

**RUTH'S STRUGGLES FOR FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE IN FANNY FERN'S RUTH HALL: A FEMINIST STUDY**

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**Abstract**

*This study aimed to identify the kinds of problem that constrain Ruth to be financially independent and to analyze her struggles to gain her financial independence in dealing with the problems that she faces. This study was a qualitative research employing content analysis method. The first result of the research was the problems that constrain Ruth to be financially independent. They were (1) stereotype: being stereotyped as weak, being stereotyped as domestic, and being stereotyped as spoiled due to her family's wealth; (2) marginalization: being underestimated and being discouraged; and (3) subordination: unfair treatment between sons and daughters and the assumption that women do not deserve high education. The second result was related to Ruth's struggles to gain her financial independence. They were (1) trying hard to get a job: applying for needle work, applying for a teacher, and applying for a columnist; and (2) working hard to prove her ability: working as a contributor, working as a columnist, and working as a writer.*

**Keywords:** financial independence, women's struggle, Ruth Hall.

.....Pemisah Seksi (Berkelanjutan).....

**INTRODUCTION**

Being financially independent for women is important. Some conditions make women have to support the financial needs of the family. Sometimes, some problems happen that cause the imbalance of the family, for example is the absence of father because of death or divorce. Such a condition needs solution because of the lack of the father's roles. The problem occurs when the father dies and leaves the mother to live with the children,

while the mother never gets a job and only does the domestic duties. The situation forces the mother either to stand on her own self to look for a job and be the breadwinner of the family or to do something to support her family, for example marrying another man.

Such issues mentioned above also happen in some literary books. One of them is a novel entitled *Ruth Hall* which is written by Fanny Fern in 1854. Ruth, as the main character of the novel, is a widow and she is in

such a situation when her husband dies. She is forced to struggle to find a job to support her family. It means that she has to leave the house to work.

Lambert (2009), states that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century America, it was clearly seen that men and women were living in the different spheres. It is also depicted in the novel where men are able to live outside, to get higher education, to have good jobs, and to associate with people, and other things in the public world. On the other hand, women are limited to stay at home and do domestic duties like taking care of children and the house. Even when they have free time, they are not allowed to go outside and socialize with other people. They still have to stay at home and do whatever related to the maintenance of the family such as sewing and laundry.

Therefore, since Ruth lives in a patriarchal society that separates women and men in different spheres, it causes some constraints for her to go outside the home and look for a job. It is not easy for a woman to

work in public because people always connect them with domestic roles. It will cause some opinions such as women are unable to work because they have no talent and experience.

In this study, the researcher is interested in revealing some points about problems faced by Ruth and her struggles in gaining her financial independence in the novel *Ruth Hall* by Fanny Fern. The researcher is interested in revealing what problems that she gets from her own family and her in-laws as well as from the society that make it difficult for her to achieve her financial independence. Besides, the researcher is also interested in revealing her struggles in dealing with her problems that she faces, until she finally can be a financially independent woman. She has a long and tough journey to find a proper job which can bring the life to her family. However, with patience and endless of struggle she can finally achieve her life goals.

The purposes of the research are to reveal the problems experienced

by Ruth that constrain her from being financially independent and to explain Ruth's struggles to get her own financial independence in dealing with the problems that she faces.

This research is expected to give some benefits both academically and practically. Academically, this research reveals some points about woman's struggles in gaining financial independence and the way she solves the problems during her journey to achieve her goals. Thus, the researcher hopes that it can enlarge the knowledge of the students that woman can also be financially independent even though it needs a long process and hard effort. Therefore, it can be a starting subject for the other researchers to analyze the same topic in a further research. Practically, by reading this research, it can be a part of information for students in understanding that women can be financially independent as men do. Also, the researcher hopes that this study can encourage other women to struggle and achieve their dreams because nothing is impossible. By

believing on their own selves, women can really make their dream come true.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **The Kind of the Research**

This research is a qualitative research employing content analysis method.

### **The Time and Place of the Research**

This research conducted since July 2015 to July 2016 in Yogyakarta.

### **The Object of the Research**

The main source of this research is a novel entitled *Ruth Hall*.

### **The Data, Instrument, and Data Collection Technique**

The data are in the form of phrases, clauses, sentences, and expressions related to the constraints and the struggles in gaining financial independence. The instrument of the research is the researcher herself. The data collection technique are by reading the novel comprehensively and by observing the data related to

women's constraints and struggles to gain financial independence, by taking notes on the detail issues to be analyzed which are related to the topic, and finally by putting the data into a table first and then transferred into the data sheets.

### **The Data Analysis Technique**

The data analysis technique of this research is conducted through six steps: organizing and preparing the data, reading through all the data, coding the data, giving a description, interrelating description, and interpreting the meaning of description.

## **FINDING AND DISSCUSION**

### **A. The Constraints that Ruth Faces to be Financially Independent**

There are some problems that constrain Ruth to be financially independent, which are stereotypes, marginalization, and subordination.

