

**Two Modes of Domestic Oppression**  
**In Elizabeth Strout's Novel *Olive Kitteridge***

*Submitted as a partial fulfillment of the requirement to obtain  
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**PAPER**



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## ABSTRAK

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Makalah ini merupakan analisis novel *Olive Kitteridge* (2008) karya Elizabeth Strout. Permasalahan yang dibahas dalam analisis ini adalah bentuk tekanan-tekanan pada perempuan yang terjadi di ranah domestik. Penganalisaan dilakukan dengan metode *context-based interpretation* dimana unsur-unsur luar teks memberikan kontribusi dalam pengungkapan makna dan *text-based-interpretation* melalui elemen karakter, plot (konflik) dan setting. Tujuan penganalisaan ini ialah untuk memperlihatkan sejauh mana novel *Olive Kitteridge* memperlihatkan dua jenis tekanan pada perempuan yang terjadi di ranah domestik dan bagaimana karakter, plot dan seting (*fictional devices*) mendukung dalam penggalan makna. Penganalisaan novel ini juga dilakukan dengan mengaplikasikan *feminist literary theory* tentang *power* dan *oppression* untuk membongkar dua jenis tekanan pada perempuan anggota keluarga di dalam novel. Dari penganalisaan ditemukan bahwa ada dua jenis tekanan pada perempuan di ranah domestik. Yang pertama tekanan secara mental yang terbagi kedalam tiga jenis yaitu *name calling*, *blaming* dan *threatening*. Selanjutnya tekanan yang kedua secara fisik. Penindasan secara fisik termasuk memukul, menendang, menampar, mendorong dan segala jenis kontak yang berakibat luka-luka pada fisik perempuan. Pelaku tekanan terhadap perempuan di ranah domestic adalah laki-laki.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Human is a social creature that cannot live independently. They need to live in a group or a community. One of the human groups is a family. In Sociology Dictionary (2011), family is defined as a group of people which its smallest part consist of husband, wife and children. It is affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence that share living exclusively. There are two kinds of family, nuclear family which is a group consisting of a father, mother and Children and extended family which has larger scope. Both in nuclear and extended family, each member has the same rights and obligations.

Furthermore as a group, a family needs a leader. It needs someone who can rule the group activity. But as a family exists in a world which is greatly influenced by patriarchy, it is a man especially husband that is must selected become a head of a family. Martin (2000) states that it is patriarchy which constructs man as the leader in the family. It means society, which is based on patriarchy system, constructs this belief. As the leader, husband has authority and control to set how his family runs. He owns his family member. He has better position and he is superior than other members. This imbalance resulted in a family domination by him. As the result, sometimes he abused the power for his satisfaction and pleasure. He as the owner of his family may do anything toward the family members in order to gain and maintain his control.

Moreover, by assuming that man's position is the leader in a family, the husband considers that woman is a man's underling. Woman becomes a family member that can be controlled. Therefore man abused the power toward woman especially his wife or his daughter. He can do as he like but in the other hand his wife may not. For instance, he can forbid the wife to have a job or ask his wife to do all the housework. The abused of power that husband does toward family members is called as domestic oppression. Marisa (1992) defines Domestic oppression as a pattern of intimidating or cruel behavior used to control family members especially for women. It is a behavior used by one against another for the purpose of gaining and maintaining control. Usually the economy dependency of woman forced woman not to take some actions of oppression. The oppression itself deals with two belligerents; the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressor is the man as actor of oppression while the oppressed, on the other hand, is woman as the victim of oppression.

