

THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY IN THE NOVEL “RED AZALEA”

Jefri Junaidi¹
Shafa Tasya Maryam²
Dion Tira Erlangga³
English Literature
English Education

jefrijunaidi1999@gmail.com
shafa.tasya987@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to observe about the issue in Red Azalea Novel by ANCHEE MIN ". This novel not only talk about what happened during Mao Zedong Cultural Revolution. The novel is about the memoir of young girl facing cultural revolution in China. She experience first the hope and jubilation, then the disillusionment and sorrow of its ultimate impact but this novel is not only about that, during Ms. Min's coming of age in China during the Cultural Revolution, nonmarital sex could be punishable by death and homosexual love was an unthinkable counterrevolutionary crime. This memoir of sexual freedom is thus a powerful political as well as literary statement. In the issue of Red Azalea novel about identity and sexuality it is included in feminist critical lens in literature. Based on the philosophy of Monique Wittig, she is a French lesbian feminist and theorist, she wrote about gender identity and sexuality. She was a critic of Marxist philosophy and advocated for the abolition of gender categories, arguing that "women" only exist if "men" exist. From the philosophy this research of the paper believe that there is a issue of Identity and Sexuality in Red Azalea Novel and this research use that philosophy. After publishing this novel the researcher hope that this paper could be reference for the theory that applied which is feminism and also guideline for another research using this theory.

Key words: cultural revolution. memoir, research, women, philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Red Azalea (1994) is a memoir by a Chinese-American writer, Anchee Min. Min was nine years old when Mao Zedong implemented a series of economic and social changes throughout China that was collectively known as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) [1], [2]. The book was praised for its direct diction which reflected Mandarin [3]. Its themes include political atrocities, state-sponsored shame, and paranoia arising from arbitrary law enforcement [4], [5]. This memoir has three parts, tracing Anchee children and young adults in China before emigrating to the US. Red Azalea is open for Anchee to talk about her life in elementary school [6], [7]. Born in Shanghai, his mother was an elementary school teacher, and his father was a drawing instructor. He, like all Chinese children, is treated like an adult at the age of five [8]. Anchee excelled in school as a teenager, was promoted to head of the Little Red Guard [9], which had a structure similar to the Girl Scouts, although all participating children were encouraged to spy on each other and report

behavior that was not in accordance with Mao Zedong's teachings [10], [11]. He won further praise by reciting, from memory, the large swath of "The Little Red Book," which is a collection of quotations by Mao [12].

When his beloved teacher was accused of being pro-capitalist and pro-western, a young Anchee was ordered to berate him publicly [13], [14]. These and other testimonies from the former female student made the "crime" of spying on Western powers apparent to society [15], [16]. The woman lost her teaching post, and to this day Anchee is unsure whether the woman was secretly executed. Years passed, Anchee entered middle school, and she continued to be a star student [17], [18]. When he was 17 years old, Anchee was ordered to work hard at the collective Red Fire Farm in southeast China, near the sea. The camp was all women [19]. Working in this commune is considered an honor and a reward for Anchee for reporting her teacher who is a "traitor". But the camp was finally horrendous [20], [21]. Anchee, along with other young people, barely had enough food to survive every day. They farm on a plot of infertile land; salt water often interferes along the ground, thereby ruining all their work [22], [23]. One day, Anchee met with Yan, the leader of his group. The woman gave him a reason to continue to live under authoritarian rule [24]. He is in love with Yan. The two have a steamy love relationship while avoiding detection from their peers [25], [26]. Personally, and in conversation with Yan, Anchee began to question the wisdom of Maoism [27]. He did not like to work in a forced labor camp as long as most of his time was awake [28], [29]. He is a star student and has other talents that can be cultivated [30]. He was also increasingly fed up with the injustices he often saw done by his superiors.

For example, another young woman in the labor community has sex with a man. Someone reported the illegal activity, and the young woman quickly broke down while being interrogated violently [31], [32]. The woman never recovered and was sent to a mental hospital. Anchee also saw some people in superior positions acting shamefully [33]. One woman accused a young girl of being counter-revolutionary because she did not like seeing her innocent face every day [34], [35]. Many of his bosses are blind to the work well done. The system does not offer Anchee a way to improve his life; going up the social ladder really depends on luck. During this time, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (aka "Mrs. Mao"), liked to write political operas (she was an actress before serving as secretary to her future husband, Mao Zedong). Anyone who enjoys life or hopes to advance their career must

praise this melodramatic opera [36], [37]. As a result, they are very popular throughout China. One day, a talent scout saw Anchee and noted that he was physically attractive [38]. Soon after, Anchee was ordered to return to Shanghai and work as an actor. In Shanghai, Anchee auditioned for the lead role in a film called *Red Azalea*, a feature film based on one of Qing's political operas [39], [40].

