

Gender Inequality Depicted in Indonesian Best-Selling Novel Beauty Is a Wound

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Abstract

This study focuses on the novel “Beauty is a Wound”, which was originally translated by Annie Tucker from the Indonesian novel Eka Kurniawan’s “*Cantik Itu Luka*” (2002). This study was conducted to identify and analyze instances of gender inequality in “Beauty is a Wound.” This study aims to: 1) identify the forms of gender inequality portrayed by women in “Beauty is a Wound”; and 2) the meaning behind inequality. The qualitative descriptive approach was adopted in this investigation. Mansour Fakhri’s (2013) idea is being utilized by researchers. The findings revealed that women face four categories of gender inequality: subordination (four), marginalization (six), violence (25), and stereotyping (five). In this study, the meaning of inequality is that (1) women’s characters do not provide the same rights as other children to get education, study, and socialize; (2) prisoners appear helpless and do not have the right to manage their own lives, which results in marginalization; (3) they were subjected to poor treatment at the hands of Japanese soldiers, which resulted in both physical and psychological injuries, which led to the claim that it was violence; and (4) the assumption that they were vile individuals.

Keywords: “Beauty is a Wound”, Gender Inequality, Novel.

When one considers men and women from the perspective of their morals and actions, it is clear that there is a difference between the sexes. According to Jary & Jary (1991), the concept of gender can be interpreted into different ways. The term “gender,” which is frequently employed to differentiate between males and females, is primarily grounded in the anatomical aspects of gender. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention the conceptualization

of gender that originated from the fields of sociology and psychology. This perspective posits that gender is primarily shaped by socially and psychologically inherent traits, resulting in the difference between masculinity and femininity.

According to Fakhri (2008), inequalities stemming from gender disparities affect men and women differently. Women are a prime example of the vulnerable group most at risk of

experiencing violence because of their social status. Patriarchal views that persist in society are institutionalized as cultural norms, leading to the creation of gender inequity that has given rise to many forms of women's oppression.

However, women are always left behind in the economic, educational, health, occupational, and political fields. This can still be found in places that still hold patriarchal culture in indigenous society (Larasati, 2021). In a society with a patriarchal culture, men are more instrumental in holding power which can automatically degrade women's roles and existences. Common occurrences in any setting, including but not limited to the classroom, the workplace, and the home. Today, in Indonesia, discrimination against women is still very visible in many aspects. Recently, a young mother was allegedly killed by her husband using a kitchen knife (7/9/2023). Long before this incident, MSD victims had reported the perpetrator for a domestic violence case to the Bekasi Metro Police last August. The real motive is based on heartache. So, the perpetrator is hurt and is also based on economic factors (CNN Indonesia, 2023; Putri & Firdaus, 2023).

The issue of gender inequality is not new. Rather, it has been a feature of society for millennia, albeit to differing degrees in different nations and over different periods. However, the mid-20th century human rights movement and the worldwide women's movements of the 1960s have helped draw attention to this type of injustice on a global scale. Moreover, it is important to note that gender equality encompasses more than only the aspect of economic empowerment. The assertion has a moral obligation. The concept under consideration encompasses notions of justice and equity, encompassing several elements within the realms of politics, society, and culture. Furthermore, it is a crucial determinant of self-reported well-being and happiness on a global scale. Thus, gender equality should be construed by the category of human rights as the universal equality standard.

Human rights reflect general and undoubted standards for both sexes (Yaroshenko et al., 2022). Meanwhile, according to data from the World Health Organization (2021), there were 8,686 cases of violence against women with 8,763 victims in 2020. Physical and psychic violence is the most common violence in adult women and mostly occurs in the household or domestic violence.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2021) indicated that the wage disparity between male and female employees has declined by 0.6% since 1995. According to her, the ILO survey revealed significant hurdles for women in finding and keeping respectable jobs, which continue to exist. Although it is easier for women to find jobs in some nations, the quality of this work is still regarded as low. Ryder, an ILO member, believes that as long as work conditions remain as they are, women will face significant hurdles in gaining access to more good jobs. Indonesia is one of the countries that is still dealing with the issue of gender inequality.

