



A CRITIQUE TOWARDS MEN'S SUPERIORITY IN THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

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Abstract

This study is aimed to explain how men's superiority is criticized in the culture of ancient Greece as reflected in the myth of Sisyphus. This is a descriptive qualitative study by using deconstruction of Derrida as the approaches. I collected the data from the myth of Sisyphus in The Greek Myths by Robert Graves, then I observed the binary oppositions appeared in the myth. Besides, I also considered on the culture of ancient Greece. Based on the theory provided, the data were analyzed one by one to find out the subversion of the ancient Greece culture as reflected in the myth of Sisyphus. This study finally found that the ancient Greece culture did not have concept about men's superiority in their cultural system. Therefore, men who were claimed as the superior one to women did not have their superiority because the cultural system of ancient Greece did not have concept about men's superiority.

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INTRODUCTION

Greek culture has contributed to the raise of western culture. Even, the concept of democracy that people recognize today purportedly was coming from the ancient Greek culture. It is one of the examples about how great the ancient Greek culture was. Therefore, the influence of their culture is still taking effect until now. In this paper, I discuss about an important aspect of ancient Greek's patriarchal culture which states that men is superior to women.

In patriarchal system, women were assumed as the second while men were the first; in this system of culture, men were also assumed to dominate women in his role in public life. In the opposite, women were not important. Moreover, the thinker Aristotle in Bressler (1998: 180) said that "the man is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled." Men precisely are stronger than women. Consequently, there is no fault if women were subordinated or feel subordinated. For women, patriarchy may seem unfair; but for men, patriarchy is fair because men feel and realize that they were created to be strong creator. Moreover, the patriarchal values are also materialized in the Greek mythology which has been claimed to be the belief system of the ancient Greeks.

Therefore in this paper, I tried to appreciate the myth of Sisyphus, one of the Greek myths' characters. In the myth, Sisyphus was popular with his cunning and intelligence. This was argued by Albert Camus in his essay entitled *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus referred to the book of Homer by saying that Sisyphus was a king of Corinth. Besides he was worshiped by his slaves and a cunning king. Unfortunately, Sisyphus was punished by Zeus by rolling a stone up to a hill; when the stone reached the top of the hill, it would roll down again and again. Therefore, Sisyphus had to roll it up again. This was called as the eternal punishment because Sisyphus would not be able to finish it. Ironically, Sisyphus was punished because he had betrayed Zeus who had kidnapped and seduced Asopus' daughter, Aegina.

Slightly, the characters who dominate the myth were men: Zeus, Sisyphus, and Asopus. Moreover,

Zeus in Greek mythology was told to have the most powerful power to rule all creatures. And, the myth also told that Zeus had kidnapped Aegina, killed Asopus, and punished Sisyphus. Therefore, the power of Zeus highly dominated as a god of gods and as a ruler. By those reasons, this paper would criticize about men's superiority as reflected in the myth of Sisyphus.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

As an effort to criticize men's superiority reflected in the myth of Sisyphus, I applied deconstructive approach suggested by Jacques Derrida. Besides, I also used women's studies to support my arguments in criticizing men's superiority. The following paragraph simply explains about deconstruction approach and women's studies.

Jacques Derrida was a figure who popularized deconstruction approach. He rejected all centralisms. He refused the patterns of structuralism. Therefore, he suggested that every centralism was not absolute. It could be substituted or even be replaced. Philosophically, Derrida stated that truth is not absolute; while, the wrong might be true. Considering the method he used, Derrida offered to read the text in detail at first (Endraswara, 2008: 70). Therefore, by reading the text, the reader would understand the structure of the text; and, at once the reader may also be wondering and questioning about the lack of the text. Finally, by questioning and wondering a text, a new alternative meaning could be covered and emerged substituting the previous centralistic meaning.

