

PORTRAYAL OF KOREAN WOMEN AS VICTIM OF MALE VIOLENCE IN MARY BRACHT'S WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUM

Mentari Cahya Cosinta

Student of English Department
University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya
E-mail: mc.cosinta@gmail.com

Ambar Andayani

Lecturer of English Department
University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya

Abstract : Colonialism era in Korea has influenced the lives of Korean women. During the Japanese occupation in Korea, many Korean women are kidnapped and forced into comfort women. Related to the third world feminist, the purpose of the study is to analyze the portrayal of third world women reflected by Korean women which become victims of male violence in Mary Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* and their struggle against Japanese oppression as seen in the novel. The writer uses Mohanty's decolonizing feminism theory which discussing third world women as categories of analysis. In order to discover those purposes, a qualitative research method is used for this study. The results show that Korean women in the novel portrayed as victim of male violence which receive several abuse, rape, torture, beatings and so on. Through this literary evidence, third world feminism puts forward the struggle of Korean women to escape from gender injustices they experienced when colonialism practice occurs in Korea has affected social and political aspects of the country.

Keywords: *Third World Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Korean Women, Comfort Women*

INTRODUCTION

Conversation about feminism in general is a discussion about how the patterns of relations between men and women in society, as well as rights, status and position of women in the domestic sector and public. Feminist literature critique starts just after 'second-wave' feminism, a concept typically used after the Civil Rights campaign of the 1960s during the rise of the women's movement in the US and Europe. However, it is evident that feminist literary analysis does not tend to be entirely established out of

the moment. According to Plain and Sellers, self-conscious expression ultimately is the culmination of women's writing for centuries, about how women write about women and about women and men writing about women's minds, bodies, art and ideas. (Plain and Sellers, 2007:2).

More recently, feminism pays more attention to categories such as gender which can sometimes be overlooked in colonial discussion in general, and that post-colonial theory tends to eliminate

gender differences to establish a single category of colonization (Ashcroft et al, 2002:168). Critics such as Mohanty, Spivak and Suleri contend that the act of colonialism is very different for women and men, and the 'double oppression' that occurs when women are subject to general discrimination as subjects of colonialism and specific discrimination as women, need to be considered in any analysis of colonial oppression.

Postcolonial feminism is often closely related to Third-World Feminism, which focuses on discussing third world women. The term three worlds begin in the Cold War era more than half a century ago. The First World consists of the United States, Western Europe and their allies which represent western capitalism, and The Second World is Soviet socialism which consists of Uni Soviet, China, Cuba and their allies. Then the countries that is not included in both is called The Third World. Third World countries are also known as developing countries because they still develop themselves in certain aspects such as education, health and economics. However, Third World women cannot be defined solely as women in developing countries. Chandra Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders* (2003: 46) puts forward "Third World Women" as an analytical and political category; therefore

she wants to rethink and examine the ties between history and the struggle of women in the third world toward racism, patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism and monopoly capital. Researchers also refer women in the Third World to subject of backwardness, oppressive practices, strong analphabetism, rural and industrial deprivation, theological fanaticism, and the overpopulation of various countries in Asia, Africa , the Middle East, and Latin America. But for the moment, Third World Women's meanings, explanations, and perceptions regarding feminism must be capable of being at the same time accurate and complex, not stuck in time in the context of a spectacle.

White Chrysanthemum is the first work of the author Mary Lynn Bracht. This novel is dedicated as a work to respect comfort women and reminders of the injustices experienced by Korean girls during Japanese colonial period. They experience kidnappings, persecution and sexual violence committed by Japanese soldiers who occupy Korea. Korean girls who are kidnapped when they are young, are forced to become sex slaves under the name 'comfort women' and many of them die because of the torture they experience, and also could not return to their homeland even after the war ends. Until the time of this novel, Japanese government has not

officially acknowledged and apologized to the 'comfort women' for the injustices they have experienced.

METHODS

This study uses extrinsic approach in which the literary work is analyzed through its feminism background and historical background. The main data source of this study is *Mary Bracht's* first novel entitled *White Chrysanthemum*. Therefore, the writers focuses on the portrayal of Korean women as victim of male violence and their struggle against Japanese oppression as found in the novel.

