

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In Greek civilizations, there are three creatures that are still famous until now, namely, Sphinx, Medusa, and Sirens. The most well-known character, named Medusa, appeared in some movies such as *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, *Clash of the Titans*, *300*, and *Jason and the Argonauts*. Sphinx, Medusa, and Sirens have the same characteristics all of them are female and dangerous. They have their own power and charm to make their enemies go to their knees and ask for forgiveness. These female figures are known as *femme fatale*, a particular image of feminine sexuality, a set of aesthetic styles, marked with a sense of danger, duplicity, and modernity (Farrimond 2018).

Femme fatale is also known as deadly women. It is characterized as a lady who is strangely enchanting and utilizing this quality to defeat men. Her obstruction against male mastery exists of excellence, enchant, and sexual charm: she entices the male target and makes him insane by denying him her warmth (Djiksa 1986). Moreover, Sarah Street also stated that in a book titled *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk reloaded*, a woman in the red dress is a 'classic representation of feminine as a trap, as dangerous yet seductive is related to the *femme fatale* (Gillis 2005). In sum, *femme fatale* character is characterized as dangerous and seductive women who

always target men to obey her and with a charm that can lead to a compromising fate. Moreover, this act is caused by men's oppression toward women that lead women to become dangerous and take revenge against men. This refers to male control or domination both in public and private space, this also called by patriarchy (Sultana 2011). It is when a woman could not act and say freely in public. They cannot do whatever they want without the intervention of men. It is also when a man sees a woman as an object. As stated by Prager on National Review that man is stirred just by looking at a female arm, lower leg, calf, thigh, stomach, even while never seeing the woman's face (Prager 2016)

Meanwhile, *femme fatale* can also be considered as a pop-feminism. Pop-feminism in itself is a part of feminism which has been talked in the new millennium. Based on Emily Spiers, her book titled *Pop-Feminist Narratives* clarifies that pop-feminism works in a theoretical domain in which comprehension of subjectivity, personality, and agency haven been changed, among others (Spiers 2018). The fact that women used to be seen as weak creatures and should do whatever the men tell. Moreover, nowadays we had a handful of female CEOs in significant companies, a strong coalition of congresspersons, governors, and congresswomen, even two women on the incomparable court (Zeisler 2008). In other words, feminism's goals had wonderfully been achieved. Furthermore, pop-feminism shows feminism's attitudes and ideology implanted for a popular girl (girl power). This is supported

nowadays by women being portrayed as superior to men, while men are portrayed with derogatory stereotypes.

Pop-feminist endeavors to express a women's activist reaction to contemporary appearances of segregation and sexual orientation imbalance (Spiers 2018). This is because the struggles of women's movement can be seen in many texts nowadays. It means that the women wanted to get equality for both men and women. It is also called Feminism (Jenainati and Groves 2007). Gender inequality is one of the issues that still happens today, regardless of the development and advancement of ladies' liberation. It happens additionally because of different elements that are fundamentally gotten from the conventional reasoning of society. Huffington Post reported that only four out of more than 135 countries have accomplished gender equality including Costa Rica, Cuba, Sweden, and Norway (Kamrany and Robinson 2012). Gender inequality is also shown in many aspects. For instance, crimes against women include rape and violence. It also is shown that in China, females are generally seen as weaker, more costly, and less keen than men (Kamrany and Robinson 2012). This gender inequality happens because men feel that they are much stronger than women, they feel that they are capable of doing anything to women even if it is a good or bad thing.

Currently, men are always seen as superior ones and women as inferior. It is also supported by the fact that women are usually controlled by men. They are seen as an object by men. Numerous woman likewise experience the immersed type of

sexual objectification that happens when women are part of circumstances, environments, and subcultures where the sexual objectification of women is empowered and advanced (Slater and Tiggemann 2002). For instance, certain circumstances that complement the consciousness of spectators' points of view on woman's bodies, such as ballet dancing, beauty pageants, modeling, and cheerleading are possible to enhance sexual objectification. This inequality also happened in the workplace. Some jobs do not need females as their work simply because they see females as weak and submissive. On the article titled *Odyssey*, Julia stated that women should not be a leader because women are so emotional, women are not independent at all, and traditionally, women are only good as housewives (Cancilla 2016). The sentence explains that women are always described as a submissive character, and the term women are not independent at all which explains that women always need men to rescue them. It is also supported by how media such as movie produced by Disney portrays that women always need men to save them.