The findings of the Global Gender Gap Report, which was published by the World Economic Forum (2021), place Indonesia at the 51st spot out of 141 nations that were analyzed. As a direct result of the gender pay gap, the fact that there is a difference in salaries based on gender in Indonesia is 0.68, which indicates that women are paid only 68% of what men are paid for the same work.

Based on the rationale provided above, the researchers suggest that the topic of gender disparity should be brought up in a novel that was popular in the year 2002. It has been determined that one of the characters from "Beauty is a Wound" is eligible for use as an object of gender analysis. In a sweeping polyphony, the epic novel "Beauty is a Wound" blends history, satire, family sorrow, legend, humor, and romance. Incest, murder, bestiality, rape, insanity, monstrosity, and the frequently vengeful undead plague the beautiful Indo prostitute Dewi Ayu and her four daughters. Because the content of the novel covers

numerous issues about gender, specifically a type of inequality between the sexes, it was decided to make the novel the focus of the investigation. Eka Kurniawan also describes the narrative of the social life of a woman who works as a night lady and gets a lot of negative labels from the people around her in her novel "Beauty is a Wound". This part of the story is told by Eka Kurniawan. This is what piques the researchers' interest in analyzing the gender disparity depicted in the work via the lens of the theoretical basis of feminist literary criticism.

Thus, the researchers are interested in examining "Beauty is a Wound", one of Indonesia's most famous novels (2015). Although the researchers are interested in examining this novel, other aspects make it attractive, including the fact that it has captured the attention of the larger society and even the international scene. Since 2016, it has been shown that this novel has been translated into 34 languages and has won numerous honors. In 2016, the novel got the first World Readers Award. Shortly after its publication, Annie Tucker translated *Cantik itu Luka* as "Beauty is a Wound", which was then published by New Directions Publishers United States.

Henceforth, some research questions for this study are: 1) How do the female characters in "Beauty is a Wound" depict various types of gender inequality? and 2) What do these disparities imply?

Method

Descriptive qualitative methodologies were used in this study. According to Moleong (2004), the goal of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject's behavior, perception, motivation, and action, in a natural setting and through the use of a variety of natural methods. This study employed descriptive qualitative research methods to explain the problems that arise and describe the data in the form of words based on the facts gathered during the study

to comprehend the phenomenon of gender inequality in the novel "Beauty is a Wound". This study relied on the novel "Beauty is a Wound", which was written by Eka Kurniawan and translated into English by Annie Tucker. The original edition was written in Indonesian. The period that was utilized by researchers to carry out this investigation was from February – April 2023.

Result and Discussion

The female character who experiences gender inequality in the novel "Beauty is a Wound". They are the descendants of the Netherlands who were used as slaves to satisfy lust and experienced marginalization by the Japanese soldiers during the war. After reading the novel "Beauty is a Wound", it can be concluded in the form of numbers and then followed by an explanation of some findings:

Table 1: Forms of Gender Inequality Found in "Beauty is a Wound"

No	Forms of Gender Inequality	Data
1	Subordination	4
2	Marginalization	6
3	Violence against Woman	25
4	Stereotype	5
Total		40

Violence against Women

Working as a prostitute made Dewi Ayu get pregnant many times and this fourth child was born with a very ugly face.

"Twenty-one years ago, she had died twelve days after giving birth to a hideous baby girl, so hideous that the midwife assisting her couldn't be sure whether it really was a baby and thought that maybe it was a pile of shit, since the holes where a baby comes out and where shit comes out are only two centimeters apart" (page 10)

Based on the explanation above, the quote refers to gender inequality because Dewi Ayu's child is considered dirt which causes psychic violence and makes her shunned by many people.

Violence against Women

Rosinah had allowed Dewi Ayu to do whatever she wanted with her death obsession, even if she was told to dig her own grave, she would do it and pass it all on for joy. Many peeps and people were jumping with the belief that Dewi Ayu had gone too far and said something inappropriate to her.

