

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

Progressive is an adjective word that is related to something that makes progress, change and improvement toward a better situation. The progressive ideas can be found in literary work such as the progressive voices of the author itself. Voices of the authors in literary works are the important part of the reason why the authors wrote the work. Voices of authors can be the expressions, feelings, ideas or the author's information to inform the readers. In the 20th and the 21st century of contemporary American literary work, there are many authors and writers who express ideas and their feelings that are related to events or phenomena around them. The voices of authors from the minority groups which are voices of Black people, women, LGBTQ, etc can be categorized as progressive voices. The progressives people want to have equality in every aspect of their life as a minority group.

Literature is the kind of imaginative work that depicts human life. According to Walter Scott, literature is "creative" or "imaginative" writing (1980: 40). Based on Wellek and Warren, it also points out that if we limit the terminology to literature and art (that is imaginative literature), it seems to be the best (1962: 22). Literature is also produced by the author's imagination. Many kinds of literary works are written by authors all over the world, such as drama, novel, short stories, poem, poetry, etc. The idea of literary work can also be derived from the author's life, experience, problems and also their voices. It means that the ideas of literary work are not only taken from imaginative things but also from the author's expressions and social phenomena. The kinds of the problems depicted in literary works are love, nature, struggle for life, conflict of life, war, violence, social class, etc.

One of the issues addressed in literary works is discrimination. Discrimination has become a never-ending issue that happens in society. According to Fish and Moin in their article entitled *Racism, Discrimination and Prejudice*, discrimination refers to the unjust treatment of people based on perceived, categorical differences, and thus is most accurately understood as an interpersonal act (2020). Furthermore, discrimination may be verbal, such as issuing threats or abusing others. However, it can also be physical, such as hitting, and relational, including excluding others. Discrimination refers when individuals are treated differently because they belong to a certain social group. Discriminatory practices come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but they all include some kind of restriction and rejection. For example, discrimination may happen due to race, class and also gender.

Discrimination is one of the darkest parts in the history of black people in America. Physical differences between people in the United States and throughout the world are obvious. The most obvious variation is skin tone, and some people have extremely black skin while others have extremely pale skin. America is a liberal and multicultural country that always respects freedom and equality. Everyone from different ethnicity, social class, or gender should be able to live in harmony and without fear of discrimination. However, in reality many people in America are still oppressed and discriminated. Race, class,

gender, nationality, age and sexuality are the targets of oppression in the United States (Wallendfeldt: 2011). Since the slavery era, race, class and gender inequality have become a part of American society. Based on Feagin book entitled *White Racial Frame*, racial discrimination persists and has a huge effect on black Americans' life opportunities and daily lives (2020). America abolished slavery in 1865, but until present racism in the USA still exists.

Furthermore, the phenomena of race, class and gender discrimination have influenced writers or authors to write literary works about the discrimination. Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde are prominent American poets their poems are so famous, because of the spirit of black people that are oppressed by white people in America. As half-black American women, these two authors use their voices to against discrimination on race, class and gender because at the time black women suffered triple discriminations. The discrimination was experienced by Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde who were born as black American women as shown through their poems. As foremost poets, Nikki and Audre wrote poems reflecting on culture and also their heritage that are described in Nikki and Audre's personal experiences. Being a black in America is a tough situation, many white Americans refusing to recognize the existence of blacks. As the result, many black American people are oppressed and discriminated against by white people until present. As a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, the United States must ensure that the skin color, race or religious beliefs of all citizens live in peace.

The latest news of racial discrimination in the USA happened to George Floyd's death by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer. Demonstrations happened in the USA to protest the racial discrimination of George Floyd. Many people from around the world speak up on social media and spread until the global movement to the Black lives matter movement. From the explanation above, we know that even though America is a liberal and multicultural country who respects freedom and equality, there is still racial discrimination in America. Race, class and gender inequality are the most common discrimination in America experienced by minorities such as black American women. The murder of George Floyd adds to the long and tragic history of police institutional brutality and racism against black minority communities in the United States.

According to the history of women's movement, especially in the United States, there has been black women's movement such as black feminist movement and black lesbian feminist movement. Since the slavery era, black women have been placed at the bottom of the social class (Lorber: 1997). Black women are discriminated against in all aspects of life. They are not only struggling because of her gender, they are also struggling with their race. Discrimination against black American women in America often occurs until present. Black American women are always discriminated by whites and men because they are black and they are women. They are always placed in the lowest position and are not considered in society.