Another study I wanted to use in this paper was women's studies. I used them to strengthen my argument in criticizing men's superiority. The reason was because of the women character in the myth of Sisyphus was assumed to be weak and be inferior. So, I tried to empower women character by applying women's studies in order to attest critically to men's superiority. Here, I would consider on the study of Simone de Beauvoir who was a French feminist. According to the theory she suggested, Beauvoir

(Tong, 1998) seemingly used the argument of existentialism philosophers by considering on the hierarchy of men and women. Generally, she asserted that women should drop her status as the inferior one. She should escape from men's dominance. By that way, women would not be inferior to men.

In this paper, I used the myth of Sisyphus as my material object. The myth of Sisyphus is a myth of Greek. He was told to get punishment from Zeus. Besides, the formal object of this paper is men's superiority as materialized in ancient Greece. Here, I would discover the weaknesses of men. Therefore, to begin my observation, the first step I did was observing the structure of the myth of Sisyphus. Here, I presented what the myth tried to say about men's superiority. After I had got the structure, at once I also found out the binary opposition appeared in the myth. Then, the binary oppositions which had a concept of centralism were reversed. I mean to emerge the non-centralism aspects in the myth of Sisyphus related to men's superiority. Finally, I could obtain the new interpretations of the myth. However then, I also used women's studies to support my argument to criticize men's superiority.

ANALYSIS

The myth of Sisyphus offers an idea about the binary opposition of men and women. Men were asserted superior to woman. The myth told that Chione had been related with two men, Hermes and Apollo. From Hermes, Chione had born Autolykus who later stole the cattle of Sisyphus; besides, from Apollo, Chione had born Phillamon. About this case, the ethnographic evidence of ancient Greek society proves that Chione was the victim of those two men. In another side, Chione herself cannot reject the reality that she had been seduced and victimized by Hermes and Apollo.

The facts say that the ancient Greek depended on patriarchal system (Caldwell, 1963: 121). Woman was subordinated by moral law which inclined to patriarchy; and, because of this patriarchal system woman was subordinated. They were assumed as the second creature in the life of ancient Greek

society. Women were shoved aside; and even, women should feel how painful to be women. For instance, they had to let their husband went out for cheating with others women. Conversely, the husband was free to have relation with more than one woman.

However, it differs to Sisyphus who had only one legal wife, Merope. Therefore, I argue that Sisyphus and Merope had their monogamy marriage. What happened to Sisyphus for sure differs from what had happened with Chione who had relation with two men. In Sisyphus' side, Merope was the one who had born Glaucus, Orniytion, and Sinon. Moreover, Merope was told as a loyal woman because she had save Sisyphus when he had been fetched down to underworld forcedly by Zeus.

In this stage, I can assert that there were two different representations of women characters as reflected in the myth of Sisyphus. Chione was purely the victim of the superiority of men; otherwise, what had happened to Merope was not a domination of men, but it was Merope's loyalty. Chione was represented as a weak woman because she had two men in her sexual relation; in another side, Merope was represented as a strong woman because she might be loyal to a man, Sisyphus. These two representations indicate that women were not merely assumed become weak, but women can give strength and become the savior of men; as what Simone de Beauvoir had stated in Rosemarie Putnam Tong (2008: 67) that men precisely attract woman because women can save men from destruction and death.

The same interpretation can also be seen in the story about Zeus who killed Asopus. The god of river, Asopus, was told to save his daughter who had been kidnapped by Zeus; but in the end, Asopus was killed by Zeus. The heroism of Asopus to save her daughter for sure had disturbed Zeus who seduced her because of love and desire; therefore, Zeus killed him. It implies that Zeus had his heart to kill Asopus because of a girl. Besides, it slightly at first indicates that Zeus was a strong one who has power. However, it was not the final point. Otherwise, Zeus was a weak man compared to Aegina. Aegina with her natural attraction of a girl was able to blind Zeus. Her attraction had made Zeus attracted; and, he did not want to loose her. Even, to hold Aegina, Zeus was

able to kill Aegina's father. Therefore, I predict that Zeus and Asopus depends on Aegina because if Aegina did not exist, so Zeus would not kill Asopus and Asopus would not look for her. In short, if previously I say that men can do anything to woman, so now I persuade to realize that men depend on woman existence; and, because of women, men was permitted to gain power and wealth.

