

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Oppression is an issue that has been raised in almost every topic and every story in the form of books or novels, articles, journals, and newspapers. As Linda Napikoski on a website called ThoughtCo.com said, oppression is when someone is forced not to be free and feel equal according to a particular law or authority. Alternatively, they do not have the feeling of justice. It can affect both them mentally and physically. Another perspective indicates oppression is "an enclosing structure of harming people in a social group while members of another, or other, corresponding social groups benefit from the harm suffered by those being oppressed" (Egidius, 2007).

Women's oppression has a similar meaning to the general intention of oppression, but it explicitly indicates how men oppress women. It disregards women's equality in their society, which has been happening throughout human history and spreading across the world. It can also mean an act done by men that harms women by restraining them from doing some authorities' work (Crossman, 2020). For example, in some cases, some men view women as not being allowed to do administrative work like police officers or educational teachers. They tend to think that these types of jobs are acquainted with only men and that no woman can take them. Therefore, when women take these jobs, they can be viewed as someone who violates society's rules. The rules show that women are seen as housewives and are prohibited from working. Another type of oppression can be found in a family where men often hit their wives when they decide to take part in one of the government works. It could be done quickly and simply if they talk calmly and explore the problem.

There are a few cases where women are most likely to be oppressed by society. Some evidence can be found in European, Middle Eastern, and African cultures (Napikoski, 2020). Examples of cases are related to sexual violence and religious differences due to race and class differences in society. Cases of sexual violence usually consist of rape and unwanted physical contact resulting in psychological trauma. This trauma makes women not respected and not reassured of safety. This oppression case usually happens to African American/black women living in an environment dominated by White Americans. Not only in terms of sexual violence against black women but also societal standards like “white women” are more beautiful in general, strengthening the oppression of black women in countries like America.

The second case becomes evidence of oppression towards women based on different sex. In some instances that happen in some societies, men tend to use their sexual status where they view women's reproductive system, such as giving birth and menstruating, as disgusting. As a result, women needed to cover their bodies and faces. Therefore, men do not overpower them. In other cultures, men view women as a child or property, and they use women for sexual intercourse without the woman's consent, or we know this as rape. Morrison portrays this case in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, where the father of Pecola rapes her, which results in life trauma that will be analyzed further in the following chapters of this thesis.

It was mentioned before that oppression could be portrayed in books, novels, articles, and newspapers. Many popular old books and stories by famous authors explain and portray how women are being oppressed by men or society in general. These literature books usually show the oppression of primarily black or African-American Women.



However, if we look further, some literature books also portray white women being oppressed by society. These oppressions are seen when black and white women live in a society where people view them as "baby-making machines" and only stay home and care for the family. There is a difference between white and black women being oppressed. This thesis focuses on these specific issues as Morrison could see and describe them in *The Bluest Eye*. Women in this novel are divided into two groups. White women are portrayed as someone with the highest status.

For this research, the literature being analyzed and discussed further as a portrayal of women's oppression is *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. In this novel, Morrison describes how the black woman is oppressed by her society, where almost everyone is white. The three main young women characters, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia, express how women are meant to have sex and be loved by men. However, the image of being oppressed after marriage and the experience after it makes this book an excellent example of exploring women's oppression. Another interesting point to explore, regardless of the pressure towards women, is how Morrison portrayed the women's character as not being weak and vulnerable. They can fight against the oppression done by men. The case of how women are oppressed by sexual intercourse or rape is also portrayed in this book, making it more interesting to explore how women are oppressed.

As this research focuses on general oppression done by men toward women in the book *The Bluest Eye*, there is a possibility that some types of oppression are highlighted more than others as a way to show the readers the perspective of both the author of the book and the researcher.

1.2. Research problem

Looking at the chosen novel in the title, the stories told by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* are something that people know as an example of portraying women being oppressed by society. If we look deeper into the issue of women's oppression in the novel, there is much more to explore and analyze. As this novel focuses on Black Women being oppressed, getting sexually and mentally violent, and experiencing racism by white people, the present writer presented two questions:

1. What types of oppression do these female characters face in the novel?
2. How do these female characters overcome those oppressions described in the novel?

1.3. The Objective of the Study

The present writer tries to understand better how the female characters feel about being sexually violated by the male characters. The present writer tries to know how these female characters overcame the experience. Hence, the objective of the study could be formulated as below:

1. To find out about what kind of oppression these female characters faced.
2. To find out how to overcome the types of oppression the female characters feel.

1.4. The focus of the Study

Based on the study's objectives, this paper focuses on the general oppression done by men towards women, especially in the different types of oppression seen in the novel *The Bluest Eye* that the female characters face daily. It also focuses on finding out whether the female characters succeeded in overcoming those types of oppression.