“Listen up, you whore who slept with all of our men!” she said resentfully. “If you are going to die, then die, but don’t preserve your body, because it’s only your rotting corpse that nobody will envy.” She shoved Dewi Ayu, but her body only rolled over without being awakened.”
(page 17)

Based on the explanation above, the quote implies gender inequality because her work as a prostitute is so hated by married women, that they even utter insults and pressure so that Dewi Ayu feels threatened.

Marginalization

Rosinah looked at him mockingly, as if to say, what a crybaby you are, making everyone wish they could spank you. Dewi Ayu even asked Rosina to tell people that she had died. Like the quote below.

“She had even preserved her own herself. “If she could have.” Rosinah signed to the Imam of the closest mosque, “She would have recited the prayers for.” The imam, looking at the mute girl with hatred, said that he was not inclined to recite the prayers for that lump of a prostitute’s corpse or what’s more, to even bury her. “Since she is dead,” said Rosinah (still with sign language), “then she’s no longer a prostitute.” (page 18)

Based on the analysis above, the quote refers to gender inequality because Dewi Ayu is marginalized, she experiences differences between other people. Just because of her work as a prostitute, no one wants to help in the process of burying her.

Subordination

When Dewi Ayu died, Rosinah and the

baby walked following the coffin carried by four men. But Dewi Ayu’s corpse was brought to a different place. Like the quote below.

“Dewi Ayu was buried in a far corner of the cemetery among the graves of other ill-fated people, because that was what Kyai Jahro and the gravedigger had agreed upon. Buried there was an evil thief from the colonial era, and a crazy killer, and a number of communists, and now a prostitute. It was believed that those unfortunate souls would be disturbed by ongoing tests and trials in the grave, and so it was wise to distance them from the graves of pious people who wanted to rest in piece be invaded by worms and rot in piece, and make love to heavenly nymphs without any commotion”. (page 19)

Based on the quote above, it is categorized as gender inequality because Dewi Ayu does not get the same rights as other people who are buried properly by Halimunda residents because of her work as a prostitute.

Subordination

Feeling that an ugly face is a curse, Sleepy is obsessed with getting a handsome prince, even Rosinah has taken him to neighboring houses, but no one wants to accept him. As in the quote below.

“They rejected her everywhere and it was that way too when it was time to for her attend school: not one school accepted Cantik. Rosinah had even tried begging a principal, but he seemed more interested in the mute young woman than in the ugly young girl and had boorishly fondled her in the office once the door was closed” (page 25)

Based on the explanation above, the quote means gender inequality because Cantik did not get the same rights as other children, she was differentiated only because she had an ugly face.

Stereotype

A brothel was a place built to meet the needs of Dutch soldiers who lived in barracks, but after the outbreak of syphilis, many soldiers kept their concubines. So that then many daily workers come to the brothel. As in the quote below.

“it would be just as much a betrayal to go to the whorehouse as to marry another woman,” said Ma Gendik stubbornly. But one week later his friends dragged the man, drunk and only half conscious, to that whorehouse and he spent one day’s pay on a bed with an obese woman with a vagina as big as a mouse hole and immediately awed by these charms, he corrected himself to say, “Doing it with a prostitute is not a betrayal, because prostitutes are paid with money and not with love” (page 36)

Based on the explanation above, the quote refers to the gender inequality stereotype because it assumes that if a woman becomes a prostitute, her self-esteem is only valued by money and there is nothing wrong with doing violent acts because they are paid.

Violence against Women

Some people think that only love can cure a crazy person, such as how difficult it was to return Ma Iyang to Ma Gendik and finally Ma Gendik was left in shackles for years. But that didn’t stop Ma Gendik from going crazy. Like the quote below.

