

Resistance in Lady Bird, a Movie by Greta Gerwig

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Abstract

A movie is a work of literature bringing out perspective of social issue, to mention here is a woman in its relation with system of society. Resistance is one among several ways of how women interact with wider society. After watching Lady Bird movie written and directed by Greta Gerwig, the writers found that the idea of resistance is vividly seen. Thus, this study is to find out the main character's resistance in the movie. To reveal the main character's resistance, this study uses descriptive qualitative research so that all information, conditions, symptoms, and phenomena can be described in detail. There are two kinds of resistances found, the first is resistance toward the family and the second is resistance toward the wider society.

Keyword: *Feminism, resistance, Lady Bird*

Introduction

The discourse about women and their position in social life has become an interesting topic. In the social structure that develops in the community women are placed in a minority position. The dominance of patriarchal culture is still very thick in our lives. As if it has become a dogma that must be accepted by women without negotiation. This is an injustice and a slope when feminism has been discussed for years, patriarchy still runs smoothly. Feminism only reaches questions and discussion without real implementation. This is indeed because it is difficult to break down the values that have been formed and rooted in society. The beliefs of society toward the existence of women are still a disadvantage of this criticism to reach its goal.

The study of feminism always stuck in the construction of social

belief. Especially in Indonesia, feminism is always misinterpreted with western movements or thoughts. Feminism is widely assumed with suspicion of defiance to destroy a culture or else a local wisdom even religion. Women's images are constructed by these social policies which in turn gives lots of disadvantages to the women itself as an independent creature. Based on Prabasmoro (2006: 22), "What is considered 'feminine' depends on who defines, where the person is, and what has influenced their lives." This means that, defining women is possible done through power which is dominated by patriarchy system. The system can construct images of women to make sure that these women keep their position as the other, as the second sex, to rule. This, of course, will damage the nature of women as an individual as men do.

To this reason, there are many women build organizations to help them stand for change for decades. Resistance has been the most way the women can do to fight against the blocking cultural system. There are women working as author of literary works bringing up the issue for change. They speak up through short stories, novels and poems of gender equality notion. A movie has also been popular to bring out such issue and become a media for a change. Effendy (2003: 226) states that the media are visual and audio-visual to convey messages to a group of people who gather somewhere. From here the ideas of feminism can be embodied through movie. In this case, *Lady Bird* is a movie written and directed by Greta Gerwig signing about this notion.

Lady Bird is a semi autobiography film from the director and writer, Greta Gerwig. Set in 2002/2003 in Sacramento, it started Saoirse Ronan who acted as a teenager named Christine who was confused and precocious or preferred to be called, *Lady Bird*. She was in her final year at a Catholic school, and dreamed of a cosmopolitan cultural life and a different Ivy League university on the East Coast, a big aspiration that caused clashes with his mother (Laurie Metcalf), a nurse who worked tirelessly to keep his family alive. Fight with his mother, fall in love, and navigate the pressure of friendship versus popularity. Plot and hard female characters. Christine (Saoirse Ronan), the *Lady Bird*, and Marion (Laurie Metcalf), her mother, reflect each other: both hard, equally strong. Both of them also play a dominant role in their respective social circles.

Based on the facts above, working on the script of the movie using feminism criticism is a must to find out the type of resistance, in this case is the main character –Lady Bird, toward the system of society. As being said that the criticism of feminist literature is the study of literature that directs the focus of its analysis to women (Sugihastuti and Suharto, 2013: 18).

Literary Review

This study uses feminism as the literary criticism especially the women resistance toward the stereotypes.

1. Feminist Literary Criticism

The birth of feminist literary criticism cannot be separated from the feminist movement that originally appeared in the United States in the 1700s (Madsen, 2000: 1). At the beginning it has been suggested that feminist literary criticism in the paradigm of the development of literary criticism, feminist literary criticism is regarded as a revolutionary criticism that wants to subvert the dominant discourse formed by traditional patriarchal voices (Ruthven, 1985: 6). The main objective of feminist literary criticism is to analyze gender relations, the relationship between women and men who are socially constructed, which among others illustrates the situation when women are in male domination (Flax, in Nicholson, ed., 1990: 40).

Feminist literary criticism will describe the existence of oppression of women contained in literary works (Humm, 1992: 22). Humm (1992: 14-15) also states that so far the writing of literary history prior to the emergence of feminist literary criticism was constructed by male fiction. Therefore, feminist literary criticism reconstructs and re-reads these works with a focus on women, their sociolinguistic nature, describing women's writing with special attention to the use of words in their writings. Feminist literary criticism was pioneered by Simone de Beauvoir through her book, *Second Sex*, followed by Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*), Betty Freidan (*The Feminine Mystique*), and Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*) (Humm, 1992: 21).

