

The Construction of African-American Identity in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*

Suryaningsih

English Literature, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
louisasuryaningsih@gmail.com

Diana Budi Darma, SS., M.Pd

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
dianabd9@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas permasalahan yang ada pada drama *Mulatto* yang ditulis oleh Langston Hughes. Drama *Mulatto* menyuguhkan isu tentang identitas keturunan orang Afrika-Amerika, khususnya terhadap Robert, tokoh utama dalam drama sebagai seorang keturunan Afrika Amerika yang bergumul dalam dunia orang kulit putih. Dengan mengangkat topik diatas, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menampilkan konstruksi identitas seorang keturunan Afrika-Amerika yang terperangkap antara dua budaya, yaitu budaya orang kulit hitam dan orang kulit putih. Pemilihan istilah kata Afrika-Amerika dengan menggunakan garis sambung adalah dikarenakan konflik yang terjadi tidak hanya membahas keberadaan masyarakat kulit hitam yang tinggal di Amerika, namun lebih kepada bagaimana karakter mereka menjadikan mungkin bagi mereka untuk berperan sebagai orang Afrika maupun orang Amerika. Adanya garis sambung tersebut melambangkan identitas yang tidak terlepas dari pengaruh Afrika dan Amerika. Selanjutnya, teori-teori yang diterapkan dalam penelitian ini adalah dalam bentuk kombinasi antara teori identitas dan karakteristik-karakteristik pengalaman masyarakat keturunan Afrika-Amerika seperti konsep *Racism*, *Double Consciousness*, dan *Black Vernacular*. Dengan menerapkan konsep-konsep diatas kepada permasalahan utama yang muncul pada drama, ditemukan bahwa dalam proses pencarian identitasnya yang sesungguhnya, Robert mengalami kesadaran ganda sebagai hasil dari diskriminasi rasial yang dilakukan oleh orang Amerika. Dalam situasi ini, masyarakat keturunan Afrika-Amerika selalu dipandang sebagai objek yang rendah, sementara masyarakat kulit putih Amerika adalah objek yang unggul. Disamping itu, kondisi ini juga menuntun Robert pada kesadaran ganda nya dan hal ini membentuk karakternya. Identitas ganda Robert terbentuk dari setiap ketidakadilan yang dia hadapi sepanjang hidupnya, baik dari salah seorang anggota keluarganya, yaitu ayahnya yang merupakan seorang kulit putih, maupun oleh masyarakat dilingkungannya. Selain itu, identitas ganda Robert juga termasuk dalam hal tradisi untuk berbicara bahasa khas orang kulit hitam. Dengan demikian, konstruksi identitas Robert sebagai keturunan Afrika-Amerika adalah ganda. Identitas Robert selalu berproses dan bertentangan antara dua budaya yaitu budaya orang kulit hitam dan kulit putih.

Kata Kunci: Keturunan Afrika-Amerika, mulatto, identitas, budaya, ras, minoritas dan penolakan peran orang tua

Abstract

This study attempts to discuss the issue raised in drama *Mulatto* written by Langston Hughes. The drama presents the issue of African-American identity particularly towards the main character, Robert, as an African-American who lives in the White world. By raising the topic above, this study aims to present the construction of an African-American identity which is being caught between two cultures: Blacks and Whites. The term African-American with 'dash' is preferably used in this study because the conflict not only deal with Black people who exist in America, however, it discusses how their character makes it possible for them to become both African and American. The hyphen symbolizes the identity which is not apart from the African and American influences. Furthermore, the writer applies the combination of critical theories among Identity theory and the characteristics of African-Americans cultural experiences such as the concept of Racism, Double Consciousness and Black Vernacular. By applying those concepts in relation to the main problem raised in the drama, it is found that in the process of searching his real identity in his life, Robert experiences "double" identity as the result of racial discrimination done by White Americans. In this situation, African-Americans are always seen as the inferior subject, while the White Americans are the superior. Besides, this condition also leads Robert to the stage of double consciousness and it constructs his identity. Robert's double identity is constructed from every inequality that he faced throughout his life, both from one of the member of his family, which is his White father, and also by the surrounding society. Moreover, Robert's double consciousness involves the practice of Black Vernacular tradition. Thus, the construction of Robert's African-American identity is "double". His identity is always conflicting between two cultures: Blacks and Whites, and it is always in process.

Keywords: African-Americans, mulatto, identity, culture, race, minority and parental refusal

INTRODUCTION

Every human being, while having his own self identity, has a sense of who he is, his own personal identity, and his relations to larger communities such as family, friend, ethnicity, race, culture, and other type of larger communities. Identity is something which is so personal and cannot be separated from the historical background of the culture where the people are living together. Personal identity seems to be what people search or the aim of their life. Human beings start looking for their identity since they were born and most probably until the end of their life. Through that process, however, identity is not merely constructed, but it also depends upon some other aspects. The recognition of identity needs struggle as well as the struggle of every marginal and oppressed group to survive in the process where the domination dictates and forces them to give up (Edgar, et al 170).

