



The Racial Discrimination in the *12 Years A Slave* Novel by Solomon Northup Towards the Supporting Character Patsey (Marxist Feminism Perspective)

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Abstract

*This research examines racial discrimination towards Patsey in Solomon Northup's *12 Years A Slave* novel. The study aims to categorize racial discrimination types using Gordon Allport's (1954) theory—verbal abuse, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination—analyzing through Marxist feminism. Utilizing a qualitative sociological method, the research identifies three discrimination types: verbal antagonism, avoidance, and physical attack. Segregation and extermination were not evident. In the verbal antagonism stage, Mr. Epps verbally degraded Patsey's race and gender, labeling her a black wench. The avoidance stage portrays Mrs. Epps, an upper-class woman, expressing resentment by withholding food and soap, illustrating power dynamics. The physical attack stage illustrates Patsey being flogged for not meeting cotton-picking quotas, showcasing the compounded oppression faced by women slaves in race, gender, and class. Patsey's abuse by Mr. and Mrs. Epps for their master's mistakes highlights how upper-class individuals perpetuate oppression. Patsey's naked punishment underscores gender-specific oppression. In conclusion, Patsey's narrative in *12 Years A Slave* novel exemplifies race and gender intersectionality, revealing capitalism and patriarchy collaboration in marginalizing lower-class black women.*

Keywords: Racial Discrimination, Marxist Feminism, Sociological Approach, *12 Years A Slave* Patsey

Received: Januari 2024

Accepted: Januari 2024

Published: Januari 2024

doi:



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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki diskriminasi rasial terhadap Patsey dalam novel *12 Years A Slave* karya Solomon Northup. Tujuannya adalah mengkategorikan jenis-jenis diskriminasi rasial menggunakan teori Gordon Allport (1954) - pelecehan verbal, penghindaran, segregasi, serangan fisik, dan pemusnahan - yang dianalisis melalui feminisme Marxis. Dengan metode sosiologis kualitatif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga jenis diskriminasi: permusuhan verbal, penghindaran, dan serangan fisik. Pemisahan dan pemusnahan tidak terdeteksi. Pada tahap antagonisme verbal, Tuan Epps merendahkan ras dan jenis kelamin Patsey secara lisan, menyebutnya sebagai wanita murahan kulit hitam. Tahap penghindaran menggambarkan Ny. Epps, wanita kelas atas, menunjukkan kebencian dengan menahan makanan dan sabun, mencerminkan dinamika kekuasaan. Tahap serangan fisik menggambarkan Patsey dicambuk karena tidak mencapai kuota petik kapas, menunjukkan penindasan berlapis terhadap budak perempuan dalam ras, jenis kelamin, dan kelas. Penyiksaan Patsey oleh Tuan dan Nyonya Epps atas kesalahan tuannya menyoroti bagaimana kelas atas melanjutkan penindasan. Hukuman telanjang Patsey mencerminkan penindasan gender. Kesimpulannya, kisah Patsey dalam *12 Years A Slave* mengilustrasikan persinggungan ras dan gender, menunjukkan kolaborasi kapitalisme dan patriarki dalam memarjinalkan perempuan kulit hitam kelas bawah.

BACKGROUND

12 Years a Slave is a biographical novel depicting racial discrimination faced by Solomon Northup, an educated black man in 19th-century America. Betrayed by his white colleagues, Northup becomes a slave, enduring oppression under various white families. The novel not only highlights discrimination against Northup but also portrays the plight of other characters, such as Patsey, a black woman facing double oppression due to her race and gender in Southern America's legalized slavery.

Patsey, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Epps, experiences severe discrimination as a black woman. This because according to Essed (1991) that gendered racism is was a type of racial and gender oppression and interconnect to create a distinct and often more challenging faced by subordinated woman. As a black woman slave, she faces additional challenges in a male-dominated capitalist system. For example, base on the novel, despite Solomon as a black slave, he had given alternative tasks to avoid punishment, while Patsey, unable to escape her daily cotton-picking quota, endured whippings. The mistreatment Patsey faces is attributed to her gender and race, aligning with Marxist feminist theory, which asserts that the oppression of lower-class women results from capitalism. Since according to Davis (1983) women and children made up a large portion of labor force in most slaves.

