

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of some subchapters, namely background of the study, research of questions, objectives of the study, significances of the study, and scope and limitation of the study. Those are important to be explained because they will describe this study generally.

1.1 Background of the Study

Literary works are usually divided into three genres which are prose, poetry, and drama. In this study, the writer chooses to do a research on prose especially novel because prose includes the characters actions, conversations, thoughts, and feelings. Prose also has wider range of the readers since to understand it. Every human being in the world known that, novel more easily because we do not have to perform it like drama, and we do not have to interpret it with great difficulty language like poetry.

In addition to that, it is free for the writer to reveal his or her own thought in the story, which is very useful for the reader to know the message from the writer of the novel. By reading a literary work, we can also recognize the history and the culture of a society at certain times. According to (Smith, 1993:11), “all literature might be said to be shaped as it is by the social and political circumstances under which it is produced”. It means that literature especially novel is one of literary work that can be explored the condition of the writers.

American literature itself began not in early years like other European literature, for people started staying in the American Continent in the 1600s. Despite of many influences from English literature, American literature has it is own uniqueness for the diversity in the people. Besides writing novels on American dream

and romance in the way of transcendentalists, modernist, gothic, or naturalist, American also has folklore and the writings of the minority groups. It seems that in American literature has the reflection of the condition about the country itself, as F. Scott Fitzgerald in the mid 1920s said that:

Innumerable novels dealing with American politics, business, society, science, racial problems, art, literature, and moving picture ... change and growth, ... protesting vaguely or ineffectually against industrialization of our beautiful old American life. (Scott, 1920:11).

Based on the explanation above, there are many aspects and diversities among those American literatures. The writings of African American people as a minority group hold an important position in American literature. The black literature is interesting and cannot be denied for without the blacks, there will not be American today. They held an important factor in the economic growth of American early years, they were the cause of the bloodiest civil war in that continent, they give the soul and the base for american music and dance until nowadays, and they face repression and inequality in the most democratic country in the world.

All these have made their voice in literature important and worthy to be heard. As we know, African American people used to be slaves brought to The United States later gained their freedom, but they have never been really 'free' enough to be treated equally in that country. Struggling through both violent and peaceful ways with the hope to reach democracy in a country that propagandizes democracy the most. Some of these people find a way to voice their protest, which is through literature.

Such complex background has caused the black literature to be “ a safe and open place to protest injustice, affirm cultural distinctions, discuss racial integration, advocate black nationalism and black feminism” (Donalson, 1996:8) yet without leaving its aesthetic part of “black legends, myths, proverbs, songs, and oral storytelling” (Donalson, 1996:8). It means that, apparently it is very interesting to

read a work of literature arising from protests against humiliation, pressures and domination.

One of the most important African American writers is Toni Morrison, who encourages African American literature, since she “has been instrumental in facilitating the work of other contemporary African American writers” (Lubiano, 1996:16). As one of the most distinguished African American writers, Toni Morrison has written several novels concerning black people in American society. Besides *The Bluest Eye* which the writer use in this study, there are some of Morrison’s other works are *Sula* which is tells about relations between black females and about values of white and black people, *Song of Solomon* which deals a lot with black male characters, and *Beloved* which tells the story of an emancipated slave woman who is haunted by the ghost of the kills.

On the other hand, Toni Morrison works have certain characteristics including that the main characters as well as the society are always black, and that the general themes of her work concern with the issues of slavery, racism, and mainly about African Americans’ problems and struggle in the American society. According to (Lubiano, 1996:16), “Yet she manages to write them in a very beautiful narrative way presenting black oral art forms, while at the same time Lubiano says that her writings come from political, social, economic, historical repression of her black culture; moreover her writings can put all those aspected together with only few boundaries.

Based on the Lubiano statement, the writer interested in her because she voices the view of a used to be slave minority people in such a super power country like The United States in her novels. Moreover, in this study the writer chooses the work of Toni Morrison entitled *The Bluest Eye* because she is the first black woman who received the Nobel Prize in Literature, meaning that her ability is world-known.

It is her first novel, formerly a collection of short stories, which tells us about how the African Americans try to live as white Americans while the fact is that they are Africans, and that their abcestors first came to the country as slaves. Than, the white standards of life force African the white standards of life force African

Americans to struggle in order to form their identity in the country. This novel explained how the African Americans try to shape the values and standards of their own people, but without realizing that the values and standards are dominated by the white American ideology. Almost all of the black characters in the novel cannot see themselves through the black point of view, but they see themselves through the white point of view.

Accepting white concepts that will never fit them, these people believe that they are inferior to the white and they try to be as close as possible to the white standards which they will never be able to acquire. One of the most obvious evidences is that they appreciate fair complexion far more than the darker complexion despite of the fact that they are black. The society believes this and the children in the society do even more. Eventually, there are victims of this condition such as a young girl turning mad and a society unable to stand on their own view.

The writer interested in this novel because the issue discussed is strongly related to our everyday life. We unconsciously set the standard of beauty by what we see in television and magazines, then everyone, especially girls and women, will do everything he or she can do to acquire this standard. In addition to the issue of the standard of beauty and life, *The Bluest Eye* also tells us how a lower society try to search for their identity, between becoming ‘American’ and ‘African’, in the middle of many problems that a minority faces such as racism, repression, and the feeling of inferiority. “*The Bluest Eye* is a history of abstractions – racism and physical aesthetics – and their manifestation in a concreted world; in the distorting of one young black girl’s life” (Lubiano, 1996:16).

1.2. Research of Questions

The researches of questions are:

1. In what way the African Americans are hegemonized by the white?

2. What are the impacts of this hegemony on the African Americans?

I.3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To describe in what way the African Americans are hegemonized by the white.
2. To describe the impacts of this hegemony on the African Americans.

I.4. Significance of the study

The importance of this study is for us to be aware of the voices of the African American people and later to understand cultures which dominate or a dominated. This study is also meant to raise cultural consciousness, to be able to understand our own culture better and especially to reconsider our attitudes or behaviors toward the minority and ethnic groups.

For the English Departement of Trunojoyo University, this study can be to encourage more researches on African American literature, especially on Toni Morrison, for there are still only a few of researches on Toni Morrison; and also to encourage researches from the point of view of cultural approach.

Since the topic discussed is strongly related to our everyday life, that is with our attempts to always follow western thought and standard of living, for we consider that western thought and people are better than ours. Moreover, we always attempt to follow white standard of beauty in spite of the fact that physical beauty never has any standard at all since it always changes. The writer hope the reader of this study will find this novel and this researches to be a lens to look at the standard of lots of things through another point of view.

1.5.Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study covers the white concepts which dominate the people in the novel and also the reaction of African Americans and the impacts on the society as seen in Toni Morrison's entitled *The Bluest Eye*. Then, the research is limited to the main characters which are Claudia MacTeer, Pecola Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, and Maureen Peal. The writer also mentions some supporting characters which are Frieda, Sammy, Mr. & Mrs. MacTeer, Soaphead Church, Mr. Henry, Geraldine, and Mr. Yacobowski.

