

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Modern races presumably descend from various mixtures of ancestral types. Some of the most obvious differences, such as skin colour are one of result of adaptation to different climates. Because of different climates, people in the world have different skin colour, for example, Asian people have well adapted for survival in tropical climates. Most of them have light skin. Different from African or Indian, most of them have dark skin as a protection from ultraviolet rays (PDF file1). Nowadays, race becomes an issue in politics and social life. There are many kinds of different races living for a few generations, and local people mixed blood combines features from the different races: white and black. Since the different races appear, unreasonable discrimination appears around them, even until now.

Recently, racism still exists in the United States. Many points to high rates of poverty and unemployment among blacks, especially African-American as strong evidence that racism is still very powerful. There are so many practices in the United States which have been motivated by racism, such as segregation, job discrimination, denial of voting rights, and slavery. One of the highest points in the United States is slavery. Based on Lois Tyson, *Racialism* refers to the belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics, just like physical characteristics, are biological properties that differentiate the races (360).

According to Becker, the chronology of the history of slavery and racism are divided into three parts. In 1619, the important role in the development of America was the arrival of the Africans to Jamestown. When Dutch exchanged his cargo of the Africans for food because the Africans became servants who traded several years labor in exchange for passage to America. In this case, the Africans worked for them to produce tobacco. In the past, tobacco considered as powerful medicine by native Americans. The price tag for an African male was around \$27, while the salary of a European labourer was around 70 cents per day. Actually, Nigeria, the Southern part of the United States is the first place where discrimination was existed among the Africans (online1). They have to work hard. In this case, most of women cooked, cleaned the house, and raised the children of the white masters. Most of men were farm labourers. They planted and also produce cotton and tobacco. On the other hand, not all Blacks in America were slaves. Free blacks lived and worked in the United states, but they had limited opportunity in expressing political views, carrying guns, and meeting with white people was forbidden, such as go to the same school or church in 1970s. Unfortunately, the African-Americans were not allowed to register, so that the number of participants of African-American dramatically reduced, so that they find difficulties to participate in politics. Even the law in Virginia were so strict at that time towards the African-Americans. As the writer mentioned above, White Americans and African-Americans' children are not allowed to join in the same school, so they need segregation. In this case, the White Americans make policy that the African-Americans cannot move to the White district, on the contrary, the

White also cannot move to the African-Americans district (Online 2). The population of the Africans were increasing around 1790 – 1800s in the United States. This is the reason why the Africans considered as the African-Americans.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as the United States president. He disagree of the attitude of slavery. Many southern states withdrew from the union and formed their own country. It was the beginning of the Civil War, which lasted until 1865. By the time, after the Civil War became known as the reconstruction, the American government sent soldiers to the Southern states to protect the “Blacks” and their newly won freedom. Unfortunately, even though they were officially free, most of them still lived in bad condition because of poverty and hard to access the job. On December 6, 1865, eight month after the end of the Civil War, the United States adopted the 13th Amandment of the Constitution, which outlawed the practice of slavery (online 3). After Civil war and all the African-Americans slavery got freedom, there was slavery’s impact on race and gender roles. The function of the Southern white woman changed, the life of black woman continued just as if the country were in its first stages of growth. The theory of the inferiority of blacks began to be elaborated upon and take hold. It was at this point that the black woman gained her reputation for invulnerability. She was the key to the labor supply (PDF file).

There was a dramatic situation number of African-American literature and literary criticism. The increased presence of African-American works directly influence American culture while the culture is also influencing the literature. It also acknowledges and incorporates the writings of past African-American

literature, the major historical movements that have influenced African-American writings, and both historical and current attitudes toward African-Americans. (Bressler 244). The situation has begun to change, but the change is coming rather slowly because there are many black American authors got top honors and awards, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Sherley Anne Williams, August Wilson, and so on. They are producing some of the most widely acclaimed literature in American works by the Black Writers (Tyson 382). Most of the African American poetry or poems talked about politics, social, and economic power. Besides literature, the development of the African-Americans are increasing nowadays. It starts with the election of Barack Obama is the first African-Americans whom the president of the United States in November 4, 2008. Since the election, President Obama has been the image of America transmitted accross the globe (womack : ix) . Not only Barack Obama, but also another important people such as Oprah Gain Winfrey known as Oprah Winfrey who bring changing for the African-Americans. She is the first talk show host who achive success nowadays. At the first time, she did not has courage and lots of people considered that she was incapable to be presenter or talk show host because her face less attractive, but Oprah Winfrey has high intellectual and quiet smart, in addition, she also talk-active. It bring her to be the important people and most of people in the world know her well.

In this thesis, the writer would like to analyze one of the well known African-American authors, Maya Angelou. The writer would like to prove that not only people from white (American) race play important role in participating in

any areas, but also people from African-American race. The history of African-Americans struggle to survive can be seen in two poems by Maya Angelou, which criticize the white Americans during 1619 - 1890.

