

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There are some societies beliefs in traditional gender roles in which men are being initially superior to women. Traditional Gender Roles portrayed men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive, while women as emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive (Tyson 2015, 8). This male-dominated pattern often oppressed women in various contexts. The unfair treatment of women's right, sexual abuse, violence, even objectification are some examples of what occurs to women in the male superior culture. Gender equality seems to be hard to achieve as long as society is still hold into the gender inequality. Gender inequality which tends to be dominated by men is the product of social inequality pattern that is widely known as Patriarchy.

Patriarchy is simply defined as a social construction built by the belief of men's privilege and the way society perceives men as being superior to women. It is a concept in which women are considered as inferior to men since this value is centering men and emphasizing on men privileges (Parker 2008, 149). Ironically, patriarchal culture puts women in subordinate place since it underestimates women for being inferior to men. Women have been oppressed for so long until some of movements appear demanding for equality. In response to the gender inequality belief and treatment that has been rooted in male-dominated society, women started to defend it by establishing a movement against Patriarchy.

Feminism is the well-known movement aiming to fight for women right by building a gender equality society who against Patriarchy. A big amount of reported even unreported cases of women suffering from unfair treatment by patriarchal society has pushed women to be more concerning in fighting their rights. Feminism concerns with women's position as the inferior subject in society and discrimination confronted by women because of their sex (Freedman 2001, 1). Feminism has attempted to break the value of patriarchal culture and to declare a belief in sexual equality (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 2017, 113). The first wave of feminism started in 18th century although women had experienced the oppression from male-dominated society since long ago. Far before feminism first wave operated, world was being so cruel that women have to suffer in silence from the various oppressions. Women as an object is one of the examples of women oppression. To treat women merely as an object is a broad statement that will be explained in detail by a theory called Women Objectification.

Objectification is making person into a thing, treating as a thing, when he or she is actually something that is really not a thing. Generally, it is used as pejorative term, connoting a way of speaking, thinking, and acting that the person find morally or socially objectionable, usually, though not always, in sexual realm (Nussbaum 1995, 249). Some of the visible examples are slavery, sexual satisfaction object (*prostitute*) and women as commodities. In context of colleges life, study found that 94% of undergraduate women are reported experiencing unwanted objectifying sexual comments and behaviors at least once over a semester, women reported more sexual objectification experiences than men, and

sexual objectification emerged as a unique factor of daily experiences of sexism (Swim, J. K., Hyers, L. L., Cohen, L. L., & Ferguson, M. J., 2001, 57). As the time goes by, women fight and demand their right and freedom to be treated equally and not being an object. Even so, women objectification is still either consciously or unconsciously occurs. As what Catherine MacKinnon cited “Objectification exists to the end of male pleasure” (MacKinnon 1987, 173). Women are still under pressure from past until now, it is not permanently disappeared, it is just underground become less visible than before.

Therefore, this study chooses *Homegoing* novel written by Yaa Gyasi in 2016 to elaborate the portrayal of women objectification occurred in the female characters and their responses as the proof of women oppression done by patriarchal society. In the novel, women objectification is reflected in some female characters: Effia Otcher, Esi Asare, and Abronoma. The Story took a place at Ghana, West Africa started in 1780 century ended in 2009. The story indeed spans more than 200 years, stretched over seven generation that separated by the two contrast ancestor’s destiny. Effia Otcher and Esi Asare were sisters had been separated by fate. Effia married a British soldier and lived peacefully a prosperous life in the Cape Coast Castle, while her unrecognized sister, Esi, was captured and caged into dungeon below the Castle. The novel has mostly described about grief and sorrow, but the focus here is the grief experienced by the women characters as slaves, being traded, and treated merely like an object. Meanwhile, in the story, male characters are seemingly being demanded not to weak. Male characters in this story are portrayed as great if they involved in women slavery, rape, and even polygamous marriage.

The story is explicitly promoting the ideas of Patriarchy in how feminism has been fighting.

The complicated problem appeared in the story precisely makes the story written by this African-American woman, Yaa Gyasi, won several awards. According to vilcek.org, some of the outstanding awards are; Berlin Prize in 2018, PEN/Hemingway Award in 2017, American Book Award in 2017, and National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award in 2017. Born in Ghana and grow up in America, Yaa Gyasi moved several times started when she was 2 years old before their family settled in Alabama. Her experience of moving around looking for the place to settle shaped Yaa Gyasi and her two brothers had unique identity that they shared a lot of trauma and joy of being African Immigrants in America. *Homegoing* reflected her thought of 'What does it mean to be black woman in America today', she confirmed to STANFORD magazine, (Gyasi, The Story Behind 'Homegoing' 2017).