According to Tyson, feminist criticism has links with "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine women's economic, political, social, and psychological oppression" (Tyson, 2006: 83). In addition to using the feminism approach, the writer also uses a historical approach to explore the novel from the perspective of real events. According to Kennedy, historical criticism "seeks to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural, and intellectual context that produces it – a context that necessarily includes the artist's biography and milieu"(Kennedy, 1995: 1810). Thus, this study using feminism approach and historical approach to examines Korean

women as victim of male violence which appears in Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* and links them to the historical and real event which cause them struggle against oppression.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Third-world women are often categorized by the status of their objects in various Western feminist literary works. Assumptions that third-world women are homogeneous characters which helpless, exploited, sexually harassed and so on, are also found in Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* which represented by Korean Women. This novel portrays Korean women during Japanese occupation and Korean War through Hana, a Korean women who experience many gender injustices. Women are portrayed continuously as victims of violence perpetrated by men, especially the ruling colonial party. This research using Chandra Mohanty's decolonizing feminist theory which women as a category of analysis is used in Western feminist writings. In this case, Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* is analyzed elaborately using Mohanty's theory. Analysis and discussion about Korean women as victim of male violence can be seen in the following discussion:

Korean Women as Victim of Male Violence

The category in the analysis of third world women which discusses in this journal is women as victims of male violence. In Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum*, male violence towards women occur in various forms such as rape, coercion, abduction, torture, beating etc. The potential for male violence against women can limit and explain their social position to a certain extent. Even so, women can not simply be defined as victims because it will make them become objects (protect themselves) while men are subjects (commit violence). About this norm, Mohanty argues that "Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies in order both to understand it better and to organize effectively to change it" (2003:24). Not only should sisterhood be claimed on a gender basis but it must be built in practical historical and political experience and study.

According to the story in the novel, Korean women continue to experience violence perpetrated by ruling man, represented by Japanese soldier. The case of Korean women who are portrayed as victims of male violence can be found in the novel through Hana's perspective, who is one of Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* main character. When Hana is abducted by Japanese soldiers and taken to Manchuria along with other Korean girls, she finds

that all the women is mistreated by Japanese soldiers there. This can be seen in the quotation below:

The door to the ferry's cabin opens, and two soldiers enter. They scan the group and then reach for a girl, seemingly at random. A small cry escapes her, and the soldier smacks her. She quietens, shocked by the sudden blow. The other soldier continues scanning the girls. (Bracht, 2018: 35)

As the party that colonized South Korea, Japanese soldiers treat Korean women arbitrarily. Not only kidnaping Korean women by force or deceive them, Japanese soldiers also using violence to anyone who act against their will. They often use this method to frighten Korean women. This is done to make them submissive and unable to resist. Japanese soldiers also use verbal violence such as shouting and calling Korean women animals to reduce their morale.

On the way to Manchuria, Corporal Marimoto, Japanese soldier who abducted Hana, rapes and took her virginity. When Hana does not obey his orders, He threatened Hana if she did not want to, he will invite other soldiers to rape her. Hana who refuses at first then can not resist anymore and is forced to obey because his punishment will be worse if she does not obeys him. Even though Hana is

frightened and shows rejection, Corporal Marimoto continues his actions. He threatens to tear Hana's dress when Hana tries to avoid him. He also tells Hana that he will take Hana to Manchuria, far from where Hana's come from, so she is scared. The following quotation below show how Corporal Marimoto forces and rapes Hana:

Then he forces himself inside her, tearing her youth to shreds with each thrust. The pain is like a knife stabbed into the tender space between her toes, except it's not happening there, it's happening somewhere closer to her heart and to her mind. (Bracht, 2018:37).

Corporal Marimoto's actions to Hana show how Japanese soldiers try to dominate Korean women. He forces his will and uses threats so Hana has no choice but to obey his orders. As a woman who has just been kidnapped and is far from her hometown, Hana can not fight back. Besides that, during her life as a Korean citizen, Hana knows exactly how the consequences will be if she resists. She can be killed or tortured more cruelly. Hana can not even think of any option to escape because she knows there is no way she can fight dozens of Japanese soldiers, let alone escapes from a sailing ship.