Anchee won the role. Suddenly, Anchee is no longer poor and unknown. His success was overseen by a man who he also considered a lover [41]. In the text, he referred to him as "Superintendent," and he was Jiang Qing's adviser on cultural matters. In love with Anchee, he is determined to make her famous; he did not know that Anchee still loved Yan [42], [43]. When Chairman Mao died in 1976, the succession to power became unclear. Mao relied on a personality cult. Therefore, there is no clear or trusted protocol on who will take over. Mrs. Mao, who once held power, was suddenly captured by rival Mao and thrown into prison [44], [45]. Many of his followers were executed. The supervisor fled to the countryside and hid. In this chaotic environment, *Red Azalea* films do not reach theaters throughout the country [46], [47]. Anchee continues to work in the film industry, usually low-level jobs such as selling movie tickets or cleaning toilets. One day, a fellow actor told him to move to the US [48]. Anchee was able to do it in 1984.

Feminism is not only about gender equality [49], it is about tearing down gendered norms and establishing a less prejudiced society that allows people to take up the roles they want, do things based on merits rather than gender, and generally be more free [50], [51]. Tell me your sex/gender based gripe, and I will tell you how it is linked to feminism. In general, feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes [52], [53]. This paper took philosophy from Monique Wittig, she is a French lesbian feminist and theorist, wrote about gender identity and sexuality. She was a critic of Marxist philosophy and advocated for the abolition of gender categories, arguing that "women" only exist if "men" exist [54], [55]. From Monique Wittig's statement it matches with the research of this paper, in this research analyzing the issue of identity and sexuality in *Red Azalea* Novel.

There are 4 types of feminism which are liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism and dual-systems theory feminism [56]. In liberal feminism These feminists

argue that gender inequality lies in the denial of rights to women in primarily the fields of education and employment [57]. It holds individual choice as supreme. And, historically has fought for law changes in order to allow women to express their political freedom [58]. With its reliance on gaining political rights, it should be noted however that liberal feminism ignores the deep-rooted nature of gender inequality and patriarchy. For Marxist Feminists, male domination over women is a by-product of the current system of production within this Capitalist epoch. With society split between the bourgeoisie exploiting the proletariat [59]. A subgroup is needed in society to prepare the next group of workers. This job falls onto women. Women end up as free care providers for the child, husband, and extended family through cooking, cleaning, hosting, and providing healthcare (typically free) [60].

Radical feminists see gender equality as a system whereby men benefit from female subordination which has been created through Patriarchy [61]. Unlike Marxist feminists, they don't see female subordination as being a byproduct of Capitalism [62]. But a part of the patriarchal system like male violence. Men inherently have a vested interest in the continuation of patriarchy so will not let it go easily [63]. Even sexual desire must be questioned as it is centered around male notions of desire.

A synthesis of Marxists and Radical feminist theory, therefore neither Capitalism or Patriarchy take a position of importance as we're in a capitalist-patriarchal society where both systems work together [64]. Patriarchy provides a system of control and law and order, while capitalism provides a system of economy in the pursuit of profit. The sexuality and gender historian Nancy Cott distinguishes between modern feminism and its predecessors, especially the struggle for suffrage [65]. The 19th Amendment, the women's movement prioritized women as a universal entity, during this 20-year period, this movement prioritized social differentiation, attention to individuality, and diversity [66], [67]. New issues are more related to gender as a social construction, gender identity, and relations within and between genders. Politically, this is a move from ideological alignments that are comfortable with the right, to those that are more radically related to the left.