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois who became the first Black to receive Ph.D. from Harvard College wrote that the problem of the twentieth century would be the color line. He argued that the problem of the twentieth-first century will be the problem of ethnic differences, as this conspires with complex differences in color, gender, and class. Increasing incidents of violence are associated with ethnic differences in many places in the world (Gates xii). Ethnic differences become the main reason of cultural domination and racism that happen among group of people who are living together.

The history of African-Americans struggle to survive and attain first-class citizenship in America is one of the most problematic chapters in human history. Basically, it is the story of how a powerless, disesteemed racial minority invented, revised, adapted, and employed a wide variety of strategies and techniques in a constant, prolonged effort to achieve the security and rights inherent in American citizenship (Thompson 3).

African-Americans experience racial discrimination until this very moment, though there has been racial equality led by many educated African-Americans. In fact, colored people, such as African-Americans, are still considered as "other", uncivilized and do not deserve to be treated equally as the Whites. They are even put at the 'Third World'; the term made by the Whites for other communities which are not belong to their Whites origin (Tyson 367). Indeed, these act of dominating and discriminating affect on the construction of their identity.

By this sort of situation, many attempts hold by African-American activists to appease racist attitudes in United States. Their works speak to the deeper

meaning of the African-American presence in America. Indeed, African-American literature explores the issues of freedom and equality in relation to the existence of Blacks in United States. African-American literature represents the way of free African-Americans or even Blacks to negotiate their new identity in an individualized nation. Therefore, they often try to exercise their political and social autonomy in the face of resistance from White public. Still, despite attempts to be regarded as a civilized and dignified group, African-Americans have always seen to create their own lives and maintain their sentiments and interests by Whites ("African-American Literature").

There have been long discussions regarding the use of dash (-) in the term African-American. Actually, there are two types of writing this term. The first one is by using dash, while the second is by omitting the dash. In this study, the term African-American identity with dash or hyphen is preferably used because for many of the children or second generation immigrants, it is hard to fully find acceptance for one culture or another. This has created a sort of a Hyphenated Identity. The idea of second generation immigrant is demonstrated as a Hyphenated Identity.

In relation to African-American identity, the hyphen symbolizes and tells how the person feels both African and American because of the inability to be loyal to just one of his identities. Second generations have to deal with the exact same problems. They feel compelled to associate with both cultures. However, they do not want to neglect one or the other. It is as if the two cultures are melted by a "hyphen." The hyphen is a symbol of the struggle of the second generation immigrants to blend in with the norms of their new culture while maintaining the traditions of their ancestor ("Hyphenated Identity").

In *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes, the significant issue portrayed is about identity among African-Americans, particularly on the main protagonist, Robert. The drama tells about the lives and the struggles of African-Americans in 1930's. The play centers on a mulatto boy named Robert Lewis, he is a son of a rich white man named Colonel Thomas Norwood and a black woman named Cora Lewis. Robert, who has been away from home for six years to attend school outside Georgia, learns that actually Black and White folks are equal. Robert has a unique characteristic as a half-black boy who is longing for his self-identity and fighting against racial equality, he believes that the Blacks do not have to pay much respect to the White and also deserve to get the same rights.

The author of drama, Langston Hughes, was born on 1 February, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri (Dickinson 6). His African American father left the family to move to Mexico, while his mother left him with his grandparents in Kansas, where they tried to pursue career in theatre (Hill 15). Hughes was the first African American author who supports himself through his writing; he wrote more than sixty books. One of the most prestigious awards Hughes received was the NAACP's Springarn Medal of his controversial play, *Mulatto*, which many critics believe as Hughes's own feelings of parental rejection. The play, which was performed on Broadway in 1935, was success and partly due to the sensational changes that the producer made without Hughes's consent (Dickinson 15).

The term mulatto, which is no longer used in United States, in the 1930s, refers to a person of mixed African and European descent. Originally, it is described mostly about the children of Euro-American men and slave women, and gradually expanded in meaning to refer to all people of mixed African-European descent. Mulatto characters appeared quite often in literary works in the pre-Civil Rights era for a number of problems and reasons (Reuter, 2013). As it is happened in *Mulatto*, by the fact that mulatto is both White and Black, it would be difficult to figure out which ethnicity and culture the person belongs to. By the strict separation of races at the time, it was not an easy matter for such persons to identify as both. They feel that they are forced to deny a part of themselves and consequently often depicted as tragic figures. They are torn by conflicting commitments and a general sense that they belonged nowhere, and with a special term "the tragic mulatto", Cora's children are considered as "principal mulatto in Hughes's play.

It is interested to analyze the construction of African-American identity in Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* as the story of the drama portrays about the life experience of being Blacks in the Whites world. In such condition, Blacks experience cultural domination and racism. Thus, these affect much on the construction of their identity. Either good or bad experiences might affect people in finding their identity. The experience of being dominated and discriminated, not only happen in America toward African-Americans during 1930's, 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. Even the same race might treat their race discriminatively.

