

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents five sub-chapters that are informed in this research, namely the background of the study, research question, research objective, scope limitation, and significance of the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

In sociology, the concept of masculinity is a form of knowledge related to gender, specifically regarding men. According to Smiler (2004), masculinity is not something inherent, but rather shaped by environmental influences. This means that a man's masculinity develops due to societal pressures and expectations. Connell (1995) further introduced the idea of hegemonic masculinity, which emphasizes how men strive for dominance in order to achieve leadership positions in the social hierarchy, thereby influencing their behavior and social interactions. Masculinity is often defined by characteristics such as dominance, courage, maturity, leadership, strength, and rationality. These characteristics, along with elements such as plot and character settings, are closely related to the theory of hegemonic masculinity.

Indeed, the characters in the novel seem to display aspects of each type of masculinity that appears throughout the story. The characters in the novel often demonstrate this through traits and actions that sometimes involve all the characters in the novel in unexpected adventures with definitions of masculinity. Moreover, at that time, society was still dominated by the concept of patriarchy, which also influenced how people behaved towards society, sometimes causing several social problems, resulting in male dominance over women, men over men, and men over their social environment. Indeed, the social environment undoubtedly significantly influences the characters in this novel. Therefore, this makes the characters in the novel more dominant and some become minorities in each storyline.

Currently, the issue of masculinity is an interesting topic for discussion in social life. Many people still do not understand what masculinity and what types of Masculinity. Connell (2005) states that there are several types of masculinity, including subordination masculinity, and marginalization masculinity, all of which

lead to social injustice, in which individuals are expected to conform to existing social standards. Some people consider this unimportant. Raewyn Connell explains hegemonic masculinity:

“Hegemonic masculinity is a configuration of gender practices that legitimizes the dominant position of men in society and justifies the subordination of women, as well as men who have different characteristics. This is not something that individuals possess, but rather an idealized model that is promoted and reinforced through social and cultural institutions and interactions. It is important to note that this is a dynamic concept that can change over time and within different social contexts” (Connell’s, 2005: 76).

Masculine power is closely linked to social injustice against individuals or groups who must conform to existing social standards, particularly marginalized men. However, this social injustice is not only experienced by marginalized men, but also by men or groups who do not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity which dictate that a man must be strong, authoritative, and dominant, and must not express his emotions. Those who do not meet these standards of hegemonic masculinity will be marginalized by other men or male groups, such as gay men, feminists, and men or groups from different ethnicities, races, and skin colors. As found in a study by (Wardani et al., 2023), hegemonic masculinity affects not only men but also women who experience aggressive patriarchy in society, leaving them powerless (Hamid et al., 2025; Azhar et al., 2025). They also argue that hegemonic masculinity also occurs to marginalized men because male figures are more dominant. Men also often experience oppression and violence. Men do not always hold power in society because they often fail to meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity in society. There is also a burden caused by masculinity in society. In this case, violence and oppression against black people are also legitimized by institutions and the police.

Exclusion, violence, and oppression based on class, race, or social status are concrete manifestations of how the dominant gender order operates toward individuals or groups who fail to conform to the prevailing standards of masculinity. Within this framework, the ideal form of masculinity known as hegemonic masculinity is culturally constructed around traits such as physical strength,

courage, authority, and dominance. Connell (2005) emphasizes that this ideal is not a natural or universal trait, but a social construct that serves to legitimize unequal power relations. He further argues that this rigid understanding of masculinity is harmful to both men and women: it grants privilege and dominance to those who conform, while marginalizing or oppressing those who do not, and ultimately perpetuates systemic gender inequality within society. Connell also states that;

“This situation becomes especially volatile when groups facing discrimination gain access to force. This is evident in the rates of violence involving Black men in today’s South Africa and the United States. Street violence by youth gangs is a prominent example where marginalized forms of masculinity are expressed in conflict with other men; this same dynamic also emerges when masculinity is asserted through sexual violence against women. In addition, gay men and men who support gender equality also face mistreatment and violence” (Connell, 2005: 83).

(Afreen et al., 2023; Yassar 2020). It is also argued that the negative impact and suffering of men who fail to meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity in a society with a concept of masculinity, a hegemonic position that has the potential to cause injustice and inequality through power over others. The crisis of male dominance in various aspects of life, such as education, economy, society, culture, politics, and other areas of public power. In this case (Bata et al., 2022), it is also argued that masculinity (manliness or maturity) is a series of roles that are socialized to boys, but masculinity is formed due to the influence of the social environment with several determining factors, namely hegemony, subordination, involvement, and marginalization.

This thesis uses the novel “Open Water” by Caleb Azuma Nelson, an author from the British colonies, published on February 4, 2021, and republished by Viking Press in 2022 by Penguin Books. This novel is also Nelson’s literary debut, praised as an exciting new voice in British fiction and becoming a Times bestseller in Britain at the time. Caleb Azuma Nelson is a twenty-six-year-old British Ghanaian writer and photographer living in South East London. His photography was shortlisted for the Palm Photo Prize and won the People’s Choice Prize. His short

story 'Pray' was shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award 2020. "Open Water" is his first novel. In this book, Nelson tells the story of a black man who lives a life that is sometimes unheard and unseen, as well as oppression and violence.

