

**INTERSECTIONALITY IN
DANAI GURIRA'S PLAY *ECLIPSED* (2016)**

THESIS

**Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
to Obtain Strata One (S1) Degree in English Department**



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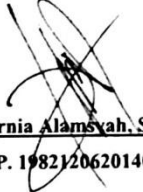
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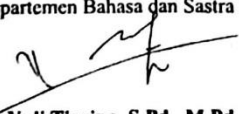
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ABSTRACT

Pramudyawardhani, Sitoresmi. (2025). *Intersectionality in Danai Gurira's Play Eclipsed (2016)*. Undergraduate Thesis. Padang: English Department. Faculty of Languages and Arts. Universitas Negeri Padang.

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Women are shaped by social structures like the patriarchal system, which creates expectations and limitations. They struggle for freedom and equality, especially in conflict zones where women's bodies are used as battlefields. Identity categories like class, race, and age increase the vulnerability to oppression. This study is an analysis of the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira that is set in the Second Liberian Civil War, exploring on the intersectional identities of the characters and how they show resilience in facing oppressions caused by the intersecting identities. The analysis uses Feminist concept by bell hooks and Intersectionality by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, which emphasizes how overlapping identities and systems of power—such as patriarchy, racism, and classism—create layered forms of oppression. Using descriptive-qualitative method, this study identifies four intersecting identities that affect to layered forms of oppression. In response, the characters show resilience in three types; conscious resistance, action resistance, and sisterhood, which serve as both survival strategies and acts of agency.

Keywords: Feminism, Intersectionality, Identity, Oppression, Resilience, Resistance

ABSTRAK

Pramudyawardhani, Sitoresmi. (2025). *Intersectionality in Danai Gurira's Play Eclipsed (2016)*. Skripsi. Padang: Program Studi Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris. Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni. Universitas Negeri Padang.

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Perempuan dibentuk oleh struktur sosial seperti sistem patriarki, yang menciptakan ekspektasi dan batasan. Mereka berjuang untuk kebebasan dan kesetaraan, terutama di zona konflik di mana tubuh perempuan digunakan sebagai medan perang. Kategori identitas seperti kelas, ras, dan usia meningkatkan kerentanan terhadap penindasan. Studi ini merupakan analisis dari drama *Eclipsed* (2016) oleh Danai Gurira yang berlatar di Second Liberian Civil War, mengeksplorasi identitas interseksional para karakter dan bagaimana mereka menunjukkan ketahanan dalam menghadapi penindasan yang disebabkan oleh identitas yang saling bersinggungan. Analisis ini menggunakan konsep Feminis oleh bell hooks dan Intersectionality oleh Patricia Hill Collins dan Sirma Bilge, yang menekankan bagaimana identitas dan sistem kekuasaan yang tumpang tindih—seperti patriarki, rasisme, dan klasisme—menciptakan bentuk-bentuk penindasan yang berlapis. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif, studi ini mengidentifikasi empat identitas yang saling bersinggungan yang memengaruhi bentuk-bentuk penindasan yang berlapis. Sebagai respon, para karakter menunjukkan ketahanan dalam tiga jenis; perlawanan sadar, perlawanan tindakan, dan persaudaraan perempuan, yang berfungsi sebagai strategi bertahan hidup dan tindakan agensi.

Keywords: Feminisme, Intersectionality, Identitas, Penindasan, Resiliensi, Perlawanan

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Women are not merely defined biologically but are also shaped by the social structures that dictate what it means to be women. These structures, such as the patriarchal system, create expectations and limitations on women while they continuously engage in struggles for freedom and equality. Their challenges become worse in conflict zones, where women's bodies are used as the "battleground". Components of identity such as class, race, and age increase their vulnerability to oppression and exploitation, as these identities intersect to create layered forms of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020). For example, a woman might face discrimination not just because she's a woman, but also because she is poor, Black, and young or old. This complexity becomes even more evident as they navigate both the external challenges and the resilience they make as responses. Women face diverse challenges, especially in a conflict environment that lacks stability.

These challenges can be seen in the Liberian Civil War, which is a chronic conflict that happened over two brutal civil wars from 1989-2003 in Liberia. The conflict originated from the instability caused by the First Liberian Civil War (1989-1997), where rebel groups that were led by people like Charles Taylor, aimed for power in the country (Gbowee, 2011). After Taylor's winning in the presidential election in 1997, the Second Civil War happened due to several

groups who were against his government and resulted in extensive violence, displacement, and even massacre.

The roles of women in the conflict were complex and diverse. Many women were victims of violence and oppression, women who participated in the war as fighters, wives of rebel soldiers, and peacebuilders. Rape and other forms of gender-based violence were widespread. Women were often abducted by rebel forces and forced into marriages or made to serve as *bush wives* (women are taken and forced to be spouses of soldiers).

At the same time, women also held critical roles in the process of making peace. Led by Leymah Gbowee, the formation of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace is a beginning movement that united women (Gbowee, 2011). It was a significant point in bringing the war to an end. It came to an end by the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in 2003.

These women's experiences, both as victims and agents of change, are illustrated in the play *Eclipsed*, which is set in the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. The characters struggle with their own agency and the oppressive structures around them. Through the lives of its characters, the play explores a topic of how intersecting identities—such as gender, class, age and race—shape individuals' experiences of systemic oppression and ways for resilience. This study utilizes intersectionality to explore how oppression and resilience exist in their lives.