The domestic oppression happened both in a nuclear and extended family. In nuclear family, usually the oppressor is just the husband. He owned the family control by himself. But in the extended family, many men can do the oppression. Each man member has the access to oppress woman. They have the same power to subjugate woman in their family. For example, an uncle can oppress his niece and grandfather may oppress a daughter in law

Domestic oppression is implemented by a man to justify the colonization of women's bodies and minds. The oppressor never treats a woman as a human. He only sees woman as an object of his pleasure. He as the owner of the object

will definitely subjected woman as he likes. He does some efforts to maintain power over women and expend their energy on the exertion to satisfy himself. To do it, he can both commit violence and marginalize women as Davis (2002) said:

Male as the oppressor objectifies women. He does not see women as people. He doesn't respect a woman. He sees women as property or sexual objects. An oppressor usually has high self-esteem and feels powerful and effective in the world. The oppressor blames women causes for his behavior. He may blame it on stress, the victim's behavior, or just a bad day. If a man feels that he doesn't have enough power or control at work, or seeks status in the community, he may abuse his power over woman.

The quotation above shows how man has negative prejudice toward woman. He does not woman as human. Man uses woman to release his emotion event though he does not have a problem with a woman. Woman is just an object for fulfilling man's desire. He blames woman as the cause of all bad things happened. Man who does not have power in community or at work, gain the power over a woman. To ensure this, he will do anything toward woman just for his own satisfaction.

The oppressors implement the domination by doing mental oppression and physical oppression. Psychology encyclopedia (2011) defines mental oppression is an ongoing emotional environment organized by the oppressor for the purposes of control. It involves the use of words, rather than blows and punches. In a mentally oppressive situation, words are used to attack, control, and inflict harm on another person. A number of behaviors are considered as mental oppression; including name-calling, blaming and threatening. First, blaming is the act of censuring, holding responsible, making negative statements about woman that their action is socially or morally wrong. Second, name-calling is an action to call

someone with a nickname that is inappropriate. And third, threatening is intentional behavior which would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities fear of injury or harm.

Furthermore the oppressors also conduct the practice of domination by doing physical oppression. Psychology encyclopedia (2011) defines physical oppression as an action involving contact intended to cause feelings of injury or other physical suffering or bodily harm. Physical abuse includes hitting, slapping, punching, choking, pushing, and other types of contact that result in physical injury to the woman. Physical abuse can also include behaviors such as denying the woman of medical care when needed, depriving the woman of sleep or other functions necessary to live.

One of the examples of physical oppression is what Ashley got from her husband. BBC news has written her story in 2009. Ashley is an American housewife that her name appear to famous when he got physical violence from her husband. Her husband intentionally hurt Ashley every time they have problem in their family life. Her husband never talks and has discussion to resolve the problem. He just slapped, hit and rammed Ashley's head when they have a fight. After he did the violence, he never felt sorry and never check the condition of Ashley. The result of the continue action makes Ashley's face damaged seriously. She got several bad wounds in her head and face. She had to do surgical operation in order to fix her face.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States 1999, males murdered 89% of female murder victims. In 32% of these murders,



the suspect was the husband or boyfriend. It also stated that the FBI estimated that one woman in the United States is beaten every 18 seconds. It is estimated that between 2,000 and 4,000 women will die each year from domestic abuse. It reported that 22-35% of women who visit emergency rooms are there for injuries related to ongoing domestic oppression.

The phenomenon has been exposed in literary works since it is reality representation. Many media has exposed this case. In addition, it is good issue to be explored. By combining knowledge and imagination, the author can serve a good picture or illustration of reality. Novel, as the one example of literary works, has become an effective medium in demonstrating this phenomenon. One of the novel that explores the domestic oppression is *Olive Kitteridge* (2009) written by Elizabeth Strout. This novel points the way of husbands (as the representative of men) oppressed wives (as the representative of women) by doing physical and mental abuse through the protagonist.

### **1.1.1 Domestic Oppression**

The term domestic refers to anything that related to the household or the family. In Merriam Webster Online (2011), Scott states that the word domestic is derived from Latin word *domus* that means family. Therefore, domestic (adjective form in English) is something that pertains to the house, home or family. Meanwhile in Merriam Webster Online (2011), the word oppression (noun form in English) is *the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner*. According to Feminism Glossary (2011) Oppression is *a type of*

*injustice. It is the inequitable use of authority, law, or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal*

According to The National Domestic Hotline (2011) Domestic oppression is a violent confrontation between family or household members involving physical harm, sexual assault, or fear of physical harm. It uses acts of violence and a series of behaviors, including intimidation, threats, psychological abuse, and isolation to coerce and to control the other person. The domestic violence is not only physical and sexual violence but also psychological. Psychological violence means intense and repetitive degradation, creating isolation, and controlling the actions or behaviors of the spouse through intimidation or manipulation to the detriment of the individual.

