

**THE OPPRESSION OF BLACK PEOPLE  
IN LANGSTON HUGHES'S *MULATTO***

**THESIS**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK  
IBRAHIM MALANG  
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**2022**

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Malang, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The Researcher



Rediani Aisyah Irwanda

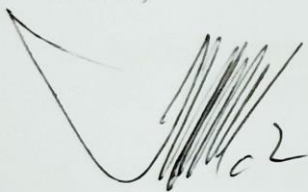
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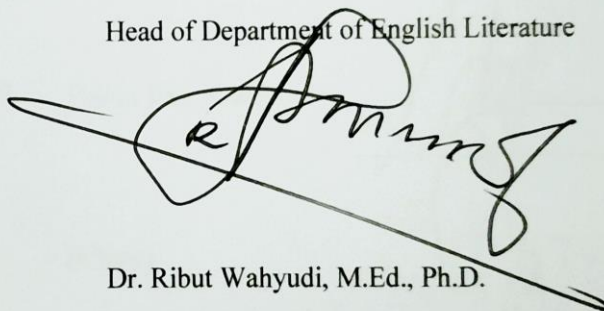
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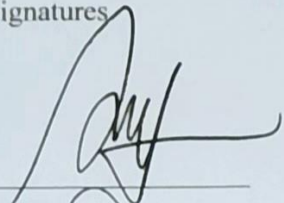
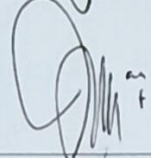

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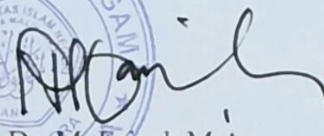
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## **MOTTO**

“Traditional westerns typify some of the hardship’s men face: you have to be rugged, silent, stoic. It's a man against nature, against the world.”

– Lisa Joy

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to:

My family; My father – Andre Irwanda; my mother – Dian Woro Bintarti; and my  
older sister – Diandra Yasmine Irwanda

.

The Board of Examiners: Agung Wiranata Kusuma, M.A. as the Main Examiner,  
Asni Furaida, M.A. as the Chair, and especially Dr. Siti Masitoh, M. Hum. as the  
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My friends in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang – Ma’had, English Literature  
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Furthermore, I, the researcher, also extend my appreciation to the people who have supported me on finishing this thesis. Their encouragements urge the researcher on conducting this writing. Those people are:

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The researcher hopes that this thesis will inspire readers and future researchers who intend follow up this undergraduate thesis since it is still imperfect in many ways. Hence, criticism and suggestions from readers are welcomed for reader's opinion would be a valuable lesson for the future researches.

Malang, November 29th, 2021

The Researcher



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## ABSTRACT

Irwanda, R.A. 2021. *Oppression of Black People in Langston Hughes's Mulatto*.  
Minor Thesis. Literature, English Literature Department, Faculty of  
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Key words: Oppression, Sociological Approach

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Even though people in this social sphere are equal human beings, many issues regarding prejudice and segregation due to differences still prevail. Hence, some groups of people, such as former slaves, minorities, and women, are regarded as inferior and receive unfair treatment in the form of oppression. Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* play portrayed the oppression that had occurred in the 1930s towards black people and the mulatto descendants who descended from a black person and a white person. Therefore, this research was structured to ascertain about the issues of social injustice contained in the play *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes.

This research has two purposes which is to observe the oppressions that the black people and their mulatto descents faced in the play, thus describing the cause of oppression to happen in the play.

This research applies literary criticism in which the researcher examines and interprets literary works. The researcher employs a sociological approach that focuses on the text and Iris Marion Young's oppression theory to analyze the categories of oppression suffered by black people in Langston Hughes's *Mulatto*. Then, the researcher did a close-reading and assessed the data from the extracted texts of the play in the form of dialogues, sentences, and phrases that is relevant to answering the research question.

Based on the findings of this research, the black people in the drama are in a society that enacts oppression towards them. Firstly, they suffer five faces of oppression, namely, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Secondly, these oppressions are still performed because the people of that society follow the hierarchal structure in the society of black and white people as well as the established rules. In other words, people's action on following them affects the existence of oppressions.

## ABSTRAK

Irwanda, R.A. 2021. *Penindasan terhadap Orang Kulit Hitam dalam drama Mulatto Karya Langston Hughes*. Skripsi. Sastra, Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

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Kata Kunci: Penindasan, Pendekatan Sosiologi

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Meski umat manusia di lingkungan sosial merupakan makhluk yang memiliki derajat yang setara, isu-isu tentang prasangka dan segregasi yang disebabkan oleh perbedaan masih terjadi. Beberapa kelompok sosial seperti kaum minoritas, kaum yang semula budak, dan wanita dianggap inferior dan mendapat perlakuan tidak adil dalam bentuk penindasan. Drama *Mulatto* oleh Langston Hughes mendeskripsikan penindasan yang terjadi pada tahun 1930-an terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam dan keturunan mulatto yang merupakan keturunan dari orang kulit hitam dan kulit putih. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini disusun untuk menjawab pertanyaan tentang isu-isu ketidakadilan sosial yang terdapat dalam drama *Mulatto* oleh Langston Hughes.

Penelitian ini memiliki dua tujuan, yakni, menemukan bentuk penindasan yang dialami masyarakat kulit hitam dan mulatto serta mendeskripsikan penyebab terjadinya penindasan dalam drama *Mulatto*.

Penelitian ini menerapkan kritik sastra dimana peneliti mengkaji dan menginterpretasikan karya sastra. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis yang berfokus pada teks dan teori penindasan oleh Iris Marion Young untuk menganalisis macam-macam penindasan yang dialami oleh orang kulit hitam dalam karya *Mulatto* oleh Langston Hughes. Kemudian, peneliti melakukan pembacaan teliti dan menelaah data dari teks yang dikutip dari drama dalam bentuk dialog, kalimat, dan frasa yang relevan untuk menjawab pertanyaan penelitian.