1.5. Literature Review

Some studies on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* have been conducted previously. The first paper is written by Ari Nurhayati (2019) about "Intersecting Oppression of Gender and Race in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*". The paper attempts to uncover the intersecting oppression of race and gender in the novels and to explain how African-American women cope with the oppression using descriptive qualitative research as the method of research. The findings reveal that the impact of white beauty hegemony on African-American women makes them hate their physical characteristics that are far from the white ideal of beauty. The findings also reveal that self-consciousness is the main factor in attempts to release them from oppression. This paper has many differences from this future research, such as how oppression intersects race and gender, focusing more on how African-American women cope. This future research focuses more on portraying characters to the oppression seen in the novel.

The second paper was written by Rochmawati (2007) about "The Oppression Faced by Black Women Characters in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*". The paper attempts to cover and analyze the kinds of oppression received by Black Women and their response portrayed by Morrison. The researcher uses feminist theory to link the novel's character to women's oppression. The findings reveal four kinds of oppression: social deprivation, physical, cultural, and psychological oppression. The results also indicate that their response from them is receiving, imitating, and rejecting the oppression. In this paper, the novel has many discoveries, such as the type of oppression that Morrison is trying to



portray and the characters' responses. The theory, writer of this paper uses the same theory as this future research but is used to link the characters to the themes of oppression.

The third paper was written by Daise Lilian Fonseca Dias (2009) about "The Female Condition in Morrison's The Bluest Eye: from Childhood to Adulthood". This paper examines the issues involving the female roles and condition of women, and the influence they suffer from the white ones are decisive to the path the black women take in life. The findings reveal that white women's condition and behavior affect black women's social behavior, especially their children. The results also show that the issue of physical beauty has a significant role in the novel because the black women are not sure about their own identity, which is caused by the white women's hegemony. In this paper, many discoveries are different from the focus of this future research, such as examining the issues involving female roles and their condition, the influence of black women on their life, and the issue of white beauty as the standard of physical beauty.

The fourth paper is written by Silje Vattöy (2020) about "Oppression of black women in The Bluest Eye: The Interplay of Race, gender, and Age". This paper analyzes how Toni Morrison thematizes the oppression of black women in this novel. The theoretical approach used in this paper is Feminist criticism and African-American criticism to help explain the discussion of race and gender. The findings reveal that using an intersectional analysis, the way the categorization of race, gender, and age come into play and affect the characters' lives. In this paper, many discoveries could be found that is different from the focus of this future research, such as focusing on the intersectional analysis to help discover how race, gender, and age affect the characters' life. For the theoretical approach,



it is fascinating how the writer of this paper uses not only feminist criticism but also African-American criticism to help analyze the focus of this paper.

The fifth paper was written by Nurul Annisa Ibrahim (2021) about "The Struggle of African-American Women against Double Oppression in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye". This paper aims to discover the kind of double oppression experienced by African-American women in the novel and to analyze how these women struggle against double oppression. The paper use sociology and the black feminism approach. The findings reveal that most African-American women characters in the story experience several oppressions. Both can be classified as racism and sexism. In this paper, many discoveries were made, such as the analysis of women characters' experience toward many oppressions, focusing on racism and sexism. This paper had a similar focus to this future research. Still, it used a different theoretical approach, such as using sociology and black feminism research theory to explain more about the women characters using the social aspects and focusing more on the approach of black feminism.

The six paper was written by Montana Berlian Maharani (2016) about "Characterization of Black Women Depicted in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye". This paper aim to reveal the characteristic of black women in the novel and to show how it represents black women in American society of that era. The findings reveal that three black women characters represent three different types of black women in the society in the form of suspension, assimilation, and emergent women. this paper is used by the present writer to help analyze the characterization of women to develop their position and roles in society.

The last paper was written by Nur Rahmi Nailah (2018) about “The Struggles of Black Women as Seen in Toni Morrison’s *SULA*”. This research discusses the struggles of African-American black women as reflected by five female characters in their work. The findings reveal that there are several factors that cause black women to struggle, the burdens imposed by the family, and the burdens heaped by the society. The difference between this research to the current research is the previous research uses the theory of suspended woman by Mary Helen Washington while the current research uses the theory of social oppression, the theory of black feminism, and the concept of race and class to analyze the novel.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

As the topic of women’s oppression is one of the social issues, the theory used in this research is *sociological theory*. Sociological theory is a theory that focuses on providing a set of ideas based on human society. This theory also provides a significant perspective on the portrayal of the reality of human culture. As stated by C.N Trueman on the website *History Learning Site*, the use of Sociological Theory is the distinction of 2 criteria or theories, such as structural and social action. These social theories usually focus on seeing the social system as a ‘reality’ that lies below the perspectives of ‘individuality’ by Western individuals. This sociological theory also determines our social characters (C.N. Trueman: *History Learning Site*, 2015). In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison portrayed this society system where they choose the life of black women in a society dominated by white American men. However, as it is already mentioned beforehand that this research focuses more on gender oppression, the use of sociological theory would be to analyze further how Morrison portrayed this social system in *The Bluest Eye*. This theory is chosen to help the



researchers and readers understand how women in the book *The Bluest Eye* overcome the sexual violence and oppression of men toward women and pursue their equality and justice in the society that the character lives in.