Living as a minority among white people, black American women, such Giovanni and Lorde, as black American women, feel discriminated and oppressed by white people.

Lorde herself had experienced various kinds of discrimination, not only because of her skin colour, but also because of her gender and sexual orientation. Being black, woman and lesbian, she finds it more difficult to avoid discrimination by the mainstream society. Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde are American poets and also half-black American women. Generally, both black and white women are oppressed because of their gender and are seen as inferior classes. On the other hand, black American women have faced double discrimination.

Most of Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's poems talk about how black American people, especially black American women are oppressed among white people. "Nikki Rosa" is one of the best known of Nikki Giovanni's poems published in one of Giovanni's books entitled *Black Judgment* (1968). In "Nikki Rosa", Giovanni describes how hard and difficult her family's life was. The effects of racism during the time when white people claimed their status as superior than black American. The poem "Woman" tells about the struggle of black American women under a patriarchal system in American society. At the time, black American women were oppressed by white people and had negative images of them. Giovanni compares herself to several different things between men and women. She takes the idea of freedom in her poem. In this poem, Nikki tells the reader women should have freedom in their life and have the same position as men in the society. "Poem For A Lady Whose Voice I Like" written by Nikki Giovanni and was published in Nikki Giovanni's collection of poems. This poem takes ideas of freedom and equality of black women in American society. In her poem, Nikki Giovanni described the way white people were treated and viewed black American women as ugly, weak and inferior through their race and their gender.

"Power" is one of the poems written by Audre Lorde. This poem was first published in 1978 and tells about the murderer of a ten-year-old black boy named Clifford Glover who was killed in 1973. His murderer was an undercover and he was killed by a racist police officer named Thomas. Audre takes the ideas of racial discrimination, the abuse of power, and injustice to black people in her poem "Power" at the time. "Woman Speaks" is one of Lorde's poems published in 1997. These poems talk about the idea that women are never given a chance to speak in society. Audre also shows in her poem how women were described and treated in her society at the time. She takes an idea of gender in her poem. Audre was trying to speak about the idea that women are not treated the way they should be during the time. "The Black Unicorn" is one of the poems written by Audre Lorde and it was published in 1978. In this poem, Lorde takes ideas of race, gender and also sexual identity. Furthermore, Nikki describes in her poem "The Black Unicorn" about the negative images of black lesbian American women during the 1970s. Black lesbian American women are described as greedy, impatient and not free among white people.

According to the explanation above, there are six poems discussed by the writer. The poems are "Nikki Rosa", "Woman", and also "Poem For A Lady Whose Voice I Like" by Nikki Giovanni. The next poems are "Power", "Woman Speaks" and also "The Black Unicorn" by Audre Lorde. Both of them successfully raised the issues of race, class and also gender through their poems. Giovanni and Lorde's poems discuss the complexity

issues in America such as issues of race, class, gender and also sexual orientation. Their poems invite the readers to give an understanding that we live in a society that has a diversity of races, classes, genders and different sexual orientations.

We live in a world that is extremely varied with people of various races, colors, ethnicities, languages, and religious views. Black American literature such as Nikki and Audre Lorde's poems play an important role for the readers to create empathy and understanding about race, class and gender inequality. Every person should care about racism because this issue affects everyone in this world, not only in America but also in Indonesia. The writer is expecting to bring the local readers to know that racism does not just exist in America, but racism can happen everywhere, including in our country Indonesia, as evidenced by the discrimination that are faced by Papuans in Indonesia as black people. However, some incidents that happen overseas and in our country Indonesia generally demonstrate lack of respect and acceptance of diversity in race, ethnicity, and religion.

