

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

Otherness is the output of a discursive process where the influential group constructs the images of the powerless group by associating them with negative attributes. Racist thought is the essential thing that underlies otherness, for instance, white supremacy. White supremacy is a racist ideology based on the belief that white people are superior in many ways compared to other races, which leads to the thought that white people should dominate other races (Saad, 2020). The sense of superiority that white people uphold leads to the way they see other races. They may see other races as others. As Ashcroft et al. state in their book, the other is the excluded subject created by the discourse of power (2007). It was common for them to portray themselves positively while attributing negative qualities to other groups. Therefore, one group will exclude and marginalize another group socially through othering. One group tends to characterize another group through stereotypical images that will make the other group dissimilar or inferior to one's group. As a result, the inferior group will see themselves as others.

White superiority is not just a way of thinking, but it is also about extending the systems and institutions that are structured to maintain this white domination (Saad, 2020). The structured system that exists nowadays promotes racial discrimination by treating people differently based on their race and causing harm and disadvantage to specific groups (Blank et al., 2004). It is the act of making another group less than human, and this group of people is not worth getting

humane treatment (Ferdinal, 2019). In other words, otherness that the dominant group carries out would lead to unfair treatment against the inferior group, such as segregation, oppression, and violence.

In addition, the United States has a long history with this issue. The issue of otherness does not only occur in American society. It also occurs in American literature. Otherness issues during the slavery period in the past played a significant role in the emergence of unfair treatment against black people, and it also became a part of American history. At that time, white people perceived black people as others, and they treated black people as less than fully human. Therefore, many authors in this era were encouraged to write literary works that take the issue as their theme, such as Harriet Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave*.

Even though slavery has ended in the United States, it does not mean the end of literary works that discuss otherness issues during this period. The fact that racial discrimination is still one of the discussed issues leads to the emergence of literary works that take otherness as the theme of their content. This issue relates to human rights violations. The authors who are concerned about the issues of human rights have worked to improve the readers' understanding of these issues as well as to remind those who commit crimes – whether they are institutions, apparatuses, or influential individuals – of the consequences of their actions on their victims (Ferdinal, 2013).

Moreover, several contemporary writers write about the practice of racial discrimination that is rooted in otherness during slavery in the form of fictional

literary works. They use their knowledge of slavery and transform it into fiction to reveal the dark side of this period and its effect on people. They believe that fiction can reveal a topic in a way where the readers are brought to the story so that they can feel the emotions felt by the characters and the conditions at a certain period. This kind of literary work is called a neo-slave narrative. The neo-slave narrative is a contemporary novel that adopts the form of the antebellum slave narrative (Rushdy, 1999). It refers to any contemporary novels that take place in the slavery era.

Neo-slave narratives primarily raise otherness issues in developing the plot of a story. For instance, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987) and *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (2016) portray how white people negate black people and prevent them from having an education. Another example of neo-slave narratives is a novel titled *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. Octavia Butler is one of the black female writers in the United States. She was born on June 22, 1947, in California. She has published several literary works and gained some awards from her works. *Kindred* is her fourth novel. This novel was published in 1979 and claimed as Butler's best-selling novel among her works. In 1980, this novel was nominated for a fantasy novel nomination in the Locus Award. This novel also received Rochester, New York's Book of the Year award in 2003. In addition, the novel has been adapted into a graphic novel by Damian Duffy and John Jennings in 2017. The graphic novel was on the first list of New York Times bestsellers for hardcover graphic novels in 2017. The graphic novel also won the Eisner Award for Best Adaptation from another Medium in 2018. *Kindred* has been adapted into a mini-series in December 2022, consisting of eight episodes.

Kindred talks about the practice of slavery in Maryland from the objectivity of a modern black woman named Dana. She lives in California in 1976 and experiences time travel several times to a Maryland plantation during the early 1800s. This novel shows the difficulties experienced by black people who work as enslaved people in Maryland. Besides presenting slavery, this novel also portrays how white people negate black people and associate them with negative stereotypes. This attitude then leads to unfair treatment in the form of violence against black people who work as enslaved people on the plantation.

