

Woman's Struggle against Oppression in *Colette* Film

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ABSTRACT

Oppression is an action that aims to gain benefits for himself while the other party is harmed. Oppression in *Colette* film can be seen in how the male character has control over the female character. The purpose of this research is to identify the types of oppression and the female character's struggles against oppression as depicted in the film. Moreover, the researchers examine oppression and the struggles in *Colette* film using Iris Marion Young's theory. The researchers used a qualitative research method and feminist perspective as an approach. The result of this research showed there are three types of oppression that the female character experienced; they are exploitation, powerlessness, and violence. Besides, the woman's struggle of the female character found are the freedom of speech and economic rights.

Keywords: Feminism, Woman's Struggle, Woman's Oppression

ABSTRAK

Penindasan merupakan sebuah tindakan yang bertujuan untuk meraih keuntungan bagi dirinya sendiri sedangkan pihak lain dirugikan. Penindasan di dalam film Colette dapat dilihat dari cara tokoh laki-laki yang mengontrol tokoh perempuan. Tujuan dari penulisan ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis penindasan dan perjuangan tokoh perempuan melawan bentuk penindasan seperti yang terdapat pada film tersebut. Selain itu, peneliti menggunakan teori dari Iris Marion Young dalam meneliti penindasan dan perjuangan perempuan di dalam film Colette. Selanjutnya, peneliti menggunakan metodologi penelitian kualitatif dan menggunakan perspektif feminis di dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan ada tiga jenis bentuk penindasan yaitu eksploitasi, ketidakberdayaan, dan kekerasan. Selain itu, peneliti menemukan bentuk perjuangan perempuan yang diperankan oleh tokoh perempuan adalah kebebasan berpendapat dan hak ekonomi.

Kata kunci: *Feminisme, Perjuangan Perempuan, Penindasan Perempuan*

A. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of equal rights for women and men has faced obstacles due to entrenched cultural stereotypes that perpetuate the belief that men are the rightful recipients of rights. This has contributed to a societal mindset that places men in a position of superiority over women. According to O'Connor, "Men and the things men do have been valued a lot in every place and time, and women and the things

women do have been valued less” (9). Across different aspects of life, there is a prevalent belief that men hold a higher status than women. This perception is largely influenced by one's gender.

The stereotype of culture about men's superiority has been attached to society. The stereotype is frequently encountered in certain instances, particularly within the context of marriage. According to Christine Delphy, "Marriage could be a class relation in which women's labor benefits men without comparable compensation" (qtd. in Young 50). In addition, Brittan states, "their (women's) freedom of action is limited by the superior power of those who are in a position to ensure their compliance" (1). In marriage, the man who is the head of the household should fulfill the family's needs. Generally, in traditional sets of cultural expectations, husbands and wives share each other roles. In this case, the pressure of the wife's role is more challenging than the husband's. Most husbands comprehend that they are superior because they can fulfill the family's needs, which leaves the wives with no choice but to do what the husband wants.

The existence of oppression happens because of the superiority of men aiming to take advantage of women for themselves. Moreover, oppression occurs in various kinds of tasks in society. Women are in a subordinate position to establish their status because women do the hard work while men earn the benefits to increase their status. It shows the existence of inequality between men and women.

Additionally, women endeavor to break free from gender inequality and strive to achieve equal rights for women in the public domain through the establishment of the women's movement. This movement was initiated during the nineteenth century. According to Rampton, "The movement began in July 1848, in the late nineteenth century at the Seneca Falls Convention New York" (Rampton). The main goal of this movement is to open opportunities for political equality, which is women's suffrage. It is then developed on struggling for the legal identity of equality, for example, in education, employment, and the right to own property.

An influential French novelist, Gabrielle Sidonie Colette, played a significant role in the early women's movement (January 28th. 1873 - August 3rd. 1954). She was one of the most influential feminists because of her role in fighting for her rights. At that time, she experienced inequality from her husband named Willy. He recruited some authors to write a novel for him using his pen name. One of the authors is his wife, Colette. In Colette's married life, Willy oppressed her to write a novel for him and he had an affair with several women. Her experiences made Colette find her passion for acting on a theater stage as an actress with her friends. Finally, she got the recognition from people for her work.