The discourse on gender, resistance, claiming is basically a

rejection of all types of oppression. According to Tong (2009), feminist movement has a tendency to go against the hegemony of the patriarchy social system. The purpose of the women's movement over the other is not to criticize the throwback era but, with the women role emancipation in the development without seeing the gender.

2. Women Resistance

Women's resistance strategies is not an organized and collaborative action taken by women in face of terrorism. It is more on reactions and strategies dictated by their traumatic experiences as women in the society. On the women's demonstrations the independent newspaper Al-Watan wrote, —Tens of thousands of women were out to give an authoritative lesson on bravery and spirit to men paralysed by fear, reduced to silence... the so-called weaker sex refused to be intimidated by the threats advanced by the sect of assassins (Moghadam, 2001: 140)

Constructing anti-woman abuse policy from the perspective of women's resistance will have a twofold effect. On the one hand, it shifts focus away from women as victims, acknowledging that the power of women is often constrained not by will but by conditions established within the political economy. As a result, it offers women a larger variety of options when attempting to resist violence. On the other hand, enabling women to resist violence has the potentially radical effect of undercutting the rationale for violence as it is situated in the political economy. Resistance patterns are varied, and are shaped by class, race and culture, ability and geography. This creates a problem for women with few private resources, however, since it is these women who lack adequate levels of both private and public resources with which to effectively resist violence. Thus women crowded into public services are not only most vulnerable to abuse, but also have the fewest resources with which to constrain it, suggesting that the violence they experience will be more severe than for other women. From the grid, the ideal case of high private and high public resources will be the best system with which to combat violence (Connell, 2003: 205). Increasing attention has been paid to the role of informal

support systems in aiding abused women. Ideally, these networks will be not only flexible, responding to the immediate needs of the women, they will also be a continuous presence in the woman's life. This has important implications for women from marginalized groups, since they offer the opportunities to combat access problems due to language, race and culture. Thus, social inclusion programmes are crucial to combating violence, as are locally based, flexible programmes for abused women, which can include community outreach and awareness campaigns, treatment programmes, and justice forums, which must be distinct from the criminal justice system. At the same time, however, it is crucial to balance cultural sensitivity with the needs of the woman (Sabol et al., 2004).

Research Methodology

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive qualitative research does not use calculations but description. The written or oral data is descriptively analyzed. The data source of this research is the script of the main characters' dialogue from "Lady Bird" movie that is Christine, who called herself as Lady Bird. The technique of obtaining the data is reading the script and identifying the data by labelling them. The identified data are then categorized and analyzed.

Discussion and Finding

This research finds that there are kinds of resistance done by Christine –Lady Bird– as the main character to the social stereotyped toward women. The writers classify them into two parts. The first is resistance to the small society (family) and the second is resistance to the wider society (her environment after family).

1. Christine's Resistance toward the Family

The main character's resistance to the family in this film is mostly done to her own mother, Marion. These kinds of resistance have something to do with her desire, existence, perspective, and actions.

a. Christine's Determination in Choosing the Desired University

Christine wants to study away from home to the East Coast in New

York but is rejected by her mother, Marion. Her mother thinks that studying away will be risky for a woman like her and the fee will be expensive. Christine's strong belief that she can handle it with a loan or a scholarship was doubted by her mother. She doubts that she would get the scholarship and assumes her daughter not be accepted at the university she wanted. Marion then suggested her to go to city college i.e. University of the Immaculate Heart. Even though Christine does not want to study there, Marion expects Christine to accept and behave well. This situation surely is not in line with Christine's expectation. It drives her mad and jumped out right away from the car telling her mom that she does not even want to study in California since she hates the state. She insists to go to East Coast (Gerwig, 2017: 3).

In this case, Marion does not provide any opportunity for Christine to deliver her reasons of why she wants to study abroad. This situation is seen as lack of a daughter's freedom in deciding what she wants. Even though Christine has already tried to assure her mother by saying that she will try to get a scholarship, but her mother's negative belief to her own daughter as well degrading Christine's position as independent creature. Since she is a woman, her life is ruled by her family, in this case is her own mother.

Seeing this case, oppression is not always done by men to women, but it can also done by women to women. Marion is a mother, she thinks that she has power to rule her daughter at best, even though it takes away Christine's freedom to decide. Christine's negative reaction to her mother insistence is the form of resistance. Christine has found that she is an independent woman who can decides whatever she likes so she wants her mother to respect her decision.

