# THE EFFORTS OF THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTER TO BE THE LEADER IN WHALE RIDER FILM SCRIPT

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to prove that the main female character in this film is fighting the patriarchy system in her tribe to gain the equality by becoming the leader. As the lineage of the leader, she thinks it is her rights to take the leadership in her tribe and continue the line of her family's destiny as the leader. Even though, her grandfather objected it because she is a female. The subject of this research is Whale Rider film. The primary data of this research is the script of Whale Rider film. The data will be obtained from the writer's observation of the film and some sources, such as books, article, and journals which related to gender inequality. The data analysis was conducted using feminism approach. The finding shows there are two events of gender inequality which the main female character faces: (1) Pai turned on the boat machine, her grandfather was mad at her and forbade her to do that again. (2) Pai was scolded by her grandfather because she used taiha secretly. Moreover, there are two effects such as: (1) Pai secretly followed the sacred class by hiding behind the window's class. (2) Pai secretly followed practicing taiha from a far.

**Keywords**: *patriarchy system, gender inequality, leadership, Whale Rider film*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this research, the writer will discuss about the efforts of the main female character (Pai), which is challenging the patriarchy system and fight it to gain the equality as men in *Whale Rider* film. *Whale Rider* is a 2002 New Zealand-German family drama film which directed by Niki Caro. The story was based on the novel of the same title by Witi Ihimaera – *Whale Rider*. It was premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9th, 2002. The film was shot on location in Whangara, the same setting of the novel.

*Whale Rider* film tells about a young girl (Pai) who wants to become the candidate of the new leader in her tribe, but her grandfather (Koro) who is the current leader of the tribe believes ─that the leader should be the first-born son a direct patrilineal descendant of Paikea (he; who rode on top of a whale) forbids Pai following the sacred class of the new leader candidate. A whale in this film is symbol of an ancient sacred animal that helps their ancestor find the shore when he lost in the ocean by rode on top of it. As Koro's belief of the tradition –only men who can be the leader, he forbids and drives out Pai who always attends the sacred class. Pai, who thinks it is her birthright to continue the family lineage as the leader even though she is a female, she always has her way to learn everything that Koro's taught to boys in sacred class. class; where men should be in charge of a family and public role, while

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women are in charge of only with kids and in the kitchen. It is similar to what Walby Silvia states in her book (1990:54) –subordination is to put women under male supremacy. It could means that men can order women while women should follow what men order to them, in other words women cannot take the job or the activities that men did. While men behave as a leader in family or social life, women have to take cares of the house and the child. As an effect, women cannot access the whole social elements such as public roles in leadership.

Leadership is an abstract concept, it means the definition of leadership is widespread and the definition depends on the context of particular issues. However, according to Batliwala (2010:8), leadership is a set of actions and process, performed by individuals, who have the capacity to create a vision for change, develop ideas, and strategies that enable others to work towards that changes, and make critical decision to achieve the goal. As for example, leadership in women context tends to look into women's movement to fight with patriarchal values in the society or family. It also means that leadership in women is one of their struggles for gaining equality. As Hitmann argue (2010:9) ―we are not interested in leadership for leadership's sake. We are interested in bringing women's talents to bear, along with men's, in addressing major social, political, and economic concern. It means women's leadership tends to have a purpose to being equal to men. Women leadership does not mean dominate or control men. This is supported by Ontario, says ―feminist leadership women and women's organizations sharing power, authority and decision-making in our common pursuit of social, legal, economic and cultural equality.

## 2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous study is a study which related previous work to avoid plagiarism or duplication of the research that has been done. Based on the result of the previous studies, the researcher has studied, analyzed and compared the previous studies that have similarities to the research that the researcher did. The similarity of the research is related to patriarchy system and gender inequality; however, they have different point of view and theory that they used to analyze the research.

The first study is found in Suhadi (2015). The researcher analyzed patriarchal oppression using radical feminism theory. The concept of the theory is based on the idea of oppression and domination, which emphasizes patriarchy as the root of women's inequality and social dominance of women by men (Firestone 14). This paper analyzes two famous short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne namely Birthmark (1843) and Rappacini's Daughter

(1844). This paper investigates the effect of the prevailing patriarchal oppression towards female characters in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories searching for identity through the lens of radical feminism, focusing specifically on authority and power. It can be seen that Hawthorne demonstrates how female characters struggle to define their lives as best as they can under male societal strictures in the early 19th century. In analyze the research, the researcher using qualitative research with a textual method. Textual method will investigate and analyze the literary work which emphasis on context analysis. The researcher used the main data of this research is quotations, sentence which highlight on women identity under patriarchal oppression as practiced in two short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Birthmark and Rappacini's Daughter.