Berdasarkan temuan penelitian ini, orang kulit hitam dalam drama tersebut berada dalam masyarakat yang mempraktekan penindasan yang bersifat struktural terhadap mereka. Pertama, mereka mengalami lima bentuk penindasan, yaitu eksploitasi, marginalisasi, ketidakberdayaan, imperialisme budaya, dan kekerasan. Kedua, penindasan tersebut masih terjadi karena penduduk dalam masyarakat itu mengikuti struktur hierarkis antara orang-orang kulit hitam dan putih serta aturan yang ditetapkan. Dengan kata lain, tindakan penduduk dalam mengikuti hal tersebut mempengaruhi adanya penindasan.

## مستخلص البحث

إرواندا، ر.أ. 2021. اضطهاد الأناص السود في مسرحية مولاتو للانجستون هيوز. بحث جامعي. الأدب. قسم الأدب الإنجليزية، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية مالانج.

المشريف: الدكتورة ستي مسيطة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاضطهاد، منهج الاجتماعي.

أن قضايا التحيز والعزل التي تسببها الاختلافات لا تزال قائمة على الرغم من أنه يقال أن الناس في الأوساط الاجتماعية لديهم درجات متساوية. تعتبر بعض الفئات الاجتماعية مثل الأقليات والأشخاص الذين كانوا في الأصل عبيدًا والنساء دون المستوى وتلقى معاملة غير عادلة في شكل اضطهاد. تصف مسرحية مولاتو للانجستون هيوز الاضطهاد الذي حدث في سنة الثلاثينيات على الأناص السود وأحفاد مولاتو من نسل السود والبيض. لأنه تم تصميم هذا البحث للإجابة على أسئلة حول قضايا الظلم الاجتماعي الواردة في مسرحية مولاتو للانجستون هيوز.

أما هذه الدراسة لها هدفان، وهما: التعرف على أشكال الاضطهاد التي يعاني منها السود ومولاتو ووصف أسباب الاضطهاد في مسرحية مولاتو. تطبق هذه الدراسة النقد الأدبي الذي تقوم فيه الباحثة بفحص الأعمال الأدبية وتفسيرها. تستخدم الباحثة منهج الاجتماعي و نظرية الاضطهاد على إريس ماريون يونج لتحليل أنواع الاضطهاد التي يعاني منها السود في مسرحية مولاتو للانجستون هيوز. بعد ذلك، قامت الباحثة بقراءة وتحليل البيانات من النص المقتبس من المسرحية في شكل حوارات وجمل وعبارات ذات صلة للإجابة على أسئلة البحث.

بناءً على نتائج هذه الدراسة، فإن السود في المسرحية هم في مجتمع يمارس القمع البنيوي ضدهم. أولاً، إنهم يعانون من خمسة أشكال من الاضطهاد وهي الاستغلال والتهميش والعجز والإمبريالية الثقافية والعنف. ثانيًا، لا يزال الاضطهاد يحدث لأن السكان في ذلك المجتمع يتبعون الهيكل الهرمي بين السود والبيض والقواعد المعمول بها. وبعبارة أخرى، فإن عملية السكان في اتباع هذا تؤثر على وجود الاضطهاد.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of the research background, problems of the study, research objectives, scope and limitation, research significance, the definition of key terms, previous studies, and research method.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

Despite the differences, people that live in this social sphere are fellow humans who should have their rights. However, idealism does not deem so as issues regarding prejudice and segregation due to differences of race, gender, sexuality, or classes are somehow prominent in many cases which suggests the oppression of some groups by another. For example, the cases of a person who is 'othered' usually include the assumption of not being viewed as human-like autistic people or the ideological aspect in which, according to Collins (1991), to justify Black women's oppression (Milton, 2016; Acuff, 2018). Essentially, in most of history, the totals of the oppressed have been the mass of people including pagans, the colonized, Jews, peasants, women, minorities, and other subjects who are suppressed by those who have power. Thus, the dominator considers those subjects being inferior so that they were unfairly treated (Wolf, 1986).

Throughout history, oppression has gained a new light by the meaning of the term as well as the way of repressing people. The terminology of oppression in the nineteenth century implied cultural domination since it is often defined as maltreatment towards certain social groups materially or psychologically. On the

other hand, its definition by the 20th century suggested biased coercion and injustices in the aspects of psychological, economic, social, and political that various social groups experience, such as the disabled or minorities underwent (Cudd, 2006). Essentially, this definition refers to oppressed people as those who are discriminated against due to their social status.

On the other hand, Marx (1973, p. 326) connects it with domination as the word oppression is derived from the word *oppressus* which means pressing over suggests power and system about those who pressure and those who get pressured. Marx mainly used this to understand the connection between domination and the oppressed. The oppressed refers to people who are subjugated and have similar kinds of conditions to other members whose status, independence and freedom of movement, power, material gaining, and ascriptive relation are regarded as lower, so they are unfairly treated and restricted by the dominant group. The group of people who receive such conditions is the poor, minority, slaves, women, and peasants because of being regarded as inferior and receiving unfair treatment by the dominator (Wolf, 1986). Without the will of the said disadvantaged groups, such injustice action can grow and be sustained in various social phenomena, from the rules in the workplace and institutions, and laws to norms, stereotypes, and standpoints (Taylor, 2016).

While the awareness of human rights exists, the cases of oppressed minorities still occur worldwide nowadays. Some primary examples include "Aboriginal, Chinese, and Muslim minorities in Australia that are being misinterpreted and mostly dominated by white" (Muslim, 2020), Latina mothers

who face oppression within daily interactions (Ayón et al., 2018), and murder cases of black people in the USA such as George Floyd (Permana, 2020) and "Rayshard Brooks" (Warga Kulit, 2020). The oppression of black people in the USA notably, which is driven by racism, has a long history and still prevails. Regardless, the recent cases are unjust and unsettling in that they sparked rage from the citizens who went riot for justice. The existing occurrence demonstrated how oppression is still relevant in the present climate.

