

REBELLION AGAINST POLYGAMY DOCTRINE IN MORMON CHURCH AS REFLECTED IN DAVID EBERSHOFF'S *THE 19TH WIFE*

(Pemberontakan Melawan Doktrin Poligami Gereja Mormon yang Tercermin dalam Novel
"The 19th Wife" karya David Ebershoff)

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Abstract

The rebellion of the congregation of Mormon church against polygamy doctrine is a major topic in *The 19th Wife* by David Ebershoff. *The 19th Wife* is a reflection of the true story of Ann Eliza Young, the 19th wife of the prophet, Brigham Young. The purpose of this research is to reveal the cause of the entire rebellion. The congregation rebels the doctrine because it gives some negative impacts to the wives, the children and the people who do monogamy. This research uses sociological approach that focuses on the theory of Michel Zeraffa: the novel as literary form and as social institution. Zeraffa states that a novel is the representation of social fact which is interpreted into written text. The result of this research shows that polygamy doctrine gives some negative impacts to the congregation so that they lose their individual right to be free and happy. The desire to win their right back is the background of the rebellion.

Keywords: rebellion, polygamy doctrine, congregation

Abstrak

Pemberontakan para jamaah gereja Mormon terhadap doktrin poligami merupakan topik utama dalam novel *The 19th Wife* karya David Ebershoff. *The 19th Wife* merupakan cerminan kisah nyata Ann Eliza Young, istri ke 19 sang nabi, Brigham Young. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkapkan penyebab dari seluruh pemberontakan tersebut. Para jamaah gereja Mormon memberontak karena doktrin poligami memberikan dampak negatif kepada para istri, anak-anak serta orang-orang yang melakukan monogami. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi yang berfokus pada teori Michel Zeraffa: novel sebagai karya sastra dan sebagai lembaga sosial. Zeraffa mengungkapkan bahwa sebuah novel merupakan representasi kenyataan sosial yang ditafsirkan ke dalam karya sastra. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa doktrin poligami memberikan dampak negatif kepada para jamaah sehingga mereka kehilangan hak individu untuk bebas dan bahagia. Keinginan untuk merebut hak mereka kembali menjadi latar belakang pemberontakan tersebut.

Kata kunci: pemberontakan, doktrin poligami, jamaah

Introduction

The 19th Wife by David Ebershoff tells about the rebellion of Mormon's congregation toward polygamy system. It is the reflection of the factual story of Ann Eliza Young, the 19th wife of Brigham Young, the second prophet of Mormon Church. *The 19th Wife* consists of the fictional stories and factual documents.

The fictional story is created by David Ebershoff. The factual documents are the chronicle of personal experience of Ann Eliza Young who is the 19th wife of the prophet of Mormon Church, Brigham Young and The Church files. In the novel, Ebershoff tells about the daily activity of Mormon family life. He explains how the polygamy system gives some impacts to the congregation, therefore they rebel that system.

The research is interesting to do since there are already some previous researches raising social condition of community reflected in the novel, but no one raises a topic about polygamy, especially polygamy on Mormon Church. Its congregation rebels the polygamy system because it provides several negative impacts. It encourages the writer to do deeper study on the subject.

Sociological theory of Michel Zeraffa which says that the novel as literary form and as social institution is applied in this research. The theory is used to analyze the impacts of polygamy system and the congregation's rebellion of Mormon Church as reflected in the novel.

Research Method

The type of this research is qualitative research. It is used to collect and analyze qualitative data to get detail and clear analysis and interpretation. Collecting the data in this research is done through library research and cybernetics research. The primary data is taken from the novel itself. The secondary data are references related Mormon polygamy, factual events of Mormon Church and factual experiences of Ann Eliza Young.

This research uses inductive method. Shaw (1972 : 107) states that the inductive process begins by using observation of a number of facts: it classifies these facts, looks for similarities among them and from a supposedly sufficient number of those particulars draws a conclusion or leads up to a principle. After collecting the data, the writer analyzes the impacts of polygamy system to Mormon congregation as reflected in the novel. Then, the writer identifies congregation's rebellion. The last, the writer concludes the discussion by generalizing the idea that congregation's rebellion happens because the impacts of polygamy make them loss their individual right.

Result

From the data analysis, it is shown that polygamy doctrine which is grafted in Doctrine and Covenant 132 gives some negative impacts to women, children and people who do monogamy. Those impacts become the main cause of congregation's rebellion in the novel. By applying sociological theory of Michel Zeraffa, it can be concluded that the impacts of polygamy doctrine and congregation's rebellion in the novel are the reflection of the factual story of Ann Eliza Young, the 19th wife of the prophet, Brigham Young.

The impacts of polygamy doctrine seize individual freedom which is the American value. From the fact and some events in the novel, it is clear that the

background of congregation's rebellion of Mormon Church is to find the individual freedom. When they do not get it in Mormon Church, they would rebel and find it by quitting from Mormons.

Dicussion

Zeraffa's theory focuses on the sociology of the novel. He states that the novel is closely related to real social phenomena. It is because the novel is often allied to some phenomena in the history of society. Each work is written based on facts and real social condition. Writers, especially novelists, try to analyze the fact then interpret them into written texts.

