

**Indigenous Feminism for American Indigenous Women Portrayed on *The Plague of Doves* by Erdrich****Karina Hanum Luthfia¹✉, Juliasih², Nur Saktiningrum³**^{1,2,3} Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia**Article Info****Abstract****Article History:**Received
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Legitimacy of women existences captured diverse and compound through the lens of cultural and social background. In the course of history, American Indigenous Women elucidated their identity articulation following the West at the hand of feminism. However, 'white' feminism is not in the position to accommodate the unique characteristics of American Indigenous Women. Their social contour and cultural commandment of which giving a rise out of their position and power cried out for suitable paradigm. Indigenous feminism as perspective from and to Indigenous Women would serve to scrutinize women empowerment, aspiration and self-actualization of American Indigenous Women. The article as presented is part of the dissertation analysis within the title *Cultural Memory and Demystification of American Native Women' Position*. The analysis of this research is a library based employing the novel from Indigenous female author, Louise Erdrich, entitled *The Plague of Dove*. In the discussion, the portrayal and representation of certain social and cultural phenomena have been captured and put into consideration as Indigenous Women's struggle in this modern days. The regulation and also power to determine Indigenous Women's identity have been strictly limited due to the presence of oppression. The unique of this research laid on the characteristics of the source of oppression in which is in a cooperated linkage within the paradigm employed which is Indigenous feminism. As there are diverse social and traditional elements brought, this research went deep in to the intersectionality studies, focusing on the sexism, racism and colonialism issues predominantly captured as the root of the oppression and discrimination against Indigenous Women.

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Ethnic studies, especially on gender relations, institute complex intersection. This circumstance occurs as researchers have to pay more attention of multi-dimension background. Historical background of American Indigenous Women is one of the dominant element for Indigenous Women study case. The polygonal

history of being the first settlers of American people until the colonialism of the West took shapes the social and cultural order toward Indigenous Women. The next element can be seen on the social and cultural order of which patriarchy exists and creates inequality on the relation of gender as consequence of West colonialism and intervention (Green, 2007; Smith, 2005). As respond to that matter, Indigenous women

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consider the disputes are on the effect of the assimilation during and after the colonialism. Indigenous women believe that the commandment of their tradition did not acknowledge power relation among gender at the first beginning. As consequence of it, Indigenous women took attempts through activism to take their equal position back.

Through Indigenous perspective which is renowned under Indigenous feminism by Suzack and Huhndorf (2010), researcher conducted an analysis on how Indigenous Women deployed her aspiration and actualization to achieve equal right and position by focusing on Indigenous Women writings, on this case is literature. The role of Indigenous feminism here is pivotal to minimize bias and assumption in understanding the phenomena portrayed on the novel as what Indigenous women would like to identify.

Indigenous feminism affiliated with forth feminist movement where intersection counted. The basic assumption of Indigenous feminism lays on how phenomena taking place to Indigenous Women should be taken into account by performing Indigenous perspective. Such as, self-determination from a woman to be domestic is not always articulated into powerlessness and oppression as it comes up within consent. In American Indigenous Women's cases, the tendency to stay in the round house for women is empowerment as they will be the one in charge in domestic area with power, equally with the Indigenous Men who are in charge in public. It was only the arena where is distinguishing. In addition, the ultimate purpose of Indigenous activism is to reclaim sovereignty (Green, 2007; Huhndorf and Suzack, 2010). The term sovereignty here can be both individual and also tribal where Indigenous women work hard to get their tribal land back and govern the society with the tribal rules and laws for their life. Into the bargain, unless White feminism, Indigenous feminism would like to consider that the source of oppression is not only on the gender relations. As mentioned before, class, race, ethnicity and historical manifestation are all considered as the root of oppression against Indigenous women (Smith, 2005). Within those

frameworks, Indigenous feminism would serve as the perspective to examine Indigenous social phenomena and issues.

The researcher concentrates to literary works published after the turning point of Indigenous American Renaissance (1980s), an event when Kenneth Lincoln published a consequential book *Native American Renaissance*. This consideration revolves around the escalating awareness of Indigenous Women toward their self-actualization and self-determination as tribal society members. There would be name such as Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, Zitkala-Sa, Joy Harjo, Paula Gunn Allen, and so on as Indigenous female authors. Yet, the researcher laid hold of Erdrich to dig the data up since her writings are acknowledged and appreciated by receiving many awards, Pulitzer Prize winning author of the Night Watchman, The National Book Critics Circle Award for Fictions, and Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Fiction. From that point, the researcher strongly assumed that Erdrich's works are adequately representative to bring Indigenous women's voices.

Subsequently, the detailed scrutiny is presented on the discussion section concentrating on the women's position toward gender relation, tribal society and harmony of nature to be the most essential lens to investigate through the portrayal on Erdrich's novel *The Plague of Doves*.