I explained about kidnapping and seducing done by Zeus and Sisyphus. The myth told that Zeus kidnapped and seduced Aegina; and' Sisyphus seduced two women, Anticleia and Tyro. At a glance, men dominated women by the action of kidnapping and seducing. However, I precisely ignored an important question about the motive why those men, Zeus and Sisyphus, kidnapped and seduced. It was told that Zeus kidnapped because he wanted Aegina to be his paramour, but Sisyphus seduced Anticleia and Tyro because Sisyphus' hatred to their fathers, Autolycus and Salmoneus.

The interesting point here is that why Sisyphus had to seduce? And, why did not Sisyphus kill their fathers? Therefore, one thing should be realized that women are valuable for any men. Consequently, a man who wants to defeat his competitors should defeat their women at first. I mean that a men depends himself to a woman. Sisyphus knew well about that condition. He wanted to revenge on Autolycus and Salmoneus, so he seduced their daughter to fulfill his vengeance. By seducing Anticleia and Tyro, Sisyphus had felt that he had defeated Autolycus and Salmoneus. Therefore, it indicates that how worthy a woman is for men. In short, women are not anymore weak; but, women were more worthy than men; and, that is why men become weak and depend on women.

Next, the myth told about Zeus' decision to punish Sisyphus which was actually emotional and individual decision; I meant it was a decision which was far from Zeus' role as ruler and god. Why did I find that it is individual and emotional? It was because Sisyphus knew that Zeus had kidnapped Aegina; and, Sisyphus betray the secret to the father of Aegina, Asopus. Finally, Zeus punished Sisyphus to die to fetch him down to the underworld. So, I found that the main problem here was because of Aegina. Again,

because of Aegina Zeus killed Asopus; and, because of Aegina, Sisyphus was fetched down to the underworld.

I found that the representation of men's superiority had been depraved even in the Greek mythology and Greek's culture. Zeus was the strongest and powerful god in Greek mythology. Edith Hamilton (2009: xx) says that Zeus was more powerful than sun. Besides, Zeus as a ruler might punish men who lied and betrayed him. However in the opposite, Edith Hamilton (2009: 3) also states that Zeus was afraid of his wife, Hera. Therefore, Zeus silently had affairs with women. Here, I argue that Zeus was actually weak. The strong one was his wife, Hera; he was afraid of her.

Therefore, in a weak status, women is subordinated and assumed unimportant. Women always became the victim of seducing with different reasons both because of desire and because of vengeance. Otherwise, men are much more powerful. They, men, freed to do anything to the women. The men seduced them; and, the men had right to have affair with women whoever he likes. In this case, the women were for sure subordinated. However, does the condition do so? It does not, because from my explanations above, women are not absolutely subordinated by the presence of men; but, it should be men who depends on the women. For instance, as what had happened with Merope, Merope was the savior of his husband, Sisyphus, from the claw of Zeus's punishment. If Sisyphus did not get the help from his wife, he might not escape from the underworld. Here men precisely had to thank to the women as the men's savior. Contrariwise, men had in fact betrayed the women as the men ignore that the women were the savior as what Rosemarie Putnam Tong (2008: 267) had stated before that women is the savior for men. Now, who surely had betrayed and ignored? And, who surely had worthy and goodness?