Therefore, discrimination must be faced and solved; it can be seen through Robert's struggle to

survive in his life. Moreover, the issue of identity is very interesting since identity is now such a significant issue that occupies an important place in analyses of race, ethnicity, and culture (Bolaffi 142). In the drama, Cora warns Robert to listen what Norwood demands to him, to be aware of who he is, and not to act just like the White folk. This is because she knows that how hard his effort trying to be accepted as Norwood's son, it is a difficult thing for his father by the fact that he is just a half black son.

Robert is asking for the equality and justice for the blacks, he wants to get the same rights as the Whites even though he is a mulatto, but at the same time, Roberts is also acts what the Whites do in the town, he is driving a car without Norwood permission, trying to drive as fast as the White folks. Robert is also often uses the front door rather than back door, the door which supposed to be passed for the Whites only. Robert shows his ambivalent perception towards Whites through his actions. As a result, Robert's identity might be considered "double", as both the Blacks and the Whites.

RESEARCH METHOD

To find the reliable result, it needs a method that is based on the problems to avoid the blurry result. In line with the purpose of this study, which is to reveal the construction of Robert's African-American identity in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*, there are specific approaches and techniques that are needed to find the nature of African-Americans' identity. In collecting the data, this study focuses on reading and documentation. Those specific steps will be elaborated as follows:

1. Theoretical Approach

To reveal the construction of an African-American identity, this study applies extrinsic approach in analyzing the problems. The extrinsic approach is worked by applying the combination of Identity theory and critical theories such as racism, double consciousness, and Black vernacular to define the production of Robert's African-American identity.

2. Source of Data

The main data source of this study is taken from Langston Hughes' drama, *Mulatto*, while the data which is used in this study is in the form of quotations taken from the drama *Mulatto* that reveal the construction of Robert's African-American identity.

3. Procedure of Analysis

Data Collection

This study will be conducted by using descriptive-qualitative method. It means that this study provides descriptive analysis without using any statistic or number in analyzing the subject matter. Repeated close reading is the tool to obtain the synopsis and find the appropriate topic to form some research questions which support the arrangement of this research. Furthermore, the next procedure is by doing intensive reading. This practice is to gather the data which comes from the character's speeches, expressions, thoughts and actions that represent the construction of Robert's African-American identity in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*. During the close reading, the writer classifies the quotation based on the focused idea.

Data Analysis

Since the focus of this study becomes clearer, data classification is needed. After collecting and classifying such complete data, this study is being arranged in order, so that it is easier to get good understanding about the play and the issues which are going to be analyzed. Later on, the text is being analyzed by using chosen theory that is Identity theory. Here, in analyzing the issue of African-American identity, the needed steps are by elaborating setting, plot, dialogue, conflict, and action in the drama and applying the concepts. In particular, the method of this research is by finding the construction of Robert's African-American identity, which is viewed from the concepts *racism*, *double consciousness*, and *Black vernacular*. Then, the next stair is to reveal how Robert's life experiences construct his African-American identity. Finally, this research provides a deep analysis on the construction Robert's African-American identity in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*.

IDENTITY THEORY

In society and every aspect in life, it such a significant thing for an individual to identify oneself with a sign of which ethnicity, nationality, race, religion or particular belief one belongs to. One's identity determines ones position or situation in society wherever one lives. Through the process, however, one's identity is not merely formed by itself, but it depends upon several influences. Those influences are generally come from the closest surroundings one lives, social interaction and also cultural backgrounds

one may hold. Thus, by the time, identity is constructed and becomes the representation of particular culture and society.

A little description regarding identity and its relation with other aspects come from Larry Samovar .On his book that discusses about communication between cultures, Larry conveys the meaning of identity as a person's self-definition as a separate and distinct individual, including behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes in society (Samovar 154). He emphasizes that identity as member of society is determined by socialization processes. Basic frameworks of child's identity are created in the primary socialization phase (Hall 4).

Furthermore, Larry delivers that identity is developed by child through his or her significant other people from the closest social environment who are emotionally tied with a child such as parents. Through continuous interactions and mechanisms of role taking and taking the roles of others, a child learns how to recognize and adopt interactional partners' attitudes towards him or her. Consequently, an individual's identity concept comes from others, and therefore, an individual becomes what others consider him or her to be.

Another discussion regarding the nature of identity is delivered by Deborah L. Wise. In her literary review, Deborah emphasizes that in identity theory, the relation between self and culture is inseparable. She explores her argumentation how culture and environment influence play a prominent role in the process of how we view ourselves as part of a larger society, and moreover, how we verify our own personal identity. Wise defines identity as a dynamic role; that all of us are a set of several role-based identities that exist in salience with each other, with one identity rising to prominence over others as environments and activities change (Wise 2).

The above explanations are added by the notion about the way language reveals one's identity. A criticism regarding identity theory and its relation with language comes from Vygotsky. He stresses the importance of language for one's identity as a mediator by stating. Vygotsky believes that the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously independent lines of development, converge. This practice happens when the language comes to the intelligence to weigh problems of present behavior with future consequences, involving both memory and foresight (Mead, 1934).

