

Deconstruction of ‘Priayi’ Javanese Family Patriarchy Issue in Novel *Canting* By Arswendo Atmowiloto

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Abstract: *This research has the purpose to reveal the patriarchy culture happens in Javanese woman's life pictured in novel Canting by Arswendo Atmowiloto. It then tries to reconstruct and reverse the inferiority image of Javanese woman in the novel who was described as domestic figure only became a woman that actually independent and had a power to rule her husband life. The researcher used deconstruction method to reverse the meaning which wants to be described by Arswendo. In novel Canting, the patriarchy construction of Priyayi Javanese woman was presented through the obedience of Bu Bei to her husband. She served every necessities of Pak Bei during her life. Through the deconstruction, the researcher was then able to reveal that actually Bu Bei was the person who had the superiority because without her, Pak Bei could do nothing, included for the preparation of Bu Bei's tahlilan (praying after the death). This research used feminism approach to describe the image of woman in Javanese patriarchy culture. Through the research, the readers would know the superiority of a woman through her fairness and womanity.*

Keywords: *Canting, Priyayi Javanese woman, Deconstruction, Arswendo*

Deconstruction is appeared from the behavior of a contemporary philosopher named Jaques Derrida who denies the logocentric. Logocentric is a willingness of a center or an “existence” of God’s word which is able to explain everything. It is a continually effort to destroy and negate the decentering. Derrida’s way to run his mission is by establishing semiotic theory called grammatology. He believes that nobody can make ‘sign’ and ‘meaning’ become identically. Madan Sarup explains in his book *Panduan Pengantar untuk Memahami Postrukturalisme dan Posmodernisme*, that “*sign will always direct to other signs. One sign will exchange the other sign each other as the signified and signifier. Sign should be read in ‘cross’ meaning and always be contained by other signs traces that never wholly appeared*” (2008:48).

In the application, deconstruction tries to reverse the hierarchy towards the existed oppositional system. Furthermore, it does the already classic oppositions, a huge changing towards the system entirely. The way is by determining a certain opposition that is the metaphysic ideology enforcement with one brings the pre-oppositions and its roles in metaphysics value. It shows how the system is destroyed in text which reveals and leans on it. It questions the opposition by using it in self argument and reinstating with a reverse that give it different effects status.

In this research, the writer utilized the deconstruction theory into a novel entitled *Canting* by Arswendo Atmowiloto. Novel *Canting* told about a very patriarchal *Priayi* Javanese family. The head of family was Pak Bei a.k.a. Ngabehi Sestrokusuma, the owner or Batik Company with brand *Canting* who was very feudalist. Everything should be served by his wife and employees. Bu Bei, who was actually ex-labor of batik, prepared everything for Pak Bei. It started from preparing hot water to take shower until selling batik in Klewer market. Pak Bei only enjoyed his life by going to socialize with his friends who were the fellow *Priayi* and “*tirakatan*”

(contemplation) of *Kliwon* Friday that sometimes colored with gambling and women. There was also a clear social strata gap between the *priayi* and labor.

Through the deconstruction, the writer tried to find marginal texts which could reverse the binary opposition between the superiority of Pak Bei and inferiority of Bu Bei in the scope of *Priayi* Javanese family. By using cultural feminism framework combined with the deconstruction, it was expected to appear a new meaning which out of general meaning understood by the readers, the meaning that looked like want to be showed by the author of the novel.

The patriarchy concept itself is described by Wening Udasmoro as a “*very important concept as the starting point to enter to gender understanding*” (2009:9). She adds that this concept has actually experienced a long history process and gets the variation of definition in every different culture. Weber utilizes the patriarchy concept as a government system when men control society through their position as the head of a family (Udasmoro, 2009:10).

The author of novel *Canting*, Arswendo Atmowiloto, who was born in Surakarta, Central Java, 26 November 1948, is an active Indonesian writer and journalist in several magazine and newspaper such as *Hai* and *KOMPAS*. In 1990, when served as chief editor of tabloid *Monitor*, he was arrested and imprisoned because of an opinion poll. Arswendo was then processed legally until convicted with the sentence of five years imprisonment.

RESEARCH METHOD

According to the background of study above, the method that could be used in analyzing the problem was library research. This method is a way to get information from the previous research, both primary and secondary data. Nazir in *Metode Penelitian* said that “*library research is the data collecting technique by holding analysis study toward books, literatures, notes and reports related to the resolved problem*”. (1988:111). It was the important step after a researcher determining the topic of the study. The next phase was doing the study correlated with the topic. In theory finding, the researcher assembled as much as possible the information from the related literature. The literature resources found from book, journal, magazine, thesis, dissertation and other sources (internet, newspaper, etc.). The library research method revolved around general process such as identify the theory systematically, find literature and analyze documents contains associated with research topic. By utilizing this method, the writer took the sources from the written materials in the library. The primary data or main object of the research was the literary work itself. Meanwhile, the secondary data were to support and give clear picture of the work.

