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The Construction of Feminism in Indonesian Film: *Arisan 2!*

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Abstract

Feminism in Indonesian society is related to the emancipation term that women nowadays have still been bringing up this issue. However, *Arisan 2!* film showed a shift in film discourse regarding the representation of cosmopolitan women in Indonesia. This research examines on how *Arisan 2!* film as a media portrays feminism in the society of Jakarta. Feminism in *Arisan 2!* film was likely to expose the liberal feminism in nowadays modern society through several issues of women's emancipation, specifically in the areas of marriage, job, and social life.

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1. Introduction

Arisan 2!, the controversial film that attracted much criticism from religious group and traditional group due to this film conveys lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered elements without censorship. Moreover, the representation of women in the current society in Jakarta could not be accepted by some groups. They consider this film as social breakdown and need to be banned in Indonesia. Tatyzo (2011, p.15) stated that "her films unflinchingly comment on the nature of patriarchy in Indonesia, and bring gender issues into mainstream society, culture and politics." Most of the requests to ban the film come from religious group particularly FPI and other Moslem groups, Aceh and Java Island. However, *Arisan 2!* played nationally in the late 2011 and received many pro and contra statements from the community surprisingly in regard to feminism and patriarchy.

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bringing up this issue. The gender equality between women and men cannot be located in balance position due to traditional norms, social values, religions and patriarchy ideology in Indonesia. Justice in gender equality is still less applied in Indonesian. The fundamental perception of traditional Asia women has changed gradually in Indonesian society. There is the new concept of feminism in several countries in Asia. Moreover, Fitzpatrick (2004, p.34) stated that Asia would have less number of divorces several decades ago by comparing to the West. This is because Asian cultures have tendency to ensure children, public perception and religion are in the priority list. However, this new modern era in Indonesia has been contributing fewer social pressures to stay married. Wealthy Indonesian women consider of being widows or single mothers as a proof that they can succeed financially with or without men in their lives. This can be judged as cultural shifting of feminism in Asian countries, particularly Indonesia.

This is also strengthening by what Papanek and Schwede (1988, p. 73) found that women are good with money through earning and managing the financial in Indonesia, particularly middle-class women in Jakarta. Although, the large Moslem populations are in Indonesia, where there is limited access for women and the dominant patriarchal system. On the other hand, large numbers of women are active in earning money even through professional career or informal activities. In addition, Papanek and Schwede (1988, p. 74) found that Indonesian women are more independent financially than before. Therefore, when divorce happens to them, they are capable to bringing up their kids most of the time without the financial support from their ex-husbands.

However, *Arisan 2!* exceeds the boundaries of a typical liberal feminism film, as it rather situated in the broader feminism movement in Indonesia. The film showed type of liberal feminism towards the society specifically in the areas of marriage, job and social life. Also, *Arisan 2!* represents a feminist film about portrayal of women in the media. Audience needs to know the portrayal of women in the society such as the patriarchal system, cultural values, traditional norms and social attitudes.

2. Equality in women

Arisan 2! is continuity of the previous *Arisan!*, which is the life of all the characters has changed after eight years. Meimei is back to single again after being cheated and left by her husband due to she cannot have a baby. Andien is still becoming a widow since her husband was dead after his affair confession. Lita is being a single parent and not deciding to have a husband or even letting know who the father of her kid to anyone. She is also in the high career to be vocal feminist in government who keep rejecting marriage institution in Indonesia. Nino and Sakti who were decided to break up and met the new partners. The *Arisan 2!* highlights the modern female word nowadays without being dependent to men and youth overrated. Women are free to choose what the best for their bodies and lives are without considering what others' thoughts.

In discussing the term of liberal feminism, McLaren (2002) stated that: Liberal feminism is characterized by its focus on equality. Men and women are thought to have the same rational capacities. On the basis of this, liberal feminists argue that men and women should be treated equally. If women are given the same educational, occupational, and political opportunities as men, the argument goes, they will realize their true potential and no longer be subordinate to men. The liberal feminism was popular in the first wave feminism particularly in Western culture. There was a big gap between men who had to do professional career at office while women only stayed at home and took care of their children at that time. In addition, there is a pressure between equality of rights and financial. The real conditions would be men who have more power over career and wealth, while most women would remain as housewives.

