

**THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TOWARDS BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN
IN THE SOUTH DURING 1970s-1980s AS SEEN IN ALICE WALKER'S
“THE COLOR PURPLE”**

¹Jenny Ronawati Bay*, ²Wihelmina H. Loda

^{1,2}Sekolah Tinggi Pertanian Flores Bajawa

¹jennybay25@gmail.com, ²wihelmina.loda@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article presented an analysis of the domestic violence towards black American women as seen in Alice Walker novel “The Color Purple”. The reason for particularly choose this topic because the wants to find out how the domestic violence faced by black American women during 1970s- 1980s delineated in “The Color Purple”. In this article, the writers applied library research to collect the data. The main data were taken from the novel “The Color Purple” by Alice Walker. Furthermore, in this article, the writers used the sociology of literature theory since the writers analyzes the novel as a reflection of situation that happened to black American women in the south during 1970s- 1980s. After analyzing the data, the writers found out that domestic violence happened to the two characters in the novel: Celie and Sofia. The black women in the novel represented black American women in the South during 1970s- 1980s. They undergo domestic violence from black American men. The violences were: physical violence, mental violence and neglect.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Black American Women, Physical Violence, Mental Violence, Neglect.*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works always have close relationship with the social condition. Through literary works, authors may share their principles and belief, their experiences in the society they live in, and their views about societies. One of literary works that reflects human life is novel. By reading it, the readers are invited to learn something new such as culture, lifestyle, someone’s character and history of certain place and time. Any studies of literary works have been carried out based on literature searches by applying various theories and approaches. (Siahaan, 2020; Liubana, 2021)

“The Color Purple” focused on the characterization of black American women that lived in

1970s-1980s. It is not easy for them to survive at the time because they had to live without any support from men. Alice Walker tried to describe the condition of black American women based on her experience. She tried to criticize the oppression by black American men to black American women.

“The Color Purple”, chronicles the life of a poor and abused southern black woman who eventually triumphs over oppression through affirming female relationships. Alice Walker’s novel “The Color Purple” reveals through the characters of the book several social issues of the era. In 1970s-1980s, the relationship between black men and women was not equal. Some black American men feel they could not be men unless they dominate black women. The black women shared their status of becoming second class citizenship by black man’s threat as described in “The Color Purple”.

Because of poverty black American women had no good opportunities in getting education or job opportunities. They also did not have a chance to get healthy life and other knowledge about living in healthy way. This situation was aggravated by domestic violence such as from family member, for example from their husbands. According to the Oxford Dictionary: violence is a violent behavior intended to hurt or kill. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia in the article;”Domestic Violence” stated that: Domestic violence: Violence committed by one member of a family or household against another. Domestic violence has many forms. Generally, this domestic violence is divided into two kinds: Physical violence and mental/emotional violence.

The writers chose “The Color Purple” because it told domestic violence done by a black man towards a black woman and the relationship between black men and black women in 1970’s-1980’s. Furthermore, the writers were interested in the struggle of the female characters in the story especially Celie and Sofia. The story shows how they struggles to keep survive in facing life, even though they had been abused by their stepfather and their husband.

METHOD

Library is the place to find information that is written. The writers used library research to get data and by reading some books which are useful for the analysis.

The primary data are derived from Alice Walker’s “The Color Purple” while the secondary data are taken from some books which could support this study, and are related to the problem.

There are several steps to analyze this research. First, the Novel Color Purple is read many times to attain better understanding of the issue and theme. The writers secondly read the criticism of the novel from other books and internet. Third, the writers used sociology of literature to analyze the novel. And the last step is conclusion. In this part the writers summed up the important points which are obtained from the analysis.