Marguerite Johnson, who became well-known as Maya Angelou, is one of popular poets in the era of African-American criticism and also feminism. She was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. She had had a varied carrier as a singer, actress, composer, and Hollywood's first female black editor, but is most famous as a writer, editor, playwright, and poet. Maya Angelou participated as a civil rights activist, she worked for Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcom X. She has also been an educator and is currently the Reynolds professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. In 1975, Angelou wrote Carol E. Neubaer in *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*. She recognized not only as a spokesperson for blacks and women, but also for all people who are committed to raising the moral standards of living in the United States. She is known throughout the world as a spokesperson for human rights, freedom, justice, and peace, and has often been the first African-American woman who fights for human rights to obtain certain job opportunities in the United States as well as in Africa. Her parents divorced when she was three years old. Maya Angelou, and her brother Bailey Jr., were sent to Arkansas with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson. During her childhood, she also saw how African-Americans defined beauty and self-worth based upon what white people expressed and displayed during their daily encounter. When she came back to Chicago, Illinois, she experienced sexual abused by her mother's girlfriend. Because of that, she went

back to her place, Stamps (*Maya Angelou's biography* - online 4). President Clinton requested that she compose a poem to read at his inauguration in 1993. Angelou's reading of her poem "On the Pulse of the Morning" was broadcast live around the world. Because of that, Maya Angelou known by many people around the world. In 2011, President Barack Obama also awarded her the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Maya Angelou wrote almost 26 poems, entitle: Still I Rise, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, On the Pulse in the Morning, Phenomenal Women, Men, and so on (online 5).

One of the most famous works, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", deals with her early years in Long Beach, St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. She wrote poems and autobiographical book with has the same title. Most critics have judged Angelou's subsequent autobiography in light of her first, and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" remains the most highly praised. She got inspiration from the well-known authors in the past, such as Langston Hughes, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Edgar Allan Poe. Other works written by Maya Angelou are entitled "On the pulse in the morning", "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", "Life Doesn't Frighten Me", and so on. There are many awards that Maya Angelou has gotten since 1970. She got a Pulitzer Prize nomination for Angelou's first book of poetry *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water for I Die*. The last awards that she got is the Black Cultural Society Award which given by Elon University in North Carolina in 2012.

"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", one of Maya Angelou's popular poem was produced in 1969. It consists of six stanzas. She is interested in writing

this poem because she wants to explore more about racism, identity, and literacy. It illustrates how strong character and love of literature can help her overcome racism and trauma. The object of the poem is a bird that being trapped on a cage by the owner. Maya Angelou wrote this poem as a reflection of discrimination of white Americans toward the African-Americans. In this case, she wants to show her pride as African-Americans through the object in this poem.

“Still I Rise” is one of the popular poem by Maya Angelou that produced in 1976. It consists of eight stanzas. There are many issues appears such as racism and discrimination between the oppressor and the oppressed are portrayed in the poems. The oppressed was being discriminated by the oppressor for long time ago and he or she wants to challenge the oppressor. In this case, the oppressed wants to show his or her struggle how he or she can passed bad experience in the past and it does not make him or her down.

The reason why the writer chooses this topic, first, the writer considered Maya Angelou as a popular poet through her poems. In this case, the writer feel interested in analysing the poems “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” because both of the poems show the struggle of someone who being oppressed by the oppressor and he or she does not want to give up. There are many issues such as discrimination and racism and it also gives solutions and messages to the society, especially the African-Americans. Besides, Maya Angelou also is an African-Americans woman who experienced sexual abused by her mother’s ex-boyfriend. Second, the writer chooses to analyse “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” because it contains messages to the reader

how we can struggle from the problem and do not easy to give up if we face lots of problems. This poems also give inspiration to the African-Americans and people around who also have same experience. Actually, the experience of being dominated and discriminated is not only happened in America toward African-American during 1950's, but also in almost every part of the world where various people from different culture, race, and ethnic are living together. As we know that, discrimination still exists until now, not only the White Americans towards the African-Americans, but also in another country. The writer wants to know the reflection of discrimination of the White Americans toward the African-Americans. She wants to find the issue from the way the poet criticizes the White Americans so that the writer use the African American criticism, especially Signifying and Black Vernacular English.

In analyzing two poems of Maya Angelou, she would like to apply the African-American criticism proposed by Henry Lois Gates, Jr.. He introduces the theory of Signifying in his book, *The Signifying Monkey*, By copying, altering, or parodying one another's literary devices – the same way that black people talk about one another when they engage in the African American folk practice (Tyson 386). The writer can conclude that the African-American has their language to express themselves. They usually use irony to insulting someone, deflating someone's pretentiousness, and so on. The writer also will apply the theory of Black Vernacular English or we can called as Ebonics or African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). According to Tyson that quote from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Black Vernacular English, which fulfills all the grammatical criteria of a

genuine language but is still dismissed by many white and some black Americans as substandard or incorrect English rather than recognized as a language in its own right (363). The reason why the writer uses the African-Americans criticism, especially the Signifying and Black Vernacular English (AAVE), she wants to focus on the language or the style of the language to see how the African-Americans express their feeling.