Differential treatment against black people is a severe problem in the United States that many authors often discuss in literary works. It is rooted in how the dominant group perceives the inferior group as the other. Therefore, the researcher decided to choose otherness issues against black people during the slavery period as her research. There are several reasons why the researcher wants to do this research. First, the practice of otherness against black people during the slavery period in America is examined by many authors, whether they are new authors or well-known authors. Some authors talk about white people who see black people as less than fully human during this period in their literary works. Second, otherness issues that black people have experienced for centuries left a legacy to themselves. It affects the way black people perceive themselves and assess their worth. The slave society, which connected with the practice of racial discrimination, had prepared the young to accept exploitation and abuse to ignore the absence of dignity and respect for themselves as Blacks (DeGruy, 2005).

Black people still struggle with their self-esteem until now. A race (black) card phenomenon has occurred in the United States these past few years. This

phenomenon has garnered considerable attention, and concerned individuals have taken to online forums to discuss the matter. Many people bring up this issue and discuss it on the internet. Many people in the United States protest the phenomenon where black people pull the race card whenever they experience discrimination. They label black people as too sensitive, and the attitude of pulling the race card makes them trapped in a guilty feeling called 'white guilt.'

Their opinion is important to be encountered. The reason this phenomenon occurs is because black people have experienced racial discrimination for centuries. The phenomenon of black people pulling their race card is indirectly a form of trauma, which is a legacy of otherness that they have felt for so long. The idea of white people arguing that the race card is over-used has become a tactic of avoidance of white responsibility. For this reason, The researcher chose to focus on otherness during an antebellum period. Understanding how otherness occurred in the past is essential because history has a profound impact on shaping society's values in the present day. Understanding otherness can help to improve human quality in society. In addition, *Kindred* is a good match for this research because the story in this novel also takes place in antebellum Maryland. Based on the explanation above, the researcher would like to entitle this research to **"The Portrait of Otherness towards Black People in Antebellum America in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*: A Postcolonial Analysis."**

1.2. Identification of the Problem

In *Kindred*, Octavia Butler presents the issue of otherness towards black people who work as enslaved people in Maryland Plantation. Otherness appears through the racist thoughts that white people hold towards black people in which

they have their negative stereotypes and prejudices towards black people themselves. Otherness causes and perpetuates a dominant power over the blacks. Through this domination, white folks treat black people with less empathy by exercising violence. As a contemporary author who did not live during the slavery period, Butler tends to present otherness explicitly and viscerally in her work, *Kindred*. In this research, the researcher will use the concept of otherness in postcolonial criticism as a tool to analyze how making assumptions about black people could lead to the practice of domination against black people themselves, as depicted in *Kindred*.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

This review deals with the issue of otherness, which leads to unjust treatment, as seen in American literature. Otherness is the result where some groups get labeled as other. A rich body of criticism and scholarship has examined this theme. Numbers of American literature often describe that black people characters experience otherness perpetrated by white people characters. The researchers tend to analyze otherness in literary works through sociological and postcolonial perspectives and use the theories related to conducting this research.

Orientalism is a term used in postcolonialism to describe the belief that perpetuates stereotypes of particular races. For instance, in Jacqueline Woodson's novels, such as *Lena*, *I Hadn't Mean to Tell You This*, and *Behind You*, black people are portrayed as careless-natured, vile, dirty, poor, and criminal (Hafizh et al., 2016). There is also a derivative term of orientalism, called otherness used by Prihandika et al. (2017) to conduct a study about the politics of othering immigrants in America as seen in three selected poems titled *Our Own Land*,

Young and Innocent, and *Because THIS is a Revolution!* By Jorge Luis Borges. The findings reveal that the immigrants struggle to get proper job and education. From Hafizh et al.'s analysis, the researchers use otherness theory to uncover the action of perpetuating different treatments towards immigrants in America. For this reason, the researcher is interested in using otherness theory to analyze literary work from different lenses. The researcher will uncover racist thoughts of white people characters towards black characters in *Kindred*.