For someone or people who are segregated by the dominant group, life for those minorities is not exactly easy. While the Blacks are mostly segregated due to racism, in Mulatto's case, they are trapped by one drop rule. The one-drop rule is defined as someone whose appearance is a distinguishable sign of African or Negro to be determined as Black (Hollinger, 2005). So, they are forced to follow their African blood. They, along with the Blacks, become minorities segregated by the dominated white society.

Particularly, by the 1930s Depression-era, the state of Georgia in the south had become a prominent state to lynch black Americans, in which the play took place. Although slavery has ended with the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the heritage of slavery still prevails, notably in the South. Consequently, damaging America's image at that time wasn't only due to racial discrimination but also lynching. Additionally, Blackmon (2009) concurred with Cohen that slavery itself is noted to transpire seven decades after the end of the Civil War. It is not surprising that the life of the blacks on the southern plantation in the 1930s is reflected in the story and is plagued with cruelty and terrors. Thus, the play has, as

remarked by Nghana Lewis (2012), racial, sexual, and gender customs in the setting or the condition of the South pre-Civil War persists even though the play is taken place after the Civil war and throughout the 1930s' Depression Era (Maulood & Barzani, 2019). The occurring slavery practice back then also suggests that both African-Americans and their descents, including Mulattos who are placed between African-American and white circles, still experience unpleasant environments because of the norms, beliefs, and stereotypes that are implemented in the social structure. Thus, it left them remained oppressed at the time.

Langston Hughes (1901-1967) is a poet and dramatist who took on almost any kind of writing form in his career in the theatre. His other work in his artistic pursuit ranges from comedy, gospel plays, chronicle plays presented in episodic narrative, as well as reasonably orthodox dramatic realism. One of the examples of Hughes's dramatic realism is *Mulatto* (1930) (Hughes, 2002). According to Elam and Elam, (2009), the work itself was criticized for having intra-racial prejudice by Bienvenu (1992) and putting personal father-son relationship issues by Davis (in Sollors (Ed.), 2000). Nonetheless, the play portrays race inequalities, brutal oppression of Afro-Americans, and white class power.

The play *Mulatto: A Tragedy of the Deep* (1930) by Langston Hughes concerns the owner of the plantation Colonel Norwood, his Black housekeeper Cora Lewis, and their mixed-raced (mulatto) children, mainly the protagonist Robert "Bert" Lewis. The play started with distempered Colonel Norwood at Bert's behavior for using his Ford without permission which almost causes the

youngest mulatto daughter Sallie to be late for her departure to the train station for school. Besides that, in the public, Robert acts as though he is a white due to inheriting Norwood's or a white man's blood, thus claiming himself as a Norwood instead of Lewis. Nevertheless, being a mulatto, whose mother is a black person, Robert is doomed to his black lineage. Consequently, he is belittled for his black ancestry. Anyhow, since Bert's behavior infuriates Norwood more, Cora often reminds Robert of his behavior but he disregards it. The colonel's anger reaches its peak when Robert leaves through the front door, where white people go in and out, rather than the backdoor, where black people and their descents go in and out. Later, in the evening, Norwood talks calmly with Robert regarding his behavior and warns him which turns out into a fight between the father and son. It ends up with Robert strangling his father to death. He eventually runs away from the lynching mob for being a murderer. The servants, Sam and Livonia, and her son, William, left Cora by the big house while she is waiting for Robert's return. After his return, he commits suicide in his parents' bedroom.

Setting in 1930s Georgia, the play depicts the practice of oppression such as plantation slavery, white's dominance, black women being raped and forced to reproduce children, and black people's lynching, which caused the blacks and mulattoes to be segregated and discriminated against in the society. Though the Colonel's wife and mulatto children may have received some privileges due to being related to the Colonel, they are still suffering some oppression due to the group they belong to. Because they realize the prevalent oppression, Cora, her children, and black people there stay low. In addition, Cora wants her children to

have a comfortable life in the north in which equality exists so she sends them to school there. Meanwhile, Robert who just returned from the north wants to use his experience to teach them to stand against white, but his actions pose a threat to both white and black people. As a result, Norwood puts him on the plantation.

Given that the oppression involves lynching, slavery, harassment of black women, and conditions pre-Civil War prevalent in that era, the work somehow reflects the said environment. Hence, this research applies the Sociological approach. Literature is the mirror of society, according to Watt, that it could reflect the state of society and it could reveal social facts of the society (Nurholis, 2019). Due to its relation to society, it's not surprising that sociology is an approach to studying literature. Accordingly, the researcher uses the Sociological approach to study the oppression that took place in 1930 society as reflected in the drama.

Additionally, in analyzing the oppression that African-Americans experience in the play, the researcher opts for Iris Marion Young's oppression theory in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* book (1990). She describes oppression traditionally as the tyranny practice by a dominant group and strongly connotated with subjugation and colonialism. Subsequently, structural oppression is conceived and exercised currently. Such oppression is a wide and deep inequity experienced by some groups due to subconscious norms and effects in normal activities like media, interactions, and culture. Based on the injustices experienced by members of groups that are referred to as oppression, Young then categorizes



oppression into five kinds which include Exploitation, Powerlessness, Violence, Marginalization, and Cultural Imperialism.

Moreover, the play stresses how black characters suffer from these kinds of oppression. Due to white's dominance in the milieu, they remain vulnerable and culturally imperialized. They also become subject to exploitation, violence, and marginalization.

