

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In modern literature and social science, themes related to identity, including race, gender, class and other social factors, often take center stage, reflecting the complexity of human experience in various social and political contexts. A person's identity is shaped by many social factors, such as race, gender, religion and social class, which interact and influence each other. The study of identity often examines forms of oppression and resistance to it. Therefore, this chapter provides the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitations of the study.

1.1. Background of Study

Every individual has a unique identity, which consists of elements such as race, gender, religion, and social class. Some identities tend to be privileged, while others face discrimination or oppression. Among these forms of oppression, systemic racism remains deeply embedded in societal structures, shaping life opportunities and outcomes. Racial segregation, implicit biases, and institutional barriers contribute to disparities in education, wealth, healthcare, and legal treatment, particularly affecting black individuals. Despite resilience and increasing diversity within the black community, White advantages persist across economic, political, and social spheres (Banaji, Fiske, & Massey, 2021). This discrimination can arise from a variety of factors, which affect individuals both collectively and personally. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that identities are formed through social interactions and individual experiences, with discriminatory treatment or privilege playing an important role in this process.

There are some situations where individuals experience discrimination based on several aspects of their identity simultaneously. For example, a black woman may face discrimination due to both race and gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar and feminist, has been a leading figure in addressing this issue. In her seminar work, Crenshaw introduced the term 'intersectionality' in her 1989 essay titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Gender". She observed

that black women's experiences were often overlooked in discussions of racism and feminism, which tended to focus on black men and white women.

Intersectionality is an analytical framework used to understand how different aspects of a person's identity, such as race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, interact and create unique experiences of discrimination or oppression. Crenshaw developed the concept further in works such as "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) identifies three dimensions of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational intersectionality that explain how various social structures, political policies, and cultural representations interact to shape individuals' unique experiences based on their identities. Structural intersectionality refers to the systemic and institutional practices that marginalize certain groups. Political intersectionality addresses the exclusion or marginalization of minority groups from the political process. Representational intersectionality involves how cultural narratives and societal norms influence the perception and treatment of marginalized groups. To combat this, oppressed individuals or groups often develop certain strategies. James C. Scott (1985), in his work on resistance theory, provides a relevant view on how such responses are formed. Scott distinguishes between overt and covert transcripts of resistance. James C. Scott (1985), in his work on resistance theory, distinguishes between overt and covert forms of resistance. Open resistance consists of visible and direct opposition to oppressive structures, whereas covert resistance includes subtle and hidden acts that undermine oppressive systems without being immediately noticeable.

Building on these theoretical perspectives, the writer analyses Natasha Brown's *Assembly* (2021), which explores the lived experiences of a black British woman facing various forms of oppression related to race, gender, and class. An in-depth analysis of identity and intersectionality is necessary to understand her experiences. As a black woman, she faces discrimination based on race, gender, and social class, creating multiple layers of oppression that affect her life in both professional and social contexts.

Several previous studies relate to this research, particularly in analyzing the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in literature. Annisa (2023) examines how intersectionality is represented in *Flygirl*, focusing on the protagonist's racial passing as a means to overcome discrimination in education and employment. Similarly, Zumairoh (2024) explores the oppression and resistance of black women in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through an ecofeminist lens, highlighting the protagonist's struggle against systemic inequalities. A previous study analyzed the film *Passing* (2021), focusing on the experiences of discrimination faced by the black female character, Irene Redfield. Using the theory of characterization by Boggs & Petrie and Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, the study examined how structural, political, and representational intersectionality affect the character. The findings highlight how race and gender discrimination intersect, resulting in the marginalization of black women in white-dominated society. Lastly, previous studies relevant to this research is conducted by Triastuti (2020) entitled *The Characters' Resistance in Mochtar Lubis's Twilight in Djakarta*. This study focuses on how resistance emerges as a response to domination in society, specifically portrayed through literary characters. Using a sociological approach and James Scott's theory of resistance, the study examines the causes, forms, and consequences of resistance expressed by characters in *Twilight in Djakarta*. This study is relevant to the present research as it also explores resistance as a social response, although it differs in terms of the literary object and theoretical framework used.

