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Judul :The american myth of nuclear family in patriarchal society as reflected in the movie the stepford wives 2004 by Frank oz

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

A movie is an imitation of the real phenomenon happens in the society. So does in America, movies are the reflection of the myths, beliefs, and values of America. Therefore, it is inevitably that the themes of the Hollywood movie are always the reflection of the society itself. For example, movies produced post the World War II were about the effort of America to win the war. Another example is *Jaws* (1975), which was considered to be an allegory for the Watergate conspiracy. (<http://www.filmsite.org/disasterfilms.html>, cited on 15th December 2005).

Realizing the fact that movie is an imitation of the real phenomenon, which reflects the myths, beliefs, and values of a society, the researcher takes movie *The Stepford Wives* by Frank Oz made in 2004. The movie is about the gender war between men and women in competition to gain the highest status in society. It was

starred by Nicole Kidman as Joanna Eberhart, Matthew Broderick as Walter Kresby, Glenn Close as Claire Wellington and Christopher Walken as Mike Wellington.

“Joanna Eberhart (Nicole Kidman) is successful television producer on the verge of yet another emmy-winning streak of TV shows when she is fired from her job at a prestigious network. She then has a mental breakdown and her husband Walter (Matthew Broderick) and their two children (Dylan Hartigan, Fallon Brook) move to Stepford, Connecticut, the most perfectly perfect little town there ever was. The women of Stepford spend all day knitting, gardening in beautiful dresses, and are the most splendid of all women on earth. Soon, Joanna along with her best-selling author buddy, Bobby, (Bette Midler) and Democratic, flamboyant fairy friend Roger (Roger Bart) realize that something isn't right in Stepford. All is not perfect as it seems, especially after Roger and Bobbie are turned into perfect portraits of Stepford. Summary written by Justin Tyler, int0xicat3xm3@001.com.

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0327162>, cited on 15th December 2005)).

The film was actually the remake of movie with the same title, which was made in 1975. The former was directed by Bryan Forbes and starred Katharine Ross, Paula Prentiss, Tina Louise and Patrick O'Neal. (www.intercorsewiththedeath.com/stepford.htm, cited on 15th December 2005))

Both were based on the novel by Ira Levin. In the novel, Levin described the contradiction between what men wanted and what women wanted. It was published in 1972 when he lived in Wilton, Connecticut. He wrote it while going through divorce. At that time, he had read a popular book called '*Future Shock*' and had become fascinated with its references to domestic robots. The other influence was the animated figure in the Hall of Presidents at Disneyland. From those, he got the idea to write the novel about robot wives.

The most important influence was the phenomenal event in 1972 that then encouraged him to write the novel. 1970s were the time when the Women's Liberation movement reached its peak. Everyday, people could see the women demonstrated to get what they wanted. New form of feminism appeared in the early 1970. There were more meetings and demonstrations to gain women's rights. The movement reached its peak in 1975 with more than 300 feminist events happened in 1972 when Congress acknowledged women's political power by approving ERA on March 22, 1972. (Evans translated by Sri Kusdyantinah Sb:1994:266-267). At that time, women saw men as enemies. The radical feminists aroused and it bothered men. Within this situation, Levin thought that it was the men's turn to show what they wanted about American women. Therefore, Levin's purpose in writing this book was a criticism toward the women's movement at that time. The word 'stepford' itself means anyone who allowed their role in society to be dictated to them by someone else. In this case, by changing the women to be robots, the husbands can dictate and control their wives, so they can keep the existence of a male dominated society. An important way that is believed can defend the male's position is the myth of nuclear family as the most perfect family form. Some feminists from the period before 1980s believed that nuclear family was a major site of women's oppression created by patriarchal society.

As we know, nuclear family consists of father, mother, and children without any other relatives. The patriarchal society creates this family unit with father as the provider, and mother should stay at home taking care of the children. The feminist

believed that this ideal form of family unit buried women's intellectualism and creativity. The 1970s and the periods before were very hard for the career women. Women would be considered as 'sick' if she was more successful than men. But at the present time when career women are very common, the society still consider that in nuclear family women should stay at home, while earning money is men's duty. It means that the myth of nuclear family, both in 1970s and at the present time still exist in the society as reflected in both movies *The Stepford Wives* 1975 and 2004. Realizing the fact, the researcher will focus only on *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz as the research object in describing the myth of nuclear family.

B. Scope of Study

To limit the discussion of the research object, the researcher emphasizes and focuses on describing and analyzing the American myth of nuclear family in the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz.

C. Problem Statement

How does the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz reflect the American myth of nuclear family in patriarchal society?

D. The Objective of the Research

To describe how the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz reflects the American myth of nuclear family in patriarchal society.

E. The Benefits of the Research

This research is done to give a contribution to the readers especially the American Studies students in achieving a better understanding about American society.

F. The Research Methodology

1. The Type of the Research

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative, that is answering the problem statement by describing and analyzing the answers.

“Qualitative data consist of *detailed descriptions of situations*, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; *direct quotations* from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondences, records, and case histories.” (Patton,1984:22)

It is plainly mentioned that qualitative research involves qualitative data which has criteria as mentioned above. It means that description in analyzing the data is the main point in qualitative research. It needs a detailed and deep description to get maximum result.

