

## NEGATIVE LABELS AGAINST WOMEN IN REI KIMURA'S BUTTERFLY IN THE WIND: A DECONSTRUCTION ANALYSIS ON THE CHARACTER OF "TOJIN" OKICHI

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**Abstract.** Women have often been the ideal target to be culturally and socially constructed within a patriarchal society. This serves as a form of gender inequality that mostly brings harm to them. In this analysis, through men's domination and power over women, these negative social attributes were intentionally as well as politically constructed to put women as 'deviant'. Applying Derrida's deconstruction theory, the negative labels could be deconstructed into positive social attributes through a critical analysis on the main character, Okichi in the novel *Butterfly in the Wind* written by Rei Kimura. The finding posits that Okichi labeled as a "comfort woman" or "mistress" by the Shimoda's society can be re-interpreted or given a new positive meaning as heroic action which was taken to save her family and country's dignity.

**Keywords:** women; negative labelling; deconstruction; new meaning

### I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of women has always been an interesting, yet endless topic to be discussed. They are often associated with particularly cultural codes, in a sense that they can be a source of meaning and, or of social and cultural labeling within a particular society. Women's lives have been critically and continuously questioned as they become the "ideal target" to be culturally and socially constructed within a patriarchal society. In her book titled *Second Sex*, feminism theorist, Simone de Beauvoir, states that being a woman is not something natural as the civilization as a unit plays an integral role in constructing her into other specific figure [1]. Women often become the victims of the practice of sexually differentiated segregation. In other words, they are incessantly indoctrinated and forced to be a certain figure expected by the patriarchal society.

The first social unit which gives women cultural values and meanings starts from the family. Father, "normally" considered as the head of a family within patriarchal ideology, is socially positioned as a more superior than other family members (wife and children). By virtue of his position, a father has a privilege to define how a household should be carried out and how the children should grow and behave. He also has the power to raise the children based on their gender status and patriarchal ideology. Bhasin [2] argues that the dominance of patriarchal ideological construction causes oppression towards women which causes inequality between men and women. It is not caused by biological factors (gender), but rather a construction of women's reality in life.

Patriarchy refers to a social order in which there is recurrent and systematic domination of men over

subordinated women across a wide range of social institutions and practices [3]. As an ideology, patriarchy means male power, the social relationship in which men dominate. Patriarchy is integrated into human culture which socially positions men as a more superior subject than women. Therefore, this creates gender-based inequality which potentially leads to women marginalization. Hasan [4] found that gender differences potentially cause injustice in various aspects of women's lives such as in the workplace (in terms of wage distribution), in the household (gender discrimination between family members), in the state level.

According to Hardjana in Ghofur [5] novel as a literary work is a creation of a work of life using imaginative and emotional language. As a narrative text, a literary work is an expression of people's life through language. It also serves as standard expressions of what a person has witnessed, inspired, and felt, both regarding aspects of life which attract direct and strong interest. A novel is a fictional story in the form of writing or words and has both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Rahmat Djoko Pradopo states that a novel usually tells about human life along with its interaction with surrounding environment. He also argues that a novel was written to give readers insights about human experiences [6]. The author describes an imagined life and reality in his literary work. Life portrayed in the novel has been imagined based on author's interpretation related to his educational background, beliefs, and so on [7].

*Butterfly in the Wind* written by Rei Kimura [8] is one of the novels that has the aforementioned aspects. Through events and conflicts, the aspects experienced by the main character, Okichi, will reveal how gender based inequality is represented in this novel. Okichi is a Japanese girl living in a family who holds patriarchal tradition. Her father works as a

carpenter. Since she was born, Okichi has to obey the family rules which mostly affect her all aspects of life and relationship with society. This novel was selected as the corpus of this research as it tells about the woman marginalization along with the dynamics of the woman's life living in patriarchal society.

Hasan [4] argues that patriarchal ideology provides a kind of justification for men, both institutionally and individually to practice subordination over women. He also adds that as an ideology and a social system, it often harms women and potentially leads to gender injustice, one of which is stereotypes in the form of negative labeling against women. This negative labelling given to the main character, Okhici, will be the focus of the analysis. In this study, the negative social labeling by the people of Shimoda was pinned to Okichi when the Japanese government, *attaché*, wanted her to voluntarily serve the American consulate general as a "mistress".

