

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The end of American Civil War in 1865 brought a change to literary works which allow black people to tell their experience of oppression during antebellum era: the era of slavery before American Civil War in 1861. The neo-slave narratives is one of the genres that talks about those oppression experiences. Neo-slave narratives is “the contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions and take on the first voice of the antebellum slave narratives” (Rushdy 1999:3). The neo-slave narratives are not only written by the “elite” as history observer but also by lower class people who experience it. Neo-slave narratives novels aim to fulfill the contemporary readers’ desires who are aware about the slavery abolition of African American (Namradja 12). Bernard Bell in *The Afro American Novel and Its Tradition* defines the term as “residually oral, modern narrative of escaping from bondage to freedoms (Valdieso 43).

One of neo-slave narratives novel is *Kindred* written by Octavia E. Butler. It was firstly published in 1979 and re-printed until 2000s. In 2003, it won the Rochester, New York’s book of the year. It is the neo-slave narratives which uses science fiction framework. It talks about antebellum south slavery in perspectives of modern woman (Dana Franklin) who settled in post-Civil Right Movement of California in 1979. Dana Franklin was forced to travel back in time to antebellum Maryland in early 1800s and felt and witnessed the brutality of slavery. Through *Kindred*, Butler represents the miserable and painful life of black women in 1800s

that they were marginalized racially and sexually by the white people. The white abused black women and created physical and psychological pains. Black women became the subject of this colonization, and they were marginalized by this imperial power and also its patriarchy.

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* describes black women in 19th century America lived under bad circumstances. Black women were double colonized, first by the patriarchy domination in which the black men themselves under the notion that women take the lower position than men in the society. Secondly, black women were colonized by European colonizer who controlled the land based on their rules. In the patriarchal domination society, women were treated as colonized object. As in the compare between women and men, there was a significant difference that black women were more marginalized in the social activities. The position of women during the invasion of European was even worst that they were treated as slaves. Black women also were discriminated by their race and their gender. Under this discrimination, black women were treated inhumanly and considered as beneficial properties.

Slavery in the 19th century America gave physical and psychological effect toward black women's life. The physical pains that black women get are from the physical violence and torments. White people during enslavement era tend to torture the black since they are not seen as human. The psychological pains that black women get are coming from mental torments. White people see black women as sexual properties that can satisfy their lusts. No matter how smart black

women could be, white people still determine them as black people; an African American women who can be oppressed and brutalized.

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* talks about slavery and the struggle of black women through the enslavement. *Kindred* can reflect series oppression toward black women in form of slavery and struggle of black women against slavery. I believe that this novel represents the miserable life and pains of black women during enslavement such as the difficulty to get job and education, experience of slave trafficking and family separation, and also black women become the victim of rape. Therefore, I am going to analyze black women's miserable life and pains during slavery in antebellum America in the perspective of black feminism. Hence, I entitle the research as **"Black Women Suffering as Slave in Antebellum America as Portrayed in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*"**.

1.2. Identification of the Problem

Since Octavia Butler's *Kindred* is a neo-slave narratives novel which I assume to represent history, thus I believe there were several oppressions described. Black women were oppressed by the imperial power due to their race and sex which I also assume that black women pains are caused by the combination of these oppressions. Hence, in this research I would like to study how black women suffering from the struggle of enslavement and oppression, and how *Kindred* portrayed those oppression.

1.3. Scope of the Research

Basically this research is applying historical approach in the perspective of black feminist criticism. Since this research is an extrinsic analysis, I am going to relate the novel with the history of slavery in America which aimed to investigate the oppressions toward black women. I focus on the history of black women during enslavement in antebellum America which portrayed in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Additionally, the series oppression toward black women and how black women did struggle those oppressions are examined through Dana Franklin as main character and other supporting characters.

1.4. Research Questions

There are two questions that will be answered by doing this research, they are:

1. What kind of oppressions do black women undergo which portrayed in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*?
2. How does *Kindred* reveal the facts of slavery in antebellum Maryland in 19th century?

1.5. Objectives of the Research

This research has two objectives: general and specific objectives. As general objective, this research is aimed to enrich the literary research on neo-slave narratives, historical novel, and the black feminist criticism. While the specific objective is intended to reveal the history of slavery in antebellum

Maryland in 19th century reflected in *Kindred*. It will also show the reflection of series oppression of racist and sexist oppression from white people and black men toward black women, and their struggle against these oppressions portrayed in a neo-slave narratives novel *Kindred* written by Octavia Butler.

1.6. Review of the Related Studies

Many critics had analyzed *Kindred* whether it is as individual subject or comparing it with other novel which has black women oppression issue. I also found several articles talking about black women oppression in different literary work. A number of articles and journals regarding black women oppression I found have been published from 2004 to 2017.

