FEMINIST THOUGHT IN ADRIAN HOWE'S BOOK: 'Chamberlain Revisited: A 25th Anniversary Retrospective'

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ABSTRACT

It is well-known that Lindy Chamberlain experienced a form of gender inequality and gender bias during her trial in 1980s. This challenged Adrian Howe to write a book which aims to counter a gender bias mindset that still exists in some people's belief. Howe uses genealogy as a part of discourse analysis method by representing selected letters written by people, mainly women who are from different religions, ethnicity and age who supported Lindy Chamberlain. In this article I will try to analyse and evaluate academic areas of investigation as they have been reflected in Howe's book in terms of what ways the scholars in Howe's book represent mainstream gender as a bias operating in the legal and social attitudes that emerge in the book.

Key Words: Lindy Chamberlain, Adrian Howe, gender, women, inequality.

A. Introduction

As a scholar from a developing country who is studying women and gender, I was little bit surprised when I heard and read about Lindy Chamberlain's case which happened in Australia, a developed country. This is because what Lindy experienced was a form of gender inequality and gender bias during her trial in 1980s. Many scholars, particularly feminists, have discussed this phenomenon from different angles. One book which examines Lindy's case is 'Lindy Chamberlain Revisited: A 25th Anniversary Retrospective', by Adrian Howe in 2005. The book tries to present 'marginal voices' which supported Lindy Chamberlain, but which have never been expressed by the media and have not been acknowledged as a part of history. Howe in her book uses genealogy to prove that not all people, especially women in Australia, had been contaminated by the media and positioned themselves against Lindy Chamberlain. She argues that her trial basically related to sex prejudice which has been institutionalised in the society's mind. To support his argument, Howe refers to some works by women feminists, written by Dianne Johnson, Kerry Goldsworthy, Catherine Rogers, Helen Grace, and Julie Marcus.

In this article I will try to analyse and evaluate these academic areas of investigation as they have been reflected in Howe's book in terms of what ways the scholars in Howe's book represent mainstream gender as a bias operating in the legal and social attitudes that emerge in the book. In this article, I will identify, classify and analyse the works of feminist scholars related to their mindset in gender equality on discussing Lindy Chamberlain's case and the connection of gender bias with Australian's social and cultural structures at that time and on reflection 25 years later. As a method study, I will use discourse analysis which focuses on the gender issues to identify any differences and changes in perspective 25 years later after the case. I will look at the ways they represent gender bias in their writing related to Lindy's case from the sexuality, maternity and the body image aspects.

B. The Case of Lindy Chamberlain and Adrian Howe's Book

To refresh the memory about Lindy Chamberlain's case, it is very important for me to present a brief note about her case. The tragedy began on 17 August 1980 at Ayers Rock, Uluru, where the Chamberlain family spent their holiday and Azaria, their nine week old daughter, went missing from the tent. Lindy said

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that there was a dingo which took her baby. However, few people seemed to accept that the culprit could have been a dingo. In October 1982, after a long trial process, Lindy was convicted of murder. Lindy was immediately sentenced to the mandatory sentence for murder of life imprisonment in Berrimah Jail in Darwin Northern Territory, while Michael, her husband, was given a suspended sentence and a three year good behaviour bond in order to take care of their children (Johnson, 2005: 134). Fortunately, the discovery of the baby's matinee jacket near Ayers Rock brought good news for Lindy and eventually on 7 February 1986 Lindy was released from prison (Howe, 2005: 115).

The Lindy Chamberlain case has been an object lesson to those who believed that it was impossible for a dingo to kill Azaria and who accused Lindy as a murderer. They have realised that a dingo, a wild Australian animal, is dangerous and that it can attack humans. This has been shown when in April 2001 a dingo killed a ten year old child on Fraser Island. The fact that dingoes were quite capable of attacking and killing children seems now to have been established in Australian society.

