

Gender-Based Violence in Nicole Baart's Novel "*You were Always Mine*"

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Abstract

This study is aimed to uncover the issue of gender-based violence in a novel that focuses on discovering the depictions of it and the way the protagonist deals with it. The object of this study is a novel entitled You Were Always Mine (2018) by Nicole Baart. The theory of Understanding Gender-Based Violence: National and International Contexts (2015) by Gangoli and Aghtaie is used to analyze the data in this study. This study applies the descriptive qualitative research method. In this study, the writer focuses on women who get exploited by an institution because of their ability to give birth and their social-economic class which makes them easy to be abused by power. The result of gender-based violence in this study shows that it affects the victims' psychological state. The conclusion shows that the gender-based violence case experienced by the characters is established by patriarchal culture and gender inequality that is also motivated by discrimination against race and lower social class.

Keywords: forced adoption, gender-based violence, novel.

A. Introduction

The writer is interested in analyzing gender-based violence in a novel entitled *You Were Always Mine* (2018) by Nicole Baart. The book tells a story about women who are not able to claim their rights as their ability to reproduce is being exploited. LaShonna Tate, who got framed for a crime she did not commit, had to let go of her newborn baby as a social worker intimidated and manipulated her into a state where she had to sign a consent form of a statement that she did not deserve and capable to raise and parent her child because she is a prisoner. The oppression that LaShonna received led her to commit suicide. LaShonna's story is revealed when Jessica Chamberlain investigates the death of her husband who was murdered because of fighting for the rights of women in LaShonna's community. LaShonna's story reveals a lot more cases of women in Iowa who had to give away their babies without their sincere consent and with the rights they cannot claim.

The exploitation of women's ability to bear children in this novel is based on the characters' perception that view women as vulnerable individuals who are weak, inferior, and can be taken advantage of. This study aims to identify the forms and effects of gender-based violence portrayed in this novel and the way the protagonist deals with the issue. The purpose of collecting proof of gender-based violence in the novel, the writer aims to arrange a scientific study based on it using *Understanding Gender-Based Violence: National and International Contexts* (2015) by Geetanjali Gangoli and Nadia Aghtaie to identify the acts and attributes between each character

that create oppression against women. The title of this thesis is, "Gender-Based Violence in *You Were Always Mine* (2018) by Nicole Baart."

B. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis, focusing on textual phenomena reflecting real-life situations. Qualitative research, as described by Gay et al. (2011), involves gathering descriptive and visual data, without numerical elements, to understand study phenomena. Data from *You Were Always Mine* novel is analyzed through descriptive essays, explaining the occurrence of gender-based violence within the story. The chosen novel is deemed suitable due to its portrayal of forced adoption among marginalized women, aligning with real-life occurrences. Additionally, the novel's critical acclaim further justifies its selection. Data collection involves reading the novel, identifying relevant texts and quotations depicting gender-based violence, and selecting data according to the study's theoretical framework. Analysis focuses on character traits, cultural context, and social conditions, applying Gangoli and Aghtaie's (2015) concept of gender-based violence. Findings are presented in essay form, derived from novel narrations.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Gender-Based Violence Against Women

You Were Always Mine (2018) consists of twenty-seven chapters, depicting a family's story revealing the exploitation of women's ability to give birth by a social worker. Twenty-five women fall victim to manipulation, ultimately surrendering their babies to an illegal adoption institution. These women, feeling threatened and manipulated, confide in private spaces using codes and pseudonyms. Understanding Gender-Based Violence: National and International Contexts (2015) by Geetanjali Gangoli and Nadia Aghtaie serves as the primary guideline, defining and differentiating gender-based violence.

One of the first indications of gender-based violence is found in LaShonna's letter: "I'm going to prison ... for a crime I didn't commit" (Baart, 2018, p. 99). Wrongfully accused of nonprofit mismanagement, LaShonna faces fabricated audits, leading to her entanglement in a dark adoption system within prison. The nexus between sex, power, and patriarchy underscores the need to control women through force or violence if necessary (Gangoli & Aghtaie, 2015). It becomes evident that no one would readily surrender their baby for adoption; LaShonna, a mature woman with a stable job, initially intends to keep her child. However, manipulation and framing lead her to lose control over her own body and child, a form of coercion.

LaShonna Tate, a black woman with a Law degree from St. Paul University, illustrates the intersectionality of marginalization. Her experience of gender-based violence arises not only from her gender but also from her vulnerability as a person of color.

Initially hesitant to contact Evan Chamberlain, who adopted her son, LaShonna reaches out after having her second child. However, an unexpected turn of events lands her in prison, accused of nonprofit malfeasance. Gender-based violence in this case extends beyond LaShonna's gender; it becomes a ploy to separate her from her second child by Initium Novum, an adoption organization run by lawyer James Rosenberg. Using his power and influence, James controls incarcerated women, coercing them into giving up their babies for adoption through Initium Novum. Thus, James's actions constitute gender-based violence.

A further insight into gender-based violence is provided by a website called birthcentral.com: "... giving birth while in prison is a dismal prospect for all involved..." (Baart, 2018, p. 113).

2. Protagonist's Reaction towards Gender-Based Violence

LaShonna Tate's decision to end her life after her baby is taken prompts Evan Chamberlain and his wife, Jessica, to seek justice for her and other victims of gender-based violence. Evan initiates an investigation, aided by LaShonna and her fellow inmates, identifying twenty-five women from different prisons who placed their babies with adoptive families through Initium Novum. Initially, Evan's quest was to uncover the sudden disappearance of his second son's birth mother, LaShonna Tate, who tragically committed suicide. Abbott et al. (2012) assert a rise in mental illness among separated mothers, especially incarcerated women, heightening the risk of self-harm and suicide. LaShonna's suicide attempt reflects not only her loss but also the inadequate healthcare and prison conditions for postpartum mothers. The United States prison system, designed primarily for men, neglects the unique health needs of women inmates, impacting their overall well-being (Ziazadeh, 2019)..

D. Conclusion

Gender-based violence is evident in *You Were Always Mine* (2018) by Nicole Baart, analyzed with *Understanding Gender-Based Violence: National and International Contexts* (2015) by Geetanjali Gangoli and Nadia Aghtaie. It encompasses violations against individuals based on gender identity, including sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. Evan Chamberlain uncovers this crime with LaShonna's help, while Jessica investigates her ex-husband's death. The novel exposes forced adoption as a form of gender-based violence, trapping powerless women in prison through false accusations. LaShonna Tate's tragic death illustrates its psychological toll. Perpetrators, driven by profit and misguided intentions, exploit women's vulnerability. James exemplifies the power imbalance, aided by complicit prison staff. Victims, often marginalized, face additional hurdles.

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