



CLIMBING ON A SPACE IN THANHHA LAI'S NOVEL *INSIDE OUT AND BACK AGAIN* (2011)

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ABSTRACT

Skripsi ini merupakan hasil analisis novel *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) karya Thanhha Lai. Topik yang dibahas adalah bagaimana usaha perempuan sejak masa kecil dalam mencapai ranah untuk menunjukkan keberadaan dirinya di tengah lingkungan sosial. Masalah yang diangkat ialah sejauh mana tokoh protagonis mengungkapkan proses pencapaian ranah untuk menunjukkan kemampuannya, serta seberapa besar fungsi elemen- elemen fiksi seperti seting dan konflik berpengaruh untuk memperlihatkan usaha tersebut. Hasil dari kajian ini adalah untuk menemukan sejauh mana usaha protagonis mencapai ranah dalam menunjukkan kemampuan dirinya, serta untuk mengetahui peran seting dan plot dalam membantu mengetahui usaha-usaha tersebut. Teori yang digunakan dalam analisis ini ialah konsep feminis dari Trinh Minh-ha dan konsep psikososial dari Richard Lazarus dan Susan Folkman. Metode pengkajian yang digunakan adalah text-based interpretation dan context-based interpretation. Hasil dari analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa perempuan dari usia dini dapat mencapai ranah yang lebih luas untuk menunjukkan kemampuannya dengan cara memiliki kesadaran akan perbedaan dan mewujudkannya dalam usaha-usaha konkrit dan memacu dirinya untuk belajar lebih banyak.

Kata Kunci: *climbing, space, girl, feminist*

A. INTRODUCTION

Most cultures have distinguished the space between males and females in most assertive ways. Males have commonly been viewed as dominant and in charge whereas females as those people behind the scene, submissive, and therefore, powerless. This gender stereotype is started from the childhood stage when children are taught that boys and girls have significant differences on position and treatment. This reality shows that development of gender roles often begins as early as childhood and it is gradually established as socially constructed term. However, for some females or girls, this situation does not let them down.

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Their understanding and awareness of the gendered space imposed on them and prompted them to make efforts to go further and higher—climbing on a space to make they be visible, presentable and exist.

Culturally history has shown us how females have successfully fought and won public space against men's domination. Agus, Ningsih, and Wahyuni (2012) stated that the larger opportunity on woman's vocation shows the progress that allow woman to have more space to develop her life. Although the restriction on woman mostly depends on the ruling party, the implementations are often applied through religion, culture and tradition.

These females realized that with the more limited spaces left for them to live, they must stand up and fight for their rights through their own efforts. In American Heritage Dictionary (2015) it is explained that space is simultaneously the medium and the outcome of social practices; the public sphere. The space that is referred to be climbed is the public sphere or the space which is assumed belongs to the men only. This struggle is done in a various ways by females with their own background.

The issue of climbing on a space is common to find in daily life. One of the great examples is Malala Yousafzai, an outstanding young girl who knows how to keep moving forward in spite of unfair circumstances. She was born into a culture where women were predetermined to a life of obedience and servitude and had very limited freedoms. One of her powerful quotes is about her view about the importance of education for young people. In her memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by The Taliban* (2013), she states "Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world." From the very young age she already stood up against the Taliban that banned girls from attending school. She spoke up for freedom for girls and young people. She determined to go to school with a firm belief in her right to an education. She showed that she could broaden the space from the restricted and limited sphere since she has a great awareness of her existence as a girl who deserves to be free and educated and has meaningful and better life.

Thanhha Lai takes concern Lai's about the children and young life, especially about girl. Her novel, *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) that won *National Book Award for Young People's Literature* in 2011, is written through a series of poems with the childhood perspective. The novel was inspired by her childhood experience on fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama. Lai voices the mind of a 10-year-old girl who gets limitation in society.

Inside Out and Back Again (2011), written by Thanhha Lai reflects the act of climbing on a space. In this analysis, *Climbing on a Space* refers to the efforts of a girl to look up for every chance in her life to be better in order to get place in the society. It is presented by the protagonist Kim Hà, a 10 year old girl who deals with lots of challenging in her life; however she shows her ability in the process in dealing with the limitation she faces in her surroundings. The protagonist and her family live in Saigon, South Vietnam in 1975 during the Vietnam War. Her father was arrested by communists on a navy mission when she was still a baby. After the end of the war they make a harrowing journey to the United States and end up

being sponsored as refugees in Alabama. The Eastern patriarchal culture and culture shock post- Vietnam War aside encourage the protagonist to climb on a space to become much higher than before. In this analysis, climbing on a space can be seen through her reluctance toward inequality and the awareness to bridge the gap.