To support this analysis, the writers used the Sociology of Literature theory. Sociology of literature is an approach to the literary work, which deals with the social aspects. Sociology of literature has an attention to literary work as an organization that is created by the author as a member society. It is undeniable that society influences the author in creating his or her ideas. The author the part of society since he or she lives in a certain group of people and customs. The writing reflected the certain condition in the time and place where the author lives, such as: the political, historical, and economical condition. As it is reflected in “The Color Purple”, Walker sought to confront the primary issue and problem that Black American women experience during her time. Watt in Supardi Damono (1979:3-4) discussed about the mutual relationship among the author, literature and the society. First, the social context of the author, namely the relationship between the positions of the author in relation to the reader including the social factors that are able to influence the author as a person. Second, literature as the picture of society. It showed how far the literary work can be considered as the picture of social condition. Third, the social functions of literary work show how far the analysis of literary work is valued, related to the social value and how far the literary work is seen as education for the society.

In analyzing the topic, the writers will concern to the second point only, namely literature as the picture of society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part explains about how the domestic violence was done by black men towards black American women. Slavery gave negative effect to black American people such as poverty. Because of poverty black American people have no good opportunities in getting education, job opportunities, living in healthy life. Poverty is the real contribution for domestic violence.

Domestic violence done by black American men, made black American women

unconsciously put their position under the superiority of male domination. They thought that it is a common thing if their men take a whole control of their life. And then violence to black American women became common view to see in the daily life. Besides, the black American women had no ability to fight back the male domination. Their brain had been brain washed by doctrine that women were just complementary “things” to support men’s needs. Montagu in her book “The Natural Superiority of Women”. (1999; 28) stated that: That’s why male domination in their culture at the time (like a tradition that women have to obey to their husband’s demand) also takes an important part in this “systematic” violence. This has made their men free to do anything with them. By violating them, black American men feel successful to show their domination. In other words, violence towards black American women has to be understood as a part of their life. Then, it’s like no days or black American women without violence. No doubt, many black American women have to suffer for years.

The writers classified domestic violence toward black American women in this novel into: violence in family, in getting education and in getting work, especially in two characters of the novel: Celie and Sofia and how they struggle to face their “unfair” lives.

The Domestic Violence toward Celie

The violence toward Celie divided into some aspects such as;

a. Physical Violence toward Celie in the Family

Black American women were always in their inferior position. This mind set had made women as victims of male domination for years. It could find these situations in “The Color Purple”.

At the beginning of the novel Celie was a young girl of fourteen; ignorant, and naive. She was living with her sister, Nettie, her mother, and her stepfather she called “Pa”. Her stepfather raped her after her mother refused to have a sexual relationship. Celie was forced to do the sexual relationship with her stepfather and she did not have courage to fight or to refuse him. It was because Celie was scared to him and if she refused, pa would hit her.

“Just say you gonna what your mammy wouldn’t. First, he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggles it around. Then, he grabbed hold my tities. Then he pushed his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He started to choke me, saying you better shut up git used to it.”

(Page:1-2).

Celie did not only get sexual abuse from her stepfather but also a physical violence. She had no strength to fight against this injustice. “He beat me today because he says I winked at boy in church, I may have not got something in my eye but I didn’t wink. I don’t even look at men” (Page:6).

Sharon Harley in her book “The Afro American Women Struggle and Image”. (1976: 5) said that Black American Women (in 1970s-1980s) lived in a tradition that after they got married, they had to live to serve their marriage must be understood as men’s right after the wedding. Because black American women know that after they got married, their husbands “owned” them in all terms, so obeying to their husband became a common thing for them. It is quite important for them to keep their family not to be separated.

After getting married with Mr._, This case also happened to Celie. Celie’s circumstance did not get better. She accepted a lot of physical violence from Mr._. When Mr._ beat Celie, he beat her like he beat his children and of course Celie could only be silent and accepted it.

“He beat me like he beat the children. He doesn’t never hardly beat them. He said, Celie get the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. (Page:23)

b. Psychological/Emotional Violence Towards Celie in Family

For young American women in 1970s-1980s, they never had plenty of time to spend as teenagers. Their common activity as a teenager was stolen from them. Their youth time was taken by unseen rule that they had to stay at home and do a lot of household duties with their mother. Sharon Harley in her book “The Afro American Struggles an Image” (1976:6), said that: “Young girl assisted their mother with household duties until their married.

