

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

All people might agree that all religions put woman and man on the equal position, no exception for right and responsibilities and just their sexes differentiate one from another. For instance, Judaism as a monotheistic religion has basic belief God creates woman and man equal and He commands human to respect each other and not discriminate one sex because of his or her dissimilar capability. Fundamental of Jewish teaching is the precept that woman and man were created as equal by God (Heschel, xxi). It shows Judaism, as one of many religions in this world promotes all human have equal position in front of God and God never commands human to discriminate each other.

In the real world, not all people respect to each other. There are still many discrimination occur surround human life. According to Aanon Antonovsky, discrimination maybe defined as treating one particular group of people less favorably than others because of their race, color, nationally, or ethnic, or national origin (3). One of the discriminations as that still exists until today is gender discrimination. In that practice, men usually act out as the villains while women are the mere victims. The occurrence of gender discrimination might be supported by an opinion of biological differences between man and woman. As explained in *The Female Eunuch*, men's bodies are stronger and bigger than women, and

their brains are measurable to array abilities (Greer, 132). As the result, it builds an interpretation in human societies that man is better than woman in all ways and

it creates a patriarchal system which always places women after men in all spheres. However, this patriarchal system could be a reason of man domination upon woman, and unconsciously, because this system has deeply rooted in inhabitants' society and culture, people are customized to interpret male domination as a common thing and not view this as discrimination. As the result, the inhabitants let men control and dominate in all spheres.

In worldwide, woman oppression has existed since years ago, including in Israel. In 1970, woman oppression in Israel became the headline news and made women paid more attention to this issue. According to Franz Kobler in *Her Children Call Her Blessed: A Portrayed of Jewish Women*, Jewish women were oppressed by male domination within national collective, military, religion, and family (53).

Until today, woman oppression still operates in many societies, including in Israeli's. In addition, Jewish have *Talmud* and *Torah* as life guidebooks which all Jews activities are patterned on those books. For some Jewish, discrimination interpretation comes through the texts which give more advantages to man in many aspects, but on the same time it discriminate and marginalize woman. In *The Jewish Women in Contemporary Society: Transition and Tradition*, Baker quotes from *Torah*: woman handle the households, men deal with worldly matters (44) and in *Talmud*: women are seductive (97).

Moreover, the quotations above create an interpretation of patriarchal concept that refers to the different domains between men and women, which men are allowed to connect with public sphere, but women only connects with the private sphere or house. Men who 'have' public sphere, have duty as the breadwinners to support the families' financial and chosen as the family leader, while women are domesticated in home and the activities only attach with bearing children and house works. Furthermore, the patriarchal rules also not permitted woman to be leader and decision maker almost in all activities, especially in social sphere. As the result, it makes woman excluded from public activities including education, career, and politic. It also makes women as the wives become fully dependent on their husbands because the husbands can fulfill their needs.

However, at the end of 1970s, some Israeli women became aware about the unequal position between woman and man. As the solution, they promoted woman movement in shifting male domination in all spheres and attempted to equalize gender rights by enacting womanhood ceremonial events, involving women as the decision makers in family and being active in social activities. As explained by Omer that in 1978, some women who wanted gender equality arranged their movements against patriarchal culture by attempting to be independent, taking part in work life, get education and active in politic agendas that concerns on women's rights to vote. These women were called their movement as 'call for change' that demanded:

Women be accepted as witness before Jewish law, be considered as bound to perform all mitzvoth, be allowed full participation in

religious observances, have equal rights in marriage and be allowed to initiate divorce, be counted in the *minyan*, and be permitted to assume positions of leadership in the synagogue and within the general Jewish community (3).

However, this issue inspired a Jewish feminist, Esther Messerment Broner, to expose the real woman oppression story in Israel through a novel entitled *A Weave of Women*. This novel, which is also being the main source for this thesis, represents a story of Israeli women oppression and struggle against male domination and the patriarchal culture within Judaism, culture and their society. By Broner's cleverness in expressing the women oppression issue within Judaism, she brought her novel won National Endowment for the arts in 1987 and Mac Dowell Fellowship in 1989 for the best Judaism novel (Svirsky,1).

In addition, the author of this novel, Esther Messermen Broner is a feminist writer who has a big love for women, Jewish and tradition. She was born on July 08, 1930 in Detroit, Michigan. Her father was a Jewish historian and journalist, her mother was an actress in the Yiddish Theater in Poland. Her parent have a big role in inspiring her in writing plays, novels, and short stories in which apply women and traditions of Jewish culture as the themes. Broner has received her PhD from Union Graduate School in 1978. After several times visited Israel, she decided to live and teach at some universities in Israel: Haifa University, Hebrew University, and Bar-Ian University.

