

GENDER

The Existence of Women in Sunao Katabuchi's Anime *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*

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Abstract. The patriarchal culture that constructs society causes the position of women to be considered low. During World War II, the position of women began to change. Women not only play a role in the domestic sphere, but also in the social sphere of society. This study aims to reveal the female positioning and self-existence of the character Urano Suzu as a woman during World War II in Japan in the anime *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*. This research uses Simone De Beauvoir's theory of existentialist feminism which includes the self and the other, the myth of women, women's existence (existence-for-self and existence-for-others). The research method uses analysis of story content by looking at sentences and images in anime related to women's existence issues. The results showed that there are two types of positioning of female characters in the anime *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*, namely being required to look according to male ideal standards, and being required to obey the concept of *Ryousaikenbo*. Therefore, Suzu redefined the role and position that she had previously only as an object (the other) who was confined to the domestic environment and turned into a subject role (the self) as a member of society who actively contributed to society, namely *Kaminaganoki Rinpohan* and *Dai Nippon Fujinkai*.

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1 Introduction

In literary works, including in films, the existence of women is often raised as a complex and profound main theme. Several films have successfully depicted women's struggles in the face of various challenges, stereotypes, and social barriers. These films become a powerful medium in reinforcing women's narratives and inspiring audiences to appreciate the role and contribution of women in various aspects of life. Thus, the existence of women in literary works, especially in films, can be an important reflection of women's struggle and resilience in facing challenges and realizing their potential in the midst of a changing society.

Research on the existence of women in film has been done a lot¹⁻⁴, but research on this matter is still interesting to do in other literary works. *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni* (この世界の片隅に/ *In This Corner of The World*)⁵ is an anime adapted from the *manga* of the same name and directed by Sunao Katabuchi and became one of the best anime in 2016. The *manga* version, written by Fumiyo Kouno, tells not only about Suzu's life, but also her comrades-in-arms, life and habits of the people at that time. While the *anime* version focuses on Suzu's life as a motivational and patriotic female figure shown by her struggle and participation as a woman who lived during World War II in Japan.

Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni is interesting to examine in a feminist perspective because it tells the life struggle of a girl named Urano Suzu to continue to survive in her limitations as a woman. The time set in this anime is around 1933-1946. At the beginning of the story, Suzu's simple life is told in rural Eba, Hiroshima. Suzu is an innocent girl who is good at painting. Around 1943, when she was only 18 years old, she was required to move to Kaminaganoki Village, Kure because she was proposed by a young man named Houjou Shuusaku whom she did not know at all. Even so, Suzu already has the figure of the young man she already loves. But she was forced to let go and accept the proposal to help his family's economic crisis because the nori (seaweed) cultivation business went bankrupt. From here Suzu's daily life will experience many things that make Suzu feel tired, stressed, and hopeless. Even so, Suzu remains strong and continues to strive to be a useful person for her husband and new family. Based on this, the *anime Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni* shows an inspirational figure for Japan at that time. Patience and also the persistence of women's efforts are sometimes not visible, but Suzu's figure still tries to show patriotic affection for those around her.

Feminism is an organizational activity that fights for the rights and interests of women. If women are equal to men, then they have the right to determine themselves as men have always been. In other words, feminism is a movement of women to obtain territory or freedom of self-determination. Regarding the feminism movement, Tong mentioned that there are several currents in the feminist movement, one of which is existentialist feminism⁶. Existentialist feminism is the thought of feminism developed by Simone de Beauvoir in her book entitled *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir⁷ suggests that "men" are called the *self*, while "women" are called *the other*. Viewing himself as a subject capable of risking his life in battle, men view women as objects capable only of taking care of household matters. With existentialist feminism thinking, showing the freedom of her existence, women must be able to make their life choices alone to live them with a sense of responsibility, both for themselves and others.

In *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*, Urano Suzu shows her existence as a woman who does not give up easily under any circumstances and is able to make choices for her own life with responsibility. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the positioning of women and their existence in anime.