Furthermore, gender inequality also has a relation with the term women objectification. It still appears in many media such as movies and advertisements. Women Objectification is when the woman is shown as an object by men, for example when women are being catcalled by men on the street and raped (Barnes 2017). Because of this term, many girls feel anxious about their own body shape, lack of confidence, and feeling shame towards their bodies. It leads them to use make up every time they are leaving the house, they need more time to choose what to wear,

and the most dangerous thing is that they would be willing to do plastic surgery to make them look better.

Red Sparrow movie is chosen as the object of the study because the figure of Dominika, at first, was very enchanting but dangerous at the end of the story. It was directed by Francis Lawrence and starred by Academy Awards winner Jennifer Lawrence. The film was released on March 2nd, 2018 in the USA. In Indonesia, it was released on February 28th, 2018 in Cinemaxx and CGV theatres. The movie got 6.6/10 from IMDB and 47% from Rotten Tomatoes. However, *Red Sparrow* was only nominated in Golden Trailer Awards and People's Choice Awards (The Internet Movie Database 2018).

In the present day, media holds a significant role within the society because it has powerful and persuasive influences (Michael Gurevitch 2005). The mass media can be enjoyed in the form of literary works, radio, internet, cartoon, TV shows, comic books, music, magazines, newspaper, and especially film. The film has been one of the greatest influences in this era because it consists of art including photography, architecture, literature, play, painting, and music (Mahmood 2013). This is why the film is the most interesting way to spend time. According to Jill Nelmes in her book *Introduction to Film Studies*, a film is an ideological tool (Nelmes 2012). It means that through film, there is a particular ideology that can be internalized in an interesting way because it is in the form of art which can be consumed easily. Other than that, ideology is a word that inspires strong emotional

responses (Freeden 2003). The body of ideology mirrors the social needs and desires of an individual, a group, a class, and a culture. Pearson and Simpson also stated that Ideology is a system of thoughts, opinions, and perspectives (Pearson and Simpson 2001). Meanwhile, the world of cinemas is dominated by American Hollywood movie productions.

Red Sparrow is focused on Russian agent who is assigned to find the mole, Dominika Egorova, portrayed by Jennifer Lawrence. Dominika gets an award and became the best agents in Russia. Dominika is a fast learner, she can hide her feelings and pass the lie detector, and she can deceive her uncle. She is then sent to Russian Sparrow School, an ex-military school that focuses on their skills of seduction to get what they need from the adversary. She became the smartest student and she immediately served as an agent. In achieving her goal, Dominika uses her own body to fool her enemies and as her own strategy. She seduces Dimitri when she is accidentally meet her at the bar, she asks him to come to her room then she starts taking off her clothes in front of Dimitri. She also seduces chief Volotov who is likes to see the strip girls by showing her thigh and touching his dick. This movie represents Dominika as an independent woman with a dangerous job which is rarely seen in real life. Based on these characteristics, the writer is interested in studying Dominika Egorova who is portrayed as a strong and dangerous woman in *Red Sparrow*.

Moreover, even though Dominika is an agent, a job that is considered as male-dominated fields, she is shown to be very good at it. While in reality, women who take a shot at male-dominated fields will likely to get negative states of mind. Olivia, who works at sports advertising and sale said that “men are doubting my knowledge of the game athletes. They expect you to know nothing about sports and the rules” (Etz 2017). Other than that, Jenny who works at power tools marketing also feeling upset because men also assumed that she does not know how to operate power tools properly, despite it being her job (Etz 2017). Those simple statements demonstrate that women are not supposed to work in the field that men should do. It is also showing that society still sees women as figures who are not capable of doing a man’s job.

