

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Kendrick Lamar's music videos *DNA*. (2017) and *HUMBLE*. (2017) represent current African Americans' condition and their identification. The two music videos represent symbolic emotions from African Americans' experience as victims of white supremacy. However, not focusing on challenging white supremacy, instead the two music videos represent the exploration of who African Americans are. In expressing contemporary social condition, a cultural product of Black textuality is presented. Black textuality is a cultural product which is written by African Americans based on their experience in a racist society (Tate 1998). In this postmodern era, Black textualities are adapted into media—including songs and music videos of Rap and Hip Hop. These music genres are known to be emotional and more meaningful than other genres because they mainly focus on emphasizing African Americans' heritage, affected by oppression. White supremacy is a belief that white people are the most superior racial group. In order to maintain this belief, white supremacists usually rely on violence acts.

Ashley Jardina, a political scientist, stated that America's politics is becoming identically white (Illing 2019). Furthermore, the issue of racism has

increased in Trump's presidential era. Additionally, an African American politician named Gregory Cheadle stated that the president himself has a 'white supremacy complex' (Bryant 2019). In May 2017, six out of ten Americans, or approximately sixty one percent of voters, confessed that racism against African Americans is widespread in the country—informed by a Gallup poll in August 2017. This number was increasing ten percent in eight years, with just 51% at the beginning of President Barack Obama's first term in 2009 (Struyck 2017). Media has the power to construct people's voice, even in objectifying African Americans.

White supremacy is a belief that is created from racism. A latest study on health issue stated that racism affects chronic stress among African Americans (Jones, Staggs and Woods-Jaeger 2019). Racism is still a major issue nowadays, although it only occurs in social context. A poll by NBC News, published in May 29, 2018, informs that 64 percent of the voters said that racism still remains a major issue, with 45 percent of all voters admits that race relations in the United States are getting worse. Although less people said that racism no longer exists, this statistics prove that minorities, including the African Americans, have racially profiled in this modern era.

African Americans are seen to be dangerous in society. There is a doctrine named *negrophobe*, in which impact makes white people afraid of African Americans (Armour 1997). African Americans are stereotyped as dangerous people. One of the main causes of this stereotype is because of crime rates. At the

year the two music videos were released, African Americans are the second most arrested hostages (FBI 2017). Not only do African Americans compose the second-highest rate of arrested hostages, but there is also the existence of organized crime held by African Americans—named The Black Mafia. It is a mafia with African Americans as the members and organizers; as they are active in drug trafficking, murder, robbery, and many more.

However, the FBI's 2017 survey also stated that the highest rate of arrested people was white people. At least from the year 2003, most crimes in the United States have been committed by white people (Welch 2007). White supremacy succeeds to make the public see African Americans as the most dangerous ones, not white people themselves. Not only in the society, but some media could also deliver abusive representations of African Americans. Thus, it could influence their audience on how they relate to African Americans (Kulaszewicz 2015).

Both black media and communities have taken their step to stand for African Americans in countering these systematic stereotypes. This includes the role of Black Television. Black Television is a media that is produced, directed, and hosted by African Americans; including the music videos of *DNA*. (2017) and *HUMBLE*. (2017). Both music videos are produced by Top Dawg Entertainment, a record label in Hip Hop and R&B—two genres that are common to African Americans. Also, one of the directors of both music videos is The Little Homies, which is known for directing Hip Hop songs. The two songs are produced, directed, and sung mostly by African Americans. The two music videos are

included as Black textualities too because of their writings in responding to the racist society (Tate 1998).

Although Hip Hop songs usually represent African Americans, each song or music video could differ from another. The music videos of *DNA*. (2017) and *HUMBLE*. (2017) portray African Americans based on the artist's experience and the current social condition. It is quite different from other artists such as Drake and Travis Scott who portray pride based on their status as high class African American. Hip Hop is commonly known for representing gangsters. Travis Scott portrays gangsters with a barbaric viewpoint. Meanwhile, Kendrick Lamar represents them as people who live their everyday lives.

Another example is shown on the difference between Kendrick Lamar's songs and Eminem's video on Youtube titled 'Eminem Rips Donald Trump in BET Hip Hop Awards Freestyle Cypher'. The two artists tease the political structure on race. However, in Eminem's video, the main character is himself standing in front of many Black people—a white person. However, like common rap music videos, Eminem represents the act of fighting the system. As for Kendrick Lamar, he asserts himself as a part of the minority group in representing racial experience caused by the system.