Several studies that previously have been conducted share connections to this study. However, the examined studies either used the work as the object of study with different approaches or employed the same oppression theory in examining other literary works. Maulood and Barzani's research entitled *The Trauma in Langston Hughes's Mulatto* (2019), for instance, discussed the experienced trauma of the African-American by applying three elements of Pederson's theoretical framework about trauma theory. They examined the play to explain how the playwright showed traumatized African-Americans through these characters. Through the close-reading, the researchers managed to discuss the PTSD suffered by the African-Americans such as the cause and reactions towards their PTSD in which their background is the cause of trauma. Another research is by Roshnavand and Torghabeh entitled *Stonequist's Concept of The Marginal Man in Langston Hughes' Play Mulatto* (2012) applied sociologist Stonequist's three-phase life-cycle Marginal Man theory. They discovered Robert as a doomed individual who lives in two different cultures since he can't adjust his desire for a white man's authority with the racist milieu. While the previous study also concerns sociological topics, they only concentrated on Robert. Thirdly, another

social issue is also stressed in *Blood Debt: Reparations in Langston Hughes's Mulatto* by Elam Jr. and Elam (2009) which centered on racial remuneration through reparation. The researchers discovered some kinds of symbolic reparation efforts (emergence of black masculinity, racial staging and artistic control, Cora's counter) with the play's text and the performance. Although the second and third ones discussed social concepts and issues, oppression isn't the main focus of the study. Meanwhile, the first study highlighted how their oppressive experience is the source of trauma rather than focusing on the phenomena.

Furthermore, some studies that apply Iris Marion Young's Faces of Oppression theory are focusing on other literary works and approaches, such as feminism and psychology. Hidayati's undergraduate thesis entitled *Black Women Oppression in Toni Morrison's God Help the Child* (2019), for instance, applies Young's oppression framework with feminism approach because it analyzed the female main characters in Morrison's novel. Like this research, the oppression that the female characters suffered are driven by race, but they're also oppressed by class and mainly gender aspects. Likewise, Freiová's bachelor thesis entitled *The Weight of Ink: Female Protagonists in the Face of Oppression* (2020) also applied psychological approach and Case and Hunter's Counterpaces framework. So, the study categorized the oppression experienced by Ester and Helen and explicated their wellness with Case and Hunter's Counterpaces by comparing their experiences. On the other hand, this research focused on revealing the oppression phenomena so a sociological approach is preferable to expound on it.

The studies above that used *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes were mostly emphasizing Robert and Cora, even symbolic reparation. Meanwhile, the last two studies applied different approaches even though they're both using Iris Marion Young's Oppression framework. Although these studies concerned either the same play or approach, they give an insight for the researcher to study another aspect.

For these reasons, the researcher intends to conduct this study to explore the oppression experienced by the black society in 1930s Georgia as reflected in Hughes's *Mulatto*. Black people are frequently one of the targets of oppression in America due to their race, especially with the persisting South pre-Civil War setting and the prevailing black Americans' lynching in 1930s Georgia. By applying the Sociology approach as well as Young's oppression theory, this study focuses on analyzing the faced oppression of black people.

## **B. Research Questions**

In this study, the researcher will explain based on the following problems:

1. What kinds of oppressions that the black people undergone in Langston Hughes's *Mulatto*?
2. What is the cause of oppression reflected in Langston Hughes's *Mulatto*?

## **C. The objective of the Research**

Related to the research questions, the study aims:

1. To observe the oppressions that the black people and their mulatto descents faced in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto* play.
2. To analyze the cause of oppression in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto* play.

#### **D. Scope and Limitation**

Regarding the problems of this research, this study intends to examine the oppression that is suffered by the black people in Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* play by applying Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppressions" framework. Because it is limited to that extent, the study only discussed the experienced oppression by these characters and the cause of such injustice in the play. The researcher will not intend to analyze outside of it.

#### **E. Research Significance**

This study is conducted for its theoretical and practical purposes in the contribution of literature study. The practical significance of this study intends to expand the understanding of the reader (e.g., students, lecturers, other researchers) and the researcher herself about the topic of the study. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to be a future reference for other researchers who are also focused on similar studies, as well as to be a contribution to the study of the said literary work.

Meanwhile, the theoretical significance of this study seeks to enrich the knowledge regarding literary criticism, sociological approach, and Iris Marion Young's oppression framework. Concerning such theoretical contributions, the research is expected to promote the application of literary criticism, sociological approach, even Iris Marion Young's oppression framework by providing examples through the society depicted in the play. Therefore, this study could provide understanding for other researchers for further studies.

## **F. Definition of Key Term**

1. Oppression: It is regarded as institutional restriction of one's development such as in learning and utilizing skills or communicating in social life (Young, 1990).
2. Exploitation: the ongoing process of transferring labor's product from certain social groups to profit another (Young, 1990).
3. Marginalization: involves exorcising people from contributing to social life and endangering them by the severe lack of material even annihilation (Young, 1990).
4. Powerlessness: overall, powerless people don't have influence or authority over their surroundings, while those who have authority still can exercise their power without exercising it (Young, 1990).
5. Cultural Imperialism: inclines towards a practice in which the dominant group universalize their culture and experience, then determine them as the norm, rather than the use of power or coercion (Young, 1990).
6. Violence: is experienced by members of a group who have awareness of fear of uncalled assault. The most frequent assault is physical violence, while the less severe cases of violence include mockery, pestering, or coercion to shame, embarrass, or condemn the members of the group. (Young, 1990)

## **G. Previous Studies**

Several studies that have previously been carried out also had analyzed the same play. While the phenomenon of oppression of black people surfaces in the

play, some of them are mentioned as the cause but never presented the phenomena into a full account. Neither of them had brought the phenomenon as the main topic.