Red Sparrow received some good reviews from many mass media such as Variety, The NY, BBC, and Theguardian. Variety’s Owen Gleiberman states that a thriller movie with Cold War vibe is finally regenerated and does not feel shallow (Fernandez 2018). Richard said that overall *Red Sparrow* is genuinely okay (Lawson 2018). He said that a liberally mounted reconnaissance dramatization that never truly gets the blood up yet turns out to be tolerable.

The writer chose *Red Sparrow* as the object of the study because the main female protagonists are still very rare in movies. For instance, most of the main character in Marvel studio is dominated with male-like *Iron Man*, *Captain America*, *Black Panther*, *Ant-Man*, and *Doctor Strange*. This also happens in spy movies such

as *Mission Impossible*, *James Bond*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, and *Jason Bourne*. Other than that, the main character is portrayed as a beautiful Russian ballerina and an independent woman that support her ill mother who then becomes dangerous and tricked her uncle until he is sentenced to death, and lives happily ever after with her mother at the end of the story. To achieve her success, she sometimes has to sacrifice her body to get what she wants. She uses her body to fool her enemies and fight them. This movie focuses on her strong appearance and images through her physical appearance. She is working in the male field even though her background is a ballerina which made *Red Sparrow* supports gender equality because she is strong, capable, and ready to fight. The setting of this movie was taken in Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria. As we know before, since the end of the Cold War, America and Russia never get along and America had adopted highly threatening policies towards Russia.

In Indonesia, *femme fatale* also happened from a long time ago. The first Republic Indonesian president, on a biography book titled *Penyambung Lidah Rakjat* by Cindy Adams, Soekarno admitted that he had recruited a group of female sex workers to become spies (Mardiastuti 2017). For Soekarno, sex workers are the best spies in the world. There were about 670 sex workers in Bandung, and he admitted that they are very loyal and obedient than another group he ever knows.

In the first cold war, there was a sexy dancer and also a sex worker named Margaretha Geertruida or also known as Mata Hari. She was born in Netherland. Her successful career as a dancer led her to have several strong relationships with men in

many countries such as military officials, politicians, and other important figures. She became a German spy and had killed 50.000 militaries (Mardiastuti 2017). She seduced men to acquire information for intelligence.

Femme fatale can also be categorized as women nowadays. Strong and fierce women begin circulating in the mass media. This is because women nowadays are starting to fight back their inequality and speak up to the public. For example, when a guy is cheating, a woman does not stay silent and accept. In the article named Radar Online, a story was shared about a woman who took her revenge when she knew her husband is cheating (Sanchez 2018). She was very mad when she found a Tinder application on his phone. Tinder itself is a dating application, it helps millions of people to find their love (Shaw 2018). Independent article also shared a story about a woman who kills her husband's mistress because she knew her husband is cheating with the mistress (Schmidt 2018).

Those examples of the portrayal of *femme fatale*, in reality, show that many women are strong and cannot be underestimated anymore. They could fight back their enemies and come back even scarier. They have been hurt by men and they want to take revenge. It is similar to Dominika's experience in the film, she is trapped by her uncle but then she can exact her revenge to him.

There are some movies with a strong main female character like *Red Sparrow*, *Salt* (2010), *Kill Bill volume 1 and 2* (2003) (2004), and *Atomic Blonde* (2017) are some of many movies that show strong image of women. *Salt* is a movie about

Evelyn Salt, a Russian agent that got a job to be a spy in America. Both *Salt* and *Red Sparrow* tells about independent female spies and revenge story because they have been tricked by their superiors. Those two movies also showed an agent that works alone to achieve her goals. However, their images are shown differently. In *Red Sparrow*, Dominika is using her charm and body to win, while *Salt* is shown Evelyn as a well-trained agent.