Then, I am going to present about the binary opposition between superiority and inferiority appeared in the myth of Sisyphus. Here, I am going to emphasize to the character of Zeus who besides his role as a ruler, he was also the god of the god in which with his words and orders, Zeus could do anything and have anything with no exceptions. Moreover, he

also had a cover towards punishment because he was the ruler who made the rules, who decide decisions and who had right to punish. Here, Zeus was assumed as the absolute power to what had and will happen with his men including killing them who disobeyed his words and order; and, who betrayed him. Here, I wanted to assert on Caldwell's statement that the role of men in the ancient Greece civilization was highly dominant. It was what the means of patriarchal system culturally and socially that men dominated women with all men's strength and power.

Zeus killed Asopus because of Aegina. Zeus asked Hades to fetch down Sisyphus to the underworld; in other words, Sisyphus had to be killed. The first, Zeus killed Asopus because he was trying to get back his daughter, Aegina, who had been kidnapped and seduced by Zeus. The second, Zeus ordered Hades to kill Sisyphus because Sisyphus had barely betrayed the secret of Zeus that actually Zeus had kidnapped and seduced Aegina. Here, I see that there exists the absolute and unfair power of Zeus to subordinate his men. But, was it true that Zeus had an absolute power towards them, Sisyphus and Asopus?

I argue that Sisyphus and Asopus might become the victim of Zeus' superiority, but their inferiority precisely indicates Sisyphus and Asopus' heroism and honesty. Asopus was a hero because he was brave to challenge Zeus' immorality who had kidnapped and seduced his beloved daughter; if Asopus later died under Zeus' hands, it indicates that Asopus truly understood if he would die. In sentence 17, it was stated "Zeus, who had narrowly escaped Asopus vengeance." It indicates that he had tried to take his right back and he had become a responsible father for his daughter. In this case, Zeus' superiority did not have impact on Asopus' bravery; the superiority of Zeus did not make Asopus afraid to show his deeds as a responsible father; and, a father who loved his child.

Zeus' superiority for sure did not make something important for Sisyphus. Sisyphus prefers to say in honest by giving the information to Asopus that Zeus had kidnapped and seduced his daughter. Sisyphus who was honest and brave finally opposed the superiority of Zeus for the sake of honesty and truth. Moreover, besides the honesty which had had

by Sisyphus, the myth also told that Sisyphus give the information to Asopus because Sisyphus wanted his men get water from the river of Asopus; Sisyphus wanted the supply of the Asopus' river by giving Asopus the information as the compensation. Therefore, now I see that over his honesty, Sisyphus also has the sense of love to his men and society. Sisyphus would not let his society lived in drain and lived without water supply. Even though in the end, Sisyphus should die, as what happened to Asopus; and, he forcedly was fetched down to the underworld because of his honest and his love to his society.

Then now, I discuss about the binary opposition of godliness and lust in the myth. I am emphasizing on the godliness which was had by god not only Zeus as the god of god but also other gods such as Asopus and Persephone. Was it true that the godliness had dominated in the soul of the gods, or was there any other sides that should be looked at seriously about the godliness they have? The myth told that Zeus, as a god, had killed Asopus; and, he also asked Hades to kill Sisyphus. Besides, it was also told that Zeus had abducted and kidnapped the daughter of Asopus; she was Aegina. Besides, Persephone and Zeus also had been cheated by Sisyphus. I argue that they have causal relation. At first, Zeus kidnapped Aegina. Since Asopus told to Asopus that Zeus had kidnapped his daughter, Zeus had to kill Asopus who made effort to get his daughter back. Then, Sisyphus was forcedly fetched down to the underworld because he had betrayed the Zeus secret. In underworld, Sisyphus also cheated Persephone in order to escape from underworld and went back to the upper world.

From the explanation above, the gods like Zeus as the god of god, Asopus the god of river, and Persephone who had important role in underworld involved in the homicide, abduction, seduction, and infidelity. Some of the gods were the doers of those deeds; and, at once they were also the victims of it. Zeus produced the homicide to Asopus and Sisyphus; and, the abduction and seduction was targeted to Aegina. In another side, the god of river Asopus became the victim of Zeus' strength and absolute power. Besides, Persephone and Zeus became the victims of infidelity which was done by Sisyphus.

