Main Themes In Oroonoko

“If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong,” said Abraham Lincoln (“Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Albert G. Hodges”, 1864). By way of explanation, there is nothing as bad as being involved in slavery activities and this is true in all circumstances. Within the term “Slavery”, this brings about the sense of being tortured in which deprived of human rights and other fundamental freedoms and unwillingly living under dreadful mistreatment and unvalued of indigenous people under the control of white colonizers. So far, this leans on more negative aspects towards slavery than the positive aspect of it. Without regard to the justification of right or wrong, Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko; The Royal Slaves is a realistic novel in which wrapped up the historical context of slavery through the narrator’s eyewitness and leaving a challenge for the readers to set their belief towards the pro or anti-slavery by themselves. For this reason, Oroonoko’s novel seems to uncover the dark side of the progression of the Atlantic Slave Trade in which occurred around the late 15th to the mid 19th century through this three implications which are racism, economic advantage, and the aspects of women respectively.

The first implication that can extract from Oroonoko’s novel is dealing with racism. When touching on the issue of slavery, it is undeniable to not mention racism. By definition, racism means segregation of people according to their origins and colour of their skin. This leads to the classification of white and black people in which the white refers specifically to the European colonists and the black refers specifically to African indigenous people in the slave trade. Is this enough reason for the native Africans to receive such inhumane and discriminate actions? Of course, not. In this case, what we can identify from the racist attitude is the reflection of European attitude towards the non-Europeans. If we about to arrange who is the top of the hierarchical pyramid, it is clearly stated that those white Europeans would be on top of the pyramid and the bottom down would be a place for non-Europeans. So to speak, the Europeans seemed to set their own standard of having a white skin colour to judge other non-Europeans as lower than them. According to the data on the working habits of African-American slaves, it indicates that those Africans still stuck in the phase of barbarism (Jones, 2010). Moreover, according to Higginbotham (1992, p. 263), “racial attitudes towards blacks … European perceptions of African as primitive, animal-like, and savage”. To clarify, the white Europeans usually label the black Africans as childlike and primitive indigenous people who would rather be proficient at survival skills and physically working in a difficult task. As a result, in the slave trade, the majority of African is in the spotlight target for illegal kidnapping and being separated from their beloved family and forced to hand into the large scale of plantations in unknown faraway lands such as America. In a nutshell, racism is still being an ongoing problem in today’s world and it is something that was ingrained as a conceptual into their mindsets with low tendency to re-ingrain it.

The second implication from Oroonoko’s novel is dealing with economic advantage in relation to honour. As being named as “Trade”, it is all about economically speaking stuff. When the captain came to do a slave trade with Prince Oroonoko, he tried to trickly praise Oroonoko as possessing a very good manner in which in opposition when compared to the normal slaves and take care of them as “brotherly and friendly” relationship (Behn, 2009, p. 130). Indeed, it also gives us a sense of Oroonoko as “noble savage”. By definition according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, from millions of slave, there will be one of them who possesses idealization of

humanity's goodness and a royalty based on their authentic life and; on top of that, they are miles away from corruption ("Noble Savage", n.d.). As mentioned in one of the in-class extract saying that "Oroonoko took delight in the culture of the white nations and … sold most of his slaves to this captain because of the esteem he held for him". The purpose of this admiration is to have absolute confidence from Prince Oroonoko that he has the equal status as them even though he is purely native African with black skin colour in order to facilitate and strengthen their slave trading deals between them. In other words, the Europeans pretend to ignore the fact that Oroonoko is a native African in order to gain more profit out of them. On top of that, there are also some degrees of racism that participate in this economic aspect as well. The clearest example would be the scene when the captain identified Prince Oroonoko as being more civilized than other European princes that he had met before. This evidence suggests that the white Europeans, including the captain, underestimate those non-Europeans, especially the native Africans as being innocent and incognizant people. As mentioned, there are some degrees of honour within the economic context as well. First of all, receiving an honour for economical reason is not eternal. Since Prince Oroonoko was caught to be a slave and sold to other unknown continents, he is immediately confiscated his honour as a prince and praise by the captain. Second of all, the opinion of Oroonoko towards the horrible slave trade is surrounding with the notion of honour. As he mentioned "And why,' said he, my dear friends and fellow-sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? … Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves?" (Behn, 2009, p. 191), it illustrates that it is unreasonable to be slaves under this economic circumstance. For Oroonoko, to be slaves, we should have been through the process of defeating and losing the war, then it is fairly to fall as the slaves of the winning side.

Beyond that points, women's oppression is problematic for a long time ago even though it had occurred in most societies, especially African society, it turns to be even worse when it comes into the context of slavery. On the grounds, the third and the last implication of Oroonoko's novel is dealing with the aspects of women during the late seventeenth century. Women were actually in the race of being commodification for a long time ago and it seems unchangeable due to the ground concept of women as a subordinate role in the society. According to Higginbotham (1992, p. 258), "Black women experienced the vicissitudes of slavery through gendered lives … fell victim to rape precisely because of their gender". Sadly, it shows that the role of women in the time of expansion of the slave trade becomes much worse and even unrecognized within African society. The sense of being a woman for men is just a machine in which capable of reproduction their population. This reveals the dishonoured aspect of men towards women. For clarification, there is a scene when the king of Coramantien ordered Imoinda to be sold as slaves to those colonists since she already married with a man and considered as a polluted woman who should not be deserved a position of the king's wife anymore. This illustrates that, on top of that, women, who lived in the country in which has ultimate power over the laws and everything such as the king, will be treated like toys in which once the king is not interested and, eventually, devalues them, they would be thrown away and left out from the society. Furthermore, from the perspective of the Oroonoko's writer, Aphra Behn also experienced her life with a restriction of being a woman as well. During her writing this novel, she had an intention to portray as a true story; however, sadly, during the late seventeenth century, women were restricted in various areas, especially the freedom of expression and speech in which, eventually, pushed the writer to compose the story into novel or fiction instead. In other words, she cannot express and talk much in relation to men because of her patriarchal society that she lived in. As a result, this might be one of the reasons why Aphra Behn did not stand her point clearly whether Oroonoko's novel would be pro or anti-

slavery because she was fearful of getting publicly condemned for her wrong commitment.

In conclusion, through the lens of Aphra Behn in the novel of Oroonoko: the Royal Slave during the late seventeenth century, racism happens because we have different skin colours, women are dishonored because they are oppressed by the patriarchal society, and the slave trade is all about economic advantage with no humaneness-involved. The novel successfully projects a sense of creepiness and challenges the readers to further develop their imagination towards the ugliness of the slave trade. In my opinion, Europeans are nonetheless being greedy tigers craving for innocent deers; the native Africans and this is deemed to be a serious issue due to slavery becomes normalized in today's society. For this reason, it would be better if everyone considers this issue seriously and find a solution to the problem of slavery to not go even worse than its history.