

## Men and Woman as Victims of Patriarchy in Ika Natassa's Books: *Critical Eleven & Divortiare Trilogy*

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper we intend to analyze the victimization of patriarchy toward two genders at the same time, male and female. Previously patriarchy was considered as a system that oppresses women only due to its characteristics that favor man. We analyze the behavior of the main characters in Ika Natassa's novels, *Critical Eleven* and *Divortiare Trilogy*, who allegedly embody the patriarchal values in their behaviors on a daily basis, the values that could victimize them. In analyzing the novels, we use the traditional Javanese values that reflect patriarchal ideology, such as *3M* and *benggol & bonggol*. We divide the analysis into two parts. In the first part, we analyze how patriarchal ideology affects the lives of the two main female characters, Alex and Anya, where they had to keep up with the expectation of becoming the ideal traditional wife and how it put them in hard times. In the second part, we analyze how the patriarchal ideology strangely also affects the husbands of the main female characters. The finding shows that patriarchal ideologies surprisingly oppresses not only the wives but the husbands as well.

**Keywords:** patriarchy; masculinity; sexism; woman

### INTRODUCTION

Despite its ability to attract a wide audience, which proves its popularity, popular literature is often neglected in literary studies (Berberich, 2015). This happens because this genre is categorized into what so-called escape literature, that is, literature created solely for entertainment which helps its readers escape from reality and immerse themselves into the world of fantasy (Konzack, 2018). This is different from literary works which are classified into literary canon, and thus considered as serious literature. This kind of literature is categorized into interpretive literature, namely, literature that can sharpen and broaden readers' perspectives on and awareness of life (McKenzie, 2010). Most of literary studies focus on the literary works that belong to interpretative literature. As a result, popular literature does not often receive attention commensurate with its potentials and to some extent, its quality.

In Indonesian literature, however, popular literature is considered to have contributed to the literary scene. This is proven by a number of scholars, among others, Djundjung (2004), Bodden (2016), Wulandari (2019), who use popular literature as an object of their literary research, where they examine people's changing worldview, as reflected in the works studied. This shows that there is a close relationship between popular literature and the reflection of the society, in which popular literature depicts current social events. Studies as such prove that popular literature has the potentials to help its readers expand their mindset.

Popular literature is mostly written in the genre of fiction. One subgenre of fiction that is popular in Indonesia is, *metropop*. The term *metropop* is popularized by Gramedia Pustaka Utama, a well-known publishing company in Indonesia, in mid 2000s. *Metropop* is the abbreviation of metro popular. As its name suggests, this subgenre usually talks about lives of women in an urban or metropolitan setting. The formula of *metropop* is quite similar to chicklit novels in general, namely, focusing on women's struggles in their love life and career (Djundjung,

2004). However, the authors of metropop usually adjust it with the current situation and social issues in Indonesia. In this way, they represent the reality or the lives of cultural groups in the society they observe in their work as faithfully as possible (Suprajitno, 2017).

One of Indonesian metropop authors that attracts our attention is Ika Natassa, famously known after both of her works, *Divortiare* (2008) and *Critical Eleven* (2015) were adapted into movies with the same titles. Natassa received a wider recognition after *Critical Eleven* was adapted into a movie in 2017 and received three awards in Asia Academy Creative Awards (Sembiring, 2018). In 2019, *Twivortiare* was released as the movie installment of Natassa's *Divortiare Trilogy*.

