

## Abortion and Violence in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du*: Pro-Choice, Pro-Life, or Merely Provocative?

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### Abstract

Abortion and violence are global issues, yet different culture might respond to the issues somewhat differently. This study aims to reveal the abortion and violence issues in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* in terms of pro-choice and pro-life movements and see how Indonesian students reading the play respond to the issues. In the United States of America, the discussion of abortion issue can be grouped into two major categories: the pro-life and pro-choice. In Indonesia, the majority of people would be against abortion when it is not for medical reasons. The students reading *Keely and Du* find the play challenging their beliefs as religious people still keeping hold of eastern values. Having discussed the nature of pro-life and pro-choice movements, it is difficult for them to decide whether they are proponent of either one. *Keely and Du* is successfully provocative in offering insight on how abortion and violence issues cannot be judged in a black and white manner.

*Key Words*: abortion, violence, pro-life, pro-choice

### Introduction

Although most women probably are looking forward to getting pregnant and being a mother, yet for many different reasons, many women do not want to be pregnant. Unintended pregnancies may be one of two types: mistimed or unwanted pregnancies. A woman may get pregnant when she does not want it to happen then but want to be pregnant later, which results in a mistimed pregnancy. She may also get pregnant when she does not want the pregnancy then or in the future; therefore the pregnancy is unwanted. The number of unintended pregnancies is on the rise all over the globe. As human reproduction is often considered as part of woman's rights, a number of women believe that they are free to do whatever they want with their unintended pregnancies, including performing abortion.

In the United States of America, there were about 1.2 million abortions performed in 2008. In general, one of every three American women will have abortion by the age of 45. Most women who have abortion are in their 20s, while teenagers contribute to fewer than two in every ten abortions. Many of those who perform abortion have already had a child or more. The primary reason for abortion is the need to care for the baby, which the mother feels that she will not be able to provide (<http://www.guttmacher.org/media/presskits/abortion-US/index.html>). In Indonesia, abortion has reached alarming levels. In 2000, it was estimated that two millions abortions occur each year, which means there were 37 abortions for every 1,000 women of reproductive age (15-49 years) annually. The number is relatively high compared with that of Asia in a whole. Interestingly, the majority of women seeking abortion in a clinic or hospital tend to be married and educated (Sedgh & Ball, 2008, p. 1). In general, there are a wide range of financial and social reasons for abortion, and not everybody supports the choice of a mother to abort. Therefore, abortion, together with violence which usually accompanies abortion, becomes interesting issue to discuss not only in scientific researches but also in literary works.

One of literary works that discuss abortion and violence issue is a play written by an American playwright Jane Martin titled *Keely and Du*. The play had its professional world premiere at Actors Theater in Louisville in March 1993. The characters are Du, Walter, Keely,

Cole, Prison Guard, and Orderlies. It is basically about the violence experienced by the main character, Keely before and after she gets pregnant and seeks abortion. The play performances in different states in the USA receive numerous responses from both those who are for and against abortion: the pro-choice and pro-life proponents. As a literary work, *Keely and Du* is worth analyzing as abortion and violence are global issues, yet different culture might respond to the issues somewhat differently. Both in the United States and Indonesia, the abortion is generally illegal. In Indonesia, abortion is stigmatized and highly restricted. This study tries to find answers to the following research problems: 1) How are the issues of abortion and violence presented in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du*?; 2) How does Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* present pro-life and pro-choice points of view regarding abortion?; 3) How do Indonesian students respond to the issues of violence and abortion in the play?; 4) Can the students identify themselves as pro-life or pro-choice proponents?; and 5) Do the students consider the play as pro-life, pro-choice, or merely provocative? This study aims to reveal the abortion and violence issues in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* in terms of pro-choice and pro-life movements and see how Indonesian students reading the play respond to the issues. Indonesian students find it difficult to decide whether they are pro-life or pro-choice proponents as *Keely and Du* is challenging and provocative in offering insight on how abortion and violence issues cannot be judged in a black and white manner.

### **Abortion and Violence in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du***

The protagonist in Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* is Keely, a woman in her early thirties, who is kidnapped by pro-life proponents while seeking abortion. The kidnappers, Walter and Du of Operation Retrieval, confine Kelly, who is three-month pregnant, with her left hand handcuffed to a bed in a basement, trying to force Keely to continue the pregnancy with the options to raise her baby or give it away after it is born. Although Keely gradually develops the bond with Du, the nurse taking care of her, she is not convinced by the pro-life's provocation. After being forced to meet Cole, her ex-husband who has raped her, Keely performs an abortion using cloth hanger which Du ironically brings to the room for Keely's birthday dress and Keely manages to hide. The play ends with Keely visiting Du in prison.

