

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Patriarchy is considered as a broad viewpoint, which has been ingrained in all humankind. Bell Hooks argues that “patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females...” (2013). She also adds that even this value has been taught early in our youth. In essence, not only men, women are also persuaded to envision the world from patriarchal standpoint (Strong-Leek 2001). Through the history, it is evident that men are usually given a significant role, while women take the secondary one. Literature, I believe, is one of the best media which reflects this role between men and women.

In fiction, women are represented differently in many ways. In the old times where the patriarchal society is stronger and powerful, most of the literary works show the women manifestly as oppressed and pathetic creatures.

The female characters are submissive and can never be better than the male characters. However, nowadays, the female characters become more variant.

Some works begin to show the women as an attractively active person, even the heroine is not a rare character anymore. Apparently, Marlon James with

his *A Brief History of Seven Killings* mixes both characteristics in the one main female character.

A Brief History of Seven Killings by Marlon James is one of the literary works with that capacity of reflecting the role of men and women in daily life through written form. It is a contemporary novel about gangster's life and political chaos in Jamaica through the perspectives of many narrators. It has Bob Marley as the connector between the characters. It is set from 1972 through 1991 and takes place in Jamaica and New York. The settings of times and places and the presence of Bob Marley make it look like a historical novel since James uses the period when the chaotic situation really happened in Jamaica. Even many reviewers argue that this novel is partly based on the real story of Jamaica in the 70s and early 80s (Miller 2014 & Lazar 2014).

However, I am not going to analyze the historical background of the novel, because some issues about the characteristics of women in the story seem more intriguing. To begin with, this novel offers a different way of telling the story from the perspectives of many narrators. This way of presenting the story is fascinating since we are getting used to read from one or two narrators which are quite easy to follow, while this one has ten narrators and even feels like more. Among these abundant narrators who are dominated by male, there is only one female narrator whom I might say is the only representation of women in Jamaica in the novel. This female narrator is Nina Burgess. Thus, she becomes the central issue in this research.

Nina Burgess is portrayed as both confidently restive young woman and manifestly submissive one in the story. She appears as the heroine and the victim at the same time. The things about her are somehow confusing yet interesting. I argue that this novel presents the ambivalence of woman's characteristics which is embedded in the way James presents Nina Burgess. Hence, this research is entitled **"Ambivalent Woman's Characteristics in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James."**

1.2 Identification of the Problems

As mentioned before, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* presents a combination of two contradictory characteristics in the main female character, Nina Burgess. In the story, she is portrayed as a restive young woman, but then the chaotic situation discloses her submissive attitudes which are covered by her heroine qualities. She runs away and changes her identity several times throughout the story. Kim Clark, Dorcas Palmer, and Millicent Segree are her other identities which also embody different personalities. Her struggle to survive as a witness of a murder attempt makes her look like a strong woman. However, a careful reading on Nina Burgess's character shows that Marlon James embodies her with many weaker points also, not only the good ones.

1.3 Scope of the Research

This research is basically a textual analysis, which focuses on the issue of ambivalent woman's characteristics through Nina Burgess as the

representation of women in the novel. This issue will be revealed by exploring Nina Burgess, who has ambivalent characteristics. The data are taken from Nina's own narratives (including her narratives in other names; Kim Clark, Dorcas Palmer, and Millicent Segree) and other's which tell about Nina. Also, the other narratives from Josey Wales, Papa-Lo, and the Singer who are related to Nina somehow.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to reveal the ambivalent woman's characteristics in the novel, this research will focus on answering the following questions:

1. How does Marlon James portray Nina Burgess as the representation of women in the novel?
2. How do the different qualities challenge our fix notion of stereotyping men and women's characteristics?

1.5 Objective of the Research

objective of this research is to examine the ambivalent woman's characteristics by elaborating James way of presenting the female character, Nina Burgess, in the novel. Additionally, it aims to enrich the research of literary criticism particularly on the contemporary literature.

1.6 Review of Related Studies

Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is an outstanding and stunning novel which has not been analyzed yet, not in a broad scale of publishing. However, there are still a lot of feminist research projects,

including research projects about the works of James, and many reviews from newspaper and magazine about *A Brief History of Seven Killings* which can be compared to my research.

For the very first, here are some reviews by Kei Miller (2014) from *The Guardian* and Zachary Lazar (2014) from *The New York Times*. Miller and Lazar bring out the historical issue of Jamaica; they believe that the novel is partly based on the real story of Jamaica in the 70s and early 80s. Then, Katharine Schwab (2015) from *The Atlantic* talks about its complex plot and abundant characters. Schwab highlights Nina Burgess as the character who might be mistaken as the marginal yet crucial figure in the novel. The first two reviewers are looking at the novel from historical perspective while I am looking at it from feminist standpoint. Nevertheless, even though the last one also focuses on Nina Burgess like mine does, but, only as the character who leads the story, not to prove any ambivalence of woman's characteristics issue. It means that these reviews are different to my topic.

