



THE STRUGGLE OF BRIDE AND SWEETNESS AGAINST OPPRESSION IN TONI MORRISON'S *GOD HELP THE CHILD*

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ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui bentuk-bentuk penindasan yang dialami oleh Bride dan Sweetness dan untuk mengetahui perjuangan Bride dan Sweetness dalam melawan penindasan dalam novel *God Help the Child*. Peneliti mengaplikasikan teori penindasan menurut Iris Marion Young untuk menentukan bentuk-bentuk opresi yang terjadi pada karakter Bride dan Sweetness, yang dipilih oleh peneliti sebagai fokus dalam penelitian ini. Peneliti menerapkan kritik sastra African–American untuk menganalisis masalah perempuan dalam novel *God Help the Child* karya Toni Morrison. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan melihat perjuangan Bride dan Sweetness dalam melawan penindasan. Penelitian ini hanya berfokus pada novel *God Help the Child* sebagai objek analisis, dan sebagai subjek analisis pada tokoh utama Bride dan Sweetness. Hasil penelitian menjelaskan ada lima bentuk opresi yang dialami dalam kondisi berbeda, yaitu eksploitasi, marginalisasi, ketidakberdayaan, imperialisme budaya, dan kekerasan. Hasil lainnya adalah perjuangan Bride dan Sweetness dalam melawan penindasan mereka. Keduanya sama-sama berhasil membebaskan diri. Bride akhirnya mengatasi trauma dan menerima masa lalunya. Di sisi lain, orang tidak mengetahui identitas Sweetness yang sebenarnya sebagai orang kulit hitam karena dia tidak pernah mengungkapkannya hingga akhir.

Kata Kunci: Ekplotasi, Marginalisasi, Ketidakberdayaan, Imperialisme Budaya, Kekerasa

ABSTRACT: The aims of the study were to find out the types of oppression experienced by Bride and Sweetness and know the Struggles of Bride and Sweetnees in the *God Help the Child*. The researcher used the oppression theory by Iris Marion Young to determine the types of oppression experienced by Bride and Sweetness. The research applies African–American literary criticism to analyze woman oppression in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*. This study used a qualitative descriptive method by looking at Bride and Sweetness struggle againsts oppression. This study only focuses on the novel *God Help the Child* as the object of analysis, and as the subject of analysis focus on the main characters, Bride and Sweetness. The result mentions that there are five types of oppression experienced by Bride and Sweetness in different conditions. The types are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Another result is about Bride and Sweetness's struggle to fight against their oppression. As they experience their own oppression, they have different effort. Bride finally overcomes her trauma and accepts her past, whereas, until the end, people don't know Sweetness's blackness since she never revealed it.

Keywords: Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, Violence



INTRODUCTION

Literature is the imaginative work that pictures the human life in society which can be enjoyed, understood, and used by the society as well. The form of literary work are drama, poem, short story and also novel. The literary work has its own definition taken from each different literature expert. Terry (2010:4) said that literature is a work of beautiful writing which record something in the form of language which is condensed, deepened, convoluted, shortened, and reversed to make odd or other aesthetic ways of composing through language tools. Simply put, literature is an expression of human expression in the form of written or oral works based on thoughts, opinion, experiences, up to feelings in imaginative forms, reflections, of reality or original data wrapped in aesthetic packaging through the medium of language. Literature can be a silent witness and commentary on human life. Literary background alone can reflect how the life of the people of a region in general. From there we can also learn what culture, life, and values upheld by the community are like this background. As a story about the living conditions of society, literary works also contain oppression.

Young (2011:13) said that oppression means the accomplishment in which done by the group of rulers. It can happen everywhere include anyone or groups. The cause of bullying is because of jealousy, anger, revenge, or feeling ashamed. Bullying causes a person or group of people to feel inferior or helpless because they are always being oppressed. There are many kinds of oppression experienced by a person or group of people, one of which is the oppression of women.