Walter and Du of Operation Retrieval are definitely proponents of pro-life movement, as can be seen from Walter's statement: "We are a group of like-minded Christians motivated by the belief in the sanctity of life and the rights of unborn children" (Martin, 1993, p. 17). Keely, in her insistence to perform abortion with a number of reasons, can be said as a proponent of pro-choice, the movements that advocate for legal access to induced abortion services. Keely was violently raped by her jobless, drunk, and violent ex-husband, Cole. If Keely keeps the baby, it will make it impossible for Keely to make Cole stay away from her. That is one of the reasons for her seeking abortion. Another reason is that she is not financially secure: she has two jobs and has to provide for her paralyzed father. On the one hand, if the baby is born, Keely does not want to keep it because she is afraid that she might unwillingly hurt the baby due to the cause of its existence. On the other hand, she cannot give the baby away for adoption because she loves it. Therefore, she believes that abortion is the best choice. Walter is definitely oblivious to Keely's reasons, believing that: "The child is separate from how it was conceived and must also be considered separately from you. I have no wish to choose between you, but if I must I choose the child who has no earthly advocate" (Martin, 1993, p. 28). Walter's opinion is supported by Du, who asserts, "It's contrary to God's will, it's murder, it's not necessary, it's as selfish an act as you could conceive, and we will not allow you to harm that child or yourself. You are better than

that, you know you are, and how you feel or what trouble you might have is not so important as a lifeö (Martin, 1993, p. 25). Therefore, there is a conflict of interest between the pro-life and pro-choice proponents in the play.

The reviews received by the performances of Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* across the United States of America do not always focus on the opposition between the pro-life and pro-choice movements. The reviews generally acknowledge the facts that the play basically challenges how the audience act upon their conviction on abortion and that the play does not offer win-win answer or solution for two extreme sides of opinion on abortion. However, the reviews given by those who publicly declare their sides do represent the opposing point of views. An example is a review written by Kathleen Broome of Pro Choice Action Network, Canada. She says, "While watching the first half of the play, I was disturbed to note that the anti-choice side was being given more of a voice than the pro-choice" (<http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/prochoicepress/96spring.shtml#keely>). Broome is commenting on Du's argument on the lack of pre- or post-abortion counseling given by abortion clinics that are supposed to also inform the dangers of abortion. Broome complains why Keely, the only pro-choice voice in the play, does not argue even to Du's statement that women performing abortion will have post-abortion guilt depression that lead to suicide attempt. In Broome's opinion, Du's statement does not have any basis in truth. However, Broome continues: "However, the second half of the play states the abortion issue as it stands in realityö if women are not allowed to choose, they will die and their fetuses will die anywayö. In other words, she believes that *Keely and Du* promotes pro-choice movement in giving women the right to choose what to do with their pregnancies. On the opposite end, a proponent of pro-life movement, who titled her review as "Keely and Duö Reveals the Tragedy of Abortion," Scheidler says:

Although it seems the playwright intended her work to be a slam against pro-life activists, as the play unfolded it actually unmasked the real tragedy of abortion. Keely, the young pregnant woman, was a victim of an abusive husband, of an unfortunate childhood and of the excessive zeal of the pro-lifers. In her frustration and bitterness she lashed out at the only person in her life over whom she had controlö her unborn baby (<http://prolifeaction.org/hotline/2008/keelyanddu/>)

Scheidler even praises the play as being very good and the actor playing the minister as doing a remarkable job of representing a Christian point of view on abortion. Acknowledging that abortion and kidnapping do not bring positive outcome, Scheidler emphasizes her opinion that Keely's abortion "highlighted the reality that women cannot be forced to make the choice for life. They can only be shown the way with love and compassion." This suggests that women should be kindly and lovingly helped to see that abortion is not the right decision, which means that *Keely and Du* is seen as supporting the pro-life movement.