The last effort she can do to realize her dream studying in the East Coast is by asking her father, Larry, signing the letter of approval for scholarship form. She asked her father not to let her mom know about this (Gerwig, 2017: 14). This proves that Christine is trying to fulfill her desire with her own efforts. She knows well that her family has

economic problem, so she insisted to find out a way to get tuition fee. This situation shows us that a woman on that age has already had a firm decision on her own which is usually not existed on the mostly girls. The girls on that age tend to agree what their parents say and keep on the safe area and avoid a risky dream. This common character is not found in Christine's character. As a fresh graduate of a senior high school, she is quite confidence with her own decision. Her action is a picture of bravery, confidence, and firmness of an individual creature. She knows the risks, she takes the risks.

b. Christine's as Lady Bird

Christine calls herself as *Lady Bird* after a conflict with her mother, Marion. "*LADY BIRD: Call me Lady Bird like you said you would!*" (Gerwig, 2017: 4). She also introduces herself as Lady Bird to others (Gerwig: 2017, 30). This second name symbolizes a person who wants to release an original image under the name she/he has. By having another name after her real name, a person will unconsciously feel easier to express his/her own willing. Name of Christine brings too much image that is why refusing to use the real name and substituting it with the other name will make this person has new identity. The word "Lady" has something to do with adult women with respect, meanwhile the word "Bird" has something to do with an animal having wings enabling them to fly. This new name is assumed to give positive impact to Christine in social interaction. She can be anyone with that new identity and create new images to that name.

c. Christine Fight against the Image of Women

Women are described as soft, gently, polite, and mannered creatures. These women are also easy handled-creature with low expectation of providing themselves with self-definition, self-determination, and self-point of view. The more they keep on the track, the more they are respected as good women by its society. This of course creates dogma to the social desired image of women. The women not on

that characters are assumed to be bad women, which are unwanted. Men prefer to have good women on their sides, so it is easy to rule them the way men do.

Christine is the reflection of ‘bad women’ character. Her behavior is considered as fighting against the rules. She often come home late by sneaking, put all things not in order, cannot take care of her own good performance. She wears shabby uniform, which in turn, make her mother annoyed by saying that the family must be considered as shabby as well and it will prevent her husband of getting new job after being resigned from his previous job. Marion thinks that the way Christine behave will impact the way society sees them. As someone with that different character, Christine questions her mother whether she has ever gone to sleep without putting all clothes away perfectly (Gerwig, 2017: 30). The question reveals a fact that Marion’s mother (Christine’s grandmother) is said as a cruel alcoholic. It means that Marion’s past life time experience is not good with an alcoholic mother. This experience has taken part in shaping Marion’s life that she does not like an image of her cruel alcoholic mother represented through her own daughter. She considered that Christine need a strict rule to make her a good women, unlike her own mother. However, this strict rule finally pushes Christine to rebel by keep arguing to her mother about anything.

All things considered bad as women is rejected and corrected. Christine even tries to change the way a woman walk. She likes to drag her feet while walking, which is not expected by her mom. Marion always comments on the way Christine walk and pushes her to walk like a lady. Christine’s reaction to her mom “*Why didn’t you just say —Pick up your feet!*” (Gerwig, 2017: 36) is quite clear showing that she is strongly disagreeing on the idea of well-mannered-walking women. A woman cannot be ruled under an image of good women –like how they shall walk, since they are independent creature and have their own consideration and decision of their own identity and image.

- d. Christine Taking a Part-Time Job to Support her Tuition Fee

Considering her family economic problem, Christine decides to take a part-time-job to support her tuition fee. Another effort she can do after proposing a letter of financial assistance to get a scholarship. Her father can only help her signing the letter, after all is her own responsibility to earn money. Unsupported economically by the family, Christine uses her potential as a worker. She believes that a woman can be independent economically. This character is recalling us to the moment when his father, Larry, fired from the job. Her mother, Marion, feel so depressed and angry about losing the job. This shows that Marion is not independent economically, so she feels uneasy with that situation. Psychologically, it creates a pressure to woman dependent economically to a man. As a mom, Marion throws all the anger and feeling of disappointment to her own daughter, Christine. She scolded at whatever Christine do.

Through the character of Christine, the readers are asked to see the opposite. A mother is dependent to a man and a daughter who is independent to a family (a man and a woman). Christine believes that by taking a part-time job is enough to support her study in New York. “*LADY BIRD: -- no, no, I’ve got that, summer jobs covered it* (Gerwig, 2017: 49).

2. Christine’s Resistance toward the Wider Society

Stereotypes on women existed among society has been there to rule women as the other. Women posits second place after men, they cannot easily show up in public as creature with knowledge, desire, intention, dream, decision, and right to take part in every field of life. They tend to do lots of domestic activities taking care of their family, working as mom or wife with bunches of chores. Those activities prevent them taking part in the wider social relation. Their daily routine has taken their time away from being known in the society.

