

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of background of the study, statement of the research problem, the objective of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of The Study

In the world of letters, literature “imitates” “life”; and “life” is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary “imitation” (Wellek & Warren, 1948, p. 89). The statement above means that literature is mimesis of a phenomenon of human life or a social reality. Therefore, the reflections of human condition or problem are often encountered in the literary works. Moreover, many literary works are adapted based on women writer’s experiences.

Related to the previous explanation, some woman writers describe about women’s real life and their experiences in their works that have no equality and get oppression or exploitation in the liberation, occupation, etc. Indeed, the inequality and oppression not only happened toward white women but also women of color’s life. Because of the existence of inequality and oppression toward women, the idea of feminism was born to support women to obtain equality and their liberation. In some women’s works, the stories about women’s experiences are presented to show the real of women’s life such as in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982). Alice Walker was known as an African

American novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist, and activist (Whitted, 2003, para. 1). Hence, in *The Color Purple* (1982), she describes about African American women characters that break the patriarchy ideology and the boundaries of traditional gender roles, against male sexist oppressors, and fight their freedom of financial independence, education, and engaging in sisterhood.

Besides Alice Walker who tells about black women's life experiences in her works. Dorothy Sterling also describes African American women's life in her works. She is an author of African American children's literature and historian in America (Woo, 2008, para. 8). Some of her novels tell about black women and anti-slavery movement. They are her first historical novel entitled *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* (1954), *Mary Jane* (1959), *Forever Free: The Story of The Emancipation Proclamation* (1963), *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (1979), *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*" (1984), and *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelly and The Politics of Antislavery* (1994). Some of her works are written and adapted based on the true story in the past.

In *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*, the author tells a great story about African American woman's struggle toward white women and struggle against slavery. The story begins at 1827 and the place is in Maryland. In the concrete, there are many black people imported into Maryland during the eighteenth century. Slaves labored on the tobacco plantations that fueled the colony's economic growth during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (The Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, 2007, p. 1). Besides, the story begins with an African American woman character named Harriet Tubman who wants to

break free from the slavery. She struggles to obtain freedom for her life. She becomes a slave before eight years old. Harriet junior's life was very distressed, because she spends her time only for her master. She must work hard and take care of her master's baby not to cry at night. However, she is different with another slave. By having life as a slave, it makes her grow up as a brave and ambitious woman within struggling to obtain liberation. Someday she finally got her freedom by the help from white people.

The explanation above is very interesting to be discussed or analyzed in this study. Thus, the writer chooses Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* as the source of data. Meanwhile, African American woman's struggle to obtain freedom of slavery will be discussed as the topic in this study. Hence, the second wave of feminism particularly black feminism is chosen to be the theory to analyze the source of data. The other reason, the study that discusses about Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* and uses the theory of black feminism has not been analyzed. Furthermore, some researchers analyze different literary work by using black feminism. They are Vivin Nofrina Sari (2002) and Gatot Hendy Febiyanto (2010). They analyze different literary work by using the same theory that is black feminism. Meanwhile, Osama Mohammad A. Said (2011) analyze Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* by comparing with a novel *Seductive Poison* that was written by Daborah Layton. He analyzes his sources of data by using the theory of comparative literature.

Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* gives opinion, “As critical social theory, black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (2000, p. 22). It means that theory of black feminism refers to African American women and focuses to emancipate or give the freedom to black women that are oppressed within the social discrimination or intersecting oppression. Furthermore, intersectionality is an analysis claiming that system of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by black women (Collins, 2000, p. 299). It means that intersecting oppression is the crisscross system of oppression or discrimination based on gender, class, sexuality, nation, ethnicity, age, and race in society that create women’s experiences and are formed by Black women.

Meanwhile, in this study, the writer will focus to analyze the African American woman character named Harriet Tubman. She is the female character in Dorothy Sterling’s *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* who is described as the view of black feminism. Therefore, this theory is appropriate to analyze the novel because Harriet Tubman was portrayed as African American female slave who wants to break free of slavery or struggle to obtain freedom. Hence, the writer chooses a titled “*Harriet Tubman’s Heroic Struggle to Break Free of Slavery in Dorothy Sterling’s Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*” as the title for this study.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated:

1. What kind of oppressions or exploitations experienced by Harriet Tubman that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*?
2. What are the impacts of her Mistress, Master, and husband's oppression towards Harriet Tubman that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*?
3. How does Harriet Tubman's struggle to obtain her freedom of slavery that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*?

1.3 The Objectives of Study

From the research question above, the objective of studies are appeared to analyze the following:

1. To analyze the several of oppressions or exploitations towards Harriet Tubman that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*.
2. To analyze the impacts of her Mistress, Master, and husband's oppression towards Harriet Tubman that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*.
3. To analyze the strategy of Harriet Tubman's struggle to obtain her freedom of slavery that appears in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In this study, the significance of the study represents about the theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study elaborates or clarifies about the theory of black feminism, and it will be giving more understanding about the theory itself to the reader. It also can increase the reader's knowledge about black woman's struggle movement against slavery, race, and gender. The writer hopes that this study can give information and knowledge about black feminism to the reader. Therefore, practically, this study is expected to give a useful contribution to the further researcher that requires a guideline to finish her or his study. This study may also give the readers understanding about the phenomenon of black women's life in 18th Century. The writer hopes that this study can make the readers aware that human is created in the same position and opportunity. Although, human is created in different race or gender human is born to be free and equal.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of This Study

The scope of this study is about theory of black feminism that is portrayed by the main character named Harriet Tubman. Therefore, the discussion of this study is limited on the narrative of narrator and the utterances of some characters that are portrayed in Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*.