



**OPPRESSIONS TOWARD BLACK WOMEN AS REFLECTED
IN SOJOURNER TRUTH'S "AIN'T I A WOMAN?" SPEECH**

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities
Diponegoro University

Submitted by:

Uli Cinthia Dewi
13020115130122

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY
SEMARANG
2021**

PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly confirms that she compiles this final project by herself and without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and diploma degree of any university. The writer ascertains also that she does not quote any material from other publications except from the reference mentioned.

Semarang, March 2021

Uli Cinthia Dewi

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Life is a hard battle anyway. If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me.”

(Sojourner Truth)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

(Holy Bible, Matthew 7:7)

*I dedicate this final project to
my beloved family, partner, and everyone
who supported me to accomplish this project.*

VALIDATION

Approved by:

Strata 1 Project Examination Committee
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

On April 29, 2021

First Member



Rifka Pratama , S.S., M.Hum.
NIP. 199004280115111092

Second Member



Hadiyanto, S.S., M. Hum.
NIP. 197407252008011013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, praise to Jesus Christ, who has given strength and blessings so, this final project on “Oppressions towards Black Women as Reflected in Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I A Woman?” Speech” came to a completion.

I offer my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my project advisor, Mr. Arido Laksono, S.S., M.Hum., who has given his continuous guidance, encouragement, helpful correction, advice, and suggestion throughout the process of completing this project.

My deepest thanks also goes to the following:

1. Dr. Nurhayati, M. Hum. as the Dean of Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University.
2. Dr. Agus Subiyanto, M.A. as the Head of English Department Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
3. My father, mother, brothers, and sister, for supporting me spiritually and loving me unconditionally.
4. All the lecturers, especially in American Cultural Studies, for teaching and giving me immense knowledge.
5. Imel, Oyin, Beua, Cimi, Kajol, Hosey, Lody, and Susan for have been giving me laugh, love, and supports during and after my college life.
6. Mbaumu and Bang Prima, for our deep talks, night calls, and exciting discussions in every occasion.
7. Yusril, for everything we have been through and every single thing you have given to me. You are worthy of having the best in life.

Semarang, March 2021

Uli Cinthia Dewi

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Abstract

Racial and gender inequality are problems following post-slavery society and Black woman is the one who has to face it forcefully. Those two things are things that they cannot choose or change, but they have to face the oppressions and stereotypes inevitably done by society. Sojourner Truth is a representation of Black woman who dares to speak up against the stereotypes through her speeches. "Ain't I A Woman?" is one of her popular speeches which are chosen as the object of this final project by the writer. To collect the data, the writer uses black feminism approach and a library research with close reading method to analyze the object of written speech of Sojourner Truth. Theory that is used to analyze this written speech is Black Feminist theory. The result of this research shows that the written speech of Sojourner Truth reflects Black women oppressions in socio-cultural and educational sides, such as Black women have to do both of domestic works and work in plantation as well as Black women, as slaves, have no opportunity to have certain educations in the society.

Keywords: oppressions, inequality, Black women, Sojourner Truth

1. Introduction

Slavery is one of American historical experiences that cannot be separated from the history of American society. Slavery brings a lot of problems, especially about gender and racial discrimination. Black women are a group of African-American women that got the biggest impact of these problems, because they are women and they are Black.

Betty Friedan, a feminist, said that feminist movements can be divided into three waves. The first wave started in 19th until 20th century and focused on the movement to women's right in election. The second wave came about 1960s until 1970s and mainly concerned with equality and discrimination. The third wave began in the 1990s and this wave continued the second wave movement (Ohio Humanities Web, The Three Waves of Feminism:2018). The black feminist strongly struggled in the second wave which was marked by the emergence of Black Panther Party in October, 1966. This party struggled and fought for ethnic minority. Actually, the black feminist movements which concerned with equality and discrimination already started before the second wave. On May 29th, 1851, the old Sojourner Truth as a black feminist that directly experienced with slavery as a slave, made a touching speech at the Woman's Right Convention in Ohio. Through her speech, she showed that black women got double oppressions in the society. They got oppressions as women, which was a gender that socially less than men and also as black people that stereotyped with slave. Truth bravely said that black women are human and women too. When white women already got the

better position than before in society, black women still did not have a better place in the society because of the racial matters. Black women real condition seems really clear in her speech (Ohio Humanities Web, The Three Waves of Feminism:2018).