However, the problem happened when many well-informed commentators blamed Australian women as having responsibility for Lindy's wrongful imprisonment. They believed that women were responsible based on several reasons. Firstly, they argue that women's testimonies during the trial were a factor which marginalised Lindy's position in the court owing to their prejudice. Secondly, those who still have a sexist framework in their mind, point out that the women jurors who had been unconvinced by the prosecution case allowed themselves to be persuaded by more vocal and outspoken members of the male dominated jury to bring in a guilty verdict. Thirdly, they believed that the greatest obstacle in changing public perceptions about Lindy was the women of Australia who took a much harder view on Lindy Chamberlain than men did. They claim that out of any group, five out of ten men might say she did it. In contrast, nine out of ten women were convinced she was horrible and she was guilty. They conclude that women were more hostile to Lindy than men and the women also who thought that Lindy should serve her full term of life imprisonment. Finally, they insist that there was an enormous amount of community antipathy particularly by women, towards Lindy Chamberlain and it is difficult to deny it (Howe, 2005: 8-9). These comments indicate that some people, particularly in Australia still have gender bias mindset in their opinions and put stress on women as a group who need to be blamed due to their prejudices.

Those comments challenged Adrian Howe to write a book which aims to counter a gender bias mindset that still exists in some people's belief. Howe uses genealogy as a part of discourse analysis method by representing selected letters written by people, mainly women who are from different religions, ethnicity and age who supported Lindy Chamberlain. There are about 20,000 letters, written to the Chamberlains from 1980s through to the early 1990s (Howe, 2005: 13). Howe wants to show the emotions and opinions of the 'silent majority' as a counter balanced opinion and to show that not all people in Australia, especially women, hated Lindy Chamberlain. Howe also presents a number of woman feminist scholars' works to make people remember and consider that women also cared about Lindy Chamberlain and supported her struggle to get a fair hearing. In my opinion, what Howe does by using genealogy as a method is a good strategy and good choice to deal with the problem since some people seem not to recognise these voices. This is because a gender bias mindset is closely related to a social and cultural construction which has been institutionalised a long time ago in the patriarchal society. Therefore, presenting some facts which happened during the Chamberlain case which lacked previous exposure in the media will be helpful for the members of community in rethinking their opinions and views based on the materials that have been provided by Howe.

C. Gender Bias: Sexuality Aspect

The first aspect that I notice in the Howe's book is the way feminist scholars represent gender bias in Lindy's case based on the sexuality aspect. Joseph Bristow (1997: 1) defines sexuality as 'a term that points to both internal and external phenomena to both the realm of the psyche and the material world'. Regarding

the sexuality factor in Lindy's case, Goldsworthy (2005: 160) believes that in her trial Lindy basically was a 'martyr to her sex'. This is because many people who were influenced by patriarchal ideology and the misogynist media nominated her as a candidate for the most hated person in Australian history because of 'her deviant behaviour as a woman'. Lindy, during her trial, showed uncommon behaviours which did not reflect the femininity expected in a patriarchal society. This has been shown by her attitude such as her courage in speaking her own words and on her own behalf; she did not 'shut up'; she did not cry; she did not lament, and she was a 'hard-faced bitch'. Lindy Chamberlain also received a negative stereotype as a dangerous woman, who provoked criticism as counter-stereotypical woman and refused to play her assigned gender role. She was an active spokesperson for her rights but the male-dominated media was angered and terrified by her refusal to play the role of a properly gendered woman.

Similarly, Howe (2005: 114) believes that most people in Australia hated Lindy because they were not prepared to accept that a woman could respond rationally, eloquently and calmly in stressful circumstances. Moreover, she points out that this happens in patriarchal societies when men have created two roles that are available to women. First, 'Damned Whore' sexuality: the role reflects a bad woman's behaviour, being a disorderly, immoral and dangerous figure which is unconstrained and uncontained by the structure of church and state. Second, 'God's Police' sexuality means a good woman's behaviour such as virgin spinsters or respectable mothers who constitute the nation's moral guardians. If a woman did not meet the entire requirement to be a good woman, then the society would classify her as a Damned Whore, like Lindy. That is why a 'conspiracy of the entire nation against Lindy Chamberlain' happened in Australia (Goldsworthy, 2005: 160).

This paradoxical attitude is still around in the patriarchal society today and it is designed for women but not for men. This is basically a model which is the product of social conditioning in the role of the woman. It was shown when Michael heard the baby crying and asked Lindy to go and see what was wrong. He actually could easily have gone and had a look himself, but he had never done it and he chose to continue eating his meal. This can be understood as domination of men over women. What Howe said is a reflection of Simone de Beauvoir (1972: 77-78) who said that sexuality plays a significant role in human life. Men who describe themselves as 'the-self' and women as 'others' feel threatened by women and the way for those men to feel secure is by oppressing women. They do this by creating symbol and myth so that women become subordinate and institutionalised and see this as a destiny to which they are born. According to Linda LeMoncheck (1985) women today live in man's world in which women are systematically sexualised by men in a way that dehumanises women. She believes that women are dehumanised in the domestic sphere, the economic and the political spheres and are taught to believe that men are always right and best.