Making assumptions about race could lead to another unfair treatment, for instance, violence. Violence also occurs in current time in America. Violence appears in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, in which police like to make threats, shout harshly, and order black people to lie down inhumanly. The worst part is that police brutality could end up in a murder tragedy, as experienced by Khalil's character, who loses his life because he is assumed to be a drug dealer by the police (Yanti, 2021). Furthermore, Nic Stone's *Dear Justyce* also depicts police brutality towards black people as experienced by the characters in the novel, such as Quan, Quan's father, Trey, and Martel's father (Ramadhani, 2022). Yanti's analysis and Ramadhani's analysis about racial discrimination offer new insight into the fact that black people lack legal protection to this day.

Segregation is also a form of unfair treatment. Alfredo Lambi (2016) supports this statement in his analysis of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which show that Black Americans in the 1930s struggled to access health care, proper clothes, food, and job. However, Lambi, in this analysis, only briefly explains the actual condition of America in the 1930s without giving an overview of discrimination in health care, clothes, foods, and jobs in that period.

Involving the discussion of these kinds of discrimination is helpful to compare the problems presented in the novel with the problems that happened in reality.

Since this research will analyze *Kindred* novel, it is crucial to involve studies about the work. Priyadi and Effendi (2022) analyze forms of racism in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. The findings reveal that there are four forms of racism depicted in the novel: internalized racism, interpersonal racism, institutional racism, and structural racism. It seems that Priyadi and Effendi try to analyze racism in detail. However, they only analyze racism experienced by the main character and provide one example/evidence for each form of racism in the novel. For this reason, the researcher is interested in enriching racism and discrimination by focusing on black characters in *Kindred*.

Still, when it comes to literary work, the researcher found a thesis conducted by Rafina Nasution, entitled *Black Women Suffering as Slaves in Antebellum America as Portrayed in Octavia Butler's Kindred* by using a theory in black feminist criticism, named intersectionality (2018). The findings show that slavery affects black women's jobs and education, in which some of them have to do domestic tasks: cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, etc. Some of them also have to work in the field. This study invites us to see the novel from a different perspective, and it gives us an understanding of how black women experienced double oppression because of their position as inferior in society, both in terms of race and gender.

Differential treatment that has oppressed particular groups for a long time encourages them to a resistance point as an expression of freedom. For instance, Dana, as the main character, resists in two ways, namely oral resistance and

physical resistance (Soelistyarani, 2019). The analysis shows that Dana does oral resistance through literacy and speech. On the other hand, physical resistance can be done by running away from the place that oppresses particular groups and physically fighting against the oppressor group.

All these studies are helpful to outline the research of this thesis. After reviewing all these studies, the researcher will use the concept of otherness to uncover racist thoughts of white people characters towards black characters in *Kindred*. In order to enrich the analysis of such issues in the novel, the researcher decided to not only focus on one black character. This research will specifically focus on the portrayal of black characters as "others" in *Kindred*. The researcher will explore the historical context of slavery in antebellum America to draw parallels between the actual conditions of that period and the events depicted in the novel.

1.4. Research Questions

Based on the previous sub-chapters, the researcher is going to formulate the research questions into:

1. How does *Kindred* portray the sense of otherness towards black people perpetrated by white people in antebellum America?
2. How does *Kindred* depict the impacts of otherness against black people perpetrated by white people in antebellum America, and how is it similar to the reality of slavery in the 1800s in America?

1.5. Scope of the Research

The scope of this research focuses on the intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The research will focus on the novel's depiction of otherness and violence as conceptualized by several postcolonial scholars. This research is limited to two discussions; the first is the portrayal of otherness against black people in the novel, which focuses on the stereotypes and prejudice towards black people in antebellum America. Second, in investigating the impacts of otherness against black people, the researcher will only focus on the negative side, namely violence.

1.6. Objective of the Study

This research aims to reveal the portrayal of otherness against black people in antebellum America in *Kindred*. The researcher would also like to analyze violence experienced by black people in the novel, which is considered the impact of otherness against black people, as seen in *Kindred*.