Theory that will be used to analyze this speech is Black Feminist theory. If feminist theory is focusing only on gender equality, then Black Feminist theory is a theory that the movement focused not only to the women, but also to the racial matters. This theory is suitable to analyze the black women's oppressions in Sojourner Truth's speech because it is focusing on the gender and race. The purpose of this study is to analyze the black women's oppressions in socio-cultural and educational sides that are reflected in Sojourner Truth's Ain't I a Woman? Speech (1851). The objectives of this research are to explain the black women's oppressions in socio-cultural sides that are depicted in Sojourner Truth's Ain't I a Woman speech.

1.1 Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth is a slave who was born in the town of Hurley, Ulster County, New York, 1797 as Isabella Baumfree. Her parents, James and Elizabeth Baumfree are slaves mastered by Dutch American named Colonel Johannes Hardenberg. Isabella's first language was Dutch because her parents and she was mastered by Dutch family. She was separated from her family, bought, and sold as a slave 4 times since she was 9. After Hardenberg died in 1806, she sold by auction to John Neely in the town of Kingston, New York. She only worked for Neely about 2 years before she sold to tavern keeper in the same town, Martinus

Schyver in 1808. Schyver owned her only for 18 months before she sold to John Dumont in town of New Paltz in 1810. In 1815, Isabella fell in love with Robert, a slave from a different master. Unfortunately, they were forced apart by Charles Catton, Robert's master. Catton did not give them permission because he only wanted to marry his slave with his own slave too. After separated from Robert, Isabella was forced to marry with Dumont's slave, Thomas and from that marriage she had 5 children (Mabee, 1993:1-6).

There is a law that required to all the slaveholders to let their slaves who born before July 4, 1799 be to be freed in July 4, 1827 called Manumission Law. But Isabella still decided to run away from Dumont in 1826, it is about 9 months before the liberation day, because Dumont denied his promise. Dumont ever made a promise to Truth and her husband to let them free in July 4, 1826. On her run, she met Isaac and Maria Van Wagenen, a pilgrim family in Wagondale who do not support slavery. Then, Isabella became their legal slave that worked voluntarily in 1826 until 1827 (Mabee, 1993:12-14).

While in New York City, she quickly became a great preacher and speaker and decided to change her name as Sojourner Truth in 1843. Since the first day being a free-man, she bravely expressed her thought about slavery that she directly felt and also about racial and sexual discrimination that her people felt. She is actively involved in anti-slavery campaign, race, and gender equality. There is a controversy about the authentic version of "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. As people know, Sojourner Truth is an illiterate person. Slavery forced her became uneducated woman. So, she did not write down her speech and no one

recorded it. This speech text was first published by France Gage in 1863, 12 year after Marius Robinson retold this speech in the "Anti-Slavery Bugle" (Garrison, 1875:136).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Black Feminism

Black feminism theory is described by some specific ideologies because it relates to justice movements for African-American women. Collins, in her book entitled "Black Feminist Thought" said that the dialogue of black feminism by fostering a fundamental shift in the paradigm of oppression. Many systems occurred in that era oppressed the black women and it was become to additive. When black women want to pursue a career, they have to face the racism that the Whites never experienced and sexually oppressed that men (both white and black) never have. So, it can be seen that black feminist mainpoint is to break the bad experiences that make the tension between White and Black itself. Salzman (2006:758) explained as follows:

"Furthermore, Black feminists have resisted for generations the separatism of their white feminist counterparts who have not traditionally included racism and classism as part of the women's rights agenda while simultaneously questioning the patriarchal beliefs of their African-American male leaders who often choose to ignore sexism in the fight for racial justice."

Therefore, the movements to break all of racism, sexism, and classism not only for the black women but also for people's social justice. Black Feminism is an ideology that protesting unconformity between government's promises and what really happened in the society. The government was promising equality in every section of the law, personal freedom, and social justice regardless race and gender.

On the other hand, society practicing different treatment toward people based on their gender, race, and class. This unconformity leads Black women, in this writings is represented by Sojourner Truth, to speak up and demand the equality in every life aspect such as in division of work, law enforcement, acceptance of right, and treatment in public places toward the society (Collins, 2002:23).

2.1.1 Black Women's Oppressions

The standard of ideal family that American society made was detrimental for Black women. American government only recognizes heterosexual marriage of homogeneous race, so that they can have their own biological children. The society also established the role in the ideal family based on gender; father, the head works in public to earn money for his family and mother keeps their children in the house. The segregation of chores and paid labor is fundamental to the gender ideological system in America. But, it cannot represent in Black family because Black women still have to work in Southern America plantation and their family privacy violated. Black women worked as hard as men. Even though every Black woman experienced different oppressions, it does not make them forgetting fundamental relationship of injustice. They used notion of family to stimulate the formation of Black civil society (Collins, 2002:47).