Another character who becomes the victim of male violence is SangSoo. She is a little girl who is also kidnapped by

Japanese soldiers from Jeju Island. SangSoo becomes close to Hana in a short time because she reminds Hana of her own little sister, Emi. On the way to Manchuria, SangSoo is raped many times by Japanese soldiers until the poor little girl is bleed to death. In addition, there are also some girls who die from the same reason. Japanese soldiers burry SangSoo and other corpses in unmarked graves once they arrive at a train station. They deliberately do it to give lessons to other girls so they obey the Japanese soldiers. Inhumane treatment of SangSoo can be seen in the quote below:

Once Hana's grief quietened down, she noticed the blood on the seat. It had soaked into the leather, and rivulets had streamed like veins down the sides onto the floor. SangSoo bled to death. She was too small, too young, to endure such torture. How many men raped this little girl? (Bracht, 2018:56)

Like other Korean girls who are kidnapped, Sangsoo and Hana share the same fate of being raped by Japanese soldiers. At the start, Hana and the other older girls offer themselves to replace SangSoo because she is too young. Japanese soldiers who considers it as a form of resistance finally beat up the other women and continue to take turns raping SangSoo. SangSoo who is still young

certainly can not survive and eventually dies from bleeding. Then she is buried in an unnamed grave on the side of the road with the dead bodies of the others who suffered the same fate as her. This certainly cause trauma for the other Korean women because the Japanese soldiers instill the understanding that if they dare to fight back, then their fate will be worse. Japanese soldiers also show that the lives of Korean women has no meaning for them.

When the group arrives in Manchuria, Morimoto disturbs Hana again and perpetrates further violence. He forces Hana to smoke. When Hana refuses, Morimoto drops his cigarette and then beats Hana because he wants Hana to obey whatever his commands. Then he lits the cigarette that has fallen earlier and pushes it to Hana's lips. Hana then obeys Morimoto's orders because she does not want to be beaten again, even though she does not like what Morimoto has done to her. The quotation below explains Morimoto's forced will to Hana:

He then takes the cigarette from between his lips and slowly pushes it into her mouth. She remains still, afraid he might burn her or worse. "Breathe in", he says. Hana shakes her head, and he drops the cigarette. He smacks her. The sting brings tears to her stunned eyes. He

retrieves the cigarette from the dirt and lights it again. He pushes it between her lips. (Bracht, 2018:69)

Corporal Morimoto shows that Japanese soldiers will not hesitate to torture Korean women they kidnap. They have pride as a colonial party to commit violence or demean Korean women as they wish. That way, they feel that they are more powerful than those who are colonized. This arbitrary treatment leaves Korean women powerless to resist. Because they afraid of being killed or tortured even worse, they follow Japanese orders.

The violence experienced by Hana reaches its peak when she is sent to a brothel in Manchuria to serve the sexual needs of Japanese soldiers who are in the midst of war. Japanese Empire at that time believes that sexual service will help the army to win the fight. They cover up sexual slavery on behalf of comfort women. In the brothel, Korean women are forced to serve Japanese soldiers six days a week and one woman can serve up to dozens of men in turns. New girls like Hana always ignites curiosity in Japanese soldiers so many of them are waiting in line to rape her. The quote below shows Hana's experience on the first day she is in Brothel:

The door swings open and she sees them, soldiers lining up for the new

Sakura. Hana later learns that a new girl's arrival spreads like wildfire through the camp, and all the soldiers show up early, racing to be the first to try her out. The first soldier enters her room. He is large, his hands already pulling down his trousers. (Bracht, 2018: 91)

The most gruesome fact is Japanese soldiers do not show any respect or sympathy for Hana. They see Hana only as an object to channel their sexual desires. They do not care when Hana rejects them. When Hana tries to fight back, the soldier beat her. The soldier resorts to violence and rapes Hana without any concern. He ignored her unwillingness and instead says that he would do it quickly. Although Hana thrashed and retaliated against the Japanese soldiers by clawing, biting, kicking or hitting, he still does not give up to rape Hana. The violence and coercion perpetrated by Japanese soldier can be seen through the following quotation:

The weight of his body crushes her, but she wriggles beneath him, pounds on his back with her fists, claws his skin, and then bites his shoulder. He lifts himself up, a brief moment of respite, and then punches her in the gut. The air rushes out of her. As she gasps for breath, he shoves his hands

between her legs and forces himself inside. (Bracht, 2018: 92)

The behavior of the soldiers who enters after the first one is no less barbaric. They take turns raping Hana despite knowing Hana begs for help and asks them to stop. There is no soldier who cares about Hana's condition. Even when Hana is bleeding because of their brutal action, other soldiers continued to rape her. They are even do not regard Hana as a whole person, but only in the form of an empty shell that had to fulfill their sexual desires. They ignore Hana who asks for their help to save her who has been kidnapped and is still 16 years old. They seem to close their eyes to avoid reality and do not care about Hana's condition. Even when the third soldier enters, Hana begin to bleed. But as if he do not care about Hana's condition like the other soldiers, the third Japanese soldier also continues to rape Hana. Regardless of Hana's condition, they continue to commit cruelty and rape her. That act of rape can be proven by this quotation:

"Look what they did", she says to the third soldiers, holding up her bloody fingers. He pulls down his trousers and doesn't look at her face. He pushes away her hand, turns her onto her stomach, and takes her. She screams, but he doesn't stop. None of them do.