In *Introducing Feminism* (1992) Marisa defines Domestic oppression as a pattern of intimidating or cruel behavior used to control family members especially woman. In most cases, the oppressors of domestic oppression are the husband. This may be because women are less able physically to hurt a man, or because they lack financial independence, making them vulnerable to abuse of power.

Furthermore it can be defined that the domestic oppression is injustice act of authority or power that happened related to the household or the family. The implementation of domestic oppression in this analysis deals with the injustice action by husband (as the representative of men) toward family member especially for wives (as the representative of woman). Those are done by doing mental oppression and physical oppression.

### **1.1.2 A Brief of Elizabeth Strout**

Elizabeth Strout was born in Portland, Maine on January 6, 1956. After graduating from Bates College, she spent a year in Oxford, England, followed by studies at law school for another year. In 1982 she graduated with honors, and received both a law degree from the Syracuse University College of Law and a Certificate of Gerontology from the Syracuse School of Social Work. That year her first story was published in *New Letters* magazine.

Strout moved to New York City, and continued to write stories that were published in literary magazines, as well as in *Redbook* and *Seventeen*. It took her six or seven years to write *Amy and Isabelle*, which when published was shortlisted for the 2000 Orange Prize and nominated for the 2000 PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction. *Amy and Isabelle* was made into a television movie starring Elisabeth Shue and was produced by Oprah Winfrey's studio, Harpo Films. She was a NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities) professor at Colgate University during the Fall Semester of 2007, where she taught creative writing at both the introductory and advanced level. She is on the faculty of the MFA program at Queens University of Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In 2009 Strout was honored with a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Olive Kitteridge* (2008), a collection of connected short stories about a woman and her immediate family and friends on the coast of Maine. In June 2010, Italian booksellers voted “*Olive Kitteridge*” and Strout as the winner of the Premio Bancarella award in the medieval Piazza della Repubblica in Pontremoli, Italy. She is the first American to win this award since Ernest Hemingway.

Elizabeth Strout mostly talks about family life and humanity. Simon (2009) states in his article:

Strout's work capture the family interconnectedness, the awareness of the accidental existential encounters which avoidably and empathically draw us together, informing our sense of humanity in perpetual conflict. We each exist as someone else's "other" and once this is understood, we realize that every "other's" humanity must be accepted before we can fully presume our own. Strout's novels communicate something fundamental to this recognition of human reality in a family.

This statement confirms that family and humanity are one of Strout's work concerns about. Strout questioned the moral values of human being which lives in a family; portrayed how they interact within their social surrounding and provide every one with awareness relies on the problems. She concerned about how human so difficult to understand each other even from someone who their love. Family as the smallest group of human live portrays the conflict and give the comprehension to the reader.

Even though she got many awards and prestige from several institution awards, she personally does not appreciate the award themselves. In The Atlantic magazine (2009), Strout states that:

The horror of the institution awards is what the press leading up to it, to make it a popular story. Where they'll actually make it like it's an arm-wrestling event between two actors. That becomes very pretty, and that's something that;s embarrassing to follow up with accepting the invitation to the party.

In this point, it can be seen how Elizabeth Strout works not only to entertain people around the world and got some awards to prove her capability, but also to seriously transmit the ideas and social issues to the people. Her activities in social

also show her goal to transfer idea and critics for the human being through her works. Therefore, some of her works are interesting to be analyzed.

### **1.1.3 Olive Kitteridge**

A novel, *Olive Kitteridge* (2008) written by Elizabeth Strout discloses two modes of domestic oppression. Domestic oppression is an injustice exercise of authority or power to control family members especially for women. In this novel, domestic oppression is represented by characters, Henry, Christopher, Jerry, Malcolm and Joe. By analyzing the whole text, there are two modes that are implemented by men toward woman in order to maintain control in the family. Those are done by doing mental oppression and physical oppression.