Christine, in this case is called as Lady Bird, is a character of woman on the opposite. She is a woman out of that stereotype. There are several actions taken by her showing her resistance toward the stereotypes such as

desiring as a leader, creating new identity as Lady Bird, and delivering her own perspective toward a sensitive-considered issue in the society.

a. Christine Desire as a Leader

Christine proposes herself as a leader nominee at the student presidential election. She made a poster of a girl with a bird's head and a bird with a girl's head. This poster of course creates chaos among her friends, however, she explained that it was only a picture and nothing wrong with that. She also mentions that her candidacy has become her own tradition and she is free to do that. *LADY BIRD: It's just a bird head on a lady body or vice versa.* (Gerwig, 2017: 6). *LADY BIRD: It's my tradition to run for office. Don't worry, I won't win.* (Gerwig, 2017: 6). She knows well that she has small chance to win the competition, but the point is that she can show up in the public bringing a new definition of woman to her school environment.

Being a woman does not prevent Christine from showing up her existence in the environment. Even though her action is considered strange, but according to her, it was just a normal thing to do as human who has desire to be a leader. When there is no one proposing her as a leader, she stands for her own nomination. This is a form of resistance and it is normal thing to do by women who need equality among society.

b. Christine's Self-Perspective on "Lady Bird" Name

Creating new identity can make a person have new beginning and hope. Calling herself "Lady Bird" rather than "Christine," she realizes all impossible things done by "Christine" through "Lady Bird." Once Father Leviatch questioned her name, whether it is a gift or what, she replies that the name is indeed a gift given by herself to herself. This is clear that she respects herself at best and thinks that the name will bring her a new beginning and hope. Lady Bird name is a symbol of freedom, of neglecting the social rules on the name "Christine" –as a woman, and of building new identity and self-control. Even though the word "Lady" still carries out genital status, yet the word "Bird" after it symbolizes freedom. To make sure that the name is well-known by her

environment, she always tries to display her name in every situation. *LADY BIRD: She take the pen and crosses out Christine and writes LADY BIRD. Leaves* (Gerwig, 2017: 20).

c. Christine's Positive Perspective toward Abortion

Being opponent to the stereotypes growing within the society is a character of resistance. It tries to reconstruct what has been there in the social system. Lady Bird did a strike on the topic of abortion. When people believe that abortion is illegal and supposed to be banned, she gives another perspective about that. *LADY BIRD: (loud) I said —Just because something looks ugly doesn't mean that it is morally wrong.* (Gerwig, 2017: 71). Her perspective toward the issue of abortion sets a clear alternative thought on it. It means that women have right to choose if they will deliver the baby or not. If they are not yet ready taking care of the baby, they have right to take an abortion to continue the live. She thinks that, abortion cannot be morally wrong. This is in line with the notion that women have right to control their own body. They are the owner of the body so they are the one can control it. Keeping the baby will not be good for their future, at that time, so abortion can be done for several logical reasons regarding to the safe of the life of the mother.

Lady Bird's statement was very strange for everyone present there. This proves that she put up a fight against the grips. Everyone only sees things from one side. They do not want to explore why something can happen as something is considered bad, so it is considered morally bad too.

Conclusion

Feminism is a series of social movements, political movements and ideologies that have the same goal, namely to define, develop and achieve gender equality in the political, economic, personal, and social spheres. Feminism combines the position that society prioritizes men's point of view, and that women are treated unfairly in that society. Efforts to change this include combating gender stereotypes and seeking to build equal opportunities for women.

Lady Bird is a movie setting clear a notion of women's freedom. Through its main character, Christine, spectators are asked to change their mind on the stereotypes addressed to women this far. Through the character of Christine, there is an alternative way of seeing women as an individual with their own perspective, desire, knowledge, wish, choice, decision and life goal. Despite various pressures in her family, Christine remains a strong character and dares to be responsible for her own choices.

Christine as Lady Bird has showed the world that people should start realizing the existence of women as men. They have similar right as men do, since they are both creatures created. No one can dominate one another, what they can do is working together to set a shared goal. Bad stereotypes on women among society need to deconstruct to find a new healthy alternative to treat women as individuals.

This movie does not speak explicitly about feminism, but the resistance conducted by the main character make women feels like they have a more role in society. Lady Bird has successfully tackled an issue that many movies about teenagers actually avoid. It brings a dynamic issue about women in a simple and funny way which can be easily accepted by its spectators. Even though the movie brings out the teenagers life as its main plot center, it still can give broader understanding to the adults especially the parents who have teenagers in the house. That through the character of Marion, Christine's mother, parents can start taking alternative to see their teenage daughters as real individual. Start stopping the stereotypes to their children will help the teenagers grow a better life. To end up this article, Lady Bird's is not only limited to women's issues. It also brings political interest in which is possible to reveal through a study. Female gaze on the movie to the women can be a political strategy for women to start a part on political life.

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