

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Most people yearn a fair world to live. Yet, the world is far from being fair. The reality does not give people fairness for free. People have to fight for their causes to find justices. The world is surely unkind and unjust. For millennia, stories of quarrelling interests have defined the world. The result is history has summarized itself as a series of conflicts; a series of war. Conflicts have been living as old as human's civilization from ancient times to today. Ones need to struggle to keep surviving. Consequently, a game of survival that runs under the nature's law has emerged. That is how, at least, the world has been narrated. To live means to fight, question, and accept the reality.

Conflict in the name of sexual identity in search of justice is one of the most criticized stories in history. The world consists of two sexes. Yet, the relationship among them does not always go smoothly. They describe and prejudge each other. They create stories, but the dominant sex has more power to dominate the stories. The power gap has led this into a minimum discourse in the matter. The creation of normality by the dominant stories begins. There is a standard norm being set. Some people reject while others submit. When text rises and marks history, it forms a significant deal in society. Text tries to narrate everything and becomes sources of guidance for people. Stories are made and spread. People read and tell. These

narrations from both oral and textual often times culminate into the creation of social norms and values. The problem is the narrations about the less dominant sex are almost far from being fair. Most of the narrations have marginalized them to be the second sex. For centuries, oppression to this sex occurs and the tales go on.

Females are these less dominant sexes that are going to be discussed in this research. Their lives are bounded to the story of “women”. These sexes have to endure the unfair narrations addressed to them. Stories are no longer stories, but they turn into myths embedded in people’s heads. *Honor killing* in Pakistan is an example of long lasted marginalization (evolved into violence) towards them inspired by irresponsible narratives. The highly patriarchal society of Pakistan supported by extreme religious ideology had oppressed its female members horribly. In 2014, it was even reported that a pregnant woman was stoned to death because she married a man who did not get her family’s consent. This was done asserted by her family as a way to save the honor of the family. When in Pakistan it was almost impossible for females to speak, Pussy Riot in Russia was probably lucky to be able to speak up the rights of them. However, Putin’s government was criticized to be no different from other patriarchal society. It had taken the females’ freedom by creating controversial and discriminative policy on women. This female protester group was arrested by the security officials. All lead to prove how powerful an established narrative is.

The narration about females is probably people’s least concerned. Truthfully, it is as important as any other fields for the betterment of human’s life. Commonly, most people are habituated by the old narrative. The problem is taking away its past

social construction for granted can be harmful and problematic. Time changes, so do people. A critical tradition in viewing things must be disseminated in order to fertilize a healthy thinking and achieve a greater social progress. Unfortunately, the history of females particularly in text is still male centric due to the influence of male dominance. Hester (1992: 1-2) even believes that the naturalistic character of male domination is actually made on purpose by male's intent. It is sure that narration is matter.

Discussing issues about female means dealing with how women as the representation of female's gender are being represented. Gender is basically narrated and dynamic since it varies from culture to culture. Inferring to Teresa de Lauretis' definition of gender, gender refers to the social construction of what male and female are (Lieske in Wallace, 2009:252). In the old time society, men and women are associated into their own roles usually because of their capacity as an individual. The traditional concept of living influenced by war culture has endorsed a shallow definition of men and women. The paradigm toward them has forced the weaker sex (on the basis of physical capacity) to accept its specific roles in society. While the stronger remains, its roles are also defined. As a result, it raises a common perception between men and women, a general conception of gender roles. Separation between roles of the sexes begins as time passes by. In male dominated society, patriarchal society is born.

Patriarchal society is a society identical with the domination of males and the subordination of females caused by coerced narration of gender. Traditionalist people

relate these phenomena as inevitable because of religious and biological reasons (Lerner, 1987:16-17). Male domination is usually found on how patriarchal males dominate females by maintaining their power in many forms while female subordination is manifested on how females are perceived as inferior entity. In this society, women are treated as inferior beings. Their roles are mostly defined by men through dictated narrations. Their movements are limited and sealed into traditionalized roles nurtured from their previous generations or ancestors. Time by time, their freedom of expression is indirectly killed by the notion of preservation of tradition and cultural values. Women have likely a minimum chance to resist. According to revolutionary feminist, heterosexuality is the perpetrator of this cycle of control and it keeps the cycle continues (Hester, 1992: 2). While Hester (1992:3) herself believes that it is actually not caused by sexuality, rather it is caused by the problematic social construction of masculinity and femininity. Aside from those views why oppression occurs, patriarchy is inherently unfair to females. It is the society where males lead while females stay behind and remain imprisoned under social norms. The doctrine that says women have to keep their roles as beauty symbols is one of the established patriarchal values. Meanwhile, it remains to be a question what beauty is. Beauty goes to the realm of femininity, yet femininity is socially constructed. Consequently, this kind of society has higher risk of abuse of power made by males because males may dictate what and how beauty is. In response to such problems, Lerner (1987:6) argues that if patriarchy is a system caused by historical process, then it can be changed by historical process too. It means that to

cut the vicious cycle of oppression to females, new paradigm in seeing them must be introduced to deconstruct the institutionalized patriarchal system.

