaches his daughter to drive a car. Laurie's father is not angry or doing physical violence to Laurie only because his child saying that her name is Mikael, even he calms Laurie not to feel sad. In the other hand, Laurie's mother who still cannot be separated from gender stereotype forming by patriarchal society, she scolds Laurie when she finds out that her child saying her name as Mikael.

Laurie's mother shows the strength of patriarchal hegemony in herself so that she cannot escape from the view that woman must act feminine. In the scene when Laurie coming home from Lisa's house with colorful

makeup on her face, her mother said Laurie is really beautiful with makeup even though at that time Laurie is really ashamed to wear her makeup because she felt makeup does not suit for her. Behind her mother compliment, it seems implied that Laurie should dress up like a woman because she is beautiful when using makeup. Laurie herself, dislikes something related to use makeup and she likes doing activity outside the house. This persuasion certainly contradicts what Laurie really wants.

## **1.2 Feminine Woman is Ideal Woman**

When a mother brings her son to complain to Laurie's mother that her child is beaten by a child named Mikael, Laurie's mother realized that Mikael in question is Laurie who claimed to be Mikael. Laurie's mother is furious and interrogated Laurie in a high tone. Laurie can only be silent to see her mother angry, which actually make her even more

upset and ended with a slap on Laurie's cheek. Laurie's identity as a feminine woman is important for her mother rather than her own child's happiness.

Although Laurie's mother looks regretful to slap her child. Laurie's mother apparently does not give up in imposing a feminine identity on Laurie. Laurie is asked to wear a dress and she is invited to go to a boy's house who hit by her and Lisa's house to admit that she is a girl. Laurie refuses and she is lugged by her mother. Finally, she is forced to follow her mother wishes. For Laurie to wear a dress and admit that she is a girl after her friends thinking she is a boy, it is a treatment that harassing her, especially in front of Lisa that she loves. Laurie understands, if Lisa knows she is a woman, Lisa will not like her anymore, because Laurie realized that woman loving woman are seen as 'abnormal' in society.

The 'abnormality' of women is often considered as a disease that must be cured and

that is what Laurie's mother doing. According to Laurie's mother, ideal woman is who behave like woman in a patriarchal image that is feminine which is described by wearing a skirt, playing with fellow woman, and using makeup. Laurie's mother tried to 'heal' Laurie by telling her identity to the public. Laurie's mother says that she does not mind her daughter 'pretending to be a boy' and her effort to show Laurie's identity is not a form of punishment for Laurie but this is the truth that have to be done. Laurie's mother failed to see that what her child showed is not just pretendant, but an identity that is rightfully chosen by Laurie herself. Showing Laurie's identity by forcing her to wear a dress and admitting to her friends as girl is actually a severe punishment for Laurie. What Laurie's mother considered to be the truth is the result of the hegemony of a patriarchal picture of feminine.

From the "Tomboy" movie, it can be seen that patriarchal

values are still deeply used in society. Part of people who are open to transition by not relying on patriarchal thinking. Man is not always bound by patriarchal value, it appears in the character of Laurie's father who is egalitarian. It is not always that woman wanted or realized that the general truth today is the result of patriarchal society as in the character of Laurie's mother. Laurie herself is presented as a woman who does not want to be defined feminine or masculine because what she creates in herself, both her gender identity and sexuality, it is what really making her feel comfort. A person gender identity does not depend on the value applying in society but the individual himself/herself feels appropriate and makes him/her comfortable.

## 2. Criticism Through Laurie Character

The writer and also movie director of "Tomboy", Celine Sciamma, presents the character of a child named Laurie who has the awareness that she can create

a new identity for herself and determine her sexuality. Sciamma through an interview with IndiWire in 2011, said that she did not understand the meaning of the word 'tomboy' in English, but in French where the movie comes from woman who has masculine character called '*garçon manqué*'. The word has the meaning '*failed boy*' or a boy who is fail and it is a mockery in France. Woman is considered a failed product because she is not man. Sciamma criticized this by presenting Laurie who apparently does not 'fail'. Sciamma thinking is in line with Millett idea that it is difficult to see woman as failing man because the standard which applying is man's standard, it is definitely biased

She makes movie with gender issue experienced by children, one of them because in France at that time beginning to allow the show of movie on gender issue in primary and secondary schools as a program related to cinema. The movie, in fact, causing a gender awareness movement both for children and

parents who came to watch. Sciamma received many questions and appreciation from parents who also wondered about children gender and sexuality. This shows the success of Sciamma in conveying the message in her movie that gender identity and sexuality should not confusing society because it is entirely owned by each individual.

## **Conclusion**

“Tomboy” movie is Sciamma critique to the idea that a person’s gender and sexuality are ruled by a society that tends to be patriarchal. Laurie character who realizes that she can create and choose her gender identity and sexuality makes her a woman who is not hegemony of patriarchal value. “Tomboy” movie gets appreciation and what Sciamma wanted as the writer as well as the movie director is achieved, namely building awareness about gender and sexuality is not natural.

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