The protagonist shows her reluctance toward inequality. She starts to show her ability to be considered in family. She resists the different treatment from family to show that she is not different from her male siblings. She deals with inequality in society by dealing with the bullies and mockery that she gets in her new school. She learns to understand the situation by preparing herself with abilities. She has willingness to learn and improve herself to become a better person.

The protagonist has a great awareness to bridge the gap, both in her family and the society. She starts to build a good relationship with her family first by learning to appreciate life. She also reconciles the bond siblings between her and the brothers. In the society, she adjusts with cultural difference. She commences to be more opened to people by making friends. She changes to be better. She also has a big heart to deal with the past and move on to climb on a space in the new place with new hope.

There are two studies that have given contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. They are from Rachel Carnell that focuses on women's effort to enhance their rights in the act of seeking the public good and Frisca Arum Indriani that concerns on women struggle to against the patriarchal oppression.

The first study is from Rachel Carnell (1998) entitled: *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Carnell in her article discusses the analysis of Anne Brontë's work based on Victorian gender roles refer to the stereotypical distinction between a female domestic and a male public sphere. It is mainly focused on character and setting. The analysis related to the concept of feminism by Jurgen Habermas (1962) that shows the distinction of terms "public" and "private" in the public sphere. The result of the analysis is the female or girl that is represented by the character refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture and insists on her status as a professional worker to pursue an affective and humanistic bond between herself and other woman.

The Third study is written by Frisca Arum Indriani (2013) entitled *Maggie's Struggle in Placing Her Existence at the Patriarchal Society in The Mill on The Floss by George Elliot*. In this study she analyzes the struggle of the woman character in placing her existence in the patriarchal society. It is conducted by using feminism approach of literary work by Eline Showalter. The struggles of the woman character appear in her effort against the oppression in education on women by learning secretly and her rejection toward patriarchy society rule about marriage. The result of this analysis is women have right to get a space by struggling on it in order to show their existence in the society.

This study reveals how someone with great desire suit herself in the difficult situation and even fight for what she thinks worth by making efforts to move from inferior side to the equal position as anyone around her. The purpose

is to broaden her space more to move forward to be existed and presentable. It relates to the feminism concept by Trinh Minh-ha, a Vietnamese-American theorist. Minh-ha (1989:528) views feminism as response to dominant streams of patriarchal thought it often reifies the category of "woman" through defining women as "not men". She argues that it is ridiculous to define "women" in contrast to "men" because women are so many more things than simply "not men". Thus, women, or girls, cannot be compared to men or boys, since they have their own uniqueness.

Climbing on a space is the actions carried out by women to show that they have power or quality in society. Bressler (1980:180) states that females are precious mankind possessing the same privileges and rights as every male and this leads them to think they are not a "nonsignificant other". It assertively means that there is no difference between males and females when it comes to right and chance. Although society places women in the burdened system, the fact that both of male and female have equal authority cannot be denied. Moreover, Bressler argues that women must define themselves and assert their own voices in the arenas of politics, society, education, and the arts by personally committing themselves to fostering such change, they hope to create a society where the male and female voices are equally valued. Females need to speak out their position to be equal. The effort of female to climb on a space to be wider is to break the existing perspective toward them.

Another conceptual framework that is used to conduct this analysis is from psychosocial theory related to cultural adaptation since the protagonist, in her effort to climb on a space, lives as young refugee in the asylum. In order to reach a space in the new surroundings, someone needs to deal or cope with the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984:141) describes coping as: „the constantly changing cognitive & behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.“ It refers to cultural adaptation, which occurs through migrants' learning of culture-specific skills that would enable them to negotiate their ways in the new cultural environment.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of novel *Inside Out and Back Again* is done through text and context-based interpretation. It is done by analyzing other fictional devices, such as; plot (conflicts) and setting. Conflicts are used to evoke the way to climb on a space by analyzing characters reactions toward the conflict. Then, the setting deals with the circumstances and atmosphere. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. Plot and conflicts in this novel give important role to reveals the meaning. These elements are analyzed based on how someone climbs on a space. These elements are analyzed based on the concept of feminism by Trinh Minh-ha and psychosocial by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reveals how far the novel *Inside Out and Back Again* show the issue of *climbing on a space* by analyzing the fictional devices such as plot (conflict) and setting. The protagonist, a 10-year-old girl, shows how she looks for every chance in her life in order to inspire and change the mindset, attitudes and unfair treatments that have imposed on her and other female girls her age: that girls are equally capable as boys. In this analysis, the acts of climbing on a space can be seen through the ways the ten-year-old girl shows her reluctance toward inequality and her awareness and efforts to bridge the gap.