D. Gender Bias: Body Image

Secondly, the writers in Howe's book also present a gender bias in Lindy's case owing to the stereotype image about her body. People still remember that during the trial, Lindy Chamberlain became the focus of the media and popular gaze. Every aspect of her life and appearance was examined, including her clothes and facial expressions. She is become public property through the media, even though in the next day she also was crucified in the media and across the nation for wearing dark glasses and for wearing different dresses to court. In that time, the media also highlighted Lindy Chamberlain because she dressed in a fairly sexy way, showing her sex appeal, she dressed like a school girl with a light blue dress, a blowing skirt, bobbysocks and another day like a film star with a black dress, red lips, shoes and handbag (Johnson, 2005: 146-147). She also had been portrayed as a woman who wore a high-necked red and black dress, a narrow black belt, beige stockings, and black high-heeled, ankle strapped shoes. Her dark hair was teased into a bouffant style, with a lock dropping over her right eye, her face, a little hollow cheeked was quite heavily made up with a red lipstick, mascara giving a deep-set look to her eyes. Her body image was getting

too much attention from media whereas Michael Chamberlain rarely got attention from media (Howe, 2005: 10).

Lindy's body was subjected to a voyeuristic male gaze, a body which was dressed and undressed over and over again by a male-dominated media which compared unfavourably females stereotypes. This body made her a victim by media and then by court, found guilty for doing a murder that she never committed. Regarding this, Grace (2005: 198) believes that the guilty verdict by the court was based on aesthetic judgement and the poor performance of Lindy Chamberlain. Similarly, Rogers (2005: 168) says that the evidence for the guilty verdict was her body image expression, mainly facial expression, which was created, interpreted, used, modelled, altered, and tempered by the media.

Regarding the body image aspect, Judith Butler (1993: 3) argues that perceptions of a woman's body are created, constructed and imposed through cultural norms. A woman has little choice relating to her body because the cultural norm governs her and her body. Butler mentions that this process, called 'performativity', is introduced and repeated until women accept and never question it. Butler also said that hegemonic culture can be shown by binary structures which appear in the language and are accepted universally (Butler, 1990: 9). Another feminist, Naomi Wolf (1990: 58) provokes the situation by saying that patriarchal culture introduced the concept that 'men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at'. This helps to explain what happened in Lindy's case.

E. Gender Bias: Expectation of Mother's Role

Finally, from the maternity aspect, Howe (2005:3) believes that people had many expectations for Lindy Chamberlain in her role as a mother, mainly how she should behave as a grieving mother when her child disappeared in the wilderness. However, as a mother, Lindy did not weep publicly over her missing child. Based on this, the media punished her and gave a negative stereotype of her as a woman who failed to present to the world as a proper mother. Marcus (2005: 205) mentions that at that time her ability as a mother was questioned and she became a victim because of it. Many questions asked of her, such as why she took her young and vulnerable daughter into the heart of the dangerous Australian bush. 'It is her fault as a mother so that law have to punish her'. In this context, Lindy was marginalised due to her failure to behave like a mother. This also indicates that a woman has no place in the Australian wilderness and had no right to take a baby there.

Rightly or wrongly, whether or not she killed her child, some people believe that she had violated the sanctity of motherhood (Howe, 2005: 239). This is because in a patriarchal society, a woman who is interested in looking attractive at such a time must be a bad woman, and a bad woman cannot be a good mother. Circumstances played a far more insidious role in Lindy's conviction than was admitted and they actively conspired against her. As a mother, she was the quintessential wrong person at the wrong place at the wrong time. She gave her daughter the wrong name, Azaria, which media alleged meant sacrifice in the wilderness, she dressed Azaria the wrong way in black, and she treated Azaria in the wrong way: the baby was reported to have been injured in a shopping trolley incident. Everything she did and said was wrong at that time.

To explain this situation, probably we should look at what Mary Wollstonecraft said about woman as mother. She argues that men always insult women with their rules and domestication. As a mother, a woman should exhibit obedience and softness of temper. This attitude has been implanted since their infancy (1974: 23). Thus, Wollstonecraft believes that to escape from subordination and to get freedom, women should get a proper education and be freed from economic dependence by working, so that they then can get their rights (1974: 25).