Based on the description above, the writer is interested to analyze a literary work, namely a novel with the title *God Help the Child* written by Toni Morrison. The novel is very interesting because it tells about the oppression experienced by black woman. The woman named Bride experiences oppression because of her black skin. The people around her feel uncomfortable with her presence, including her father who rejects her presence. Bride's father does not accept her because of her black skin while he and his wife are whites.

Basically, both white and black woman face the same oppression because of their gender that they are considered as weak creatures. However, black women receive double oppression. They do not only face the oppression through their gender but also because of their race and class. People treat black women unfairly because of their skin color. The case of racial discrimination and exploitation towards black woman, never and as time goes by, show the oppression problem of black woman needs to be concerned.

The dominant ideology classifies black women to be superior and submissive. The assumption is used by white women to treat black women arbitrarily. White woman control the imaged and spread negative myths about black women (Collins, 2009:17). However, the real reason behind the oppression of black women in America is because they are part of a minority ethnic.

Related to the study, Morrison's works are considered as valuable writing and deserve to get honors, the writer has picked out *God Help the Child* novel (2015) written by Toni Morrison as the object of the research. Despite her age, Morrison still writes a fresh, adventurous and vigorous work, *God Help the Child*. It is the noble prizewinner with rich tale of a young woman struggle against sadism and parental neglect. Morrison gives an understanding of the inter-black prejudice to dark skin tones which is rarely public airing (Gates, 2016:22).

The writer is interested to analyze *God Help the Child* novel by Toni Morrison because in the novel it tells how the struggle of mothers and children in the fight against oppression. Bride and Sweetness' struggles against oppression are different. So, their efforts are also different. The struggle in the Bride version aims to gain acceptance from the family and society. Meanwhile, Sweetness chooses to hide her true identity as a black person so that she can avoid trouble with society. Both managed to free themselves. Bride finally overcomes her



trauma and accepts her past on the other hand, people don't know Sweetness' true identity as a black person because she never reveals it until the end.

Based on the background described above, the writer formulates the problems as follows: what are the types of oppression experienced by Bride and Sweetness in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*? How do Bride and Sweetness struggle to fight against oppression in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*?

METODE

The research design refers to the overall strategy chosen to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. The purpose of a research design is to provide a plan of study that permits accurate assessment of cause and effect relationship between independent variables. Research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study. There are two types of data namely primary data and secondary data that are needed to this research. : primary and secondary data

ANALYSIS

The Oppression Experience by Bride and Sweetness

Exploitation

According to Young, exploitation is power and inequality relationship involving a condition when the exploited is continuously in the subordinated one. It since the dominant has power and wealth to do any actions of using the energy of individuals or group to control the exploited (Young, 2011:8).

In *God Help the Child*, the exploitation is described by Sweetness who suffers due to her status as the poor. Although her skin is brighter and yellowish, Sweetness's status cannot save her from other's unfair treatment since she is perceived as the poor. The exploitation is shown in the excerpt below.

The Bible! Can you beat it? My mother was housekeeper for a rich white couple. They ate every meal she cooked and insisted she scrub their backs while they sat in the tub and God knows what other intimate things they made her do, but no touching of the same Bible. (Toni Morrison, 2015:11:10).

Lula Mae (Sweetness's mother) works as the housekeeper for a rich white family. Lula Mae does a good job, more struggle in services, but all she does not enough for the whites. Instead, the whites make her do more difficult works arbitrarily. Here, the arbitrary treatment suffered by Lula Mae from her white master indicates exploitation.

Discussing this case further, the excerpt "no touching the same bible" answers the reason behind the exploitation that happens to Lula Mae. For racist whites, such caricature of black people strengthens whites' belief to justify their unfair treatment towards black people because they claim that they are not in the same class or their God was different. They believe their God is naturally superior so whatever they do to black people are for given

The other reason, supported by a Marxist perspective, is because the riches claim themselves as the dominant because they have money meanwhile the poor are forced to submit them. Thus, Lula Mae as the poor

deserves to be exploited (Heldke, 2011). However, Lula Mae's case is not that simple. Lula Mae is a private employee whose salary depends on the rich's satisfaction, it means serving her master well is her duty.