Although many studies have utilized the intersectionality framework to study identity challenges in literature, there remains a gap in research specifically focusing on Natasha Brown's novel *Assembly*. Among the existing research, only Becker (2024) directly examines *Assembly*, discussing the protagonist's navigation of social mobility in a racially and class stratified society. However, Becker's analysis primarily focuses on economic aspects rather than a comprehensive exploration of how race, gender, and class intersect to form systemic oppression. Although the *Assembly* has attracted critical attention, a detailed intersectional analysis of how race, gender and class interact to create layered oppression remains

unexplored. This research aims to fill that gap by examining how these intersecting identities shape the protagonist's lived experience and how she responds to or resists that oppression.

Assembly was chosen for its vivid depiction of the challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of race, gender, and class in contemporary British society. The novel highlights personal struggles and sparks a wider discussion about the social realities faced by marginalized women. The novel has been widely acclaimed, winning several awards, including the Folio Prize, the Goldsmiths Prize and the Orwell Prize for Fiction (Aitken Alexander Associates, 2024). These awards reflect the literary quality and social relevance of the work.

The novel tells the story of a black woman who overlaps with her identity amidst societal racism and gender expectations. The main character's experiences of discrimination and stereotyping create tension between her aspirations and societal pressures. Through a poetic narrative, Brown explores how identity is shaped by diverse social and cultural factors. This analysis of intersectionality highlights personal struggles while underscoring systemic problems in contemporary society. Brown's discussion of *Assembly* emphasizes the protagonist's journey as symbolic of the challenges faced by many women of color in pursuing success amid societal expectations and discrimination (Brown on *Assembly*, 2023).

This study explores the various forms of oppression experienced by the protagonist and how she resists them through the lens of intersectionality. By examining the intersections of race, gender, and class, this research highlights how overlapping identities contribute to systemic marginalization, shaping the protagonist's social experiences. Crenshaw (1989) emphasizes that women's oppression is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that restrict their roles and opportunities. These structural inequalities impact the protagonist's relationships, reinforcing feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.

Through this study contributes to literary discussions by demonstrating how literature captures real-life intersectional struggles. It examines Brown's narrative techniques in portraying these complexities, providing a deeper understanding of

identity and discrimination. By shedding light on the intricate ways oppression operates, this research offers valuable insights into the broader social realities faced by marginalized individuals.

1.2. Research Questions

This study focuses on two main questions to understand how intersectionality theory is applied in a literary context, specifically in the novel *Assembly*:

1. How is the oppression of the main character in *Assembly* portrayed from the perspective of intersectionality?
2. What forms of resistance does the main character exhibit in *Assembly*?

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the forms of oppression experienced by the main character in *Assembly* from an intersectional perspective.
2. To analyze the types of resistance demonstrated by the main character in Natasha Brown's *Assembly*.

1.4. Significance of the Research

There are two contributions the writer hopes to provide to the readers through this study. The first this study contributes to the academic field of literary studies by applying the theory of intersectionality to Natasha Brown's novel *Assembly*. The study aims to deepen the theoretical understanding of how these identities interact in literary narratives. It contributes to a broader discourse on intersectionality in literature and it examines Brown's narrative strategies in depicting complex identities, offering insights that can inform future literary analyses and enhance theoretical models of narrative representation.

The second is the practical implications of this study address real-world issues relating to discrimination and social inequality. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of discrimination faced by the protagonist, Educators can use these insights to encourage a deeper understanding of intersectionality, Support

Social Activism as it provides concrete examples of intersectional discrimination and Empower Marginalized Communities.

1.5.Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study operates within the scope of feminist literary criticism by integrating theories of intersectionality and resistance to analyze *Assembly*. focuses on examining the experiences of oppression and resistance of the main character. As such, this study aims to understand how the complex interplay between identities affects the main character's experiences and how intersectionality theory can help explain these dynamics. However, the limitation of this study will be analyzing the main character's experience and does not consider the experiences of other characters in the novel *Assembly*.