Then, I pose my argument to be contrasted with the presence of the godliness of the gods. For instance, was it true that the godliness highly appear from the deeds of god? Or, any other interpretations? Firstly, I persuade to realize that the deeds of killing, seducing, and cheating are not anymore the deeds which should be had by the gods. I hereby see that the only the river of God Asopus who actually had the capacity as a god because he had worthy deeds of godliness. It can be proved by his effort to try to save and take back his daughter from the hands of Zeus. Asopus would not do so if he did not have love to his daughter and high heroism soul.

In the opposite, Zeus was presented another characterization; he for sure had shown his lust and not his godliness. He killed and also seduced a girl. Then, where was the godliness of this god of god? Here, the role of Zeus as the god of god was used to do as what he wanted and to materialize his lust. It was also happened to Persephone. Even though Persephone had power in the underworld, Persephone in fact had been cheated by Sisyphus; however in the end, Sisyphus had to be fetched down for the second to the underworld.

The next aspect I want to discuss is about loyalty and infidelity. Here, I firstly present that loyalty might be happiness and a truth, but is it true that rebellion and infidelity is a mistake? Hades obeyed Zeus' order to kill Sisyphus and fetched him down to the underworld. Besides, Ares was claimed to be a hero by saving Hades who had been imprisoned in Sisyphus' hands. Here, I see that these two characters, Hades and Ares, were two gods who had their loyalty to Zeus. Hades obeyed Zeus' order to fetch down Sisyphus to the underworld, but Sisyphus did not receive the destiny which was had given by Zeus that he had to die. Sisyphus succeeded to imprison Hades before Hades was able to fetch him down forcedly. Unfortunately, the infidelity done by Sisyphus by imprisoning Hades was not successfully finished because Ares in the end could bring Hades freed and caught Sisyphus. This case shows the loyalty and the heroism of Hades and especially Ares.

In the opposite, Sisyphus betrayed Zeus by giving information to Asopus that his daughter, Aegina, had been kidnapped and seduced by Zeus. In

addition, Sisyphus also cheated Persephone. It was told that Sisyphus had been fetched down successfully to the underworld because he betrayed Zeus. However, he was forced to go to the underworld. Sisyphus said to his wife Merope not to bury his body yet; therefore, Sisyphus would have a reason to go back to the upper world. After arriving to the underworld, Sisyphus asked permission to Persephone that he should go back to the upper world for three days to remind his wife to bury his body soon. For sure, this was a lie. Sisyphus' request to go back to the upper world was permitted by Persephone that Sisyphus could escape and went back to the upper world. But, three days had passed, Sisyphus did not go back to the underworld as what he had promised with Persephone. Finally, Sisyphus was forcedly fetched down to the underworld for the second.

Therefore, the opposition between loyalty and infidelity in the myth of Sisyphus was clearly appeared. But the question is: is it true that loyalty always a truth while infidelity is a mistake? But then, what I find here does not say so. To begin this explanation, I present some questions: Why did Sisyphus made infidelity? What was the reason of his infidelity? Why, in the opposite, they were characters who were loyal to the words and orders of Zeus?

I hereby assert that Sisyphus actually did not feel guilty about the infidelity which he had done. He made his infidelity for a truth and the right he had. So, this infidelity was not a sin then. Why? First, Sisyphus however had a truth saying by giving information to Asopus that Zeus had kidnapped and seduced his daughter apart from the compensation that Sisyphus got from the his deal with Asopus to made the water supply in the kingdom of Sisyphus. Therefore, there was no fault the the infidelity because the infidelity means a truth. Second, Sisyphus also did not feel guilty when he had succeed to cheat on Persephone because the decision saying that bringing Sisyphus to the underworld had been a mistake. I am saying how cam the person who did not have sin and mistake was bringing in to a jail? Sisyphus had done the truth but the bad destiny had just come to him. He was being in punishment because of the bad ruler.