2 Result and Discussion

In this section, the myth and positioning of women are presented due to the view of men who are always looking for the ideal female figure so that society then makes the culture that women must be ideal as desired by men. Second, it will be explained about the existence of the main female character in facing the limitations faced by women in patriarchal Japanese society in this anime.

2.1 Myths and Female Positioning

In this anime, several depictions of myths and female positioning are found as follows.

1. Appearance should match male idealism

One of feminism's main criticisms of women's appearance is objectification, where women are often seen as sexual objects or entertainment for men. This objectification can have an impact on women's self-image and self-esteem, as they feel compelled to meet social expectations regarding physical appearance in order to gain attention or recognition. Interestingly, in this anime, the perpetrators of objectification are actually carried out by women. In the minute duration anime 26:64 -

28:16, Suzu is being scolded by her sister-in-law for her appearance. While Suzu was cleaning the charcoal in the cooking stove, suddenly Suzu's sister-in-law named Keiko returned to the Houjou family house and saw Suzu who was shabby and her pants patched. Keiko scolds Suzu for changing her clothes, but because Suzu doesn't have another change of clothes, she has to modify her own kimono into a fashionable monpe (work pants for women) in Western style.

Monpe is one of the women's clothing made to facilitate women because the use of kimono makes it difficult for women to move or when carrying out activities with more active movements that will make it difficult to move and protect themselves during World War II. Beauvoir mentions two myths of men towards women, namely fulfilling what men want and quiet like the calm of nature. Of these two things, the ideal woman is described from her appearance that must be beautiful to fulfill the wishes of men. In this scene as spoken by Keiko, Suzu's appearance is very shabby and impolite for a wife to use when in the house even when cleaning the stove so Keiko calls Suzu has no self-awareness as a woman. This shows that there is a myth that women as wives are required to look beautiful and ideal to be able to please their husbands.

In addition, at minutes from 58:17 to 58:20, Suzu was scolded by her sister-in-law for her appearance of going to her husband to deliver the notebook left at home to her husband's office in Kure City. When going to leave, Keiko scolds her for not dressing up and wearing shabby clothes when going away. Finally, Keiko told her to put on makeup and change into a western-style kimono. This scene also shows that women are positioned as beings who are seen and judged by men, so they are required to be ideal and beautiful in the perception created by men. This is in accordance with the view of Wolf (2002: 10-11) that myths about beauty are one of the tools of women's feminism that can encourage women to validate themselves. In society, when women do not meet the ideal beauty accepted by society, they are considered ugly and unattractive in the eyes of men so that there will be a sense of insecurity. As a result of this, women seem to be supposed to beautify their appearance to match the ideal view that exists in society.

1. Required to obey the concept of *Ryousaikenbo*
At 01:00:56-01:01:26, Suzu received special treatment from Houjou's family when she was rumored to be pregnant and changed when she found out that she was diagnosed as not pregnant. In September 19, 1994, Suzu

delivered a notebook left at home to her husband's office in Kure City. At night during the conversation, her husband commented that he looked thinner, but Suzu denied that his appetite had been growing lately. The two were shocked and assumed that Suzu was pregnant because her appetite was bigger than usual. The rest of the family was happy to hear the news and her sister-in-law increased the food ration for Suzu, but after knowing the results of the doctor's examination that Suzu was not pregnant, the treatment of family members returned to the previous disciplined and strict treatment towards Suzu.

From this, it shows the myth of the ideal woman in patriarchal society, namely giving birth to children or producing offspring so that they can fulfill the role of women as mothers. Beauvoir mentions two myths of men towards women, namely fulfilling what men want and quiet like the calm of nature. From these two things, women are idealized as figures who will produce male lineages, especially Japanese society which has the concept that the child clan will use the husband's surname. If women cannot fulfill motherhood, women are considered imperfect and blamed rather than men for their view that women's bodies can conceive and give birth so that women should fulfill and do what men want.

In Japanese society from the Meiji period to the beginning of Showa, education in women refers to the teachings of "good wife and wise mother" or *Ryousaikembo* (良妻賢母)⁸. The ideal female construction in Japan that is still inherent today is that women should be able to take care of the household and take care of children.