Michel Zeraffa's theory is suitable to analyze the impacts of polygamy to Mormon's congregation and congregation's rebellion to polygamy system in Mormon Church as reflected in the novel. It is because *The 19th Wife* is written based on social facts and historical reality of Mormon society. Ebershoff interprets the facts and portraits them into the novel.

In the novel, Ebershoff creates two main characters. The first is BeckyLynn, the faithful 19th wife as the mirror of the loyal Mormon congregation. The second is Jordan Scott, BeckyLynn's son who is a castaway child. He is the mirror of Mormon congregation opposing the Church. Supported by the setting of Utah territory which is the residence of Mormon congregation, the novel is based on the historical reality.

The 19th Wife is based on the historical reality of Mormon theology. In the theology, polygamy doctrine has become the basic foundation and plays significance roles for the congregation. Although polygamy doctrine gives aspects to the church, the doctrine gives some negatives impacts to the congregation.

The first impact of polygamy doctrine is on women life. There are two impacts of polygamy on women life. One of them is Mormon polygamy which inflicts rivalry among wives. In the real case, Amelia, the favorite wife of Brigham Young, was always unhappy when Brigham took a new wife. Ann Eliza was one of victims of Amelia's jealousy. Amelia showed her jealousy explicitly, even in front of Brigham. The feeling of jealousy which is experienced by Ann Eliza is reflected in the novel. Ebershoff shows some causes of jealousy and oppression of wives in the novel. The first cause is the wife's list. The list is the documentation for every women. When a man who has passion to a certain woman, she will be passed down to other by the acknowledgment of the church. The purpose of having this idea is to trace down with whom the women have been going with. The other feeling of jealousy grows as a man puts his highest concern to one particular wife,

so he gives his highest fortune to the one he loves the most. One of cases happens to Kimberly, one of wives of Jordan's father. It also happens to Kimberly's daughter. They get a bad deal from some jealous wives when Kimberly gets Jordan's father married. When Jordan's father brings them a new house, the jealous wives try to jeopardize Kimberly by leaving the floor unnailed. The house is always falling apart on them. The floor plank is caving in. Once, a window strikes Kimberly. It nearly makes her die.

The other impact of polygamy on women life can result to function the wives as the labors for their families to earn money. The factual document of Ann Eliza shows that after a year of marriage with the prophet, Ann Eliza, her mother and her children should go to "The Farm" to live. They were tasked to take care of the farm as well as the workers, meanwhile Brigham returned to the city to lead the Church. Ann Eliza's effort is shown to suffice the need of the whole family in *The 19th Wife*. Many wives are gathered in one big house and they should do the household chores in daily basis without the help from the husband. Moreover, they are not only performing as workers but also as mothers of the children. The father no longer has the care to share the burden of a big family. There are many women performing themselves as labors. Ironically, the job of the men is better and much easier than the women. Basically many men work only for the church; they become highly dedicated to the church. Furthermore, there will be a discussion for every men to marry more than one woman not only because of the order of the church but also because of for the sake of money. The wives and the children can be a deposit to beg for money from as long as they are not married legally. The government will give them donation because they do not have a husband or a father as the head of the family to fulfill their daily needs.

The second impact of polygamy doctrine is on children life. Because of polygamy doctrine, children get less attention from parents. This is experienced by Ann Eliza as a child. She lacked of affection and attention from the father because they lived apart. Ann Eliza's father lived in Salt Lake with his three other wives, while Ann Eliza and her mother lived in South Cottonwood. Ann Eliza childhood is reflected in *The 19th Wife*. The novel tells that children are not only lacking of attention from their father, but also from their mother because women have to work to earn a living. Day by day, the children live in survival. They are gathered in a place. They sleep in places which are not suitable to be called as beds. They sleep anywhere that they could possibly lie down their bodies so they can work in the next day. Moreover, they lose emotional bonding with their father. They also lose the

meaning of their existence because they are given the same names and even they are numbered to avoid the confusion. What happens to Sarah 5, one of Jordan Scott's step sister is an example. She is just only called 5, although her name is Sarah. Moreover, violence happens to the daughter from the early age. They become the objects of harassment because they are in these chaotic situations and their parents can not provide them protection. They become vulnerable. The lack of attention and absence of figure of a father made them fragile in social violence. For boys, they are also having the same problem, since their existence is also ceased into the minimum. They are considered as threads, competitors for every adult man to have more women. Their minor mistake will be exaggerated to cast them away. To limit competitors and rebellions becomes the sole aim why they are banished.

The other impact of polygamy doctrine on children life is much housework which have to be done by children. It happened to Ann Eliza and her two brothers, Aaron and Gilbert. At the age of 20 years old, Gilbert was appointed to follow his father for missionary task to the United Kingdom. Aaron Web (16 years old) took the place of the head of the family. Moreover, Ann Eliza, at the of 10 years old, helped her mother and her step mother to do much house work and took care her step sister, Diantha. What happened on Ann Eliza and her brothers is reflected in *The 19th Wife*. The children are under a lot of pressure in this very early age. They have to work within unusual working hours. They also have to work with the chore which beyond their capacity to take. Ebershoff describes about the children activity that kids older than eight are in school and the younger kids, from five to seven years old, look after the babies or do housework.

