

# **QUESTIONING REJECTION OF BECOMING AMERICAN AS CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION REPRESENTED IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVEL BELOVED**

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**Abstract**— Discrimination occurred in the basis on skin color. Racial groups express preferences for individuals with lighter skins. Racism itself can be defined as a set of institutional conditions of group inequality and an ideology of racial discrimination. Morrison in her novels depicts the behaviors as one realization of discrimination. Seeing the data concerning on the construction of black people as differentiated ethnic group culturally that becomes a discourse to be rejected, this article aims at explaining the construction of black people as differentiated ethnic group culturally that becomes a discourse to be rejected. The analysis arrives at the question about the differentiation as a means of difficult acceptance.

**Keywords**—*discrimination, racism, rejection, question, Beloved, Toni Morrison*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination occurred in the basis on skin color. Racial groups express preferences for individuals with lighter skins. The preferences significantly affect how individuals interact and treat each other (Arhin). It, historically, cannot be separated on Nazi holocaust. Different race are limited in freedom of speech relating its ideology (Rubio-Marin). The limitation sometimes created a stress for themselves since they are minority. It happened in England when the non-white immigrants came to this country (Wadsworth et al.).

Racism itself can be defines as a set of institutional conditions of group inequality and an ideology of racial discrimination. The ideology is characterized by a set of beliefs holding that the subordinate group is biologically or culturally inferior to the dominant racial group (Gee et al.). Discrimination is defined as the differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group and treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group (Gee et al.). The treatment, for example, can be seen from the use of language. Morrison (Chakravarty) represents through color symbolism that an entire language of culture in *Beloved* is associated with the daily lives of African-American women. The African spoken represents the life force, giving life to inanimate, the adjectival, that cannot be touched or experienced. From

metaphoric perspective, Morrison (Al-ahmedi) wants to camouflage the critical idea of differentiation towards black and white people from colors and of situational change of freedom to imprisonment represented in the metaphor of crossing water. In another word, racism is a broad construct that reflects the processes, norms, ideologies, and behaviors that perpetuate racial inequality (Gee et al.). It can be seen in *Beloved* novel. Morrison, from Foucault's subjective nature of history perspective, (Changizi) creates African-American traumatic history as a part of American history. She tries to picture alternatively marginalized perspective to win some power and control for her people and subvert the dominate discourses which operate only for the white people's needs and interests.

Discrimination is viewed as the component of racism focused on behaviors (Gee et al.). Morrison in her novels depicts the behaviors as one realization of discrimination. Politically, Morrison (Ali) illustrates women as oppressed being in different layers. Firstly, women are oppressed by patriarchal institution. Secondly, women have double burden into being. Thirdly, brutal institute of slavery robs them right of motherhood and womanhood. *Beloved* and *Sula* proposed elaboration of black women who fight for their rights and are cherished members of the black societies. The behavior of violence can be seen as well. Morrison (Anju) expresses her idea about violence in unique way since oppression, sacrifice, conflict between black and white people as an effective means of society's understanding.

Another example of discrimination can be seen in self-legitimation behavior. It reflects of self-affirmation and self-identification. In *Beloved*, Morrison (Ayadi) tries show recognition of self-affirmation by delaying diverting self-identification. She tries to heal the memory by repressing it. The recovery needs psychic process. She uses woman character as symbol of the hurt of the past as well as restores womanhood. Another example is relating to subject position, especially woman position. Morrison concerns and reflects destiny of black woman, the African-American culture, and their communities. It relates to her eco-feminist consciousness as woman position connected to male and nature (Ahlawat).

Morrison also (Anoosheh) makes narrative form which signifies the subjectivity illuminating the political structure of social domination. She uses history of slavery in America as means of destructing family relationship in the context of middle passage.

Concretization of those matters deals with the operation of slavery. Morrison (E) depicts the atrocities in slavery traumatizing. It becomes the psychological impact of the women especially in the dynamics of power and oppression on minority groups. The trauma perpetuates narrative concerns of human made traumatic situation and implicit critiques of social and political structures, and it is a power indicator of oppressive cultural practices. The trauma of slavery is tried to be symbolized by ghost in *Beloved* novel. Through *Beloved*, Morrison (Deyab) uses *Beloved's* ghost to retell the story of slavery as a way to let African-American go through it and overcome it. The ghost functions as a means to reframe the past in order to make sense of the present and to provide an orientation to the future. It is also to recover the past from oppressive history of slavery haunting them. She also gives voices to forgotten stories from some African-American slaves' perspectives.