Following the research objections, the present writer applied the sociological approach suggested by Wellek and Warren in Theory of Literature.

By “sociology of literature”, we may mean the social study of the writer, as an individual or as a type, in the process of being a representative of his age and society or a survey of the process of expressing the writer’s experience on implying the relation between his life and society. Toni Morrison wrote this book to describe her relationship with the community she lived in when she was young. She grew up in African American Culture, which later motivated her to write the book based on her childhood memories. *The Bluest Eye* was the first book Morrison wrote explaining the relationship between beauty, ugliness, and friendship. In this book, she describes how a black girl is influenced by the beauty of a white girl with blue eyes, which the character later wants to have, leading to a lot of discrimination and racism.

Other than the sociological approach by Wellek and Warren, there are theories such as the theory of social oppression, the Concept of Race and Class, and the Theory of Black Feminism that are going to be used for the present analysis.

1.6.1. Theory of Social Oppression

Social oppression is a type of oppression that is usually based on social scope. This includes behavior like “mistreatment, exploitation, and abuse of a group or groups of other people to a different group or groups”. It can be seen in how these groups hold more authoritative powers over a society that comes with laws and norms.

This theory shows different positions in the hierarchies related to race, gender, sexuality, and ability. Similar to how Morrison portrays this oppression, social oppression shows that people from the lower rankings or a minority group, in this case, the black society, are being controlled by the white community, where they were not given enough privileges to have a better quality of life. It can be seen in the way that black people, especially black women, receive "fewer rights, less access to most resources, less political power, lower economic potential, worse health and higher mortality rates, and lower overall life changes" (Canadian Race Relations Foundation).

1.6.1.1. Lookism

Lookism is a social oppression that refers to a social standard where people have to follow specific criteria to fit into the norms of society. This usually includes physical appearances of gender, sexual orientation, and race. According to the thesis by Cherea Hammer (2017) titled *A Look into Lookism: An Evaluation of Discrimination Based on Physical Attractiveness*, lookism is often called physical attractiveness discrimination, which according to Hammer it focuses on discrimination based on the not-so-attractive looking person in other people's eyes. Therefore, to women, fulfilling the standards of lookism, such as beauty and appearance, and how they dress communicates how their biological gender defines them. The appearance of long hair, lighter skin, ideal slim body, way of dressing, and applying makeup is perfect as they are essential in the future workplace. This is also why beauty standards are essential to determine whether a woman or a man is worthy of respect. Therefore, the current research

paper further discuss the importance of lookism in the form of how beauty standards determine whether the women characters are oppressed or not.

1.6.1.2. Colorism

Based on the article titled *12 Types of Social Oppression*, Colorism is a pattern where it indicates that a person, man or woman, gets treated differently because of their color (Tom Head, ThoughtCo, 2021). This usually happens to people with skin features with a darker skin tone found in most Black African-Americans. Even so, people with different skin colors that are not considered white or light-toned, such as Asian people, also get mistreated (Tom Head, ThoughtCo, 2021).

Another perspective of colorism is in an article written by David Knight (2015), where he observes how people refer to themselves as a part of the “light-skinned” or “dark-skinned” groups, especially in the US. He shows that research found that there are some kinds of color-biased where people with lighter skin have more value than people of darker skin because they are viewed as criminals and deemed to be suspicious and misbehave. The implicit biases of colorism also happen in the education field as teachers still do not expose much to this topic, which makes them careful not to "trigger" a specific color group. Therefore, the current research paper focuses on analyzing further the equality of education based on the colorism that the character faced.

1.6.1.3. Sexism

According to an article in Britannica, sexism was initially formulated to "raise consciousness about the oppression related to sex that is against women

and girls"(Gina Masequesmay, Britannica, 2014). It means that sexism tries to maintain the attitudes between women and men through the ideology of oppressed women and girls because of their sex or gender (Gina Masequesmay, Britannica, 2014). These conditions lead to many prejudices, such as women being weaker than men, which affect their roles in making logical and rational decisions. They view them as unsuitable for participating and being good leaders in political and social choices. Another definition of sexism is from the perspective of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe where they define it as "any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behavior based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline" (Council of Europe). It is also mentioned in the article published by the Council of Europe that there are three types of sexism: traditional, modern, and neo-sexism. Traditional sexism focuses on supporting traditional gender roles where a stereotype between men and women occurs. Modern sexism focuses on reducing gender discrimination, especially towards women. Neo-sexism focuses on ideologies that justify discrimination towards women based on competencies.