The first study is *The Trauma in Langston Hughes's Mulatto* by Maulood and Barzani (2019) which discusses the trauma experienced by African-Americans. The researchers applied Pederson's theoretical framework through close reading which emphasizes the text's gap in the text itself, searches the proof in the larger detail of the story, and focuses on the represented experience that is ontologically, physically, and temporarily distorted. Through close reading, this study focuses on examining how the playwright uses the drama to show traumatized black American characters. They pointed out the cause of PTSD which includes slavery's heritage and black family submission towards white masters, even down to Robert's childhood trauma and Cora's PTSD as well as their reaction toward their trauma. Although they focused on the trauma studies of the black people, they also gave an insight into the culturally oppressed "white" Norwood through Cora's memories and expanded some oppression background that influences their trauma. While this research also examines black people and mentions their sufferings, their psychological experiences are not classified due to the main approach leaning towards the oppressions themselves, rather than their psychological being (Maulood & Barzani, 2019).

Another study entitled *Stonequist's Concept of "The Marginal Man" in Langston Hughes' Play Mulatto* by Roshnavand and Torghabeh (2012) focused on the mixed-raced person Robert who doesn't have belongings in any of his two



ancestries. This study used a three-phase life-cycle in Stonequist's *Marginal Man*, a sociological term meaning doomed to be in two opposing cultures. The first phase is the introduction in which an individual does not notice the gaining of two cultures. As a child, Robert doesn't realize the difference between himself and the dominant group, thus recognizing himself as white. Secondly, the crisis in which the individual realizes the clashing culture is the beating Robert receives from Norwood, thus traumatizing him. Then the third phase is the reaction to the crisis to escape agonizing lower status. While his mother and siblings understand and survive the racist milieu which granted them privilege, Robert fails to adjust to the reality which caused him to crime, mental disorder, and suicide.

Being trapped between two cultures causes marginal individual Robert to experience double-consciousness that is also undergone by oppressed individuals in Young's framework. Thus, it could be a reference in this research. The difference between this and current research is the focus, while the research also applies sociological matters and doesn't solely concentrate on Robert (Roshnavand & Torghabeh, 2012).

The third study is conducted by Elam Jr. and Elam titled *Blood Debt: Reparations in Langston Hughes's Mulatto* (2009). It centered on the play's functions as remuneration, or rather a symbolic payback for social-politics hierarchy through the play's text and performance. Using the play's text and the performance, they discovered some kinds of symbolic reparation efforts. First, the act of reparation in the play from Robert is symbolized through the emergence of black masculinity whose position is expected to be lower than whites. It is

represented by his "social power" against the white clerk and Norwood's (or ruling white man's death).

Secondly, during broadways, aside from controlling the performance and augmenting racial and sexual politics, Jones refused to pay Hughes the prescribed royalties which Hughes demanded due similar to Robert, and struggled for artistic control. Regardless, the work itself still plays "a payback". The third concerns reparation demands through Cora's rebuttal to the Colonel (who is dead) regarding the social mystery of miscegenation and his incapacity as a virtuous person, father, and lover, even though she has limited agency and is the gatekeeper at the same time.

While this study also concerns social issues through the play's text, the researcher would expound on the oppressions which is the main cause of remunerating, rather than the remuneration. Regardless, they also provide some background context on some oppressions as its purpose is reparation by showing the slavery history and the context that Norwood is also oppressed despite being in the oppressor group (Elam & Elam, 2009).

Even though some studies examined other literary works, the discussed topic is relevant to this research, due to the similar theme. Nevertheless, they don't share a similar approach to this research.

An undergraduate thesis by Hidayati entitled *Black Women Oppression in Toni Morrison's God Help the Child* (2019) aimed to describe the oppression and struggle of two black women, Bride and Sweetness in the novel. She applies Young's Five Faces of Oppression framework, which consists of Exploitation,

Marginalization, Cultural Imperialism, Violence, and Powerlessness, and Walker's womanism, which is a movement for supporting and cooperating with both women and men in the struggle. In brief, both Bride and Sweetness experienced oppression in the aspect of gender, class, and race. As Sweetness knows the marginalization of black and white, she manages to hide her blackness's history due to her lighter skin. But she and her black daughter Bride still experience them. Sweetness mostly suffers class and gender inferiority through the experienced Exploitation and Powerlessness, while Bride experiences Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, and Violence due to the three aspects. Then, Sweetness's struggle is by hiding her blackness while Bride tries to be independent after her mother's neglect by cooperating with Jeri who helps her portray her beauty through fashion, listens to Rain's painful neglect which encourages Bride to move on, and builds a future together with Booker after mending their relationship. As the main focus was two women, this study used a feminism approach. While this research also applies the same oppression theory, the researcher doesn't solely focus on the female characters in the story. Nonetheless, this study applies the oppression theory that inspires the researcher on conducting this research about oppression due to the resemblance of both works' focus on black people (Hidayati, 2019).

The next study is a bachelor thesis *The Weight of Ink: Female Protagonists in the Face of Oppression* (2020) by Freiová that focused on *The Weight of Ink* (2017) by an American author Rachel Kadish. It intends to reveal the connection and parallels of repression suffered by 17th-century woman Ester

and 20th-century woman Helen, thus comparing and contrasting them. Aside from Young's Oppression theory, Freiová also used a psychological approach which is Case and Hunter's Counterspaces framework which promotes the segregated groups' well-being. The study revealed that both Ester and Helen were oppressed by using religion in which Ester is repressed due to religious traditional belief of gender roles while Helen is repressed for being non-Jewish studies the religion and nation. First, Ester is exploited for her gender role and prevented from studying, while Helen's case is exploiting herself with the study since it never spiritually fulfills her and lets her be recognized by Dror. Secondly, they are marginalized for not being suited to study due to gender norms (Ester) and the fact of being non-Jewish (Helen). Then, the culture of marriage causes Ester to be powerless and unable to pursue study, while it makes Helen unable to marry Dror but is still able to study. In which, both women pursue study. Through Ester's text, Helen learns and presents how wrong the portrayal of women in the dominant culture is. Fourthly, Ester faces physical violence and forced christening, while Muriel bullies Helen out of jealousy. Although it isn't visible as Ester's violence, Muriel also asserts symbolic dominance by taking the upper bunk bed and letting water drop onto Helen's bed. Thus, their counterspace is the study that acts as the setting to promote both women's well-being. Ester has studies to encourage her well-being in both her gender and religious minority which, three centuries later, inspires Helen. Though she feels lacking in spiritual fulfillment, Helen feels independent at the end and close to being Jewish which is equal to Dror. While the study enriches the researcher's further comprehension of the theory, the

