

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Racism is real and exists in human history, since they acknowledge and problematize physical differences, including in many literary works, for instance, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and Langston Hughes's *Mulatto*. The fact that human lived in a world that consists of various communities, in which race differences among them raise frictions between the diverse races create the base of racism problem human civilization. Vincent N. Parrillo in *Strangers to These Shore: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States* explains that race is the simplest way to differ people among their varieties, but the varieties are more complex by how humans look and how they adapt with their environment (18).

In fact, it becomes the very basic reason why racism exists in our world, the experience of being dominated and discriminated, not only happens in America toward African-Americans during 1950s, but also in almost every part of the world where various people from different culture, race, and ethnic are living together. It cannot be denied that discrimination is a part of human life, whereas there's a party unpleasant with the diversity among human races. Even the same race might treat their race discriminatively. The history noted that racism is a problem that becomes a big issue in human world, even in the modern world like

today there are a slightest problem about racism, for instance, the murder of Chinese people in Indonesia in 1998 and the politic of apartheid in Africa.

Along with the differences easily defined from their appearances, people then classify and subordinate themselves into certain race types and classes. As a matter of fact, such classification tends to create segregation, which later leads to racial problems. The so-called obstacle has become the basis of racial disintegration. In *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* adopted by the *General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, Article I, it is briefly described that race means every human beings belong to a single species and shares similar origin. Humans are born equal in dignity and rights; all of which form an essential part of humanity. However, implementing such equality in dignity and rights is not easy to achieve, since ideology applying distinctions between different racial groups still exists.

According to Rodriguez in *Slavery In United States*, a social scientist recognized as an immediate connection between war and slavery, one of the problems occurring as the result in subordination of different race is the practice of slavery upon the race which appears, or is discovered and accepted as lower class and considered to have potential possibility to be conquered (77). The practice of slavery is applied by positioning the defeated group or race as lower class, while the conqueror as the superior one. Rodriguez explains that racial, ethnic, or religious implications were not particular at that time, but it was merely intended to state that slaves or their previous relatives had experienced the hardship of defeat in the past. This was the type of slavery existing for centuries in

the ancient and classical civilizations that gave rise to the modern world. It is believed that enslaved war prisoners possessed an economic value rather than being killed on the battlefield, which later created initial understanding in which a human being becomes a commodity. The concept was realized as such things occurred (78).

In the United States, the beginning of slavery occurred in the form of discrimination practices performed by the White Americans towards Africans. The Americans as the superior race use their power and status to overrule the inferior race, which are the Africans. Ketchum in *What is Democracy?* explains that since 1619, slavery had been brought along with colonizing the New World (108). According to the book entitled *Slavery in United States* explained that, The African-American history recorded that the approximate start of slavery in the British North American colonies began on August 20, 1619, when a Dutch ship delivered “*twenty and odd*” Africans to the English settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, where they were sold at auction as servants (*Slavery in United States* 87).

The Africans brought to the land of America have their own nationality as an African. However, the next generation of Africans born in America (also called as the Afro-Americans) receives two nationalities: African-American. This nationalities change has caused significant effect. The direct result of colonialist control which creates self-division for African-American has made them separate their attitude toward different society. Parrillo states that, “*The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows; the other with the white man*” (8), meaning that

an African-American would have to behave differently with an American and with another African-American.

The African-American's attempt to adapt with the America social condition becomes rather one way option to be accepted in the American society since it is actually not their natural identity. Their soul, blood and flesh are African. Whether they want it or not, America is their new homeland, with which they must adapt. Even though rejection comes from the American, the African-Americans continuously try to find suitable behavior to make known with, as an example, in the way they dress, in learning all the things around them, as well as in the ability to create something difference. It is possible for them to start their own culture, language and style.

Furthermore, along with the process of adaptation, the African-Americans have also been internalizing several American mind frames; as in having bravery to reach "*the American Dream*", while struggling to be free from slavery status and fights to receive equal treatment. In the American problem referred to the way of life of the American liberal ideals and the miserable situation of the Africans. On the one hand, sealed in the American doctrine is the belief that people are created equal and have human rights; on the other hand, Africans, as one tenth of the population were treated as an inferior race and were denied numerous civil and political rights. Parillo concluded that the "Negro problem" is a "white man's problem." That is, Americans as a group were responsible for the disadvantageous situation in which Africans were trapped.

The Emancipation Declaration brought by Abraham Lincoln to free the

African-American from slavery did not only give the key to open the African-American slavery prison locks and set them free. It was because the only difference of the African-American status. Before the Emancipation Declaration they had only been measured as product; while after receiving their new status, they were still treated unfairly. Even when African-Americans are already free from slavery, it does not mean that the discrimination and the bad action towards them end up. In spite of their free status, the African-Americans still had his problems, range from the condition where most of them were uneducated, unskilled, and of no profession. Job vacancies were open but only minor job were offered in the industrial North, where many migrated and trained as a farmer, and landless of their own (*What is Democracy?* 108).

