

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents background of the study, research focus of the study, objective of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The establishment of sexism and racism has been cemented in the American social structure that can be traced to the first days of the country was born. Sexism was the main foundation of the political and social order that white colonizers brought with them from their European countries (hooks, 1998: 37). By regarding women as second citizen, this notion strengthens men's position as upper class. Racism has also played a significant role in the Western culture, rooting back to the slave trade in early colonial era. Racism, white superiority, and notion of privilege, are an illness in which society is far from finding a cure (Grillo & Wildman, 1991: 397).

Literature, for particular individuals, is used to break boundary of social illnesses, to express and criticize the authors' feeling about particular things. History records that there is a time period in literature that reflects the circumstances of people of color; that is Black Art Movement era. It is an era that occurs in United States and is one of the stepping stone of the black literature advancement. At that time, there was an increase number of literature that emphasize on the life colored people, whether it was a novel, poem, or/and drama.

Most of them were discussed about racism, oppression, and segregation that happened in the life of colored people (La Rue, 1995: 53).

Black Art Movement emerged as a result of African American people movements in America. As supposed with Wellek and Warren's (1963) statement that literature is a mirror of life, Black Art Movement's existence was the reaction from African American people in the 1960s America's society circumstances. When activists applied their economics and politics proficiency in annihilating segregation, writers and artists used their creative expertise to support the movement (La Rue, 1995: 51). Hence literature serves an important role in human history. It not only provides us a delightful recreational media, but also supports system in a political movement.

The standardization of beauty is also a social issue that weighing down the life of women. The concept of beauty has had such a huge impact on women lives; it enforces the idea of an ideal woman. From celebrity to television programs and magazine advertisements, mainstream media has a great impact on how women perceive the notion of becoming beautiful women. It is a tiring and burdening standard for any women to live up to, particularly for women of colored. They receive humiliation from their skin tone on daily basis. The notably absence of women of color in magazine images draws a message that lighter and clearer skin means more beauty. Valuing whiteness as the beauty standard trickles down to more than skin tone; it is also regarding with the Anglicized features that

society associates it with white women: smaller nose, thinner lips, less prominent curves (Wolf, 2002: 44). They receive a strong notion that their values deeply depend on their level of attractiveness.

The depiction of African-American people is well reserved in the Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. The novel is one of the products of Black Art Movement that is first published in 1970. The story resonates around an African American girl named Pecola raised after the Great Depression in Ohio, America. Due to her colored skin, she receives disrespected humiliation and racial mockery for her physical appearance in her members of community that associate beauty with white race. In the end, she develops an inferiority which led to her desire for blue colored eyes. Pecola prays for her eyes to turn blue in order she will be as beautiful and beloved as all the blue-eyed children in America. This dreaming appears as her scapegoat for she believes that it will lead her to life betterment.

Intertwined with the discussion of racism and sexism issues, the researcher decided using the theory of black feminism. Through the lens of black feminist theory, the novel will be studied critically to analyze *The Bluest Eye* novel by Toni Morrison.

1.2 Research Statement of the Problem

Based on the description of the background stated in the previous sub-chapter, the following research questions are advanced as follows:

1. How is the portrait of African American people in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?
2. What are the characters' perspectives of beauty myths in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In relation to the research statement of the problems above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To discover the portrait of African American in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.
2. To understand the characters' perspective of beauty myths occurred in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses the portrayal of African-American in the Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Black Feminism is used as the theoretical lens in order to convey the depiction of African American people in the novel. In addition, the analysis is limited to only on the narrator's and characters utterances which describe the condition, situation, and cultural view that occur through the narrative.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be detailed on three dissimilar basis, yet interdependent levels: the impact of the study for the discipline, the impact of the study for societal, and the impact of the study for the individual researcher. First,

this research can provide a better understanding in the literary field of black feminism. Moreover, the significance of the proposed study is not confined to the boundaries of academy. Conducting this study provides an opportunity for the questioning of fundamental assumptions that guide societal practices outside the room of an academic institution. It is only through constant examination and criticism that society can continue with the dismantling of the inherent social prejudice that is occurred within social structures and relationships.

The third and the final significance is for the individual researcher. The benefits that are gained from undertaking a critical endeavor that are self-reflexive can be paramount. Although the researcher's feminist beliefs, as well as his male Asian descent, can certainly be considered a bias that may inherently diversify the findings, it is important that a student of the academic community constantly question and criticize our beliefs. The purpose of this study is not merely limited to provide an analysis that takes a specific novel and utilizes a methodology to analyze it. This study also can extend empowerment through the further understanding of racism and sexism that are inherent in our society. It is also expected that this research can encourage the students to be an agent of change for the social betterment