

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

For more than a century, African American women were not considered full-fledged American human beings with all rights, and they were only considered enslaved people. However, in the 1960s, the world was aware of and concerned about the movement of black women to be able to voice those who had been silenced. According to Showalter (1997), discrimination and racism are also treatments that are always received by black people, especially by black women.

According to McCain in his book entitled *How Long Have You Been Planning this? All Our Live*, Racism in America has a long and varied history, and dramatic progress in addressing it occurred in the 1960s. (McCain, 2000). One of the most destructive forms of oppression for black people is sexism and racism. This sexual oppression has become an American culture to rule over the sexual acts they commit against minorities such as blacks. The history of the struggle of black women has become clear evidence in literary works. Several issues are discussed in literary works of black women, including the women's movement among black women. Sexism and racism are essential in understanding how protective factors, such as feminism, can interfere with the relationship between discrimination and psychological distress. For that, a strong sisterhood relationship between black women is essential in fighting racism.

Segregation between black and white people occurred in America. In

1960, this separation was written into a Segregation Law. However, social segregation still flourished after the 1960s. Segregation can be defined as the process of separating or isolating one group from another, usually based on attributes such as race, religion, ethnicity or gender. Segregation can occur in various contexts, such as education, employment, and social life. Segregation law regulated public areas and public facilities in South Montgomery. Rhea, in his book *Race Pride and American Identity*, states that during the nearly century-long battles against segregation before the 1960s, Black cultural resistance often involves rejecting visions of the white past. To understand why the Racial Pride movement was started by black people, it is important to revisit these early expressions of the racial pride dream. (Rhea, 1997).

Black women's struggles are told as part of a broader struggle for equality and justice, and also as examples of black women's courage and ability in the face of discrimination and inequality. They have to face various forms of discrimination and oppression, including racism, sexism and patriarchy. In this context, sisterhood between Black women is a very important form of solidarity and support to overcome these challenges. Black women must have awareness, love, solidarity and strength to form sisterhood. Sisterhood is a crucial feature of second-wave feminism, providing a sense of unity and collective purpose and demonstrating the solidarity of the feminist movement (Morgan 1970). By uniting women's allies who share the problem of oppression by men, women can truly enjoy freedom and equality. Black women's sisterhoods can help raise their awareness of the struggles and challenges facing the community. Solidarity among them can strengthen their

sense of belonging and increase their ability to confront violence and discrimination. Black women's sisterhoods play an important role in their selfdiscovery. Sisterhood can help increase awareness, solidarity, love and strength and help combat the struggles and violence facing the community. Sisterhood can also change the way society views and perceives black women and help change the shame and excessive stereotypes placed upon them.

The segregation, oppression, and discrimination that these black women experienced formed questions within them, such as whether they deserved such treatment? The questions arise as a form of curiosity about themselves regarding the inappropriate treatment they have received. This creates a desire to discover themselves. According to Jim Unah in his article entitled *Self-discovery: Who am I? An Ontologized Ethics of Self-mastery*, self-discovery comes from self-examination, while self-examination occurs when someone starts to ask the question “Who am I?” to themselves. He also added that self-discovery comes from constant self-analysis and commitment to a set of values. What matters is not this or that isolated act but the sum of one’s actions (Unah 145 &155). This gives existence meaning and purpose. After they get to know themselves through self-discovery, feelings of resistance begin to arise based on feelings of not deserving this treatment. This is the reason for their resistance against the acts of racism they have received.

Many literary works have been written by black women writers that discussed issues based on what their people had gone through, such as racism, discrimination, and even the oppression experienced by black people, especially

black women. These literary works present the real experiences of black people who experience suffering and discrimination in various walks of life, such as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. Both novels raise the issue of femininity for black women. The *The Color Purple* novel is written by a black woman through her opinions and experiences as a black woman. *The Color Purple* can be seen as a literary work that displays the struggle, resilience, and strength of black women in the face of multi-layered oppression. Although *The Help* is written by a white woman through her life experiences in Mississippi and her relationship with her family's maid. Although *The Help* is a work of fiction, Stockett was inspired by experiences she saw and experienced in the past, including racial discrimination that occurred in the United States in the 1960s. Stockett wanted to tell the story of the struggles of black women living as maids and domestic workers and the fight for equality and justice.