To analyze Patsey's racial discrimination, the researcher adopts Gordon Allport's (1954) framework for racial discrimination types: verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination. Using a Marxist feminist perspective, the study aims to classify these acts of racism, examining their impact on Patsey, who represents the intersectionality of class, gender, and power within the context of slavery. The proposed research, titled "The Racial Discriminations in *12 Years a Slave* novel by Solomon Northup towards the Supporting Character Patsey (Marxist Feminism Perspective)," seeks to deepen our understanding of historical oppression, labor exploitation, and resistance, fostering a more inclusive perspective on literature and history.

METHOD

This research was designed to apply qualitative method. Qualitative method could be defined as a descriptive data whether written or oral which could be used or observed in this research. Those data according to Huberman (2014, p. 15) may be collected in various ways (observation, interviews, documents, tape recordings) and processed through (recording, typing, editing, or over-write). Since this research applies the qualitative method, it means that the data in this research are the utterances within the *12 Years A Slave* novel which had the racial discrimination towards Patsy as the supporting character.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The *12 Years A Slave* novel was made based on true events in nineteenth century. In nineteenth century, the form of capitalism could be seen from the practice of slavery, where the white people were the upper-class people who owned their private business of cottons and their own plantations. While on the other hand, the black slaves were the working class people who worked and became the legal property of the white people. The slaves faced many forms of oppression from the white people who were the bourgeoisie. One of the slaves who was described had been through inhuman kind of oppression was named Patsy. Patsy was a black woman slave owned by Mr. and Mrs. Epps.

As a working class woman, Patsy oftenly faced many forms of oppressions because of her race and her gender as a woman. A gender which considered weaker and easier to be manipulated and over exploited. To ease the researcher in describing the racial discrimination towards Patsy, thus the researcher used the theory of types of racial discrimination by Gordon Allport, the sequential steps by which an individual behaves negatively toward members of another racial group: verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination.

After that, in order to analyze those types of racial discrimination by Gordon Allport towards the character Patsy, the researcher used the theory of marxist feminism where capitalism is male-dominated and women oppression is the worst kind of oppression. The oppression towards women is caused by difference class since the upper-class or known as the bourgeoisie women were capable to oppress both the lower-class or known as the proletariat women and men. The researcher believed that this theory was in line with the

conditions of a slave woman named Patsey who trapped in the racial discrimination supported by the capitalism.

The first type of racial discriminations is verbal antagonism. In this type of racism, the researcher found one data mentioned that Patsey was called as black wench when Mr. Epps did not believe her answer that she went to Mrs. Shaw was to ask for a soap. In the eye of marxist feminism, this type of oppression faced by Patsey was a way of how a black woman back than would be assault for their race by calling them black and be calling wench to degrade her gender. According to Lewis (2016) that the gendered racial micro aggression happened to black women whether behavioral or verbal. This type of oppression happened to lower-class women in capitalism dominated by patriarchal man like Mr. Epps who tended to degrade his opposite gender slave.

The second type is avoidance. There were two datas which represented the avoidance towards Patsey. First data portrayed how Patsey was being avoided by Mrs. Epps in the way that she would bring dainty food from her mansion to all slaves but Patsey. The second data showed how Patsey was not given any soap from Mrs. Epps as she did to the rest.

From the eye of marxist feminism, those avoidance behaviors from Mrs. Epps described how Patsey as the working class woman did not have the same privilege like best quality foods or even enough money to buy a soap as Mrs. Epps had. Besides, the position of Patsey as the property of Mrs. Epps had made it easier for Mrs. Epps to perpetuate the oppression towards patsey as the lower-class woman by avoiding Patsey's basic needs as human being. This was in line with the statement of Donovan (2011) that based on the racial hierarchy in the America, it depicted the different stereotypes towards the white women and the black woman. It showed how a white woman like Mrs. Epps was stereotyped as a privileged woman and a black woman like Patsey was stereotyped as a dependent slave. Those oppresions were in line with the concept of marxist feminism that the oppression towards women was the result of capitalism since money was oftenly the power and how the white women were able to perpetuate oppression towards black women slaves.