The playwright, Danai Gurira, is a Zimbabwean-American playwright and actress. She has dedicated her career to telling the stories of African women. Her dual cultural identity influences her storytelling. She suggests that people need to

pay more attention to African women who tend to be ignored in the global community (PublicTheaterNY interview, 2015).

Danai Gurira wants to show the ideas of strong women through her plays and this commitment can be seen in plays like *The Convert*, *Familiar*, and *Eclipsed*. In an interview released by *PublicTheaterNY* in 2015, she explained that she was inspired to write *Eclipsed* after she saw a photograph of women holding rifle AK-47s. She decided to explore more about the portrayal of African women most people never see. She studied what was happening and interviewed some women who were present in the conflict. Therefore, the play can be said to depict the reality of the conflict. She wanted to portray the lives of African women in war zones in a way that challenges stereotypes of victimhood and highlights their agency and strength.

About the title, she explained in the interview, it is about amazing women with potential but they get eclipsed, which means that there is something that blocks them. However, through the title itself, there is hope that the blockage is temporary and the women can stand and do what they have been dreaming.

The play begins in a camp during the Second Liberian Civil War, 2003, where three women—Helena, Bessie, and The Girl—live under the control of a Commanding Officer (CO) of a rebel group against the current government. The women are being numbered instead of being called by their own names. The Girl is a 15 years old newcomer, who then struggles between staying in the camp and seeking freedom.

Maima escaped from being a bush wife. She decided to join as a fighter in a rebel group. She invites The Girl to join her. The Girl is confused between the desire to be out of the sexual slaves and wanting to join Maima, or just staying in the camp. She wants to do something with her life instead of being stuck in the camp. She decided to join Maima, but then got surprised by the job she got, in which she must “deliver” women and young girls to the soldiers to do sexual activity.

Rita is a member of the Liberian Women’s Initiative for Peace. Driven by the pain of losing her own daughter, she works to build peace in the conflicted country while also taking her chance to help other women. She sees no good in the ongoing conflict but destruction. Rita becomes a light of hope for Helena, Bessie, and The Girl, teaching them not only to survive but to thrive beyond the war’s grip. She helps Helena realize that her worth extends far beyond being a servant to the CO; she is a person with her own name, not merely a number.

As the conflict begins to end, Rita encourages the women to leave the camp and pursue their dreams. She inspires the women to reclaim their futures and take the first steps toward a new life. However, Bessie and Maima have their own desires. Bessie believes that she should stay with the CO because she has their baby, while Maima thinks that the conflict is not done yet and she cannot leave the battlefield. In the end, the women have their own way to survive in the aftermath of the conflict.

Quoting from *Toward Freedom* (2021), Danai Gurira brings these stories of women and girls in war and invites audiences to see the lives of women and

girls who are subjected to repetitive rape, deprivation of food and freedom, by not showing them as flailing victims but instead as dynamic women and girls, in dangerous circumstances. The play provokes the empathy that is significant for social justice.

1.2. FOCUS OF THE PROBLEM

This research focuses on Danai Gurira's play *Eclipsed* (2016), which examines the intersectional identities that affect to the characters' layered forms of oppression and how the characters show resilience in facing oppressions.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the background, this research seeks to answer these questions:

1. What intersectional identities affect to the characters' layered forms of oppression in the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira?
2. How do the characters show resilience in facing oppressions in the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira?

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purposes of this research are:

1. To analyze the intersectional identities that affect to the characters' layered forms of oppression in the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira.
2. To examine how the characters show resilience in facing oppressions in the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1. CONCLUSION

From the play *Eclipsed* (2016) by Danai Gurira, it can be concluded that women face many struggles in life, especially for freedom and equality. Women face oppression and exploitation yet have to survive the system by internal resilience or external resistance. In conflict zones, women's bodies are vulnerable and become the "battleground".

The results of this research shows that women in the play face layered forms of oppression. They face gender-based oppression, forced to serve men, and being ranked and numbered only. They are limited and denied from knowledge and information, causing them "blind" from what is really happening and to not aware of their condition. They face oppression and exploitation since they were children and teenagers; have to navigate their lives within an oppressive system, an innocent child has to deal with sexual servitude and adult roles. As their struggles in their own community seem never end, they wait for years to really receive aid and help, and have to "beg" for intervention. However, besides being oppressed, the women find their own strategies of resilience; they resist internally and show resistance with real actions. Sisterhood also grows connection among the women; a woman influences another to reclaim and take over their identities and bodies.

There are layered forms of oppression affected by the intersecting among identities and power. Almost impossible to see which is the first, second, or third

layer, but it is a fact that they are all happening at the same time. Besides identities intersecting with each other and with the dominant power contributing to the layered forms of oppression, it also leads to how people navigate their lives. They learn how to survive and to adapt to the context of the environment they are in. Humans are becoming from one identity to other identities as they are growing.

These struggles highlight that human experiences are diverse and layered. One thing happens, and then comes one new struggle. Women in the play are not merely victims, but represent the journey of life; facing struggles, aware of it, learning and reclaiming one's identity, and then transforming and healing.

5.2. SUGGESTION

Based on Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge's framework of intersectionality, which identifies eight identities, or more, this research has highlighted four key identities that intersect and create the complicated experiences of the characters. Therefore, it opens a bigger discussion of the play as it offers a bigger field of exploration, particularly regarding struggles of women facing systemic oppression. This research also opens a deeper discussion about long lasting emotional as the consequences of war.

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