In 2018, a movie based on the life of Colette directed by Wash Westmoreland was released. Richard Glatzer wrote the story. The screenplay is by Richard Glatzer, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, and Wash Westmoreland. Keira Knightley, Dominic West, Eleanor Tomlinson, and Denise Gough are the main cast members of this biographical drama. In the *Colette* movie, the researchers find out the portrayal of women's struggle and oppression related to the main topic of this research. The researchers focus on the main female character. Colette is a brave woman who gets out of oppression and struggles to get the right in her life. The researchers are inspired to analyze the main character's struggle in the movie because Colette's

experiences may help future society gain information about oppression towards women and the importance of equal rights. Two problems are addressed in this research: to find out the types of oppression and woman's struggle to deal with oppression.

B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. Feminism and the Waves of Feminism

The female population has long been subjected to oppression, leading them to establish deep connections with other oppressed individuals in society who have faced similar challenges. In order to achieve the goal of human liberty, women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries decided to make a movement. Their first goal which was called the first wave in the late eighteenth until the early nineteenth was to consider the "social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women" (Schneir 76). On the other hand, Schneir stated that "many early feminists identified marriage as a primary instrument of woman's oppression" (Schneir 15). From the statement above, marriage is the source of woman's oppression.

The second wave in the 1960s continued into the 90s. Scholz has stated that the second wave was trying to embrace all necessary aspects to fight for in the first wave. The social roles required women to be wives. It caused them to live in isolation because it was difficult to collect liberation from society's mindset (66-67).

The third wave of feminism continued in the middle 90s. Third-wave feminism tried to eradicate the standards that put some people in limited action. Based on Scholz's statement, "There is no consistent 'third wave methodology' but there are some definite trends. Four trends are (1) multiplicity and the rejection of norms, (2) critique of the structures of consciousness, (3) use of popular culture, and (4) political coalition-building despite ideological differences" (108).

Fourth-wave feminism is a new silhouette because feminists nowadays measure by the academy or theorists instead of activists (Rampton). In addition, "Key concepts in global feminist theory are human rights, coalition or solidary, and empowerment" (Scholz 134). Scholz also stated the fourth wave of feminism looked at issues that engaged with the global perspective, which were sex and gender-based harassment and violence (135).

Based on the statements above, the wave movements were performed to fight inequality in the public sphere by using the realm of public discourse. The detail of the aims in each wave is different, but they still in the same goal, which is equality for both genders.

2. Five Faces of Oppression

Young stated that oppression is divided into five forms. Those are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

a. Exploitation

The central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation, then, is that this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another (Young 49). This action tends to be negative because in order to take advantage without any responsibility it will cause harm to other parties.

Exploitation could happen based on gender, usually, the one who becomes the object of being exploited is a woman. “There is a little bit of difficulty to show how women are treated because the systematic transfer of power from women to men is shown clearly including the transfer of material labor and to fulfill men’s sexual desire” (qtd. in Young 50). Based on the statement, gender exploitation is mostly about the superiority of men toward the inferiority of women as laborers. Men benefit women by getting their status in the environment to exploit the women to work for them. Women usually become the object for men to transfer their desire for sex. Furthermore, women’s work is nothing compared to the social status that men obtain.