“Qualitative attributes have labels or names rather than numbers, assigned to their respective categories” (Bailey,1987:60-61). According to Bailey, qualitative research deals with anything except numbers. If it involves numbers, they appear not in mathematical ways. For example, the second street, or house number 2.

In analyzing the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz, the researcher describes any data found in the movie, such as the facial expression, the settings, dialogues, body language, costumes, make up, and lightings, and also the characters in the movie. They are described in very detail and deep way to get a deep analysis about the movie so it is easy to answer the problem statement.

2. Theoretical Approach

In answering the problem statements, the researcher applies:

a. Socio-psychological theory

An individual is integral with the society because society influences what an individual does and thinks. What women and men wanted and did in this movie were in contrast and each had been influenced by the phenomenon in society. For that, the researcher applies socio-psychological approach in analyzing the myth of nuclear family.

“Socio-psychological approach is concerned with understanding the wide range of condition that shape the social behaviors and thought of individuals” (Baron and Byrne, 1997: 8). According to Baron and Byrne, the condition plays an important role in shaping what an individual does and thinks. Society does really shape a human being’s perspective, opinion, and belief. What people see will lead them into a conclusion. If someone lives in an environment which has some rules, he or she is obliged to follow the rule. At first perhaps it is an obligation, but then he or she will internalize the rules and it is not an obligation anymore because they get used to. Socio-psychological theory is used in this research since it helps the researcher to

expose the different points of view of the characters of Joanna Eberhart and Claire Wellington, and also the reason of the differences in the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004.

b. Cultural Approach

Stuart Hall in Storey (1996) says that cultural studies covers many different kinds of work (Storey:1996:1). The studies deal with large numbers of discussion. Storey himself defines cultural studies as the text and practices of everyday life instead of culture in narrow sense as the objects of aesthetic or intellectual work. He believes that the cultural studies refer to all of the things in our daily life.

In the other part of the book, he adds that popular culture is one of the objects discussion in cultural studies (Storey:1996:2). Popular culture refers to the product of human work and thought as what Nachbar and Lause say (1992). To understand more about popular culture, we have to look also at the other cultures. There are folk culture and elite culture. Folk culture refers to the culture that developed within limited community and is usually communicated from generation to generation orally. Folk song is an example for folk culture. The next culture is elite culture. It refers to the culture that is produced by and for those who have special interest, training or knowledge. A play of Shakespeare is an example. What should be noticed is that those cultures, including popular culture, have nothing to do with stupidity or poverty. No culture is considered better or worse than the other (Nachbar and Lause:1992: 15-16). This means that when we talk about culture, it has nothing to do with good or bad, educated or uneducated, primitive or modern.

Among the three cultures, popular culture has major portion of a society's total way of life. It surrounds us and it reflects as well as it shapes the audience's beliefs and values. The condition in the society should not be ignored since the culture is the product of the society. The movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 is a culture's product which embody the beliefs and values. So, by understanding the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz as the culture's product, the researcher can be objective in analyzing and answering the problem statement.

c. Feminist Approach

Men demand the ideal wives who society calls 'the perfect wives'. Perfect here means perfect in the eyes of the patriarchal society and usually emphasizes on the need and benefit of the men only.

Some feminist believed that by giving the same educational and occupational opportunities men are provided could eliminate the gender inequity (Tong, 1998: 130). Men always consider that women should not have to get well education as well as men do because those men believe that those women will not need it. What is believed to be needed by those women is only the skill of taking care of the house such as cooking and knitting, or maybe sewing. The best thing for women is staying home and taking care of the house including the children while the man should get the well education as well as job. If some women go out to work, they do not think about getting a high position or respected career. It will be inappropriate for them. By having a high education as well as the men do, women can get elite jobs, too, and it of course makes them get respected.

Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes that each man is in search of the ideal woman—that is, the woman who can make him whole. But because men's basic needs are so similar, their ideal women tend to look the same (Tong,1998:192). As what has been mentioned before, an individual does not exist separated from the society, which includes individuals. What a person does can influence someone else to have the same actions. Especially when they have the same interest and purpose. It finally results the same thought and actions.

The movie told us that all the husbands in Stepford turned their wives into robots. Those husbands had the same purpose and aims, which is to defend their position in the society. In making their wives into robots, they will have what they want from women. Those wives had the same characteristics such as beautiful, slender, and always did what their husbands told them to do. They had the same vision and mission in the life that was to dedicate their life to their family.