F. Lindy Chamberlain's Case and Its Critics

In Howe's book, I have found that she emphasises four main issues. Those are first, the sensitivity of feminist scholars' reaction to Lindy's case, second, the myth of witch, third, dingo and Australian

nationalism and fourth, the power of knowledge. Howe wants to show this as he feels that these four issues need to be criticised and related to the struggling feminism in the future since it is a fact that needs to be deconstructed.

1. Lack of Sensitivity of Feminist Scholars

The first issue that he wants to address is the sensitivity of feminist scholars' reaction to Lindy's case. In his opinion the case does not appear to have been a burning one for trained thinkers working inside or outside academia. This is, as she mentions, despite the growth of cultural studies within the universities, scarcely any academic commentary appeared at that time either in the media or in scholarly journals (Howe, 2005: 108). As mentioned in Howe's book, Howe only reproduces the writing of Dianne Johnson, Kerry Goldsworthy, Catherine Rogers, Helen Grace, and Julie Marcus which was written between 1984 and 1989. There is gap during 1980 until 1983 but Howe does not explain why this happened. She noticed that the feminists have been active in writing since 1984 after Lindy was sent to the prison. This indicates that the study women and gender in university should not be just theoretical but should also create sensitivity that leads to practical outcomes.

2. National Identity Buried the Truth: Dingo

The second issue is about the dingo. The dingo is an Australian wild animal and has been an icon or symbol of nationality. When Lindy tried to blame a dingo as a murderer, people rejected her statement. This is because this animal is close to them, especially to men. So animal lovers, in particular supporters of the underdog-dingo, were outraged and took Lindy's statement as a joke. However Richard Gould in 1969 had asserted that dingoes never attack humans though he warned not to pet the dingo as there is always the other side of the wild dog that is unpredictable. He also mentions that Dingo represents frontier masculinity as gendered male in the present wave of Australian nationalism and acts as a metaphor for maleness (Marcus, 2005: 211). Marcus also said that many people reject other known facts: first, dingoes often come to the camp to look for food. Second, dingoes also steal not only chicken but also lambs, goats and small dogs. Third, there are many big dingoes which are not afraid of humans. Fourth, Aborigines found the tracks of dingoes during the search for Azaria. From these facts, it seems that the national identity can defeat and bury the truth.

3. The Myth of Witch

The third issue is about the myth of witch. Ayers rock, Uluru or 'the rock' is described as an awesome geological freak, the dead heart, like a huge beast at rest in the desert, a brooding presence, and the haunt of ghosts and demons. On their holiday the Chamberlain family had already visited such places as Devil's Marbles near Alice Springs and place called Cut Throat Cave as well as the Fertility Cave at the base of Ayers Rock. As well, Lindy's Seventh-day Adventism brought out the latent hostility of Australians to minor or extremist religious sects in particular and to visible religious piety in general (Goldsworthy, 2005: 158). People saw Adventism as a marginal Protestant Sect related to sorcery with fearful rites carried out in the desert, for example, sacrifice in the wilderness. It became worse when Lindy said there was a reason for Azaria's death and that maybe it was needed to bring Azaria back to God. Second, Lindy said that tourists attracting contributed to the tragedy by failing to properly respect the dingoes. God allows things to happen but Satan is the instigator. The overtness her religious belief become a source of public antagonism (Johnson, 2005: 151). They called Lindy a woman who had fed her baby to the dingoes, a modern-day Lady Macbeth or Pontius Pilate and two legged dingo. They saw Lindy as a witch who could shed no tears after Azaria's disappearance and this

built an undercurrent of resentment and suspicion. People thought of the name Azaria as a name which had a powerful magical ring thus strengthening their accusations (Johnson, 2005: 152).

The witch is a figure embodying the power and threat of female sexuality which must be tamed. Erica Jong says that witches have long been associated in the popular mind with 'the practice of sorcery, the ability to appear and disappear at will, shape shifting, the preparation of magic selves, the stealing of children, dancing in circles and having wild nocturnal parties' (Johnson, 2005: 131). A witch is a person knowledgeable about herbs and poisons, a person who made a pact with the devil for power, even if only in their imaginings, a person who arranged with other persons to bring about supernatural effects, midwives, old women. Histories of witchcraft in the middle ages show that often a man who looked upon a young woman with lust would accuse her of making him lust by means of witchcraft. If the woman did not respond to the man, this too could be cause for accusing her of witchcraft. According to Jong, hundreds of thousands of people, 80% whom were women, were killed for being witches during the middle ages (Johnson, 2005: 153).