The remaining problem caused by the cuffs of slavery overcome on the swelling stamped in the African-Americans body and soul, formed as discrimination from the White Americans who object with the new status of the African-Americans. Certainly, this discrimination has the tendency to become racial discrimination. Every people with various backgrounds basically came from one same origin, and therefore, they have equal rights. However, the realization of equal rights might get opposition from them who believe that humans should be put on unlike common position.

The portrayal of such racial problems is illustrated in the drama entitled *Mulatto*, which takes place in Georgian plantation (1930), explores the social relations between African Americans and whites. The African American woman (Cora) married the White (Colonel Thomas Norwood). Most Whites in *Mulatto*

believed that they should be superior to the African Americans, who often worked for them in cotton fields as their grandparents had when they were slaves in 1800s. For the most part, African Americans accepted their fate, because they knew that there could be disastrous consequences if they tried to challenge the status quo. The marriages between difference races are uncommonly in there, and absolutely it will arise many conflicts. Because of that, the White (Colonel Thomas Norwood) try to conceal his marriage with Cora, the African American not to be as mistress in that house, but as the black housekeeper. Colonel Thomas Norwood, has three children with Cora, they are William, Sallie and Robert. William and Sallie, have no ambition to be anything more than field hands, and accepted their fate just as the son of black housekeeper in there. According to the text, concluded that how the Whites, including Colonel Thomas Norwood treats his wife and children not to be his member of his family, but as a servant in his house and he refuses to call them his own (854).

Robert Lewis is the youngest mulatto son of Cora Lewis and Colonel Thomas Norwood; his actions cause the conflict in the play and lead to the murder of Norwood and Robert's own suicide. Since he was a boy, Robert, who Cora calls "Bert," has shared both the physical characteristics and the headstrong ways of his father, Norwood. As a child, Robert is Norwood's favorite mulatto child, until Robert calls him his father in front of an important group of White people. Norwood beats the young Robert, a beating that he never forgets. Norwood also sends Robert away to school for six years, so he does not have to be around him. However, this backfires on Norwood. Since Robert has been heavily educated

outside of the plantation, when he returns he finds it impossible to be subservient like the other African Americans who work for Norwood. Ultimately, this behavior, which is generated from Robert's desire to act more like his White half than his African American half, leads to a final confrontation with Norwood. The latter pulls a gun on Robert, but Robert easily overpowers his father, and then chokes him to death. When Robert realizes what he has done, he flees the mob that he knows will be sent after him. Ultimately, he is unable to leave town, and so he returns to Norwood's house, where he shoots himself before the mob can catch him and hang him.

The author of *Mulatto*, Hughes, was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His African American father left the family to move to Mexico. Langston Hughes, a major U.S. writer, came into prominence in the 1920s as a poet with exceptional gifts. He is still most well known as a poet although he published prolifically in numerous literary genres, including short fiction, children's fiction, literary criticism, and drama. *Mulatto*, one of many plays Hughes wrote during the 1930s, was first staged in 1935 and was well received by audiences who appreciated its trenchant treatment of race relations in the United States. Hughes was one of the first black authors, who could support himself by his writings. Hughes emphasized the importance of African culture and shared Du Bois's belief that renewal could only come from an understanding of African roots.

Mulatto is chosen as the corpus of the study because of several reasons. First, the practice of racism performs mainly by Colonel Thomas Norwood, a

common American colonialist who has double role; in one part he became representation of common Native American, who has military background and also a landlord. In another part, he has African slave family, husband of Cora Lewis and father of three mulatto children, which he treats them unfairly most of the time with discrimination. That differencing treats of Norwood creates complication in Native American community and the relationship of his family. Second, the resistant responses that performs by Robert Lewis, who is a descendant and inherits a Native American colonialist father's blood and African slave mother physic, is a result of his double status, which mean even though Robert has white American blood his still receive discrimination treat such other African slaves, but instead of stop he becomes more eager in fight back the unfair treat, he cannot accept that everything he struggles for his right as an American turn out always ended with his being blame, because he is also an African.

Through this analysis, it is expected that the kind of racial discrimination practices by *Mulatto's* main character and other characters getting involved in the conflicts can be found. This thesis will also describe the meaning conveyed in the practices of racial discrimination as seen from the story among the characters. The discrimination practices in the drama will be analyzed using the African-American theory, especially the theory proposed by W.E.B. Du Bois's in his book entitled *The Soul of Black folk*.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Regarding the background of the study above, there are several problems which become the questions of this thesis, which are:

1. How is the practice of racism by the Whites portrayed in the drama?
2. How is the resistance of the Black's wife (Cora) and the Mulatto children toward racism?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Regarding the statement of the problems above, the objectives of the study are as the following:

1. To classify the practice of racism by the Whites portrayed in the drama
2. To describe about the resistance of the Black's wife (Cora) and the Mulatto children toward racism

1.4 Significance of the Study

The accomplishment of this study is expected to enrich the notion of African-American literary reading and contributes ideas, response and criticism in literature, especially African-American criticism. By analyzing the acts of the whites and the "double" consciousness by the Afro-American, it is hoped that the readers would know more about the representation of "double" as the result of racial discrimination which is done by the White American who dominate the culture. Moreover, this study also portrays African-American struggles in living in America.