Second is found in Santosa (2015). The aims of this research are to identify the female character's problems in her family related to gender roles. In collecting data the researcher used read-write technique and the data analysis was conducted using a feminism approach. The sources of data that the researcher analyzed was divided into two parts; primary sources and supporting sources. The main source is Steibeck's The Grapes of Wrath which was consisted of 30 chapters and published in 1939 by The Viking Press with 313 pages. In analyzing the data, the researcher used books and articles to gain more knowledge or information related to the research question. In this research, the researcher used Theorizing Patriarchy (Sylvia Walby) and The Second Sex (Simone de Beauvoir) for the main books of supporting the data.

The third is found in a journal of Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR), by Daulay and Saladin (2017). The aim of this research is to find the phenomenon of increasingly widespread female leaders in government, politics and business/private field. The data of this research was conducted by doing interviews with key informants and additional informants. In addition to interviews, the research was focused on group discussion were also conducted to complete the existing data deficiencies. This research was used feminist theory in raising gender issues in women's leadership. The word "eco" in ecology comes from the Greek Oikos, which means the home of all women and men, animals, plants, water, soil, air, and sun. The theory of ecofeminism is assumed to see individuals more comprehensively, as being bound and interacting with their environment. At the beginning of the concepts, eco-feminist look at women's issues in participation with the surrounding natural environment. The method of this research uses qualitative research. The research

corpus is the female village head, the female village apparatus and the head of the PKK and other women's tools. In this research there are 10 people of informant research.

After taking a look and learn of each previous study, the writer has been studying, and comparing them with the research or study that the writer will take for her own journal "*Fight Gender Inequality: The Effort of the Main Female Character to be the Leader in Whale Rider Film Script*". The difference between the writer's studies with the other researcher was in analyzing the film script; the writer used a feminist leadership theory by Srilatha Batliwa (2010). Batliwalas's famous theory about female leadership was written in a book entitled Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation (For *CREA*), which focused on building leadership capacity, and particularly of younger women. It means to assert their rights by doing continually evaluating relevant experiences, questioning their roles in society, challenging power structures, and effectively catalyzing positive social change. *CREA*'s work has consistently tried to inform practice with the best available analysis and theory in the fields of gender, human rights and sexuality, and to build theory from the knowledge and insights gained through practice. Within this, *CREA*'s particular goal has been to foster such leadership in the fields of sexuality, sexual rights and women's human rights, which is the intersection at which we work.

*note: CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action)*

## 3. DISCUSSION

In this study, the writer found the main female character's efforts of how she had challenging and fighting the gender inequality that has been done in her tribe especially by her grandfather ─Koro.

## 3.1 GENDER INEQUALITY THAT THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTER FACE

In *Whale Rider* film, men are assumed to be the next leaders of the tribe. The consequence of the patriarchal value is that men and women must understand their roles in the system. For example, men are the leaders which have a role to order women and to manage the family. However, it is different for women. They have no role to lead the family and order men. It is in line with Butler (1997:54) ─since women's position under male supremacy, they are powerless. It means that they do not deserve to be leaders. This becomes the gender role problem. Through Whale Rider film, this problem is clearly seen in the main female character, Pai:

## 1. Pai turned on the boat machine, her grandfather was mad at her and forbade her to do that again

The first example is when Pai turns on the ship's machine using the rope that being thrown away by Koro. This can be seen in this scene (00:17:41−00:18:27):

> Koro tries so many times to turn on the ship's machine. Koro: "useless bloody rope. I'll get another one." Koro throws the rope and leaves. Pai takes the rope and tries to turn on the ship's machine. Pai shouts "Paka! Paka! It's working! It's working!" Koro comes and turn off the ship's machine "I don't want you to do that again. It's dangerous." Koro stares Pai then leaves.
>
> *(Note: Paka is Koro. In the film, Pai calls Koro as Paka)*

It shows that Koro forbids Pai to not do that again –turns on the ship's machine which should be done by Koro himself. In their society, turn on the ship's machine is considered as the men's roles. It means that Pai is prohibited to turn on the ship's machine because it is not included to her role, as a girl. This implies that men have more dominant role than women, so that it does not give women an opportunity to do what the men must do.

## 2. Pai was scolded by her grandfather because she used *taiha* secretly

Second example is when Pai being found out by Koro while she is practicing taiha movement with her friend –Hemi. Koro gets mad and scolds Pai. But Pai's grandmother – Nanny supports Pai. This can be seen in this scene (00:39:09–00:40:01):

> In dining room, Pai, Koro and Nanny are having dinner. Pai drinks a glass of milk. Pai: "I'm sorry Paka." Pai continue having dinner. While having dinner, Nanny said to Koro: "Have you gone deaf now? Somebody just apologize to you." Koro mad: "YOU DON'T MESS AROUND WITH SACRED THINGS! (while hits the dining table, and a glass beside him fall and shatter)". Nanny: "SHE WAS JUST WATCHING!" Koro: "SHE WAS USING TAIHA!" Nanny and Koro stare each other, then, Nanny moves from the chair trying to clean the shatter glass. Koro: "Let the girl do it." Nanny: "You might be the boss out there, but I'm the boss of this kitchen. I'll do it." Nanny cleans the shatter glass.
>
> *(note: taiha in maori tribe means destiny, in this film depicted as stick fighting to determine their destiny)*

As Koro respects the patriarchal values, he is angry at Pai, it shows that Koro does not want to see Pai using taiha, because it is not what girls should do. This implies that Pai has no opportunity to use taiha, and Koro can decide whatever he wants such as ordering Pai to clean the shatter glass in the floor. This is discrimination toward women.