We decided to analyze Natassa's metropop novels, *Critical Eleven* and *Divortiare Trilogy*, her two most notable works, because both talk about the common problem that many face in the society, that is, marriage. Marriage could be a serious issue for young urban metropolitan couples, whose values might not be in line with those of the society, which is still traditional in nature. *Critical Eleven* talks about the marriage life of a couple, Ale and Anya, who decided to be together after previously accidentally met on a flight to Australia. After they got married, Anya who previously worked as a management consultant could not stand the boredom of staying at home for a long time due to her pregnancy. Everything went normal until Anya got a miscarriage. Ale blamed Anya for working too hard, which he thought was the main reason of her miscarriage. Anya felt irritated knowing that Ale put all the blame on her and decided to stop talking to Ale for eleven months. The other novel, *Divortiare Trilogy*, talks about the life of Alexandra Rhea, a successful career woman, who became a widow after she decided to divorce her husband, Beno. After she got remarried with Beno, Alex pulled some strategy to improve her relationship with him, knowing that her previous marriage with Beno was a disaster. Alexandra tried to become a better wife for Beno by being more concerned with traits that usually are possessed by traditional wives. Yet, this was not easy for both of them.

The topic of marriage is quite common in literature. Normally, it depicts the traditional values of the society – patriarchy, which often frames women in a subordinate position, a traditional gender role that often subjugates them. However, in this study, we show that *Critical Eleven* and *Divortiare Trilogy* treat marriage and patriarchy differently, unlike the usual formula where patriarchy often oppresses women overtly and covertly in their marriage. These novels describe the female main characters, Anya and Alex, as independent career women who are financially stable. They are depicted as modern women who tend to prioritize their career instead of their roles as wives. Nevertheless, they feel insecure because they do not have a traditional female trait, such as the ability to cook, one characteristics of domestic sphere that patriarchal values perpetuate. Their insecurities affect their relationship with their husband. The similar thing also happens to the husbands. Men, who are usually considered as the agents of patriarchy, are also pictured as the victims of patriarchy. Ale (Anya's husband) and Beno (Alex' husband) are taught that once they get married, the husband is responsible for household expenses and all the wife's need. In the traditional gender roles, men are expected to be the provider for the family, and thus work outside, whereas women take care of household (Thobejane & Khosa, 2014). However, due to some circumstances, Ale and Beno are worried that they may not be able to do so. And this puts pressure on them, which affect their marriage life. In other words, as seen in this novel, patriarchal values affects not only men, but women as well. Thus, in this paper, we are interested in analyzing how patriarchy can victimize both male and female characters, in this case, Ale & Anya and Beno & Alex.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to understand the victimization of patriarchy toward the male and female main characters in the novels discussed, we use the theory of patriarchy. This theory is the primary theory that functions as the basis of our analysis. Since the cultural setting of these novels are Javanese culture, we relate the discussion on patriarchy to Javanese concepts regarding women's position in the family. We also use another theory that supports our analysis, namely, the theory of masculinity.

Patriarchy refers to a system of beliefs that perpetuates men's domination over women, which structures gender inequality between men and women. This inequality is embedded into the social and cultural institutions of a society. As a result, "women are disadvantaged relative to men" (Benstead, 2021, p. 241). In other words, men are constructed as superior to women, and this leads to men dominating the public sphere. Women are best suited to the domestic sphere. The fact that society only sees women as individuals that are good at doing domestic activities makes the practice of patriarchy so obvious when it comes to marriage.

In Javanese culture, men are the ones who have control within the marriage. The wives cannot go against the husbands' opinion. This is reflected in a traditional Javanese value that is set to be the ideal persona of Javanese wives that is called as *wanita*, an abbreviation that stands for *wani ditata* (willing to be arranged). It means that women should be the ones who are disposed to be controlled by their husbands (Handayani & Novianto, 2008). Seen from patriarchal perspective, this "constrains women" (Benstead, 2021, p. 241). It occurs because women are subject to men's domination and authority.

Javanese culture also discerns women as *kanca wingking*, where women are destined to be "a friend that walks behind a man" (Sutjipto, 1992). This view creates a narrative that women will always propose to be in a subordinate position than men. The wives are expected to be invariably submissive and not having a chance to have opinions for themselves. In other words, in Javanese culture, wives are seen as those that are being owned by their husbands. The wives are obliged to be devoted to the husbands.