Walter and Cole, the men in *Keely and Du*, are portrayed as claiming to great faith in Christianity, yet they commit violence against Keely. Walter, the Christian priest, is even revealed as running away from his responsibilities by asking Du to leave Keely after the abortion, after which he actually leaves to avoid being charged of crime. Ironically, Du, who stays to help Keely and bears the consequence of being a convict at the end of the play, assents Walter's leaving by saying, "We're Christians. You're needed. I am not" (Martin, 1993, p. 67). Therefore, Denise Neary does not seem to agree with Scheidler who considers *Keely and Du* as pro-life. Neary's review for *The Inquirer* says: "Essentially, it has three "giants" - men, the pro-life movement, and Christianity - all of which are effectively slain by play's end" ([http://articles.philly.com/1994-11-13/entertainment/25869261\\_1\\_keely-and-du-end-abortion-](http://articles.philly.com/1994-11-13/entertainment/25869261_1_keely-and-du-end-abortion-)

abortion-debate). Neary judges the play as posing the all-out assault on men, the pro-life movement, and Christianity. Neary also accuses the play and its flier at the performance of the play by the Philadelphia Theatre Company in 1994 as capturing the pro-abortion bias.

Accompanying the abortion issue in *Keely and Du* is the violence issue. When Du is reciting Bible to convince Keely not to abort, Keely tries to explain her point of view:

I could get messed up, who knows, killed by who impregnates me, not to mention I might, I don't know, hate this baby, hurt this baby, throw the baby or something like that, I'm not kidding, what's inside me. Now, do you have some Bible quote for that, or am I just beside the point, handcuffed to this bed, carrying the result of being fucked by my ex-husband while he banged my head of a hardwood floor to shut me up (Martin, 1993, p. 27).

What Keely says represents the much violence that she experiences: being raped by her ex-husband; being kidnapped, confined in a basement, and handcuffed; being forced to take her ex-husband back; and being imposed to keep her pregnancy until it is due. Keely recalls the traumatic event:

I just touched his arm so he would know it was alright, and he locked onto my hand, and I said -let go now, and he started in I said he needed . . . pulled me in, you know, hard, and I got a hand in his face, and he I he bit down I bit down hard, and I I don't know, went nuts I bunch of stuff .. got me down on the floor I got me down on the floor and raped me. That's how he caught up with our marriage, that's how he changed (Martin, 1993, p. 36).

By giving her own marriage as an example, Du is trying to convince Keely to keep the baby and starts building a happy marriage with Cole. Keely is trying in vain to show Du that her situation is different. The final attempt to convince Keely is by bringing Cole, who is said to have repented, to meet Keely. Linda Kintz argues:

This scene presents the most horrific violence of the play. In a domestic context, with both of them sitting on the bed to which she is handcuffed. Walter has completely negated the importance of the rape and the extension of Keely, except in her role as the glue of civilization. Walter's complete control of language now means that he can enforce Cole's rights to make her listen (2001, p. 203)

The meeting does not work as expected. Cole is making a lengthy speech on how he has repented, found Jesus, and become a good man; therefore he asks Keely to have him back and build a family. After being silent, Keely suddenly bites Cole's hand, after which Cole slaps Keely's face hard. Cole's acts highlight the violence that Keely experienced in the past and will have to endure in the future if she lives with Cole. A moment later, left alone in the basement, Keely performs her own abortion using the dress hanger, a final act of violence in the play.

### ***Jane Martin's Keely and Du: Pro-Choice, Pro-Life, or Merely Provocative?***

Perspectives on abortion may be tied to cultural and religious values. However, unintended pregnancies are not bound to cultural and religious borders as can be seen from the fact that women of every faith and from different types of jobs and different levels of society all over the world access abortion services. It is also true in Indonesia, a country whose people are said to be bound to eastern values and consider themselves religious. Adultery and abortion are strictly prohibited based on Eastern and religious values believed by Indonesian people. Therefore, most Indonesian people would be against abortion practice. The view against abortion was apparent in the Contemporary English Drama class, held in the spring semester of 2013 at



the English Department, Diponegoro University, Indonesia. Twenty two students were attending the class. The initial discussion on abortion resulted in a similar point of view against abortion because the students believed that it was against religious sanctity. A brief overview on the teaching of different religions on abortion can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. *The teaching of different religions on abortion*

The teaching of different religions on abortion			
Prohibited	Roman Catholic Church	Jehovah's Witnesses	Evangelical Christians
Very restricted	Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches	Orthodox Judaism	Hinduism
Limited	The Church of England	Islam	Liberal/Reform Judaism
No written law	Buddhism	Sikhism	Quakers
Individual decision	Humanist	Methodist Church	

Source: Best Practice Toolkit: Abortion Education by Natalie Misaljevich and Lisa Hallgarten.

