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## Violence as a Form of Oppression towards Black Women in Octavia E Butler's Kindred

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### Abstract

*This article analyzes violence as a form of oppression towards black women in Octavia E Butler's novel entitled Kindred. The primary source is the novel Kindred by Octavia Butler while the secondary sources used are books and articles. The aim of this research to identify violence as the form of oppression experienced by the black women represented by the black female character, Edana (Dana), in Kindred. In revealing this issue, the writers refer to Black Feminism Theory proposed by Patricia Hill Collins. The results of the study show that the black women experience violence as the form of oppression caused by racial and gender backgrounds. In this sense, black women face the regulations of black women's bodies as the physical violence. Furthermore, the physical violence leads to psychological violence. The study also shows that both white men and white women can be the perpetrators of violence towards black women.*

**Keywords:** *violence, oppression, race, gender, black feminism*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis kekerasan sebagai bentuk penindasan terhadap perempuan kulit hitam dalam novel Octavia E Butler yang berjudul Kindred. Penyajian data melalui sumber primer yaitu novel *Kindred* karya Octavia Butler, dan sumber sekunder yang digunakan adalah buku, jurnal, dan artikel. Kekerasan sebagai bentuk penindasan terhadap perempuan kulit hitam direpresentasikan oleh tokoh utama yaitu Edana (Dana). Persoalan penindasan terhadap perempuan kulit hitam ini dianalisis dengan mengacu kepada teori *Black Feminism* oleh Patricia Hill Collins. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa perempuan kulit hitam mengalami kekerasan sebagai bentuk penindasan yang disebabkan oleh latar belakang ras dan gender. Dalam hal ini, perempuan kulit hitam mengalami pengaturan tubuh sebagai bentuk kekerasan fisik yang berdampak pada kekerasan psikis. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan penindasan terhadap perempuan kulit hitam tidak hanya dilakukan oleh laki-laki kulit putih tetapi juga oleh perempuan kulit putih.

**Kata Kunci:** kekerasan, penindasan, ras, gender, feminisme kulit hitam

## Introduction

Being a woman in this era are better off than in the past. In this 21st century, women in most nations have the rights to get a good education, to get a job, to build a career, and have other legal rights which makes women nowadays get many opportunities to express themselves. They can be what they want and do what they want even after marriage and having children. However, if we look back to the past, women were left behind compared to today. Women were simply expected to get married and have children. The woman was seen merely as a servant to her husband and produced children. Only middle to upper-class women was allowed to take education. They stayed at home to take care of the home, looked after the children, and did the housework, while their husbands worked and brought in the wage (Wibowo, 2012).

Women in the past faced more pressure, especially if they were the minority and lived in the majority. For instance, black women lived in the white community. Many black women still get racism and discrimination in society today. Black women faced violence as form of oppression couple times more than white women. They are not only faced with white men but also with white women. (Rose and Chanthiramathi, 2019). This issue has been highlighted in literary works such as the works of Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Many of their works concern about violence as the form of oppression towards black woman in white society. For instance, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, shows the issues of racism, violence, and oppression of black woman in society. How black women (even in their adolescence) get abused, treated as mere an object by men of every stratum (Harsh, 2020). Meanwhile, in Maya Angelou's *Memoir: A Letter To My Daughter*, the intersection of race and gender is depicted through the beauty standard in society which remain of whites' physical characteristics. Having tan skin tone, curled hair, and a curvy body shape as black woman is not consider perfect for beauty. Therefore, it impacts to black woman's self-acceptance and confidence (Dominilla, Kuncara &Valiantien, 2020).

As a way to fight for rights and equality, Black women make a movement called Black Feminist. A movement is a form of protest against the white feminist movement where its existence does not stand for all women, particularly black women (Collin, 2000). Black feminism is concerned with the discrimination, sexism, oppression, sexual

harassment, racism, and homophobia that affect African-American women in daily life (Tillet, 2005). Therefore Black feminism is appropriate in examining African American women's life.

Octavia Butler is one of African-American writers who depicts the life of African-American women in her novels. She is a phenomenal female writer as she was a pioneering and the first African American writer of science fiction. Most of her works are concerned with women's rights, injustice towards African American women, the environment, and political disparity (Rothberg, 2022). One of her famous works, *Kindred* (1979) is a novel about Edana (Dana), a black woman who had time travel to antebellum Maryland in the earlier 1800s. At that time, slavery existed and the black women faced oppression. Her time traveler makes her experience the suffering of African-American women during the slavery time.

Gender inequality, racism, sexism, and oppression towards black women are the most highlighted issues in black feminism analysis. Octavia E Butler represents the relation between race and gender under the situation of slavery in America in her work, *Kindred*. It shows how black women experience violence as a form of oppression during the slavery era. Thus, the writers scrutinize how the issue of violence as a form of oppression depicted in Octavia E Butler's *Kindred*.

