

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

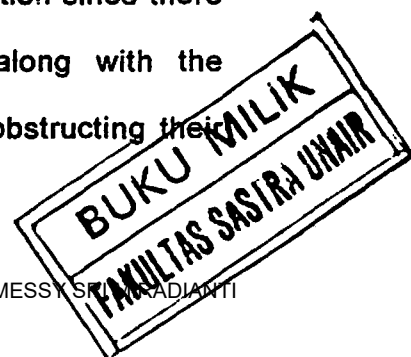
### A. Background of the Study

In their lifetime, all people must pass through a series of life stages. These stages can be marked off in years or in some important events. However in the process a person must encounter problems or, on other words, there must be a crisis that should be faced or solved in order to gain the concept of a "self".

Some young people can pass this crisis uneventfully and without turmoil. Thus they can adjust to the society well. However there are some others who must experience turmoil or even cannot survive from it. Consequently they grow up to be maladjusted or sometimes they may end their life in a tragic way.

Moreover, along with the rapid development of a society into a larger and a more complex one, parents sometimes do not have enough time to spend with their children. Consequently these children do not get enough love, affection, care, and guidance, that they need to survive from the crisis, from the elder people. Thus, these children must face the crisis alone without a peaceful place they can go to, whenever they need protection, shelter, peace, and advice.

The young people from the minority ethnic group often suffer more. They frequently face the crisis in much more difficult situation since there are many other social and psychological problems along with the restriction and the oppression from the dominant group obstructing their



dreams of a better future. An example of the unlucky young people from the minority ethnic group which their origin and history differ significantly from other elements of the population in the common development of the American society is the young Afro-American generation. They suffer from the identity crisis. They also suffer from racial prejudice. Both suffers are the slavery's heritage.

Slavery is a very savage exploitation on human's life. It leaves lots of permanent dreadful memories in each Black people's heart. The forthcoming effect of the slavery itself also ruins the nobleness of African culture among African lineage. Slavery has made many Afro-Americans falling into the worst economic condition and into the lowest rank of society during the slavery-abolishing era. But the worst of all, slavery almost washes away the genuine African way of life.

Therefore triggered by the poverty and the oppression, the Afro-American parents tend to be a money chaser and a worker not only to safe their life but also, even, to strive hard for gaining a recognized higher status. Thus without they realize it, they are being uprooted from their cultural heritage everyday. And they leave their children alone with their uncertainty and without teaching the valuable norms in a culture they can hold on.

Consequently defining the next generation's self-identity of the Afro-American is not a trivial problem, on the contrary, it is a crucial problem since it deals with the continuance of a large number of their ethnic race in America. A way to safe them is through finding their root and then hanging on to their own culture. Culture is a way of life. Thus it

governs human behavior (Tomashow:13). Therefore it can provide and grant them with a reliable identity, safety, and certainty.

An Afro-American woman author who concerns with the crucial problem on defining the Afro-American's status or self-identity, the society, and its relationship with the African culture and tradition is Toni Morrison. As being not only as a colored person but also as a woman artist who can speak out her thoughts through her works, she feels she has to illuminate and authenticate parts of the young Afro-American's experiences that have been ignored or misinterpreted.

Moreover being seen as an inferior class, Toni knows better the need of defining the self-identity in order to free those young Afro-American generations from the uncertainty, from losing their identity and from being alienated. Therefore, in her works, Toni Morrison consciously tries capturing the history of Black's life and how they look at it. Through her writings Toni Morrison reminds the readers that though someone is destined to be a Black and to be an underestimated person by especially white people, he or she should not lose his or her identity and grace of being African's descendant. These grace and stiff self-identity are their weapons to survive.

One of the most complex and ambitious novels revealing the history of the Afro-American and their problems is Morrison's third novel *Song of Solomon*. It is inspired by the ancient folktale of a flying African. This folktale darns the link between the origin of the Afro-American people, the flight that can be interpreted both as a freedom and as the wandering time of slaves shipping to America, and the identity. The use of

this folktale as the background of the story is proposed in the book's epigraph, *The fathers may soar/And the children may know their names*. This epigraph describes that there are many Afro-American fathers who leave their children behind. Sometimes they leave them with their mothers and relatives or even often with no one who can tell the children who are their fathers' names. The vagueness of the Afro-American family tree is the effect of the constant breaking of family ties derived from the separately selling of member of Negro families during slavery.

*Song of Solomon* is about the problem the young Afro-Americans have, in which they try to combine the dream to have a self-identity to gain a better future with some kind of respect and reverence for their ancestors.

In this story, there is an Afro-American boy named Milkman who feels that his life is confusing, meaningless, and monotonous although he has everything that most of Afro-Americans do not have at that hard time. It is because he is trapped between racial prejudice and destructive impulses for material things without being let to define who he is and where he should set his position. Then when he finds possibility that a past can open out to him like a great adventure, he decides to wander to the land of his ancestor in which he finally finds his ancestor's land and then his self-identity. At the end, Milkman realizes that only by knowing the past history of his family, he can feel the freedom from the uncertainty of his identity.

