

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Racism is one of the most common issues that has been happening for a long time until nowadays, especially for African Americans. One of the reasons is that they are not the majority population in the United States. The United States is one of the countries with the largest population in the world. The population residing in this country consists of various ethnicities, races, and immigrants. As reported by the Census Bureau at the end of 2019, about 60.1% of the population in America is inhabited by non-Hispanic whites, 18.5% is inhabited by white Hispanics, and others are inhabited by black people, immigrants, and races from other countries (Johnson 2020). Since this country is occupied by various races, accordingly there is one race that dominates, namely the White race. The domination of the White race makes minorities feel excluded, whereas the dominating people do not feel that they are dominating and isolating them, and it causes racism (Simon 2020).

Among the races in the minority group in America, African Americans have experienced the worst oppression by White people. White people presume that African Americans are a group of people who are wild, lazy, violent, and rude. Indeed, African Americans are also portrayed as uncivilized people (Mahmood 2019, 619). The racism that happened to African Americans occurs because there is a history about the oppression of minorities and continues and develops into a more complex problem. For example, it happens in the structure and system in the

economy, social, politics of the United States government (Tourse 2018, 4). The racism that includes it systematically and involves an institution is known as institutionalized racism. However, institutionalized racism more refers to the racial system that is inferred into the practice of a government policy, law, and other things related to an institution (Urrestarazu 2020).

This incident has occurred since the 1970s until now. Most of the white leaders in the United States are not too concerned with their task of turning the country into a true democracy where there is true freedom and justice for all. Current institutionalized racism retains many of the basic features that perpetuate more racial views, descent, actions, and intentions than previous generations of white people (Feagin 2006, 9). Feagin also said that this system of white oppression against blacks was not a historical accident but was deliberately created by white Americans who had the privilege. This kind of oppression is not only a surface-level feature of United States society but encompasses and connects major social groups, networks, and institutions throughout society (2006, 10).

The societal acceptance of difference for black people in the United States is entrenched especially in institutional practices, administrative policies, and public sentiment. All are subject to discriminatory practices when applied to non-whites, especially black people (Littleton 2017, 2). This term of institutionalized racism has taken a comprehensive form of social control that is used to maintain dominance over African Americans. With the white population being more dominant, the institutions in the United States were heavily dominated by white people and it has an injustice embedded in it (Hamilton 2020).

African Americans are well aware of the institutional racial inequalities that occur to them. As reported from Nationscape Insight analysis, in 2020 found that 96% of Americans agree that there are acts of racism that occur against black people in America (Morin 2020). Amidst the covid-19 pandemic conditions that hit in 2020, they also still feel that there is racial oppression that is happening systematically through institutions. As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 79.9% indicated that Native Americans were hospitalized at a higher level of facilities than black Americans (2020). The covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on their economy. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the average number of unpaid people around 3.6%, but the percentage of unpaid blacks in America is 6%. It is common to exclude black Americans from economic gain (2020).

Institutionalized racism also can be shown clearly from the existence of police brutality that is systematically carried out against Black people. The suppression of African Americans progresses through the criminal justice system, where punishment and execution ultimately depend on race profiles for racial differences (Nichol 2016). Black people, in particular, encounter the highest risk of police violence and brutality. According to Sinyangwe in Mapping Police Violence, cases that occurred in 2020 regarding the existence of police brutality is 28% of Black people have been killed by police despite being only 13% of the population in the United States (2020). One of the incidents that have recently been reported regarding the case of police brutality is the death of George Floyd's Breonna Taylor,

Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery. That incident is a reflection of the deadly and systemic racism by the institutions in the United States.

Almost all Black people were killed by the police because they did minor offense suspiciously and used a banned strategy. These patterns continue because the existence of racism against Blacks is systemic. The struggle that African Americans waged in the United States has been going on for a long time in historical context. This is starting with still intact institutionalized segregation and massive rejection of school integration in 1960. Segregation is an all-encompassing regime of degradation and systematic oppression. At that time, all the system is codified in state and local law and enforced by intimidation and violence. All these occurrences have led to the establishment of the civil right movement (Ware 2013). Since the existence of the civil right movement which was deemed ineffective in handling racism cases in the 20s, while cases of racism were increasingly widespread and even occurred systematically by a certain institution, then a new movement was formed with the case of police brutality against Trayvon Martin, Black Lives Matter Movement (Siscoe 2016).

After all, the Black Lives Matter movement is not just a renewal of the Civil Right movement. In fact, the Black Lives Matter movement is more concerned with human rights, and it is slightly different from the Civil Rights Movement. The focus of the Black Lives Matter movement is less on changing some specific laws and more about championing a fundamental restructuring of a society in which Black life is free of systematic dehumanization (Roberts 2018). According to one of the founders of Black Lives Matter Movement, this movement is about the ideological

and political intervention where Black people life is systematically and deliberately targeted. This is a reinforcement of the contribution of black people to all society, our humanity, and our resilience against oppression (Louis M. Maraj 2018). Black Lives Matter struggles with action in physical labor public space and strengthened by social media. The Black Lives Matter rebellion was recently carried out due to the murder of George Floyd's, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery only because of a trivial matter (Clayton 2018).