Broner dedicated herself to a feminist reconstruction of Judaism by her poems, novels, and short stories that image both the existential and exile of Jewish

women within Judaism. Until today, Broner has written ten books including *A Weave of Women* itself, *The Women Haggadah*, *The Telling*, *Morning and Mourning*, and many more. She also wrote radio scripts for National Public Radio and plays. Her musical, *Higginson: An American Life* has premiered June 17, 2005, by the Michigan Opera Company. She also led the original Women Seder for thirty years and was proclaimed a Wonder Women Foundation for her work in feminism Jewish ritual.

At a glance, one may think that Broner's novels are only meant for women because her main characters are all women and the problems are the one always considered as women's problem but a more sensitive one will find that E.M. Broner uses these 'tools' to give the reader a picture of life as whole. Furthermore, E.M. Broner has motivated in writing the literary works that deal with Judaism and woman because she wants to shares her own experience. She wrote about reality, she explains detail of Israeli women activities from their society until bedroom. Most of her novels are inspired from her and some women's experiences as Orthodox-Jewish women who have exiled from their religion and society that has been influenced patriarchal system that gives more advantages to man but marginalized woman (Miller, 3). By her novels, she wants to shows and provokes other Jewish women to insist their rights for participations in religion, family, politics, and education which have been dominated by men.

In addition, even though the main issue of this novel is Jewish women oppression, but Broner also put other women oppression issues to show the patriarchal operation in general. Because this novel is based on the author's

experience, thus, the story of this novel also represents the real story. It depicts the 1970s Israeli women's less privileged position within society, and reflects some women movements against male domination and their womanhood ceremonial events and activities that symbolize the solutions of women exclusion and oppression. In this novel, Broner created some women characters, as the representation of Broner and her feminist friends who break the patriarchal rules, create group of women as a place to share women problems, reenact the womanhood events and pattern woman roles.

Set in the old city in Jerusalem, this novel underlines a story of 1970s Israeli women, especially Orthodoxy Jewish women involvement in enacting women power and womanhood between the patriarchal culture existences. As depicted in this novel, the major issues that faced by these women are: unequal rights between wife and husband in marriage, refusal for women to grant divorce, denial from leadership position within general Jewish community, participation in religion events and many more.

As many patriarchal societies in this world, laws in many spheres are patterned from males' experiences which only give benefits for them. Consequently, women not only disadvantaged by these laws, but also being passive and controlled by men in all activities (Tyson, 84). It is revealed in this novel that in family, men and women are structured by having different domains where men as the breadwinners are placed in public sphere that has many varieties activities, while women are not allowed to be businesswomen and domesticated in home that duties just connect with bearing children and household matters.

Similarity, in Judaism women also precluded from the participators and performers positions in all religion events, separate from men by the *mekhitzah* that hanging between them in worships and not allowed to follow the religious study of *Torah* and *Talmud*. So does in societal life, women are excluded from leadership and decision-maker position, not allowed to be witnesses in courts, not permitted to get high education and work life.

However, this position not only makes women marginalized from many areas in their society which put men always superior to women, but also makes women dependent on men and always seen from males' perspectives. As portrayed in this novel, in facing this disadvantageous position, the women characters establish actions to shift the patriarchal culture by endorsing the permitted rules for women: prefer to be businesswoman, not marrying, create womanhood worship, and etc.

Broner not only applies her characters to struggle against the male domination, but she also uses the narratives in every chapter in this novel to portray the real 1970s Jewish women movement. For instance, the chapter of 'The Giant and Dwarfs' represent a riot which happened in a woman's *Torah* service in 1989 that led by Anat Hoffman, one of American Jewish feminist (Omer, 29). The women march to Israeli Rabbinate also signifies a real protest of the 1978s Jewish women in insisting women position within political area.

The patriarchal system has deeply-rooted in all societies mind sets, consequently, many people, even the Orthodoxy Jewish women reject the renewing laws which actually have purpose to give more advantages to woman.

According to these women characters, their struggles face many obstacles in awaking Israeli inhabitant's awareness of the patriarchal system because they have been customized and programmed by the patriarchal culture, so they believe the rules which exists in their society in the correct one. Moreover, these women characters are called as blasphemy by other Jewish since they believe the women characters attempt to change the God's laws.

For the woman oppression issue in this novel, the women characters are portrayed oppressed by patriarchal ideology that programs males as the dominators in all spheres, and even thought some women can connect to public sphere, they still experience discrimination. For examples, women are not allowed to join the religious study and only allowed to join the formal study, the government gives less support for women students by giving good facilities only for men and not for women. Similarly, in work life, women are paid less than men and not trusted to handle the important tasks or sits on high positions. In politic, the government does not care enough about women problems and applies men's authorities and laws as role models to fix women's problem.