The first mode of domestic oppression is the mental oppression. In a mentally oppressive situation, words are used to attack, control, and inflict harm on another person. At least there are three actions considered as a mental oppression that is done by husbands. First is name-calling. This is an action to call someone with a nickname that is improper. This action makes their wives down psychologically. It is represented by a husband, Henry. He called his wives not by the original name. He calls a name that is inappropriate for wife such as *idiot*, *moron* and *bitch* just because negative prejudice toward his wife. The second is blaming. It is represented by Joe. Joe prefers to yell and speak with loud voice toward his wife whenever she makes a mistake. He blames his wife even though the mistake is considered as a small mistake. Every time, he always talks to his wife with yelling and screaming. Third is threatening. It is represented by Jerry. Jerry often threatens his wife by point his gun. He uses a gun as a psychology

weapon to show his powerful position. He intimidates his wife by telling her to get killed if she refuses what he wants. By doing threatening, Jerry has a control over women about what she can do and what she cannot do. It limits the movement of his wife since the threat are always haunted the mind of his wife.

The second implementation of domestic oppression is the physical oppression. The oppression is done by hitting, kicking or anything that makes a physical contact to injury or harm woman. There are three characters, Henry, Malcolm, and Christopher did the oppression. Henry does bad treatment toward his wife. When he has a problem in job, he will hurt his wife by doing physical abuse. With that kind of abuse, it satisfied him and become a routine activity to release his stress about the job. The next character who done the oppression is Malcolm. He feels that it is his wife who brings a bad impact to his life. He lost a job and his father died after they got married. He never likes his wife and he intentionally hurt her to show his hatred. The third character is Christopher. He does physical violence after three years of his relationship he and his wife still have no baby. He blames his wife as the cause of the condition. This condition makes him disappointed and the treatment toward his wife has started to change. He does physical violence for punishment of his wife condition.

## **1.2 Problem of study**

Olive Kitteridge (2008) encloses many cases, but two modes of domestic oppression appear as the central issue in the life of characters. In order to disclose this issue, the research questions are formulated as follow:

1. How far does Elizabeth Strout's novel *Olive Kitteridge* expose two modes of domestic oppression?
2. To what extent do fictional devices; characters, plot (conflict), and setting give contribution in revealing two modes of domestic oppression?

### **1.3 Purpose of study**

This study is intended to disclose the two modes of domestic oppression in the novel *Olive Kitteridge* (2009) written by Elizabeth Strout. It is going to investigate to what extent the fictional devices; characters, plot (conflict), and setting, give contribution in disclosing two modes of domestic oppression.

### **1.4 Previous Study**

The analysis about this novel which focuses on the two modes of domestic oppression has not been found yet. However, there are some studies that have given inspiration and contribution in analyzing this novel.

The first analysis is written by Ragini Devi (2010), entitled: *Thwarted Dreams of Women in Their Constant Life: The Thousand Faces of Night*. It uses feminist criticism to reveal the meaning. The analyses focus on the character. It analyzes how woman characters get difficulties to reach their dreams because of their husband who constitutes so many rules and regulations. And when characters failed to follow the rules and regulations, their husband will commit some actions to punish the characters. The study shows the oppression toward woman as one of some efforts from patriarchal culture to keep man dominate woman. In the study, it pays attention to the patriarchy as the system of authority that facilitates ground for other terms of supremacy, hierarchy, exploitation and violation. Patriarchy, as

her point out, is argued as political institution. And the essence of politic is power. The analysis shows how in patriarchal culture, male member of society predominates in position of power. And it is manifested through woman's role, function and responsibility in a society, which are shaped to carry out the male self-interest.