The third type is segregation. The researcher did not find any data which represented the racial discrimination in the form of segregation towards the supporting character Patsey in the *12 Years A Slave* novel by Solomon Northup.

The fourth type is physical attack. Physical attacks are commonly utilized within interracial interactions to establish dominance and control over segregated racial groups that challenge the perceived superiority of another racial group. Additionally, physical attacks can be motivated by hate crimes and prejudice. Based on research findings, there were 12 sets of data that depicted how Patsey experienced physical violence as a form of racism within capitalism.

In the first data, Patsey was whipped if she failed to pick twice as much cotton as the other slaves did. The second data described that Patsey pleaded for forgiveness and cried as she was stripped naked and subjected to a brutal whipping for daring to go to Mr. Shaw's house without Mr. Epps' permission, which made him jealous.

In the third data, Patsey was still continuously beaten, resulting in the formation of net work wounds on her back, yet Mr. Epps still ordered Solomon to whip her while threatening Patsey that she would be whipped until she wished she were in hell if she ever dared to visit Mr. Shaw's house again. The fourth data stated that Mrs. Epps instructed her male slave, Solomon, to whip Patsey in the absence of Mr. Epps on the plantation. The fifth data revealed how Patsey's back was covered in scars from the whipping as the result of her lecherous master and jealous mistress.

The sixth data described Patsey would face physical violence if she dared to refuse Mr. Epps' desires, while on the other hand, she could suddenly be injured with a broken glass bottle hurled by Mrs. Epps. The seventh data stated how Mr. Epps mercilessly beat the defenseless and powerless Patsey with a whip, ten times stronger than the previous lashes done by Solomon, without regard for the blood and flesh sticking to the whip from Patsey's back. The eighth data depicted how woman slaves, especially Patsey, experienced more severe physical violence compared to other slaves. The ninth data revealed how Mrs. Epps really wanted to get rid of Patsey even by death. The tenth data described how Mrs. Epps, as an upper-class woman who supported slavery, tried to trample out Patsey's life in any way to please her own emotions. The eleventh data showed how Patsey would be whipped by Mr. Epps whenever he was drunk to gratify Mrs. Epps' jealousy. The twelfth

data showed how Patsey's immense fear when Mrs. Epps became furious and jealous over Mr. Epps' licentious acts towards Patsey, as Patsey would inevitably become the target of emotional outbursts and Patsey surely would receive whipping.

In the perspective of Marxist feminism, Patsey represented the embodiment of how lower-class women faced oppression within the world of capitalism. This was in line with Jones (1982) that the burden faced by the woman slave represented the extreme oppression through all the patriarchal and capitalist system. She was subjected to the threat of being whipped if she failed to produce twice as much cotton, while male slaves like Solomon were given the opportunity to perform other tasks to avoid being whipped. Patsey also experienced physical violence inflicted by Mrs. Epps, which validated the Marxist Feminist view that oppression against women was rooted in class differences, where even women like Mrs. Epps participated in physical violence, perpetuating the nature of violence within capitalism since according to Reed (1972) in capitalism society, money is often the main power. Furthermore, the sadistic violence in the form of whippings inflicted by Mr. Epps, portrayed his depraved obsession and desire to keep Patsey obedient and fearful under his ownership, illustrated how the male-dominated capitalist system had perpetuated the patriarchal system which rendered woman slaves like Patsey as vulnerable objects to be exploited and oppressed.