Traditional Javanese culture also prescribes the standards for ideal Javanese wives. In order to be an ideal wife, a woman should devote herself to her husbands, by practicing values known as 3M. 3M stands for the three values that are considered as the ideal traits that every Javanese wife should have. They are *macak* (dressing up) – women should take care and beautify themselves in order to please their husbands, *manak* (giving birth) – women are obliged to have children because having a descendant is considered as one of the most important things in a family, and *masak* (cooking) – the ability that all Javanese women are expected to do, that is, to cook and serve food for their family. The 3M term becomes really important in creating the ideology of gender in Indonesia because when a woman cannot fulfill the three aspects, they will be considered as "incomplete" by the society (Kuntjara, 1997).

Masculinity is referred to as "the social roles, behaviors, and meanings that are prescribed for men ... in any given society at any one time" (Kimmel, 2001, p. 9318). It implies that a person can be characterized as masculine through cultural norms and values found in the society, such as the way men should dress and speak. However, due to social and cultural changes, masculine character traits undergo some changes. Nowadays, there are some other core traits of masculinity that are considered can be socially accepted such as, "status seeking, achievement and success in work and sports, independence, confidence, competitiveness, risk-taking, aggression, and the act of avoiding behavior, speech, and emotion that signify femininity" (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020, p. 25). Men who do not show these qualities are considered as having fragile masculinity, defined

as a psychological consequence of those who fear they are falling short of strict masculinity standards (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020). If they fail to convince the society about their manhood, these men have the risk of losing their status as real men. In many cases, the men usually tend to get some kinds of pressure that can later on trigger their anxiety to prove their manhood to the society (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020). In other words, the ones that can signify men's masculinity is their manhood and their achievement and success, which is often measured by wealth. Failure to prove that they have those will make them lose their "value" in the society. This also happens in Javanese culture, where men are only valued as real men when they have *benggol* (money) and *bonggol* (sexual virility) (Ulya et al., 2021).

*Benggol* represent the social value where a man can provide all of his wife's needs financially. This social value is supported by the social concept of *dadi wong* which literally means "becoming a person" in English. In Javanese culture, one of the biggest goals for men is when they can get a job and earn money out of it. When they have a relatively substantial amount of money, they will be considered as *dadi wong*, becoming a "real person." In short, man's value as an individual is irrelevant if he does not have enough money to support his family.

*Bonggol* represents the social value where a man is able to give offspring to the family by impregnating his wife. In Indonesia, society sees the act of having children as a symbol of power and dominance of men (Rahmani & Abrar, 1999). Because of that, infertility has an important role in creating an effect on men's self-esteem. Infertility can cause an emotional crisis for most men that can be shown in the form of anger, guilt, depression and loss of self-esteem.

## ANALYSIS

### **Anya & Alex as Victims of Patriarchy**

In *Critical Eleven* and *Divortiare Trilogy*, Alex and Anya seemed to share some similarities in facing problems of attempting to embody the image of perfect traditional wives. The first similarity between both women is that they were career women before being housewives. Because of that, Anya, who worked as a management consultant, and Alex, who worked as the bank manager, have to end up in hard times in pursuing their endeavors as the ideal housewives. They feel that they need to have the traits of the ideal traditional wives so they could be good wives, even though they did not find it comfortable. They think that the only way to be happy within the marriage is only by possessing the traits of a traditional wife. Their desires to embody these traits make them trapped in the patriarchal mindset, as reflected in the 3M value, which leads to victimizing them.