In the immediate postwar period, Simone de Beauvoir opposed the "women at home" norm. He introduced the existentialist dimension to feminism with the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex) in 1949. Although less an activist than a philosopher

and novelist, he signed one of the manifestos of *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*. The rise of feminist activism in the late 1960s was accompanied by emerging literature about what might be considered issues related to women, such as concerns for the earth, spirituality, and environmental activism [68], [69]. This created atmosphere revived studies and debates about matricentricity [jargon] as a rejection of determinism, as with Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* and Marilyn French in *Beyond Power*. For socialist feminists like Evelyn Reed, patriarchy has the characteristics of capitalism. Ann Taylor Allen illustrates the difference between the collective male pessimism of male intellectuals such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel in the early 20th century, compared to the optimism of their female counterparts, whose contribution has been neglected by the social historian of that era [70].

History of selected feminist issue: Feminist Theory

The sexuality and gender historian Nancy Cott distinguishes between modern feminism and its antecedents, particularly the struggle for suffrage. She argues that in the two decades surrounding the Nineteenth Amendment's 1920 passage, the prior woman movement primarily concerned women as universal entities, whereas over this 20-year period, the movement prioritized social differentiation, attention to individuality, and diversity. New issues dealt more with gender as a social construct, gender identity, and relationships within and between genders. Politically, this represented a shift from an ideological alignment comfortable with the right, to one more radically associated with the left.

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Ann Taylor Allen describes the differences between the collective male pessimism of male intellectuals such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel at the beginning of the 20th century, compared to the optimism of their female counterparts, whose contributions have largely been ignored by social historians of the era.

- A Few Feminist Philosophers

These examples of feminist philosophers will show the diversity of ideas represented by the phrase.

Mary Daly has taught for 33 years at Boston College. The radical feminist philosophical theology that he sometimes calls criticizes androcentrism in traditional religion and tries to develop new philosophical and religious languages for women to oppose patriarchy. He lost his position because of his belief that, because women are often silenced in groups that include men, his class will only include women and men who can be taught by him personally.

Hélène Cixous, one of the most famous French feminists, criticized Freud's argument about separate pathways for the development of men and women based on the Oedipus complex. He builds on the idea of logocentrism, the privilege of the written word for words spoken in Western culture, to develop the idea of fallogocentrism, where, to simplify, binary tendencies in Western languages are used to define women not by what they have. or have but with what they don't or don't have.

Carol Gilligan argues from the perspective of "feminist differences" (argues that there are differences between men and women and that equating behavior is not the goal of feminism). Gilligan in his study of ethics criticized traditional Kohlberg research which states that principle-based ethics is the highest form of ethical thought. He points out that Kohlberg only studies boys, and that when girls are studied, relationships and care are more important to them than principles.

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lost his position because of his belief that, because women are often silenced in groups that include men, his class will only include women and men who can be taught by him personally. Hélène Cixous, one of the most famous French feminists, criticized Freud's argument about separate pathways for the development of men and women based on the Oedipus complex. He developed the idea of logocentrism, the written privilege of words spoken in Western culture, to develop the idea of fallogocentrism, where, to simplify, binary tendencies in Western languages are used to define women not by what they have or have, but by what they don't or don't have.

Carol Gilligan agreed with the perspective of "feminist differences". Gilligan in his study of ethics criticized traditional Kohlberg research which recognized the basic ethics of thinking in the highest form of ethical research. He points out that Kohlberg only talks about boys, and compiles related girls, relationships and care are more important to them than principles. Monique Wittig, a French feminist and lesbian theorist, writes about gender identity and sexuality. He is a critic of Marxist politics and allows the abolition of gender categories, arguing that "women" only exist if "men" exist.

METHOD

The researcher uses qualitative research as the methodology of this research. All of the data of this paper obtained from E-book Red Azalea novel from internet source the reason why the researcher use online source or e-book is to make the observation getting easier that in e book the keyword can be search inside the novel, the novel includes part 1 untill part 3. In data source also the researcher seen the review of Red Azalea novel from several people who have read the novel. In analyzing data, the researchers start to read as well as analyzing each part and page of the Red Azalea novel which related to Identity and Sexuality in that novel. The researchers read the whole part of the novel and then tried to analyze for the each part of the novel and identification does that quotations from the novel a part of identity issue or sexuality issue in Red Azalea novel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research discuss about identity and sexuality in Red Azalea Novel which is the novel related to the feminism critical lens. The result of this paper talk more about identity and sexuality within the repressive environment of Mao Zedong's cultural revolution. The data from this paper use qualitative data and the data took from the Red Azalea Novel.