In another occasion based on the data above, the beatings committed by Mr. Epps to Patsey, in order to please Mrs. Epps for his own licentious act towards Patsey, symbolized how lower-class women like Patsey were also oppressed in the sense that they would be blamed and take the consequences of the mistakes committed by men, particularly those from the upper-class. This was often happened to black woman slaves in the nineteenth century since those women were stereotyped as hypersexual by the slave owners as an excuse for the act of oppression and assault done by their slave-owners (Spates et al., 2020) Furthermore, the sadistic beating and being stripped naked that caused her back to bleed, inflicted by Mr. Epps when he discovered that Patsey had secretly left the plantation, depicted how lower-class women were fully controlled by their dominant male owners and how their male owner could control their live based on the licentious desire those male owners had towards the woman slaves. As reflected in the case of Patsey, woman slaves were considered objects whose bodies were subjected to the master's will and sadistic

desires. Patsey's cries and prayers symbolize Patsey's powerlessness in facing of the beatings inflicted upon her by Mr. Epps, a white man who held dominaton over her. This was in line with Willingham (2018) that the sexual and the physical abuse of black women were repeatedly used as the tools to lynch the black women in order to dehumanize them. Yet, those black women also subjected to the physical sadistic punishment as a public punishment.

The fifth type is extermination. The researcher did not found any data which represented the racial discrimination in the form of extermination towards the supporting character Patsey in the *12 Years A Slave* novel by Solomon Northup.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

1. Conclusion

In conclusion, the novel *12 Years A Slave* was based on true events and very famous from the nineteenth century, highlighting the harsh realities of slavery and the oppressive nature of capitalism during that era. The story portrayed a society where white individuals, as the upper-class and owners of businesses and plantations, held power and control, while black slaves, as the working class, were considered legal property. The character of Patsey, a black woman slave owned by Mr. and Mrs. Epps, served as a poignant example of the multiple forms of oppression faced by both her race and gender.

Drawing on the theory of types of racial discrimination by Gordon Allport, the researcher examined the various types of discrimination that Patsey experienced. The forms of discrimination witnessed in Patsey's story in the *12 Years A slave* novel included verbal antagonism, avoidance, and physical attacks. Verbal antagonism was evident when Patsey was referred to as a "black wench," a derogatory term used to degrade her based on both her race and gender. Patsey also faced avoidance, where she was excluded from receiving certain privileges, such as dainty food or basic necessities like soap. These acts of avoidance further marginalized her as a lower-class woman in a capitalist society.

The most distressing form of oppression endured by Patsey was physical attack, which she endured through whippings and brutal violence inflicted by Mr. and Mrs. Epps. These physical attacks further illustrated the intersectionality of race and gender, highlighting how Patsey's status as a black woman made her particularly vulnerable to

violence and exploitation within the patriarchal and capitalist system. This reinforced the notion that within the capitalist system, money equated to power, allowing those in privileged positions to perpetuate oppression, even against their fellow women.

Therefore, Patsey's story in the *12 Years A Slave* novel exemplified the intersectionality of race, class and gender, underscoring the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy collaborated to perpetuate the marginalization and exploitation of lower-class women.

2. Suggestion

The researcher only analyzed the struggle of black people but from the perspective of marxist feminism to analyze the oppression towards the supporting character Patsey as a woman slave in the position of working class women in nineteenth century. Aside from that, the researcher believe that other researcher could conduct an analysis of the *12 Years A Slave* novel from the other aspect, for instance analyzing the relationship between white supremacy and capitalism in the *12 Years A Slave*.

Moreover, the researcher hopes that there would be an expand analysis of how racial and gender discrimination in various cultural and social contexts. For instance, a study can be conducted on the experiences of marginalized groups, particularly women, in different countries or regions, such as East Asia, Africa, or Latin America. By employing the Marxist feminist framework, researchers can analyze the influence of capitalist systems, cultural norms, and power structures on the lives of these individuals, uncovering the specific challenges they face and identifying potential ways for the better social transformation in nowadays.

By pursuing further research in these areas, researchers and students in the English Letter and Culture program at Gorontalo State University can deepen their understanding of the complexities of racial and gender discrimination, contribute to academic discussions, and work towards social justice and equality within their respective fields of study.

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