The first article is an article from *International Journal of New Technology and Research* published in 2017. It is written by Adolf Tanyi Mbeh entitled “Didactics and Intersections in the Teaching of Genre and Interracial Desire in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*”. Mbeh discusses the interracial relationship which he called as interracial desire. Mbeh sees the fact that interracial marriage is a taboo by agreeing of an argument about the Dana’s unconsciousness toward two oppressor’s body whose lie down above her. Mbeh also compares the way showing love between two white men toward black women by: (1) raping; is addressed by white men toward black women as 19th century conventional love, and (2) share the mutual desire which “questioning the lingering presence of oppression and sexual violent”. By showing the after effect of the past as the

contamination in the interracial relationship between Dana and her pair, Mbeh is suggesting that there is racism that lurking beneath their relationship.

Lena Ampadu (2004) in her article entitled “Racial, Gendered, and Geographical Spaces in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*” which published in *CEAMagazine* discusses about how Butler created her story by considering the racial, gender, and geographical spaces. This article gives the understanding that black women should have the chance of survival in antebellum slavery. Yet I believe that black woman was still the precious property of slaveholders, therefore black women had the less chance of escaping. She claims that as neo-slave narratives, Butler wants to highlight the physical injured as the impact of the brutality of antebellum slavery. The choice of Maryland as the setting of the novel, she argues, is the result of consideration that Dana Franklin in order to survive have to run from Antebellum South. Therefore, Maryland sounds perfect because it gives the main character the “realistic chances of escaping”.

Sarah Eden Schiff (2009) in “Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*” finds out that *Kindred* is a “fantastic journey representative of the discursive manipulation of history” which has a dual effect of a curative memory and history. To Schiff, Butler shows the double consciousness which highlights the intimate connection between past and present; she also claims that the present is the double of the past. In *Dissociated Temporality: the Past and the Present as Doubles*, Schiff perceives the “weirdest looking couple” passage as a repressive post-Emancipation culture as the double of the past which that I regard it as the legacy of slavery, the racism which

continues to the twentieth-century African Americans. This is an interesting research since Schiff believes that somehow Octavia Butler does not represent the real historical moment of antebellum slavery, meanwhile I believe that Butler succeeded in representing the history of antebellum slavery though she does not tell all story about the past. She states that Butler does not bother to represent several events in the present time such as the Celebration of the Fourth of July as one of the event in bicentennial.

The next article is “A Discourse of Power: The Manipulation of Stereotypes in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*” by Cheri Molter (nd). She claims that Butler manipulates some stereotypes in *Kindred*, such as the mammy figure, jezebel, and the Angel-in-the-House. The mammy figure was portrayed by Sarah, the cook of the house. As Butler explains that Sarah is still showing the submission to the master after she was separated from her family which proved that Sarah is a decent mammy figure. However this proof is proved wrong as the story goes, Sarah is not only showing a submission to the master but rather to stand for Carrie, her muted daughter, which for the master this love is used to show the power toward her. Cheri Molter also shows the manipulation of jezebel stereotypes through Dana and Alice. Dana is stereotyped as jezebel because she slept with a white man who’s known as her husband whom she cannot proved due to the Maryland laws about interracial relationship. Alice in the other hand is stereotyped as jezebel since she has to surrender herself to be *consumed* by the master because she has been freed from a slave auction. This article shows the character’s development throughout the story, and proves that the stereotype for

several characters should be analyzed deeper to acknowledge whether or not the stereotype is manipulated.

The last is an article from undergraduate thesis entitled *The Representation of the Female Messiah in Dana's Character in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred: An Archetype study* written by Mutia Septianda Sari which is published in Andalas University. She (2015) claimed that the main character of *Kindred* has the similar characteristics with the female messiah. Dana as the main character is described as the savior who helps the people around her. The characteristics which similar are Dana understand the difficulty of women in the society, she cares about the others, and wants to people around her grows to be a good people. The similar characteristics are strengthened by some images such mother figure, the plantation, and the missing of the arm as the symbol of sacrifice for her community (Sari 2015).

This research has the similarity with those articles since they discuss Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. The first article discusses interracial relationship, the second one is talking about the choosing of main character's race and gender and the geographical consideration of location as the setting, the third is talking about the manipulation of history, and the fourth talks about some stereotype toward black women in the society which manipulated in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and the last talks about black women could be the messiah for her people. This research however, focuses on the representation of black women's oppression in antebellum America which later finds out how black women struggle the oppression and its portrayal of slavery's history in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

In conducting this research, I use historical approach to see the reflection of the history in the object of research. Historical approach is seeking the reflection of “author’s life and time of the life, and the time of characters in the work” (Guerin et.al 22). The aim of this approach is to analyze the history that reflected in a literary work. In analyzing literary work by using historical approach, it helps to understand several issues such as social, politics and religion which far from the millennium era. Joan W. Scott in “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” states there are two distinct categories to analyze literary work using historical approach. The first category is descriptive category which refers to “existence phenomena” without interpreting, and explaining the causal of the phenomena. The second is using the causal which seeking the understanding “how and why these take form they do” (1986:1055). I use the first category which refers to the phenomenon where black women were oppressed by white people and show its reflection in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*.