In this novel, a young Black man pursues a career as a photographer in London. His identity is deliberately obscured, referred to only as "he" in the third-person narration. As a Black British man, he faces unique racial and social challenges within London society. His experiences of racialization, particularly due to his skin color, impact the construction of his masculinity, making him vulnerable to violence and marginalization. He grapples with issues of identity, self-representation, and society's perception of him. The Black community in London also experiences violence, oppression, subordination, and marginalization from the broader London society and law enforcement. These experiences shape the perspectives of the Black characters in the novel, who often feel they lack the authority and power to fight against the oppression perpetrated by London society and the police. Consequently, the Black and female characters desperately desire freedom and are constantly haunted by feelings of exhaustion and despair. Violence and oppression continue to occur around them, ranging from police searches to shouting and violence in the streets and public spaces. This highlights how the hegemonic masculinity dominant in London society operates through discriminatory and exclusionary practices, which in turn affect the construction and experience of masculinity for Black men.

Based on the above issues, this study will focus on the social injustice of masculinity, using the theory of masculinity. This study discusses the subordination, violence, and marginalization experienced by the character in this novel. The researcher chose this topic because it is interesting to analyze, as the data used by the researcher has never been analyzed by previous researchers using the theory of masculinity, and this data has also only recently been published. This research is also relevant to the social injustice that still occurs in some patriarchal societies that oppress black groups or individuals. This novel was also a bestseller in its time. Therefore, this novel is worth reading and analyzing. Previous studies that used the

same theory but different data. Namely, using R W Connell's theory of masculinity, which is related to this study.

The first previous study was entitled "Hegemonic masculinity in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*" by MI Arrasyid, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University (2022). The aim was to identify representations of hegemonic masculinity in the novel *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* and to find the factors that shape the hegemonic masculinity of the main character.

The second study is titled "Reconstructing Masculinities: A Select Study of Contemporary Malayalam Cinema" by Binoy, S (Doctoral dissertation, St. Teresa's College (autonomous) Ernakulam) (2024). The objective is to discover the concept of masculinity that has changed over the years, analyze how changes in masculinity are reflected in Malayalam cinema, and examine how contemporary Malayalam films reconstruct masculinity.

The third study is titled "Hegemonic Masculinity in Transcultural Society in the Novel *In the Kitchen*" by Monica Ali. by Azhar, N., Butt, H. I., & Latif, F. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(1), 1712-1721 (2025). The objective is to represent hegemonic masculinity, and how navigating power dynamics and gender hierarchies influence male characters in a patriarchal society where men who do not conform to dominant masculinity norms experience oppression and marginalization. It also analyses elements such as capitalism, the exploitation of immigrants, and the subjugation of women and men within the framework of hegemonic masculinity.

The fourth study is titled "Hegemonic masculinity represented in Mukhtar Ma'i's *In The Name of Honor*" by Rezaian M. A, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University (2022). The objective is to find descriptions of hegemonic masculinity in Mukhtar Mai's novel *In The Name of Honor*. It also analyses the forms of hegemonic masculinity found in the novel.

The fifth study is titled "Hegemonic Masculinity in Okky Madasari's *Bound*" by Yassar, F. A. *LITERAKULTURA: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 8(3), 60-67. (2020). The aim is to analyze hegemonic masculinity and practices of social injustice depicted in the novel *Bound* by Okky Madasari.

The five previous studies used the theory of hegemonic masculinity to analyze problems found in the data, whether in novels, films, or in real life today. All five also used different data sources with the same theory, namely hegemonic masculinity. The author will also use the same theory, namely hegemonic masculinity, which will be used to identify the unnamed black main character in *Open Water*.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the description in the background, the focus can be formulated into one research question as follows:

1. What kind of masculinity do the Black characters portray in the novel?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

According to the research questions, this study aims to:

1. Identify and analyze the manifestations of Subordination and Marginalization by the character in “*Open Water*”.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of research on subordination masculinity and marginalization masculinity. In practical terms, the results of this study are expected to enrich readers’ knowledge of masculinity particularly the social injustices associated with it as well as subordination and marginalization; and it is hoped that they will inspire other researchers to conduct research on masculinity using the novel “*Open Water*”. It is hoped that after reading this study, its findings will serve as a reference for readers, particularly students in the English Language Studies Program at Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the study

The scope of this study is to analyze the subordination masculinity and marginalization masculinity by the characters, and black groups in this novel using masculinity theory to answer the research questions.

This study will discuss Caleb Azuma Nelson's novel, republished by Viking Press in 2022 by Penguin Books, focusing on subordination masculinity and marginalization masculinity using masculinity theory. The novel was written by Caleb Azuma Nelson, a woman of British colonial descent.