Sexuality in feminism lens it is well established that women are under represented in positions of power and leadership, undervalued, experience discrimination and gender based violence in scientific and health disciplines across the world. Intersectional approaches have provided insights into how other categories of difference such as ethnicity, class, geography, disability, and sexuality interact with gender to compound inequalities.

Feminist views on sexuality widely vary. Many feminists, particularly radical feminists, are highly critical of what they see as sexual objectification and sexual exploitation in the media and society. Radical feminists are often opposed to the sex industry, including opposition to prostitution and pornography. Other feminists define themselves as sex-positive feminists and believe that a wide variety of expressions of female sexuality can be empowering to women when they are freely chosen. Some feminists support efforts to reform the sex industry to become less sexist, such as the feminist pornography movement.

In Red Azalea novel from the research of this paper discuss about identity and sexuality in Mao Zedong's era, and here take a look of the quotations for the first issue that I have found in the novel about sexuality:

“I was excited. I could not say a word. I squeezed her hands back, hard. For many nights afterward, before going to sleep, I replayed the ceremony in my head. I dreamt of Yan's laughing. I realized how much I liked it.

For the second quotation: **Under the blankets, Yan's arms were around my neck. She held me closer. her breasts pressed against my shoulder. She turned me toward her.**

This novel is not only about cultural revolution, but it is even more about both lesbian and heterosexual love relationship. The writer or known as Anchee Min she fell in love with her leader named Yan. From the quotations that I got, Anchee Min she likes Yan and Yan has the same feeling too toward Min because Yan never reject all the thing that Min did to her, they also look very closer and even sharing bed together every night.

Another example of sexuality in the novel about at that time women got experience discrimination, this is the quotation from the novel: **It was an accident, my mother said.**

She was having a severe headache when she was ordered to do job. She was not allowed to rest when her blood pressure was high.

From the quotation said that Anchee Min's mother she got sick and her blood pressure was high but still her mother should continue to work and she can not take a rest even for a while she needs to to her job

Inside of discuss about sexuality, Red Azalea novel in this research also discuss about identity. The example of quotation that represent about identity in Red Azalea novel: **My father was no longer a college instructor, he was sent to work in printing a printing shop as an assistant clerk. Although my mother had university degree, she was sent to work in a shoe factory.** From that quotation I can conclude that someone's identity or degree in Mao Zedong's era not so important, no matter how high your education level is you need to follow the rules in that era, if you should work at that office you don't have any choice or you can not reject that.

Second example quotation about identity in Red Azalea novel: **They were called "La-Sai"- a slang word which indicated that the girls had done shameful things with men and were condemned by those who were moral. These girl had no self-respect. They were called Porcelain with scars. No one want wanted them. They looked forward to no future. They had no future. They were garbage. Placing them next to me showed generosity of the Communist Party.** From that quotation also represent about identity in Red Azalea novel, because it explained the identity of the girls at that time in Mao Zedong era who called as La-Sai or known as the girl who had done shameful things with no self-respect, bad attitude and they don't even had future.

CONCLUSION

Red Azalea novel tells a lot about Cultural Revolution during Mao Zedong's era but it is not only about Cultural Revolutin that happened at that time, actually this novel is about the real experiences about the writes Anchee Min. In Red Azalea Novel also discuss about love, heterosexual, traditional gender roles, politics, gender and also sexuality as this research disscused in the title about Identity and Sexuality. She named the title of the Novel "Red Azalea" because the title refers to the Azalea flower, a flowering shrub that blooms in shades from pale yellow to crimson red. The color red is a symbol of

communism, representing blood of the workers who died in the struggle against capitalism. For example in this research more focus in discussed about Identity and Sexuality because the researcher find out the fact about that, as we know from the novel Anchee Min the writers she fell in love with her leader named Yan and from that we know that included in sexuality issue and feminist critical lens. We know that feminist criticism is (also known as feminist criticism) is the literary analysis that arises from the viewpoint of feminism, feminist theory, and/or feminist politics. After publishing this research paper the researcher hope that the paper could be a reference for another research that use this theory in the future . And also the can be a picture how the past ear and nowadays era is so different where nowadays women get many chance as men for example the job that in the pass only could handle by a man now can also handle by women. Woman not seen as a weak but seen as similar as men.

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