

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The Bluest Eye novel is the first work of Toni Morrison and published in 1970. The novel reveals the current problems referring to racism. According to Diane Johnson (in Grewal, 1997), “Since the novels are about black people who victimize one another, they only confirm Morrison’s white audience’s stereotypes about black people”. McKay (1999) reveals, “*The Bluest Eye* explores issues of black identity, self-love, and self-hatred in a world in which the violence of race, gender, and class makes it extremely difficult for large numbers of people to find dignity in their lives”. McKay (1988) argues *The Bluest Eye* makes one of the most powerful attacks yet on the relationship between Western standards of female beauty and the psychological oppression of black women.

Uniquely, the novel delivers black children character. Toni Morrison represents the role of children as a symbol of the level of inability to melt the readers' sympathy. As said by Frankel (1970), “Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* couldn’t be more different. She is dealing with children, not men; she is dealing with the forties, not the present; she is dealing with the black subculture, not the military one. But the biggest different is that she is dealing with people to whom no ultimate glory is possible”.

Sissman (1971) mentions, “Morrison gives us a fresh, close look at the lives of terror and decorum of those Negroes who want to get on in a white man’s world—Negroes who would now be scorned as Uncle Toms; she puts

her compassionate finger on the role of crude fantasy in sustaining hope, as in the experiences of Pecola's mother". According to Carmen (2008), "*The Bluest Eye* addresses the social forces that drive understanding and definition of cultural constructs, such as beauty, normalcy, family, and sexuality". These constructions illustrate the cultural impact transparently experienced by the African-American community. Toni Morrison reflects on the other side of the Africans' life in America.

African-Americans occasionally experienced discriminatory treatment. They are still characterized in committing many crimes, social injustice and moral barbarity. Such discrimination became the most frequently discussed topic in the last two decades. According to polling data obtained Pew Research Center (2016), "Half of the population in the United States argues that the issue of race is still a big problem". Norris (2018) states, "Mid of the 53 percent population is white majority; the United States should immediately realize its racial equality".

Interestingly, many people led to discrimination and made attention to black Americans. Errington (2011), "No doubt that racism in America, especially in the central and southern states, is still widespread and deeply rooted. To uproot racism to the roots of American society takes a very long time". Racism situated black ethnic groups are under injustice experience treatment. In figures released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Deutsche Welle's Annual Report, 2017), "More than 50% of black Americans call these four issues as discrimination fields - jobs, courts, schools and police treatment. Whilst on white people the number is less than 30 percent".

Such indirect discrimination will involve negative stereotype which develops in America. The stereotypes allow people to make quick inferences about individuals who belong to a specific social category with whom they come in contact (Devine, 1989; Kawakami, Young, & Dovidio, 2002). In fact, the racial stereotypes of early American history had a significant impact in constructing African's beliefs. The black stereotypes have been emerged since Black Slavery period to Black Civil Right Movement, as explained in images of the Sambo, Jim Crow, the Savage, Mammy, Aunt Jemimah, Sapphire, and Jezebel events (Green, 1998).

Historically, African Americans were victims of slavery in the 19th century as a form of imperialism constructed by the white supremacy. Racial conflict continued during the Civil War, some insurgents called for abolition and equality by fighting by mediating and conveying awareness through mass media. As the segregation system had been collapsed and revoked in Abraham Lincoln's period, African Americans were still sustained stereotype threats. Green (1998) states, "Recent research has shown that whites are likely to hold these stereotypes especially with respect to issues of crime and welfare. As political and legislative decisions are still controlled by white males, these negative biases are often expressed through policy formation".

In another case, African Americans are disproportionately represented in news stories about poverty and lack of welfare. This portrayal was particularly likely to reinforce stereotype threats. For instance, low income blacks in news stories are more likely to live in slums or urban areas, more likely be entirely unemployed and "idle". The idle black male on the

street corner is not the "true face" of poverty in America, but it is the dominant one in portrayal media (in Clawson et al., 2007).

African Americans convinced that negative threats rooted in the race system. The bad trail is based more on facts leading to a pattern of physical differences. They eventually are cornered in social influences such as society, neighbors, family, parents, schools, mass media, etc. As result they will get stereotype threats because their feelings will indicate with anxiety, guilt and despair. Spencer and Castano (2007) states, "Stereotype threat occurs when people who share a particular identity race, for example, or socioeconomic status perform below their potential on an assigned task due to fear that their performance will confirm negative stereotypes people already have about them". In other words, the impact of stereotypes will directly influence attitudes and behaviors individually and in groups. Hilton & von Hippel (1996) say, "Stereotypes are not only beliefs about characteristics and behaviors of human/social groups and their members. They also include inferences as to why those characteristics and behaviors go together".

Therefore, African Americans are still inferior society class, particularly in operating the city's facilities as reflected by Morrison's *Bluest Eye*. The big question is how far this situation has negative impacts to African community and how Toni Morrison intentionally reconstructs blacks' identity. Although, many recent news showed that racism and intolerance are decreasing, in the contrary America's tendency to raise this issue seems visible anywhere. White Americans prefer to undergo bad publicity rather than harboring social problems. Their prejudice might blame gradually African Americans as the target of social conflicts since economic crises in 1930.

The novel has had a significant impact on the friction both black and white races and the awareness of inequality of American policy. Morrison's interest in African issues has been subjected to bitterness of racial conflict along her life. Therefore, this current study investigates how Toni Morrison emphasizes stereotype threats and its impact toward the social development of American society.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher constructs the title of this thesis as “Protest against Stereotype Threats Reflected in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* novel.

B. Research Problems

Based on the description of the background above, the problems of the research are arranged in order to overview the answers to the research problems that can be formulated into the research questions as follows:

1. What dominant aspects of the social background influenced the production of *The Bluest Eye* novel?
2. How did Toni Morrison protest against the negative stereotypes in the black people?
3. Why did Toni Morrison address the stereotype threats in the novel?

C. Limitations of the Study

Problems related to the title above is very broad, they are not affordable and resolved at once. Hence, they need for restrictions on the problem to avoid misunderstandings and deviations above, as well as focusing the problems to be clearly studied. The researcher limits the scope of study and focuses on the problems as follow:

Firstly, the study will focus the analyses on historical-social background of Tony Morrison. It is viewed from the perspective of American racism in the 20th century, and associated within the issues of racial conflict. The existence of Tony Morrison's life became the mainstay of the black civilian movement, leading to the relevance of stereotypes issues in the characters' point of view.

Secondly, the study will review through the Intergroup Threat Theory. It focuses on negative stereotypes that affect human mentality and behavior.

D. Objectives of the Study

The goal of this study is to realize the implementation of the benchmarks of this research, so it needs to be clearly defined. It will obtain an idea as well as the benefits of the study. There are several objectives as formulated as follows:

1. To describe dominant aspects of the social background influenced the production of *The Bluest Eye* novel.
2. To discover Toni Morrison's protests against the negative stereotypes in the black people.
3. To reveal the reason why Toni Morrison address the stereotype threats in the novel.

E. Benefits of the Study

1. Theoretical Benefit

Theoretically, this study is expected to support other literary works relating to the study of human rights and equality. It confirms that carrying out stereotype threats within the minority or oppressed groups still needs further attention.

2. Practical Benefit

Practically, this study is expected to encourage readers to anticipate broad-based stereotypes, such as the workplace, family neighborhood, school, community, media space and case studies in reality. It is determined independently predicting oneself how to deal with them without having to be suspicious and look down on each other, as an effort to reduce discrimination phases, even though they come continuously throughout time.