In the story, Okichi's sacrifice will be reinterpreted or reconstructed using Derrida's deconstruction theory which identifies contradictions in the text. Therefore, this study will also focus on the deconstruction of Okichi's status as a "mistress" of an American consulate general in Rei Kimura's *Butterfly in the Wind*. The purpose of this study is also to re-interpret the negative labeling to provide a new meaning behind the taken for granted stereotypes

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research applies descriptive analysis by focusing on the process and meaning based on the theory relevant to the study. Qualitative methods demand understanding of the substance of an event. Thus, qualitative research is not only conducted to get an explanation, but also to help get a deeper explanation. Therefore, it is important for researchers to equip themselves with adequate knowledge regarding the problem being analyzed [9]. The steps of this study are described by referring to *Understanding Qualitative Methods*, which mentions several characteristics of qualitative research, which are (1) using procedures to get the data, (2) limiting the research to the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach, (3) using a qualitative approach, (4) starting research with one focus, (5) applying detailed methods including data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Finally, after writing is done persuasively, the readers can convincingly get the same experience. [10]

By applying Derrida's deconstruction, meaning is found in the text. It is not merely presenting the original meaning, or seeing it objectively. This method is to understand the meaning of the text which must not continue to maintain the existing meaning and determine the meaning which then glorifies it, but a completely new "truth" must be obtained. This "truth" is obtained without ignoring the preceding 'truths' or meanings. Then, after being discovered, this "truth" must not legitimately claim as an absolute "truth". Derrida in Barker [3] also suggests that the purpose of deconstruction is not simply to reverse the binary

orders, but to show how they are implicated in each other. Therefore, it tries to expose the blind spots of the text as well as the unacknowledged assumptions in which they operate. Following this idea, Derrida would say that meaning is undecidable.

McQuilan, in the article *Understanding Jacques Derrida's Theory of Deconstruction as Radical Hermeneutics* ([www.lsfdiscourse.org](http://www.lsfdiscourse.org)) states that there are five strategies to understand deconstruction [11]. First, deconstruction means an event; the reading event, second, deconstruction is the contamination of binary oppositions, which means that various binary antinomies can be dragged along and there must be one hegemonial side and a marginal side. With deconstruction, what is shown in binary opposition is the side that is marginalized because there is something else in the dominant interpretation of the marginal. Instead of allowing the domination of one of the poles, it will try to suppress the opposite pole, so that the binary antinomy itself can be removed. It could be argued that this is a strategy for explaining that there is something else. Third, deconstruction can be explained as a reading process that is concerned with being marginalized. In the context of binary opposition, marginalized subjects in the binary opposition are in demand. Things that have been silent and silenced will be allowed to speak. Fourth, deconstruction is historical meaning that the terms favored in binary opposition are not stable. Every term has its history and it also shows that the term is unstable. Fifth, nothing is inseparable from the text. This explains that in deconstructive reading the meaning of the text refers to a series of traces, namely the contexts in the text that give meaning, so that there is an attempt to stop rehabilitation and construction efforts.

Applying Derrida's deconstruction theory, this study aims to redefine the negative labeling given to female main character and propose a new meaning by reading the events in the text of Rei Kimura's *Butterfly in the Wind*

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Okichi's father, Ichibei Saito, has been very concerned about his daughter's future life. Okichi was not born from a family of upper middle class social strata, but only the daughter of a carpenter who is in the lower social class. Her father believed that things would have been easier if Okichi had been a boy. Living within patriarchal society, her father agreed with the idea that only a boy deserved to be given enough education or knowledge about carpentry and then he just had to continue his father's work. Saito's thoughts made him believe that he had power over his daughter, Okichi. He thought that he was privileged to determine Okichi's future without giving her an opportunity to decide hers.

When Okichi was 12, her father asked her to leave and learn to become a geisha at Sen Murayama family. Her father's orders clearly cannot be refuted as her father's words are considered "law" in the family. Having learned to be a geisha for six months, Okichi returned to her hometown,

Shimoda, and met a carpenter, Tsurumatsu, who later became her boyfriend. Okichi planned to marry him. However, instead of getting married with Tsurumatsu, Okichi was again ordered by a government attaché who wanted her to be voluntarily given to a high-ranking American, Townsend Harris, for political purposes.

Okichi, of course, could not refute the government attaché's command who had previously ordered her father to voluntarily give her to Townsend Harris even though she strongly opposed the unilateral decision. In the encyclopedia Britannica ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)) it is said that Townsend Harris was the first American diplomat to serve as the American consulate General in Japan, specifically in Shimoda [12]. He was also the first to negotiate an American-Japanese treaty, the "Harris Treaty", by introducing the Japanese Shogunate to foreign trade and culture during the Edo period.