Gender exploitation has two aspects, the transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and the transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men (Young 50). Material exploitation is “the improper, illegal or unauthorized use of an individual’s funds, assets, property, power of attorney, guardianship or conservatorship for the profit or advantage of anyone besides the individual” (Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation). Besides, sexual exploitation involves “a person profiting from the use of another person’s body in a sexual manner in order to benefit” (Definition of Sexual Exploitation).

b. Marginalization

Some marked groups are treated inhumanely by receiving various racism as if it was fate for them. There are forms of marginalization according to an article about marginalization. The first is economic marginalization “refers to disparities in amassing wealth or getting a job” (What is Marginalization). The second is political marginalization “Communities struggle to participate in parts of the civic process” (What is Marginalization). The last is social marginalization, which is “when someone can’t participate in everyday leisure activities (What is Marginalization). Marginalization happens because of certain conditions of people, race, culture, and gender. It leads some groups toward others to treat them differently.

c. Powerlessness

According to Young, powerless people have little opportunity to develop themselves. It causes them to lack the skills and often struggle in the division of labor and making it hard to be respected by people (56-57). Based on the statement, shows people with powerless are find it hard to express their rights for themselves. The difficulties of the powerless in an environment are clear. The status of the powerless generally is described skeptically because they lack authority. In addition, “The reality is that women are only marginally able to express what they are feeling and are rarely validated for their feelings” (Moore 4)

1. Social inequality: they are treated as if their social identities are unacceptable, and their desires and ambitions are seen as unrealistic and therefore irrelevant.
2. Social inferiority: according to which some are ‘above’, or have ‘high’ status, while others are ‘below’, having ‘low’ status.
3. Social invisibility: a perception of not being valued, noticed, or acknowledged, wherein one’s talents, abilities, and personality are not recognized.
4. Economic distress: the most powerless individuals in a society will typically lack useful economic skills, training, and education, all of which places them

at a disadvantage in competition for jobs and other opportunities of life (TenHouten (96-98).

d. Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism is an ideology for some groups toward other groups to mark them as subordinate and less developed. The dominant group considers themselves the best, while the “other” is not as good as them. They create their own culture as universal, whereas their identity becomes remarkable since the dominant groups are more disseminated. Grubbs argues that cultural imperialism can be in three forms, as follows:

1. Cultural domination refers to the group of people that believes in cultural values and practices that they are dominant in the society.
2. Cultural impositions refer to the group of people that also has values or practices but, in this case, they forced upon a person or group of people to use their language.
3. Cultural fragmentation refers to forcing the possibility to change a culture without a significant program so that the culture is unified (Grubbs).

Based on the explanation, cultural imperialism may happen in society if the majority of them have the same knowledge, culture, or experience that led them to mark out other people.

e. Violence

Violence causing fear or hatred of the other party involves insecurities on the part of the violators. According to Young, “Violence is a form of injustice that a distributive understanding of justice seems ill-equipped to capture” (63). There are several forms of violence, they are economic violence, it is referred to as “women who work often are paid wages below subsistence” (Krantz), the second is sexual violence includes “forced sex through the use of physical force, threats, and intimidation (Krantz), the third is psychological violence “preventing a woman from seeing family and friends, ongoing belittlement or humiliation, economic restrictions, violence or threats against cherished objects and other forms of controlling behaviors” (Krantz), and physical violence is “aggressive acts such as kicking, biting, slapping, beating, or even strangling” (Krantz). To sum up, all forms of violence are to injure the victim and abuse them for their purposes. It is one of the faces of oppression that is horrible acts so no one deserves this kind of treatment.

3. Women’s Struggle against Oppression

Women face many struggles in life to fight the inequality between men and women. Hooks states that “women gained more rights in relation to salaries and positions due to feminist protest, but it has not eliminated gender discrimination. On the average, most women still do not get equal pay for equal work” (49). Women need to move so they can deal with the severe position of being oppressed until they get their rights. The women’s movement appeared as the fresh air for many women who could not express their feelings and actions at that time. The movement also exists to give women a chance to be equal so society can treat them in the same way.