“Barefoot schoolboys would gather outside his goat pen in the afternoon before they went home to herd their cattle, and joking around for a bit he would teach them how to fondle their genitals, rubbing and using their spit: and so the teachers at school forbid to go near him. But the children must

have tried what he had taught them because a number of them visited the goat pen in secret in the middle of the night and whispered to him that had discovered a new way to pee that felt way better than peeing the usual way. “It will be even more enjoyable if you try it with the private parts of little girls.” When one afternoon a farmer found two nine-year-old children making love in the pandan shrubs, the villagers cruelly boarded up that goat pen. Ma Gendik was stuck inside with no one to talk to, and of course without any light at all. (page 37)

Based on the explanation above, the quote refers to gender inequality violence because she says to underage children that women are considered as a place to satisfy lust and there is nothing wrong with that.

Marginalization

Ola’s parents had a high fever, she asked Ola to ask the commander of the Japanese army for medicine but instead, he asked Ola to sleep with him and Ola refused. So Dewi Ayu came to replace her as collateral. As in the quote below.

“The Commandant was in his office, sitting in his chair, staring absently at his iced coffee on the table and listening to radio static. She barged right in without knocking man turned, surprised by her nerve, his face showing the anger of someone who does not play around. But before he could explode, Dewi Ayu stepped forward, separated from him only by the width of the table. “I will take the place of the previous girl, Commandant. You can sleep with me, but give her mother medicine and a doctor. And a doctor!” (page

66)

Based on the explanation above, the quote refers to gender inequality because to get medicine to cure his friend’s parents, he was willing to sleep with the Japanese soldier.

Marginalization

Finally, they stood in a row in the middle of the field, trembling with fear while their mothers stood in a circle in the distance. Then there was a selection, some of the girls were pushed aside and wasting no time running towards their mothers. Like the quote below.

“They were called one by one to face an official who examined them much more minutely with small squinting eyes. That final selection left only twenty girls in the center of the yard clutching one another, but no one dared look at anyone else. These choose girls- young, pretty, healthy, and strong were ordered to pack all of their belongings immediately and gather in the camp office. The truck was already waiting to take them away”. (page 70)

From the explanation above, the quote refers to gender inequality because it marginalizes the prisoners by separating the girls from their mothers. After all, they were used as prostitutes for the Japanese soldiers.

Violence against Women

After the girls who were selected and brought to the brothel arrived, they did not realize that they would be made into prostitutes. But by the time they realized they were trying to find a way out they even climbed so they could escape and not be made prostitutes but still it was in vain because the house was heavily guarded. Like the quote below.

“Several girls tried to climb onto the roof of the house as if they

hoped they could fly away or find a rope there that they could climb up into the sky. “I already tried everything,” said Dewi Ayu. “There is no escape.” “We are going to become prostitutes! Shrieked Ola, collapsing and weeping. “It’s worse than that, said Dewi Ayu. “I don’t think we’re even going to get paid.” Another girl named Helena immediately accosted the Japanese officers who appeared and accused them of violating their human rights as outlined in the Geneva Convention. Not just the Japanese, but even Dewi Ayu laughed out loud. (page 80)

Based on the explanation above, the quote refers to gender inequality because it makes them afraid and makes the detainees become prostitutes, moreover they are not paid for the tiring and scary work.

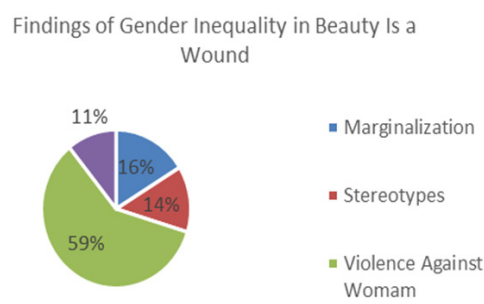


Figure 1: Gender Inequality Found in “Beauty is a Wound”

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, violence against women was found in 22 data (59%), marginalization was found in 6 data (16%), stereotypes were found in 5 data (14%), and subordination was found in 4 data (11%). It can be concluded that the dominant form of gender inequality in the novel “Beauty is a Wound” is violence against women.