The concept of feminism has been growing widely from the early stage (1550s) until nowadays. The term of feminism has become vague. This journal concentrates on post feminism. The concept of feminism from the first until third wave has explained earlier in the beginning. It is compulsory to know what basically feminism against oppression in this society. It is patriarchal theory which is more applied in Asian countries or eastern culture. The patriarchal is generally taken all the perspective towards women as inferior group. Men lead the society to determine the concept of women, such as behavior, intellectual and communication in daily activities. The critical discourse analysis will investigate how far feminism in Indonesia applied in women that can be seen in the *Arisan 2!*, which is aimed to give an understanding towards society for specific purpose. The purpose of critical discourse analysis in *Arisan 2!* is about to know the women's voice from the construction of liberal feminism in order to against gender inequality and patriarchy system.

Wodak (1997) cited in Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000, p. 448) stated that CDA studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed. So, the selected language in dialogues in *Arisan 2!* and communication behavior feature in specific genres

have a prospective to become crucial critical tools. These can be treated as sources of meaning and information to be concentrated further.

3. Choices challenging patriarchy

It is compulsory to know what basically feminism against oppression in the society. It is patriarchal theory which is more applied in Asian countries or eastern culture. According to Weedon (1987) cited in Gamble (2002, p. 36), he defined that the term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interest are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labor and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference.

The term of patriarchal is generally taken all the perspective towards women as inferior group. Men lead the society to determine the concept of women, such as behavior, intellectual, and communication in daily activities. Patriarchy is a common system in Asian culture when women are normally subordinated by men for any condition. Men are considered to be more powerful in career, family and financial while women are considered to be less powerful in career and family. However, *Arisan 2!* shown differently by comparison within the reality. There are several character in this film, for instance a doctor who often be called Doctor Joy. She is a well-known doctor for perfect skin appearance. She was captured more powerful in career and financial. She was basically take care and make decision for her family. Another character is Meimei, who also captured as a divorced woman and could not have a kid from her previous marriage. In addition, Lita decided to give a birth without being married and having a husband. All of it represent the patriarchy system is no longer applied strictly in society. Doudaki noted that the feminism show's heroines challenge patriarchy with their lifestyle and everyday choices, they do not actually define themselves as it oppressed objects, as they have already achieved emancipation, which is primarily sexual, familial, financial (2012, p.9). Thus, women can take control of their lives.

Arisan 2! showed the women nowadays are brave to stay single and unmarried as long as they are happy. They could be accepted themselves as a delighted human being to enjoy life without official companion whether they are healthy or unhealthy. They believe their own rights to control their lives by not getting married when they are at young age. It is contradiction with society norms when female who are turning 20 years old and above are getting used to the question which is applied from their society. This was shown in the film when Moli and Lita explained why all people want to get married and they do not understand the good side of being married. Doudaki (2012, p.7) noted that the shows could be considered innovative, when the issues of women's sexual freedom are presented openly and interpretations of this freedom are offered, for instance sexual self-determination, free choice of partners, sex life outside the marriage frame. Moreover, *Arisan 2!* indicated of freedom women, who does not think that the marriage is the compulsory anymore, also the woman can make decision freely of partners in life.

In addition, divorce is not taboo anymore. When the marriage could not be fixed, it is better to be separated. Meimei in this case is brave to make decision to divorce with her husband. The reason of the divorce is her husband cheated on her because she cannot have a kid. Faithfull in unfolding the decay of patriarchal system, such as study of postfeminism in *Sex and the City* (popular television series in America) also found their characters put forwards a dual model of independence against the family institutions: towards their biological families and towards the institutions of marriage (Doudaki, 2012, p. 11).

Another character, Lita also has a kid without official husband. She did not get married. She enjoys enhance her career in politics. Important dialogue was shown by *Arisan 2!*, such as "*I am tired to respond them.*" and had response: "*It is your own risk Lit that you still want to reach your ambition to fix this country through inside the government system.*" and continued with answer from Lita: "*Geez Talu's face looks like his father now. Oh really? Who is the father then? When are you going to let him know? I am going to let him know later when he is grown up.*" The text representation could be categorized in liberal feminism. When women are free to reach their dreams, even the hardest part is dealing with the government, the women try to fix the country through internal system. They also have freedom to raise their kids without husband. The data of how Indonesian women have been changing gradually can be seen in Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia (2012), the data analysis from 2009 to 2011 indicated that almost 35% of Indonesian women are still not getting married and around 3% of Indonesian women are life divorced by her decision. This is interesting due to the percentage of Indonesian men who are still not getting married is 43% and only 1% of Indonesian men are life divorced by his decision. The data shown is aligned with the research result of construction of feminism in *Arisan 2!*.