The history of America's arrival to Japan is marked by the arrival of four steamers and an aircraft carrier, namely the USS Powhatan, which arrived at the port of Edo, Tokyo. The fleet of ships was known as the Black Ship Fleet (*Kurofune*), which was led by an American Navy officer named Commodore Matthew C. Perry. Japan, which had long isolated itself since 1639, since the political isolation (*Sakoku*) was implemented by the Tokugawa military government, was very impressed with the arrival of the black ships. With the power of arms, the Black Ship fleet forced Japan to accept its arrival and in the following year America and Japan signed a cooperation agreement that ended 2.5 centuries of political isolation and at the same time overthrew the rule of the Tokugawa dynasty in 1868.

It was a sign that Japan had entered a new era and began to open up and return the government to the Emperor which was previously held by a military government. The Emperor serves as head of state, but government and politics are run by a group of Japanese intellectuals. Japan launched a major reform with the motto *Fukoku-Kyohei* which means "a rich country and a strong armed forces". The main objective in proclaiming this reform was to create a nation that was able to stand equal to Western nations, which was later known as the Meiji restoration [13].

After being forced to hand over by her father to Townsend Harris, Okichi's character undergoes drastic changes psychologically and sociologically. Psychologically, Okichi had to bury her dream of getting married with her boyfriend, Tsurumatsu. She had to obey her father's orders and the government which was seen as "law" in her country. Okichi was saddened by this predicament and she had no power to oppose the rules.

Previously, after turning 12, she complied with her father's wishes to be a geisha.

*"My dear child," he began. "I have made a decision about your future." ... "After your twelfth birthday, you are to leave this family and enter the Sen Murayama family. There, you will go through the necessary training to become a professional geisha" ... But her father's word was law in the family so she did not argue with him. She had to accept everything he decreed*

*eventhough her heart cried out against it.* (Kimura, 2010: 8)

This shows that men plays a role in creating negative labeling of women. Okichi's father knew geisha profession would lower his daughter's self-esteem as a woman because it is known as a job to serve men, but he believed that it was her future. A future that her father unilaterally decided on with the idea that the geisha profession was perfect for a woman as beautiful as Okichi without thinking about the consequences for being a "comfort woman".

Okichi was later asked to serve an American consulate general, Townsend Harris. At that time, women were not allowed to leave the house by their parents so as not to be attracted by foreigners whom they called "foreign devils" because of their reddish brown hair color, *"That means the foreign devils will be here permanently and we'll have to live among them."* (Kimura, 2010: 17).

Townsend Harris was fascinated by Okichi's beauty so that a Japanese government official was sent to pick her up and give her to Townsend Harris for political reasons. Without Okichi's knowing, her father let him pick her up and forced her to forget her dream of getting married with Tsurumatsu.

*"Apparently, that foreign devil saw you coming back from the bathhouse a few days ago and is so enamored that he insists on having you. Our Shogun wants only to please him so that our country can get a favorite deal in the Treaty they are going to sign soon. So he has ordered that you be persuaded to serve that foreign devil."* (Kimura, 2010: 19-20)

Okichi had no power to refute and oppose her father's decision. She knows that within patriarchal social society, women's voices and opinions are almost never taken into account, especially on the political grounds.

*"You know as well that I do, Okichi, that a request from the governor's office to people like us is no less than an order." "An order," Okichi whispered. "They order me to sell my body and my soul for the sake of my country. They care not about the life, the blood and the spirit that flows in my veins and the pain and the suffering that will be mine and mine alone."* (Kimura, 2010: 20)

Okichi's mother was not able to help her even though she had begged her husband. This shows that both individually and institutionally, the practice of women subordination creates negative labeling of women in society. Women's lives are determined by men. Being defined as a geisha and "mistress", Townsend Harris implies the man superiority over women.

The status as "entertainers" and "mistresses" has been constructed as a negative labeling in society. In general, women are no longer considered as "respectable" as they are considered "tarnished" or "dirty" by men, while men does not accept negative labels as experienced by women. Gender-based injustice is very detrimental to women sociologically, such as the term "mistress", "comfort woman", "prostitute", "widow" and so on. This negative labeling can be said to have built a normativity that "good and respectable women" are women who are not associated

with men physiologically unless legally bound through marriage, women who maintain their virginity and dignity. If they violate, they are considered to have "deviated" from the prevailing norms in society, thus giving rise to this negative labelization.