The second movie with a strong female character like Dominika in *Red Sparrow* is *Kill Bill volume 1* and *2*. Despite the movies being produced in 2003 and 2004, it is stilling the greatest movie until now (Shareca 2017). The story tells about a female, known simply as The Bride, who takes revenge on Bill and his squad because they attempt to murder her on her wedding day. Luckily, she still alive and she plans to avenge Bill for intending to kill her. Then, she goes to Japan to find a sword from the famous Hattori Hanzo. 4 years later, she takes revenge to kill Bill and his squad. Similar to Dominika, The Bride is shown as an innocent and nice character but dangerous at the end. Moreover, similar to Evelyn in *Salt*, The Bride in *Kill Bill* is a well-trained woman before she takes her revenge.

The last is *Atomic Blonde*, a 2017 movie directed by Charlize Theron (Internet Movie Database 2017). It revolves around a spy named Lorraine Broughton who needs to discover a rundown of twofold specialists who are being carried into the west. Lorraine has to work with the head of Berlin Station, David Percival to finish her mission. They carry out the most dangerous mission and face with criminals and

cruel spies, who have killed secret agents for no apparent reason. Both movies show the main characters who do not need men help to carry out their mission and they both work on a male field of work. Other than that, both characters additionally play a primary role in keeping themselves alive rather than sparing their life.

Those movies above portrayed women as very strong individuals and they do not give up easily. They try very hard to get their rights back and take their revenge. Furthermore, with the making of movies with genre like this, people will know that women should not be underestimated anymore. This is proven by several Indonesian articles such as Okezone News, Kompasiana, and Brilio which show that women can also work on the male-field. Brilio asserts that now all jobs can be done by women and men. Women's emancipation is evenly distributed with the overwhelming evidence that women who have a job that was formerly only carried out by men (Khoirudin 2015). Other than that, Khoirudin also mentioned some of the male-field jobs which at present age are dominated by women. For instance, being a CEO company, pilot, military, and engineer.

There are also other several studies which had been conducted in order to investigate the *femme fatale*. The writer chose three related studies to be reviewed. First, *From Enchantress to Murderess: A Feminist Study on the Character of Amy Dunne as a "Femme Fatale" in Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl* by Sandra WidyaResti, *Angel in the House vs Femme Fatale: A Contrastive Study of the Two Female Protagonists in Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharum Binder* by Priya Das, and *Dangerous*

Liaisons, Fatal Women: The Fear and Fantasy of Soccer Wives and Girlfriend in Spain by Mariam Vaczy. These studies are different from this study in the method and theory that are used for analysis. Moreover, these related studies have similarities in which they discussed the *femme fatale* issue.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

How is the image of the *femme fatale* portrayed through the character of Dominika Egorova?

1.3 The objective of the Study

In an attempt to answer the statement of the problem, through this research the writer aims to:

1. To discover how the image of *femme fatale* is portrayed through the character of Dominika Egorova in *Red Sparrow* (2018)

1.4 Significance of the Study

From this study, the writer wants to show how the main character, Dominika Egorova portrays the character of *femme fatale* and whether this term is still exists nowadays. Because nowadays many women are wanted to show fierce and strong images so they would not be underestimated anymore. Other than that, the writer also expects the readers to think critically regarding the representation of a woman in society, especially how *femme fatale* is portrayed in the media with the society that constructs how a woman should act.

The film is interesting because it is based on the novel with the same title and written by Jason Matthews. I expect this study to help the readers and other researchers to think critically regarding feminist criticism, the representation of women, and especially *femme fatale* since it has never been greatly produced thus far.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- *Femme Fatale*

An appealing lady who, with her charming magnificence and sexuality, entices men or her casualties to their total decimation, and her seductress can overpower men (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 2010).

- Women Objectification

A particular term which leads to a man who sees women into a sexual object, not a person (Cahill 2012)

- Pop-feminism

Women can accomplish equality with men through a positive, go-getting state of mind, without the need to look at or change social foundations and predispositions (Spiers 2018).