On the relation to the above historical elaboration, it can be concluded that the problem which affects females is obviously about narrative. The male centered narrative as a result of patriarchal ideology is the culprit of how oppression towards females may still survive to today. To fight the oppression means to demand a fair and responsible narrative about females. However, Herman (2005:17) argues that the level of credibility of a narrator is subjective and dependent on the reader's view about what credibility comprises of. This implies meaning that there are two factors that constitute people's perception on how responsible narrative is. Those are the reader (when it comes to text) or the receiver and his or her knowledge to judge whether a narrative is reliable or not. This argument proves why there are still many people who accept the constructed values while some others do not. It is because people are varies from head to head and their knowledge upon things affect them to view things differently. Campaigning for a better awareness is certainly needed.

Inequality between men and women in patriarchal society will be optimally resolved by counterbalancing the established narratives with new narratives which portray women as the representation of females fairly. It means that a misleading narrative must be criticized and reconstructed. Gender equality entails a factual description on both sexes. In the context of written materials, text should communicate a new normal of what a female is. Feminist theories are essential and pivotal in introducing a new normal. The spirit of females' independence must be

proliferated. Simone de Beauvoir's call that says "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman", summarized by Postal in Wallace (2009: 57) as the liberation of women from any determinant on what defines women in society is necessary to educate a society on issues about women and females.

Literature is a promising text that can be used as a curative material to deconstruct the deeply rooted patriarchal ideology in society. Socrates' mimesis about Plato's Republic that posits literature as a reflection of society is a good start (Kenan, 2002: 109). Literature is a society in words. It is the mirror of human civilization. Yet, war literature is susceptible to patriarchal narrations. This is due to the fact that this literature exploits war in building its story. The representation of gender in war literature can be problematic. War constitutes significantly in creating gender narratives in society. Patriarchal values accumulated from war may authorize the creation of gender. War literature, then, can be so patriarchal in nature. Strong male dominance in war themes is one of the causes which catalysts these patriarchal narrations. From those reasons, this research is interested in analyzing this literature as a textual artifact of civilization that is prone to patriarchy. American literary narrative of war as a popular literature is chosen as the focus of this research.

Anthony Doerr's *All the Lights We Cannot See* is an example of this literary genre. It is a literary work which fuses historical settings and fantasies. It is historic in some parts and fictive in the other parts. The novel speaks about the story of two human beings named Marie Laure Le Blanc and Werner Pfennig who cross their paths in World War II. It is interesting that this novel uses historical settings aimed to

mimic certain condition at the past. As a historical fiction about war which is fictive in nature, its story might be found sensitive to any community or reader which has an affiliation with the history. Nonetheless, aside from that, Adamson (1994: xix) addresses that the artistic substances which come from the author's imagination to the story is equally important to give a soul to the text so that it can be intellectually stimulating to the readers. It means that the fictive part is also significant in creating the whole story and attracting the readers as well. This fictive part is under the authority of the author to define and tell. This is where his or her fantasy works and manifests. This is also where the author's knowledge, values, and ideology might reside and influence.

There is a stereotype in society about historical fiction saying it must portray the precise reality of the historical settings being used in the story. It is also why Doerr's *All the Lights We Cannot See* is an appealing material to study according to the researcher. The reality demanded is basically also a mere generalization of what happened at the past. That is because the condition revealed is also based on the author's perception of the past which is probably structured by historical books or any other books the author consumed available in schools, stores or libraries. Meanwhile, factually, those books are also possibly influenced by political agenda or else. Dominant actors always have a power to dictate a story. Indonesian's historical narrative incredibility towards the narration of *1965's mass killing* is an example how dominant actors constructed history. On the same analogy, the reality demanded from historical fiction cannot also represent the whole truth of the history and it is probable

to even bring a misleading message to society. This is in line with a view that states reality is sadly formed by society (Simmon, 2006:20).