Another aim of this study is expected to enrich knowledge about racial discrimination towards the African-Americans in the United States; to acknowledge how they make a living under such discrimination. In addition, this study is expected to be a helpful discourse for further studies, especially in

English Department, Airlangga University. Thus, the readers can study more about the analyzed drama along with the racial issues presented in it.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

There are several issues raised in the drama, *Mulatto*, such as identity, racism and some other important issues, such as Postcolonial. Those issues can be analyzed through various perspectives. Therefore, this study will be focused particularly on the life experiences of African-American who lives in America. It focuses on Cora and Robert, as African-American and the main characters in the drama, whose experience mainly deal with cultural domination and racial discrimination. Thus, it leads to the stage of Cora and Robert's double consciousness. In another side, this study also focuses on the presentation of African-American "double" identity in which the identity is the combination and influential from both African and American cultures.

1.6 Theoretical Background

In analyzing *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes, the writer will apply the concept W.E.B. Du Bois as the fundamental point of view for getting a focused and logical result. W.E.B. Du Bois is one of the main figures in African-American criticism, whose book *The Soul of Black Folk* will apply in analyzing the issues. It contains experiences to develop the groundbreaking work on being African-American in American society. Double consciousness is at once a denial (an inability to see oneself except 'through the eyes of others') and a gift (an endowment of 'second-sight' that seems to allow a deeper or redoubled comprehension of the complexities of 'this American world') (Edward 9). The

writer also applies the racial discrimination theory suggested by Vincent N. Parillo, through his book *Strangers to These Shore: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States* to analyze the kinds of racism, which perform by the Whites.

The reason of applying the African-American criticism in this study is because the concept is suitable and applicable to the issue of African-American identity raised in the drama. The goal of using African-American criticism is to learn several important aspects of literature that might not have seen so clearly or deeply without this theoretical perspective, such as to describe what is “racism”, kinds of racism and the impact toward the objects itself. Moreover, it is applied to appreciate the opportunities and the responsibilities of living in a culturally diverse world, to understand that culture is not just a fixed collection of artifacts and customs frozen in time, but a way of relating to oneself and to the world, a psychological and social frame of reference that necessarily alters in response to cross –cultural encounters, whether those encounters occur in a real community or on the pages of literary text. The most painful lesson in the history of human culture ore often the most valuable thing for African-American (Tyson 400-401). However, opinion and statement from other African-American scholars and other reliable sources are also used to support the analysis of this study.

1.7 Method of the Study

The data needed in the analysis process is obtained by searching from reliable and accurate information concerning the topic discussed, including that obtained from books, articles and dictionaries, as well as the one obtained by browsing some internet sites related to the works of Langston Hughes, particularly

the drama, *Mulatto*, itself. Criticism, reviews and commentaries about the drama are also helpful in the analysis process. Based on this fact, some sources related to the topic will be used.

Basically, this study is a qualitative study. The main source of the data is the drama itself. Some aspects and details of the drama function as a major foundation to be analyzed. After reading the drama, the necessary data is selected and gathered. Library research will also be conducted since many of library sources are accomplished through elaborated studies, such books dealing with literary theories and literary criticism.

The main source of the analysis is drama entitled *Mulatto*. As for data analysis, it is applied by finding information from particular books dealing with the literary theories and approaches that will be used in the analysis. A focused analysis on symbols of certain events and dialogues are also a valuable source given a special place in the analysis.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

African-American / Mulatto : African people who live in America, originating from Africa. Their ancestors were brought to America as slaves, then they acquire their new status as free people and live in America as American citizen, although their status as African descent cannot be separated from their identity.

Culture : The attitudes, behavior, and beliefs of any social group. Cultures may form based on common

religion, backgrounds, or any number of other factors.

Discrimination : The practice of treating one person or group (gender, religion, status social, etc) differently from another in an unfair way.

Disintegration : The process by which an object breaks down or loses cohesion.

Double Consciousness : An individual whose identity is divided into several facets, including soul, thought, and social worlds.

Racial Discrimination : Discriminate, unfair treatment, perform violence which practice against certain human race, because they belong to a different race.

Racism : Any ideology, understanding, action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, that classifies and subordinates an individual or group based on his or her skin color or race. It can be performed individually or institutionally