1. Reluctance toward inequality

The reluctance toward inequality is shown by the protagonist in her efforts to fight against the limitation set for girls in the society. She starts to show her ability to be considered in family. She resists the different treatments from her family to show that she is not different from her male siblings. She also shows the struggle in society by dealing with the bullies and mockery that she gets in her new school. She learns to understand the situation by preparing herself with abilities. She has willingness to learn and improve herself to become a better person.

The protagonist starts to show her reluctance toward inequality in the first circle of society, which is family. It is shown in the following quotation:

But last night I pouted when Mother insisted one of my brothers must rise first this morning to bless our house because only male feet can bring luck. An old, angry knot expanded in my throat. I decided to wake before dawn and tap my big toe to the tile floor first. Not even Mother, sleeping beside me, knew. (p.2)

The text above shows that she realizes there is an inequality between boy and girl in her family. Family is the smallest unit of society that is influenced by cultural values. The quotation "*only male feet / can bring luck*" shows how the Vietnamese culture views boy as having higher position than girl. This cultural belief is likely to prioritize boys as they are considered as having central importance in the family. Her family applies that belief in doing the accustomed manner. The setting here refers to the cultural condition that put limitation of girl's role in Vietnam. Girl is regarded as marginal gender that has no significant importance. This condition leads the protagonist to struggle with the confining of her role in that patriarchal culture. The quotation "*an old, angry knot / expanded in my throat*" shows her response that clearly implies that she feels offended. The internal conflict occurs when she finds the unfairness in value determination of boys and girls. The conflict within herself encourages her to show her ability. She releases that conflict by turning back the situation, which can be seen in the quotation "*I decided / to wake before dawn / and tap my big toe / to the tile floor / first.*" The action she does reflects that she has a great awareness to break the belief view and destroy the conception that boys are better than girls. Although society put girls in narrow space, she believes there is no difference between her

and her male siblings. She makes efforts to be the first than anyone and that awareness comes from her own self. She does not let herself behind her brothers since she believes she has the same quality compared to them. It portrays that she has great consciousness about her existence in the society since the earlier stage in her life.

2. Awareness to bridge the gap

Another way to climb on a space is seen by the awareness of the protagonist to bridge the gap between her and people around. She has a great eagerness to bridge the gap, both in her family and society. She starts to build a good relationship with her family first by learning to appreciate life that is influenced by her mother's way of thinking. She also reconciles the bond siblings between her and the brothers. In the society, she adjusts with cultural difference. She commences to be more opened to people by making friends. She changes to be better. She also has a big heart to deal with the past and move on to climb on a space in the new place with new hope.

She also tries to bridge the gap with her siblings. In their homeland, she feels marginalized since the brothers tend to be more prioritized than her. However, on the journey to Alabama, the relationships between them change. It can be seen from the following quotation:

The chick had not a chance after we shoved for hours to board.....I open Mother's white handkerchief. Inside lies my mouse-bitten doll, her arms wrapped around the limp fuzzy body of his chick. I tie it all into a bundle.

Brother Khôi nods and I smile, but I regret not having my doll as soon as the white bundle sinks into the sea. (p.86)

The quotation above implies that the bond between her and her brother gradually changes. The family dynamics change throughout her effort to reach space as well. In Vietnam, she is annoyed with her older brothers and does not like how they get the attention. The brothers annoy her since they are all older and therefore must get more attention and freedom. The setting refers to the sad atmosphere due to death of a chick of Brother Khôi that has derailed from the boat on the journey on leaving the country. That chick is his favorite animal which he brings on the journey to Alabama. She does an effort to comfort her brother and helps him deal with devastation feeling after loss of his favorite one. She releases the conflict that once exists between them by letting the doll which is her favorite thing be gone as the baby chick of brother Khoi dies. The way she lets go of her possession designates that she also let her ego be gone as they are leaving the country. She lets the old of her fade away in her struggle to climb on a space. The conflict because of the unfairness she feels is trying to be pressed. The

gap gradually fades away as the bond sibling is being reconciled.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The novel *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) by Thanhha Lai reveals climbing on a space done by a female protagonist. It is exposed through text-based and context-based interpretation by focusing on fictional devices such as character, setting and conflicts. The protagonist in this novel is a 10 years old girl who deals with lots of challenging in her life; however she shows her ability in dealing with the limitation she faces in her surroundings. The Eastern patriarchal culture and culture shock post-Vietnam War aside encourage her to climb on a space to become much higher than before. Climbing on a space can be seen through her reluctance toward inequality and the awareness to bridge the gap.

Note: This article is written based on the Yesmawati Zai's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A., 1st advisor, and Desvalini Anwar, S.S., M.Hum., Ph.D. 2nd advisor.

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Climbing On A Space in Thanhha Lai's Novel *Inside Out And Back Again* (2011)
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