

WOMEN BETWEEN *ARBEIT* AND FAMILY: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE ON CAPITALISM IN THE NOVEL *MOBBING* BY ANNETTE PEHNT

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women in the public sphere, especially in the context of work (*Arbeit*) is not a big issues in modern societies anymore. However, their reproductive functions as wives and mothers are still used in a capitalistic system to send women back to their domestic sphere. They are materially and symbolically placed in this sphere in order to maintain the masculine domination in the public sphere. This situation can be found in the Novel *Mobbing*, a novel written by Annette Pehnt that become the material object of the research. Pehnt showed the portrait of a german middle class family who was struggling to survive in a competitive world. The novel shows the women who won the competitions. The writer wanted to show how women were usually marginal in the capitalis society although they were also active in this public sphere. The paper aims to explore how women and *Arbeit* are shown as important aspects elaborated in german literature.

Keywords: women, *Arbeit*, german, family, *Mobbing*

INTRODUCTION

Mobbing is one of the literary works of Annette Pehnt, published in 2008 which is a novel telling the story of a small family of middle class in Germany. Rühler Joachim and his wife (as I-Narrator) lived their lives with a very pleasant, as middle-class families more in Germany. Mona, their first child who was five years old, had entered kindergarten at that moment and their second child who was four years old -in this novel being called Baby- also in a state fine. Jo's wife was a translator of French novels into German. Joachim Rühler called Jo, working in local city (*Stadtverwaltung*) in the culture. Problems began to arise when Jo was accused of embezzling office and was fired from his job. Since then Jo's struggled to help the lives of their families and continue to support her husband to finally get his job back.

Annette Pehnt was a German writer who was born in Cologne July 25, 1967. Pehnt completed her college majoring Anglistic and Germanistic. Her Roman debut *Ich muss los* was published in 2001. In the following years, Pehnt wrote several novels and children's books. To achieve them in the field of literature, Pehnt has received several awards among them *Hermann Hesse-Literaturpreis*. Currently, Pehnt stayed in Freiburg with her husband and three children. Besides being a freelance writer, Pehnt is also a lecturer at the Universität Freiburg since 2007.

This article specifically discussed about the position of women who had the advantage of reproduction and parenthood were always seen as something natural rather than as a social and economic potential. This view would negate

the contribution of women in the context of the survival of mankind in general. With the approach of Marxist, it was shown that women had been isolated both material and symbolic, especially in their capitalism thought.

Theoretical Background

Feminism criticism against the system of Capitalism is not a new discourse. The basics of this criticism began to be found for example in the writings by Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858) with John Stuart Mill who publish a new perspective on freedom and equality of the difference between genders. The main purpose of their writing was not only the creation of human relations better without knowing the sex differences, but also gives provision abilities that mankind was able to work without any dependency attitude. The main message was actually to be conveyed in this book is not meant as limiting the freedom and distance with others, but freedom must be interpreted as reciprocal links that do not lead to the creation of dependency and hierarchy and authority that is not symmetrical.

Thoughts on gender equality, especially in the world of work is becoming more prominent these days. In a capitalist society, it is clearly visible how women are positioned marginally in both domestic and public shutter. Housework majority becomes the responsibility of women is not at all considered as *Erwerbsarbeit* who must earn a salary and social benefits. The labor market outside the household, they even earn relatively low salaries of their coworkers are male. This condition is certainly contrary to the large share of women in the process of social reproduction, because the macro-economic perspective, the role of women in socio-education and infrastructure investment as a form of consumer-care and their work in unpaid household should actually be counted as part of the activities reproductive.

However, in fact, a large share of women in the process of social reproduction by capitalist society is often not seen economically, so that their role is reduced in such a way. The ability of the women such as giving birth, treating and caring for people: children, husband and family members of others are seen solely as something natural (*von Natur aus*). Ability possessed by a woman is something that is derived from nature. That is the ability that they receive as a gift from nature and not something generated by women's efforts. Because of this ability derived from nature (*von der Natur*) and not acquired through a learning mechanism, then what they do relates to the natural ability also should not get paid. With this view, capitalist society remains lower position women than men and become a source of exploitation of natural and have no end. Mindset that later became one of the points of criticism points Marxist feminists, because it de facto does not exist any one group of people - both the capitalist society or not- that is able to survive without the role of women in the process of social reproduction.

To eliminate or at least reduce the oppression of women economically, Marxistfeminists group always fight for freedom which recognizes the relationship that is not based on the dependence of the negative ones as disclosed by Taylor Mill (Bauhardt, 2015: 36): "*In Arkennung von gegenseitigen Beziehungen, durchaus die nicht in Abhängigkeit auszuarten brauchen.*". With such a pattern of relationships, men are expected to also take responsibility in terms of care or treatment. Mechanisms that could be done for example by extending working hours of men in the field who do not make

money. Thus the responsibilities of work and care work (*Sorgearbeit*) is no longer synonymous with the demands of women.