To emphasize the portrayal of women suffering from objectification in female characters on *Homegoing* novel and how their respond toward it, this study will apply one of feminist concepts that is Women Objectification by Martha Nussbaum. According to Nussbaum, shortly, Objectification is to seeing or treating someone merely as an object. She stated that, confusions can arise because women have not clarified the concept of objectification to themselves, and that once women do, women will find that it is not only slippery, but also multiple concept, objectification is morally problematic (Nussbaum 1995, 251). Nussbaum in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* journal has identified seven notion that involved in

the idea of treating person as an object. These notions conclude, *Instrumentality*, *Denial of Autonomy*, *Inertness*, *Fungibility*, *Violability*, *Ownership*, *Denial of Subjectivity*. Nussbaum claimed that none of which implies any of others, though there are many complex connection among them (Nussbaum 1995, 251). Behind other specification, Dworkin in Nussbaum identified objectification has other features that it may be either good or bad depending upon the overall context, including social context, and social power. According to Kantian way, the notion of humanity is also involved (Nussbaum 1995, 257).

A number of literary studies has examined *Homegoing* novel using various approaches. This object, *Homegoing* (2016) novel by Yaa Gyasi also has been analyzed by Amanda Scheuer entitled “*The Struggles of Identity and Belongingness in Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi*” (2017). By using African diaspora as focus of analysis, Amanda emphasizes on how the protagonist characters who suffers from abuse and exclusion faced by two choices, whether to stay in Africa, or leave their birthplace to find new home by forcefully was traded to America. African-Americans will continue to face the struggles that come with their identity and with finding a place to belong because of the injustice that has been engraved in their history (Scheuer 2017, 4). Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* has also been examined by Mar Gallego in “*Sexuality and Healing in the African Diaspora: A Transnational approach to Toni Morrison and Gyasi*” (2017) and Dominique Haensell in “*Temporality, Haunting, and Resurrection in Yaa Gyasi’s Homegoing (2016)*” (2017). Generally, both are aimed to explore the story significance as narratives of actual history in order to set the history straight as it were. Gallego emphasized on

contextualizing the historiography of enslavement as the approach to analyze the study, while Haensell emphasized on what is missing from the discourse of “Post-Ethnological” in Black History. Gallego found that Gyasi has chronicled new forms of identity and agency that promote individual and generational healing as form of protest and resistance against toxic definition of hegemonic and sexuality. In Haensell’s analysis, he found that Engagement of Black History is what had been missing in the Post-Ethnological in Black history. The previous studies above have contributed to give historical and racial insight in contextualize this analysis. The African Diaspora concept would support to explain on how the female characters as slave women actually want to escape and going back home in responses of the oppression they have received. Meanwhile the historical aspect would help to contextualize the situation within the enslavement in the story.

As many feminists insist that women objectification is complex and morally problematic, many of them argued women objectification in sexual aspect. Women to varying degrees, began to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 200). Due to numerous feminists have view women objectification in sexuality aspect, this study served this study served women objectification view from a novel that portrayed objectification experienced by African women in the late eighteenth century.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

In order to provide a clear understanding on the issue of women objectification, the statements of the problem that will be examined in this study are:

1. How is Objectification toward female characters portrayed in the novel?
2. How do the objectifieds respond toward the Objectification?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statement of the problem above, the question regarding the issue will be answered to elaborate:

1. How Objectification toward female characters is portrayed in the novel.
2. How the objectifieds responds toward the Objectification.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Due to most previous studies have focused on the slavery in context of colonizing black people as the African by the whites as the British and the American, this study examines through feminism approach, with theory of women objectification. In addition, numerous feminist have argued women objectification in sexuality view. This study serves women objectification in women slavery supported by African Women in colonialism era. The findings of study are useful for feminists who stepped further to the study of Woman Objectification as their supporting data analysis. By analyzing issue of objectification which is portrayed in Yaa Gyasi's "*Homegoing*"(2016) novel, everyone who has not familiar with the term of 'Woman Objectification', will find out some knowledges related to the issue. Everyone who is interested in the study of Woman Objectification also could

find it useful for them as the contribution to the related researches using feminist criticism. In addition, this study will give some insights to the students of literature in English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, as woman objectification also became one of the lecture topics using feminist criticism.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Commodity : An object which relatively traded, can be turn over physically, can be saved for a certain time, and interchangeable with other object

Objectification : The act of treating person as if he or she is an object, when actually he or she is a person not merely an object.

Objectification can be related to dehumanization

Polygamous Marriage : A marriage system which allows man to marry multiple spouses, or have more than one wife.

Reaction : An action and feeling someone performed as the response of something that happened to them.

Treatment : A manner or a way someone performed to behave when he or she deals with someone or something.