In this case, women have tried to make several movements called the Waves of Feminism. According to Rampton, the first wave was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women American feminists launched the movement at the Seneca Falls Convention in the United States (Rampton). In addition, Scholz stated, “The first wave of feminist activism may be characterized by struggles to gain recognition of the legal, economic, social, and intellectual status of women” (66).

a) Opening Legal Rights for Women: The Vote

The right to vote is supposed to be crucial for women. It facilitates women to speak, own property, protect, and make a contract. “In Europe and the United States, some of these laws began to be proposed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it would take until the twentieth century for women to truly be considered legal persons worthy of state protection against violence and to own and transfer property” (Scholz 51).

b) Economic Rights

According to Scholz, there should be an equal opportunity for women and men to have the same chance to obtain a job and the same fee for employment. In contrast, those jobs traditionally based on gender (nurse, elementary school teacher, daycare provider, etc.) are commonly held by women who are underpaid because women’s income is an addition to the main income of husbands (54-55).

c) Human Rights

The feminist efforts were to secure human rights internationally. Women fought for their rights as long as they did not damage others. Human Rights in this research, is an act “without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion” (Holcombe 2). According to Scholz, “Feminism itself is often associated with equal rights for women, with the effort to obtain and maintain reproductive rights often in the forefront. These rights give women some freedom to decide when or whether to be pregnant” (60-61).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

This research includes qualitative research. Qualitative data is commonly expressed through words rather than numerical figures. It offers a rich source of well-founded descriptions and clarifications of processes within identifiable local contexts (Miles et al. 1). In addition, the value of qualitative research lies in its ability to delve into the emotional aspects that underlie human behavior, such as feelings of unbrokenness, resignation, desperation, and apathy. This highlights the importance of qualitative research in uncovering the complexities of human emotions (Flick et al. 5). Qualitative research is a relevant way to interpret social life from the researcher’s perspective by using the appropriate method. Therefore, the researchers chose qualitative research because to conduct potential interpretation of meaning or value behind the words and scenes in the *Colette* film.

The researcher used feminist perspectives in this research. As explained by Orr, “The purpose of feminist criticism is not to provide a reading of a work but the mapping and changing of attitudes and conditions and the reformulation of a new language which is woman-centered and free of patriarchal constraints and oppression” (qtd. in Potter 146).

2. Data and Data Source

The researchers used a film entitled *Colette*, directed by Wash Westmoreland as the object of this research. The data source in this research was *Colette* film script. The data focused on the scenes, words, clauses, sentences, dialogues, or narration that contain the topic of women's struggle and oppression toward the main female character as referred to in the research problems.

3. Data Collection

- a. The researchers watched *Colette* film and repeatedly paid attention to the action and the conversation with English subtitles. By using English subtitles, the researchers felt easier to understand the storyline and figure out the issues of the film.
- b. The researchers read the film script repeatedly while selecting the data by highlighting the narration, dialogue, or words in the film script that related to woman's struggle against oppression to gather the potential data.
- c. The researchers took screenshots of the scene and noted ideas of the scenes, narration, dialogue, or words in the film script that contained Collette's oppression and her struggle.
- d. The researchers read articles related to the main topic of this research to understand the issues of oppression and woman struggle.

4. Data Analysis

Miles et al, in the *Qualitative Data Analysis* book, argue that there are three activities of defining analysis to explore an analysis to be more depth. The three data analysis activities consist of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (10-11).

a) Data Reduction

In this activity, the researchers collected the potential data-oriented from rough data that contained the research problems. "Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (Miles et al. 10). This kind of activity aims for the data to be organized. By checking the action, the utterance of the dialogues, and the narration in the *Colette* film, the researchers decided to choose whether the data were suitable or not.

b) Data Display

Data display is the next step of data analysis in this research. According to Miles et al, "a *display* is an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (11). It helped the researchers to understand the context of the situation in the *Colette* film. It is a piece of organized and compressed information that allows the researchers to conclude what is happening and what the researchers should do for the next action.

c) Conclusion Drawing and Verification

In this part, the solid data can conclude to maintain and review the whole analysis process. "Conclusions are also *verified* as the analyst proceeds" (Miles et al. 11). This step allowed the researchers to draw conclusions based on the research problems.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Woman's Oppression

a. Exploitation

Exploitation itself is “an action of treating people someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work” (“Exploitation”).

Willy : You could write them up. Those stories of Saint-Sauveur you told me last year. **They could be Willy's next novel.**

Colette : My school stories?