Through the feminism approach, the writer tried to reveal the inferior image of Javanese woman in patriarchy culture. Meanwhile, by using deconstruction method the writer then reversed the meaning as showed in the novel through the marginal text that nearly did not realized by the reader as well as the writer of the novel itself.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Novel *Canting* told about the life of *Priyayi* Javanese family that still had a very patriarchy atmosphere in the relationship between the male and female characters. Pak Bei's characteristic as the head of the family was still feudal so that the readers could feel how the dividers between the employer and labor were created in the story. Hence, a clear binary opposition in this novel was the husband, Pak Bei, who represented the center (the male authority in *Priyayi* Javanese family) and the wife, Bu Bei, who represented periphery (the obeyed Javanese wife and served her husband). Of the binary opposition, it could be observed that the authorized person and the person who had special rights was Pak Bei, as the husband. In this part, the readers were able to see how Bu Bei as the person who did not have the special rights could reverse the patriarchal discourse in her family. Although she was determined by a strong *Priyayi* Javanese construction, but indirectly Bu Bei could show her superiority as a woman.

In *Canting*, the female characters, especially Bu Bei, were constructed as an individual that must obey the fine Javanese manner, where as a wife, they should be able to make their husband happy and take care of family domestic affairs, such as kitchen and children's necessity. Therefore, a woman could get the happiness in her life. It might be seen from the quote below:

Cahaya wajah Bu Bei adalah cahaya kebahagiaan. Kebahagiaan wanita yang berhasil mengisi hidupnya dengan kerja yang panjang dan bakti yang tulus kepada suami (2007:6).

The patience and obedience characteristics toward the husband became a must that was absolute for *Priyayi* Javanese woman in running their family life. This thing had become pattern for them, which was generated from generation to generation, if she wanted to get life security. Bu Bei was loyal to wait for her husband's decision about 'the unwillingly child' in her womb becomes the picture of a full obedience behavior.

Bu Bei masih menunggu. Ndalem Ngabean masih sepi. Matahari mulai lemah. Pak Bei membaca koran yang terlambat datang....Bu Bei masih menunggu. Sampai agak gelap (2007:10).

In Javanese tradition, a woman was indeed constructed to be mastered in three things, that were cooking, good at kitchen to serve food, make up (*macak*), good at make up as the asset to attract a man, and make love (*manak*), good in 'bed' to fulfill man sexual desire as well as giving birth the healthy children who became the pride of their parents. These things were clearly pictured through the daily life of Bu Bei who had the task to prepare the entire Pak Bei's necessity, started from the food, showering, to the needs of travelling. It was showed through the quotation below:

Malam itu Pak Bei berangkat ke Yogyakarta, diantarkan oleh sopirnya. Bu Bei menyediakan segala perlengkapan yang dibutuhkan...Semua keperluannya, mulai dari pakaian, uang, perlengkapan untuk melayat, telah disediakan. Juga rokok Pempa kesukaannya (2007:10).

Talking about the woman construction in Javanese patriarchy culture, especially for *Priyayi* Javanese, it surely could not be separated from the position of man as the binary opposition of this construction. If a woman was placed into the inferior condition where she did not have bargaining position as the domestic person, but the men was much luckier since they were placed into the public sector which was possible for them to be more develop in knowledge and personality. With this full serving from his wife, Pak Bei practically has more spare time to do nothing. His spare times were more spent to take care of small things, such as look after his pet and reading. If he went out from the house, Pak Bei then only spent his time for the unimportant things, such as "tirakatan" (contemplation) at *Kliwon* Friday, that was basically only gathering with the aristocratic who likes

to gamble, drink alcohol, and make love that covered by the activity discussing about Javanese culture preservation.

Pak Bei menegak arak Bekonang sebagai tanda keakraban. Lalu mengambil tempat duduk di tikar....(2007:20).

Moreover, in bed affairs, it was clearly seen that the concept of “serving” or making love was very different between the male and female characters. It was surely that Bu Bei never got a whole “satisfaction” from the making love activity with her husband because she only regarded that making love meant serving, doing her obligation as a wife and of course she would be happy when was being touched as the caring manifestation form which she yearned. Meanwhile, for Pak Bei, making love was only like the sexual rites which would proof his masculinity, lead to his ego as a man to be looked strong on bed. From those facts, the readers can assess that the body intercourse relationship of the husband and wife is never based on love feeling and the inner bounding between them. This different concept is clearly pictured into the quotation below:

Bu Bei menerima getaran yang aneh. Seperti dialiri setrum yang membuatnya merasa dipanggil untuk berbakti....Tak menjadi soal benar apakah ia mengalami kepuasan atau tidak. Itu tak penting benar....Bagi Pak Bei, saat pagi seperti ini adalah saat di mana ia bertarung dengan kelelahan yang dirasa mulai menggerogoti dirinya. Ia ingin membuktikan kepada dirinya sendiri bahwa ia masih kuat, masih jantan (2007:36-37).