This fact also happened to Celie. Almost her entire teenage life was spent by doing household works. “By time I get back from the well, the water be warm, by time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I get all children ready for school it be dinner time. Besides physical violence Celie also got mental violence in her marriage. Celie’s husband, Mr._, always asked Celie to do other thing when she was doing a household work. She had to do what Mr._ wanted although she was busy. “Celie, I hear Mr._ call Harpo” “I stick my head and my arm back in my old dress and

wipe the sweat and dirt off my face as best I can. I come to the door. Yes sir? I ast, and trip over the bottom. I was sweeping with when I first notice the wagon” (Page:47)

c. The Neglect toward Celie in Getting Education

According to Cooper in Sharon Harley’s book “The Afro American Women Struggles and Images” (1976:89-91), black women at the time (1970s-1980s), was placing their women in a second social class. They believed that women would not make any better condition by getting education. Women were better in doing household rather than going to school. For them (black American men), giving education to their women was considered as a threat to the male domination. Their opinion was: if all black women were still in stupidity, all black man can make women only depend on them. If they were successful with that, black women can easily be controlled. Finally, this condition made black women in second social class because of t their “obedience” to their men.

Celie was a poor, barely literate Southern black woman. It can be seen from the grammar and language which show that she was less educated. “You too dump to keep going to school, say pa, Nettie the clever one in this bunches”

Celie had been neglected in getting education. Her stepfather made Celie get out of school. Her stepfather made Celie get out of school. Her stepfather considered that Celie was too stupid to have education. “The first time I got big pa tool me out of school ... You too dump to keep going to school, say pa” (Page:10-11).

As the result of the neglect make Celie lived was that in stupidity that makes her unaware to fight her father and her stepfather. She could only think that she only depends to her husband.

d. Celie’s Struggles against Domestic Violence

In 1970s-1980s many black American women generally faced the fact that they had to struggle by themselves. This fact happens to Celie. At the beginning of the story, Celie had to pass her youth life with a bad experience. Her stepfather raped her and left her permanent- psychological trauma in her life. For this, Celie had no reason to fight back.

Being abandoned was another part of Celie’s marriage life. Mr. _, Celie’s husband, decided to make an affair with Shug Avery, a bar singer. Celie had known about this but as usual, she could not do anything.

But surprisingly, Celie and Shug Avery became friends. In fact, even though Celie and Shug Avery were two different women, Celie always got help from Shug Avery. Without Shug, Celie could not escape from Mr. __. Shug always listened to Celie's complaints and cared about her. That made Celie feel happy and comfortable with her. Shug helped Celie to learn about how to express her sense of caring for someone. She began to experience a real relationship with someone she

cared about. For the first time in her life, Celie truly loved someone besides her mother and sisters.

“My mama dies, I tell Shug. My sister Nettie runs away. Mr. __. come hit me to care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He is calm on top of me and fuck, even my head bandaged. Nobody ever loves me. (Page:117-118).

Slowly, Celie changed. She found someone who could stand with her in every condition. This gave her strength for facing her life. This progress must be underlined as a new beginning of Celie's struggle. She developed her bravery and her anger towards Mr. __, just to make herself sure about to fight Mr. __ from now on. Shug asked Celie to come with her to Memphis and to stay in her house.

“A man tries to be nice to you fly in his face, I curse you. I say; What that mean? He says; I say until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble. He laughs. Who you think you is? You can't curse nobody...Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say. Then I say, you better stop talking because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me” (Page:213)

After Celie released from Mr. __'s shadow, she began to develop her hobby in making pants. Eventually, she was good in making pants design, that people from all over Memphis started to order pants from her. Shug help Celie turn the work into business; turn the cried to pride.