The table shows that different religions have different perspectives on abortion. As can be concluded from the table, the five officially acknowledged religions in Indonesia (Islam, Catholic, Christian, Hinduism, and Buddhism) have different teaching on abortions. Although most Indonesian people are Muslims, who are supposed to know that Islam allows abortion under certain circumstances, still they tend to be against abortion practice. Alamri suggests that in Islamic perspectives, an abortion is permissible in particular circumstances where the pregnancies endanger the mother's health; the fetus is known to have fatal abnormality; or the fetus will have severe disability. In other words, abortion is permitted for medical reasons. Abortion is also tolerable when the cause of pregnancy is an incident beyond the woman's will, such as in rape cases. It is recommended that the necessary abortion is performed before 120 days of conception (2011, pp. 39-40). All students agree that if a pregnancy poses a major threat to the mother and/or the fetus, abortion is the best choice, but for reasons other than that they cannot conform.

The students find *Keely and Du* challenging their beliefs as religious people still keeping hold of eastern values. Before reading and discussing the play, almost all students are against abortion. After reading and analyzing the play, most of them agree with Keely's decision to abort. However, having discussed the nature of pro-life and pro-choice movements, it is difficult for them to decide whether they are proponent of either one. Of those who agree on Keely's decision to abort, about half of them declare that they are proponent of pro-choice movement. Some are not sure if they are proponent of pro-choice or pro-life movements as they still believe that religion will not allow abortion, consider psychological and social impact of abortion, and think that there is no right to take other's life. Interestingly, two of them say that they are actually more of pro-life proponents. They believe that everybody has the right to live, yet they support Keely's decision to abort because they can see that Keely's circumstances are beyond what they could bare if they were put in her position.

Most students who do not agree with Keely's decision believe that abortion is against God's will and violates religious sanctity. Keely should follow her maternal instinct to care for the baby. They assert that the baby has the right to live, and Keely should not take it away. If Keely worries about what will happen to her when the baby is born, she give the baby for adoption. Besides, no one knows what the future holds; therefore Keely should give the baby and herself a chance. Almost all of the students who are against Keely's decision claim to be pro-life. None claims to be pro-choice. Only few are not sure where to stand.

Overall, with a slight difference in number, more students are pro-life proponents than pro-choice. In between are a number of students who are not sure. On the one hand, they believe that abortion is against God's will and human's conscience. On the other hand, they are aware that the decision to keep the pregnancy may cause psychological disturbance and social problems upon the mother. One female student admits that even though she does not agree with Keely's decision to abort, she is not sure whether she is a proponent of pro-choice or pro-life because if she were put in the similar situation, she would do the same. Another female student says that she used to be a pro-choice proponent, but considering the fact that there are many irresponsible women performing abortion for non significant reasons but selfishness, she is not sure whether she is still a pro-choice proponent. She even says that it would be best if technology had not been developed as it would have spared the women unnecessary conflict of their pregnancies.

All students acknowledge that *Keely and Du* is successfully provocative in offering insight on how abortion and violence issues cannot be judged in a black and white manner. The play succeeds in presenting the many aspects of abortion issue which makes it hard to decide who is right or wrong. There is no unison in deciding whether *Keely and Du* promotes pro-life or pro-choice movements. That Keely manages to abort does not make all students agree with the decision and become pro-choice proponents. The play also complicates the matters further by having Keely tell Du in prison that Cole gave up on her, and she has a relationship with a married man. Although she knows that she should get out of the relationship, but Keely keeps the relationship that probably goes to nowhere. It implies that Keely's life may not turn out to be better after the abortion. The very end of the play poses an open question:

*(The conversation burns out. THEY sit. DU looks directly at her. THEY lock eyes. The pause lengthens.)*

DU. Why?

KEELY. *(Looks at her. A pause.)* Why?

*(THEY sit. The LIGHTS dim.)* (Martin, 1993, p. 70)

The students understand the questions as presenting the fact that the debate is still going on. Both Keely and Du are not convinced by each other's arguments and actions on abortion issue. Students are also made to see that a good cause may not lead in a good result when performed not in good ways, such as what is done by Operation Retrieval in the play.

## Conclusion

Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* succeeds in promoting Indonesian students to think more critically and reasonably on abortion and violence issues. It helps them to see the many aspects of abortion that they may have not thought before. In addition to introducing pro-life and pro-choice movements, *Keely and Du* challenges their strict opinion that they had against abortion

before reading the play. Just like the mixed reviews on *Keely and Du* that they read, the students also have different point of views in categorizing the play as pro-life or pro-choice. In the same sense, they also have mixed feelings in considering themselves as pro-life or pro-choice movements. Based on the fact that Keely manages to abort herself, Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* can be said as promoting pro-choice, yet it does not make all students take the side of pro-choice movement. Therefore, all students agree that *Keely and Du* is successfully provocative in offering insight on how abortion and violence issues cannot be judged in a black and white manner.

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