Following the definition of sexism, it was said that sexism happens in many aspects of daily life. This includes receiving better education and getting treated equally in the workplace. This can also be seen as sexual harassment and gender-biased treatment (Gina Masequesmay, Britannica, 2014). Therefore, the current research paper focuses to find more in-depth sexism based

on negative prejudice towards black women and mistreatment in education and the workplace to discuss as a type of oppression the female character faced.

1.6.2. Theory of Black Feminism

The theory of black feminism is used to analyze the second question which focuses on the coping mechanisms of black women that were oppressed by the white society. According to the book *Woman, Race, and Class* written by Angela Davis, black feminism is a movement where it focuses on how black women struggle to receive anti-slavery treatment (Black Women and Club Movement: Women, Race, and Class, 1983: 75-80). Davis also stated that black feminist deals with how black women defend themselves when a white man is about to violate them sexually. An example is given to support her argument, which Joan Little portrays in her case where she was being accused of killing a white guard in a North Carolina jail in defence of the guard raping the little girl, which was viewed as an act of bravery by the black women in the society (Rape, Racism, and the myth of Black Rapist: Women, Race, and Class, 1983).

In comparison to the general meaning of feminist theory, an expert named Catharine MacKinnon, in an article from a website called *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, said in her project that it is more focused on rejecting the existing framework as a hopeless representative of the male norm. She adopted the "anti-subordination" approach, focusing on the result of the ground-breaking work on how sexuality makes men more dominating, and sexual harassment was viewed as a form of sexism.

Focusing on its origin, black feminism is created as a way to help not only American-African Black Women but black women all around the world in overcoming the type of oppression they received by making them fight for their equality in eliminating injustice



and inequality such as helping them to receive the recognition of their uniqueness in any forms as a way to show their true identity (Master Class, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this theory is to help analyse how the woman characters overcome the type of oppression seen in the novel, especially black women characters being sexually violated, especially by the black male in society.

1.6.2.1. Concept of Class and Race

The relationship between race and class has been hotly debated. According to Jean Ait Belkhir and Bernice McNair Barnett (2001) in the journal *Race, Gender, and Class Intersectionality*, as Cuádriz and Uttal's chapter pointed out, "Race, class, and gender are a thing that is intersecting in human's life, where it feels meaningful to one's life, but they are overlapping and cumulative in their effect on people's experience" (*Race, Gender & Class: Volume 8, Number 3. 157-174.*). Another perspective by Omi and Winant (1986) claims that race is more the primary category than a class based on the United States' claim regarding the organization of racial lines. To analyze the different perspectives of race and class in the female characters' society, understanding the theory and different perspectives on race and class is a must.

The purpose of using the concept of race and class is to be able to explain the position and role of the three main women characters in society. This theory is considered to explain the economic force and pressure in consideration of the status of women in a particular race and class from the perspective of social class.

1.7. Research Methods

The method used in the study is library research. The data are obtained from data sources in the form of written materials relevant to the study. With *The Bluest Eye* as its primary data source, secondary data sources would also support and enrich the analysis.

1.7.1. Method of Collecting the Data

The primary data are passages from the literary work, *The Bluest Eye*, related to the main characters. The data are obtained from closely reading the novel several times and taking notes of the needed data. Thus, the primary data consists of narration from the author's perspective on the society in this novel, description, the conversation between two or more female characters and between female and male characters, and all written materials from the book which are related to the female characters and can support the analysis of the study. Notes on the characterization of the main characters will be followed. They would encompass the main characters' descriptions, others' views of them, speeches, past lives, conversations with others, reactions, direct comments, thoughts, and mannerisms.

The secondary data are taken from other books, journals, essays, articles, interviews, and online sources, which provide information on the theories and the scope of the study. Hence, the data would include the concept of race and class and the idea of black feminism concerning the social system portrayed in the novel.

1.7.2. Method of Analysing Data

The analytical process in the study is conducted in three steps. The first step is applying the theory of social oppression to analyze the perspectives of the female characters regarding their feeling of being sexually oppressed. The second step is using the concept



of race and class and the theory of black feminism in analyzing female characters' characterization of their feeling of being sexually oppressed and black feminist treatment as a form of gender oppression in a society full of male characters, and to see how race and class affect these characters. The third step is concluding the previous analysis to formulate findings on women's oppression and their treatment by the society portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*.

1.8. Presentation

This graduating paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter One provides the background and framework of the paper. Chapter 2 analyses the types of oppression in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Chapter three provides the women characters' way of dealing with being oppressed by society and the way they overcome it based on the types of oppression that were analyzed before. Chapter four contains the conclusion which is drawn from the analysis.