Second, an article entitled "Marlon James's "Dangerous" A Brief History of Seven Killings" by Maria Grau Perejoan, a student of University of Barcelona. Maria analyzes the novel by using the historical approach. She admits that this novel explores the 'suppressed histories' through its dangerous look and form. She also believes that this novel brings back the ignored issue about the history of Jamaica Island, and Caribbean region (2016). Similar to other reviews above, this article also focuses on the

historical issue about Jamaica, especially Caribbean region which has been ignored. However, mine is more concentrate on the issue about women that the novel presents. Using feminist criticism approach, the analysis later will be concluded whether the novel is categorized as feminist or patriarchal.

The third one is a dissertation of Agnel Barron, a University of Florida's student, under the title "From Slave Ship to Citizenship: Re-Imagined Communities and the Counterculture of Modernity in the Historical Novel of Slavery." This dissertation investigates some novels which contain slavery issues. One of them is *The Book of Night Women* by Marlon James. Through the cultural studies, Barron examines the issue of the female slave experience – rebellion and the sexual politics of slavery in *The Book of Night Women* (2013). If this research examines women and slavery issue, my research analyzes the ambivalence of woman's characteristics. Through feminist criticism, I want to show the ambivalence impression about women that Marlon James portrays.

Finally, last but not least, here is the thesis which triggers this research, a thesis from student of Andalas University, Ivan Atmanegara, entitled "Sexuality and Misogyny in Greek Tragedies: A Feminist Discourse to *Antigone* and *Medea*." This thesis examines how the authors of both *Antigone* and *Medea* depict their main characters. The works have heroines, yet the ways of both Sophocles and Euripides write their heroines' destiny show their hatred toward women (2007). At the first, this research looks like a feminist,

but then it turns out misogynist. Similarly, yet different, my research also has this kind of pattern. James portrays the main female character both as victim and heroine. The analysis later will be concluded whether the novel is categorized as feminist or patriarchal.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Feminism is ‘man-made,’ as Gill Plain and Susan Sellers explain, which means that feminism happens to appear to resist patriarchal domination (2007: 203). Feminism or feminist criticism is better termed as *Cultural Politics* than as a theory (Selden 2005: 116). That is because, basically it derives from cultural phenomena of women movement that women want to be equal with men. In old time, women used to think like men because the ideology was dominated by men. Men’s domination of language traps women inside a male ‘truth’ (121). We are not aware that unconsciously, women did play a significant role in certain work as if we read from women standpoint.

This domination system is called Patriarchy. Bell Hooks in her essay entitled “Understanding Patriarchy” states that:

Patriarchy is a political-system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (2013).

Additionally, Hooks also claims that patriarchy becomes “the most threatening social disease” which has been taught since children. It is smoothly embedded in our life because it begins in the very long time.

In order to reveal the ambivalent characteristics of woman in the novel, I would borrow Hélène Cixous’s ‘Patriarchal Binary Thought,’ one of her most groundbreaking ideas:

Activity/ Passivity

Sun/ Moon

Culture/ Nature

Day/ Night

Father/ Mother

Head/Emotions

Intelligible/ Sensitive

Logos/ Pathos (quoted in Moi 2003: 102)

These binaries are profoundly innate in the patriarchal value system. Each opposition can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the ‘masculine’ qualities are seen as the positive and powerful one, and the ‘feminine’ qualities are seen as the negative and powerless one. As Cixous continues, because, under patriarchy men are always the ‘victor’ (103).

Also, to enhance the issue of ambivalent woman’s characteristics in the novel, I would borrow Cheri Register’s ‘Prescriptive Criticism,’ one of three distinct subdivisions that she forms:

Prescriptive criticism is best defined in terms of way in which literature can serve the cause of liberation. To earn feminist approval, literature must perform one or more of the following functions: (1) serve as a forum for women; (2) help to achieve cultural androgyny; (3) provide role-models; (4) promote sisterhood; and (5) augment consciousness-raising (quoted in Donovan 1989: 18-19).

As Register continues, an ideal feminist literary work is a work that accomplishes five functions that is formed. I argue that some of these functions are covered in the novel through the main female character, for the reason she has complex personalities. Her appearance breaks the feminist rules and also challenges system in patriarchal society.

1.8 Method of the Literary Research

In doing the research, there are three steps to follow: the data collection, the analysis, and the report of the result. This research deals with books and any related materials. The primary text of the research is *A Brief History of Seven Killings* which was published by Riverhead Books in 2014. While, the other secondary sources are the thesis, master thesis, dissertation, article journals from the internet, and theories books related to feminist criticism and Marlon James, the approach and the author.

The analysis uses the qualitative method dealing with the texts mentioned above through the feminist perspective about the ambivalent woman's characteristics. It starts by reading the whole novel and highlighting

Nina's narratives including the ones in her disguise's characters, and others which describe her.

After that, it focuses on how the author portrays the only female character whether she carries the feminine side only as Hélène Cixous's 'Patriarchal Binary Thought' offers or she has such a masculine side as well. It continues to the way the author makes the male characters treat her. Then, the ambivalence of woman's characteristics will be analyzed through the action of Nina and her relationship with other characters in the novel using Cheri Register's 'Perspective Criticism.' All this analysis will be concluded whether the novel is classified as patriarchal or feminist. The result will be explained descriptively.