Thus, this research aims to analyze the narratives of gender being used by the author in portraying women in his novel. The researcher believes the author may consciously or unconsciously be influenced by a patriarchal ideology in telling the story of women in war. Gender narratives in text are important in shaping women in society. The theory of poststructuralist or postmodern narratology and feminist criticism on gender and war will be used to uncover these narratives. Gender narratives have a power in constructing the readers' paradigm on women. The existence of male domination and female subordination in the novel as the probable effect of patriarchal values is managed to be proved by the researcher. As a reader belongs to a society, the more readers read the novel means the more power to build a stigmatization. In turn, this stigmatization can later on be seen as a normal thing in society. Misleading narrative like this is harmful and need to be addressed.

B. RESEARCH FOCUS

The study of narrative is crucial to humanities. Literature is one of many forms of telling a message to people. It is influential and continues to become a popular culture in society. American literature is part of this narrative artwork. It has an exceptional place in shaping America as a developed nation and a modern world. It has successfully communicated new normal to people to combat oppressions. Nevertheless, aside from those joyous narratives, the researcher believes that

American war literature still remains susceptible to male oriented narrative resulted from previous patriarchal background of America. Patriarchy is not something that is easily changed. If previously feminism has been successful in moving women to fight for justice, it does not mean that it has also successfully moved those who affirm the previous establishment to acknowledge justice. War literature is problematic since it establishes a prejudice of war. To be precise, this literature exploits it to make the story, has a strong relation with male heroism and unavoidably defines women on those patriarchal settings.

American war literature is produced by American authors and mainly tells on wars their nation involved in. The wars are utilized to narrate the horrific and the heroic condition about the people. This war setting may perpetuate a system of warring society in the story making. An established concept of it, then, may be used to portray the condition. Gendered society caused by war will be more likely regarded as a normal thing in this sense. In war, the dominant is the fighter or the soldier. Meanwhile, the general concept in society when they relate to soldier is men. That is because people have been habituated this way.

Heroism is dominant in war literature and American war literature is no exception on this too. It exists because an urge to protect or save. Contextually, it is very intact in American society. This is possibly caused by the war culture which has shaped America as a nation till today. War is continually practiced. The truth is, it is still being literally practiced by its government till this moment due to any particular political reasons to confront and dominate fear. The rise of fictional superheroes in its

popular culture is more likely the effects of this culture. Unfortunately, heroism is mostly characterized as a male field. Females' participation is hardly recognized and their identity is commonly jeopardized.

The making of war literature unavoidably defines women on those patriarchal settings. Recently published novels or other literary works are under criticisms and demands to provide more constructive endorsements to issues about women. In the context of gender representation, it is demanded to provide fairer or more empowering narratives. Nevertheless, subjectivity is still an absolute authority to narrate a story according to the authors' preferences.

In brief, this research managed to focus on the gender narratives residing in modern American war literature because of those aforementioned issues. Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* as the object of this research is published in 2014. The novel has gained *Pulitzer Prize* in 2015, a famous and highest award for literary work in America. Using this novel, the researcher questions how Doerr narrates women through their gender narratives.

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Modern American war literature as a modern historical fiction must challenge the traditional narration of war that subjugates women. It is hoped so because it is inherently a fiction. Indeed, it should portray the horror of war to remind people and put awareness about it. However, on the same analogy, its narration should also endorse positive impacts to the readers by emphasizing a positive gender embodiment

at the time of war. It means fair gender narratives are worth mentioned as an attempt either to objectify war or inspire women. The traditional narration of women that implicitly shows women's submission is dangerous to be kept. A narration is important to form a reality. Decades ago was a reality, today is reality and the future is also reality. Reality is how people manage to construct the world and every drop of sweat to fight an unfair established reality is worth to mention and be valued.

Thus, an equal gender narrative is encouraged to challenge the historical process of generalized and stereotyped paradigm on gender. It is important to portray fair imagery when it comes to gender. The struggle has not ended and will never end. Finally, under this research, the researcher finds it is crucial to dig up the way the author represents it in his novel due to the probable patriarchal legacy's influence.

The questions are, then, concluded as follow:

1. How is female subordination narrated in Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*?
2. How is contrastively male domination narrated in Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*?

D. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives are:

1. to prove and explain how the presence of female subordination narrated in *All the Light We Cannot See*.
2. to prove and explain how the contrast presence of male domination narrated in Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*.

E. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study is to enrich the research on war literature and women. It is also hoped that this research will encourage readers to be more aware and critical towards gender narratives. Gender narratives are important to be addressed to avoid any continuing misleading patriarchal doctrines. This research will also remind that famous and prized novel does also fall to criticism.

Meanwhile, practically, this research will also add a new reading on gender in society. It is hoped that through this research people will be more open to the idea of gender. It is expected that this research will erase the stigmatization of gender and omit the continuing oppression of patriarchy.