literary work that the researcher chooses revolves around racial climate rather than religion as in this previous study. The characters in their respective works have a conflict with society or customs. Furthermore, discussing psychological matters isn't the main focus of research (Freiová, 2020).

Based on the illustration above, the studies carry the difference between the previously studied and this. Those that focus on Hughes's *Mulatto* (1930) centered on the issue of slavery as in remuneration debt, a social theory like *Marginal Man*, or trauma studies of the said literary work. Meanwhile, the studies that applied Young's theory aren't focused on the play nor using sociology as an approach to their analysis. Therefore, the researcher aims to study entitled *Oppressions of Black People and Their Mulatto Children in Hughes's Mulatto Play* with the blacks and their mulatto descents as the main focus by applying Young's Five Faces of Oppression framework.

## **H. Research Methods**

Research is required to be per the question and objective of the study through a systematically relevant approach. Hence, a method that is appropriate to be applied is crucial to carry out the study. For that reason, the researcher will point out the method of the research.

### **1. Research Design**

In order to answer the questions of the study, this research employs literary criticism to find the form of oppression of African-Americans and their descent that is represented in the literary work. According to Abrams and Harpham (2011), literary criticism is generally a term to describe a study that

defines, interprets, examines, and assesses literary works. Thus, the approach that is applied is the sociological approach, specifically, sociological of the text because contents, purpose, and other social issues are denoted in the literary works. Consequently, it is an interdisciplinary approach to study literary works by reading and realizing them by connecting the phenomena in the literary to the social aspect (Wiyatmi, 2013).

In this study, the researcher focuses on the oppression, a social injustice experienced by the black people and their descents. For that reason, the researcher applies Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppressions" model from her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) to observe the experienced oppressions in the play. These oppressions include exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Aside from the kinds of oppression, the cause to such injustice is highlighted as well.

## **2. Data Sources**

The main data of this study, as suggested by the title, is the 1930s play itself, *Mulatto: A Play of the Deep South* written by the American playwright Langston Hughes. The presented data consists of the form of words, phrases, sentences, and dialogue that is related to the discussion of this study. The source of the data is extracted texts from the book entitled *The Plays to 1942: Mulatto to The Sun Do Move* in the series of *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes Volume 5*, edited by Johnston, N., and Sanders, L. C., and published by University of Missouri Press, Columbia in 2002. The play contains two acts with the second act consisting of two scenes.



### **3. Data Collection**

In examining this study, the researcher does the following steps. Firstly, the researcher read the text of drama to comprehend the broad spectrum of the drama. Secondly, the following reading aims to gain a deeper understanding of it and highlight the significant matters that presumably are related to the topic of study. Then, the researcher marks the kind of oppression that is suffered by the black and the mulatto characters faced in the play based on Young's theory and the cause of such occurrence. Subsequently, the researcher assesses the data and arranges them accordingly.

### **4. Data Analysis**

Once the researcher collected the data, the researcher would do the following steps on linking the data based on the research question; First, the researcher classified the data related to the five oppressions framework by Iris Marion Young, according to the respective oppressions (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence) experienced by black characters Robert, Sallie, Cora, William, and the servants. Second, the researcher analyzed the cause of these five oppressions. The researcher will explain them by interpreting them from the data which include the underlined words, phrases, sentences, and dialogue of the play that is connected to the respective research questions. Lastly, the researcher comes to a conclusion that is formed on the data analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since this research focuses on the oppression of black people in 1930s *Mulatto*, it contributes to the sociological approach and oppression theory by Iris Marion Young. Hence, this chapter intricately describes the related theoretical basis to support this research's topic. It includes Sociological Approach, then followed by The Theory of Oppression which consists of Oppression as a Structural Concept and the Five Faces of Oppression, namely, Exploitation, Powerlessness, Violence, Marginalization, and Cultural Imperialism.

#### A. Sociological Approach

Despite being in two different fields, both sociology and literature have a linkage, hence sociology could be one of the approaches in literary criticism. According to Durkheim (1958), sociology objectively discusses individuals, society, social practices, and phenomena, for instance, culture, language, politics, etc. Concurrently, Damono explains that some genres of literary works center on the matter or issue of society and their activity that the sphere of sociology discusses. Likewise, Swingewood defines sociology as an objective study regarding humans in institutions and society, as well as their social systems, to reveal their existence and its patterns.

Similar to that, literary works also discuss human life, their ways to adapt to it, and their aspiration to change it. In other words, sociology and literature primarily propose similar overviews (Wahyudi, 2013). Consequently, the linkage

between sociology and literature is based on the fact that they similarly discuss humans. Sociology studies in literature then is an interdisciplinary approach to studying literary works by reading and realizing them by connecting the phenomena in literature to the social aspect (Wiyatmi, 2013).

