

THE REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITY BLACK COMMUNITY AS SEEN IN THE NOVEL ENTITLED “SULA” BY TONI MORRISON

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Abstract

This study discusses about the representation of identity black community as seen in the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison. This study focussed the struggle of the black community in the 20th century. In the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison, where black community experiencing oppression by the dominant community in every day life. This study used Principle Critical Race Theory by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017) for the analysed representation of identity namely, 1) Racism is Ordinary, 2) Interest Convergence, 3) The Social Construction of Race, 4) Intersectionality, and 5) The Voice of people color. The result this study, the representation of identity depicted in the injustice, hope for freedom, and rebellion against the norms that existed in black society. The conclusion this novel depicting identity shape individual experiences of black people. Furthermore, this novel filled insights into struggle, thought, betrayal, and finding for identity the black people in the 20th century.

Keywords— Critical Race Theory, Identity, Representation, The novel Sula by Toni Morriuson, Qualitative Research

Introduction

Literary works are imaginative creations that serve as reflections of human experience and social dynamics. They span a variety of forms, including prose, poetry, drama, and rhyme, with the novel being one of the most prominent and influential genres. As a form of prose, the novel delves deeply into character development and the complexities of social situations, often highlighting the conflicts inherent in everyday life. According to Wellek and Warren (1949), the elements, form, and structure of a novel play important roles in uncovering themes and messages, allowing readers to engage with the narrative on multiple levels. Novels often depict various aspects of life within a social context, as authors draw from their own experiences and the social bonds that shape their perspectives. This interaction between literature and social reality affirms the importance of literary works as mirrors of the human condition (Wellek and Warren, 1993: 109).

One of the most striking examples of this literary exploration is "Sula," a novel by Toni Morrison that emerged as a significant work in 1973 in America. "Sula" addresses a wide range of social issues, including gender dynamics, racial tensions, and complicated relationships within the black community. Set in a fictional black community called The Bottom in Ohio during the mid-20th century, the narrative intricately intertwines the lives of its characters, revealing the social and cultural pressures they face.

To analyze the identity of black community in America as depicted in "Sula," this study employs Critical Race Theory (C.R.T) as articulated by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. C.R.T provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding how individual and community experiences related to identity are influenced by broader social, historical, and cultural structures. By applying this theoretical lens, the exploration of "Sula" not only

illuminates the complexities of identity but also affirms the enduring relevance of Morrison's work in contemporary discussions of social justice and equality.

Literature Review

Definiton of Literature

Literature is a reflection of the creative imagination that shapes the meaning and cultural reality of society. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1949), literature possesses aesthetic and artistic value, which can be divided into several forms, namely poetry, drama, and prose.

- a) Poetry, as described by Edgar Allan Poe in his essay "The Poetic Principle" (1850), is a beautiful work composed with rhythm and harmony to awaken the feelings of the reader.
- b) Drama, according to Wellek and Warren, is a text that involves the relationship between the director, actors, and the audience, with elements such as plot, characters, and diction that contribute to its meaning.
- c) Prose is a flexible form of expression used to narrate events and describe everyday life.

Novel

The novel, as one of the forms of prose, is a long and complex work of fiction. M.H. Abrams (1999) states that novels have deeper storylines and richer character development compared to short stories. Based on themes and styles, novels can be divided into several types, such as realistic novels that depict everyday life in a natural way, romantic novels that focus on love stories, historical novels that combine fact and fiction, science fiction novels that explore the future, and psychological novels that delve into the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

One notable example in literature is the novel "Sula" by Toni Morrison, published in 1973. The novel explores themes of friendship, identity, and morality in the context of the Black community in 20th-century America. Toni Morrison is recognized as a prominent writer and Black feminist activist who raises issues of racial and gender injustice in her work. "Sula" serves as a critique of social and racial dynamics in America, illustrating how Black communities faced poverty and discrimination.

Relationship between Literature and Humanity

Literature also has a close relationship with humanity, serving as a reflection of people's lives and experiences. Wellek and Warren (1949) stated that literature represents human life in the form of beautiful works. Jean-Paul Sartre (1947) added that literature not only describes experiences but also reflects social and cultural aspects, thus serving as a mirror of human civilization that is constantly evolving.

Identity

According to Domonic Abrahams (1988), identity is the knowledge individuals have about their membership in a particular social group. This identity is influenced by various social and historical factors and is formed through interaction with the environment.