#### **1. Stereotypes**

A stereotype is a kind of labeling to a certain group of people, which usually cause disadvantages and

injustices (Fakih: 1996: 16). In Ruth's case, there are some stereotypes that constrain her to get her financial independence such as being stereotyped as weak, domestic, and spoiled due to her family's wealth.

Because Ruth as a woman who is stereotyped as weak, so she reputed as unable to be the breadwinner of the family. This condition is caused by the opinion that women are usually staying at home and managing the household duties, so they do not have any talent or capability to work in public because they are lack of experience. However, Ruth's condition forces her to be the breadwinner of the family since her husband dies. Because of the stereotype that women are weak, it makes Ruth's family underestimate and do not support her to look for a job.

The next thing is being stereotyped as domestic. It constrains Ruth to look for a job in public. In her society there is an opinion that good women are those who stay at home and able to manage

the household duties. The opinion that women are always connected to the domestic roles makes them hard to get a job in public. Such a condition is unfair because women also have the right to go outside the house to associate with other people, to school or work. They deserve the same opportunity to explore their abilities as men. Only because of the stereotype that women are domestic, it is hard for Ruth to go outside the house and get a job. This condition depicts that in her society, women are always connected to the domestic roles which make them difficult to look for a job in public. Therefore, the limitation of the stereotype that women are domestic will be one of the constraints for Ruth to get a job.

The last problem is being stereotyped as spoiled due to her family's wealth. The fact that Ruth's family is wealthy makes her difficult to get a job because people believe that she does not need to get a job since her family will help her. This condition constrains Ruth to get a job and gain her financial independence. This is a very difficult situation for Ruth. As a woman who comes from

a rich family, actually she does not need to work because she should have enough support from her father. However, her current condition as a widow with small amount of money forces her to get a job to earn more money for living. She still faces difficulties in finding a job because people will always connect her to her rich family background. It makes Ruth realize that she should cover her identity in order to get a job. This will be a good solution for her, because she can apply for a job while on the other hand she is not connected to her family anymore. Later, Ruth uses a pen-name *Floy* to work in the publishing world.

## 2. Marginalization

Marginalization is the act of relegating or confining a group of people to a lower social standing or outer limit or edge of society (Young, 1990: 53). In Ruth's society, people tend to marginalize women due to the opinion that men are more logical and responsible in working than women, so it constrains women to get a job in public.

Ruth faces such kind of marginalization. She is underestimated by people in her society, especially to work in publishing world because they assume that men are better to work in publishing world than women. To cope with that problem, Ruth appears by using a pen name *Floy*, which is accepted and becomes popular in the publishing world because of her talent and quality. The reason why Ruth uses a pen name is not only because she wants to cope with the problem that make her difficult in finding a job, but also to prevent any kind of underestimation to her because of the fact that her father and brother are also popular in publishing world.

The next marginalization that Ruth faces is being discouraged by her own brother, Hyacinth. When Ruth first applies to him to be one of his contributors, he says that Ruth has no talent and writing will never be her passion. Due to that rejection, Ruth struggles on her own way to gain her success by using a pen name *Floy*. However, after she gets

popularity, Hyacinth tries to stop her by asking her to stop writing to avoid the rivalry between them. This condition is a constraint for Ruth in gaining her financial independence.

### 3. Subordination

Women's subordination means the inferior position of women to men, (Sultana, 2010: 7). In the male-dominated society, there is an assumption that women's role are regarded in the lower position of men. Ruth's faces two kinds of subordination. The first is the unfair treatment between sons and daughters. Because of the opinion that sons are more valuable than daughters make Ruth face unfair treatment from her father, Mr. Ellet. During her life, Ruth always gets less support than her brother both in spiritually and financially. Ruth does not get spiritual support during her worst time when her husband dies from her father because she is regarded as unimportant as a daughter. She also gets no inheritance at all while her brother

Hyacinth gets all of her father properties.

Because she is considered as less important than her brother, then she gets no support either spiritually or financially. This treatment can be seen as a constraint for Ruth to gain her financial independence. If Ruth gets spiritual support from her family, it will be easier for her to recover from losing her husband and then try to look for a job because she gets good spirit from her own family. Besides, she will not live in poverty if during the time she looks for a job, her father wants to support her financially. However, only because she is a woman and has her own principle about her life (by trying to support her children by herself), then she gets nothing, she gets no spiritual support and no financial support. She has to build her own success by her own work. It is easy for Hyacinth to get a house in a luxurious square in town with all money that he has, but for Ruth, it is hard enough for her to buy bread and milk for her children every day. This kind of subordination is unfair, just because of the opinion that sons are more

important than daughters, then it makes women get less support from their family than men in everything.

The next subordination is the assumption that women do not deserve high education. In Ruth's society, people believe that women's place is in the home, managing the household duties, so there is no need for women to get higher education and become as smart as men or even smarter than them. It is common for a girl from rich family to go to boarding school, but the purpose is not to get education and become clever, but rather to get a lover. Her friends are wondering the fact that Ruth is really diligent to study, while after school, she can marry a rich man and does not need to work. They believe that "it's quite unnecessary for a pretty woman to be clever," (Fern, 1854: 21). Here, it can be seen that the society has successfully implanted the idea that women do not need to be clever because their duty will be at home to keep the needs of the husband and children. Women do not need to be clever, to read, to explore talent,

which later constrain them to get a job and to be independent women.