FINDINGS

In the industrialized countries of Europe, including Germany, actually have been a revolutionary change in the three sectors namely; 1) the market or the company, 2) family or household, and 3) the state or politics, as noted by Kocka (2001). Kocka pointed out that the understanding of the role of a man as a father who must provide for the family and a woman who plays a mother who must take care of the household, not previously been regulated explicitly. Around the 19th century until the early 20th century a working mother in the care of the household and the family did not categorized as *Erwerbsarbeit*. But since the 70s all this has got clear regulations, so that kind of work thus has become the country's social responsibility. In addition, a decrease in the number of births has reduced significantly the type of domestic work and family so that trigger increased participation of womenfolk in the working world.

The participation of the womenfolk in the working world today finally has become a fitting and appears to no longer be a matter that should be debated. This is reflected also in the novel *Mobbing* (Pehnt 2008) featuring characters, Jo's wife—a French into German-Novelstranslator. *Stadtverwaltung* where Jo worked in women's leaders displayed the initials A and even figure *Chefin* as head office.

The presence of womenfolk in the working world has become a propriety, it is just how they are positioned equally with men. This is exactly the problem. Construction of women in the workforce is what constantly questioned. This kind of oppression of women depicted in the figures themselves wife Jo who expresses her disappointment when nobody saw her husband's dismissal issue from the standpoint of her, both as a mother with two children as well as a wife (Pehnt, 2008: 44).

Jo's attitude change after being fired just shut up and do not want to help domestic tasks that once he often did, make *Ich-Figur* increasingly losing patience. All these problem is then revealed to his friend, Katrin, but the answer ostensibly defending Jo and suggested that *Ich-Figur* positioning itself as what is experienced by Jo made it feel more disappointed. *Ich-Figur* expression with the sentence: "[...], und wer versetzt mich in meine Lage." ([...], and who can put himself in my position) is a form of protest and jealousy at the injustice he feels, This sentence as if meaning that the right to understand are those who are being fired from his job, but as a mother and as a wife who worked day and night for the family is not entitled to sympathy and empathy.

Domestic work done by a wife and a mother of two children turned out in view of the fact that Katrin as a woman was also seen to have lower bargaining power than jobs in the public sphere. Katrin saw that work out there (read: public space) is more difficult compared to what had been done by his wife Jo at home (read: domestic). Therefore, Katrin requested that Jo's wife might empathize with him and not vice versa. Value of fresh domestic work is considered lower than in public employment as it was seen by Katrin, at least could represent the views of the general public.

The view is then became a writer's main point of view who wished to show how injustice in understanding and position of women. Domestic work of

Jo's wife is indeed very tiring. In addition to the daily tasks at home, Jo's wife also had to care for and maintain their two children. In addition to keeping *das Baby*, Jo's wife also had to take Mona the shuttle who had entered the age Kindergarten every day. Not only that, a character in the novel mobbing wife Jo also described as an interpreter translating English-French novels into German was doing at home. This makes the task pile Jo's wife could not accept the suggestions and views from Katrin, her friend, who had never seen the situation facing the family of one's own view (read: a woman who has a husband and two toddlers, and even as a translator).

The position of Jo's wife character are examples of women who were among duties as a wife and mother and a translator or between domestic and public duties. Conditions experienced by Jo's wife turned out in the statistical records also experienced by about 56% of women between the ages of 25 to 54 years who have two or more children. The tendency in Germany is the decreasing number of women in the labor force who have children. In other words, more and more children are possessed by a woman, the opportunity to return to work in the public sector are also getting less. This trend is evident from the declining number of women working in the public sector in full or *Vollzeiterwerbstätigkeit* that only about 20 percent between 1991 and 2010, but at the same time the number of women who work part time or *Teilzeitarbeit* and carry out light work more or *geringfügige Beschäftigung* precisely increased. (Böhm, et al., 2011).

The above description confirmed the same phenomena as experienced by Jo's wife character. When they do not have children, Jo's wife was able to translate more romances France, but after Mona was born, and after her second child, practically translating activity is no longer practiced. The motivation to return to her French translation of novels reappear when Jo did not work anymore and the children they no longer need to be with her. But the effort to go back again to pursue the field of translation more intensively for Jo's wife certainly will not be easy, because in addition to competition in the world of work is increasingly tight, she also had to start from scratch again. This then became one of the low participation of women in public spheres.

Despite the work done by women in continuing their family life is not valued as it should be and even regarded as something that is supposed to be done, but in the novel *Mobbing* is seen that the role of women was not less great and even exceed her husband. At times when the husband has not a job, the wife then takes all responsibilities, both for domestic affairs and the financial affairs of the family.

CONCLUSION

Particularly, point of view by capitalist society assessing reproductive potential and nurturing women as something that is naturally obtained not through learning mechanism and therefore it is not classified as *Erwerbsarbeit*, worth thinking back. Annette Pehnt in her novel *Mobbing* tried to open the eyes of the reader in assessing the position of a woman, a mother, and a wife in relation to their work. Pehnt who selected figures showed a small middle-class family in Germany who must continue fighting to get a lifeline from the onslaught of competition world of work showing the superiority of women in winning the fight. Through this novel, Pehnt wanted to hit the capitalists

thought that marginalize women indeed has become the backbone of the existence of capitalism during this time.

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