

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Research

Racial discrimination and racism are not new issues; both of them have a strong relationship. Andersen & Collins said that racial discrimination is not allowed anymore. However, racism still affects how groups interact and the different levels of power they have (Baker et al. 57). The acts of racial discrimination arise because the majority group considers their skin and physical differences to be something that is considered bad. According to Andersen, the concept of race, when seen in a social context, is a basis for treating groups differently based on racial differences. (Baker et al. 58). In other words, the concept of race can be defined as a perspective that categorizes people based on their physical appearance and is determined by history and complex social, economic, and political systems. It could be based on their hair, facial features, or skin color. Race also helps determine whether strangers are perceived as a threat and should be avoided. These groups are also classified as minorities and majorities.

In general, discrimination can take various forms, such as gender, economic, and racial discrimination. Racial discrimination against black Americans has a profound impact that has occurred throughout history until today. Racial discrimination affects the social, economic, and political aspects of the lives of people affected by discrimination. Unlike other forms of discrimination, racial discrimination is deeply embedded in systemic structures, affecting people's

access and rights to resources and other opportunities that have a significant impact on racial groups that experience discrimination, especially Black Americans.

A racial issue, which can lead to several actions such as racism, is a belief system that categorizes people into different groups and claims that they evolved separately and have different levels of ability. This belief suggests that mixing with this inferior group will create individuals who are also considered inferior, making one race seem better and the other worse because this belief creates inferior and superior races. According to Bowser in his research entitled “Racism Origin and Theory” (2017), racism has several forms, including cultural racism and institutional racism, and there are also three levels of racism: the cultural level, the institutional level, and the individual level (Bowser 579-581).

The act of racism can lead to systemic and social impacts such as racial injustice, as stated in D.C Matthew’s research racism itself refers to the belief or ideology embedded and involves prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, or hostility directed towards a person or group of people of a different race and in principle, can give rise to racial injustice (Matthew 887). Racial Injustice refers to the unfair treatment of individuals or groups on the based on their race. It is a consequence of racism, which continues to sustain unequal results and chances for different racial groups. The issue of racial injustice can be understood through the lens of racism. One of the reasons racial injustices occurs is because people often deny some races while allowing others, where a person's rights or chances are determined by these two principles. People who deny some races think that their race is superior to

others, and this still exists in many countries. Minorities are often discriminated against by majorities, and they make the minorities have problems, for example, in their jobs, their education, and others.

The issue of racial discrimination and racism against African Americans and other black people has been a persistent topic of research in the literature, which aims to provide an overview of the historical and ongoing struggles faced by the black American community. Throughout the literature, many authors have explored themes that highlight the issues of racial discrimination, racial injustice, and social inequality faced by Black Americans. One of the examples is author Angie Thomas with her novel *The Hate U Give*. The novel written by Thomas focuses on the experiences of black girls against racial issues such as police brutality and racial injustice that exist and develop in America. Highlighting how the problem of racial discrimination still exists today.

In this research, I chose the novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, published in 2020, written by African-American author Janae Marks. Most of her work focuses on addressing themes of identity, family, and societal issues, particularly racial injustice. Her writing often explores the experiences of black characters navigating challenges and discrimination in contemporary settings. *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* is a middle-grade novel that highlights the issue of racism and tells the story of a twelve-year-old African-American girl named Zoe Washington, who discovers a letter from her biological father, a man she never knew, while pursuing her dream of becoming a pastry chef. This novel is set in Boston, Massachusetts, in contemporary times. Through Zoe's experiences, Marks

highlights the problem of racial discrimination, especially racial injustice faced by black Americans, which then becomes the basis for in-depth research on racial injustice in this research.

There are several reasons why I am interested in researching the issue of racial injustice in the novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*. First, I know and am aware that racial injustice is still a big issue nowadays, which is still very relevant to be discussed occasionally. Gutmann (1998), said that one of the most long-standing and systematic problems of racial injustice is the problem of racial injustice against black Americans (Gutmann 107). The issue of racial injustice still has to get the spotlight as a power to protect the rights of black Americans and against discrimination. That is why this issue should be an essential one to discuss because, in reality, we found a lot of this phenomenon.