Willy : Yes. There may be something there... **You must start straight away, my love. Aim for four hours at a time - the wolves are at the door!**

(00:25:35-00:25:48/ Colette)

A writer that worked for Willy complained about salary but he could not pay them because the previous novel did not work well. Then, he saw Colette in front of him and told her to write some stories of hers so that he could launch another book to make money. By forcing his wife, he told Colette that she must start to write as soon as possible and give a deadline for her by writing four hours at a time. Colette felt uneasy because it was considered inappropriate to do such work. The data is included as a form of material exploitation. It can be seen when Willy tells her to write some stories. Colette's reaction toward Willy's order was a question “My school stories?” This portrayed that Colette felt that something was not right. She was exploited by her husband for his own benefit.

b. Powerlessness

Powerlessness derives from a lack of decision-making power, the inability to enact choices and exposure to the disrespectful treatment that results from occupying a marginal status.

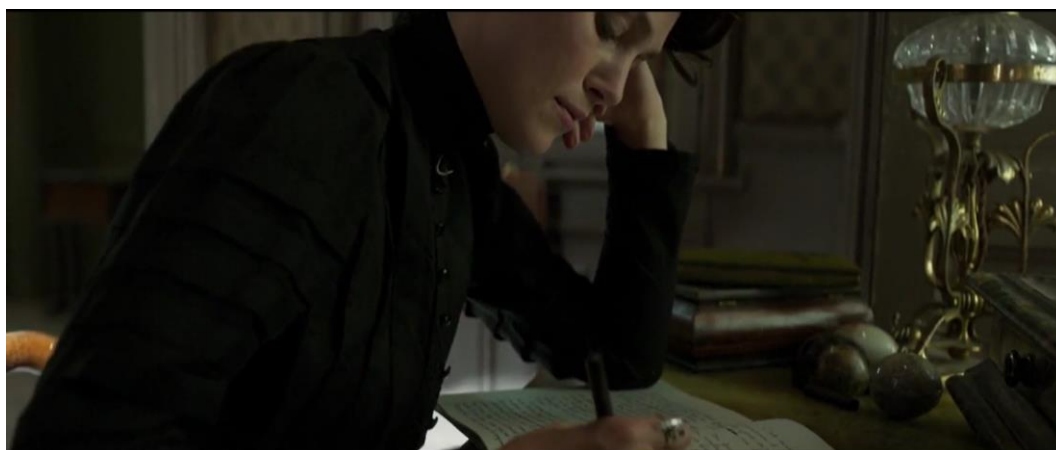


Figure 1. Willy asked Colette how is the writing going 00:56:02 – 00:56:11, Powerlessness, Irish Marion Young (Colette Movie, Wash Westmoreland)

Willy : How's the writing going?

Colette : **Slow...painful...** How was your meeting with the bank?

Willy : Good... yes, it was good. I won't bore you with the details.

He heads off. She continues writing.

The data included as the kinds of oppression called powerlessness which counted as social invisibility. In the data, the female character could not fight for her desires to be free from her husband's order. Based on the definition of social invisibility itself, the female character in the film faced this kind of oppression because of lack of recognition in her ability. The data shows the situation where the female character is powerless and she has to take orders from the male character who has the power to control the female.

c. Violence

Violence is a behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something.



Figure 2. Willy forced Colette to write and locked her in a room 00:46:41-00:46:55, Violence, Irish Marion Young (Colette Movie, Wash Westmoreland)

He arrives at the door of the study and stands expectantly at the door jamb as she walks past him into the study.

Colette : I'll start tomorrow.

But Willy closes the door and....

Colette : No! Willy!

Willy : Write!

Colette : Willy!

Willy : **You will do as I say! I will return in four hours and I expect to see pages.**

He pockets key and goes off.

Violence was portrayed by Willy toward his wife by closing the door and locked his wife in a room so she could not go out. Then, Colette was trapped in a room and not able to get her freedom and rights. It indicated that the male character was doing psychological violence to the female. Employing violent means, he induced a sense of fear among the other parties, leading to the female's obedience to his commands.