Having the status of a geisha and being "owned" by Townsend Harris as a "mistress" resulted in her being socially labeled negatively as "Tojin" which was derogatory to her when she confronted the people of Shimoda, where she was born, after a long period of "devotion" to the American consulate general, "Tojin Okichi" was the name shouted in derision by the townspeople of Shimoda. "Tojin" in the article entitled *Tojin Okichi Monogatari A Tale of "Chink Okichi" and Townsend Harris* by William Wetherall states that the term "Tojin" is used by Japanese people to insult or demean someone because they are considered "outsiders", "Tojin" has in fact been used in Japanese to disparage someone [14]. This explains the gender injustice that Okichi received in the form of negative labeling from the Shimoda society is detrimental to her because in fact everything she does is compulsion due to conditions putting her as an inferior subject in a patriarchal society.

Based on Derrida's deconstruction of the text, Okichi can be interpreted to an infinite extent where the "truth" is not single, absolute and universal. The "truth" or meaning obtained is not the only truth, but an opportunity to find new "truths". Therefore, the text of the novel *Butterfly in the Wind* was deconstructed as a re-meaning of the social label that Okichi accepted. As previously explained, Okichi is negatively labeled as "comfort woman" and "Tojin" because she is "owned" by a foreigner. In the history of Japan, especially after the end of 2.5 centuries of political isolation and entering the era of the Meiji restoration, where foreign influences began to enter, foreigners were seen as "negative beings" because of their different physical appearance. Japanese women avoided interacting with them so as not to get half-blooded offspring that could "destroy" their "purity". If they have relations with foreigners, they will be considered outsiders and despised as experienced Okichi with the label "Tojin".

The labelization of geisha as "comfort woman", "Tojin" or "mistress" pinned on Okichi produces different meanings when interpreted in a new way. All of this social labeling has been constructed as a negative verdict by society so that it is considered an absolute "truth" that Okichi is not a good and respectable woman because she has "deviated" from the norm. However, when reinterpreted, it can be said that Okichi had done an extraordinary act. Okichi's obedience to her father's orders could be interpreted as a heroic act of a woman in order to defend her family's honor. At a relatively young age, Okichi was willing to leave her family despite being forced to pursue the geisha profession whose job is to entertain men, but demands professionalism which is not easy. Okichi gained knowledge with a long process to be a professional geisha, not only because she was forced to obey her father's wishes, but indirectly she supported her family's life as well.

Okichi took an education to be a professional geisha. It can be positively seen that geisha is not a "cheap" profession as it requires women to have intelligence and special skills such as singing, playing musical instruments, language skills and other skills. In an article on the *Liputan6.com* webpage, Yulianingsih said that geisha are actually traditional Japanese artists and entertainers who demand years of training. It is not easy for a woman to gain this status. They have to work hard to hone their artistic talents, practice playing music and dancing for years, even during their heyday some started at the age of 6 [15].

Okichi's sacrifice to be a "mistress" of the American consulate general, Townsend Harris, can also be interpreted as a heroic act. Okichi had to "serve" Townsend Harris for political reasons and for the sake of her country" with the aim of perpetuating the American-Japanese mutual cooperation relationship. This act can be considered as Okichi's sacrifice for the country which should be seen as something positive as well as heroic that a woman does in that context. Therefore, the social labeling accepted by Okichi can be reconstructed into a new meaning because it is not an "absolute truth", but something that is essentially constructed. The practice of women subordination creates negative labels against women has harmed women sociologically, but based on the above explanation through a study of the text on the main female character, Okichi, a negative labeling of women who has been socially constructed can be deconstructed so that it will turn into a positive meaning.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The finding of this study has revealed that the deconstruction of the text focused on the character Okichi can be reconstructed into a completely new meaning. Okichi, who is labeled as "comfort woman", "mistresses" of foreigners or "tojin" by the people of Shimoda shows that on the one hand women still experience gender-based injustice. Okichi's negative labeling as "comfort woman" and "tojin" is a social construction of women that can indirectly be said to be part of the practice of subordination of men towards women. This subordination is marked by her father, government attaché and the American Consulate General, regarding Okichi's life without letting her make choices for her own life, so this then became the cause of Okichi to be in an inferior position and to get this negative labelization in society. On the other hand, the deconstruction of Okichi's character's text creates a new meaning, in the sense that social labeling is essentially something that is constructed and not an absolute truth. The practice of subordination of men towards women which plays a role in creating negative labeling of women has indeed harmed women sociologically, but after experiencing reconstruction, this negative labelization is actually the result of a woman's heroic action in saving her family's honor and country.

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