What Morrison wants to deconstruct through her *Beloved* novel is destructing the dominant racial group towards minority one. In this case, Morrison tries to give evidence on how white-people ethnic group subordinates the black-people one. *Beloved* speaks about self-destruction. Morrison (Birouk) claims that identity politics with its legitimate and necessary concerns about equivalence and "planetarity" should be readdressed by the ethics of recognition and responsibility. The distortive lenses of dominant power's discursive structures filter the desire of how the will to die or the will to kill one's children exceeds the instinctual calls of survival, of how people dare to sacrifice their life to respond their pain, violence, and ignominy, and of how their emancipatory intents are often appropriate. All of them are politically oriented the concern motives about the primordial and indivisible value of human life itself. Another way done by Morrison is to deconstruct stereotype constructed by white people. Morrison (Augustina) also in *Beloved* novel tries to deconstruct stereotype of men's masculinity that is illuminated by hegemony and white men. Through black men, she gives alternative illumination that portrays and validates African-based brand masculinity as not patriarchal in nature but as compassion, love, woman respect. In another word, she puts centers on positive male characters in her novel.

Those illuminations above crystalize on the way Morrison deconstructed the hierarchal condition towards black people as subject to posit. She offers an alternative perspective as a comparable discourse towards white people has put in all people's mind. In different sense, she tries to subvert the white people's dominance. The subversion is also a means of deconstructive reading. It, in deconstructive reading, indicates hierarchy in *binary opposition*. For Derrida, binary opposition are also little hierarchies (Tyson). That is, one term in the pair is always privileged, or considered superior to the other. Therefore, by finding the binary oppositions at work in a

cultural production, and by identifying which member of the opposition is privileged, one can discover something about the ideology promoted by that production (Tyson).

In order to discover the limitations of the ideology one thus has uncovered, Derrida observed, one must examine the ways in which the two members of the opposition are not completely opposite, the ways in which they overlap or share some things in common (Tyson). For deconstruction, language is the ground of being, but that ground is not out of play: it is itself as dynamic, evolving, problematical, and ideologically saturated as the worldviews it produces. For this reason, there is no center to our understanding of existence. There are, instead, an infinite number of vantage points from which to view it, and each of these vantage points has a language of its own, which deconstruction calls its discourse (Tyson). Practically, meaning is not a stable element residing in the text for the reader to uncover or passively consume. It is created by the reader in the act of reading. Precisely, It is produced by the play of language through the vehicle of the reader (Tyson).

Literature delivers meaning. It cannot merely be received as a definite unit of referential meaning that can be decoded without leaving a residue (Man). The meaning can be a code. The code, on one hand, is unusually conspicuous, complex, and enigmatic. It means it attracts an inordinate amount of attention to itself. And, this attention acquire the rigor of the method (Man). On the other hand, the analytical power of the meaning is allowed to come into being without seeming reductive (Man). It simplest term, the form of literary meaning seems superficial and expandable (Man). The polarities of meaning of inside and outside have been reversed, but they are still the same polarities that are at play (Man).

Considering to the illumination and explanation above, the writers want to explore about rejection of becoming American as cultural differentiation in *Beloved* novel (Morrison). The rejection becoming a means of cultural differentiation is tried to be questioned. This article aims at explaining the construction of black people as differentiated ethnic group culturally that becomes a discourse to be rejected. The analysis arrives at the question about the differentiation as a means of difficult acceptance.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive analysis (John W Creswell; John W. Creswell; Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman; Merriam) applying deconstructive approach (Tyson; Man). The material object of this study is the study of *Beloved* novel (Morrison). Its formal object is the study of this novel concerning on the construction of black people as differentiated ethnic group culturally that becomes a discourse to be rejected. The data analysis was taken by some procedures: (1) data were revealed as *undecidability* of text; (2) data were analyzed to reveal complex operation of the ideologies of which the text was constructed (Tyson).

### III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

*Beloved* is a narrative structure consisting of tension between the oppressive past memory and the future promise (Ayadi). This novel concerns on personal history which is neglected by historian. Paul D said to Sethe that they got more yesterday than anybody. They needed some kind of tomorrow (Morrison). Morrison wrote that disremembered and unaccounted for were the realization of being neglected (Morrison). Here, Morrison tries to give paradox in past and future and being recognized and forgotten. They become the binary oppositions which lead to rejection of the existence of one ethnic group. Those are black people.