2. Woman's Struggle

a. Opening Legal Rights for Women: Freedom of Speech

The legal rights for women included an action where the female struggles to speak in order to get freedom.

Colette : I'm planning on killing Renaud off in the next one.

Willy : No - you can't. Please.

Colette : (quoting Willy) **"The hand that holds the pen writes history."**
(00:59:29-00:59:38/ Colette)

The data showed that Colette was trying to speak up and was brave enough to take action on her work. She threatened Willy by saying that she planned to kill him in the next story. The struggle that Colette experienced in the scene to speak can be found in the first movement of feminism.

b. Economic Rights

The recognition by women of the vital role and value of their engagement in the labor market, along with their initiative to mobilize for the purpose of seizing control over their own futures, embodies their economic rights.

Colette: (adamant) **I want my name on the book.**

Willy : No no no. Willy is a brand name. And the fact is, women writers don't sell.
Colette lets out a gasp of frustration.

Colette: Bastard! Selfish, smug, fat, lazy bastard!

Willy : I'll give you fat... All the other descriptions are libel.

Colette: **I need credit for my work! My name on it!**
(01:18:55-01:19:10/ Colette)

Economic rights were portrayed by how the male character refused to put Colette's name and stated that women writers do not sell. Willy was portrayed as a symbol of inequality. There must be an equal opportunity for women and men to have the same chance to get the job and equal pay.

3. Discussion

The following section provides an analysis of various forms of oppression and the efforts made by women to emancipate themselves from oppressive structures. Young stated the types of oppression: (1) exploitation, (2) marginalization, (3) powerlessness, (4) cultural imperialism, and (5) violence.

To compare the analysis, the first previous study was Muhammad Wizari Yusuf's thesis entitled *Catherine's Struggle to be Free from Oppression in Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"*. The thesis focuses on the main female character named Catherine Barkley's oppression and struggle. The story is about Catherine refusing to marry after being asked to marry at some times. There are three kinds of oppression experienced by Catherine, those are physical violence, psychological violence, and powerlessness. From the five types of oppression, the female character named Colette experienced three types of oppression such as exploitation, powerlessness, and violence. Gender exploitation primarily involves

the dominance of men over women, positioning women as inferior laborers. Collette as the female character became the victim of gender exploitation as a result of the actions of their husbands, who sought to exploit her for personal gain.

In order to combat oppression, it is imperative for women to engage in struggle. The second previous study entitled *Analysis of Gender Equality and Feminism of Main Character in Colette Movie* written by Lintang Ursita used the same object as the current study, *Colette* film. Both study emphasized on woman actions to fight against oppression. Women continue to play a pivotal role in leading and engaging in resistance movements against various forms of oppression. These movements underscore the vital importance of women in political and social struggles, emphasizing that genuine liberation cannot be realized without addressing gender inequalities.

The researchers determined that both the prior studies and the present study share a common focus on a particular type of oppression, namely the oppression of women, and the struggle to combat it. The study's findings revealed that the female character encountered three forms of oppression, namely exploitation, powerlessness, and violence. Additionally, the female character's struggle encompassed the pursuit of freedom of speech and economic rights. From all those oppressions that she experienced, Colette finally realized that no one can prevent her freedom except herself so she decided to struggle to fight the oppression. Colette struggled for copyright of her works, in other words, she tried so hard to be free from the oppression that her husband did to her.

E. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, after the researcher presents findings and discussion on the previous chapter, the researcher can finally draw a conclusion based on the research questions and the purposes of the study. Through Iris Marion Young's book about five types of oppression, it is applicable in analyzing woman's struggle against oppression in this film. The female character experienced three types of oppression from her husband in the film. There are exploitation, powerlessness, and violence.

From the oppression that the female character experiences, she chooses to overcome the oppression through some struggles. The researcher concluded that the struggle in *Colette* film is the freedom of speech and economic rights. At the end of the story, the main female character develops to be fearless, confident, and passionate.

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