Therefore, Lula Mae's situation supports her to do whatever they order voluntarily. Her situation also states that poor black women have been exploited due to their job for a long time since Lula Mae's experience occurs when Sweetness was still young until she herself experienced it (already explained in the discussion of the previous excerpt above).

Overall, corresponded with Collin's perspective, through Sweetness and Lula Mae's case, there searcher finds a social phenomenon in which the majority of black women in America are involved in low-paying jobs because they have a job as the housekeeper or related to parenting ability (babysitters, nurses in nursing home, waiters) in this novel is stated. Both Sweetness or Lula Mae are the members of American citizens, poor black women and work by getting low salaries-which is the factors cause Sweetness and Lula Mae to experience exploitation.

Marginalization

Marginalization refers to the process of exclusion that places or shift someone away to be the peripheral society. Marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression because it involves material seizure and annihilation. The marginalization process of black women continues as long as white power dominates a particular society. Since the whites are dominant and being the main culture, their assumption about no needs other "colored women" to achieve welfare in society. The support for black women is also not obtained (Yusuf, 2016:22). Black women lack of attention, help, and companion in this case.

The writer finds the data related to marginalization in *God Help the Child* which is experienced by Bride and Sweetness. Bride is marginalized in her workplace because of lacking in education and her skin color. Meanwhile, the law separates Sweetness in taking public facilities and services since she perceives as black women.

Some of you probably think it's a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin color-the lighter, the better-in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools But because of my mother's skin color, she wasn't stopped from trying on hats in the department stores or using their ladies' room. And my father could try on shoes in the front part of the shoe store, not in a back room. (Toni Morrison, 2015: II:10).

Sweetness's experience in her childhood above informs us about the harsh reality faced by black people because of their skin color at the time. Black people suffer the pain of hatred and humiliation due to racist prejudices and discriminative habits from people even though the era of slavery has ended. Also, the government participates in marginalizing black people by continually authorizing the separation or elimination of civil rights and denying citizenship towards black people (Collins, 2009:63). As a result, American people do the same thing since they think it is part of their ideology, even their treatment may be worse.

From a racism perspective, these experiences of black people are called "racial segregation" or "American apartheid". This term refers to the separation of facilities and services in all access such as housing, schools, churches, health services, and others, or it can also be defined as a discriminative separation committed by white people against other colored people, including the blacks. This separation is often unequal because the portion given to the colored especially black people is fewer. Implicitly, it seems that white people consider them to be dominant and superior so this kind of separation is common in America in the past (Collins, 2006:64).

Powerlessness

Young argues that the powerless individual or group does not have the power to resist their oppression.





The dominant easily control the powerless to do their orders since the capacity and power of the powerless has been limited by them (Hinson & Bradley, 2013:55). According to Freire (2004:31), the powerless experience “a culture of silence” in which they are not able to speak their voice. While particular individual or group (e.g. a slave) certainly cannot express the terrible condition, the others just think that their participation will not give an impact (Hill, 2009:18).

In this novel, this belief supports Bride and Sweetness feel powerless under their landlord's order, as follow:

He never touched her. I never did convince him that I ain't never, ever fooled around with a not her man. He was dead sure I was lying. We argued and argued till I told him her blackness must be from his own family— not mine. That's when it got worse, so bad he just up and left and I had to look for another, cheaper place to live. (Toni Morrison, 2015:II:11)

Based on the novel excerpt above mentions Sweetness is accused by her husband, to have an affair. Both Sweetness and Louis argue about whose Bride's black skin comes from. Louis does not admit Bride as his child. Meanwhile, Sweetness does not convince him that she never fools around with another man. Sweetness just says that Bride's blackness originates from him. However, Louis cannot accept Sweetness's statement so he leaves the house. This condition describes Sweetness feels powerless to challenge that man's accusation.