“I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I put pants now in every color and size under the sun. Once us started making pants down home. I ain't be able stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me. (Page: 218-219)

Finally, Celie found her own way to be a strong and independent woman, who could not be inferior anymore. Celie found her freedom and happiness as a woman by making a struggle against her husband; against male domination in her life. She eventually found the meaning of life. “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time” (Page:222).

Domestic violence towards Sofia

The violence toward Sofia divided into some aspects such as;

a. Physical violence toward Sofia in family

In 1970's-1980 in marriage the relationship between black men and black American women is the one of love and trouble (good and bad). It means that even though a man loves a woman he still does violence towards his woman. Novelist Gayl Jones in Patricia Hill Collins's article "Sexual Politics and Black Women's Relationship" (1990:181-198), explain that: "the relationships between the men and the women dealing with are blues relationships. If the man angry, he can do violence to her women even though he loves that woman. This fact also happened to Sofia, Harpo's wife (Harpo was Celie's Stepson). Even though they love each other, Harpo still did violence to Sofia. When Sofia was a child, she experienced domestic violence from her father, her brother, her cousins, and her uncle.

After married to Harpo, she was also abused by her husband. It was because Harpo wanted Sofia treated the same as Celie who always obeyed his father, Mr. _ . Even though he loved her, he still abused her.

"You still bothering Sofia? I ast. She my wife, he says. That don't mean you got keep on bothering her, I say. Sofia loves you, she a good wife. Good for the children. And good looking. Hard working. God fearing and clean. I don't know what more you want. Harpo sniffle. I want her to do what I say. Like you do for Pa. Oh, Lord, I say. When Pa tells you to do something, you do it, he says. When he says no to, you don't do he say, he beat you". (Page; 65-66).

b. The Neglect towards Sofia

Sofia was neglected by her husband. Harpo never completed their family's needs such as providing food. Like other black American women Sofia had to work hard on domestic works. It is Important for her children to get some nutrition, and other stuffs; she had to work hard to complete the family needs. On the other hand, her husband never wants to help her. Thompson in his book "Sociology of the Black Experience" (1974; 108) said that: "Even when father is present in the home. It is likely that the mother will have the more secure job, the more clearly defined protective responsibilities and greater respect in the community. In such homes, the mother is

forced to develop a kind of self- sufficiency.”

c. Sofia’s struggles

Sofia was a strong girl. When Sofia was a child she experienced a domestic violence from her father, uncle and her brother. And after she married Harpo, she experienced bad treatment from her husband’s and she realize she realize she must struggle and must fight back because she did not want to be like her mother who suffered from her father, however she did not want to become a weak woman.

“They fighting like two men. Every piece of furniture they got is turned over. Every plate looks like it broke. The looking glass hang crooker, the curtains torn. The bed looks like the stuffing pulled out. They don’t notice. They fight. He tries to slap her. What he does that for? She reaches down and grand a piece of stove wood and whack him cross the eyes. He punches her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates. He rolls on the floor. He grabs her dress tail and pull. She stands there in her slip. She never blinks an eye he jumps up to put a hammer lock under her shim, she throws him over her back. He falls bam up gainst the stove”. (Page:39)

Whenever Harpo hit Sofia, she always fought back because she did not want to suffer from Harpo’s violence. Sofia realized that woman should not got bad treatment from man. Sofia said that even though she loved Harpo she would kill him if Harpo hurt her. “A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men. But I never thought I’d have to fight my own house. She let out her breath. I love Harpo, she says. God knows I do. But I’ll Kill him dead before I let him beat me” (Page:42)

Sofia refused to follow the expectations of the male domination. Finally, she decided to leave Harpo because she did not want to suffer anymore although she still loved Harpo. At this point Alice Walker wanted to show the readers about Sofia’s struggle toward male domination. “You gon let her go? I ast Harpo. He looks like only a fool could ast the question. He puffs back, she made up her mind to go, he says. How I’m gon stop her? Let her go on. He says, cutting his eyes at her sister wagons”. (Page:71)

Even though Sofia had a lot of suffering, she tried to wake up again and tried to be strong each day. After she finished working in Miss Millie house as a maid, Sofia worked for Celie. They ran the pant business well.