Throughout studies of literature, many theorists conceive a sociological approach to discover the relation between sociology and literature differently. Plato from the ancient Greek era believed in literary works as an imitation or mirror of society, while Aristoteles who rejected Plato's idea assumed it as catharsis (Nurholis. 2019). Later, Hippolyte Taine in his *History of English Literature* (1863) identified the historical "moment", the "race" of the writer, and social and geographical "milieu" as elements that shaped a work (Abrams & Harpham, 2011). Then, it was followed by Marxists (Marx and Engels) with their perspective of literature being an "epiphenomenon of social structure" and literature stabilizing the ideology of class relation (Jadhav & Hall, 2014, p.660). Afterward, Warren and Wellek's sociological approaches revolve around the author, reader, and literary work itself. Watt's theoretical approaches have a similar sense which includes the relation of the writer to the reader, the social function of literature, and the function of the text as a reflection of society (Wiyatmi, 2013).

Since this research mainly centers on the text of the play itself, the researcher would focus on the text approaches, the text's function as a reflection of society, and the contents, purpose, and other implied social issues (Wellek & Warren, Watt as cited in Wiyatmi, 2013). After all, according to Richard Hoggart,

society's nature could be realized through literature. Likewise, for Austin Harrington, literature conveys that some matters concerning society aren't stated in the science of society (Vána, 2020). The aforementioned definitions have explained how sociology and literature have a similar overview, how sociology can be an approach to studying literature, how the literary work itself could be examined sociologically because literature discusses society.

## **B. The Theory of Oppression**

Generally, oppression is mostly translated as the control of the dominant group. Additionally, they have the power to maintain their authority. While they are all holding similar concepts, the term itself even changed according to history and the theorist who proposed the definition.

Various theorists in the modern era such as Marx or Frye have their concepts on how such injustice is enacted, though they are all stressing forced mistreatment. The abstract idea of oppression had existed by the 1960s by the radicals as a riposte to Marxist's essay, who suggested the relationship of power structure between oppressor and oppressed or the connection of domination, to lessen sexism and racism injustice through the effect of the ideology of bourgeois or class domination. While they could be interconnected to class oppression; the category of oppression in the scope of ageism, sexism, and racism that social movement stressed have their underlying forces (Wolf, 1986; Young, 1990).

A 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Frye (1986) used the component of 'press' in 'oppression' to emphasize someone being molded to reduce them into mass or

immobilization of their movement. Thus, she determines the element of structure in oppression in which part of the bounded structure of barriers and forces frequently reduces and immobilizes a group of people. It is a system of correlating barriers and forces that mold, immobilize, and reduce individuals of a certain group which resulted in submission to another group.

Meanwhile, Iris Marion Young in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) book referred to the concept that happens when one's development is institutionally restricted. In a sense, it contains "systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen" (p.38). She believes this condition is identified in social groups, e.g., Blacks, Indians, Asians, women, working-class people, and LGBT people. Although they aren't always suffering it in the same manner, they commonly are given similar inabilities and restrictions. Additionally, this social condition is structural and is executed by the institution in daily life, rather than by some dictatorship. Hence, she proposed oppression as a structural concept.

### **1. Oppression as Structural Concept**

In the traditional sense, oppression is the tyranny practice by a dominant group and is strongly connotated with subjugation and colonialism. It is primarily defined as the wrongful acts committed by other society that is not ours, e.g., communist to anti-communist. Then, the New Left by 1960-70 altered the

definition of oppression as the daily exercise by the liberal society on purpose rather than dictatorial coercion. It is called structural because it emerges from the unquestioned rooted practice, convention, and symbols in the assumptions based on the institutional regulation and the collective outcome for following the rules. Structural oppression is the result of subconscious beliefs and reactions in our everyday life such as interaction (e.g., stereotypes in media and culture) and structural attributes (i.e., in the administrative hierarchy and market system). Since the oppression systematically is economically, culturally, and politically performed in the main institution repeatedly, we couldn't just simply eliminate the leaders or establish some new rules to remove the oppression.

Foucault (1977) argues that, in modern society, we have to view the operating power beyond the pattern of power as "sovereignty", a connection between the superior and subordinate, and instead examine the practice of power as the impact of habitually liberal and humane practices in the education system, consumer wares' production and distribution, government administration, medicine, etc. Many people do conscious action that plays a part in retaining and reproducing oppression, though they frequently are simply doing it and don't realize it for being a medium of oppression (Young, 1990). The description suggests that people can unintentionally cause oppression, never mind subject individuals intentionally.

In this term of oppression, Young presumed that systemic oppression implies association among groups whether it is conscious or not. Thus, for each oppressed community, there is a privileged group that is associated with that

community. "Group differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects" (Young, 1990, p.42).

Though the structural phenomenon called oppression is "immobilizing and diminishing a group", this definition of the frequently targeted social group isn't just merely numerous people (ibid, p.43). Rather, it essentially links to their belonging identity that is distinguished from another "by cultural forms, practices, or way of life" (p.43). A group's members share special similarities that drive them to connect rather than with those not associated with the group. The existence of a group is due to its relation to another group.

A certain group may be determined by outsiders because these people don't have any particular consciousness of being in a group or because they are ostracized and labeled as a certain category of people who later are aware of it due to the oppression they shared. Regardless, group difference shouldn't be oppressive as difference still can exist without oppression, rather than executing oppression due to the idea of the belonging or exclusion of groups since they don't have any similarity. After all, even though individuals are partially shaped by groups, they are diverse and incoherent (Young,1990).

Additionally, as aforementioned explained, groups that suffered oppression are Blacks, Indians, Asians, women, working-class people, and LGBT people. Hence, this human oppression might be linked with some critical theories

due to their similarities such as post-colonialism, Marxism, African-American, feminism, and LGBTQ studies (Tyson, 2006).

## **2. Five Faces of Oppression**

### **a. Exploitation**

Before getting through the definition of exploitation, it is necessary to learn Marx's exploitation theory, the basis of exploitation theory. Exploitation in Marx's theory revolves around class structure that still can prevail without the existence of normatively and legally authorized class distinction. The distinction of class in the precapitalist era is legalized through superior and inferior ideologies. On the contrary, class domination in the capitalist society is rooted in profit which is acquired from the difference between the work value of the laborers and their capacity that the capitalist pays for. Profit is attainable since the owner claims the earned surplus value.