Another stage which Vygotsky considers closely connected to the idea of identity is the use of feedback in the process of how people identify and define themselves. Feedback is a method by which people self-verify the identity that they have created by using (among other things) a stimulus-response mechanism (Dewey, 2002). The stimulus-cognition-response mechanism is the beginning of the mediated acts Vygotsky uses to form an activity system (Vygotsky, 1978). When these stimulus-response experiences become part of our memory, it gives rise to a self-perception based on the responses of others with whom we interact (Mead, 1934). Unconsciously, reactions from other people play a significant role, and furthermore shape one's identity to become what they consider.

RACISM

As one's identity cannot be separated from cultural experiences background, one of the characteristics of African-Americans identity that is in line with identity formation is the experience of being discriminated. Racism always becomes one thing that cannot be separated from society life with the multiple races that are living together. Since race becomes a significant social issue, people use racial differences as the basis for discrimination.

Whenever it is related to the practice of racism or racial discrimination, this is not apart from African-American struggle to confront that difficult circumstance. Lois Tyson, on his book entitled *Critical Theory Today*, delivers the notion of *racism* that refers to the unequal power relations that grow from sociopolitical domination of one race by another. The forms of this systematic discriminatory practice are the act of segregation, domination and persecution. In other words, White people domination refuses the real colored people existence by denying their access to rights, representation and resources based on racial differences.

Indeed, the prejudice which is done by society's racist stereotype toward African-Americans affects much on their identity and self-perception. The practice of racism and other oppression make them no longer feeling proud of their race, moreover, as a precious beings. Before many African-Americans are dare to speak up "Black is beautiful" and say it loud: "I'm black and I'm proud as a sign of radical change of their self-definition, they suffered from internalized racism (Tyson 382).

Tyson defines the meaning of internalized racism as the results from the psychological programming by which a racist society indoctrinates

color people to believe in White superiority. Victims who experienced internalized racism generally feel inferior to Whites, less attractive, less worthwhile, less capable, and often wish they were White (Tyson 383). Racial discrimination is not only the matter of being discriminated by particular groups' supremacy, but at the same time it gives significant influence towards self-view and the preciousness of self people who are oppressed.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

As well as racial discrimination practice, another characteristic of cultural experiences which are not apart from its close relationship with African-Americans identity is double consciousness experience. By the incident of being dominated by such power authority, many African-Americans experience this double belief. Their feelings of inferior and weak, unconsciously, raise a taste of stuck in two identities, consciousnesses and beliefs. Lois Tyson simply defines the meaning of double consciousness as the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures, the Black culture which grew from African roots and was transformed by its own unique history on American earth, and the European culture imposed by White America. For African-Americans who experience this double vision, it means to the situation in which one body is divided into two separated souls, both as Black and American.

The experience of having these two consciousness is possible for African-Americans. This is because even though African-Americans are entirely inherited by cultures and traditions of African ancestry, life experience in America with the complex dominance as well as strong influence of White supremacy cannot deny the fact that both can blend into one in the soul of an African-American. The real practice of this condition is by having one cultural self at home as an African and another cultural self as American in White-dominated public space, such as work place and school (Tyson 383).

Further justifications regarding the nature of one's double consciousness come from Du Bois. In his review on the 'Conversation of Races', he considers that Double consciousness is at once a denial, it is about the inability to see oneself unless through the eyes of others. The way people who experience this awareness can see their self depends on how people perceive and define their personal. By this, response and feedback from other become major consideration about oneself. The second view of double consciousness that is emphasized by Du Bois is the nature of this consciousness as a gift. This notion refers

to a blessing of 'second-sight' that seems to allow a deeper or redoubled understanding of the complexities of American world. This formulation clarifies that for those who experience this dual consciousness is believed as an endowment that will automatically occur due to a tendency to understand in depth the culture and values of America. This sort of understanding, however, that will eventually lead someone to act as American (Edwards xiv).

In addition, Du Bois clarifies One who experiences this double vision ever feels his two-ness, an American and a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled struggles and two warring ideals in one dark body, the one whose solitary determined the strength to keep it from being separated (Edwards 8). For the next, the practice of this double consciousness is not simply marked by its double-ness, yet, it sometimes involves speaking two languages.

BLACK VERNACULAR

The last characteristic of African-Americans cultural traditions that is used as a sign of their identity is the use of Black vernacular English. Since the previous two concepts deal with the cultural experiences of African-Americans, language is also influenced by culture. Language and culture are intimately related, as culture come up with new ideas, it develops language components to express those ideas.

On the book, *The Signifying Monkey*, Black English vernacular, according to William Labov's three-year National Science Foundation whose study released in 1985, is a healthy, living form of language. He conveys that through this vernacular Black people show the development signs of their own grammar. Labov's existence research leads him to conclude that there is evidence that, far from getting more similar to Standard English, the Black English vernacular is going its own way. The Black vernacular, he continues reflects a larger social picture of separated speech communities. Indeed, the Black's own grammar, which is very rich and complicated, is developing its own way. It looks as if new things are happening in Black grammar (Gates xix).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROBERT'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Robert Lewis is the youngest mulatto son of Cora Lewis and Colonel Thomas Norwood. Robert is eighteen years-old, strong, well-built, immature and stubborn African-American boy. He is the main protagonist in the drama who becomes the center of the play because as an African-American, he creates

conflicts with White people, particularly his own father, Colonel Norwood. Throughout his life, Robert went through a reality that he is both half Black and White. By this condition, he experiences cultural domination and parental rejection because of his African-American background.