Together with historical approach, I also use feminist criticism especially black feminist criticism to analyze the reflection of history found from the object of research. Feminist criticism appeared under the notion of gender equality, and the notion that women were aware that they should have the same position with men in the society. It concerns with the marginalization toward women all over the world, and the imbalance power of gender in the culture that are reflected in the literary text (Guerin et.al 196). Since the patriarchal system only allowed men to lead the society, it makes feminists concerning the position of women as the

second sex. This position caused several problems such the violence against women, the atrocity of sexuality, and the oppression toward women's life.

In its development, the need to achieve the equality among gender and races emerge in form of black feminist criticism. Black feminists criticize the bias on criticizing the equality of gender which is only focusing on the position of white women in society rather than black women. Civil Right movement in the late 1960s and the early 1970s brought black feminist criticism into the front line on criticizing the white people's imperialism, and black people patriarchy. This movement was supported by Second Wave of American Feminism, and Black Power and Black Arts movements (Plain and Sellers 154). Black feminism criticizes the feminist who only focus on the white women in order to become the part of patriarchal power structure in the society without concerning another races (Guerin et.al 208).

Kimberle Crenshaw, one of the earliest black woman who voiced about the marginalization towards other black women, (1989) in her article "Demarginalizing the Interaction of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" states that white feminist created a claim that the reflection of women's experiences and women's aspiration do not include black women. She also questions how "the claim of "women are", "women believe", and "women need" are made when those are not applicable to black women's needs, interests, and experiences?" To Crenshaw, feminist theory tends to overlook the role of race when they describe women's experience through analyzing the patriarchy, sexuality, and separate

sphere ideology. However, Feminists ignore the function of their race such to alleviate some aspect of sexism, how their race privileged them over, and contribute the domination to other women which is black women and women of colored. Therefore, as Crenshaw suggests, the feminist theory cannot realize its potential to deepen its analysis by addressing non-privileged women (154).

By the suggestion from Kimberle Crenshaw, I use black feminist criticism instead of feminist criticism since *white* feminist cannot represent the needs, interests, and experiences of black women. Intersectionality is one of the term in black feminist criticism coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989's essay: "Demarginalizing the Interaction of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics", it is a "theory to comprehensively analyze the intersections and interactions of systems of oppression, and how these intersections and interactions affect live hood and of those who cross identity between these systems" (Smith 2-3). Crenshaw assumes that racism and sexism are the system of oppression which intersect and interact to each other. Therefore, black women whose intersect with both race and sex are affected by the interaction between racism and sexism, and become the victim of racist and sexist oppression which create a double burden (Smith 3).

Kimberle Crenshaw describes the discrimination toward black women in an analogy of traffic in an intersection. Discrimination is the traffic itself which coming and going from all four directions, and it may flow from one direction or another. If there is an accident, it may be caused by cars traveling from one or sometimes all directions. Similar to black women, if she is harmed because they

are in intersection, the injury is the result from sex discrimination and/or race discrimination (149), and the same goes with oppression.

In addition, Patricia Hill Collins states three interlocking dimension that encompassed the oppression of African American women. Firstly is the exploitation of black women's labor intrinsic to capitalism as the economic dimension of oppression. Joy James (1999) states this exploitation is as evident as slave trafficking such as in a "slave mart" in first half of twenty century, black female domestic worker were sold to the highest white male bidder (62,69). Secondly is the interdict of equitable access to education as political sphere that has denied the privileges of black women that are extended to white male citizens. Black women have often denied the equitable access to education and sent to the underfunded and segregated school in South. The third is one of ideology that black women are perceived as being sexually promiscuous as well as asexual and stereotyped as aberrational sexual being (Tate 2000:48-49).

1.8. Methods of the Research

In conducting the research, the library research method is applied in the first step. The data are collected from the work of Octavia Butler: *Kindred*, as the primary data. The secondary data are taken from historical sources, books, articles, journals related to the topics, and browsing on the internet.

The second step is analyzing the data which firstly I read the primary data in order to reveal the historical phenomenon occurred. Then I will apply the

historical approach and black feminist criticism toward the novel helped by the secondary sources to strengthen the arguments.

The last step is presenting the results of analysis. The descriptive method is used in this step since it is a qualitative research. The presentation of the result of analysis will be in form of words.