Kathryn Stockett and Alice Walker are the two famous American writers who raised the issue of racism experienced by African Americans in the United States. Walker was the eighth child of African American sharecroppers. Walker moved to California when she wrote *The Color Purple*, her most famous novel depicting the growth and self-realization of an African American woman between 1909 and 1957 in Georgia town. The book won a Pulitzer Prize and was adapted into a movie by Steven Spielberg in 1985. A musical version produced by Oprah Winfrey and Quincy Jones premiered in 2004. Unlike Walker, who is clearly African American, Stockett is white. Stockett wrote *The Help*, inspired by her childhood maid and nanny, Demetrie, an African American who played an essential role in

Stockett's growth. *The Help* captures the lives and struggles of African American maids in 1960s segregated Mississippi. It went on to become an international bestseller. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett are two novels that raise this issue. Walker introduced the issues of racism and discrimination through her works. In the novel, the authors describe the bonds of sisterhood as a tool for women to gather the courage to fight against oppression and domination. The male characters in the novel are described as very evil, and victims of sexism, racism, and paternalism create this treatment.

The Color Purple (1982) was published in 1982 and written by Alice Walker. This novel is one of the works about the story of the struggle of black women who were abused. The story depicts the lives of Cellie and Nettie, set against the backdrop of the customs and climate of early 20th-century Georgian countryside. Separated as sisters, Cellie and Nettie maintain their sisterhood through sincere letters spanning two decades, finding hope in one another across time, distance, and silence. In the novel, Walker emphasizes that the ability to express thoughts and feelings is crucial for developing self-identity (Walker, 1982).

In this novel, Cellie, a central black female character, cannot fight against those who harass her because she feels that remaining silent and invisible is the only way to survive. Cellie has suffered from acts of sexual violence and oppression since she was in her teens. She got the action from her stepfather. The move did not just stop there. Cellie then married a man and still experienced acts of violence from her husband. The women's movement among black women and black women in this novel is significant in gathering courage against the discrimination and

oppression they experience. The sisterhood looks like how Cellie and Nettie, who are her younger sisters, have made her able to survive for years, living in a culture of oppression perpetrated by patriarchal men.

I chose this book as the object of my research because I was intrigued by the struggles of female characters who are abused and live under black-male and white male control. However, with the women's movement created during oppression and violence, the female characters in the novel become strong and can fight against the patriarchal norms that oppress and view women as weak. In contrast, black women's sisterhood relationship strengthens resistance against patriarchal norms. It is not only the relationship between black women intertwined in *The Color Purple* novel. However, there is also a relationship between black women and white women. I am interested in discussing the relationship between black women fighting against the discrimination they face in this story and being able to raise their voices for freedom. In this research, I assume that Walker tells the issues that black women fight for in the novel *The Color Purple* to achieve equality between women and men.

The Help is Kathryn Stockett's debut novel, first published in 2009. This novel was the first one Kathryn Stockett released, and it received many positive responses from readers. This novel is packaged interestingly because each chapter tells the point of view of 3 different characters: Aibileen and Minny, black women who work as maids, and Skeeter, a white woman. Aibileen and Minny also develop a friendship and understanding with Skeeter that was believed to be impossible. *The*

Help tells the story of life in 1962 in Jackson, Mississippi. The theme of this book is the story of a black woman who works in a white man's house.

The Help highlights African American women who experienced discrimination while working as housemaids and nannies for white families in Jackson, Mississippi. These black women lived very far from their employers' homes, and they lived in black-only villages that were in stark contrast to the decent, spacious, and comfortable residences in the white towns. Black residents' residences seemed shabby, cramped, and inadequate, "I stop in front of an abandoned, haunted-looking house three down from Abilene's, as we planned." (Stockett, 194). Black people did not have the right to own property or build homes. Unlike white communities, they built homes on large plots of land. Black residents face difficulties because their homes and workplaces are very far away.

This book tells how black women are treated. They were slandered, considered inferior, and were not even allowed to use the same toilets as white people because they thought black people had infectious diseases. Black people experienced discrimination regarding shelter, housing, and restrooms in the workplace. I chose this novel because of the black feminist issues and discrimination that are very inherent in the story in this novel, which is depicted directly from the point of view of both races, which are white people and black people.

I aim to analyze both novels because both novels raise the same issues, both novels are written from different perspectives. I will discuss about the comparison between the experiences of segregation of women of color that occur in the novels

as well as how the role of sisterhood is able to find themselves in each novel. Through comparison, I want to find the differences and similarities in the depiction of black women's issues that occurred in the novels. Both novels *The Color Purple* and *The Help* were written by authors of different races. *The Color Purple* was written by black author Alice Walker, while *The Help* was written by Kathryn Stockett who is a white author. I want to analyze how each author displays how black women struggle to deal with situations in a discriminatory environment in each author's perspective. In addition, I also analyze which of these two novels displays the problem of discrimination of black women in more detail and clearly. A comparison can show how cultural influences, and societal expectations affect the authors' presentation of the problem. In *The Color Purple* shows how the experience of segregation to discrimination experienced by the main black female character in the novel, Celie, to the discriminatory treatment she gets from her own father and husband. Celie's resistance begins when she gets encouragement and support from her relatives so that she is able to push herself out of male domination and find herself as a human being who has the right to freedom. At the same time, *The Help* also discusses the experiences of black maids against the segregation they experienced while working with whites. How the role of sisterhood in their environment helped the black maids to be able to free themselves from white domination that looked down on black people. Basically, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett are novels that raise racial issues against black women, which encourages black feminism but is also supported by a strong sisterhood that allows them to oppose discrimination against black women. Using

the third wave of feminism, these two novels narrate how these black women fight against themselves against the racial discrimination they experience.