As an African-American man, there is actually a process undergone by Robert that constructs his identity. When he was a child, Robert learned his cultural background from his father. Furthermore, his teenage period by attending school outside Georgia was strongly influenced by the African and American lifestyle. Therefore, Robert's way of thinking is still being affected by the African and American cultures. Robert's double consciousness is rooted by his childhood memory and also by further interactions that he experienced from his surrounding environment. Thus, he undergoes an understanding process about his own cultural life experiences which construct his African-American identity. In order to provide clear explanation, this subchapter is divided into three parts: Robert's racial discrimination experiences, Robert's "double" identity, and Robert's Black vernacular.

A. ROBERT'S RACIAL DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCES

This section deals with the first characteristics of African-Americans experience, which are racial discrimination experiences. Although the role of parents takes a leading contribution in the primary factor that influence a child's identity, the external factors that come outside home also contribute influence and determine his identity, in this context, the identity of an African-American.

Robert experiences racist attitudes from his White father. He becomes the picture of racial discrimination's victim, while his father and the other White people become the actors of racial discrimination practice. In reality, Norwood's hatred feeling toward Robert is not only in terms of his refusal, but also clearly portrayed on his perception that Black people, including Robert, always be the source of problems in his life. He is fed up with all Robert's manners and even wants to go from his presence.

Furthermore, Robert's adolescent period is covered with the injustice in public places. As African-American adolescents begin to pass through beyond their immediate familial environment, many encounter societal institutions that often covertly and overtly discriminate against them because of phenotypical characteristics such as race. adolescence is a developmental period in which African-American youth may increase their risk for exposure to racial

discrimination as they begin to spend more of their free time outside home and in public places (e.g. malls, restaurants and schools) the places where they may become targets of racial discrimination (Fisher, et al, 2000).

As he grows up and begins his interaction with his surrounding environment, Robert is thus suffering inequality and isolation from society around the city increasingly. One of his experiences to be judged discriminatively is the injustice that he found in public places. Black people presence in United States always becomes a frightening reality and something which is not expected. What Robert does is actually a reasonable thing which is done by everyone who wants to get rights. He requires only what should be recognized by the officers, but only because he is an African-American, and it is clear there that it was witnessed by several White people, so the officer immediately judges him no matter he is true or not.

Because of this, Southern Whites do not realize that in certain areas like in the cities where Robert attended his education, society begin to change. Robert's educational experience outside Georgia encourages him to perceive racial equality in his hometown. Robert reveals his perception towards racial inequality that still dominates the South. He is persistent that for African-Americans who simply able to accept this circumstance, it still okay for them to stay. However, for he has seen people who start to act cooperatively toward African-American like him, it is hard to easily receive such treatment.

B. ROBERT'S "DOUBLE" IDENTITY

While the above justifications mainly talk about Robert's racial discrimination experiences, along with all the injustices and domination done by White people, this section discusses the second characteristics of African-Americans experience, which is the practice double consciousness. Common experiences for minority races such as African-Americans, which is being discriminated by White domination, makes it comes no surprise that many of those oppressed groups experience double identity.

Robert falls into two distinct identities, which are African-American and White identity. Robert has undergone the process in which his childhood experience is being dismissed by his father only because of his race background, and in his adolescence, he also meets such refusal and inequality from his surroundings. These things, however, construct his character both as a descendant of Black, along with his suffering and rebellion that he feels, and as a descendant of White, coupled with the arbitrariness and

arrogance as a strong individual. Once, he wants his dignity as Black people is appreciated; but on the other hand, he also becomes White people who acts quite ruthlessly by showing his power to the Blacks.

At the beginning, Robert is full of hatred towards his father and all White people generally; he even wants to go out from Georgia to forget all the bad treatments that he received. As the play progresses, however, he holds a White man's action that makes him acts arbitrarily. Such clue that shows his White identity is his personal confidence and self-esteem which are lacking in many African-Americans. Robert often demonstrates his White consciousness through his actions, and most of these actions are actually unusual even forbidden attitudes done by African-Americans.

Robert's tendency to show his Black heritage can be seen from his demand for justice to all African-Americans, his awareness toward the inequality that he got in the post office and also his educational background that supports his attempt to make the Whites Southerners accept African-Americans' presence in United States. By contrast, the White people privileges that are shown by Robert are in a form of his courage to pass the 'front door', his brutal attitude on the road to confront the White Southerners, his refusal to work in the cotton fields and his struggle to be accepted as Norwood's son.