The first M of the 3M value is *macak* (dressing up). It demands women to always look good for the sake of pleasing their husband. As a result, Alex and Anya feel like they are obliged to look pretty in front of their husbands and other people. Alex in *Twivortiare* needs to go through an uncomfortable phase just to look presentable. There was one time when Alex and Beno were invited to Beno's cousin's wedding and Alex needed to wear kebaya. She said that the effort that she put in wearing the attire and doing the makeup was intended for Beno (*Twivortiare*, p. 136). The fact that she was bothered because she had to wake up early and deal with all the hassle of wearing kebaya shows that she did sacrifice (at least she did feel that way) just to look pretty, whether in front of her husband or the relatives. Technically, she did not see "not being pretty" as a choice at that moment because the only choice she had was being pretty since *macak* value forces women to do that. Anya in *Critical Eleven* thinks that she needs to look pretty for the husband anytime just as an act of "gratitude" due to her husband for being handsome in the first place (*Critical Eleven*, p. 54). It seems that the nature of *macak* value pressurizes her to dedicate her beauty to her husband. There is also an underlying message that even though she was not a fulltime housewife, she still had to embody the traditional trait of a wife and could not leave it

every time she gets home. Their case shows that the wives are somehow still trapped in the patriarchal mindset. They do not see the activity of dressing up and putting makeup as something empowering or rewarding but more like a sign of adherence to their husband as required by the tradition.

The second M value, *manak* (giving birth) leads Alex and Anya to the point where they have to face some challenges in order to have a baby. In Javanese culture, giving birth is considered a women's duty as soon as they get married. It becomes such a mandatory act because the Javanese believe, when a woman is giving birth to a baby, it will bring luck to the parents and the family (Koentjaraningrat, 1985).

Anya and Alex feel that they need to have children for the sake of happiness in the family. In *Twivortiare 2*, Alex is so obsessed with having a baby because she thinks that the presence of a child could make her marriage life complete (p. 16). She also gets pressures from her relatives. There was one time when she was attending a family event and she had to deal with one family member who kept on telling her that the presence of a child was good for the family (*Twivortiare*, pp. 133-134). The pressure seems to validate *manak* value, despite it really hurts her feeling. In Anya's case, she considered herself as a failure after she found out she got a miscarriage. She started to blame herself for all the bad things that happened. She thought she was the one who was responsible for causing the disaster. She saw herself as someone that is unworthy, less and incomplete when could not do what the *manak* value demanded her to do. She even labelled herself as an "incompetent wife," (Critical Eleven, p. 312).

The third M value, *masak* (cooking), gives Alex and Anya insecurity. In Javanese culture, an ideal wife must be able to cook food for her husband and children. The Javanese see the activity of cooking as a form of love and devotion to the family, especially to the husband. Javanese culture prescribes women to have *watak gemati* that is a value where Javanese wives should be the ones that are responsible in taking care of what the husbands like and one of them is cooking. If a wife is not able to possess this trait, she will not be loved by the husband (Widyastuti, 2014). Alex is described as a wife who does not have a good cooking skill. She never cooks before, except frying eggs. However, when she got married, she tried to learning cooking, and cooked for special occasion, her husband's birthday. Just like what happened to her in fulfilling the *macak* value, she also put extra efforts in embodying the *masak* value. The fact that she decided to learn to cook, although she dislike it, with the expectation that Beno would spend more time at home, and it somehow would trigger happiness in their marriage reflects her internalization of the *masak* value.

Anya also experienced the similar thing. There is one part where Anya was questioning Ale whether he was sure or not in choosing her to be his wife. She tried to convince him that if he chooses her to be his wife, then he would deal with a woman who is "incredibly stupid" in the kitchen (*Critical Eleven*, p. 215). Anya asked Ale that question because she felt insecure, knowing that her mother-in-law is a really good cook. This shows that Anya seemed to manifest *watak gemati*. That is why she was worried that she could not make her husband happy if she could not possess *masak* value.

The discussion above show that the 3M value of patriarchy plays a central role in Anya's and Alex's life. However, the internalization of this patriarchal value victimizes them, from sacrificing their comfort in order to look beautiful to the insecurity for not having a good cooking skill. We can see how these women need to pull some strategies in order to keep up with the requirements of being good wives in their marriage. The fact that Anya and Alex who feel that they are not good enough because of not having the traditional traits of an ideal wife shows that patriarchy victimize them by affecting the way they see themselves. In addition, it gets more ironic because patriarchy has come to the point where it has been internalized in people's mindset.