This form of inequality stems from the same source of error, namely the gender stereotype of men and women. Stereotype itself means giving a standard image or label/stamp to a person or group based on a false or misguided

assumption. Labeling is generally carried out in two or more relationships and is often used as an excuse to justify an action of one group over another. Labeling also shows the existence of an unequal or unbalanced power relationship that aims to subdue or dominate the other party.

In this case, the impression of weak women makes women underestimate and make women the second class in society. The social area and the law should be fairer in considering the phenomenon that often occurs in the world of sex because not all commercial sex workers are considered to be the most wrong. As described in the novel "Beauty is a Wound", it is very sad to see the social life of these women changing from prisoners of war to slave prostitutes in the colonial period. The meaning behind its inequality in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" is described as follows:

Subordination

In this novel, the beautiful character is said to be the daughter of a prostitute who has an ugly face, because of that face she always gets bad treatment from the people around her. The meaning behind inequality is, gender inequality is an unfair treatment given to one of the female characters by not giving the same rights as other children to get an education, study, and socialize with the people around them so that it is referred to as subordination.

Marginalization

In this novel, many female detainees who were deliberately used as prostitutes were then tortured by Japanese soldiers and no one was paid for their work. They were also detained and denied treatment facilities, which caused the detainees to die. The meaning behind the inequality found is that gender inequality is given to those who become prisoners, they even experience impoverishment, the prisoners seem helpless and do not have the right to manage their own lives for themselves so marginalization occurs.

Violence against Women

In this novel, female convicts turned into prostitutes are forced to satisfy the lust

of the Japanese soldiers, even those who run out will be forced back into the room naked. Likewise, with Dewi Ayu's child, Alamanda married someone she didn't love and had raped her. The meaning behind the inequality found is gender inequality given to women who become prisoners, they receive bad treatment from the Japanese army, causing injuries both physical and psychological so that it is said to be violent.

Stereotype

In this novel, many people think that if a woman becomes a prostitute, then her self-esteem is only valued by money and there is nothing wrong with committing violence because she is paid for it. They also think all women will do anything, including giving their virginity for money. The meaning behind the inequality found is gender inequality which is the treatment that women who work as prostitutes get, the assumption that they are despicable people, even though this assumption is only temporary, can harm someone because it will become discrimination.

The researchers highlighted gender inequity as a result of faulty beliefs. Only ten chapters of the novel's 18 chapters correspond to the researcher's theory. Women's gender inequality is represented in the novel by constraints on women's rights and freedoms, both relating to individual women, marginalization, behaviors that make women fearful, and labeling women negatively based on incorrect assumptions.

The story is set in the colonial era and is based on the experiences of Indonesian women; as such, it contains descriptions of discrimination against women. This novel's depiction of women's roles provides insight into stereotypes, violence against women, and other forms of oppression. Yet inequalities between the sexes persist in contemporary society. Gender inequality is pervasive in popular culture, including popular music, short tales, films, and books. The female protagonist of "Beauty is a Wound" is an example of how women are still treated poorly in literature. Several women who make their living as

prostitutes are depicted, each of whom is disliked by her fellow villagers. She evolved into a brothel catering to tough and nasty males. Because of her past as a prostitute, her body was not given a decent burial after she passed away.

In the context of this study, the term “feminism” refers not to women’s opposition to males based on gender differences but rather to an understanding of the equality of position and role between men and women. In the home as well as in society as a whole, men often hold positions of authority that give them precedence over women. In today’s society, it is not unusual for gender disparity to frequently become a societal problem. Without a doubt, gender inequality is used as an excuse for men (husbands) not to meet their commitments to women (wives). In addition, gender inequality is used as a reason for women (wives) to not fulfill their obligations to men (husbands). When it comes to making a living, for instance, quite a few women put in the same amount of effort that men do to care for their families, yet many husbands appear to avoid taking responsibility for their wives and children. This is an unfair dilemma relating to gender because the gender equality that is being questioned is the requirement that one must take into account the so-called “nature of women.”