Those previous justifications are a form of Robert's double awareness that he felt so far. Because he is a mulatto, surely, he is both Black and White. He has two distinct cultures and social values at the same time. In fact, there is tendency to release his Black cultural identity and at the same moment he also infuses desire to be recognized as the Whites. In other words, Robert undergoes two distinct principles and ideas at the same time. He undesirably confesses his hatred towards every White folk in the world, even wishes to demolish them all, however, half part of his consciousness denies the fact that he is also an African-American descendant. Robert's two contradictory statements reveal his double awareness, moreover, his double identity.

C. ROBERT'S BLACK VERNACULAR

Robert's double consciousness involves his Black tradition in speaking Black Vernacular English. The fact that can be inferred from Robert's practice of Black vernacular is that he uses his language to give new meaning on the inferiority labeled on the Blacks by the Whites. He does it by opposing the standard meaning given as well as following the standard meaning given by the Whites.

In the second act play, the moment when Robert has just shot his father, he expresses his feeling

towards his father's death by saying, "*Niggers are living. He's dead* (2.1.863-50)". Here, Robert uses the word "nigger" which has the standard meaning (based on the English standard meaning made by the Whites) similar to the word "negro" which means African decent, but it has a strong meaning on the negative sense. In other word, this term is used as one of the decline in Africans' degree to the majority groups such as White America. By contrast, in Robert's Black vernacular, he uses the word "niggers" to defend his tribe, which are African people. Because of his father's death, Robert believes that there will be no more persecution, discrimination and colonization done by the Whites toward the Blacks. He considers that the death of his father represents the end of White domination in his people's life.

This sharp statement becomes Robert's new spirit and conviction for his attempt in fighting racial inequalities in African-Americans' life. Robert gives new meaning to the word "nigger" as his self-resistance towards Whites supremacy and standardization. Robert uses the word "nigger" as if there is no negative meaning in this word. It reverses an originally insulting word used by a majority to put down the oppressed groups' mental into such downturn. In this context, Robert functions this sort of labeling with a positive connotation, lessening the power of its insult.

Yet, Robert also uses the word "nigger" when he confronts with his father. On the occasion where Norwood threatens his position by expressing, "*Niggers like you are hung to trees*", Robert irritably replies "*I'm not a nigger*", then Norwood responds by emphasizing "*You don't like your own race?*" (2.1.862.30-35). Through Robert's expression, it can be inferred that Robert also believes on the meaning of the word "nigger" or "negro" made by the Whites. Robert's denial signifies his refusal to be considered as minority race. In other word, he confesses his race's weakness and inferiority to the Whites, and therefore, even he himself does not want to accept this fact. At this point, Robert's double consciousness on the use of Black vernacular "nigger" can be evidently seen. He uses the word "nigger" with two opposing meanings similar to two conflicting cultures, Blacks and Whites.

ROBERT'S LIFE EXPERIENCES CONSTRUCT HIS AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

After knowing the construction of Robert's African-American identity, this section discusses the processes how his life experiences construct such character and identity. Robert's life experiences are marked by denial of White people's domination in his

life, especially his own White father, Norwood. He represents common experiences that are faced by most African-Americans. Indeed, the problems that appear in Robert's life are not merely common realities that arise in his complicated background, however, wound in his soul as the representation of an oppressed group of people. Family refusal and social condition that he faced, by the time really have shaped his character and identity as an African-American.

In particular, his African-American identity is constructed by his father's denial, which results in Robert's physical and psychological abuse, and also by the social condition influences at that time, which are the background of his growing place; Georgia plantation and the last is acceptance of mulatto. These three subtopics prove that one's identity, particularly the identity of an African-American depends upon several other aspects. In this case, these aspects come from the influence of inner problems in terms of parental abuse towards Robert, and also the influence of outer dilemmas such as the impact of setting and recognition of mulatto during this time period. Each of these factors will be briefly elaborated as follows:

A. PARENTAL ABUSES' EXPERIENCES THAT CONSTRUCT ROBERT'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Robert's life experiences are marked by denial of White people's domination in his life, especially his own White father, Norwood. He represents common experiences that are faced by most African-Americans. Robert's character as a child is not separable from the role of the closest people around him, which are his family. The way he socializes and interacts with the surrounding environment indicates how big the influence and the role of parents in building his character as well as his identity. support and motivation given by parents really verify a child's self concept toward himself. The role of parents in Robert's life have given contribution in shaping his identity , but unfortunately, this contribution seems to be negative influence for him.

What happens in the process of Robert's life is exactly the opposite reality of this phenomenon. Robert did not get what is generally owned by children at his age. In his childhood, Robert experiences refusal from his White father, and not only that, this reality is getting worst because it leads to physical and psychological violence.

Robert's father, Norwood's attitude that is by kicking Robert under the horse's feet in front of his White colleagues is the form of his hatred feeling to Robert. Through the action, it is obviously depicted that Robert obtains inappropriate treatment from his beloved father. He becomes the victim of his father's

hatred against African-Americans, though Robert is basically his own descendant. For his father, Norwood, this is because the fact that Robert is not fully identical with him. He is embarrassed with the word "papa" that is spoken by Robert. This action indicates that he refuses Robert's presence in his life.

