

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Oppression refers to injustice exercise of power. Cudd (2006) defines oppression as unequal and unjust restrictions. The results of those restrictions are advantage to one group, the dominant group and harm to another group, the oppressed group. The oppressed group experiences different kind of oppression. Oppression of women has been the most basic and widespread form of oppression than any kind of oppression. Society, particularly male-dominated society tends to value man over woman. Man and woman are ruled and placed differently in the society. Women in the 21st century still suffer from oppression in the workplace and public sphere. They still have lower chances to get employments, have lower possibilities of being promoted to higher positions, and even earn lower salaries than men from the same type of jobs (Alvesson & Billing in Majstorović & Lassen, 2011, pp. 1)

Women's oppression cannot be separated from male-dominated society or patriarchy. The concept of patriarchy led to a dualistic perspective of male privilege and female subordination (Zinn, 2005, pp. 2). Lerner in Majstorović & Lassen (2011, pp. 1) defines the concept of patriarchy as the relationship of a superior dominant

group to an inferior subordinate group based on the mutual obligations and reciprocal rights. In other words, dominant group requires subordinate group to fulfill their needs and subordinate group is obligated to fulfill the needs of the dominant group. Beauvoir (2011, pp. 97) states that patriarchal society considers woman merely as a productive object for man, such as a sexual partner, a birth giver, an erotic object, and an “Other”. Blagojević in Majstorović & Lassen (2011, pp. 85) mentions various types of patriarchal oppression such as misogyny, discrimination, exploitation and violence.

Societies create women out of females (making gender out of sex). Patriarchy system expects woman to be passive, obedient, and submissive (Spelman in Witt, 2011, pp. 30). Lerner in Majstorović & Lassen (2011, pp. 1-2) adds patriarchy system can only be maintained if women agree to cooperate in gender socialization, denial of education and knowledge for women, and division and discrimination in accessing political power and economic resources. Women are likely to be oppressed by men, but they are also oppressed by other women as well. Beauvoir (2011, pp. 141) states that women are intended to live under the men’s authority and will never have their own authority.

Zinn (2005, pp. 63-67) thinks that a major focus of patriarchal is to control women’s bodies, for example, sexual control, medical control, and appearance. For woman, physical appearance is a major influence to marry a higher status man, whereas, man is assessed based on his intelligence, accomplishment, and wealth.

Feminine beauty is a major requirement that every female must possess in male-dominated society. The idea of beauty is socially constructed. Many women do various beauty practices like shaving and wearing makeup to measure up the requirement of feminine beauty, which is constructed by male-dominated society. Jeffreys (2005, pp. 6) believes beauty is a harmful cultural practice that is damaging to women.

Dworking in Jeffreys (2005, pp. 6) states that beauty practices are timewasting, expensive, and painful. Beauty practices can cause damage to women's bodies and psychological issues. It restraints her body function and defines her physical freedom. According to Jeffreys (2005, pp. 7); beauty practices are necessary for the male-dominated society to differentiate male and female; hence, the dominant sex class can be differentiated from the subordinate one. In other words, beauty practices create, as well as represent, the "difference" between both sexes. The "difference" between men and women is created by culture but is viewed as natural and biological. Jeffreys (2005, pp. 20) adds the idea of sexual difference is a biological distinction between men and women, which is expressed in masculine and feminine quality, including appearance and also behaviour.

The writer chooses to explore the issue about women's oppression because women's oppression is the kind of problem that women are still facing right now, while women may not realize that they are being oppressed. Woman still becomes the victim of stereotypes and is required to possess the traditional traits of woman. Some

people still believe that woman's job is inside the house, bearing and rearing children, taking care of her husband, and doing never-ending housework, while a man's job is outside the house where he can interact with public world. Man is not required to do the housework and help his wife, because unlike woman, man is not described as having domestic traits. Woman also suffers from discrimination in the workplace where she gets lower payment than man for the same type of job.

Issue such as women's oppression is often portrayed in literary works like poems, short story, novel, play and even film. One of them is *Only Ever Yours*, which is written by Louise O'Neill and first published in 2014. The novel is chosen as the data source because it horrifyingly portrays women's lives in a misogyny and male-dominated society where women are forced to meet the expectation of the society. The novel also portrays the double standard which happens in the novel that is similar to today's society where woman is required to protect her virginity whereas man can do whatever he wants with his body. *Only Ever Yours* perfectly portrays the situation in the real-life world where male-dominated society limits woman's function based on her physical performance, women fight among each other to be better and perfect in every single aspects, including visual, while man is programmed to only choose woman who fits into the society's requirement.

In *Only Ever Yours*, women are placed as subordinate and oppressed group where their functions have been reduced as breeding machine and sexual object. The first letters of all the female characters' names are not written in capital letters. For

example, freida, isabel, megan, cara, etc. The way they are named shows that they are placed as secondary sex; they have no right as human being; they are merely objects to be owned and will be thrown away once they are no longer useful and tasteful. Their eyes are completely cut off from the outside world and forbidden to acquire intelligence. They are busy improving their appearances and comparing themselves with their classmates. They will never revolt against the patriarchy because they are far too busy improving their appearances and competing between each other.

Over the recent years there are several studies concerning the issues about women's oppression. The first research by Kalantarian (2016, pp. 1-6) investigates a study to analyze Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* based on theories of Beauvoir (1949). It aims to explore why and in what way women are oppressed in a patriarchal society. The result of the study shows that men are the prime measure by which the world and particularly women are judged. The novel and the theories represent the problem of women's otherness and attempts to discover the means by which women overcome this secondary status. They assert that the social construction creates a generalized idea of women that all female must obey. Sexuality has the main role in restricting women and is the main cause for women's oppression and victimization and their inferior position in the masculine society.

The last research Haque (2016, pp. 1-6) explores the ideologies of black community regarding the standards of American beauty in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, focusing on the ugliness of racism that is experienced by the female characters in

the novel. The research uses theory about colonialism and anti-colonialism. The research finds out that whiteness is the purest and heavenly shape of beauty. People who are not white are not enlisted in the realm of beautiful creatures and always ignored by the society as a worthy human being. The characters in the novel have curly hair, and flat nose, which are the strong elements of ugliness. The society worships blue eyes, light skin and blonde hair. They are not only experiencing racism from the American beauty standards, some of them are compelled to do sex which is totally brutal and illegal.

By combining and developing the related researches, this study explores the issue about women's oppression, how women are described according to traditional traits, and how women's beauty and body are socially and culturally constructed by patriarchy. This study uses Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours* as a data source; meanwhile the previous studies use Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Mongo Beti's novel and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as the data sources. The study applies the theories of Beauvoir (2011), Jeffreys (2005), and Wolf (2002), to explore the issue about women's oppression in form of traditional traits and also beauty and body construction, focusing on the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the narrations, dialogues, and quotations in the novel. The writer will analyze the study using descriptive analysis method, with qualitative approach.

1.2. Research Question

How does *Only Ever Yours* portray women's oppression which is experienced by the female characters in the novel?

1.3. Purpose of the study

To explore how *Only Ever Yours* portrays women's oppression which is experienced by the female characters in the novel.

1.4. Scope of the study

The scope the study is on the issue about women's oppression that is portrayed in the novel, focusing on the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the narrations, dialogues, and quotations of the novel.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is expected to give a contribution in literary analysis using feminist approach. It is expected to give more understanding and comprehension related to the issues about women's oppression in patriarchal system or male-dominated society that is portrayed in *Only Ever Yours*. The last, this study is expected to be beneficial for English Literature Study Program students who want to enrich the study of literary works.