B. Statement of the Problems

In order to analyze Maya Angelou's poems, it is important to make the specification of problems that is going to be analyzed. The writer of the study would like to state the question to elaborate her analysis: How is the reflection of discrimination of the white Americans toward the African-Americans presented in Maya Angelou's poems "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"?

C. Objective of the Study

The purposes of the study are aimed to find out the important points in the statement of the problems: To find out the reflection of discrimination of the White Americans toward the African-Americans through Maya Angelou's poems discussed in this thesis.

D. Significance of the Study

In this study, the writer wants to enrich the notion of African-American literary reading by analyzing Maya Angelou's poems and contributes some ideas

and criticism in literature, especially African-American criticism. The writer hopes by doing this analysis, it will increase the reader's understanding how the struggle of the African-Americans against the white Americans is presented in two selected Maya Angelou's poems "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings". Through this study, the reader will understand how poems or any literary works express the idea behind it.

The goal of using African-American criticism is to learn some important aspects in literature. This thesis provides information, enriches knowledge, and understandings in studying African-American criticism which is hope to give the benefits and contribution to the study of literature, especially in the English Department, Faculty of Humanities in Airlangga University.

E. Scope and Limitation

There are several issues raised in Maya Angelou's poems, such as identity, racism, the combined oppression of racism and discrimination. Those issues can be analyzed through several perspectives. In order to gain a comprehensive analysis and avoid an overlapping explanation, which are not related to the subject, a scope and limitation will be determined. The important thing to be noticed is the work that is analyzed. In particular, the writer will focus on the poems "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings". She wants to focus on analysing the language of poems to reveal how the poet reflects discrimination and show the struggle of the African-Americans against the white Americans.

F. Theoretical Background

In analyzing the two poems of Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”, the writer will apply African-American criticism proposed by Henry Louis Gates, specifically the signifying and Black Vernacular English or AAVE. In this thesis, the writer is looking at the language of the poems that the African-American used in criticizing something and show the African-Americans’ identity, so that the writer can see how the struggle of the African-Americans faced bad experience in the past especially racism and discrimination. In this poems, contains the protests and criticism by the poet because of the act of discrimination during the era of the speaker of the poem lived. The concept applied in this research involves the concept of signifying, how the way African-Americans speak or express their feelings by using irony and other figurative language that construct the African-American identity. By looking at Black Vernacular English as the style of English Grammar that the African-Americans used in the poems, such as repetition.

In addition, the reason of applying the African-American criticism in this research is because the concept is relevant and applicable to the issue of African-Americans. The African-Americans identity can be raised in the two poems “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”. However, opinions, comments, and statements from other African-American scholars and other reliable sources are also used to support the analysis of this study.

G. Method of the Study

Related to the background of the study above, it can affect the method of the study by paying attention to the poems. The corpus of the study is Maya Angelou's poems entitled "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" to be the main object of this study. The objective of the study of poetry, it will focus on giving the interpretation of the poem which is using the African-American Criticism, especially Signifying and Black Vernacular English.

In analysing and collecting the data from the poem, the writer would like to apply the Close-reading method. Firstly, the writer is doing a close reading to the poem and tries to understand Maya Angelou's poems entitled "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings". The writer will analyze the issue of the poem especially on the language of the poet as the form of the reflection of discrimination of the white Americans toward the African-Americans. Second, the writer looked for many information and sources about the theory that would be applied in analysing the poems. In this case, the writer decided to use the African-Americans Criticism, especially Signifying and Black Vernacular English or AAVE theory as a tool to analyse the poems because the writer concerned on the issues in the poems and the language that the poet used in criticizing the oppressor. On the other hand, the writer also applied the language of poetry as an approach: figurative language, imagery, and repetition. It will helps the writer in analysing the words and finding the signifying and black vernacular english on the text. Third, the writer checked the poem and tried to understand of the poems. Then, the writer tried to pay attention to the poems also. After that, the writer

reads again the poems and concentrated on all its details and the patterns of the poem to elaborate the important information inside the poems through the language of poetry that the writer already mentioned above. The last step, the writer will find out the reflection of discrimination of the white Americans toward the African-Americans in the poems.

H. Definition of Key Terms

- a. African-American : black Americans society or Afro-Americans are a citizen of the United States with ancestors who came from Africa.
- b. Discrimination : prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially race, age, and sex.
- c. Freedom : liberty or the condition of being free from slavery or oppression.
- d. Pride : Pleasure or satisfaction taken in achievement, possession, and association.
- e. Struggle : fight for something or to make an effort to against the oppressor.
- f. White Americans : native Americans as the oppressor who treat the oppressed as slave.