Because of both the physical and mental abuse that he experienced, Robert wonders about who he is, his position in Norwood's house, and also the reason why he cannot build close relation to his own father. The answer of those questions is the fact that he is merely an African-American. His childhood memory regarding his father's rejection is strongly attached to his psyche and his consideration of his identity. His father's refusal is not only hurting his soul, but also shaping his identity.

B. THE INFLUENCE OF BACKGROUND OF SETTING THAT CONSTRUCT ROBERT'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Being treated unequally both physically and mentally, is not the only experience that constructs Robert's African-American identity. Another aspect that also plays a role in the formation of his character is the pressure of setting, both the setting of time and place. The drama, which takes place in the condition where slavery still exists, complete with the application on Georgia plantation, provides condensed traumatic memory even strong influence for most African-Americans at that time.

Ron Eyerman emphasizes that it is not the experience of being enslaved but the memory of slavery and its reconfiguration in the minds of later African-Americans' generations that potentially cause cultural trauma. He argues that African-American historical identity which is formed and rooted in the collective memory of slavery.

Robert, who is raised on the plantation of South America, is also affected by the hard life and struggle experienced by the slaves' workers. The facts about life on the plantation have proven that slaves who work for such manual jobs perform subservient even individuals who are bound by higher authority. They complete harsh and exhausting work, even often for 15 hours a day at the peak of harvest season ("Plantation and Slavery"). By contrast, landowners still frequently use violence against slaves to enforce their will. Without a doubt, life under slavery remains unworthy and inhumanly for African-Americans ("Plantation and Slavery"). The above conditions are actually common realities about the life of African-Americans that Robert does not want to experience.

As a result of those influences, Robert shows his resistance by denying his fate to work on the plantation. Robert challenges Norwood with disobedience and rebellion. This sort of thing is thought to be such a trigger for the rest of Negro workers in the field to rebel and ask for more freedom from Norwood. His actions turn out to be a start for African-Americans in Georgia plantation that they deserve to do, to say and to think whatever they want to without being controlled or limited. The impact of slavery hopes that he can fulfill African-Americans' duty. Yet, with this kind of expectation, he even precisely rebels every boundary and restriction which is addressed to his tribe. Robert's denial becomes the representation of enslaved African-Americans' rebellion.

C. THE ACCEPTANCE OF MULATTO IN UNITED STATES

One of the underlying elements of the injustice and parental refusal that he received is because of his background as a mulatto. Truly, Robert's background as a mulatto forms his African-American identity. As it is seen from the physical characteristics, mulattoes are generally intermediate between the parents' races. This biological phenomenon gives rise to a sociological problem. This is because the major issue is not dealing with the biological problem of intermixture itself, but it is more on the sociological consequences of this integration.

Furthermore, by having two cultural backgrounds that are completely contradictory, it is certainly not easy for mixed-races such as mulattoes to gain full acceptance by the American society. *Mulattoes* are both the combination of Black and White descendants. The *mulatto*, in the cultural and sociological sense, is a man of mixed-blood and divided loyalties. Thus, within the *mulattoes* there is the same conflict that exists eternally between the two culture groups: they are both a White man and a Negro. In the play *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes, despite the fact that mulattoes come from Black and White cultures, in fact, one of their parents, particularly the one who comes from the dominant side as the White folks, are not simply able to accept their presence sincerely.

It is real that the practice of interracial marriage leads to the birth of many mulatto children. As the play shows, white men generally reject their paternity when it comes to their mulatto children, including Robert's father, Norwood. Although Norwood tries to help his mulatto children by sending them to school, he refuses to call them his own. Norwood says to Cora when discussing Robert's

behavior, "Cora, if you want that hard-headed yellow son of yours to get along around here, he'd better listen to me. He's no more than any other black buck on this plantation (1.1.849.10)". Mulattoes are often called "yellow" since their complexion is usually lighter than brown and darker than white, a sign of their mixed genetic heritage. In other words, parental refusal has become such boundary for all mulattoes in United States, including Robert.

Moreover, Robert's attempts become the depiction of every mulatto's struggle in United States. The play emphasizes that not only Robert's rebellious behaviors, but the difficulty to accept mulatto in general that strongly determines Robert's acceptance, furthermore, the construction of his identity.

CONCLUSION

In short, this study indicates that in the process of searching his true identity, Robert experiences double identity. His life experiences lead him to his double consciousness that is the awareness of belonging to opposing cultures: the Black and White culture. In addition, Robert is asking for the equality and justice for the Blacks, he wants to get the same rights as the Whites although he is just a mulatto.

Last but not least, the implied reality of this study is that Norwood's denial underscores the denial of African-Americans and mulattoes by most Whites in this time. The play uses a tragic drama to illustrate the tragic qualities of race relations. Indeed, both Whites and African-Americans had better be careful because racial conflicts will certainly lead to violence and tragedy for both races. Therefore, discrimination must be ended; the Negro's struggle must be terminated, because all men are created equally; that they are gifted by the Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

WORKS CITED

"African-American and Black." Web. 7 March. 2013

<<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/African-American>>

<<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Black>>

"African American Literature." Web. 8 March. 2013

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_literature>

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to* 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002. Print.

