CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the era of 1960 white supremacy claimed that white people are the superior group in United States, while black people are the inferior group. Because of that condition black people are used to be white people property and this practice is called slavery. Balles and Allain (2012, p. 4) stated that slavery is the status or condition of a person whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. But this condition was changed by United States Amendments 13, 14, 15 which clearly explained for black people positions is generalized with white people on the basis of law and citizenship. This is not only to abolish slavery, but also to equalize black people rights. However, it does not end here because there is a legacy of slavery called discrimination.

Meanwhile slavery had been abolished from the United States, white people still consider themselves as superior group. This condition caused discrimination for black people. Discrimination is a negative action towards an individual or group of people on the basis of race, gender, and social class (www.simplypsychology.org). Moreover, International Labor Organization (ILO) convention in 1958 no.111 also stated that the action of discrimination are inequality treatment, no opportunity and given preference.

Thus, the effects of discrimination are unconfident, losing identity and to be separated (www.ilo.org/discrimination).

Discrimination also related with ethnicity difference which is known as racial discrimination, as Pager and Shepherd (2008, p. 2) stated that “it refers to unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity”. Dealing with racial discrimination usually occurs toward minority group, while United States has many minority groups such as Arabs, Chinese, Cuban, Puertorican, Latin and also Black. Black people, as the largest minority and ethnic group, experienced the most severe discrimination.

During the present time it is not only racial discrimination that occurred in black people, but also social class discrimination. Wright (2003, p. 2) defined class is “a social categories sharing subjectively-salient attributes used by people to rank those categories within a system of economic stratification”. Social class discrimination, for an instance; there are a segregation in bus shelter and drinking fountain that divide black people and white people. Thus, “it is not only about the material substances that defines class, but also how the individual’s construal of his or her class rank, and is a core aspect of how he or she thinks of the self and relates to the social world” as Kraus (2012) had explained. Social class discrimination is one of forms of inequality which focus on the status of the individuals.

Discrimination either racial or social class are depicted in any kinds at literature such as books, journals, articles and literary work. One of literary work that this study focuses is poem. The study conducts on poems because it is one of literary works which

understandable by the readers and listeners. They will more easy to understand the core of the poems through symbols. Simile, metaphor, personification and imagery are part of figurative language which describes a representation of poet's idea through diction. Eagleton reviewed that poem is a fiction which verbally inventive moral statement and the listeners will recognize it through the author's words diction and also figurative language (2007, p. 25). There is a possibility when the readers and listeners confused in understanding the poems, but they will still get the meaning of poems from its expression.

On the basis of this case, the study focused on analyzing the expression of discrimination whether racial and social class discrimination that Maya Angelou had ever received. Maya Angelou is a black woman writer who had ever received discrimination in her life. She expresses the experience of discrimination and also the one who can build a certain atmosphere for her people and emerge a certain condition too. She is also a director and a dancer. She had ever directed a play which told about black people life. Hook (1990, p. 24) reviewed that Maya Angelou had received many awards such as U.S National Council on the arts gave her National Medal of Arts in 2000 for her contribution in arts and culture selected by President Bill Clinton and The U.S highest civilian honor in Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010 given by President Barrack Obama.

Maya Angelou is not only poet who took racial and social class discrimination as a theme in a poems, but also Thomas Inch (1956) and Rachel Spinelli (1967). In their poems especially in racial and social class discrimination theme, they expressed how

minority group suffers from inequality. The inequality which depicted in actual racial and social class discrimination poem are like slur, harassment, stereotype, and the most severe – segregation. Those poets expressed the inequality because they want to show it to the readers how important freedom and equality for each person.

To analyze discrimination in this Maya Angelou's poems, the study uses semiotic approach by Roland Barthes. Thus, the semiotic approach will analyze the expression of Maya Angelou includes the figurative language in it. Due to the analysis, the writer aims to reveal how discrimination whether racial and social class discrimination are depicted in Maya Angelou's poems. There are three poems that will be analyzed in this study, they are "*I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*", "*Weekend Glory*", and "*Still I Rise*".

The writer found a previous study of semiotic approach in analyzing the poems that was conducted by Nash in 2009. Nash explained about how figurative language and the idea of the poems are revealed by the semiotic theory. She also explained that analyzing the denotative meaning is the first step to reveal the idea of the poem. After that she also told us that the denotative meaning could be the base of the interpretation of the connotation level. Moreover, Nash explained that the poet's idea of the poem will be seen in after the analysis of connotative interpretation.

The writer choose only three poems of Maya Angelou because in those poems already be controversy. Those poems are famous because the idea in it. Steven (2004, p. 37) reviewed that Maya Angelou's poems, entitled "I Know Why The Caged Bird

Sings", "Weekend Glory", and "Still I rise" are the reason of black people rising up against the discrimination. He also stated that those poems are one of the greatest literary works with great ideologies in it.

1.2 Research question

Based on the background of study, the research problem in the study is:

1. How discrimination depicted in six Maya Angelou's poems?

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe and depict discrimination whether racial and social class discrimination in Maya Angelou's poems entitled "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings", "Weekend Glory", and "Still I rise".

1.4 Scope of the study

The study focuses on analyzing the expression and figurative language of Maya Angelou's three poems entitled "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings", "Weekend Glory", and "Still I rise" in order to know more how discrimination depicted in Maya Angelou's expression in the poems.

1.5 Significance of the study

The writer hopes that the study will encourage student of English Department to get further information in understanding kinds of discrimination through poems or any literary works and with semiotic approach.