2.2 The Existence of the Main Female Character

2.1.1 *Being For Itself*

In accordance with Beauvoir's theory of existentialist feminism, *being-for-itself* is the awareness of the existence that exists in human beings, both women and men. As human beings, women must be aware of their existence in order to be a subject (*it self*). The author finds several images in scenes from this film that show that women are able to realize and interpret their existence or *being-for-itself* during World War II, as follows:

1. The desire to fight in the war
At 01:29:08-01:30:44, Suzu extinguishes a firebomb that fell into her house in Kure. In the 20th year of Showa, Allied aircraft attacked Kure City with firebombs that burned many houses. Suzu and her family rushed to find a *bunker*, but when she was about to leave she saw a firebomb that

fell on the floor of her house. He became reminded of all the bad events that happened to him, namely the loss of loved ones and also the arm of his right hand that had to be amputated due to the bomb blast. Suzu finally realizes that she must not be constantly silent and feel desperate in the face of enemy attacks. Then he fought bravely and confidently in order to save the victims of war. Suzu shows her existence then she has *being-for-itself*, that is, awareness of existence or existence as a subject (*the self*). Suzu kept her life to put out the fire even though she was still sick and had only one arm. This shows that Suzu is aware of her existence as a subject (*the self*).

2. The desire to move forward and rise from the slump in grief
At 01:54:05-01:55:04, Suzu decides to rise from the slump of losing Harumi and Mizuhara, her loved ones. On October 6 of the 20th Showa year, Suzu was on her way after exchanging clothes for groceries for war victims. Suzu saw someone like Mizuhara who was smiling looking at Aoba's ship, which had fallen with her and Fraumi's laughing voice. Suzu seemed to see the happiness of Mizuhara and Harumi. Suzu then felt that she had to quickly rise from the slump, no longer crying and blaming herself for their departure. When women want to show their existence, they have *being-for-itself*, which is the awareness of existence or existence as a subject (*the self*). Suzu finally got up and didn't blame herself for not being able to save the people she loved. This shows that Suzu wants to no longer be negated as an object (*the other*) and accept its existence as a subject (*the self*).

2.1.2 *Being-for-others*

According to Beauvoir's theory of existentialist feminism, being-for-other is a consciousness that arises because of the existence of other subjects in the world so that it will maintain its subjectivity. This can be found in the following scene.

1. Active in community associations

At 00:23:55-00:24:45, Suzu who participated in the *Kaminaganoki Rinpohan* association was assigned to distribute foodstuffs on February 24 of Showa's 19th year with Chita and Kariya. In the association, Chita and Kariya are depicted as characters who always have different opinions. Suzu is a member who is adept at helping and mediating between the two colleagues. When a woman wants to show her existence, she must have *being-for-others*, that is, awareness of the existence of other subjects. Humans are basically social creatures who need others, without others

humans cannot realize their existence. Suzu in this scene shows her existence as an active person by contributing to *Kaminaganoki Rinpohan* (Kaminaganoki Village Neighbors Association).

2. Create new food recipes when there is a shortage of food ingredients

At 00:38:20-00:41:13, Suzu made a modification of the food recipe using natural ingredients she found around the house to prevent hunger due to food scarcity. Suzu collects natural ingredients to create Kusunoki-inspired recipes and saves on ingredients. When a woman wants to show her existence, she must have *being-for-others*, that is, awareness of the existence of other subjects. Humans are basically social creatures who need others, without others humans cannot realize their existence. This is shown when Suzu is free to be creative in making innovative food because of the scarcity of foodstuffs.

3 Conclusion

The conclusion of the writing is that the female character in the anime *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni* is positioned as a character who must heed the concept of *Ryousaikenbo* for Japanese women. However, on the other hand, Urano Suzu's character transcends herself from her limiting circumstances by carrying out the following strategy: working to achieve social transformation. Suzu redefines the role and position she had previously only as an object (the other) confined in the domestic environment and turned into the role of the subject (the self) as a member of society who actively contributes to society, namely *Kaminaganoki Rinpohan* (Kaminaganoki Village Neighbors Association) and *Dai Nippon Fujinkai* (All-Japan Women's Association).

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