Those oppositions concurrently indicates problem of identity. The identity of black people is represented by Nan and Sethe, one of woman characters in the novel. It cannot be separated from black women's existence, experience, and culture that are brutally oppressed by the world of white or male consciousness (Chakravarty). To build up an identity under such circumstances is to establish strong dynamic woman relationship (Chakravarty). Morrison tries to reconstruct it by Sethe and Denver (Morrison). She depicts that she was name as a black and thrown away (Morrison). It also can be seen from the mark had by Nan. Nan told what happened to Sethe about the dehumanization working from dawn to another dawn, from day to night in the rice field. She had to work two or three weeks just like what the other did (Morrison; Ayadi). In another word, the problem of identity becomes the manifestation of rejection of the existence of black people.

The mark or the scar becomes a symbol of how dehumanization as manifestation of cultural differentiation. It shows a trace of the past occurrences. Beside past occurrences, it gives indication of terrible violence practiced to the slave. Morrison illuminates how Sethe's back skin had been dead for years. She also depicts the school teacher took her milk (Morrison). The result of those moments was feeling lost, fractured, robbed. Her identity of woman and mother was taken (Ayadi). What happened to dehumanization above represents the rejection of the existence of black people.

The story above occurred in the past time. It revealed suffering as struggling for identity. Woman depicted in *Beloved* had identity problem as the subordinate. She worked overtime. She lost her baby since her milk was taken away, so the baby died because s/he had no milk to feed up. It emphasizes on the opposition of becoming recognition and forgotten. Being recognized as a human with being forgotten occurs at the same time. In different term, it can be underlined that these processes of being recognized as black people is realized as being forgotten since their right was taken away represents the rejection of the existence of black people.

Morrison also depicts male character as a representation of the existence of black people. She tries to subvert white people belief about black men. Morrison created Sixo as the representation of good cook (Morrison). She also gives advantage to Sixo's characterization (Morrison). Sixo was depicted as intellectual person. It was contrary to white people's belief that black people were unintellectual people

(Augustina). Sixo was also the one who said that his owner, Garner was died because of murder. He told the Sweet Home slave men that Mrs. Garner was sick because schoolteacher is slowly poisoning her with medicine used for putting down horses (Augustina). Morrison wrote

Sixo said the doctor made Mrs. Garner sick. Said he was giving her to drink what stallions got when they broke a leg and no gunpowder could be spared, and had it not been for schoolteacher's new rules, he would have told her so. They laughed at him. Sixo had a knowing tale about everything. Including Mr. Garner's stroke, which he said was a shot in his ear put there by a jealous neighbor (Morrison).

Beside the illustration above Morrison characterized Sixo as critical man towards education. He thought education as cultural transfer or oppression. He thus resists any imposition and influences of white culture. He refuses to learn to read and write because he sees that education is not an innocent process, but a means of transmitting cultural values (Augustina). He also characterized as complex nature of masculinity. Morrison draws Sixo on a mythical scale, especially in his warrior-like abilities. From the existence of Sixo, Morrison represents legendary figures in African mythology. The figures are having courage, endurance, stealth, intelligence and encounters with supernatural forces (Augustina). From the representation of Sixo, Morrison tries to reject the dominant belief of white people towards black people. It indicates that Morrison tries to show the black people recognition by delivering the advantage of black men existence among white people's perception on cultural differentiation.

Morrison, as a matter of fact, proposes existence of black women and men as a device to question the cultural differentiation. The cultural differentiation is rooted on the white people's belief. The belief is designed for a means of transmitting their dominant ideology to the black ones. Their dominant ideology consciously manifests to black people and weakens the existence of them. The black people, slowly and unconsciously, have problem of identity. It is undeniable that black people's losing identity is strengthened by the occurrence of slavery in the past.

She also depicts the past as a discourse to be rebelled. The rebellion of her is done by proposing Sixo as an advantage black people's representation. He subverts all white people's recognition towards black people. He is critically created to question whether black people actually are rejected or accepted. It is shown in Morrison's last critical proposal in her *Beloved*

They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget, until they realized they couldn't remember or

repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise. They never knew where or why she crouched or whose was the underwater face she needed like that. Where the memory of the smile under her chin might have been and was not, a latch latched and lichen attached its apple-green bloom to the metal. What made her think her fingernails could open locks the rain rained on? (Morrison)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

What happened in the *Beloved* showed the questioning process of the domination of intended cultural differentiation. The question starts when Morrison shows these processes of being recognized as black people realized as being forgotten since their right was taken away represents the rejection of the existence of black people. It perpetuates to subvert all white people's recognition towards black people. He is critically created to question whether black people actually are rejected or accepted.

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