

Females Body Representation, Movement, and Perspective:

The Fragile Longevity of Feminism in Indonesia

Charissa Adria Rizanti

School of Design, Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia
Charissaadria.106@gmail.com (Charissa Adria Rizanti)

Abstract: The emancipation of women and gender equality movement was the turn points for the rights possessed by women today. However, people in Indonesia in particular still has the presumption that tends to the paradox of the female body. The female body is still a taboo to talk about by society. Many are judging the female body as a beauty and yet they also have to always cover their body up. This is perceived as inconsistent with information and foreign cultural influences, especially western culture that dominate the electronic media. Coupled with feminism ideology, these paradoxes raise the questions of where is the position of the female body in the society, especially Indonesia.

Keywords: Female, Body, Representation, Taboo, Paradox, Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Females bodies have different components than men. Both biologically and physically, as well as in context and symbols. The female body becomes an enigma in this millennial age. Supported the acceleration of information, a cultural mixing becomes inevitable. It also affects the meaning of the female body both outside and in Indonesia. Females body representations causes several catharsis and paradoxes in various subjects such as art, philosophy, religion and etc. One of these paradoxes for example, such as worship and praise for women but also assess women as temptation and need to cover their body up.

The paradigm of the female body is not without cause. Different growths in west and east both culturally and scientifically becoming the crucial point of this paradigm. All can be reviewed from the ecological background and the influence of belief system scattered in their respective areas. Moreover, in Indonesia have a strong background of Islam that has been fused with local culture, especially in the island of Sumatra and Java. Contrary to that, the acceleration of western modern information and ideology provides another view for Indonesian's young generation in seeing women's representation. How does this friction occur? To what extent and where is the position of representation of woman body next?

2. Females Body Representation in History

2.1. Females Body Representation in Art Scene

Females Body was already familiar theme in the art world, both as objects and subjects. Women's body has a symbol and meaning that changes time by time. For example,

at the age where people worship the gods or the time of Paganism. The statues of the naked body made of marble on the Greek and Roman temples are made very beautiful, proportional and very ideal. At this era, nudity was a form of human idealism manifested in the Gods. The naked female goddess for example can be relied upon as a form of fertility and motherhood which was the essence of the function and body of women in social life at that time

In 1863 Edouard Manet made a breakthrough on the art scene of getting out from the realm of religion. With a focus that was more emphasize on everyday life, Manet then became one of the motors of Impressionism movement. With his works entitled *The Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia*, Manet changed the representation of women and painting and also popularized the term *Gaze*. The idea that the subject or object in the painting looked toward the appreciator, looking and communicating to who saw the painting.

Both of these works caused a lot of protests because casually aired naked female body and satirical criticism on the community. Seeing the gesture and the atmosphere presented in the painting, it could be interpreted as Manet representing a narrative about high classes prostitution, female degradation, and the reality of female life in society.

2.2. Female Body Representation in Religion

When Abrahamic religion was present in Europe, Catholicism at the time, nudity was already taboo. Women's visual representations are no longer naked, but wear clothes especially on Gothic paintings. The sacred females are

depicted with the size of a subject or object with a greater proportion of the others and have a yellow circle or "Halo" behind their head. These sacred females are depicted as a form of religious spread as an appreciation of Virgin Mary by the church. Paintings at this time were made as a missionary media and the representation of women who always presented closed in accordance with the Catholic teachings. The form of narration and painting as allowed and in the message by the church at that time. Until finally the era of the Renaissance began.

The Renaissance was an era in which there was a renewed interest in ancient Greek and Roman scholarship as they rediscovered its files and scripture. In the field of philosophy, science, and art, the renaissance period again placed the female body and its nudity to the gods, this time apart from the Catholic Religion of that time and fused with philosophy. With the secularism is born two opposing camps that is the stronghold of Religion in this church and academic camp.

Nudity on art is interpreted by the religious camp mostly as retelling the story of tragic or sin. While in the science of philosophy, nudity in art is the retelling of ancient Greek and Roman texts for the reinterpretation of these stories. Although in fact, art was regulated by the church and dogma in its society so that the arts still follow the church or the nobles who are able to order artwork.

In similar to Christian, most of the Islam sects prohibits the representation of living being entirely, both two dimensional or three dimensional, as the fear of *syirik* or imitating God. These ideas also went to distance the Muslim from Arab's Paganism before Islam raised in Mecca. But some few are more accepting as long it's not realistic style artwork.

2.3 Female Body Representation in Modern and Contemporary Era

On 1960s, second-wave feminism started in United States before it spread throughout Western world. Second wave feminism broadened the debate to a wide range of issues: sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. Second-wave feminism also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape issues, establishment of rape crisis and battered women's shelters, and changes in custody and divorce law. On this period, western world started their movement and gain support from musician and artist and such. Anti-war protest and civil right movement spread across the west.

With reference to attempting to restore utopian idealism in the early 20th century advanced by earlier modernist movements, feminist artists attempted to change the worldview focusing on the interference of the establishment of the social arts field, the history of art, and daily interactions. As in the words of Suzanne Lacy, an artist and feminist, when declaring Feminist Art's goal is to "influence cultural behavior and change stereotypes".

At this stage, Feminist was split into two sides, Pro-sex and Anti-sex feminist. These also sparked "Sex war"

among women studies. The Pro-Sex group were encouraging the portrayal of women sex and work such as pornography, sexualization, and prostitution were part of female empowerment as the shaming of female body and their representations were the part of patriarchy oppression. Anti-Sex Feminist disagree and condemned sexual act and female objectification by a woman as the part of male entertainment therefore a part of patriarchy.