Toni's *Song of Solomon* (1977) won the National Book Critics' Circle Award and the National Book Award for the Best Novel. Moreover

Toni Morrison has written many novels such as: *The Bluest Eye* (1969), *Sula* (1973), which was nominated for the 1925 National Book Award in Fiction, *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 and brought up on the screen, and *Paradise* (1998).

The writer is interested in choosing this novel due to the fact that it was written by a Black American woman author. The Black American woman authors have a quite different view in seeing the life of the Black American than a Black American man author such as Richard Wright.

Furthermore the writer tries to analyze '*Milkman's struggle in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom*' which is apparent to be the focus of this novel by using structural approach and semiotic theory. It is due to the fact that the writer wants to reveal the young Afro-American generation's process in obtaining his "self" and his freedom structurally. Then since in discussing the structure of the text needs an interpretation, the writer uses the semiotic theory.

Moreover the writer wants to raise the problem of '*Milkman's struggle in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom*' because the writer is interested in Milkman's effort in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom to express his thought which are not so simple and so easy. Milkman must strive to escape from his father's effort to cultivate materialism belief together with its containment of bourgeois capitalist way of life and destructive racism of his peers. However by tracing his origin, Milkman finds his self-identity and freedom from all of the uncertainty in his life. Besides the complex problems in the novel, the writer also perceives that *Song of Solomon* contains lots of lessons for

her and even for the readers especially to remind us not to loose from our culture and history since it is needed for our self-concept and our future.

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

Considering the background of the study above, the writer formulates some problem statements to study on *Milkman's struggle in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom* as follow:

1. How did Milkman look at his "self" and his life relating to his status as a part of the black community?
2. What was Milkman's motif for his journey from North to South?
3. What did Milkman learn from the surrounding society in the South?
4. How did he finally obtain his self-identity and his freedom after his journey?

## **C. Objective of the Study**

Related to the statement of the problems, the objectives of the study on *Milkman's struggle in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom* are:

1. To find out Milkman's conception on his "self" and his life related to his status as a part of the black community in the North.
2. To find out Milkman's motif in doing the journey from North to South related to his longing to release himself from the burdened and confusing problems.
3. To find out the influence of the South society to Milkman's changing attitude and also Milkman's changing view on his life and "self".

4. To find out how Milkman finally obtained his self-identity and his freedom after his journey.

#### **D. Significance of the Study**

By analyzing this novel, the writer expects that it will give contribution to the world of knowledge in general, and to the world of literature in particular. The writer also expects that this writing will give a beneficial study on the Afro-Americans and their problems especially for the students of English Department of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in Airlangga University.

The writer hopes that this writing will help the reader in learning and in understanding much better about the Afro-Americans, the problems they must face, especially the problem in defining their identity, and also the way they face their problems. Accordingly by analyzing Milkman's life experience, hopefully, we can obtain some lessons or insight on the need of self-identity, especially for the immigrants or the minority group. Besides, it is hoped that this study can help the readers to value more on a human's life since it is helpful to make this colorful world much more peaceful and convenient to live in.

#### **E. Scope and Limitation**

In order to obtain the purpose of the writing without broadening the problem, the writer concentrates on the subject matter by limiting her study only on Milkman's character and some other characters that influence him along with the conflicts. The writer also confines her study

on Milkman's struggle in obtaining his self-identity and his freedom. Furthermore the writer will also focus her analysis on setting and plot, since they give a great contribution to Milkman's character.

## **F. Theoretical Background**

This thesis is intended to find out how the major character, Milkman, obtains his self-identity through his reliance on his culture which consequently set his freedom. In doing so the writer considers that it is important to discuss the problem structurally through the analysis on the characterization, setting, and plot. Therefore the writer will employ the structural approach for discussing the problem.

The characterization is used to know the characteristics of the main character and other related characters, while the setting is used because it plays an important role in revealing some symbols which describe the Afro-American's social and psychological condition, and the problems they must face. The plot is used to show the trails of the main character's life together with the conflicts.

In addition the writer decides to use some other approaches. They are sociological, cultural, and psychological approaches, since they help the writer in understanding the problem and in completing the analysis. Besides the writer also needs cultural background to make the understanding more complete.

Finally the writer assumes that the most appropriate theory in analyzing the problem is Semiotics Theory.



## **G. Method of the Study**

In working on this thesis, the writer searches the data from many books, journals, articles encyclopedias, and other printed materials related to the works of Toni Morrison, particularly of *Song of Solomon*. The writer also tries to find information from the Internet.

Then for the theory, the writer reads some particular books dealing with the literary theories and approaches that will be used in the analysis. But, as the main source of the analysis is the work itself—in this case is Morrison's *Song of Solomon*—whereas the other sources are used for supporting the study.

Regarding the subject of the study, descriptive analysis is used, therefore, the analysis of the thesis is done by describing the problems through dialogues, events, and actions of the story. The descriptions of the problems are clarified by the data found in the library.

## **H. Definitions of Key Terms**

**Self-identity** : one's self-conception

**Freedom** : the state of being free from a confusion in defining one's identity; liberty from the uncertainty of one's status; the state of being free from being oppressed and underestimated.

**CHAPTER II**  
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**  
**AND RELATED STUDIES**