Hana falls silent. She lies still as they plunder her body one after the other. (Bracht, 2018:92).

Several quotations above illustrate that women experience sexual violence perpetrated by men. Rape is a very painful thing for women physically and mentally. The systematic rape carried out by Japanese soldiers undermines the dignity of Korean women and damages them mentally and physically. Here Hana has tried to fight as a woman can do. It's just that she really can't win against men who are physically stronger than her. Worsen fact is that they think Hana as a colonized woman must obeys what they want and again will resort to violence if Hana opposes. Violence against women can be seen as a normal act for Japanese soldiers. They show that their treatments of the colonized women are only as an object to fulfill their desire. They do not care that Hana is not a prostitute and continue to rape her.

After a while, Hana realizes that she stuck in a routine of serving Japanese army. Her status as a comfort women or sex slaves make her must serve Japanese army for ten hours every day, six days a week. Soldiers get half an hour, officers an hour, and that means that every day Hana is raped by about twenty men every day. In addition, the officers' treatment is often more cruel than ordinary soldiers. Hana

knows that all comfort women have wounds from officials who are drunk or angry. At one time she also experiences violence from officers who humiliate and injure her. It can be seen in below quotation:

He leans in as though to inspect her, and using the tip of his swords, he searches through her pubic hair. This will have to go”, he says. “Remain still, or I will cut you”, using the sword, he proceeds to shave her, nicking the tender skin, drawing blood. Hana trembles as the cold blade scrape across her skin. She bites her tongue when it cuts her. “Your kind are all diseased”, he mutters as he works. “You practice improper hygiene. You’re full of parasites. I will not be infested”. (Bracht, 2018:123).

Officers who have higher rank than ordinary soldiers turn out to treat comfort women worse. Not only do they force comfort women to serve them sexually, but they also physically hurt them. In addition, they also verbally abuse the comfort women, saying that they are full of parasites and can transmit disease. When in fact, it is Japanese soldiers who bring their illness into the brothel. Every girl brought in is innocent and clean at first. They are the reason why these women have to undergo humiliating

medical check-ups and injected with painful chemicals. The hypocritical behavior of the officers who insult comfort women proves that higher ranks make them even more condescending to colonized women.

All of the quotations above shows that the men who have power, in this case are Japanese soldiers and officers, commit violence in various forms to Korean women such as kidnapping them, beating them for no reason, and also raping Korean women even though those women have voiced rejection. They take advantage of Korean women's fears and turn them into threats so the women obey their commands. We can simply assume that in this novel, women are portrayed as helpless victims which unable to fight back the violence they experience. They are only given one choice to survive, which is to obey the orders of the men who oppress them. Even though they experience a lot of violence and actually suffering from it, they are subjected to the threat of oppressors. However, we need to interpret the violence committed by men in specific society by considering historical aspects and other factors such as colonialism.

Hana's point of view in Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* is set during the Japanese occupation of South Korea in 1943. Analyzing from the historical point

of view and the background of Japanese occupation of Korea which occurs in 1910 - 1945, the violence perpetrated by Japanese soldiers on Korean women is based on their sense of mastery over their colonies. By oppressing weaker people, they feel stronger. In addition, the state of war made the Japanese soldiers become depressed and afraid of the future. Considering that comfort women are a program ordered by Japanese emperor to raise the fighting spirit of Japanese soldiers, the soldiers think that they had the right to force colonized women to serve their sexual desires. Whereas here the colonized women do not do this on a voluntary basis, but they are deceived, forced and even abducted from their families.

The submissive attitude of comfort women like Hana is not without reason. This can happen because they are from colonized country. They grew up in Japanese occupation and know very well that Japanese people do not value their lives. They only know that if they still want to live they must continue to be obedient, whatever violence and wrongdoings Japanese soldiers commit to them. In addition, they do not have enough ability and opportunity to fight back the oppression and violence they experienced. They can not escape easily and they do not know the way back home. Because they are isolated in the brothel all day, comfort

women do not know the conditions outside. The circumstances erodes their hopes slowly and make them think that they only need to wait and survive until the war ends.