Another study is written by Umesh Prasad (2009), entitled: *The Feminine Anguish in Cry, the Peacock*. The study is also deals with feminist comprehension. It focuses on the character. The study analyzes how the character Maya struggles to live with her husband who never sees Maya as a human. It discusses how the protagonist suffered physically and mentally in marital relationship. The study shows how Protagonist has to stand with her husband's attitude who posits her as an object and commodity. The analysis also shows how man always blames his wife as the cause of not having a child. It depicts the cry of an agonized woman feeling lonely and unwanted.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

This novel is analyzed through the perspective of feminist with the concept of oppression and power by Foucault. Feminist criticism is derived principally from the idea of feminist who believes that this world has been overwhelmed by patriarchal culture. It is organized in favor of the interest of men. Beauvoir (1983) argues that the representation of the world, like the world itself, is a work of men. Men describe this world from their point of view. They confuse it with the absolute truth. It is the men's belief that women are inferior by nature



and the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageously on earth.

Patriarchy itself is defined as a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property (Barber, 1997). This system insists that males are born to be able to control basic resources. The system does not allow women to gain access to go public or in the other hand woman's area is in domestic. Women were put in the center of the domestic sphere and were expected to fulfill the roles of a calm and nurturing mother, a loving and faithful wife, and a passive, delicate, and virtuous creature. They have no control of any basic resources or to have any rights or privileges, including custody of their own children.

Patriarchy regards that it is men who operates the position of power in family. This notion is argued by Kate Millet. She announces her point of view of patriarchy as political institution (in Guerin, 1997). The essence of politic is power. The most fundamental and pervasive contact of power in the family is the male dominance. This power is extended, directly or indirectly in civil and domestic to constrain woman. In patriarchal culture, male member of a family predominates in position of power. The more powerful a position, the more likely males will achieve it.

Feminist identifies family construction as a model of power. Michel Foucault (2007) defines power as a means through which the marginalized are controlled and the thing that the marginalized or others seek to gain. Foucault

explains the example of power can be found in the family. In a patriarchal culture, man controlled his wife and his daughter. He owns them as the object or a commodity for his institution. Moreover since the most pervasive concept of power in the family is the male dominance, male members have chance to oppress woman. According to Foucault as soon as there is a power relation or domination, there is a possibility of oppression. Male members dominate in the system. The system has given male members authority to do anything over woman. They may rule and arrange their family just by their decision. Therefore system also gives chance to make injustice action. Males can use power just for his satisfaction. To fulfill the desire, they have woman as an object. They commit some injustice exercise over woman. The injustice exercise may include anything that make woman suffered mentally or physically. Men are socially permitted to hurt woman if she did a mistake.

The form of this analysis is also supported by text-based and context based interpretation. The text based is an interpretation which focuses on the work itself (Guerin, 1997). It signifies that the meaning of the whole story is found within the text by figuring out the formal elements of a text such as setting, theme, characterization, and language. Meanwhile the context based interpretation is done to see literary work chiefly (Guerin, 1997). It is the reflection of the author's life or character's life which is existed in the work. By paying attention to the context of the story, the meaning will be easily reached.

Further to reveal the implementation of domestic oppression, it is crucial to investigate its fictional elements. It focuses on the character, setting, and plot

(conflict). According to Card (1999) characters are the people or creatures endowed with human characteristics who carried out the actions in a work of fiction. They seem the real people which are reflected through their attitude, speech, and performance. The characters of this novel are Henry, Christopher, Malcolm, Jerry and Joe. Their attitude and speech reflect the domestic oppression over their wives.

Meanwhile, setting (Card, 1999) refers to specific time, condition, and place, which set a work of fiction. It is a fictional world where all the actions are related. In this analysis the setting is the modern era of America which still shows the strong influence from the patriarchy. Last, plot is consisted of all actions that occur in a work of fiction (Card, 1999). The actions result some conflicts, generally between one character and another character, character and nature, character and social, or character and himself. The conflicts of this analysis appear between the character and another character (their wives).

## **1.6 Methodology**

The analysis of the text will be done through text-based and context-based interpretation. In text-based interpretation, it will be done by emerging and analyzing the fictional devices such as plot (conflicts), characters, and settings. The three of them cannot be separated because they are correlated each other. The use of them is connected to uncover the implementation of domestic oppression. To support the analysis, there are some facts that are related to contemporary issues.