One of the fundamental human rights is the unequal treatment of men and women. The right to live one’s life in an honorable manner, free from fear, and with the freedom to choose one’s path. Since these rights were never meant to be exclusive to men, in practice, females are entitled to them just as much as males are. It is not accurate to automatically assume that men’s and women’s rights and obligations are equivalent in the absence of further investigation. Everything doesn’t need to be the same for females and males to have gender equality. To achieve this goal, individuals should be given the authority to make decisions that are not influenced by the idea of gender. To this day, however, women are almost always seen to be nothing more than typical supporting characters.

According to the researchers, unequal treatment of women is a result of the prevalent patriarchal culture in society, which considers women to be perpetually inferior to men. Always, culture dictates how women should behave in society, such as speaking softly, being patient in their behavior, accepting things with more resignation, not speaking harshly, requiring security, being sensitive, etc. Therefore, when a woman departs from the stereotype line associated with patriarchal culture, she is considered to have violated her femininity. Jacobsen (2011) stated that if individuals of different genders are not given equal opportunity to develop their potential, then societies forego the increased level of output and ultimately well-being that would derive from their higher productivity. The full potential of a society’s members cannot be realized unless it invests equally in educating and training men and women, providing them with equal access to more productive forms of work, and providing them with equal access to advancement in their careers over time.

Whether they are aware of it or not, women shackle themselves to the confines of a patriarchal culture. She did not dare to put up a fight when his life partner treated her cruelly; instead, she chose to take it. A stubbornness that is communicated through an impolite demeanor dares to go up against the feminine nature that is associated with him. If they proceed in this manner, it will without a doubt not be considered acceptable by most members of society. They will be viewed by their husbands as disobedient because of their actions. Even further unfavorable generalizations are likely to be made about him. Therefore, giving tacit approval to any sort of treatment for violence committed against him is a concrete example of perpetuating that stereotype.

This discovery is additionally supported by the social issue of stigma, which frequently occurs in today’s culture. For instance, inequality that occurs within the context of schools does not give pupils equal rights. This is due to the perception that women are

inferior to males, which means that women are not always allowed to take on leadership roles. There is always a qualification in admitting employees, particularly employment as contractors, which generally accept male employees, and the reason for this is because the belief that women are weak creatures is confronted not only within the context of school but also in the workplace. The reason for this is that women are perceived to be weaker than males. Inequality is a result of the stereotype that has been entrenched in people's minds: that women are fragile and sensitive human beings, and as a result, they should only be suited to remain at home, work as housewives, and take care of their husbands and children. As a result, this research demonstrates that gender discrimination does not just take place in works of fiction; rather, it frequently takes place in real life as well.

Conclusion

The research done on the topic of women's inequality in Annie Tucker's translated version of "Beauty is a Wound" is compelling. The study's authors found that gender inequality, particularly in literature, continues to be a source of oppression for some women. This is supported by findings from the study of female sexism in the book "Beauty is a Wound". Thirty articles were found that addressed the topic of women's inequality in the workplace.

Based on the findings of the analysis in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" using Mansour Fakih's theory, it is possible to conclude that there are three levels of gender inequality, namely the form of gender inequality, the dominant form of gender inequality obtained in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" and the meaning behind inequality.:

1. The researcher found that the forms of gender inequality are subordination, marginalization, violence against women, and stereotypes.
2. The researcher found that the most dominant form of gender inequality

found in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" is violence against women which has 25 data, subordination as much as 4 data, marginalization as much as 6 data, and stereotypes as much as 5 data.

The researchers concluded that the meaning behind inequality in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" is that, Gender Inequality is an unfair treatment given to one of the female characters by not giving the same rights as other children to get an education, study, and socialize with the people around so that it is referred to as subordination. Gender inequality is given to those who become prisoners, they even experience impoverishment, the prisoners seem helpless and do not have the right to manage their own lives for themselves so marginalization occurs. Gender inequality is given to women who become prisoners, they receive bad treatment from the Japanese army, causing injuries both physical and psychological so that it is said to be violence. Gender inequality which is the treatment that women who work as prostitutes get, is the assumption that they are despicable people, even though this assumption is only temporary.

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