The term Male Gaze then was popularized in the art field and literature. Describing the world and women from a masculine point of view, presenting women as an object of male pleasure. This concept was first developed by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Mulvey argues that the asymmetry of gender power is the controlling force in theaters and built for the enjoyment of male audiences, deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology and discourse. Male gaze occurs when the camera puts the audience into the perspective of heterosexual men. For example, this may linger over the curve of a woman's body. Women are usually shown on two different levels: as erotic objects for both the characters in the movie and for the viewers who watch the movie. The man appears as a dominant force in the fantasy of the created film as she was passive about his active gaze.

The concept of sexual objectification and in particular, the objectification of women, is an important idea in feminist theory and psychological theories derived from feminism. Many feminists regard sexual objectification playing an important role in gender inequality. Some social commentators however, argue that some modern women objectify themselves as an expression of their empowerment over men, while others argue that increased sexual freedom for women, gay, and bisexual men have led to an increase of the objectification of men.

3. Female Body Representation in Indonesia

3.1. Incompatible culture and hypocrisy

Female body representation in Indonesia is no different from most of the Asia culture. We solemnly assigned female as the second sex and support for the family and the male figure as the leader. Thus the Idea of female inferiority is standardized as the definitive role for female gender. This instances went into extreme in the presence of Abrahamic religion like Islam, Jewish and Christian.

The exposed female body is considered as a sin and prohibited in public. Wearing a short and revealing clothes are socially unacceptable in general. These rhyming with the belief of "women have to cover up" rules in respective religions. These natures to cover female body derived for religious scriptures and verses said about the temptation of female body and the punishment to reveal them. Also to "protecting" female from harassment and sexual aggression as it also raised their dignity. Thus the idea of female unsexualization never stop the Idea of female inferiority. It is clear that female always taught to serve, desired, and satisfy

male. Furthermore, perpetuate the notion of female mistreatment that always become western criticism to Abrahamic religion especially Islam.

As such, the Idea of “Nakedness” are driving negative statement regardless for the scientific purposes or art purposes. For example, was the incident that happened in Bekasi on July 28th 2017, when group of Civil Society Organization protested for a statue called “Tiga Mojang”. The sculptor Nyoman Nuarta was disappointed because the statue of his work had to be torn down because it was protested by an Islamic community organization Bekasi City. He considered the organization and the local government did not understand the art. According to Nyoman, the issue of SARA (tribe, religion, race, and intergroup) carried to knock down the statue in Harapan Indah City Housing, Bekasi, was unfounded. Like the symbol of Trinity and Our Lady.

More sadly, Nyoman continued, the statue of Tiga Mojang claimed to contain elements of pornography so it is not worth standing in the city of Bekasi, whose society is religious. While Nyoman clarified that there is no element of pornography in his work. The idea of the statue is the result of the cultural exploration of the *Priangan* people who wear the *kemben* as traditional clothes on special days. The clothes are also commonly used by a virgin while welcoming a respected guest.



Picture 3.1. Tiga Mojang
(Source:)



Picture 3.2. Tiga Mojang Abolishment
(Source: Tempo.com)

3.2. Indonesian Feminist perspective on Female Body

The female body, often said to be weak, helpless, A commodity, and so on. Patriarchal meanings dominate eastern cultural thinking that still perpetuate patriarchal culture as a whole. The definition of the sex or gender system is essential to understanding the meaning of the feminine and masculine parts. According to Gayle Rubin, a radical-libertarian feminist, the sex/gender system is "a series of arrangements, used by society to transform biological sexuality into products of human activity" (Tong, 1998: 72).

According to Gadis Arivia in the 71th edition of the women's journal, there are ways to retain equality in this perpetual male dominance. There are Four things that need to be done to re-empower the female body; First, women must be open to talk about sexuality and sexually demonstrating women explicitly, that women have sexual power and not be a taboo to talk about. Secondly, women must dare to say "no" if it is not in accordance with his personal will in terms of his appearance and existence. Thirdly, women must dare to say "yes" to their sexual desires. When women are ready to break up sex, then, the desire must be respected. Fourth, women must dare to learn not to blame themselves for their sexual desires or for their clothing choices.

Indeed, there will always be pros and cons of the discussion of women and sexuality. Many groups consider this to be too taboo to discuss and discuss. However, there will always be unsuitable parties to the choices women make. Therefore, the important thing is that he chooses a choice because it is comfortable and not because of the intimidation of others. Because a woman is an independent being, she should also have a right to herself, especially to her body.

4. The Murky Future for Female Representation Indonesia.

It is hard to predict the future, nonetheless for the female emancipation and female empowerment. Strong rooted culture of patriarchal society and overall religious environment would not tolerate more modern and westernized idea of female role.

Even the Indonesian law and government ensure the equality between gender and create a ministry specialized to protect woman and children (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak / KEMENPPA), the violence and the against woman and degrading woman for their appearance still happening. Many woman activists dedicated themselves to create a better environment for woman and children. These activists also sharing their thought through female discourse, college education, and journals to give a better understanding for the next generation of female inequality that they need to fight.

But the heating issues of racism and xenophobia caused by the recent Jakarta's Election, strikes an extreme segregationist between the majority and the minority. Enforcing more and more this Abrahamic religion and culture to push our nationalism and multiculturalism out from the equation. Maybe it's still too soon to hope for equality with safe environment for speak out and open mindedness in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

In the end, the debate on female equality and the representation of female body was a controversial thing. Nevertheless, it is important to society as a whole to empower female as whole. As negating the bad stereotypes of religious society who always mistreat woman is really important for progressive future. As said, creating a prosperous nation was not enough by economic welfare for everyone but also social openness to our own multiculturalism.

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