

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I.1 Background of the study

The novels, Light in August by William Faulkner and Native Son by Richard Wright tell about the living situation non-white, especially the black in America in 1920s-1930s. In order to understand the society condition at that time, it is needed to know the condition of American society in that particular time. The issue of racism influences the social relationship in the American society. Although slavery was no longer practiced, racial prejudice and discrimination to black people were still strongly applied in society. According to Martin N. Marger in his book, Race and Ethnic Relations, "Racism is the belief that humans are subsided into distinct hereditary groups that are innately different in their social behavior and mental capacities and that can therefore be ranked as superior and inferior." (Marger, 1991: 27). Therefore, racism towards black people puts the African-Americans as a group of race that is inferior in the 'white' world. Racist's thinking from the white society "leads naturally and inevitably to the different treatment towards blacks". (Marger, 1991: 27). The black was treated unequally in many aspects of life. It was strengthened by their living conditions, which were in poverty. One of the reasons was because they could not get chances to have a proper job or education. They could only get menial work like working for the

railroads, steel mills, coal mines, etc. some who lived in rural areas worked on farms owned by white landowners while others worked as domestic servants for white folks (www.geocities.com/bettye_sutton/greatdepression.html).

In the white world, the black is confined within the popular culture that portrays the white as superior, sophisticated, and wealthy while the black is depicted as: dangerous, inferior savage or humble ignorant servants. These pictures are not entirely right; they are “pictures in our heads that we do not acquire through personal experience, called stereotypes” (Marger, 1991: 75). The exaggerated image that tends to be negative about the black is then planted in people’s mind. It controls social relationship between the white and the black. It gives certain influences in how the blacks feel and think about themselves and the whites. This can be mentioned as social construction. Black people in the white world are the victims of racial prejudice and discrimination. They are constructed by the racist condition. ([Http/encyclopedia.thefree_dictionary.com/racial](http://encyclopedia.thefree_dictionary.com/racial)). Racism has limited their prospect in life and even their conception of themselves.

From the explanation above it is evident that what is believed and done in society influences the perspective and behavior of one’s character. Therefore, in my view, sociological approach is an appropriate approach to use in analyzing the two novels. With an application of Frantz Fanon’s theory in his book Black Skin White Masks, I would like to show in my discussion how society can construct someone’s, especially the black’s, thought and behavior. Fanon explains the concept of subject versus object in relationship between the white and the black. Fanon states that “...then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects...For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to

the white.” (Fanon, 1986: 109). It shows that in the ‘white world’, the black people are seen as objects which are stereotyped by culture that depicts the superiority and inferiority of white and black people. The black people experience a construction process in their existence and identity. This phenomenon can be found in the works of Richard Wright, Native Son and William Faulkner, Light in August.

The black characters in these novels have more or less the same pattern of social construction. They continuously experience injustice, discrimination, and prejudice from the racist society. Both writers, Richard Wright and William Faulkner, present their characters under the common setting of racist conditions: family sufferings, poverty, defiance, and violence. The characters must face the stereotypical fact of their blackness; that they are inferior, stupid, and bad. They have no control over their lives for they are limited by the understanding of the popular culture; the white is superior whereas the black is inferior.

Wright describes it effectively through the thought and feeling of his character. So readers can get clear explanation of how and why the character acts out certain actions. While Faulkner emphasizes more on the construction itself made by society, because his character is a mulatto; he has negro blood from his father. Readers can see the different treatment from society, how they construct his identity when they find out his racial background.

I.2 Statement of the Problem

After reading both novels, I formulate the statement of the problem as follows:

1. How does the white society construct the black’s characters?

1. What is the black's reaction to such a racist condition?

I.3 Purpose of the Study

This study is done in order:

1. To show how the white society constructs the black's characters.
2. To show the black's reaction to such a racist condition

I.4 Method of Research

I use library research in analyzing both novels. I begin the study by reading the novels: Native Son by Richard Wright and Light in August by William Faulkner, and then to support my study, I read several references and information from the internet that are relevant to the topic being discussed. To deepen my analysis I use extrinsic approach, to be specific sociological approach, with a theory by Frantz Fanon in his book, Black Skin White Masks.

I.5 Organization of Thesis

I organize my thesis into 4 chapters. I begin with Chapter One, the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, Methods of Research and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two, which contains the analysis of how the protagonist in Light in August is constructed in the racist society. Chapter Three, which contains the analysis of how the protagonist in Native Son is constructed in the racist society. Chapter Four provides the Conclusion and the comparison between the

two works. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendix, which contains the synopses of the two novels.