Critical Race Theory

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement and analytical framework that seeks to understand and address racism in law, policy, and social institutions. It analyzes the problem of racism through a framework known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). There are five principles of this theory:

a) Racism is Ordinary

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017) state that racism is commonplace in everyday life, not just an individual act, but a system that maintains racial inequality.

b) Interest Convergence

Derrick Bell (1980) posits that the rights and progress of racial minority groups occur when their interests align with those of the majority group.

c) The Social Construction of Race

This principle asserts that race is not a fixed biological category but a social construct created to maintain power dynamics.

d) Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical framework used to understand how various aspects of social identity, such as race, gender, and class, interact and influence individual experiences in facing discrimination and oppression.

e) The Voice of People of Color

This principle emphasizes that the experiences and views of racial minorities are crucial for understanding and challenging racial injustice. Mari Matsuda (1995) argues that it is important for minority groups to speak out and create their narratives because laws are often made without considering their experiences as victims of racism.

Research Method

This research used a qualitative research and the types of research is library research. Object this research used the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison which was released in 1973. The data collection process begins by reading the entire page of the novel to obtain information and conclude what will be analyzed about the topic. To take the data and answer the question of the study, the authors used five principles of critical race theory by Richard delgado and Jean Stefancic to link the representation of identity the black community in the early 20th century.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presented result and discussions : first, the representation of identity black community based on the principles of Critical Race Theory (C.R.T) by Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (2017) the discussion was divided into five parts, namely, Racism is Ordinary, Interest Convergence, The Social Construction of Race, Intersectionality, and the Voice of People of Color, as represented in the novel Sula by Toni Morrison.

Representation of Identity of Black Community as seen in the Novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison.

a. Racism is Ordinary

Racism is ordinary in everyday life, not just an individual act, but a system that maintains racial inequality. In the novel “ Sula “ by Toni Morrison, racism is depicted as Ordinary and integrated into the everyday lives of black people, creating discrimination and prejudice that are considered normal.

Differences in Housing Between White and Black People

“Which accounted for the fact that white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio, and the blacks populated the hills above it, taking small consolation in the fact that every day they could literally look down on the white folks.”

The racism is ordinary which illustrates that there is systematic racism within the social and geographical structure. When Black people live on less fertile land, while White people occupy the fertile valley floor, this separation reflects that racism is not an isolated act but a normalized system.

Then the representation of identity depicting in the underline word “**white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio, and the blacks populated the hills above it, taking small consolation in the fact that every day they could literally look down on the white folks.**” shows the struggle of black identity who are economically and geographically inferior to white people who live in fertile and profitable places.

b. Interest Convergence

According Derrick Bell (1980), interest convergence which stated that the rights and progress of racial minority groups occur when their interests are in line with the interests of the majority group. In the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison, the concept of interest convergence is seen in the dynamics of the relationship between the black characters and the larger society where the black community in Medallion struggles for recognition and rights, but often only when there is an advantage for whites or when the situation is advantageous to them.

The Removal the Black communities Areas

“In that place, where they tore the nightshade and black- berry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighbor- hood. It stood in the hills above the valley town of Medallion and spread all the way to the river. It is called the suburbs now, but when black people lived there it was called the Bottom.”

The interest convergence which illustrates that there is changes in the identity and values of a place along with demographic shifts. when, black suburbs were known as the “Bottoms,” they were considered less valuable. However, when whites took over to build the “Medallion City Golf Course,” economic interests and infrastructure development trumped the rights of the black community that had previously lived there. The loss of places that had meaning to the black community shows that history and cultural heritage can be erased for the benefit of the dominant group, reflecting how progress for one group often comes at the expense of another.

Then, the representation of identity depicting in the underline word “it was called the Bottom” and “The beeches are gone now, and so are the pear trees where children sat and velled down through children sat and velled down through.” which reflect how Black identity was once tied to community, history, and rootedness in a specific place it called “the bottom”.

c. The Social Construction of Race

The Social Construction of Race is that race is not a fixed biological category, but a social construct created to maintain power dynamics. In the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison, the social construction of race is seen through the depiction of the black community in Medallion, Ohio, who are trapped in a system of hierarchies and stereotypes imposed by the larger society.

Black People's Views on Sula.

“The fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent to their bile. Nor was the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of “they insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape,” which reveals internalized racialized shame and the community’s deep discomfort with interracial relationships the community’s refusal to see Black women as autonomous in their sexual choices white women a consideration that might lead them toward tolerance. They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable In that way, they regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did.”