One of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement is Patrisse Khan Cullors. She is growing up by experiencing the detention and brutality of an institution in her country. She was an activist since she was a teenager. Moreover, she also acted in many other social justice organizations until now (MomsRising 2020). After the establishment of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Khan Cullors, as one of the founders of that movement, published a memoir entitled *When They Call You a Terrorist* with Asha Bandele's, as the co-writer. This memoir published at the beginning of 2018, shows us the problem of the racism issue that going around the author's life in Los Angeles. Patrisse Khan Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza as the founder of Black Lives Matter Movement have been called as a terrorist and they are considered as a threat to White people. In fact, the definition of terrorism involves violence, or protest, and non-peaceful activities. Whereas Black Lives Matter is an open movement with several open organizations participating alongside self-proclaimed supporters, rather than a strict group with defined membership. Thus, labeling terrorists or threats to the movement as a whole is inappropriate (Byman 2020).

When They Call You a Terrorist is not only talking about the biography of the author's life, it also a memoir of sorts for all men and women of color who have lost their lives unjustly in the country that they lived, as she hopes to be a voice for them. Her entire life has led up to the movement. This memoir proves that the racism issue is a serious problem and can be a systemic problem. The impact is very noticeable in the society where the stereotypes are brought up that make inferior groups feel oppressed. The racial discrimination that is systematic from an institution is still difficult to eliminate until nowadays. Through the reason, this is why this study is important to raise up and discuss the issue.

The content of *When They Call You a Terrorist* memoir is about a special theme or a part of the author's life, as it is a story with the narrative shape, focus, and subject matter, involving reflection on some particular places and events, which this memoir can be categorized as a literary work (Thomas 2016). *When They Call You a Terrorist* by Patrisse Khan Cullors and Asha Bandele also won several awards since it was published. The author of this memoir also conducting a book tour in 13 cities, which starts on January, 12th until 25th 2018. Another award this memoir received was from TIME Magazine. This memoir is categorized as the best memoir in 2018. The last award is from Politics and current events OWL in 2018 (Macmillan 2018).

However, this study is analyzing *When They Call You a Terrorist* memoir by Patrisse Khan Cullor and Asha Bandele. Since the content of the memoir is about the oppression of various institutions experienced by African Americans, the writer chooses institutionalized racism as the issue of this study. To examine the memoir,

this study applied the theory of oppression by Joe R. Feagin. This theory is used in analyzing the structures and processes of oppression that set in the context of the family, economic, political, educational, and religious institutions of society. This theory is often used to observe how institutions in the United States are strictly based on stereotypes, ideas, images, emotions, tendencies, and racial practices (Feagin 2006) which is related to the content of the memoir. Moreover, this study also discusses how Cullor and other African Americans deal with acts of racism. This issue is very important and interesting to discuss since this incident is still happening until nowadays.

Institutionalized racism has been analyzed in several fields of research. Such as (Hextrum 2019) which discusses institutionalized racism in the field of sports and education, as well as Mahala Miller (2017) who investigated institutionalized racism in the economic industry field, and there are also Peterson who discuss institutionalized racism that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic in the public health (2020). Moreover, institutionalized racism has been widely discussed in the literary field. Institutionalized racism which is analyzed from the perspective of literature is used as a reference in this study. These researches use different methods and concepts, and that the gap in this study. This study also used memoir as the object, which can be a gap from previous research, because no one has analyzed the institutionalized racism in the memoir.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background that has been explained, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How is institutionalized racism portrayed through African American characters in *When They Call You a Terrorist*?
2. How do African American characters in *When They Call You a Terrorist* fight against institutionalized racism?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems which have been mentioned above, the purpose of this study is as follows:

1. To investigate how institutionalized racism is portrayed through African American characters in *When They Call You a Terrorist*.
2. To examine how African American characters in *When They Call You a Terrorist* fight against institutionalized racism.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to adding knowledge and provides some clear information to the readers that institutionalized racism is a part of racism and this is still often experienced by African Americans. However, the reality of racism that is experienced by African Americans in this autobiography that is used as the object of this study is almost invisible in social science. By doing this study the writer tries to inform that the problem of racism should not be underestimated because it can

develop into a structural problem that built into the economic, political, and cultural heritage in our societal institution.

In the end, this study also would be beneficial especially for those students in Universitas Airlangga or others who are interested to use institutionalized racism as their topic for the application of their literary criticism. This study also gives additional knowledge in the field of literature as a reference for other researchers in analyzing with their different perspectives.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

African American : Black people from Africa who immigrated and lived in America because of certain things (Martin 1991).

Racism : A phenomenon that maintains avoidable and unequal inequalities in power, resources, or opportunities across racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious groups in society (Jesica Walton 2013).

Institutionalized Racism : A policy determined by an entity, organization, school, or business that makes an unfair decision based on a particular race (Sue 2006).

Police Brutality : Violence based on the existence of stereotypical racial attitudes towards black people (Jones 2017).

Black Lives Matter Movement : A social movement in response to the numerous killings of African Americans and began with the experience of black people in America who demand human rights and that their lives do not matter (Cullors 2018).