In novel *Canting*, happiness could be obtained by Bu Bei when she was not side by side with her husband, Pak Bei. A taste of independence and freedom from the shackles created by the construction of Javanese culture, especially Javanese *Priyayi*, which she experienced, symbolizes the happiness itself. Researcher assessed that there was ambiguity happens inside Bu Bei's mind and soul because she was happy when she could serve her husband through full obedience and devotion, but she was also grateful when she was away from her husband. Researcher argued that the her happiness as a dutiful wife was simply false happiness that had been implanted since she was young. Therefore, it became a way of strict life. The opportunity to far from Pak Bei, was told, could be obtained with the departure of Pak Bei outside of the house or if she went to Klewer market, where she sold batik with the brand *Canting*. It could be seen from the following quote:

Ia justru berbahagia dengan adanya pertemuan semacam itu. Karena bisa melepas suaminya pergi dari Canting. Memberi keleluasaan karena selama ini terkungkung. Jauh dalam hati, Bu Bei mensyukuri adanya pertemuan yang menuntut cerita banyak arti (2007:17).

Klewer market was symbolized as the freedom itself. Literally it was depicted in the novel that the market was a place where a career woman was working and transforming herself from a domestic woman to be a woman in power. In the market, Bei Bu could be transformed into a "boss" or ruler that could set her men in accordance with the will of her heart. There, Bu Bei became conscious of her dignity, sex appeal, the right to determine, and do whatever she wanted.

Pasar adalah dunia wanita yang sesungguhnya....Bu Bei berubah menjadi direktur, manajer pelaksana yang sigap...Pasar adalah panggung di mana wanita-wanita yang di Canting memegang peran pembantu, menjadi yang nomor satu. Di mana ibu-ibu menjadi sadar akan harga dirinya, daya tariknya, haknya untuk menentukan, dan berbuat apa maunya (2007:42-44).

Through this symbol, the Javanese female domestication was reversed in the Arswendo's novel. Wife construction which was established as inferior and determined figure that should serve and obey her husband with all her heart, could actually obtain the "authority" and a sense of independence in a simple way. Without resistance to the system, but fused with the existing construction.

Although in the eyes of radical feminism, the departure of women into the market to sell and make money was considered as a form of double slavery, but culturally the happiness through the simple way precisely made women feel "wholly" by realizing that there was equal power between herself and her husband even though in a different social sphere. Javanese woman who seemed indeed destined shackled by patriarchal culture in her life, through this novel got a new image that without the presence of men, they could be in an equal position with the man.

Moreover, Bu Bei's devotion in serving her husband is also able to reverse the fact of Javanese women determination. It becomes a superior power that can make Pak Bei feels like a fool who does not know anything when Bu Bei leaves her husband forever. Bu Bei's habit that always prepares all the necessities of Pak Bei becomes a kind of boomerang for him because it has instilled apathy and laziness to care about the little things. The "stupid" feeling is shown to his youngest daughter, Ni, when he has to hold "*tahlilan*" (the praying after the death of a person by sending verses of Holy Koran) for Bu Bei.

"Kamu tunjuk siapa yang mengurus. Saya tak tahu apa-apa. Sebenarnya saya ini tak tahu apa-apa soal ini. Betul, Ni. Semua dulu ditangani ibumu. Saya tahunya beres dan baik" (276).

From the dialogue above, the reader may judge how Pak Bei such as loses direction and becomes a figure who does not know anything though he has the predicate as head of the family. Confusion felt by Pak Bei is not only felt by himself, but Ni is able to read the situation after his father's fall caused by the death of his mother. It can be seen from the following narration:

Ni tak membalas, akan tetapi merasa. Merasa bahwa ada sesuatu yang mengguncang ayahnya. Mengguncang dari akar. Justru penampilannya yang gagah, yang tabah, menjadi semacam cara untuk menutupi kegelisahannya (2007:277).

In the end, Pak Bei whose at the beginning of the story was always taking anything for granted and tend to underestimate the presence of his wife in his daily life admitted to his children the preciousness of Bei Bu figure, a woman who had been able to carry out her duties as wife as well as a perfect career woman. This further reinforces the fact that the superiority are actually in the hands of Bei Bu, Javanese female figure who always obedient to her husband.

"Ini yang istimewa, sebab ibumu mencapai tingkat pasrah dalam arti sebenarnya. Ibumu bisa menyatukan antara karir, kepentingan pribadi, kepentingan seorang istri, kepentingan seorang ibu, dalam satu tarikan napas yang sama" (2007:281).

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, the writer may conclude that novel *Canting* tries to make and describe the patriarchy atmosphere in *Jawa Priayi* family into the story. The submission of Bu Bei towards her husband to serve him both as wife and mother is told in detail so that it is able to deliver the clear picture or image of the patriarchy concept that happens in the story to the readers.

Nevertheless, although in most of the story the woman construction as "server" either in domestic dealings or sex matter and as "the money machine" which lead to the double slavery assumption toward women is very dominating, but it can be found the fact that the submission, obedience as well as patience done by character Bu Bei precisely become the way for her to show her superiority as a woman in her own house and family. It can be seen when Bu Bei is died. This incident at the las time makes Pak Bei feels like stupid man because he knows nothing either domestic matter or the batik business.

Through the description, the readers then get a new knowledge about the discourse that tries to be created in novel *Canting*. It because the patriarchy discourse is no longer as the meaning pattern for the readers after that concept is reversed or given the cross sign by the novel text itself.

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