It does not need agents to endorse the value because people already see the values as something that has to be owned in the first place.

### **Ale & Beno as Victims of Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is defined as a system that most likely puts men in a position that is more dominant and beneficial than it does to women. However, that is not always the case. In the lives of Javanese women, patriarchy is manifested in the 3M value that regulates the standard for the persona of ideal wife. Javanese men are spared from the patriarchal influences in their lives, as there is also a manifestation of patriarchy in traditional Javanese value that standardizes the ideal traits of a man, namely *benggol* (money) and *bonggol* (sexual virility) value. Just like any other ideal traits that were created as a form of masculinity, when a man cannot succeed in embodying the traits, they will be considered as "less" in the society. Similar to what happens to Alex and Anya, the main female characters in the novels analyzed, who feel that they lose their "value" as a woman if they cannot meet the expectation prescribed by the 3M values, Beno and Ale also have the same feeling, that is, they feel that they lose their "value" as a man if they cannot meet the expectation prescribed by the value of *benggol* and *bonggol*.

The *benggol* value refers to the notion that men are valued based on what they have. In traditional Javanese culture, there are five types of possessions that a man should have in order to be considered as an ideal man. Those are bondo (money), griyo (house), turonggo (vehicle), kukilo (pet), and pusoko (weapon) (Darwin, 1999). In modern concept, these five things may be perceived as wealth and fortune. Different from women who are expected to own several types of quality that comes from within, men are being valued based on things that they possess. This fact validates the narrative about the man's self-worth that is being measured by his wealth and fortune. Because of that, when it comes to the family, men are also expected to be able to afford the household's and the wife's needs.

Beno, the main male character in *Divortiare Trilogy*, directly asked Alex to save her money and put all the responsibility of providing her needs to him (*Twivortiare*, p. 168). Even though he knew that Alex earned enough money because she worked as a bank manager, he kept on providing for his wife. He even used a religious justification for that. He said that their religion, Islam, dictates that providing the wife's need is the husband's responsibility, and it is sinful if the husband cannot do that (*Twivortiare*, p. 169). His statement shows that husband's inability to provide for his wife is considered as something wicked and unforgiveable. That is why men will do their best in order to avoid this "sin." And if they cannot reach this benchmark, they feel that their masculinity is being threatened. That is why Beno insisted on providing for his wife, although sometimes he questions his ability to do that.

Ale, the main male character in *Critical Eleven*, also had the same feeling as Beno. He believed that it was the husband's duty to give financial support to his wife, although the wife also earned her own money. The inability or the lack of the ability to do so may made him insecure. This can be seen in an incident where he accompanied his sister, Raisa, to go shopping. He saw a pair of shoes that was being displayed and told his sister that it was the same type of shoes that Anya wore when he picked her up after work. After he found out about the shoes' price, he was shocked to death (*Critical Eleven*, p. 233). He did not expect that the price was astronomical. He doubted that later he could not keep up with Anya's lavish lifestyle. He even stated that he was not at the level where he could buy anything that Anya desired because he felt that he was not that rich (*Critical Eleven*, p. 234-235).

The discussion above shows that Beno and Ale are still trapped in a patriarchal mindset. They claim their masculinity on their ability to provide for their wife. They hold fast to the value of men as the breadwinners. The internalization of this value, that is, good husbands should

possess the ability to provide for his wife, a narrative that being financially successful, is mandatory for them because of the expectation of providing for their wife. Failure to do so can give them insecurity.

