

**THE DECONSTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC RESISTANCE OF *PAISANO*  
PEOPLE TOWARD AMERICAN CAPITALISM IN JOHN STEINBECK'S  
TORTILLA FLAT**

**A Thesis**

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### ABSTRAK

Dalam skripsi ini, penulis menganalisis sebuah novel Tortilla Flat karya John Steinbeck yang mengangkat kisah Danny dan kawan-kawannya sebagai orang *Paisanos* di pinggiran kota Monterey, California. Cerita ini tak lepas dari Kapitalisme yang berkembang sejak industrialisasi tumbuh di Amerika pada akhir 1880 an. Penulis menjelaskan kontradiksi-kontradiksi teks novel Tortilla Flat dalam bentuk oposisi biner yang menggambarkan 2 hal yang saling berlawanan seperti baik/buruk, menerima/menolak dan non-konformis/konformis.

Penulis menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan kutipan-kutipan dari data primer yaitu novel Tortilla Flat yang kemudian dianalisis dengan teori dekonstruksi Derrida. Kemudian, penulis menginvestigasi dan mengeksplorasi kontradiksi-kontradiksi yang terdapat di dalam teks novel Tortilla Flat. Melalui pembacaan dekonstruktif, kontradiksi-kontradiksi tersebut dapat membongkar dan menghancurkan hierarki oposisi biner yang telah dibangun oleh teks itu sendiri. Sehingga dalam hal ini berlaku teks telah mendekonstruksi diri teks itu sendiri. Dalam skripsi ini, penulis akan memperlihatkan bagaimana proses itu terjadi.

Dalam skripsi ini, penulis bisa menunjukkan novel yang semula ditujukan untuk menggambarkan kehidupan sekelompok orang yang bisa hidup lepas dari cengkaman kapitalisme Amerika justru juga menggambarkan sekelompok orang yang menjaga eksistensi kapitalisme Amerika. Pada akhirnya penulis memperlihatkan bagaimana kehidupan orang yang tinggal di Amerika tidak bisa lepas sepenuhnya dari kapitalisme.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Research

The meaning of the text in structuralism discourse is closely related to the creator of the text. Here, text can be equalized with the art work which delivers the creator's style. It means the creator has his/her own characterization that makes their work becomes different from the others. Furthermore, the meaning itself can be produced through determining the structure which is built within the text. It also implies the authority of the creator as a subject to establish all aspects related toward the work. Meanwhile, post structuralism put no place to the creator since text is already able to present the convention of the meaning by itself (Barthes 1977: 142). Barthes' article entitled "The Death of the Author" which is compiled in his book, Text, Music and Image states that text is not to be interpreted in one meaning only but text is a place where we can see many 'quotation' which come from many sources (1977: 146). So, the creator can not be defined as the original creator of the text anymore because the text which is produced comes from many 'quotation' by the creator. It is closely related to the definition of the text itself. Etymologically, text derives from Latin, *textus* which means tissue and *texere* which means tisser. So, the existence of the text can not be separated from other texts as sources or 'quotation'-as Barthes argues before-to build a new text.

Establishing the single meaning in a text in structuralism becomes one of the aspects which are criticized by Jacques Derrida. Derrida proposed a strategy in



analyzing a text through questioning the existence of one absolute meaning in text. Later, this strategy called as deconstruction. Deconstruction destroys the hierarchy/the structure which is controlled by the author of the works. According to Derrida, every structure within the text built by the author in structuralism remains the meaning which is controlled by the author. The meaning thus seems to be the privileged and it covers the plurality of meaning.

Based on the explanation above, the writer proposes a deconstruction research within John Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat. The novel narrates the condition of non-Native American people called *Paisanos* in 1917-1930. This community basically is the immigrant come from Spain and other European countries. This community claims that their individual and social life is totally different and freely untied from American social value.

What is a *Paisano*? He is a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican, and assorted Caucasian bloods. [...] The *Paisanos* are clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them very vigorously (Steinbeck 1965: 7).