But, what did these characters do, Hades and Ares? I hereby state that these two characters had

become the infidel of a truth. Moreover, they had support the mistake which had been done by their leader, Zeus the god of god. They, Hades and Ares, were blinded with power and superiority of Zeus then they cannot in the end, the loyalty had been damaged by the sins done by the loyalty supporters.

From the explanation above, I here precisely state that the characters who was preciously stated as the strong, dominated, and superior were not anymore superior because of their own mistakes and sins. The superior was not more superior; it had been substituted by the inferior. The godliness of Zeus had been disappeared; and then, I highlighted that Zeus was a sinful god. The weaknesses and the sins of men had made them depraved while the women were more worthy with their sincerity and their patience. The women appeared in the myth were strong women and loyal especially to their husbands. They did not have any affair while their husband kidnapped and seduced others women.

In fact, the lack of men's superiority in the Greek mythology was parallel with the religion's condition of ancient Greece. The worth and godliness of Greek's gods had been merging with the migrating tribes' gods (Daly, 2009:153). The merging of gods between Greek and other tribes had changed the culture of ancient Greeks' society about gods. Their gods were assumed to have humane and desire to represent the merging culture. Therefore, the godliness and worth of Greek's god was flourished with human's desire. They were not gods who had to protect and take care of their slaves, but they were also human who had desire of wealth, throne, and women. The influence of others tribes' gods had substituted the originality of ancient Greek culture and belief system.

Therefore here, I state that men's superiority has disappeared because of their own deeds; and, men's superiority has fell down because of wealth, power, and women. Men are not worthy anymore because their sin of killing, seducing, abducting, and betraying. Men do not have power and strength anymore because they actually depend on the existence of women. They, men, are imprisoned and locked in weakness and confinement. And, those are represented in the Greek mythology and the culture of ancient Greece.

The representation can be seen in the aspect of belief system in ancient Greek society that the gods were not anymore be worshiped. The society inclined to worship on silver, gold, and material success. Therefore, according to Caldwell (1963: 321) the positions of Greek gods had been weakened and destroyed. However, the ancient Greeks still worshiped their goddesses. Caldwell (1963: 321) says that Tyche, Fortune, and Lady Luck were goddesses they worshiped. Those three goddesses were still worshiped in society's ambition towards material success; besides their belief in oracles. In short, the belief in gods of ancient Greek society was decreased along with their belief and worshiped in goddesses.

Besides, ancient Greek society both men and women were able to have the same rituals. Men and women might give to their gods with the same offerings. In addition, boys and girls in the age were having the same education by "listening to their elders" (Donaldson, 1907: 18). Therefore, because of this same right, between men and women, the ancient Greece did not have concept about men's superiority; or, I might say patriarchal system. Women were unrestricted just as men. So, the ancient Greece culture was actually did not put men as the most superior creature instead of women. So, I argue that men were not superior one according to the reflection of ancient Greek culture.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of binary oppositions above, I can conclude that the representation of men's superiority in ancient Greece was materialized. Men had dominated women precisely. In short, the cultural system applied in ancient Greece was patriarchal. The men totally dominated the part of social and cultural life the age; and, it was reflected in the myth of Sisyphus.

After I reversed the hierarchy of its binary opposition, men's superiority was not totally superior and dominated; but, men was inclined to be inferior and weak because of their own ambitions and desires. Besides, men also did some bad deeds such as homicide, seduction, abduction, and betraying to

complete their ambition and desire to wealth, power, and women. Therefore, implicitly men had been blinded and become slaves of wealth, power, and women. Those are the aspects which had been missed by the patriarchal system saying that men dominate. The men cannot avoid that they are the slaves of ambition and desire. They, men, depend on the wealth, power, and women that they want them. Therefore, men are not more superior because of their own ambitions and sins. Finally, to sum up the conclusions above, I briefly present that men are not the superior one, but there are other sides of men which prove men's weaknesses.

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