Cultural Imperialism

Stereotype from Family

In family relation, the stereotype may happen. *God Help the Child* shows Sweetness as a mother stereotypes Bride as stated on:

She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black. I'm light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Ann's father. Ain't nobody in my family anywhere near that color. Tar is the closest I can think of yet her hair don't go with the skin. It's different-straight but curly like those naked tribes in Australia. (Toni Morrison, 2015:II:10).

From the data above, Bride has been stereotyped by her mother because of her skin color. Her mother (Sweetness) does not only reject her presence but she also claims her daughter into Sudanese. Sweetness since her skin color is brighter and yellowish, she notices the contrasting skin between them. Indirectly, Sweetness ignores her daughter. This case shows women in the same race possibly stereotype the fellows, more over in the family.

Stereotype from Society

Stereotype happened to black people for a long time ago. In this novel, Bride experiences stereotype in the series of her life starts from her first social institution (in school), then continue to the widest institution (workplace and human relationship). The first evidence states Bride is stereotyped by her peers. It is described in:

I was six years old and had never heard the words-nigger ||or-cunt|| before, but the hate and revulsion in them didn't need definition. (Toni Morrison, 2015: IV:37)

As the school is the first place for children to communicate and interact, young Bride knows social stigma about her black skin from her peers. In this case, the adult's social stigma which circulates around them also



influence children's mindset.

Violence

a. Psychological Violence

The first psychological violence noted by the researcher is shown by Bride's love relationship in the excerpt below.

-Isn't she beautiful? II he kept repeating.-Look at her, Mother Dad? His eyes were gleaming with malice.

But they outclassed him with their warmth-however faked-and charm. His disappointment was obvious, his anger thinly repressed. His parents even drove me to the train stop, probably so I wouldn't have to put up with his failed racist joke on them. I was relieved, even knowing what the mother did with my used tea cup. (Toni Morrison, 2015:IV:26-27)

The action of Bride's old lovers and his white parents is a form of psychological violence that happened to Bride. Bride has been treated as an object for jokes. For them, Bride's blackness is funny to be mocked and laughed at. The way they welcome her might seem warm to the extent of formality. Within a humbled gaze, they greatly satisfy for bullying her. They are proud that they have conquered a poor woman. They deny a black aesthetic.

b. Physical Violence

Bride experiences physical violence committed by her mother as shown in:

I didn't make a sound, didn't even raise a hand to protect myself when she slapped my face then punched me in the ribs before smashing my jaw with her fist then butting my head with hers. She was panting when she dragged and threw me out the door. I can still feel her hard finger sclenching the hair at the back of my neck, her foot on my behind and I can still hear the crack of my bones hitting concrete.(Toni Morrison,2015:III:24).

The data above discovers the severe physical violence happens to Bride. Here, it describes Bride's mother, Sweetness, uses to injures Bride's body. The injures are starting from little action like slapping Bride's face until actions that fatally damage her body. Because of Sweetness's punishment, Bride suffers physical losses. However, Bride just receives the injure from her mother since she is afraid Sweetness will do more damage actions. It is seen that Sweetness does. Not only hurt Bride physically but also emotionally, Bride also suffers an ongoing trauma.

Characters' Struggle to Fight against the Oppression

The general perspective about colored women (especially black women) circulates in society is the assumption that they are inferior and submissive under the white's control. People suppress black women in many aspects such as economic, religious, social, etc. It is because they are oppressed in their race, gender class. In response to this case, black women need to struggle against their oppression. The aim is to achieve equal rights in society and eliminate the unfair treatment they receive (Yusuf, 2016:19).

As the black female character in *God Help the Child* by Toni Morrison, Bride and Sweetness do struggle to be free since they have experienced oppression from people around them. Everyone has their own way to solve problems and open their opportunity. So, Bride and Sweetness's struggles are different because they have their own experience of oppression.