Korean Women's Struggle Against Japanese Oppression

As explained in the previous sub-chapter, Hana, Emi and other Korean women get oppression because they come from colonized country. In the previous discussion, we find how Korean women are treated as victims of male violence. Based on that, this sub-chapter will discuss how Korean women begin to realize the oppression they receive and finally doing struggle to fight the oppression by having self-determination and resistance.

Self-Determination

In Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum*, Hana feels it very difficult to face her fate in the first week of being in Brothel, remembering that almost every day she had to serve many Japanese soldiers who were waiting in line to rape her. She does not eat at all and only cried at first, but then her fellow comfort woman, Keiko made her realize that she needs to survive. After Keiko gives advice, Hana begins to get self-determination. Even though now she is forced to be sex slave or comfort women, she is more hopeful that someday they will be free and she can see her family again. She then tries her best to

survive against the soldiers who only saw her as an object. This can be seen in the quote below:

If she isn't stealing time by fetching water, she finds a reason to wash herself extra carefully before the next soldier enters the room. When they try to hurry her, she follows Riko's advice and mentions venereal disease prevention, and if they press her, she lies and says she notice red bumps or pus-filled sores on the previous soldier. (Bracht, 2018:119).

The above quotation proves that Hana has self-determination to survive the oppression. She not only resigns to face her fate as a colonized woman who is forced to become a sex slave or comfort women. Hana has the passion and thought to survive. This can be seen from Hana's way to stall as much time as possible or mention about infectious diseases to Japanese soldiers. Even if that didn't work for some soldiers, Hana knew that silence would make them go faster. This shows that Hana has the ability to think and adapt to circumstances. She never put herself as a victim, but she tries to be a subject that can make decisions for her own self in order to survive.

Resistance

Besides Hana, other Korean woman in Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* struggle against oppression with her own

way. This is reflected with resistance done by Tsubaki. Tsubaki is a comfort woman who lives in the same brothel as Hana. Tsubaki who is a woman is able to put up a fight if she is really pressed and can not tolerate the oppression carried out by Japanese soldier. One day, she kills a Japanese soldier who forces her to have sex and threatens to kill her if she refuses, even though it is past service hours. This can be seen in the quotation below:

“When he returned, he came out of hours and I refused to service him, not that I would have ever let him touch me again. But then he threatened to kill me!” She shook her head, recalling her anger. So I grabbed the bayonet from his hands before he knew what was happening, and I stabbed him in the neck.” Tsubaki grins with pleasure at the memory. “We buried him in the middle of the night. We disguised the grave as a vegetable patch.”(Bracht, 2018:128).

Tsubaki points out that even though she is a comfort woman, she should not be treated as they want. She can not simply obey whatever is ordered by the Japanese army, let alone accompanied by threats. Seeing the situation possible, Tsubaki tries to resist by stabbing the

soldier with a bayonet until he dies. Tsubaki's attitude shows that she has the guts to fight the oppression she gets. She also burying the soldier's corpse in the garden and disguise it as vegetable patch. In addition, not every people can have the courage and be able to think bravely as her at such times.

CONCLUSION

Korean women in the novel experience violence done by men who have power. Examining from the historical aspect, violence perpetrated by men is based on the colonialism (Japanese occupation in South Korea). Violent behaviour of Japanese soldiers towards Korean women is influenced by the colonial domination and Japanese emperor's decision regarding comfort women. Although their actions are highly unjustified, it explains how violence such as coercion, rape, torture and beating perpetrated by Japanese soldiers on Korean women can occur. However, we can conclude that Korean women will try to fight against the oppression when they get a chance. Their struggles include self-determination and resistance. They are not women who just surrender when they are oppressed even by people who are much stronger and have power than them. In the case of Hana and Tsubaki as comfort women, they showed resistance by oppose the order of Japanese soldiers.

REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Hellen Tiffin. 2002. *The Empire Writes back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Routledge
- Bracht, Mary Lynn. 2018. *White Chrysanthemum*. London: Penguin Random House
- Kennedy, X.J., Dana Gioia. 1995. *An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003. *Feminism Without Borders : Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. London: Duke University Press
- Tyson, Lois. 2006. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York : Routledge
- Plain, Gill and Susan Sellers (ed.). 2007. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.