METHODS

The researcher employed library research to assist the analysis. The choice is under consideration of the material objects which are novels by Louise Erdrich as Indigenous female author, entitled *Plague of Doves* (2008). The researcher examined on how Indigenous perspective/feminism can bring certain characteristics of the Indigenous Women's actualization or resistance portrayed on the novels. This analysis is a phenomenological work as the interpretation of meaning toward those sequence of phenomena was concentrated on the Indigenous perspective. The researcher grasped the lens of Indigenous perspective through a collection of

repertoire received from the secondary data or books related to Indigenous women and society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis here starts from a social catastrophe for Indigenous Women as it transpired, which is patriarchy. Patriarchal system in the life of tribal members is lined up to be the root of the issue. Huhndorf and Suzack commented on the existence of patriarchy that,

“for indigenous women, colonialization has involved their removal from positions of power, the replacement of traditional gender roles with Western patriarchal practices, the exertion of colonial control over indigenous communities through the management of women’s bodies and sexual violence.” (2010, p. 1)

The excerpt divulged is forthrightly and chronologically navigating the emergence of patriarchy in tribal life of Indigenous Women. As a consequence of that, on Indigenous perspective, the resistance deployed by Indigenous Women against patriarchal system in their lives abundantly hold contrast if compares to the white feminism’s resistance. While resistance in white feminism is aimed to achieve equality regarding gender relations, Indigenous perspective would like to see if the resistance performed by Indigenous Women is more on reclaiming their previous social positions back.

Apart from the fact that colonialism intervenes the definition of resistance, some elements as part of the characteristics of Indigenous feminism are also considered such as race, class, and sexuality.

“Indigenous feminist analysis and activism must aim to understand the changing situations, the commonalities, and the specificities of indigenous women accross time and place; it must seek ultimately to attain social justice not only along gender lines but also along those of race, class and sexuality.” (Huhndorf and Suzack; 2010, p. 3)

From that circumstance, Indigenous perspective insubstantially considers Indigenous women’ activism as a movement merely toward

gender relations. The intersection of race, class, historical background brought up idiosyncratic pattern on Indigenous phenomena, especially on the problematic core of patriarchal system.

Employing Indigenous perspective as declared, the researcher explored the disputes taking place on Indigenous women’ lives reflected on the material objects as follow. The representation of Indigenous women in the characters examined to be the voice of Indigenous women in reality. Within the assumption, they are deliberated to bring akin aspiration and voices to be heard.

Beside patriarchal system in Indigenous Women’ lives, assimilation is one of the major disputes depicted on the literary work. Assimilation is strongly considered as the source of oppression which subsequently mold the style of power relations as the feature of Indigenous feminism diversely established by numerous social elements.

“Around that time, we passed Ash Wednesday, and I was reminded that I was made of dust only and would return to dust as soon as life was done with me.” (Erdrich, 2008, p. 10)

Taking a look at the excerpt in general point of view, there would not be any issue seen. However, the practice of Abrahamic religion as represented by the celebration of Ash Friday would be consider into dispute for Indigenous Women. Through the Indigenous society’s point of view, the portrayal indicates many signals which lead to the validation of either domination and oppression from White toward Indigenous Women at the first beginning.

Tracing back from the historical background, the existence of Abrahamic religion among Indigenous Women took place inside the reservation, a tribal land which is organized and managed by the Federal. As consequence, the practices, rules and regulations performed is predominant by White living practices. The religious belief brought by White gradually stamped out the traditional belief of Indigenous women. In Indigenous heritage, the belief system

is projected on to the universe and nature through its balance and harmony (Kelsey, 2010).

Taking a look at Indigenous belief system, Indigenous people follow paganism and concentrate on the harmonious relation within nature and spirits. However, those way of life has been shifted through the dominance of colonialism through the establishment of reservation system. The substantial issue of the assimilation here formed in the practice of belief signals hindrance to Indigenous Women's freedom as the practice initially performed by force inside of the reservation. In addition, the legitimacy of Indigenous traditional belief does not receive social recognition and acknowledgement in the society due to White supremacy over Indigenous people.

Additional evidence of the inculcating White religious belief is captured on the citation below,

"In the year 1896, my great-uncle, one of the first Catholic priests of aboriginal blood, put the call out of his parishioners that they should gather at Saint Joseph's wearing scapulars and holding missals. " (Erdrich, 2008, p. 5)

Escalating to the next level, Indigenous man presented as the religious leader as portrayed.

The succeeding issue portrayed is on ethnicity case. Through the view of Indigenous perspective, the tracing of tribal identity is paramount to articulate their identities (Tallbear, 2013). This proposition appertaining to their tribal recognition as their DNA have to meet certain categories to fulfill the requisite. As reflected on the citation,

"Evelina, you know that your grandma Junesse, was not all Chipewa."

"Yes," I said.

"Her father left her and of course she was raised by her aunt. Her father's name was Eugene Wildstrand." (Erdrich, 2008, p. 85)

the investiture of being Indigenous consults on the recognition of the descendant line. The prevalence of patriarchy in Indigenous society's life provokes boundaries and limitation to Indigenous women to determine their tribal identity. The point is on how offspring of

Indigenous people would be conceded only if they are from their paternal side. Meanwhile, traditionally the system did not discriminate the identity of gender from the successor to define and legitimate their connection to their root of the heirs.