The internalization of *bonggol* value is also depicted as victimizing Beno and Ale. This value prescribes that the ability to have kids becomes the symbol of the masculinity. That is why when a man is being infertile, he does not succeed in embodying his masculine traits. Even though infertility can be something scary for women (see the 3M value), men may also face the same problem. In *Twivortiare 2*, Beno felt pressurized due to the absence of a child in his marriage life with Alex. Alex recalled how Beno always saw himself as a failure for not being able to have a baby (*Twivortiare 2*, p. 17). Actually Beno never did anything that possibly could decrease his value as a person. He did his role as a loving and caring husband for his wife. Despite all the quarrels that he had with Alex, he never did anything that intended to hurt Alex's feelings. However, when he found out that could not possess one trait that demanded a man to have kids as a manifestation of masculinity, he felt like he lost his value as a man.

In *Critical Eleven*, the way patriarchy victimizes the male character is quite different from what happens to Beno in *Divortiare Trilogy*. Patriarchy victimizes Beno by making him feel like he lost his value as a man when he could not impregnate his wife. However, patriarchy victimized Ale through his relationship with Anya. After Ale blamed Anya for her miscarriage, Ale has to go through eleven months with Anya giving him a cold shoulder and it made him frustrated (*Critical Eleven*, p. 83). The sweet memories he had with Anya triggered his frustration more when Anya cut the communication between them (*Critical Eleven*, p. 125). The patriarchy victimized Ale through its internalization of the patriarchal value that obliges women to give an offspring and it was shown on Ale's behavior when he pointed out Anya as the main cause of her own miscarriage. Even though it looked like it was only Anya who was being victimized by the patriarchy value, the fact that Ale had the patriarchal mindset shows that Ale was still trapped in that mindset, which later led him in his hard times to make up with Anya. In this case, patriarchy victimized Ale not in terms of making him less as man for not fulfilling a standard but it put him in hard times for having the patriarchal mindset itself.

The discussion above shows that patriarchy is offensive to not only women's value, as in what we usually find in many literature works, but men's as well. Somehow people do not recognize the pressures they get from patriarchal values because their expectations are rooted that value itself. Men are expected to always look strong and tough, and this makes people somehow forget that being vulnerable is something normal since people cannot be always at their peak of performance all the time. In patriarchy, male dominance becomes the key factor of its practice. The presence of male dominance triggers the expectation from the society that demand men to behave like that. And this creates a narrative that men are prohibited to be subordinate and showing any features or trait that is not idealized as the signs of being masculine.

## CONCLUSION

Based on our analysis on Ika Natassa's novels, *Critical Eleven* and *Divortiare Trilogy* above, we can conclude that not only does patriarchy oppresses women in particular, but men as well. Patriarchy that is usually seen as a system that disserves females due to its limitation toward women by diminishing their capacity in the public sphere apparently can victimize men by vilifying their manhood when they are unable to be in the position that is more ahead than women.

Through the theoretical framework of patriarchy, which is manifested in Javanese standard of ideal husband and wife, our analysis shows that the main characters from the novels analyzed are still trapped in the patriarchal mindset and victimized by it. The victimization of

patriarchy was shown on how these characters felt like they did not have other options except adopting following the patriarchal values, even though no one asks them to do so. We can see how Alex and Anya, the female main characters, are being victimized by patriarchy, as proven by the fact that they have to be in hard times, and to suffer due to their mindset about the prescribed traditional roles of wives, as reflected in the 3M values. We can also see that surprisingly patriarchy also victimizing the main male characters. The Javanese values of *benggol* and *bonggol*, as the manifestation of patriarchy, perpetuates the patriarchal mindset that can make them in hard times and suffer as well.

To conclude, our analysis shows that patriarchy can attack any gender by putting up the expectations in the society, which can affect someone's mindset once the expectation cannot be achieved. It also exposes the effects of patriarchy, from badly affecting someone's perspective to the hard times an individual has to go through. The two couples in Ika Natassa's novels are depicted as individuals who are nearly perfect. Yet, they have an arduous life because of their patriarchal mindset.

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