This article discusses the problem of violence as the form of oppression towards black women described by Octavia Butler in her novel entitled *Kindred*. To support the research, the writers use the theory of violence as a form of oppression and Black Feminist by a Feminist Theorist named Patricia Hill Collins. Young (1990) states that violence is one of five types of oppression. Apart from other four types of oppression (exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and powerlessness), violence is the most prevalent oppression experienced by many groups in America. Moreover, the victims of violence are the women, the Blacks, the Asians, Arabs, and LGBTQ community. They experience violence physically and psychologically. Damage, fear, humiliation, rape, and destruction of property are the examples of violence.

With regards to the violence experience by the black women, many black feminist scholars have discussed this issue. Patricia Hill Collins is one of the scholars who

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discusses race, class, and gender. As an American Academic, she is a social theorist known for her sociological approaches to feminism, black liberation, and nationalism. Collins (2000, 2023). evaluates black feminist theory to shape black women's awareness of facing oppression. In her book entitled "Black Feminist Thought" Collins (2000) explains the issue of "Women Oppression" from a black feminist point of view. Collins argues that black women are uniquely placed because they stand at the focal point where two very powerful and prevalent systems of oppression come together with race and gender.

The issues of violence as a form oppression faced by black women will be analyzed in this study. Through the lens of black feminism, this study scrutinizes how the black women experience violence as depicted in *Kindred*.

Some scholars have discussed various issues related to the black people and the black women found in *Kindred* and other works. Arige (2019) in *The Journey of Return: Reviving The Past of Return: Reviving the Past to Redefine the Present* examines the reconstruction of African American identity, culture, and legacy through a story laced with the lingering memory of slavery in *Kindred*. This study shows how injustice and trauma can leave scars for generations in the future. Furthermore, Priyadi & Effendi (2022) discuss the issue of racism in the novel *Kindred*. The results demonstrate the act of racism experienced by the main character. The act of racism is considered as a form of oppression happens due to the background of the main character as black woman.

Another study entitled "The Oppression Towards Black Female Characters as Maid in *The Help* Novel by Kathryn Socket" (Dominilla, Kuncara,&Valiantien, 2020) uncover that black women are not only face oppression through their gender, but also through the race and class. Similarly, Capagain (2020) in *African American Woman, Racism and Triple Oppression* finds that black women face triple oppression which are sexism, racism and classicism. Lasty, Pertiwi and Rosiandi (2022) in the study entitled "Black Feminism Reflected through The Narrator's Responses of Women Oppression in Maya Angelou's *Memoir: A Letter To My Daughter*" emphasize the different forms of black women oppression. This study finds black women oppression identified through the control of black women's images and regulation of black women's bodies. These previous studies correlate with the writers' study. Each study supports the writers to get better

understanding regarding relevant knowledge in conducting this research particularly on the issue of oppression of black women.

### **Method**

The method used in this study is library research. The primary source used is the novel *Kindred* by Octavia Butler, and the secondary sources used are books, journals, and articles. In conducting the study, the writers collect the data from the primary source, select the data, and analyze the data. Secondary sources have supported the writers in collecting relevant information related to the writers' analysis.

### **Result and Discussion**

Most African American women were brought to the United States to work as slaves. They live under pressure and experience oppression. Oppression refers to any unfair circumstance in which one group consistently and repeatedly denies another group access to social resources (Collin, 2000 p 4). The oppression of violence towards black women reflected in *Kindred*. In this sense, the regulation of Black women's bodies leads to the arrangement that allows black women's bodies to become objects and the cause of oppression of violence.

Violence is an act carried out by individuals or groups to oppress the weak so that they continue to suffer (Mikołajczuk, 2020). There are two kind of violence: physical violence and psychological violence. Mikołajczuk (2020) defines physical violence as "an intentional act causing body injury, inflicting pain, or a real threat of causing body injury such as kicking, choking, pushing, slapping in the face, using firearms and sharp instrument"(112). Meanwhile, physical violence is "all the acts that aim at depriving the victim of self-confidence to make them feel lonely and dependent on the aggressor only, for example: coercing, threatening, humiliating, intimidating, demeaning, insulting, embarrassing, etc" (107).

Black women experience both physical and psychological violence in *Kindred*. They are seen as weak and inferior by white men. Most black women in *Kindred* work as

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slaves. They work in the plantations of the white family. However, black women live under pressure with many rules and they often get violent. As seen in *Kindred*:

"He punched the woman in the face exactly as her husband had been punched earlier. The woman collapsed to the ground. The patroller rode away and left her there" (Butler, 1979, p. 37)

This indicates the form of physical violence perpetrated by white males against black women. It shows the brutal persecution of black women. Physical violence is also experienced by the main character, Edana Franklin. Edana (Dana) is "dragged and pushed hard out of the room" (107) by the owner of the house just because Edana (Dana) didn't listen to him. She is even slammed with a whip (a tool for hitting animals) as the punishment for not obeying the rule.