At the subsequent of time, the depiction of White oppression against Indigenous women and Indigenous people to be general is represented in the excerpt below,

"Eugene Wildstrand, a neighbor of the slaughtered family, and William Hotchkiss, a locksmith a grain dealer, stepped their horses close to the sheriff. Some of the men were on foot." (Erdrich, 2008, p. 73)

Genocide as mention into the words "slaughtered family" was taken into account as part of the dark history under colonization of White against Indigenous people. A strong act to suppress the freedom of speech and action of Indigenous people by the act of murder gave impact to the social stability of Indigenous women to exist and live both biologically and also subjectively.

In consequence, the issue of Indigenous women's lives cannot be examined scarcely as the problem of gender relations. The source of oppression occurs from the intersection of the social elements, yet mostly in form of colonization. The work of Indigenous Women analysis and evaluation is performed in accordance to colonial historical background, as reflected certain of the practices are apparently a shape colonial manifestation.

Against the oppression practice, Indigenous women and society deployed their resistance in the structure of tradition revival.

"The boy put his feet in the boot and stood miserably beside Mooshum as his aunt led the horse and cart off down the grass trail, then turned onto the broader road leading north. Mooshum brought the boy to an old man called Asiginak, who was name for a great chief, Blackbird, and lived alone farther back in the bush. The old man was the boy's great uncle." (Erdrich, 2008, p. 58-59)

The traditional elements depicted on the citation above, such as the words “Mooshum”, “Asiginak”, and Blackbird as totem, are part of Indigenous women attempt to conserve their attachment to their traditional realm. The urge to be tangled with tradition in their daily basis is significantly valued to counter the oppression in form of assimilation regulated by White. The action is aimed to declare their self-determination as tribal society member through the repetition of action and representation toward their identity creation.

The endeavour of Indigenous Women’ identity representation was also actualized through public domain acquisition.

“Of course Geraldine knows all. She is a tribal enrollment specialist and has everyone’s secrets alphabetically filed. I must in fact, call upon her expertise for many questions of blood that come my way. A few days later, I visited her office. I nodded as I entered the room and Geraldine glanced away.” (Erdrich, 2008, p. 89)

Geraldine as a Indigenous Woman took action to defend Indigenous Women’ life aspirations by advocating them as a tribal enrollment specialist which means that she served also as a tribal lawyer. The position is vital for Indigenous feminism movement to be a decision-making agent as most cases remained awry taken by Federal Law system. On this case, as a lawyer, Geraldine has to afford a view of many individuals and representations. The cases afflicted Indigenous Women taking place not only because they are women, but also because they are Indian. Thought that contour, there would be many social elements and affiliations involved to the business. From that point, Indigenous feminism is precisely suitable to dig the issue of Indigenous women up since it accommodates diverse elements as the background of the oppression occurs.

The concept accommodates wider perspective not only gender relation or social group tie-up, but also including the relationship between individuals as being and nature as harmony. One of the point can be taken a look from how Indigenous Women praise an honour toward the

tribal land as their motherland. They believe that the land of their ancestor is something spiritual. The preservation of nature inside would be their most concern as their legacy for their new generation.

Meanwhile, within the White paradigm, land as property is taken into account as the object of exploitation for the sake of advantage. Any spiritual aspect as what Indigenous Women follow cannot be considered within White monetary system. As a consequence of it, the brutal mishandling of the tribal land was reviewed as the source of oppression against Indigenous Women by employing the view of Indigenous feminism. This claim is based on the connection between Indigenous Women to their land as their spiritual mother and ancestor’s legacy. Indigenous Women strongly protect the nature as it is how they communicate to their spirits.

From all of these analysis, Indigenous feminism holistically more accommodative to bring Indigenous issue especially on gender area, compared to White feminism where the focus of the oppression is merely on the existence of gender or sexism. The suitability of the paradigm subsequently provides deeper understanding of the analysis and diverse social elements to be taken a look at.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous feminism is an predominant movement for American Indigenous Women as it seeks to address the unique challenges and experiences that they dealt with. As Indigenous women, they have been objectified to not only sexism but also racism, colonialism, and other form of oppression. Indigenous feminism acknowledges the intersectionality of these issues and works to promote the rights and empowerment of American Indigenous Women.

One of the ways in which Indigenous feminism is suitable for American Indigenous Women is by providing a space for their voices and perspectives to be heard. Historically, Indigenous women have been excluded from decision-making processes within their communities and have often

marginalized in wider society due to the manifestation of colonialism. Hence, Indigenous feminism seeks to challenge these power imbalances and create opportunities for Indigenous women to participating in leadership roles in form of identity reclaiming and self-determination.

In addition, Indigenous feminism also recognizes the importance of traditional acknowledge and cultural practices in the lives of American Indigenous Women. It values the role of women in their communities and acknowledges the contributions that they make to the well-being of their families, communities, and nations. Overall, Indigenous feminism is an important movement because it promotes the rights of Indigenous Women and empower them to have a voice and role in their communities.

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