2.2 Sociocultural and Educational Theory

The two sides of Black women oppressions that will be highlighted in this final project are sociocultural and educational side. Sociocultural is a theory used to describe people's behaviors that affected specifically by their surroundings, social

and culture factors. According to Sanderson (2010), sociocultural perspective is a perspective describing people's behavior and mental processes as shaped in part by their social and or cultural contact, including race, gender, and nationality. Then, according to Nunn (1920), education is the complete development of the individuality of the child so that he can make an original contribution to human life according to the best of his capacity. The writer is going to elaborate them with the Black women's oppressions that depicted in "Ain't a Woman?" speech.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Approach

The writer uses Black Feminism approach that is placing Black women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis. This approach used to research case related to inequality of gender and race at the same time (Collins, 2000:7). Type of this research is qualitative research. Qualitative research is one of social science methods that used non-numerical data to collect and describe what really happened in a certain case (Punch, 2013:19).

3.2 Method of Data Collection

The writer also uses a library research with close reading method to support and prove the analysis of this speech. Library research is kind of method to collect data that using printed sources like book, previous research or expert's opinion to support the research. Library research is a method used for researcher to find out and collect factual information or expert's previous research and opinion (George, 2008:1). The steps of library research that the writer used to collect and analyze the data such as identifies the topic and theory that will be used for the research,

makes questions list that might be written in this final project, looks for trusted authors, books, and journals by internet, and reads and makes notes of information that suitable with the topic of research and also cites the statements from previous researchers.

4. Discussion

Sojourner Truth is one of many Black women that had to face “double oppressions” in the society. She is a representative of Black women as feminist in that era that bravely against Patriarchy system or men superiority and racial discrimination are like hereditary thought which has become a culture and common truth. Slavery legality that occurred for centuries is also be the cause of why slavery, racial discrimination, and gender inequality are very hard to remove from the society.

As the writer mentioned before, slavery also be the factor why racial discrimination and gender inequality are hard to remove from the society. Racial discrimination is discrimination acts because of someone’s race. People believe that race, which is appears from skin color, is determining the social class; White is higher than Black. White is the master and Black is the slave. It becomes a common stereotype in the society. Slave “status” was inherited from the mother to her child or children, so automatically every birth from Black woman slave is a “slave baby”, whether the baby’s dad is a free-man. Then, gender inequality is a situation in society that does not give both of woman and man the same rights. This kind of situation often puts women as the inferiors in many aspects of life. It

can be seen from Truth's statements in her speech which is also a true story of what she actually experienced with racial discrimination and gender inequality.

4.1 Sociocultural Oppressions Toward Black Women in "Ain't I a Woman?"

Speech

Patriarchy is a system used by the American society in that era in almost every aspect of life. In 19th century, the first wave of feminism has been intensified by the feminists, so the society already knew and started to treat women well. But, Truth, as a representative of Black women, shows that she did not get it. This kind of situation can be seen in this part of her speech:

“Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place every whar. Nobody eber help me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives m e any best place [and raising herself to her full bight and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked], and ar'n't I a woman?” (Garrison, 1875:134)

For hundreds of years Black people were originally kidnapped and sold as slave from Africa to America have to face the truth that White people looked at them with condescension. It means that the one of reasons why Black women did not get well treatment from the men is because in the past their race are identified as slave. Truth is also questioning about women's ideal role in American society in the next statements of her speech:

“I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern and seen 'em mos' all sold off into slavery...” (Garrison, 1875:134)

People said that the division of roles in ideal family is man as father has to work in public and earn money to feed his family and woman as the mother keeps their

children home and does the domestic works. But, Black women have to do both of these things. They have to work in Southern America plantation and their family privacy violated. Some of them works without payment and forced to have a lot of children, so that the master can have more slaves from her. Black women can't be as feminine as the Whites because they have to work as hard as man in plantation. The type of works given to Black women is also economically exploitative, physically burdensome, and intellectually dead.

Black women are minor in politics, economics, culture, law protection, and even in public area. Black women have no voice and power to express their thought, idea, wants, protest, and rejection because the society already settled with their thought about man superiority in all aspects of this life. When the women still young or still single, they belong to their family. After married, they belong to their husbands. They can not mastering themselves. Black women that declared themselves as feminists and non-conformists have to face bad judgement because of their gender, race, and their past as a slave. For example, Frederick Douglass, a Black abolitionist was patronizing Truth, whom he saw as "uncultured" human. Frederick Douglass is a Black-man and also had experienced with slavery as slave, same with Truth. But, he still patronizing Truth. Truth and Douglass have the same race, but Douglass underestimating Truth because of her gender as a woman. In her speech, Truth also mentioned this issue, how the society did not give the same opportunities to the women because of their gender. She explained one of many reasons why the men should have respected women. With her simple

reasoning, Truth was trying to explain why people should respect woman, this situation was depicted in:

“Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as man, cause Christ want a woman. Whar did your Christ come from?” (Garrison, 1875:134)

In that era, Christian (Jesus Christ followers) is the major religion. Many people think that women can not have the same rights and opportunities with the men because Christ is not a woman. But, Truth “reminded” them that Jesus Christ also has a mother, Mary. Mary is a woman, she was the woman who gave birth to Jesus. Then, people can not use the statement “Christ was not a woman, so women can not have as much right as men” as a reason to underestimate women. Truth also mentioned women’s abilities if they have the same opportunities with the men. Women can do big changes if the society gives them the chance to improve themselves, so they can prove it.

4.2 Educational Oppressions Toward Black Women in “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Speech

Society assumes that Black women are incapable of doing work that needs intelligence, so they are only allowed to work as labor. Truth also protests this intellectual injustice in her speech, it can be seen from:

“Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head— what dis dey call it?' ' Intellect,' whispered some one near. ' Dat's it honey. What's dat got to do with women's rights or niggers' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, would n't ye be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?” (Garrison, 1875:134)

Through her statements, we can see that people already known that women have no same rights with the men, but the men did not give the women chance to get their rights deliberately. Patriarchal system or men superiority which is deeply rooted since hundreds of years in the society be the cause of why people did not give a chance for women to get a good education. In reality, the women have willingness to improve themselves and equalize their rights, but the group of people who have more power did not support them. This inequality of education cannot be separated from slavery. Slaves are identically being made to do heavy physical labor that don't require them to use their intelligence. Therefore the society believes that the intelligence of Black are less than that of White. Another reason is because the society's common truth about what women can do or not. Young women are not require to educate themself with science or even learning how to write and read. Most women in that era are illiterate. Since young, their mother already taught them how to be a good wife with house-caring abilities. Therefore the society believes that women only can do domestic works and can not do another bigger than it.

“If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all 'lone, dese togedder [and she glanced her eye over us], ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again, and now dey is asking to do it, de men better let em.” (Garrison, 1875:134)

Through this statement, Truth shows her opinion about what women can do if they have a chance to do something bigger than before. So far women are only allowed to do domestic works such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning house, and caring her husband and children. They have no opportunities to have professional carrier in order to improve themselves, so they can do something

bigger than domestic works. As the writer mentioned before, Black women in that era only can do domestic works. They have no chance or even permission to do something bigger like having professional carrier. The reasons why the men give them no permission are because of their background as slaves and the society's common truth about what women can do or not. This issue also gives an impact to American regulation about women's rights to vote in election. Society did not believe in women's intelligence to take a decision to vote in election. So, one of rights that demanded by feminists is to have rights to vote in election. It can be seen in the first wave of feminism.

5. Conclusion

Through her speech, Sojourner Truth mentions her oppressions in socio-cultural and educational sides as a Black woman, especially who lived in the lowest position of society. It can be seen from her statements about how people think about Black women's intelligence ability, how Black and White women are treated differently, and the society's perspective about women in their rooted system called patriarchy. With simple reasoning and explanation from different perspective, Truth is trying to reflect the audiences that the society has not treat people equally and to fight society's negative common truth about Black women, and also fight for rights equality between men and women and also between White women and Black women.

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ATTACHMENT

Here is the speech that was used in the fourth section of this final project. The writer quoted this from a book entitled *Sojourner Truth's Narrative and Book of Life* (1875:133-135) by Garrison:

' Well, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar must be something out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de women at de Norf all a talkin' 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place every whar. Nobody eber help me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place [and raising herself to her full bight and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked], and ar'n't I a woman? Look at me ! Look at my arm ! [And she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power.] I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—and ar'n't I a woman ? I have borne thirteen chilern and seen 'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard—and ar'n't I a woman ? Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head— what dis dey call it ? ' Intellect,' whispered some one near. ' Dat's it honey. What's dat got to do with women's rights or niggers' rights ? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full ?' And she pointed her significant finger and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud. " ' Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as man, cause Christ want a woman. Whar did your Christ come from ?' Rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eye of fire. Raising her voice still louder,. she repeated, 'Whar did your Christ come from ? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with him. Oh ! what a rebuke she gave the little man. "' Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of mother Eve. I cannot follow her through it all. It was pointed, and witty, and solemn, eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause ; and she ended by asserting that ' if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all 'lone, dese togedder [and she glanced her eye over us], ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again, and now dey is asking to do it, de men better let em.' Long-continued cheering. ' Bleegeed to yo for hearin' on me, and now ole Sojourner ha'n't got nothing more to say.'