

# GENDER OPPRESSION: A STUDY ON *GIRL, WOMAN, OTHER* BY BERNARDINE EVARISTO

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender oppression has become a world problem for a long time. It usually happens to women and girls, especially to them who are in vulnerable positions due to their lack of financial and educational capabilities, their status as immigrants, people of color, and dependent on the oppressors. *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo depicts the stories of 12 female characters who are descendants of black immigrant in United Kingdom. The author tells how the immigrants managed to survive in the environment where women and people of color are being oppressed.

Based on library research, any scientific study or research on this novel has not been conducted yet. In doing the study on the novel, the writer used gender oppression theory. Gender oppression is the act of abuse and violence, patterns of control and power, and systems of abuse and violence committed by group or individual against women and girls because of their gender [1]. Gender oppression is divided into three categories, namely: (1) Sexual Harassment, (2) Sexual Abuse/Assault, and (3) Intimate Partner Abuse or Domestic Violence [1]. Victims' responses towards gender oppression are divided into two classification. Resistance happens when the victims are challenging the norm and hierarchies by doing any action that can overthrow the oppression. On the other hand, submission occurs when the victims admit defeat and surrender to the oppressions [2].

## METHOD

The source of data in this study is *Girl, Woman, Other* a novel by Bernardine Evaristo. The writer uses a qualitative method by applying close reading and interpretation techniques to gain a complete understanding of the data. Interpretation is exploring the meaning of the text by drawing our own understanding, background, and observations while

responding to the literary work [3]. This particular respond can be given by the readers when they are reading the text. Thus, in analyzing this novel, the writer read it carefully and repeatedly while taking notes on gender oppression and responses. The writer carefully questions the data by doing silent observation technique until all data are deeply and precisely understood. Data related to gender oppressions and responses are explored through words, phrases, and sentences. The data then analyzed by using gender oppression and respond theory mentioned previously. This sequences are repeated carefully and critically to solve the research problems perfectly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The forms of gender oppressions found in the novel are sexual harassment (sexual looks or gestures, sexual comments, sexual jokes, and unwanted request for dates or sexual relations), sexual abuse or assault and intimate partner abuse. In most cases, gender oppressions happened in the novel due to the lack of victims' ability to fight back and their vulnerability which are exploited by the oppressors. All of the data for this research are taken from the novel by Bernardine Evaristo [4].

Gender oppression in form of sexual harassment can be seen from Bummi's case. She is one of the main characters of this novel who received an act of sexual looks and gesture from the leader of a church she attends, Bishop Obi.

Bishop Aderami Obi of her church who started to behave differently towards her after Augustine died who began to visually gorge upon her body whenever he saw her, like she was the first course, main course and dessert merged into one when he talked, it was to the bountiful breasts Augustine had worshipped when he put a reassuring arm around her after

church, he slid his hand lightly down her back, sweeping it over her buttocks so slyly nobody else would notice when she tried to move out of his way, he pressed closer to her (115)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that he has practiced the act of sexual looks in the way he stares at Bummi's body as if her body was a three course appetizing meals. He gazes through her body with an obvious sexual intention. The other sexual harassment done by Obi is putting his arms around her body and subtly touches her buttocks when no one notice it. Sexual gesture also practiced by the Bishop, he presses his hip close to her body to emulate sexual activities. By doing those things he has done an unwanted sexual caresses and gestures which can be categorized as an act of gender oppression.

Gender oppression in form of sexual abuse or assault is taken from Nzinga's case. She is one of the characters in the novel who received sexual abuse from her mother's boyfriend. He takes her virginity when she was alone at home doing her homework. There'd been earlier signs, inappropriate touching and comments she'd been too young to decipher and later, too vulnerable to ward off she had her virginity stolen while her mother and brother were out shopping and she'd stayed in to do her homework (55)

From the quotation, it can be seen that this incident happens when Nzinga reaches her puberty. The average age for girls to begin puberty is 11 years old. The age when most of girls do not have an understanding of any sexual related issue. This vulnerability side of Nzinga is utilized by the abuser. He sexually assaults a young girl who he rapes when nobody is at home to protect her. Any sexual action aimed at an underage person is considered as sexual abuse or assault. Thus, by taking her virginity forcefully, he has committed a crime of sexual assault to her. He exploited her inability to fight back or even give a consent about it in order to fulfill his disgusting desires.

The next data is from Helen who received an act of gender oppression in form of intimate partner abuse from her husband Kwabena.

Mum worked eight hours a day in paid employment, raised four children, maintained the home, made sure the Patriarch's dinner was on the table every night and his shirts were ironed every morning meanwhile, he was off saving the world his one domestic duty was to

bring home the meat for Sunday lunch from the butcher's.... (14)

Kwabena's action and decision to put such a burden on her wife can be considered as an act of financial abuse which happens in an intimate relationship. He exploits his wife to provide financial income, while he is out there doing his political things. It may seem normal for him to think that as a wife it is her responsibility to help and serve her husband, but with this attitude he has lived in their house without working and helping too much with the household task. Those facts fall under the financial abuse in intimate partner relationship category.

There are two victims' responses found in the novel, one is when they do anything to fight back and free themselves from the oppressions and oppressors, also known as resistance. The second one is when the victims chose to surrender to the treatments and continue to have lives under the negative treatments which is categorized as submission.

The example of resistance can be seen from Nzinga's case earlier. She manages to tell her teacher about what has happened to her and get out from the oppression.

The next morning she managed to tell a teacher at school after she'd burst into tears... a social worker was assigned, she and her brother were fostered out to a family who cared for them (56).

It can be seen from the quotation above the act of resistance form Nzinga. She managed to tell her teacher about the incident of sexual assault. It is considered as a resistance act because by telling someone about what happens to her, she practically has done something to overthrow the oppression and prevent it from happening again. She is able to get out from the toxic household where she is not their priority to a safer place where she can continue to live peacefully far away from the abuser.

The data of submission can be seen from Helen's case. She is exploited by her husband as the only source of family income on top of doing all the housework and raising their children.

I can tell Mum's unfulfilled now we've all left home because she spends her time either cleaning it or redecorating it she's never complained about her lot, or argued with him, a sure sign she's oppressed (14)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Helen accepts her destiny as a subordinate to her husband. She never argues with him even though her daughter

can see the sign of unhappiness from her. She just surrenders and admits defeat to the oppression. She lets the oppression continue to happen by not doing anything to change or overthrow it.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The study reveals that all cases of gender oppression are done by male characters except one. Nzinga is the only female oppressor who committed an act of intimate partner abuse to her female partner. The perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual abuse or assault are all men. In term of an intimate partner abuse, there are no differences between men and a woman in committing it. The underage victims only received an oppression in form of sexual abuse or assault, while the older victims, especially those who are in relationships are prone to receive physical, verbal, and financial abuse. In some cases, financial condition is the main reason why the oppression happened to the victims. The perpetrator used their higher position and wealth to oppress the victims. In other cases the perpetrator use their strength advantage to oppressed their victims by using force.

The victim's responses towards the oppression are resistance and submission. The underage victims did not know how to handle the oppression due to their lack of understanding of sexual matters. One of them choose to keep silent while the other only confessed to her teacher after being asked firmly. Women with high educational and strong financial capability mostly chose to be separated from the oppressor because they are capable to live by themselves. In contrast, those who do not have adequate education and financial capability chose to submit to the oppression or resist by committing suicide.

For future research, the writer suggest to explore more about racism, feminism and psychological aspect of this novel in order to provide more knowledge and understanding for the readers.

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