Furthermore, Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia (2012) found the data of comparison between men

and women who have finished their bachelor degree in universities from 2009 to 2011 are similar in percentage. Men are 10,65% and women are 10,20% in the city. Education level plays the important role to approve the existence of gender equality term in Jakarta as one of big city in Indonesia. *Arisan 2!* could convey the promotion of sophisticated women in the society of Jakarta. The film showed women as active working person, busy, office and social needs oriented who most of the time spend their time in public sphere rather than domestic sphere. This is also strength by Ray (2006) through his belief as follow patriarchal societies propagate the ideology of motherhood which restrict women's mobility and burdens them with the responsibilities to nurture and rear children. The biological factor to bear children is linked to the social position of women's responsibilities of motherhood: nurturing, education and raising children by devoting themselves to family. This concept is preventing feminism ideology from assuring 100% active working women is fulfilling 100% of their domestic duties. Therefore, the liberal feminism is basically applied and developed in urban particularly society in Jakarta.

Arisan 2! promotes a liberal feminism ideology, yet against perception towards women that undermines women who are subordinated by men and staying at home. Moreover, traditional women are often being exposed in the other films. Women are almost mainly presented in the domestic instead of public. *Arisan 2!* captured women more in public and integrated public-domestic instead of full domestic. There are much attentions have been paid to the role of the media particularly film in constructing feminism ideology. In discussing feminism in integrated public-domestic segment, Johnston and Swanson (2003) found that women perceive "our jobs help us expand our minds, take pride in our achievements – and pay the bills." (p. 26) Feminism ideology of being a woman is highlighted in this phrase. Their jobs as working women are not only to get primary or additional income but also to enhance their knowledge and get rewards to what they achieve and contribute. Feminism take this as fulfilling women needs and wants also balance their rights and duties. Most active informants agreed that modern women are not mandatory to merely stay at home. They consider working outside house, enhancing their careers, manage their family and socialize in socialite groups are acceptable. This is also not only determining feminism against patriarchy system but also proving gender equality in the modern society.

Women are also allowed to express their femininity and do anything they want to do with their bodies. This can be seen in the film how the characters react towards tattoos, liposuction and botox. According to the main religion in Indonesia, tattoos are not allowed to be applied in body, particularly women. Women should not be worn outfits that are too sexy according to the main religion. According to Anti-Pornography Bill as known as RUU-APP (2008) cited in Tatzon (2011) explained as follow: How the Bill would be enforced and what constituted pornography were the dividing factors, and the rise in political and cultural Islam influenced this divide. Article 1 of the legislation broadly defines pornography as: pictures, sketches, illustrations, photos, writing, voice, sound, moving pictures, animation, cartoons, conversations, movements of the body, or other forms through a variety of communication media and/or performances in public which contain obscenity or sexual exploitation which violates the moral norms in society (p. 13).

However, the women characters in the film represent some women who live in Jakarta general. They have tendency to have perfect bodies by doing liposuction and botox. They have fully control of their lives and their choices to live. This can be seen on television that many actresses have tattoos and do liposuction and botox. They are open and not keeping these as a secret anymore. The third wave of feminism has applied in the context.

According to Johannsdottir (2009), she defined patriarchy in the perspective of radical and liberal feminism that:

Men have the power to create women's image, they are the editors, directors, photographers, designers etc. They have the power to define women. However even though women are gradually getting positions of authority the beauty-image seems not to be changing. Women's image provides that they are being stared at, the clothes they wear are more tight and colorful than the clothes men wear, their sex appeal is the only thing that matters, they try to look nice, stay in fashion and mind not being to boisterous, because they know they are being judged by their looks. The beauty-business, cosmetic producers and the sellers of various weight loss products make profits from keeping the image of female beauty in a tight leash. It is their vested interests to nourish women's inferiority complex and their feelings of imperfection (p. 20).

The patriarchy is basically taking control on how the way women like to be seen in the public. The appearance also determines the taste and financial level through styles and outfits. The sexual advertisement is related to liberal feminism which is freedom to choose what the best for women through their bodies, ideologies and behaviors. However, the key point is based on the power of men to define women whether all the cosmetics, beauty treatments,

botox and plastic surgeries have empowered them to look gorgeous in men's eyes. The judge could be men and other women in the society but the criteria are made by men.