Bride's first conflict which makes her feel suffered is the absence of acceptance and love from her



mother, Sweetness. It is Bride's reason for willing to do anything to get love from her mother. It is discussed as follow:

I was only eight years old, still little Lula Ann, when I lifted my arm and pointed my finger at her. -Is the woman you saw here in this room? The lawyer lady smells of tobacco. I nod. 'You have to speak, Lula. Say yes 'or no.' "Yes". (Toni Morrison, 2015: III:24).

Bride changes her name from 'Lula Ann Bridewell' to 'Ann Bride' as soon as she leaves her high school. She firstly uses the official name when she does a working interview in Sylvia, Inc. She again changes her name by shortening it to only 'Bride'. Bride successfully creates a new memorable identity and erases her miserable past. On the other hand, Bride also wants people to accept her existence.

Unfortunately, despite all efforts she does, Bride still loses people she loves. Her second destruction is when Booker (her boyfriend) suddenly disappears and Bride cannot accept his words, even loses confidence she hardly builds. Her meeting with Rain (a white teenage who saves Bride from the death) on her journey to find Booker at Whiskey (a small village in California) makes her learn to accept her painful past, as stated in:

'Why? Why would she do that? Why would anybody do that to a child? Bride wondered. Even Sweetness, who for years couldn't bear to look at or touch her, never threw her out.....Listening to this tough little girl who wasted no time on self pity, she felt a companionship that was surprisingly free of envy. Like the closeness of schoolgirls. (Toni Morrison, 2015: X:62).

Sweetness puts an awareness of the negative perspective of black people since she was a child. She was very glad her skin is brighter and yellowish rather than other blacks, even though she is also a descent of black family. Without telling about her skin color to society, Sweetness indirectly hides her identity to avoid suffering from being oppressed. Sweetness considers hiding her identity is the secured way to survive since she knows well about all hatred and ridicule towards black skin.

Even though Sweetness moves out from the old house, until the end, people do not underestimate Sweetness for her skin color. It is discussed on:

.....That's when it got worse, so bad he just up and left and I had to look for another, cheaper place to live. I knew enough not to take her with me when I applied to landlords so I left her with a teenage cousin to babysit. I did the best I could and didn't take her outside much anyway because when I pushed her in the baby carriage, friends or strangers would lean down and peek in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning. (Toni Morrison, 2015:II:11).

Sweetness's anxiety arises because she is afraid people will spread negative gossips if people see the contrast skin color between her and her black baby. So, she leaves her baby when she works. This condition shows that Sweetness's new neighbors perhaps make biases prejudice but un automatically know her true identity if Sweetness never tells them. In this case, it can be said that Sweetness's struggle mission to escape from suffering because her skin color has succeeded because she never reveals her blackness tot here.

SIMPULAN

From the analysis, the writer concludes all forms of Young's oppression depicted through the main characters Bride and Sweetness, it can be concluded as follows, oppression division; exploitation,



marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence happen to Bride and Sweetness in their own condition. Exploitation occurs only to Sweetness. She is exploited due to her social status as the poor. The second form of the oppression, marginalization, happens to both Bride and Sweetness in different situations. Bride is marginalized at work because she lacks in education and is perceived as the black, whereas, Sweetness marginalization leads to the separation of facilities and services for black people. Furthermore, cultural imperialism, in this novel happens only to Bride in the type of oppression. Moreover, Bride is the victim of violence in this novel, either psychological or physical violence.

In response to the oppression, Both Bride and Sweetness do struggle to fight against oppression. As they experience their own oppression they have different struggle. Different from Sweetness, Bride's is not only in social life but also in family life. Their goal is liberating themselves from their suffering. Their struggle, in the end, is success. Bride finally overcomes her trauma and accepts her past, whereas, until the end, people don't know about Sweetness's blackness since she never reveals it.

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