1.2. Identification of the Problems

The Color Purple and *The Help* tell the story of black women who experience sexual violence, segregation and discrimination who fight for their rights and justice. Both novels also present the importance of sisterhood, the self-discovery of oppressed black women that was very widespread in America in the 1960s. In this study, I will show how black women resist segregation and discrimination through the role of sisterhood until they are able to achieve freedom and find themselves.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

In conducting research, the author needs some guidance from several sources. It aims to show differences in viewpoints and opinions in researching objects to broaden the analysis. There are several sources that become a reference for the author to continue research.

The first related study comes from Agata Szulkowska from the University of Bialystok, entitled *The Problem of Racism in Kathryn Stockett's novel The Help* (2017). This article analyzes Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*, focusing on presenting the ubiquitous problem of racism experienced by African Americans in the United States. Szulkowska explains specifically that *The Help* demonstrates the shameful, humiliating, and unbearable living conditions of black maids in the 1960s in Jackson, Mississippi. This article discusses the different types of racism that exist in society, such as overt, institutional and structural racism. In addition, it provides

an overview of the history of racism in the United States. The purpose of this article is to examine the history of race relations in the United States, highlight the issue of white supremacy and illustrate the harmful consequences of racial prejudice. However, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between white and black characters in Jackson, Mississippi, as presented in Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*. Unfortunately, this article is written only from the author's own point of view, without mentioning the opinions of credible experts, but only presenting the author's opinion on racism in the novel *The Help*.

The following related study is the research by Dian Perandha Wulandari (2020) entitled *Black People's Lack of Informal Education as Reflected in The Color Purple Novel by Alice Walker*. In this research, the writer discusses the impact of black people's lack of knowledge about informal education, as described in the novel *The Color Purple*. She uses the theory of literary sociology by Alan Swingewood and Diana Laurerson to explain how family and social relations cannot be separated in the world of education, an incredibly informal education. Wulandari argues there were produced two factors. The first is the family as the foundation of the main place of education, and the second is the community environment. This research describes the subject in detail. In *The Color Purple* novel, Wulandari notes the negative impact of lack of education on black women who are portrayed as black children who do not receive their rights as children. In *The Color Purple*, Wulandari explains the impact of low education on the black

community and illustrates that education is important for human development. Wulandari explains that the difficulty of black people to escape from the oppression they experience is partly due to the low level of education.

The third related study is analyzed by Sriwati (2011) and is entitled *The Sexual Oppression of Women Characters as Reflected in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*. In this study, the authors explain sexual oppression against women in the family. The main topic discussed in this study is women's sexuality, such as rape, marriage, childbirth, and sexual relations with husbands to rape in the novel. The author clearly describes what happens to women in the family in the novel *The Color Purple*. In the form of oppression that occurs because of a patriarchal culture in the family, women get pressure. This research explains the topic in detail. This research was made systematically and explained in detail, so it is clearly understood.

Sri Wahyuni (2019) discusses the fourth related study entitled *Feminist Messages: Women's Oppressions, Empowerment, and Identity as Seen in Half of Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. The researcher discusses the pressures experienced by the main female characters in the literary works she examines. The researcher uses a feminist approach to analyze gender equality by Jane Freedman. The researcher argues that the feminist issue in the novel *Half of Yellow Sun* successfully represents modern women who struggle against oppression and depicts women's empowerment in the story.

Fadillah Satya Handayani (2016) discusses the fifth related study entitled *Racial Discrimination Towards the Hazaras as Reflected in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner*. Handayani argues that social structural factors and social psychological factors cause racial discrimination. She added that differences in

cultural beliefs and practices are also social structural factors in racial discrimination. Social psychological factors that cause racial discrimination are prejudices and stereotypes that occur in society. The researcher uses a sociological approach to analyze literary works, such as social reflection, and a psychological approach to investigate the effect of modern psychology. The study was easy to understand as the explanations were detailed and systematic, and it definitely helped me figure out discrimination in literary works.