Kendrick Lamar is known for representing African Americans' ethnic identification in his last two albums. His previous album, 'To Pimp a Butterfly,' represents the idea of changing society (Lamar, Kendrick Lamar: 'DAMN' Interview | Apple Music 2017). In this album tour, Kendrick Lamar once teases vigilantes for killing African Americans. Lamar continued to explain in his

interview that his latest album, 'DAMN.,' represents the idea of changing one's self, including African Americans, to change themselves before changing society (Lamar, Kendrick Lamar: 'DAMN' Interview | Apple Music 2017). In his interview, Kendrick Lamar continues to explain that the album is based on the duality of human nature.

In responding human's viewpoint of political structures, Hobbes (1968) stated that human beings possess the quality of whether to have passionate motivation or pessimistic reasoning. It is explained that people pursue power so they could have what they desire, including their desire as being controlled from institutions. People see passion as if it is a motivation like animals having pleasures to eat (Hobbes 1968). While for pessimistic point of view, it is where people do not have the willingness to fight and accept the pain caused by the institution. Reasoning itself is what ends people's passion, making people to accept certain conditions with pain.

*DNA.* (2017) and *HUMBLE.* (2017) are released in this album. *DNA.* (2017) represents the exploration of African Americans' racial heritage. The music video also teases America's institutionalized racism by explaining the term *Dead Nigga Association*—African Americans sentenced to death. As for *HUMBLE.* (2017), the music video represents the idea of keeping things real, using religious and urban imageries. Both songs are referenced from the album's theme of human nature's duality and fixing oneself before changing the society.

The two songs were successful. *HUMBLE.* was placed second in the Billboard chart 100 on its debut, and became number one on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017. On 4

June, 2017, *DNA*. was placed number four in the chart. These two songs are released in the same album titled 'DAMN.'—which was released on 14 April 2017. The album itself achieved eight awards in 2017 and 2018. It is one of the highest achievements for a rap genre album.

The two music videos are representations of contemporary African Americans' voices living in a racist society. The dominant group creates certain perspectives on Black people, for instance constructing negative stereotypes on them. Negative stereotypes could be constructed in media, in which they have a big role in constructing public's psyche (Welch 2007). Some theorists like Derrick Bell and Bettelheim show that Black textuality could be as an act of challenging their status under white supremacy (Delgado and Stefancic 2000).

There has not been any study that focuses on comparing Black textualities in recent years, especially in cultural studies. However, there is a research by Tate (1998) in her book 'Psychoanalysis and Black Textuality'. The study uses a qualitative method and the theory of Lacan's psychoanalysis. This study finds that all the analysed Black textualities deliver African Americans' unconscious desire of freedom which was caused by racial trauma.

In contrary, this study examines Black textualities using the semiotic approach of John Fiske's Television Culture. The music videos of Kendrick Lamar's *HUMBLE*. (2017) and *DNA*. (2017) are responses to America's current racist society. Fanon stated that Black people must be 'black' in relation to white people (Fanon 2008). It means that they must be proud of their inferior status. However, there is duality within the two videos in talking about African

Americans, as they have pride of their status quo but not being real in delivering the message—the two music videos.

## **1.2 Statement of Problems**

Based on the issue that is discussed in the background, the writer would like to define the statement of the problem with the following question

1. How is African Americans' social demand for racial-ethnic identity based on the concept of duality represented in Kendrick Lamar's music videos of *DNA*. (2017) and *HUMBLE*. (2017)?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

Referring to the question above, the writer would like to determine this study's objective as follow:

1. To deliver understandings on African Americans' social demand for racial-ethnic identity represented in the music videos of *DNA*. (2017) and *HUMBLE*. (2017).

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to raise the awareness of white supremacy and its impact to the victims, especially African Americans. They are still the minorities in their own country. White supremacy is still a major issue, including for the coloured people. The analyser expects certain significances from this study.

Relating to the media, the writer of this study expects to show a nuance of African Americans' social demand for their racial-ethnic identity, represented by an African American rapper. Kendrick Lamar's videos show different context social demand than other African American artists. The writer expects that this study gives a new perspective in African Americans' social demand, and how it is affected by society.

The writer also expects this study gives benefits to Universitas Airlangga. Hopefully this study could give basics to further research in Cultural Studies from English Department Universitas Airlangga, specifically in African American criticism. Also, hopefully this study could be beneficial for English Department students who are interested in African American Criticism.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

These are the five important explained terms that give understanding to the readers:

**Black Textuality** : A cultural product which is written by African Americans based on their experience in a racist society (Tate 1998).

**Duality** : A struggle of whether having a desire or being realistic in responding to surroundings (Hobbes 1968).

**Racial-Ethnic Identity**: The quality of being part of a certain ethnicity which plays an important role for African Americans' socialization (Reitzes 1999).

**Sign** : Anything that could be interpreted, or could be referred to something, through words, images, sounds, acts or objects (Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* 2007).

**White supremacy** : An ideology of White people, they who have European descent, should be dominant over people of other backgrounds—including their superiority in culture (Anti-Defamation League 2015).