In reality, the problem of racial injustice that has a major impact on minorities still occurs to this day, especially in the US. Cited from CNN US in 2023 there was an issue about racial injustice that happened in the US. Marvin Haynes a black person, became one of the many people who had to face racial injustice in America. He was charged with murder without any concrete evidence, there was no forensic evidence, such as fingerprints or DNA, this was a terrible injustice (Mossburg et al.) This shows that there is still racial injustice faced by black Americans. It took decades for them to be free from accusations of wrongdoing that they did not commit. Therefore, awareness of the racial injustices faced by minorities can foster empathy and empower people to stand up for the rights, equality, and justice of the marginalized, especially black Americans.

The second reason is because this novel shows the racial discrimination and mistreatment of black Americans in society. One of them is the portrayal of racial injustice in this novel. Black Americans have no right to speak about their opinion about the law, they lack legal protection, and they feel powerless about it. *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* by Janae Marks explores the importance of depicting the struggle of black Americans through literature. This novel illustrates the struggle of black Americans through the experience of an African American girl who struggles to get justice in the middle of systemic racism. Through *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, Marks reflects on broader issues of racial injustice and racial discrimination that affect the life of the black community. In *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, I believe that Janae Marks is trying to show that black Americans experience unfair treatment due to racial injustice. Through this novel, Marks highlights the struggles faced by black Americans, illustrating their lack of voice, legal protection, and power in society. Therefore, I decided to entitle this research **“Racial Injustice Against Black Americans in Janae Marks’ Novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*”**

1.2 Identification of Problem

From the Desk of Zoe Washington illustrates how the main character Zoe and her family struggle with the impact of their race, illustrating the unfair challenges they face. The primary issues found in this novel include trouble with the law, unfair treatment, and negative stereotypes. I found through the narrative in this novel that Zoe’s family goes through unfair situations with the law and legal protection. They might be treated poorly by the police, face biased judgments, and

struggle to find proper legal help because of their race. Then, they also have to face several unfair treatments as black Americans, and they also have to deal with negative stereotypes that show how unfair judgments based on race affect their social life.

1.3 The Scope of The Research

This research focuses on extrinsic elements to find out the various forms of racial injustice depicted in the novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*. Therefore, this research needs to further examine the social-historical context in which the novel is set, which is Boston, and it also discusses the comparisons between Boston as portrayed in the novel and the reality of Boston today. Additionally, this research also focuses on racial injustice that happened to black Americans through *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* which puts black Americans socially into inconveniences.

1.4 Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* depict the racial injustice of black Americans, particularly Zoe Washington and her family, and what does this tell us about contemporary Boston?
2. What are the regulations portrayed in *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* that contribute to racial injustice?

1.5 Objective of the Research

This research aims to explore the racial injustice faced by black Americans in Janae Marks' novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*. It will look at how the novel shows the unfair treatment of black Americans, focusing on Zoe Washington

and her family and what kind of injustice they experience. The research will also connect these events in the novel to the real-life issues of racial injustice in today's Boston. It will identify the rules and systems in the novel that contribute to this injustice and use them to understand the racial situation in Boston.

1.6 Review of The Previous Studies

The first research is a thesis by Yuliana Indri Yanti (2021), entitled “The Portrait of Racial Discrimination Against Black American People in Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give*.” This research discusses the issue of race, especially racial discrimination against black Americans represented in the novel *The Hate U Give*. This research aims to reveal the impact of racial discrimination, which puts black Americans in a harmful social situation, such as getting a good education, accessing good work, and legal protection. This research uses qualitative and descriptive research methods. The results of the analysis show that black Americans struggle to get equal rights and similar opportunities as other Americans. This study uses the same theory from Joe R. Feagin about systemic racism to analyze the novel. This research is useful for my research topics, as it also discusses the issue of racial discrimination and uses the same theory. Then, the explanation of the forms of racial discrimination that are provided is very useful and helps me easily understand the issue of racial discrimination, which will also be part of the discussion for my research. This study helps me understand how to apply the theory to the analysis of the novel.