Aura Berliana Melanni (2022) discusses the following related study: *Self Representation, Sisterhood, and Women's Power Represented in Audre Lorde's Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Melanni argues that there are two types of self-representation. There is self-representation as a black woman and self-representation as a lesbian. She also added that Lorde presents the self-representation of black lesbians as strong and self-assured women. Lorde portrays sisterhood between black lesbians as the result of their same conditions as a minority, and women also have power against discrimination and as a source of strength. This research uses the theory of feminist literary criticism by bell hooks, combined with the objective approach by M.H Abrams. The researcher found that the main character's ability to achieve self-representation is based on power. The researcher claims that women's energy comes from women's power itself. This research explains in detail and systematically. The feminist theory, according to Bell Hooks, is the same as the theory I will use so that it is easier to understand. This research explains in detail and systematically. The feminist theory, according to Bell Hooks, is the same as the theory I will use so that it is easier to understand.

Nur Awaliyah Amir (2020) discusses the seventh related study entitled *The Analysis of Women's Resistance in Walker's The Color Purple*. This study aims to find out women's resistance in *The Color Purple* novel and the forms of women's resistance in the novel. The researcher uses a structuralism theory approach in dealing with internal aspects to discover the forms of oppression carried out by the patriarchy. This study explains in detail how female characters resist both actively and passively to free themselves from oppression. This research paper has the same topic as my research paper. However, I analyzed the novel with a multicultural feminist approach to make my research different from the author's.

The previous related study is discussed by Cindy Bella Difa (2019), entitled *The Impact on Sisterhood for Women Survival During World War II as Reflected in All The Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr*. This study focuses on the impact of women's relationships on freedom and society during World War II in Germany and France, which Doerr describes as many female characters as possible in the story, using Josephine Donovan's theory of female imagery. The researchers said there were three ways women built their sisterhood to survive World War II. They created good relationships between women, contacted their female relatives, supported each other in case of war and built clubs for actual warfare. I am very interested in the results put forward by researchers because they are apparent. The researcher also adds the impact of the importance of sisterhood and the moral message in the novel to make the readers interested in it.

The following previous related study is discussed by Syifa Zahra Salsabila (2022), entitled *Weaving Characters Imagine and Black Women's Oppressions in the Cinematic Adaptation of The Color Purple*. This study aims to find out women's

resistance in *The Color Purple* novel and the forms of women's resistance in the novel. The researcher uses a structuralism theory approach in dealing with internal aspects to discover the forms of oppression carried out by the patriarchy. This study explains in detail how female characters resist both actively and passively to free themselves from oppression. This researcher has the same topic as my research. However, I analyzed the novel with a multicultural feminist approach to make my study different from the author's.

The following study is discussed by Muhammad Hairul Rizal (2020), entitled *The Lesbianism of Cellie in the Novel "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker (Psychological Approach)*. This study examines the aspects and factors that influence the main character to become a lesbian in the novel *The Color Purple* using psychological approach theory. Researchers also examined the main character's views in the novel about relationships and sexual orientation. Researchers found that the factors that influence the main character are lifestyle, personality, and social interests. I used this study as one of my references for my research because the topic discussed was fascinating. This research will help me see what aspects influence the main character's being a lesbian.

The following related study is an article from Abigail Flavia Dominilla, Singgih Daru Kuncara, and Nita Maya Valiantien entitled *The Oppression Towards Black Female Characters as Maids in The Help Novel by Kathryn Stockett (2020)*. This article analyzes the pressure problem in the novel *The Help*, especially in the two main black female characters, Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson. This research aims to analyze how types of oppression occur from the perspective of postcolonial feminism using qualitative research methods. The results showed that Aibileen

experienced four types of pressure, namely exploitation, marginalization, helplessness, and cultural imperialism. Meanwhile, Minny Jackson gets all kinds of bullying caused. This oppression can be seen through the characters' narrative, dialogue, actions, thoughts and physical appearance. Based on the analysis, researchers concluded that black women experienced double oppression than white women because the pressure occurred because of their race. This research helped me recognize the oppression that occurs to black women, especially to the two main characters, namely Aibileen and Minny. Unfortunately, this article only focuses on two black female characters, whereas there are many other black female characters who also experience a lot of oppression in the novel *The Help*.

1.4. Research Questions

This research is conducted to compare the novel *The Color Purple* with the novel *The Help* regarding the issue of discrimination and black feminism by focusing on answering the following questions:

1. How do black women fight against segregation? How do they discover themselves during the segregation?
2. How do Alice Walker and Kathryn Stockett shape black female characters in the novels?

1.5. Scope of the Research

This research focuses on acts of the bonds of sisterhood fights against the discrimination against them as black women in the novels *The Color Purple* and *The Help* and how they oppose this with the feminist movement, which is supported by the strong sisterhood relationship between them.

1.6. Objectives of the Research

This research aims to find out how black woman and white author delve into the lives of black women in a discriminatory environment. I also intend to examine how important sisterhood between black women is in the novels *The Color Purple* and *The Help* and whether the development of sisterhood between women can liberate the female characters in the novel or not, therefore I pay attention to how the courage of the novel's characters to be free from patriarchal culture from the perspective of multicultural feminism.