The last impact of polygamy system is on people who do monogamy. It actually happened to Ann Eliza's neighbors, Mrs. Jones and his son, Jacob. Mrs Jones was a widow. Since her husband's death, some men had felt the slap of her rejection that she was already suspected as disloyalty to the doctrine of spiritual wifery. She and her son also fought the onslaught of the Utah Reformation (public confessions by Home Missionaries). At one night, Ann Eliza and her mother heard two pistol shots. In the morning, word came that Mrs. Jones and her son were dead. The treatment which happened to Ann Eliza's neighbors, Mrs. Jones and her son is reflected in *The 19th Wife*. The death sentence is conducted in subtle way. The attempt of murder could be in numerous ways such as poisoning the drink. It happens to Quenny's mother, Jordan Scott's step sister. Quenny's mother wants to leave her husband. Thus the Church murders her. Quenny tells, 'They put salt in her

dialysis machine. It crystallized her heart. She went into the clinic for a treatment and never came home'.

Next case, the punishment for the outlaw comes to man. If he rejects polygamy doctrine, his wife will be taken into the church and she belongs to the prophet. Hence, the next thing he knows that this will be the prophet authority to consider the future of the wife. No one could oppose the law. The prophet's power is too strong to fight against. It happens to Hiram Alton, Quenny's husband. Hiram rejects to do polygamy, then the Church takes Quenny to marry with other man.

All the impacts of polygamy doctrine become the cause of Mormon congregation's rebellion. They fight against the Church's order to show that they refuse the doctrine. One of the ways is doing monogamy. Furthermore, most of them decide to come out of Mormon Church. The decision was taken by Ann Eliza on the 17th of July, 1873. She decided to run away from Mormon Church, and ungrudgingly left her mother, father, home and her friends to find a freedom. She went from one city to another city to reveal the bad system in Mormon Church and the negative impacts of polygamy doctrine to the public. After making long journey, Ann Eliza with her youngest son and two friends finally arrived in Washington. One day after they arrived, they went to United States Capitol building and finally she met congress members and president Ulysses S. Grant. After she told her stories, she also asked the congress to protect women and children who got treatments like her and her children experienced. A few weeks after her visit, congress passed the anti-polygamy Poland Bill. Besides, Ann Eliza brought a procedure of divorce to the prophet, Brigham Young, to the court and demanded him to pay money allowance. However, Brigham rejected it and teared commanded letter from the court. For the consequence, he had to be in jail with accusation that he had shown disdain for the court's mandate by refusing to pay Ann Eliza's fee in the stated time.

Ann Eliza's decision to rebel polygamy doctrine is reflected in *The 19th Wife*. Not only wives who rebel the doctrine, but the children also rebel it. Being unable to bear the situation that occur in the house, the children decide to leave the Mormon Church as Sarah 5 does. She is willing to leave her loved ones and belongings she has. It is caused to get her freedom and happiness. The other rebellion is done by Hiram Alton. When the Church takes his wife to marry another person as the punishment because Hiram does monogamy, he rebels the Church. He kills his wife's husband to be and takes her away from Mormon Church.

With the purpose to find individual freedom which is the human right, Ann Eliza Young rebelled Polygamy

doctrine, fought against her husband, Brigham Young, and quited from Mormon Church. She was willing to travel a long way in pursuit the right as a free and happy woman that she had never felt as Mormon congregation. Individual freedom is also the background of all forms of rebellion undertaken by the characters in *The 19th Wife* by David Ebershoff. The wives, children, and even men who do monogamy will rebel polygamy doctrine and the Church when their individual freedom to pursuit of happiness are bound by the Church's role and doctrine.

Conclusion

The implementation of polygamy doctrine apparently gives negative impacts to the congregation, as experienced by Ann Eliza. Since she was a child, she got less attention from her parents, especially her father. When she was a teenager and became a wife of plural marriage, her life as the 19th wife of the Prophet made her suffer more. All the impacts caused Ann Eliza rebelled the doctrine and finally she quited from Mormons. All Ann Eliza's experience of her sufferings as Mormon congregation and her rebellion to polygamy doctrine and Mormon Church are reflected in *The 19th Wife* by David Ebershoff.

The impacts of polygamy doctrine and the church absoluteness cause women work hard to earn money, children get less affection from their parents. All members are forbidden to do monogamy. The congregation lose their right to get individual liberty and pursuit of happiness. Consequently, a lot of them finally rebel polygamy doctrine and quit from Mormon. The congregation is willing to fight for their individual right to get liberty and pursuit of happiness which have never been gotten in Mormon Church.

The research gives a moral lesson that God creates human beings with equal rights. Every human being has the right to live, to get liberty and to pursue of happiness. No one should take the rights of others, even in the name of God.

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