On the other hand, the portrayal of women in *Arisan 2!* brings out the concept of liberal feminism that the beauty of women's bodies is on their own decision. It could be represented from the dialogue that said "*Real socialite has to be social not only appear in the parties, take photos anywhere and get published in the magazine right... Gotta go, anyone wants a few liposuction and Botox, it comes with a pre-launch party package! Be hurry to make appointment ya!*" Liberal feminism has linked to capitalism in some specific elements, such as their perfect looks through make-up, botox, plastic surgeries in order to make their appearances and representations that are going to be the proof of being outstanding in the society. Attending the glamorous party and getting publicity in the famous magazine is important for women as a proof of their existence in society. Therefore, it is mandatory for them to prepare and look fabulous in front of public and botox is one of their solutions to make it more perfect.

The Topic: "*Tattoo...*" and Subtopic: "*What are you trying to prove here?*" determines liberal feminism that most women characters in *Arisan 2!* have shown could not be applied to their kids. The character of Andien, who is one of women that represents liberal feminism but she is shocked and disagreed when her children have tattoos in their bodies without her permission. Andien as a single parent plays the role of traditional mother in domestic sphere that shows she is hygiene freak and against tattoo for children under 17 years old. According to MacCormack (2006, p. 6), she described this phenomenon as tattooed women can be represented as being tattooed because of body dissatisfaction, to attain a certain image as a result of social pressures to appear attractive. Simultaneously a woman with tattoo is more likely to be represented as unfeminine, extreme or radically departing from the norms of feminization.

In addition, Atkinson (2001) cited in Wohlarb, Stahl and Kappeler (2006, p. 88) in discussing about tattoo in feminism perspective conclude that what people valued most about their own body modification was "being different", so tattoos, in particular, can resemble attempts to accentuate one's sense of self-identity as well as "to attain mastery and control over the body" explored the meaning of tattoos specifically from women's perspective and found that female tattoos have various functions, including cultural rebellion but also personal reclamation and self-definition. Therefore, there is a connection between tattoos and liberal feminism. Liberal feminism conveys being different and stand out from the male-dominated is the main concept that needs to be proved in the society. The identity of woman by being to attain mastery and control over the body is crucial to be highlighted in liberal feminism. The concept to attain mastery and control over their bodies can be applied in women's own decision to have tattoos, liposuction, botox and any plastic surgeries. All of those embody their self definition of constructing what women they want to be perceived in the society. It is the era of liberal feminism movement to show the world that women have power to control their own bodies. It is their own call without being interfered from others. Women are more confident, satisfied and happy toward their bodies that impact to their lives as well. It is not a lifestyle but it is more a liberal feminism action for women.

4. Conclusion

The film exposes the liberal feminism in nowadays society through delivering several women issues. Several aspects which was considered taboo in the past or might still some group nowadays consider it as taboo, were captured explicitly by *Arisan 2!* Nia Dinata, as a director of *Arisan 2!* is one of evidences that women are capable to transform knowledge and sensibility to public and audience through their big role in film-making or cinema. *Arisan 2!* portrayed the liberal feminism strongly through textual analysis in most of scenes. The demonstration of feminism is significantly varied. Feminism in *Arisan 2!* was likely to present women more in public settings rather than domestic setting. Moreover, this film constructed the women in active working women as fearless, tough, free spirit, brave to speak their minds, control their lives, and interested in political. Also, the film portrays woman in self-improvement, health issues, relationship, body and beauty issues as well.

The images of women in *Arisan 2!* represented women in beautiful faces, appearances, ideal figures, smart, fashionable, sophisticated, consumptive, independent, object of sex fantasy and against traditional portrayal. In the contrary with women in Eastern-minded who still hold the value of Eastern culture in traditional codes such as ethics, moral and behaviors; for instance, women should not wear appropriate suits to cover their bodies. Super mini and tight clothes are considered inappropriate in the society. *Arisan 2!* also constructed the term of hybridism which is defined by Falah (2001, p. 7), she stated this term apply when women have higher education and job salary in marriage and freedom to choose for being single all the time or being married or being divorced as well. They still consider marriage in traditional value as discussing their decision towards family.

The analysis results indicate that *Arisan 2!* perceives strong liberal feminism. They agreed the term of hybridism

when women have higher education and job salary in marriage and freedom to choose for being single all the time or being married or being divorced as well. They still consider marriage in traditional value as discussing their decision towards family. However, they do not think that is the compulsory anymore. Women can make their own decision bravely freely in their life. So, there are significant tendencies that the stage of feminism in Indonesia is about the gender equality and choices to challenge patriarchy.

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