### **B. Ruth's Struggles to Gain Financial Independence**

#### 1. Trying hard to get a job

Ruth's responsibility to keep her children and to support them makes her struggle to get a job and earn money. Because she keeps her own principle that she wants to get her own life and does not depend on someone else, she knows that she needs money to support and continue her life. Her struggle to gain her financial independence is started by trying hard to get a job. Firstly, she applies for needle work in Mr. Herbert's store but she fails. Mr. Herbert is used to be Harry (Ruth's husband) favorite tailor. The fact that Ruth begs for a job in such place shows how she really needs money and wants to do anything to get money. She does not care about her reputation and social class anymore, because the most important thing for her is how to get money to support her family's need. It means that Ruth

is a realistic woman and a responsible mother to her children.

Secondly, she applies for a teacher in a primary school and she fails. Actually two of the school's committees are Ruth's relatives, Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin, but both of them vote against her. This condition show how most people in Ruth's society put prestige above all. Knowing that Ruth's present condition is poor while they are popular people, they refuse to help her in order to keep their prestige.

Lastly, Ruth applies for a columnist in several publishers and she fails. Initially, she applies for her brother but she gets rejection because he says that Ruth has no talent and she cannot be a good writer. Then she applies for some other publishers but remains getting rejection because of some reasons such as no vacancies and having different religion view with the magazine's issue.

#### 2. Working hard to prove her ability

Facing failures and rejections from some previous publishers does not stop Ruth's struggles to get a job.

After trying to apply to be a columnist in some offices, Ruth finally gets her first job as a contributor in a magazine publisher. This acceptance can be a start for her to reach her goals, although it is just the beginning yet it is a good progress. During her journey to be financially independent, she is working hard to prove her ability by working in some professions. First, she is working as a contributor. Her article is accepted in *The Standard* and is about to be published. It is a beginning of Ruth's career in publishing world. Together with her pen-name *Floy*, she becomes popular. It shows that Ruth really has a good talent and she can produce good works as well. However, getting a job as a contributor in *The Standard* and being popular with her pen-name do not mean that Ruth solves her financial problem, because of the payment from *The Standard* that still cannot meet her family's needs, it makes her try to get additional job by working for other magazine publishers.

The next struggle is by working as a columnist in *The Pilgrim*.

Because of her popularity, she receives higher payment than in *The Standard*. Nevertheless, Ruth has to work really hard because she works for two different publishers, where she has to make an article a week for *The Standard* and two articles a week for *The Pilgrim*. During her time working as a columnist, she gets acquaintance to Mr. Walter, the editor of *The Household Messenger*. Knowing that Ruth does not get the payment she deserves, he offers Ruth to work exclusively to his magazine with more sufficient income.

The last struggle is by becoming a writer. After Ruth gets popularity as a columnist, she also becomes a writer. Her book becomes a best-seller and gives Ruth lots of money. All of her bitter life experience in the past finally can be paid off by her success in the publishing world. This condition can be the evidence that by having a strong will and endless struggles, Ruth can break all the stereotypes, marginalization, and subordination that people give to her. She can prove to her family and her society that she is able to support her family by herself, she is able to get a

good career, and she is able to get really good income without their help.

Her destitute condition with no support from her family forces her to struggle by herself if she really wants to get a better life in the future. That is why she tries really hard to look for a job and becomes a writer, which finally in the end can be an appropriate job for her. Therefore, all of her life struggles, from poor, pain, sorrow, underestimated and more, are now paid off by her works that are well-known by most people in the country. There is nothing satisfying to Ruth more than enjoying her own-struggled success.

## **CONCLUSION**

Patriarchal system in the society where Ruth's live cause some problems, which constrain her to get a job in order to gain her financial independence such as stereotypes, marginalization, and subordination to women. Some stereotypes such as being stereotyped as weak, being stereotyped as domestic, and being stereotyped as spoiled due to her

family's wealth become Ruth's constraint to go outside the domestic area and to work in public. Besides, Ruth also gets marginalization such as being underestimated and being discouraged, which also constrain her to be a financially independent woman. The last constraint that she faces is the subordination to women such as the unfair treatment between sons and daughters and the assumption that women do not deserve high education. Therefore, there are many things that constrain Ruth to get a job and to gain her financial independence.

Ruth who gets many constraints in achieving her goal does not give up but she struggles to cope with it by trying hard to get a job and working hard to prove her ability. The ways she tries to get a job are by applying for needle works, applying for a teacher, and applying for a columnist. There are some ways that Ruth takes to prove her ability such as working as a contributor, columnist, and writer. Being a writer finally leads Ruth to be a financially independent woman, which also

breaks all the stereotypes, marginalization, and subordination that she has faced before. Finally, she can prove to the society, by having strong will she is able to face all problems and achieve her goal.

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