Moreover, it is not only white man treating black woman harshly. White woman also treats black woman harshly. This happen because as white, they feel superior over black. They considered black woman is lowered than them and seen black woman is different with them. As reflected through character Margaret. Margaret is Tom Weylin's wife, a white woman who is arrogant and has bad temperament. She never appreciates her maids' hard work, always treated them rudely and likes to demean them. Margaret ever 'slapped'-Edana (Dana) 'across the face (93)' and shouted her as 'You filthy black whore! (93)' just because Edana (Dana) makes small mistake and read a book. Margaret hates to see slaves or maids reading book because she does not want them being educated.

Another form physical violence in *Kindred* is rape. Rape and abuse often happen to black women at that time. As slaves, they do not only work for the Whites but also being their sexual objects. Black women at that time were often forced to satisfy white men's sexual desires. They don't care whether they are underage or already married. This is reflected in the following sentences:

"He reached out and ripped my blouse open. Buttons flew everywhere, but I didn't move. I understood what the man was going to do. He was going to display some stupidity of his own. He tore loose my bra and I prepared to move." (Kindred, 1979, p 42)

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In this scene, Edana (Dana) is almost raped by a patrol, a white man whose job is to watch over the slaves at home. This incident occurred twice during Edana's (Dana) time travel to the antebellum South. The attempt of rape occurs once again at the end of the story, where Rufus (Weylin's son, a white man) tries to rape Edana (Dana) to express his longing desire for Alice, his childhood's friend. But luckily, Edana (Dana) is able to save herself.

Rape is also committed by Rufus when he interacts with Alice, a free black woman who is married to an enslaved man. This means she is a free slave woman who married to a slave man. But it turns out that Rufus has feelings for Alice (who is his childhood's friend), so he becomes obsessed with getting Alice. He also does various ways to make Alice belongs to him. He rapes her, as in the sentence:

"You raped a woman—or tried to—and her husband beat you up," He looked away guiltily. "Rufe, did you manage to rape that girl?"

"Why would you do such a thing? She used to be your friend." "When we were little, we were friends," he said softly. "We grew up" She got so she'd rather have a buck nigger than me!" (Kindred, 1979, p. 122-123)

Here, Rufus admits the rape. He feels jealous of Alice's husband and wants Alice to be his. This show how heavy the pressure and oppression experienced by black women. The experiences faced by black women above are the effects of white men's domination of black women. White men consider black women's position is lower than theirs so white men treat black women arbitrarily. This defines the regulation of black women body's as the object of white men's sexual desire. In addition, the regulation of black women's bodies is considered as a tool for white people to maintain their upper position (Collins, 2002). So they are still being superior and powerful over black women.

Apart from physical violence, black women also experience psychological violence. Psychological violence is violence that is done to hurt someone's mind or mental. So that it can cause trauma and damage humans mentally. Like what Edana (Dana) experienced when she helps Rufus from Weylin's threat:

"What the devil's going on here?" A man's voice, angry and demanding. I turned, started, and found myself looking down the barrel of the longest rifle

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I've ever seen. I heard a metallic click, and I froze, thinking I was going to be shot for saving the boy's life. I was going to die. (Kindred, 1979, p. 14)

Weylin's actions in this sentence made Edana (Dana) feel threatened. Edana (Dana) was shocked and very scared by Weylin's actions, who rebuked and held out a knife as if she was about to be shot. This traumatized Edana (Dana), so that every time she returned to the antebellum she tried to avoid Weylin. As a man and white, Weylin is superior and has powered over Edana (Dana) because she is a woman and black. Black woman in America during this time has no right to their life. They were supposed to be slaves and maids and lived under pressure from white people (Didier, Nathalie, Belmonde, 2020).

The act of violence towards black woman shows how whites easily express their anger towards blacks. They dehumanized black women by harshly treating them. The way white people punch, hit, scream, and other violent acts defines the regulation of black women's bodies as the object of emotion impingement.

## Conclusion

The form of violence as a form of oppression towards black women reflected in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* are physical and psychological violence. The type of physical violence experienced by black character is raped, punching, slapping in the face, and slamming with a whip. Meanwhile, the type of psychological violence experienced by black character is threatening, insulting, and screaming. The violence towards black women in *Kindred* is experienced by Edana (Dana) and Alice. They face a regulation of their bodies perpetuated by the white people. In *Kindred*, black women are treated as slave and live under pressure from white rule. The black women experience couple times of physical and psychological violence committed by the white people which give them trauma and fears.



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