

## **CHAPTER III**

### **EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 The History of Women's Oppression in the United States**

The oppression of women in the United States has been deeply rooted since the colonial era and continues to this day. During colonial times, many women were still under the control of men. This was largely due to the lack of education for women in the 17th and 18th centuries, leaving them with limited knowledge about life. In the colonial era, women were only taught to be polite, obedient, and loyal to men (Gamble, 2006:6). At that time, women were seen as caretakers of the household and responsible for reproduction.

In the 19th century, oppression in the United States continued, with men holding full power, further reinforced by social norms that strengthened their dominance. Many women in the United States had numerous responsibilities, but they did not receive their rights properly, especially in the workplace. At that time, women worked in extremely poor conditions. Women are often unaware that they are being oppressed in the workplace, including being sexually harassed. This is due to men having control over women's bodies, and they felt they could easily silence women regarding their crimes using their power.

Still, in the 19th century, many legal systems in the United States protected men who committed sexual harassment due to the patriarchal structure of American society (Gamble, 2006:3). The failure of the law to protect women from sexual

oppression in the workplace has been a subject of protest since the era of the anti-slavery movement (Mackinnon & Siegel, 2003:5).

Thus, to this day, the oppression of women in the form of sexual crimes is still widely experienced in the workplace in the United States. Although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits oppression in the form of sexual harassment in the workplace, many women still experience it (Jagadesan, 2019:19).

### **3.2 Radical Feminism Theory**

From pre-colonial times to the post-colonial era, women often faced social discrimination, which led to the rise of the feminist movement that advocated for equal treatment for women in society. Feminist theory seeks to explain the oppression of women, investigate its causes and consequences, and offer solutions and strategies to advance women's liberation from various forms of oppression (Mohajan, 2022:5).

As time passed, in the 1960s and 1970s, feminists tried to integrate women into many “systems” of society such as education, the economy, and the law. This led to the rise of radical feminism, a movement inspired by women's experiences in radical social movements (Tong, 2009:48). Radical feminism became a tool to express various forms of oppression caused by male dominance, commonly known as patriarchy. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is the root of women's oppression lies in social constructs that place them in an inferior position compared to men. Therefore, the primary struggle of radical feminists is to liberate women from male dominance by demanding equality, ensuring that women have full autonomy over their own lives (Tong, 2009:49).

Radical feminism emphasizes that all oppressed women never feel safe in their lives, whether it is a small thing like walking on the street or being at home (Rowland, 1990:271). Tong supports this view, and states that women can be oppressed in both public and private spaces (2009:52). Men often use their power to oppress and abuse women because it is the only thing they can do, both psychologically and physically (Millet, 2016:44).

Radical feminism is divided into two branches: radical-libertarian and radical-cultural. Radical-libertarian feminism believes that these issues can be addressed by having ideas of androgyny, where women possess both feminine and masculine traits. In contrast, cultural-radical feminism emphasizes that women do not need to behave like men, as they believe that is inappropriate and unnecessary for women (Tong, 2009:50). Despite the differences, both are in agreement that the oppression of women stems from an unbalanced gender system that supports male dominance, or patriarchy.

### **3.3 Theory of Women's Oppression**

#### **3.3.1 Causes of Women's Oppression**

##### **3.3.1.1 Patriarchy**

Patriarchy originally referred to a system where men were the heads of households, however, over time, patriarchy has expanded to include social systems and practices where men dominate, oppress, and exploit women in various areas (Walby, 1990:21).

Walby divides the structure of patriarchy into six main forms that are interconnected (1990:1). One of these forms is male violence, which focuses on

how violence is used as a tool to maintain male dominance over women. Walby considers male violence against women as an integral part of the patriarchal system that serves to control and oppress women (1990:135). She emphasizes that male violence is a systemic mechanism through which men maintain dominance over women (1990:135). Walby's perspective aligns with radical feminist views that see male violence as a tool of patriarchal control.

#### **3.3.1.1.1 Women Get Sexual Oppression by Men's Power**

The dominance of men places women in a subordinate position. Walby classifies this as a form of violence. Male violence functions as a tool to subjugate and control women (Walby, 1990:134). They serve as sexual objects intended to satisfy men's needs, rather than being treated as human beings with equal rights and freedoms. They even justify it as part of the job that must be obeyed. This violence is reinforced through societal norms and institutions that normalize the exploitation and objectification of women, perpetuating the idea that their primary role is to serve men (Walby, 1990:140). In many cases, this control is justified under the guise of social, cultural, or even professional expectations, making it difficult for women to challenge or escape these oppressive conditions (Walby, 1990:140).

#### **3.3.1.1.2 Women as Victims of Blaming by Men**

In male violence, victims of oppression are often subjected to victim blaming for the experiences they received (Walby, 1990:146). Victim blaming is rooted in male dominance, where men view women as the ones who must adjust and position themselves according to societal expectations (Walby, 1990:145). This mindset makes women doubt their own experiences and feel the need to constantly

prove that they are being oppressed by men. Victim blaming is often justified by blaming how women dress, their appearance, or even their mere presence, which is unfairly seen as provocative (Walby, 1990:146).