This topic is worth studying for important reasons. Firstly, it brings out the understanding of the society which is complex and not only consists of one race, class and gender but also sexual orientation which reflects in Lorde's poems as a black lesbian woman. Secondly, it raises an understanding to the readers about the impact of race, class and gender discrimination against black American. Furthermore, know the impacts of those discriminations give the basic understanding to the readers to respect diversity of other people regardless of their race, skin color, class, and also gender. Considering all the reasons above, the writer feels challenged and interested in analyzing Giovanni and Lorde's poems to see how racial, class and gender discrimination play a significant role toward black American people, especially black American women's life. And also to reveal the poems represent black American women's voices as a minority group in America. Thus the writer entitles this research **The Progressives Voices of Black American Women Poets as Portrayed in Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's poems.**

1.2. Identification of the Problem

Discrimination between black and white will raise the awareness of black people to struggle and get their identity as black American. Also Giovanni and Audre Lorde as outstanding black American poets take on the themes such as freedom, violence, black love, and black pride. Another central issue in Giovanni and Audre poems is gender and being a lesbian mother. Through their poems, Giovanni and Audre want to make a change in American society. They want black American women to get their new status in American society. Then, their poems serve as a clarion to raise the anti-discrimination and anti-racism in America, especially against the racism of the black woman. Also Samuels (2007) states Black Arts Movement artists called for African-American self-determination, self-respect and self-defense (p.48).

In this thesis, the writer examines the voices of black American women who fight racial, class, and gender inequality as shown in Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's poems.

In the poems, race, class and gender inequality impact black American women's life since the slavery era until present. Recently, those issues have been the primary problems that are faced by black people in America, especially black American women.

According to the explanation above, black American people, especially black American women struggle their life to get justice, freedom and also the same position among white people in American society. The writer wants to analyze the voices of black American women based on Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's poems against race, class and gender inequality toward black American women

1.3. Review Related Literature

To start doing the research, some previous studies will be used as references based on the works, topics and also the approach. Those sources are in the form of several articles, journals, and theses related to the object of this research. The purpose is to take more profound understanding to explain the issues.

The first review is a thesis published in 2018 entitled *The Portrait of Nikki Giovanni's Personal Experience In Her Selected Poems* by Hanik Fauziah Agustin from State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. This thesis examines the relationship between Giovanni's personal life and her poems. In this thesis, Hanik uses three selected poems of Nikki Giovanni such as "Nikki Rossa", "Knoxville Tennessee" and also "Mother". This thesis also focuses on the extrinsic element of Nikki Giovanni's selected poems such as the biography of Nikki Giovanni. Hanik uses the biographical criticism as the main theory. The result of this thesis shows that three poems have different experiences of Nikki Giovanni based on the content in each poem. The things reflected in this thesis are about Giovanni's childhood, her life during racial discrimination and segregation as black a American woman and her love for family. This thesis has an excellent explanation about Nikki Giovanni's experience as a black American woman. Unfortunately, the author can only find three issues related to the experience of Nikki Giovanni. Actually there are more issues that can be discussed and found by the author. Furthermore, this thesis underpins the writer's research since the work and the author are the same. This thesis helped the writer to have more knowledge and perception about racial discrimination and segregation during Giovanni's personal experience.

Still in the thesis, Haryantoni (2012) *Reading Feminism Voices In Selected Poetry by Audre Lorde*. He examines the feminism voices as reflected in selected poems of Audre Lorde. Haryantoni used descriptive analysis with a lens of black feminist concept. The main focus of his study is the study of women's oppression due to the power of patriarchy in society and the domestic area. His thesis investigates the selection of Audre Lorde's poems such as A Woman Speaker (1968), For Each Of You (1968), Now (1968), Love Poem (1973), Coal (1976), The Black Unicorn (1978), Who Said It Was Simple (1978) and Power (1982). The result of his thesis showed that Audre Lorde challenged patriarchal oppression and women struggle in a patriarchy society. This thesis paper is detailed and rich knowledge about women's oppression and gender inequality in a patriarchal society.

This thesis helps the writer's research and gain the knowledge about gender inequality toward women since the works and the issue are the same which discuss gender discrimination in Lorde's poems.

The next review is an article published in 2021 entitled *Black History Is America's History* by Monica E. Peek from The University of Chicago. This article discusses the history of black people in America, from the slavery era until the present. In this article, the author mentions several incidents that discriminate against black American people in America, including the black movement against racism such as black lives matter. The result of the explanation states that the history of black people is part of American history. This article is quite good at explaining events related to the history of black people in America but the author only explains in general and not in detail. This article helps the writer to get information and perceptions about the historical events of black American people because the writer also discusses the history of black people in chapter 3.