From the explanation above, it shows that in many ways woman always becomes the object of gender discrimination. Moreover, Tyson states this patriarchal ideology is men monopoly of position of economic, political and social power to keep women powerless by denying them from those spheres (90). In patriarchal culture, it is not important how clever a woman is or how strong she is because men are the best in any way and men's perspectives become the best role



models for all perspectives. Somehow, women's perspectives are ignored because it is believed that women are innately inferior to men (Tyson, 84).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

- How are Israeli women positioned in their society as it is represented in the novel?
- What do Israeli women's actions in struggling against the oppression?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

- The Israeli women's position in their society.
- The Israeli women's actions to struggle against the oppression.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Ultimately, the women characters' struggle inspires the readers that women should know what to do in reaching their goals. Moreover, this thesis could be a reference for the readers, especially the students of English Department, Airlangga University to know and learn more about English-Jewish literature by reading it. The writer hopes the women oppressions and struggles which are analyzed in this thesis, could encourage the readers, especially women to pay more interest in reading material about women's matter. Therefore, the writer also hope after the readers read this thesis, will be more students interest to

do further analysis about this novel because there are still many topics in E.M. Broner's literary works to be discussed.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitations**

Even though many themes and topics exposed in this novel, including Diaspora, tension between Arab and Jews, love and family life, but the writer only limits the analysis on the Israeli women position within three main domains in Israel: family, religion, society. In addition, the writer also concerns on Israeli women struggle against the oppression. The struggle focuses on the women actions to free themselves from male domination and patriarchal culture in their society. The actions concern on equalizing Israeli women and men position and rights in all spheres.

### **1.6 Theoretical Background**

Since the novel *A Weave of Women* exposes a story of some women who quest gender equality within their religion, Judaism and their society, hence the writer applies feminism as the main theory. Moreover, the writer also applies Biale's concept, which explains:

The essence of the problem of women in Judaism is their sociologically inferior status. We are viewed in Jewish law and practice as peripheral Jews. It is peripheral status which results in women being excluded from central activities of Jewish life and

permits law which make them dependent on men and vulnerable to exploitation (qtd in Baker, 35).

Feminism has many forms and it largely determine movements to equalize gender roles in every aspect. According to Spalding in her book *Taking Sides*, she has observed that the first feminism movement started in 1800s. On July 14, 1848, four women drafted an announcement for a meeting to be held in Seneca Falls, New York, for the purpose of discussing the social, civil, and religious conditions and rights (xi). Then other movements held in the early nineteenth century and still continuing until today.

As explained in *Taking Side's* introduction pages, Feminism is divided into three waves. The first wave existed in 1960s and early 1970s, concerns on woman's right to vote (Spalding, xi). In the middle 1970s, second feminism appeared in campaigning legal and social equality for woman. The last, the third wave was built as the continuing action for the second wave feminism appeared in 1900s (Bunim, 75).

In analyzing this novel, feminism is used to observe the women's oppressions and movement story including their positions and action. In order to get deep analysis and to map the women's positions and struggles, the writer applies the Biale's concept.

### **1.7 Method of the Study**

The main source of this thesis is the novel *A Weave of Women*, written by E.M. Broner. This study uses the method of data collection from the novel by

having close and constant reviews, library and online researches. This research is done by collecting data from various books, journals, reviews, and other materials. After collecting a complete data, then the writer arranges and makes a study on it. Afterwards, this analysis is done by using those provided sources based on the method and theories at the boundary to keep the analysis on the right track. The last step is drawing the conclusion, so that this study is complete based on the academic research requirements.

### 1.8 Definition of Key term

In addition, the writer put some key terms of some words to ease the reader on understanding the analysis.

Judaism: the monotheistic religion which has basic belief in God's Ten Commandments and has Moses as the prophet.

Orthodox Judaism: the Traditional Judaism which strictly applies *Torah* and *Talmud* in everyday life.

Feminism: an ideology that focuses on women movement to equalize gender positions and its rights in all spheres.

Discrimination: treating a person or group differently from other

Patriarchal Ideology: structuring of family and society units based on the man, as father figure, having primary authority over the rest of family members and take primary

responsibility over the welfare of the community as the whole.

Private Sphere: patriarchal ideology determines it as the house, the woman's sphere that the duties are only connect with nurturing and fixing home works.

Public Sphere: patriarchal ideology creates this sphere as men's that relates to all public areas including education, work life, military, politic, etc.