Applying feminist approach in this thesis makes it possible for the researcher to see how society see women as individuals and wives and finally can help the researcher in answering the problem statement.

b. Historical approach

This thesis involves the historical approach since the movie which becomes the subject matter contains the fifties values that can be seen from the costumes. Present time is understandable if we have the knowledge of the past. That is why, the researcher considers it very important to know the American life in fifties especially about the image of the women at the decade since this movie wants to bring back the

fifties life. At fifties, the image of American wives is called the most American perfect wives ever. During the decade, America had political conflict dealt with Cold War. When the suspense was getting higher and threatened America and the whole world, society pointed out mother as the important and influential figure who people got protection and comfort. Women were demanded to always be alert toward any matter dealt with their families. They were the warm place where people run to during the unfriendly and suspicious situation. Media kept raising the issue that it was a noble duty of women to get married soon and have a lot of babies. Focusing on the families was the duty of the women. By exploring the history of the women's image during the fifties decade enable the researcher to understand the values dealing with women's image during the decade and eventually can help the researcher in finding the answer to the problem statement.

c. Popular Culture theory

Popular culture tells us what we are now, what we have been in the past and where the two overlap to define what we may always be. It is tightly related to the spirit of an era (Nachbar and Lause,1992:4-5). When something is popular at a certain time, it reflects what happens in the society. A product will be popular if it contains belief and values of the society. And as the formula of the popular culture, the more popular a product is, the more it reflects the society.

In popular culture, myth lies on the ground, which means that as the base where everything starts, myth is the most stable and the strongest values than the other elements of popular culture since it forms the cultural mindset.

“Myth says nothing about ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ of any belief or value; it says that the belief/value is significant and long lasting-vital to mindset of the culture, which holds it-and that is widely accepted as being true (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 84).” Myth talks about beliefs and values that are believed and accepted to be true. The myth is usually passed down from parents to children and it is long lasting. There are many myths in America, one of them is myth of nuclear family. The nuclear family in America is believed to be the most ideal family form even we can find that single parents are very common in America. It means that the myth exists in America and it is stable in society. So by applying the popular culture theory in which the theory of the myth is included, the researcher has the proof of the long lasting existence of the nuclear family in America and can reveal why the men defend it.

d. Semiotic Film theory

Semiotic or *semiology*, or sometimes called *semiosis*, according to French philosopher Roland Barthes, is learning how humanity signifies the things (Sobur, 2003: 15). While Peirce, an American philosopher defined ‘semiosis’ as a relationship among a sign, an object, and a meaning (Sobur,2003:15). From those definitions, we can underlie that those philosophers see *semiotic*, or *semiology*, or in another term *semiosis*, as a study about signs. Semiotic is a field of study of analyzing signs to reveal the meanings that lie behind them. The word *semiotic* originally came from Greeks, *semeion* which means ‘sign’ or *seme* which means ‘the interpreter of the sign’ (Sobur,2003:16).

A film consists of signs which contain certain meanings. The visual image of the picture in film imitates the reality. Characters in the movie are the portraits of the real persons in the real life. They eat the same way the real person eats and people have the convention that they do what people call 'eat'. That is why a movie is an imitation of the real life. To deliver the message, it involves the visual images and the linguistic. Visual images refer to the pictures, while linguistic refers to the words used in dialogue. As Van Zoest said:

“Van Zoest (Van Zoest, 1993:109), film dibangun dengan tanda sematamata. Tanda-tanda itu termasuk sebagai system tanda yang bekerja sama dengan baik untuk mencapai efek yang diharapkan. Berbeda dengan fotografis statis, rangkaian gambar dalam film menciptakan imaji dan sistem penandaan.” (Sobur,2003:128)

The pictures are not simply visual images. The whole pictures and added by sound (dialogues, music, or the sound of the slamming door) create meanings and messages. The closer the film to the reality, the more touching the film will be. “Sistem semiotika yang lebih penting lagi dalam film adalah digunakannya tanda-tanda ikons, yakni tanda-tanda yang menggambarkan sesuatu” (Sobur,2003:128). Film uses the icons that describe and contain some messages which can lead the audience's conclusion toward what they are watching, and finally, the purpose of the director will be gained.

The icons symbolize some meaning, for example, flower is identical with women and beauty, red symbolizes the passion or anger, and the loud music symbolizes the tension of the story, and etc.

Semiotic film theory is applied in this thesis as the tool to reveal the message behind the sign found in the movie.

3. Data and Source of Data

a. Source of Data

Data and source of data used in this research is VCD *The Stepford Wives* by Frank Oz, and starred by Nicole Kidman as Joanna Eberhart, Matthew Broderick as Walter Kresby, Glenn Close as Claire Wellington and Christopher Walken as Mike Wellington. The movie was produced by Dream Works and Paramount Pictures in 2004 and distributed in Indonesia by **Medialine** Entertainment.

b. Main Data

Since the aim of this research is to give an explanation about the American myth of nuclear family as reflected in the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004, the main data used in this research are the facial expression, settings, dialogues, body language, costumes, make up, and lightings, in the movie.

c. Supporting Data

Supporting data used to support this research are from movie reviews, the script and articles about the movie *The Stepford Wives* 2004 by Frank Oz and also the other related articles.

G. Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter is introduction which consists of research background, scope of the research, and problem statement, the objective of the research, the benefits of the research, the research methodology, and thesis organization.

Chapter II is literature review. In this chapter, the researcher discusses five subchapters. They are second wave feminism and women's issue in 2004, socio-psychological theory, theory of myth of nuclear family, stereotype, and semiotic film theory.

In chapter III, the researcher analyzes the data and answers the problem statement. In the chapter IV, the researcher draws conclusion and gives suggestion about the subject matter discussed.