“Meanwhile, I hired Sofia to clerk in our store ... but pit Sofia in there to wait on colored cause they never had nobody in a store to treat’em nice. Sofia was good at selling stuff too because she acts like she doesn’t care if you buy or not. No skin off her nose/ and then if you decide to buy anyhow, well she might exchange a few pleasant words with you”. (Page:287-288)

CONCLUSION

By this article we can get the real picture of the society portrayed in the novel. The writers come to conclusion that in 1970s-1980s black American women had to face oppressions. They underwent oppressions by black men.

There were a lot of factors which cause the violence towards black women. Poverty gave negative effect to black American people. Many of black Americans did not have good opportunity to develop their skill and their education was also neglected. Many of black men became frustrated and they did not know how to protect and how to be responsible to their family and their women. This transformed them into violence acts against the people closest to them, especially to their women. The other reason was male domination culture. Many of the black men had their own perceptives about women. Women had to obey their husband’s demand. Some of the black men felt that they could not be a true man if they did not dominate and take control of their women.

The social condition of black women in the South during 1970s-1980s, was portrayed also in the novel. Women in the novel got domestic violence from their men. First character was Celie who had been abused by her stepfather. She became an incest victim because of her mother’s sickness. And after her marriage, she also got domestic violence from her husband; she underwent a physical violence, mental/emotional violence and neglect. Second character was Sofia who had to fight her husband Harpo. He tried to assert himself as a dominant male. He wanted her wife always obeyed him, and she must face with racism from the Mrs. Millie and her husband.

Women in this novel had to stand up against the unfair treatment they received from the hands of men. To get out from this problem they rely on God to ask strength and protection to God, they must be creative to protect themselves Sofia work together in making pants. This is proven that they can be strong and became independent women.

REFERENCES

- Booker, Rolanda. (2010). *Struggle of the Black Women*. Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute. From <http://ww.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1997/3/97.03.01.x.html>. (Accessed on 5 July 2010).
- Collins, Patricia. (1990). *Sexual Politics and Black Women's Relationship*. New York; Routledge, 1990), p. 181-198. (Online) From <http://www.routledge-ny.com>. (Accessed on 21 Feb 2002).
- Djoko, Supardi Damono, (1979). *Sosiologi Sastra: Sebuah Pengantar Ringkas*. Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa Departement Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1979. Encyclopedia Article, 'Incest: Fact Discussion'.
- Harley Sharon and Terborg- Penn, Rosalyn. (1978). "The Afro-American Woman: Hornby. (1995). New York: Oxford Press Inc.
- Kerber, Linda and De hart, Jane. (1982). "Women's America". Oxford University Press.
- Leslie, Gerald. (1982). "The Family InSocial Context". Oxford University Press.
- Liubana, M. M. J., Siahaan, D. G., & Neno, H. (2021). Folktales Genre in Border Area of Indonesia-Timor Leste: A Study of Oral Literature. *The International Journal of Language and Cultural (TIJOLAC)*, 3(2), 86-96.
- Montagu, Ashlley. (1999). "The Natural Superiority of Women. Rowman.Altamira.
- Raatma, Lucia. (2010). *The Biography of Oprah Winfrey Ferguson* Publishing Company.
- Siahaan, D. (2020). Analisis Pendekatan Struktural dan Nilai-Nilai Budaya pada Novel Carlos Karya Erin Cipta. *Jubindo: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 5(2), 98-110. <https://doi.org/10.32938/jbi.v5i2.575>
- Struggles and Images", Black Classic Press.
- Thompson, Daniel. (1974). *Sociology of Black Experience*. Greenwood Press.
- Walker, Alice. (1982). *The Color Purple*. New York: Pocket Books.