The second research is an article by Afifah Indriani and Delvi Wahyuni (2021), entitled “Institutional Racism in American Post-Civil Rights Movement in

Dear Martin by Nic Stone (2017)". This research focuses on four issues of systemic racism through several African-American characters in the novel. This research aims to explore the issue of institutional racism, using the theory of systemic racism by Joe R. Feagin to analyze this novel. This research uses the descriptive research method. The analysis of this research shows that African-American characters experience four forms of institutional racism, which are The White Racial Frame and Its Embedded Racist Ideology, Alienated Social Relationships, Racial Hierarchy with Divergent Group Interest, and Racial Domination: Discrimination in Various Aspects. This research is useful to my research topics because it uses the systemic racism theory by Joe R. Feagin, which is also a theory that supports my research. In addition, this article also discusses the issue of institutional racism, which is related to my topic. This research does not necessarily form the basis of my research, but some of the information in this article will be useful for additional information for my research, especially about institutional racism faced by African Americans.

The third research is an article by Irina I. Holden (2023), entitled "Racial Injustice in Astrid Lindgren's *Kati in America*." This research aims to highlight Lindgren's criticism of racial injustice in the United States, especially in the South. As described in chapter 15, which is missing in the English translation. This article uses the novel *Kati in America* as its main source, supported by other sources of biographical information about Astrid Lindgren and her trip to the United States. The method used is comparative analysis, which serves to highlight the absence of the chapter in the English translation and the importance of its content in addressing

racial injustice. The findings of the article reveal that Chapter 15 of *Kati in America* describes the protagonist's first-hand experience of racism in New Orleans, which emphasizes Lindgren's clear condemnation of racial injustice. This research has similarities with my research, which discusses the topic of racial injustice and takes the novel as the object of research. Although this study discusses the issue of racial injustice and takes the novel as its object of research, there is no specific explanation or discussion of this racial injustice issue. This research discusses the novel as a whole, and there is no specific theory used by the author.

The fourth research is an article by Muhammad Al Hafizh (2017), entitled "Portrait of Racism in Globalization Era: An Analysis of Jacqueline Woodson's Novel." In this research, the researcher discusses the problem of racism. This research aims to discuss how the portrayal of racism in America during the era of globalization is reflected in the novels of Jacqueline Woodson. The research specifically focuses on two novels by Woodson, *If You Come Softly* (1998) and *Behind You* (2004), and employs the Gramsci hegemony theory for analysis. The data for the research is taken from literature sources related to the formal object of the study, which is the social function of literary works, particularly J.W.'s novels, in American society. The research findings suggest that the social context of Woodson's novels addresses racism in the era of globalization in America. This research is useful for my research because it uses a middle-grade novel as the object of the analysis. However, this research does not necessarily form the basis of my research, but some of the information in this article will be useful for additional information for my research.

The last research is an article by Jeni S (2019), entitled "The Problematical Portrayal of Racial Discrimination in Jacqueline Woodson's novel *The Brown Girl Dreaming*." The article discusses the portrayal of race relations and the impact of civil rights movements on the lives of African Americans in Jacqueline Woodson's novel *The Brown Girl Dreaming*. The aim of this research is to explore the themes of race, identity, and the impact of civil rights movements on the lives of African Americans in the novel. This research focuses on a single novel, which may limit its generalizability to other works of children's literature. The result shows that *The Brown Girl Dreaming* offers a complex portrayal of race relations and the impact of civil rights movements on the lives of African Americans, particularly in the context of the North-South divide. This research highlights the importance of understanding how to depict racial issues, especially in children's literature, as it can provide an understanding of social issues. Overall, this research is useful for my research, as it discusses racial issues that are analyzed through children's literature and provides an understanding of the issue of racial discrimination in children's literature. Thus, this research is useful as some additional information.