The social construction of race which illustrates Where the Black community perceives Sula as being beneath White individuals, their reaction is one of “choking disgust.” Although they share the same skin color, they cannot escape their feelings of revulsion towards Sula. Thus, the social construction of race not only affects relationships between different races but also shapes internal dynamics within the Black community itself, creating tension between identity, autonomy, and existing social norms.

Then, the representation of identity depicting in the underline word “They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable” depicts how the identity of Black women is influenced by

existing social norms and stigma. The rejection of Black women's sexual agency demonstrates how their identity is often viewed with disdain, creating feelings of shame and discomfort within the Black community itself.

d. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical framework used to understand how various aspects of social identity, such as race, gender, and class, interact and influence individual experiences in facing discrimination and oppression. This concept highlights the complexity of unique life experiences for each individual. In the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison, the concept of intersectionality is clearly seen through the experiences of the main characters, Sula and Nel, who are black women facing multiple layers of oppression.

Helene's Experience on the Train Illustrates how Various Identities Intersect.

“Helene looked up at him. So soon. So soon. She hadn’t even begun the trip back. Back to her grandmother’s house in the city where the red shutters glowed, and already she had been called “gal.” All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble.”

The social construction of race which illustrates that there is where various identities—such as race, gender, and social class—interact and influence individual experiences. When Helene is called “gal,” her emotional reaction encompasses vulnerability and fear. The term “gal” not only refers to gender but can also carry a derogatory connotation, reinforcing her feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. Helene's experience cannot be separated from the social context, where her identities interact and shape how she is perceived by others, as well as how she perceives herself in a world filled with norms and stereotypes.

Then, the representation of identity depicting in the underline word **“All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble.”** reflects Helene's emotional experience related to her identity, as the feelings of vulnerability and fear she experiences show how her Black identity can influence self-perception and life experiences, creating an emotional burden associated with stigma and discrimination.

e. The Voice of People Color

The Voice of People of Color emphasizes that the experiences and perspectives of racial minorities are essential to understanding and challenging racial injustice. In the novel “Sula” by Toni Morrison, the voices of people of color are represented through a deep and complex narrative that depicts the lived experiences of Black women in America

The Expression of Pain and Loss Experienced by Nel after Sula's Departure.

“O Lord, Sula,” she cried, “girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.” It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.”

The voice of people color which illustrates that there is expression of pain and loss experienced by the character Nel after Sula's departure, where deep emotions and the collective experiences of the Black community are conveyed through sorrow and longing. In this context, Nel's voice not only represents personal grief but also resonates with the experiences of many Black women who are often marginalized and unheard. Thus, this expression highlights the importance of acknowledging and celebrating voices that are frequently overlooked in historical and cultural narratives, as well as how individual experiences can reflect the collective struggle against oppression and loss.

Then, the representation of identity depicting where Black identity is evident in Nel's emotional expression as she feels the loss of Sula. The phrase **“O Lord, Sula,”** and her long, **“loud and long”** cry illustrate the depth of pain and longing that is not only personal but also reflects the collective experiences of Black women who are often marginalized. The sorrow expressed through this voice and emotion highlights the complexity of Black identity in facing

loss and oppression.

Based on an in-depth analysis of novel *Sula* by Toni Morrison, the representation of black identity uses The five principles of Critical Race Theory When, Racism is Ordinary is depicted through the presence of injustice, stereotypes, and judgments that govern the lives of the Black community, this causes them to be stressed toward their life. Then, Interest Convergence is illustrated by the struggle of the Black community to gain recognition from the dominant group (whites). The Social Construction of Race is represented by the hierarchical systems and stereotypes established by society, where Sula and Nel grapple with their identities, often judged based on skin color and binding social norms. Intersectionality is portrayed through the Black identity being influenced by social factors such as gender, race, and identity, where Black women find themselves at the intersection of racism and sexism, resulting in unique forms of discrimination. Lastly, the Voice of People of Color is expressed through characters filled with hope and struggle in confronting racial discrimination and patriarchal norms.

Through this depiction, the identity of Black Community in America are shown : a blend of struggle, oppression, rebellion, and hope for freedom as black communities.

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Conclusion

The representation of identity within the black community in Toni Morrison's novel "Sula" reflects the principles of Critical Race Theory. Racism is ordinary experience that causes injustice and stress for black individuals. The struggle black community for recognition by the dominant group demonstrates a interest convergence, while the social construction of race and intersectionality reveal the unique challenges that black women face. The voice people of color as hope and resilience reflect the complexity of struggle, oppression, and hope for liberation within the black community.

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