The reason of the research is related to the way of John Steinbeck delivers the unchained relationship of *Paisanos* people from their social environment, especially American Capitalism. It is interesting to be analyzed about the consistencies of Steinbeck in creating a community which can show their disagreement toward Capitalism in certain time. Schultz and Li in Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work argue that "Despite their amoral and

immoral behavior, most of the major and minor characters in the book demonstrate a remarkable ability to survive poverty, congenital deformity, and social disapproval, sometimes with ingenuity, sometimes with self-delusion..." (2005: 223).

Later, the economic resistance which is reflected within Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* contains and constructs hierarchy where there is a binary which empowered the others as the representation of the truth within the superior binary. This novel brings the spirit of confrontation as the denial toward American capitalism. Here, the subjectivity of Steinbeck has the authority in deciding what ideal form for an individual and community are created, especially for *Paisanos* people.

In the light of this, the writer considers that deconstruction is fit to deconstruct the hierarchy is built by Steinbeck to investigate the self contradictory within "the truth" of the author in his works. Later, "the truth itself can be questioned and decentered to destroy the hierarchy of binary opposition. It implies confrontation becomes one of the binary which marginalize the other action which opposes it. Thus, this research also can show self contradictory about Steinbeck who critics American capitalism through the novel, has undermined his own disagreement to it.

Furthermore, the explanation above presents the resistance toward American capitalism which happens in the community of *Paisanos* people in 1917-1930. Through deconstructing the social condition or symptoms within the novel, it will reveal and arise the hidden meaning and the covered meaning of the novel. In addition, the social condition controls individual action/attitude and community through the constructed ideology, reality which occurs in the era. Therefore, the writer wants to conduct a research entitled "The Deconstruction of Economic



## Resistance of *Paisano* People toward American Capitalism in John Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat.

### 1.2 The Identification of the Problem

The main problem is the novel gives a narration about the characters' (*Paisano* people) economic resistance toward American Capitalism in pre World War I to post World War I in America. The economic resistance of *Paisano* people becomes the truth through the hierarchy of binary opposition which should be questioned in deconstruction. Through deconstruction, the half of the binary opposition which takes the position as the center and the other is marginalized or covered by the dominant. The binary opposition can dynamically move to show that each side shows the hidden aspect to each other.

### 1.3 The Scope of the Research

The discussion of the research covers both extrinsic and intrinsic aspect of the novel. Extrinsically, the discussion includes the information of American Capitalism during World War I. The research questions the writer would to answer are:

1. What are the causes of economic resistance shown by the characters in the novel?
2. How do the characters show their economic resistance toward American Capitalism?
3. How do the characters deconstruct their economic resistance toward American Capitalism?

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

John Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat contains binary opposition in which left binary as "overt ideological project" much more privilege than right binary as marginalized side. Later, through deconstruction the writer can see the binaries move dynamically as self contradictory found within the text and let the text deconstruct itself by those contradictories so there is no privilege or center and marginalized anymore (Tyson 2005: 259).

Steinbeck uses this novel to show how a group of people who is represented by *Paisanos* people can live away from American capitalism. These people declare their non-conformity toward everything which can pressure their daily life into capitalism. Danny tends to show his crime as his resistance toward capitalism. To Danny, wealthy does not only belong to the rich people, wealthy belong to all people who need it immediately instead of rich people who not so sufficient to it. Thus, Danny claims his crime is permitted to reach an equal condition among the rich people and poor people represented by *Paisanos* people. Furthermore, in one sequence Danny undermine all his resistance toward American capitalism by joining American army in World War I against Germany. From this point, Danny patriotism can be defined as one of the ideology which will keep poor people fight against other poor people from different country. Danny has let himself become a person who is controlled by rich people who can pay a bail to avoid the war and enjoy the victory without any blood. It seems that Danny has destabilized his resistance toward American capitalism.

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