The myth about woman as witch basically was promulgated by men who thought that the best way to control woman is to construct myths about her. Myths are meant to explain the unexplainable, to simplify the complex, to rationalise the irrational (Tong, 1994: 205). The influence of the myth about women and gender bias during the court hearing indicates that this problem needs to be follow up and countered immediately. Wikler (1987: 227) suggests that educating judges about gender bias in the court is necessary, so that the terms like 'trial by sex' and 'martyr to her sex' will never happen again. By educating the law enforcers this will minimise the influence of gender-based myths, biases and negative stereotypes about women.

4. Buried Knowledge Vs Disqualified Knowledge

The fourth issue that has been addressed by Howe in this book is the struggle between 'buried knowledge' and 'disqualified knowledge'. Regarding Lindy's trial Howe believes that buried knowledge is a scholarly knowledge that was present but which had been buried or masked. Buried knowledge contents are profoundly important in that they make effective critique possible, allowing us to see clearly the dividing lines in confrontation and struggle. Only critical analysis and research can unmask or unblock them. On the other hand, disqualified knowledge is quite different, as a whole experience of knowledge that has been disqualified by the hierarchy of erudition and sciences as nonconceptual, as insufficiently elaborated, naïve and hierarchically inferior and below the required level of erudition or scientificity. These low ranking, disqualified and even unqualified bodies of knowledge are far from being general common sense knowledge. They are local and specific and have no common meaning. They are incapable of unanimity. This knowledge is known at local but needs to be brought out to provide a framework for understanding the immediate context. For example, during the trial a number of people wrote letters, telling their experiences of dingoes attacking human, but the jury preferred to believe the London expert who stated that dingoes were no danger to a human body (Howe, 2005: 16).

The genealogy method that used by Howe was introduced by Foucault to reactivate local knowledge so that it can provide space for those such as the bounty hunter, farmer or women raised in the outback, or the nurse's knowledge of how grieving parents behave and pits them against expert opinions. People wrote to the Chamberlains in order to share their local, experientially based knowledge so as to help right the wrong they saw unfolding before them. Disqualified knowledge contains memories of hostile encounters that have been marginalised. During the Lindy's trial, people preferred to believe the scientific truth presented to them rather than rely on local knowledge (Howe, 2005: 274). Foucault mentions this phenomenon as a regime of truth. Indeed, he suggests that feminists to use local knowledge as an alternative solution to fight male dominated sciences which tend to oppressive to women (Sawicki, 1991: 66).

As a reflection, there are 20,000 letters in the Chamberlain archive and the 150,000 petitions which show that not everyone was convinced. The letters to Lindy represent one group of those marginalised voices (Howe, 2005: 114-115). Goldsworthy (1986: 158-159) mentions that the marginal voices believe that the trial and conviction of Lindy happened because of two basic things, a primitive religious phenomena and her failure to weep at her daughter's funeral (thus violating the sanctity of motherhood). The voices of this silenced counter-public challenge widespread misconceptions about the Chamberlain case. First, they challenge the idea that the nation condemned Lindy. Second, they challenge the sexist fantasy that her worst enemies were other women (Howe, 2005: 20).

G. Conclusion

In conclusion, I appreciate that Howe's book contributes significantly to Australian society by addressing a part of the historical facts of the Lindy Chamberlain case that was previously ignored by the media and at the trial. The writers in Howe's book have shown that gender bias was an issue during the trial, especially in regard to sexuality, body image and the maternity aspects. Lindy's case affected the legal system since courts have used Lindy's case as a precedent in dealing with similar cases during trials. However, even though that it was 25 years ago since Lindy's case happened, there are still some people who have a gender bias in their mindset. This indicates that feminists still need to work hard in fighting for gender equality in society. Another important thing that I have noticed as a minor weakness in Howe's book is that he does not explain why feminist scholars in the beginning between the trial in 1980 and 1983 did not react to defend the Chamberlains and why they abstained from commentating. Were they also influenced by the misogynous media and public depiction of Lindy as an evil witch-like killer? Nevertheless, this book is not the end. Feminists still need to present their works as a continuation of Howe's genealogy by using another approach such as deconstruction analysis to counter gender bias and the sexist mindset which still strongly exist in some societies.

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