## 3.1.2 THE EFFORTS OF THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTER CHALLENGING THE GENDER INEQUALITY

As Wollstonecraft (1792) said, "Women must stand up for their rights and not allow their male-dominated society to define what it means to be a woman. Most importantly, women must reject the patriarchal assumption that women are inferior to men." It means by participating in those public roles, they can prove that they are not like what society perceives them, so that the society can change their assumptions that women also deserve the equal roles as men have.

In *Whale Rider* film, the reflection of women's efforts gain the equal roles is depicted by Pai, as the main female character. She tries to challenge her grandfather's –Koro belief, –he who was born as a boy who should be the next leader. By challenging Koro's belief, Pai wants to prove to Koro that women also can get a chance to participate in social role such as become a leader:

**1. Pai secretly followed the sacred class by hiding behind the window's class**

The first example is when Pai being forced to leave the sacred class ceremony by her grandfather –Koro. Pai knows there is a sacred class where the boys will be taught by Koro about what they need to be the next leader, so Pai sneaks from behind the class and peeking it the class through the window. This can be seen in this scene (00:35:58−00:36:58):

> Pai is walking behind the class and hears Koro's voice and peeking through the window. Koro: "Its *canoe* sank and he called on the ancient ones for strength. You're going to learn that chant, all of you, learn it exactly. And if you break the chant, you will suffer the *utu*."
> The boys see Pai peeking from the window. Koro turns his head to what the boys look. Pai gets down from the window quickly and hides from Koro.
> Koro turn his head back to the boys: "The consequences." Hemi interrupt: "Like what? Someone dying or something?."
> Koro: "Like your dick"ll drop off." Hemi put his hands to his lower (the other boy laughs). Koro: "So hold onto your dicks!" The boys put their hand to their lower and laughing. Koro: "Enough! Hold onto your dick! Now… repeat after me." Pai peeked back from the window.
> Koro teaches the chant to the boys. The boys repeat the chant after Koro. Pai also following the chant that Koro taught to the boys.
>
> *(Note: Conoe is like a tiny ship/boat. Chant is like a sacred song,*
> *it used by Maori's ancestor to call for help.*
> *Utu means the cost that should be paid)*

Even though Pai is being expelled from the sacred class's ceremony, –because she refuses to sit in the back, Pai never gives up of the sacred class. Pai listens and repeating the chant well –which Koro taught to the boys, secretly from Koro. It is her way to fight the patriarchal system that forbids a girl to follow the sacred class.

**2. Pai secretly followed practicing *taiha* from a far**

The Second example is when Pai is following *taiha* movement secretly from Koro, –Pai knows if Koro see it he will be mad to her, but her friend –Hemi sees Pai and approaches her. This can be seen in this scene (00:38:11−00:38:58):

> Hemi: "Koro knows you're doing that?"
> Pai: "I'm not doing anything".
> Hemi: "Then how come you're hiding round here, then?" Pai grins a bit.
> Hemi: "Koro cool, eh? (Hemi swing the stick in his hand) he's teaching us to be warriors, man. Gonna be chiefs. Gonna smack all those other ones." Hemi swing the stick to Pai's face.
> Pai: "You shouldn't have hit Koro like that."

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Hemi: "He was alright. He was real patient, eh? How he won't let you do it?"

Pai: "Girls aren't allowed." Hemi: "You could sit up the back as long as you were quiet. I wouldn't mind." Clack… Pai hits Hemi's stick.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Hemi: "You're not even holding it right. Your hands should be like this (showing Pai how is the right to hold the stick) and your feet… ...like this." Hemi shows Pai how is the right position while holding the stick.

As Pai practices *taiha* secretly from Koro, Pai is fighting the gender discrimination. Pai knows that *taiha* is not for a girl, but she keeps practice it by secretly following Koro's *taiha* movement. It shows that Pai wants her right as the lineage of the leader without distinguishing the gender.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This day, gender inequality is not only women but also men. There is gender inequality, when a person or people were being treated by another person or people by distinguishing their gender. For example, a boy who wants to become a chef is forbidden by his parents just because a chef's job is cooking which is only done by woman. From there gender inequality appears. Gender inequality mostly started from family ─especially for daughters, they cannot express how they think related to their family decision. In effect they cannot access the whole social elements such as public roles. But, Gender inequality is not something that cannot be fought. We can fight all the gender inequality by challenging and fighting it, such as the main female character in *Whale Rider* film ─Pai, she shows us how she is challenging the gender inequality in her tribe to get an equal role as the other boy. From that, the writer concludes that the main female character in *Whale Rider* film was challenging and fighting the gender inequality.

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