This victim-blaming culture encourages a culture of silence, where victims hesitate to speak out about their experiences due to the fear of potential consequences (Walby, 1990:101).

### **3.3.2 Types of Women's Oppression**

Oppression has five forms: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 2014:13). In this research thesis, the writer will only explain the types of oppression relevant to the discussion, namely exploitation, powerlessness, and violence.

#### **3.3.2.1 Exploitation**

Exploitation refers to the continuous actions of individuals who use their power to gain personal benefits at the expense of others (Young, 2014:14). Exploitation happens because of a social system that allows certain groups to benefit at the expense of others (Young, 2014:48). In the context of women's oppression, exploitation often takes the form of sexual exploitation. In this context, power is understood as the ability to manipulate or coerce women into submission without resistance. In other words, women's bodies and sexuality are used for the benefit of men, without full control from the disadvantaged party.

In addition, the unfair economic system makes it increasingly difficult for women to escape the cycle of exploitation, as they have no alternative means of survival other than keeping their jobs and relying on their wages (Young, 2014:48).

### **3.3.2.2 Powerlessness**

Powerlessness refers to a situation where certain groups of people lack power and are unable to make decisions to improve their lives (Young, 2014:21). Women in such powerless positions are often easily oppressed by men who hold greater power (Young, 2014:62). In the workplace, this powerlessness is often reinforced by factors such as the persistence of patriarchal culture and social inequality, which further oppress victims and make it difficult for them to seek justice (Young, 2014:62). Victims in powerless positions are also often unheard because they are seen as a minority.

The practice of *quid pro quo* in the workplace also pressures victims with limited voice to comply with sexual demands to keep their jobs. As a result, women in powerless positions become increasingly vulnerable, indirectly reinforcing their subordinate status because they continue to have less influence compared to men (Young, 2014:62).

### **3.3.2.3 Violence**

Violence perpetuates the power dynamic where the dominant group uses violence as a means to maintain its dominance (Young, 2014:5). This violence aims to intimidate, control, and subordinate the targeted group. It is often carried out repeatedly, following the same patterns, directed at specific groups, and executed without their consent. In this context, one of the most common targets is women, as they are perceived as the weaker group. The violence frequently takes the form of sexual violence.

Some common forms of sexual violence against women include sexual harassment, rape, and coercion, where individuals are forced to submit to violence. This type of violence not only harms women physically, but also causes severe psychological damage (Young, 2014:6). These harms are further worsened by social and legal systems that often neglect victims of sexual violence, resulting in many cases of oppression not being taken seriously.

### **3.3.3 The Struggle of Women's Oppression**

#### **3.3.3.1 Collective Struggle**

Struggle is an action taken to overcome a problem that follows so that it does not continue or continue in the future (Ramadyani & Setiawan, 2019:342). In this case, Tong initiated an effort to confront women's oppression called Consciousness-raising (CR). Consciousness-raising is a collective means to voice what they feel including when they get sexual oppression (Tong, 2009:48). Consciousness-raising is an important means for women to understand that their experiences of discrimination, sexual harassment, control over their bodies, are not individual events or mere coincidences, but part of a pattern of male domination that has taken place systematically and repeatedly (Tong, 2009:49).

Not only about sharing experiences, consciousness-raising in radical feminism also aims to build a women's movement that dares to fight patriarchy in all its forms (Tong, 2009:49). The awareness gained through consciousness-raising often encourages women to engage in collective action, such as protest movements against the pornography and prostitution industries, and struggles for bodily autonomy and reproductive rights (Tong, 2009:49). Therefore, consciousness-

raising is often the starting point for women to begin to see the world in a different way-not as individuals who must conform to existing social norms, but as agents of change who have the power to challenge and dismantle entrenched systems of oppression.

### **3.3.4 Social Impact of Women's Oppression**

#### **3.3.4.1 Raising an Awareness of Women's Body and Self-Control**

Social impact refers to a change, whether positive or negative, that encompasses various aspects of life, such as living conditions, quality of life, well-being, and happiness (Wallstam, 2018:130). In the context of women's oppression, social impact means any change whether beneficial or harmful that affects both present and future lives. In the context of sexual oppression against women, their bodies are still often seen as objects that men can control. Many women are unaware that their bodies entirely belong to them. This resistance is reflected in their right to make decisions about their bodies without coercion from others.

According to Tong, consciousness-raising efforts also contribute to this positive change (Tong, 2009:48). More women are becoming aware that their well-being is of utmost importance, including having control over their lives and bodies. Through this awareness, women begin to reclaim their rights as human beings and voice their experiences of oppression (Tong, 2009:49). Women are better able to prevent sexual oppression when they understand their rights over their bodies, and they become more capable of rejecting and reporting the oppression they experience. This process is essential in breaking the cycle of women's oppression and serves as a crucial step toward changes in laws, institutions, and cultural

perceptions of gender and power (Tong, 2009:50). By increasing their understanding and awareness of their rights and bodily autonomy, many women also feel safer, more confident, and more empowered to value themselves.