Bolaffi, Guido, Raffaella Bracalenti, Peter Braham, and Sandro Gindro, eds. *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. London: Sage Publications, 2003. Print.

Burke, P. J. *Identity Processes and Social Stress: American Sociological Review*, 56(6), 836-849, 1991. Print.

---. *Identity Change: Social Psychology Quarterly*, 69(1), 81-96, 2006. Print.

"Child Abuse and Neglect." Web. 31 May. 2013.

<http://www.idvaac.org/conferences/proceedings/1995/part3.pdf>

Dell'Almico, Carol. *Critical Essay on Mulatto in Drama for Students*. Gale, 2003. Print.

Dewey, J. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002. Print.

Dickinson, Donald C. *A Bio-Bibliography of Langston Hughes*. Connecticut: Archon Books, 1972. Print.

Edgar, Andrew, and Peter Sadwick, eds. *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Edwards, Brent Hayes, ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Soul of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Eyerman, Ron. *Review of Cultural Trauma: Slavery and The Formation of African American Identity*. Bryn Mawr College, 2002. Web. 4 June. 2013

<rwashing@brynmawr.edu>

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis, ed. *Black Literature & Literary Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1984. Print.

---. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

---. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.

Hall, S. *Who Needs 'Identity?: Question of Cultural Identity*. London. Sage Publication, 1996. Print.

Hill, Christine M. *Langston Hughes: Poet of The Harlem Renaissance*. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc, 1997. Print.

Hixon, J. G., & Swann Jr, W. B. *When Does Introspection Bear Fruit? Self-Reflection, Self Insight, and Interpersonal Choices*. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 64(1),35-43, 1993. Print.

"Hypenated Identity." Web. 19 May. 2010.

Literary and Cultural Theory. <<http://www.tweb.ucsb.edu/~marcus01/index.html>>

"Impact of Physical Abuse on Children." Web. 1 June. 2013.

<http://www.ferrycounty.com/Courts%20and%20Law/Sex%20Offender20Info/Impact_of_Physical_Abuse_on_Children.pdf>

- Mead, G. H. *Mind, Self & Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934. Print.
- Mitchell, Anthony B. *Self Emancipation and Slavery: An Examination of The African American's Quest for Literacy and Freedom*. Department of African and African American Studies vol.2 no.5: Penn State University, July 2008. Web. 7 June. 2013.
<http://www.jpnafrican.com/docs/vol2no5/2.5_Self_Emancipation.pdf>
- MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.
- "Mulatto." Web. 18 June. 2013.
<<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/mulatto>>
- "Physical Abuse." Web. 1 June. 2013.
<<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/physical+abuse>>
- "Plantation and Slavery"
<<http://textbook.s3.amazonaws.com/Creating%20America/4.3%20The%20Southern%20Colonies%20-%20Plantations%20and%20Slavery.pdf>>
- Poquette, Ryan D. *Critical Essay on Mulatto in Drama for Students*. Gale, 2003. Print.
- "Psychological Abuse." Web. 1 June. 2013.
<<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/psychological+abuse>>
- "Racial Identity Matters." Web. 14 April. 2013.
<<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/aaril/files/racialidentitymatters.pdf>>
- Reuter, Edward Byron. *The Mulatto in United States*. Boston. The Gorham Press, 1918. Web. 10 June. 2013.
<http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books200910/reuted0001muluni/reuted0001muluni.pdf>
- Samovar, Larry A. *Communication Between Cultures*. Wadsworth. Language Learning, 2007. Print.
- Sellers, Robert M, Nikeea Copeland-Linder Pamela P Martin, R. L' Heureux. *Racial Identity Matters: the relationship between Racial Discrimination and Psychological functioning in African American Adolescents*. 16(2) 187-216. University of Michigan, 2006. Print.
- "Slavery in United States" Web. 27 March. 2013
<<http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-285186>>
- Stets, J E., & Cast, A. D. *Resources and Identity Verification from An Identity Theory Perspective*. *Sociological Perspectives*, 50(4), 517-543, 2007. Print.
- Stets, J. E. *Examining Emotions in Identity Theory: Social Psychology Quarterly*, 68(1), 39-56, 2005. Print.
- Swann Jr, W. B., Stein-Seroussi, A., & Giesler, R. B. *Why people self-verify*. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 62(3), 392-401, 1992. Print.
- Tafarodi, R. W. & Swann Jr. W. B. *Self-Liking and Self-Competence as Dimensions of Global Self-Esteem: Initial Validation of a Measure*. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 65 (2), 322, 1995. Print.
- "The Great Depression-An African-American Perspective" Web. 27 March. 2013
<<http://mtungsten.freeservers.com/>>
- Thompson, Daniel C. *Sociology of the Black Experience*. London: Greenwood Press, 1974. Print. Contributions in Sociology, No 14.
- Tyson, Louis. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999. Print.
- Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. Print.
- Wise, Deborah L. *Identity Theory: A Literature Review*. University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. Web. 31 March. 2013.
<http://debwise.com/Matrix_2_files/wise_identityLR-1.pdf>