The fourth is a thesis by Marpaung in 2009 entitled *An Analysis of Racial Issues In Some Langston Hughes Poems*. Marpaung's thesis examined Langston Hughes' poetry about negative race prejudice against black people, such as skin color, prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and racial segregation. In his thesis, Marpaung used a descriptive qualitative technique to offer a summary of the analytical results. He examines these topics through the use of Langston Hughes poems about discrimination against black people. He also discusses the definition of racism and its history. Then he talks about the purpose of poetry, its history, and different types of poetry. Knowing the definition, history, and types of poetry makes it easier for Marpaung to investigate Hughes poems in his thesis to highlight racial concerns based on skin color and prejudice. This thesis helps the writer as a reference in analyzing a poem because the writer also analyzes poems with the topic of racism in America.

The next review is an article conducted by Elie Savers entitled *Power, Privilege and Disadvantage: Intersectionality Theory And Political Representation* (2015) from Vrije University, Belgium. This article critically reviews the extant literature on social group representation and clarifies the advantages of intersectionality theory for studying political representation. It argues that the merit of intersectionality theory can be found in its ontology of power. Intersectionality theory is found on a relational conception of political power that locates the constitution of power relations within social interactions, such as political representation. As such, intersectionality theory pushes scholarship beyond studying representation inequalities that are linked to presumably stable societal positions to also consider the ways in which political represented. This article has high capability of vocabulary. It will underpin the writer's research for a better version. Furthermore, this article describes in detail the intersectionality theory, and it helps the writer to write and do the research because in analyzing the issue, the author also uses the theory of intersectionality.

The last, a thesis by Ririn in 2018. Her thesis entitled *Racism In Benjamin Zephaniah's selected poems*. Her study aims to examine racism in Benjamin Zephaniah's

selected poems. Ririn takes the racial issues from those poems, the poems described racism in Britain in each poem. According to her explanation, racism is a crucial issue that still happens in the modern era in many countries such as Britain. Her research uses critical race theory by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. This research also talks about the homology of racism in society and literary works using Genetic Structuralism approach by Lucien Goldmann. After all, this thesis underpins the writer research since the theory is the same. The additional knowledge the writer gets after reading this thesis is useful in increasing the writer's viewpoint.

After reading the six sources that the writer have taken from thesis and also article journals, the writer decided to do research *The Progressives Voices of Black American Women Poets as Portrayed in Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's Poems* using Critical Race Theory by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. As the previous related studies that writer have explained, there are some researchs that investigate the dicrimination race and gender toward black American people and black American women with the same approach and issues. Previous researchers have not been able to discuss about the race, class and gender discrimination of American black women by using Critical Race Theory.

1.4. Research Questions

This research will answer the following questions :

1. How do gender discriminations and social class inequality impact black American women's life in Giovanni and Lorde's poems?
2. What are the progressive voices of black American women as seen in the poems?

1.5. Scope of Research

The writer will focus on voices of black American people, especially black American women, such as race, class and gender dicrimination through the poems by Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde. Then, the writer limits this research into three discussions. First, the writer will focus on the backgrounds of race, class and gender discriminations toward black American people. Then, the writer examines the progressive voices of black American women through Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde's poems by using Critical Race Theory. At last, the writer will discuss the the impact of gender discrimination and social class inequality toward black American women's life as seen in Giovanni and Lorde's poems.

There are some significant problems and issues to be analyzed in Nikki and Audre's poems such as race, class and gender issues. This study will be a significant effort in inviting readers to become citizens and individuals who respect and tolerate the differences in society regardless of skin color, social class and also gender. Because there are so many racist incidents that happen in countries around the world, such as the George Floyd case and the anti-Asian racism case. This research also gives the readers an overview of the racial, social class and gender inequality experienced by black people, especially black American women. Furthermore, this research and the poems are expected to make readers

would be aware of current social issues such as race, class and gender issues. And this research also provides information on issues of race, class and gender that can be used as a reference by the next researchers.

1.6. Objectives of Study

The objectives of study are:

1. To investigate the impacts of gender discrimination and social class inequality toward black American women's life in Giovanni and Lorde's poems.
2. To find out the progressive voices of black American women in the poems.

The result of this research hopefully can be used as reference in other related studies who have the same works, issues and also the theory