However, Young assumes that Marx's exploitation theory needs a normative sense in which C.B. Macpherson (1973) managed to reconstruct. In his point of power transfer, the capitalist has the power to gain and preserve the obtained benefits from workers. Due to transferring their power more than the supposed amount to the capitalist, the worker's power reduces. In addition, they also lose control and undergo material deprivation, which later is related to Marginalization. Thus, most importantly, it robs their important aspect of self-regard.

Basically, according to Young, the main view of exploitation is that it happens "through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one



social group to benefit another" (Young, 1990, p.49). This view isn't all about the distributive fact of some people being wealthy and many people being poverty-stricken, but structural relations among groups. This oppression enacts inequality and power relation through the operating social rules of what the job is, who does something for whom, how labor or job is recompensed, and the social process in which fruit of labor are appropriated. Such relations are systematically reproduced over and over where the haves preserve and augment their status, power, and riches by utilizing the have-nots' energies.

Nonetheless, Marxist's class theory does not include and explain racial and gender oppression, as certain races and gender do transfer energies to the benefited groups. Thus, Young then added the idea of gender and racial oppression:

- 1) Gender oppression or women's oppression sometimes involves power transfer that is systematic and isn't the same in return, from women to men. It isn't only about unequal power, fortune, and status, thus causing them to be excluded from privileged activities. Rather, they work for men which directly made men's power, self-actualization, fortune, and status viable. Aspects of gender exploitation usually involve transferring material results of labor, as well as transferring sexual and emotional energy of women to men.
- 2) In racial oppression, Young considers them suffering capitalist super-exploitation and classifies them as *menial labor* or the labeled labor of servants. The term menial labor means they should be the servant of the benefited group. In many cases, many service labor or servant jobs such as

bellhops and porters are filled with Latino and Black laborers due to the firm cultural pressure. Aside from service, menial labor also indicates servile, blue-collar (or inexpert), and low-salary work that is without autonomy. Here, someone is subordinate subjects to many people's orders.

In summary, exploitation is a social process that led to the energy transfer of one group for another, thus causing uneven distributions. "The injustices of exploitation cannot be eliminated by redistribution of goods, for as long as institutionalized practices and structural relations remain unaltered, the process of transfer will re-create an unequal distribution of benefits" (ibid, p.53). To change it, it is essential to restructure institutions and systems, a similar action to cultural, structural, and institutional adjustment (Young,1990).

#### **b. Marginalization**

For Young, "Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use" (Young,1990, p. 53) which might be related to labor. Marginalization is not only denoted to racial groups. Many cases of old people, single mothers, disabled, American Indians, and young Latino or Black people are considered marginal as they can't get a job or are unemployed.

As the result, this category of oppression could be the most serious since marginalization involves expelling people from contributing to useful social life and probably endangering them by extreme material deprivation even annihilation. Nevertheless, material deprivation isn't just the extreme harm resulting from marginalization since it can be managed through redistributive

policies, though doesn't remove the wide-ranging deprivation, thus creating new inequality.

- 1) Welfare provision creates new inequity by taking the dependents' freedoms and rights. Dependent people (e.g., the old or disabled) are subjected to condescending, punitive, arbitrary, and degrading treatment by the officials who hold the authority in the welfare bureaucracy. Because they need the service provider, they are also required to comply with the enforced rules. Thus, it makes dependency to have the rights to respect, privacy, and individual choice suspended. Even so, the dependency shouldn't be oppressive, considering that a dependent person has the right to gain support.
- 2) Dependent people are prevented to exercise their ability in socially established and recognized manners. Although someone has protection and means of comfortable living, they remain marginalized as the injustice in the form of boredom, lack of dignity, and uselessness persist in the institution. Even though productive and valid activities occur in social cooperation, its processes and structures shut people from participation (Young,1990).

Essentially, the issues of marginalization frequently include usability in the system, material deprivation, and new injustice despite welfare provision. Thus, for that reason, they end up feeling segregated or marginalized from others by the apparatus.

### **c. Powerlessness**

Previously, regarding Exploitation, the difference between the working and middle class in everyday life is a constructed division between non-professional and professional. Professional has the privilege of status and division of labor compared to nonprofessional. Thus, aside from exploitation, another oppression that is experienced by nonprofessionals is referred to as powerlessness by Young.

Hence, in this sense, people who experience powerlessness lack dominance or power. According to Young, non-professionals suffer both exploitation and powerlessness. After all, compared to the professionals, they don't have status, authority, and recognition so they must follow orders from them. Non-professionals also don't have or scarcely have working autonomy, hardly employ their judgment or creativity, lack authority or expertise, and don't command respect. As the result, they lack the privileged status that professionals have which causes oppression for them.

There are three aspects of the privilege of professionals. Firstly, professionals can obtain and practice the profession progressively and expansively. Their status then rises after experiencing progress in skill or knowledge of a particular field and professionalism. Non-professionals aren't given development for gaining recognition, thus remaining powerless. Secondly, professionals somewhat have autonomy so they possess authority over the supervised workers, aides, or clients, while the non-professionals lack so. Thirdly, the privileges of professionals are beyond the workplace. The way of life of

professionals revolves around respectability in public places or media due to their connotated culture, e.g., clothes, tastes, attitudes. Consequently, non-professionals tend to look *respectable* and *professional* when they try to get a job, loan, or property.

These kinds of privileges are visible in racism and sexism. For example, a Puerto Rican man or a woman is respected once people learn that he/ she is a business executive or college lecturer. Meanwhile, the reverse occurs for a white man whereupon he receives respectability until they discover him being in the working class (Young, 1990). In this sense, people of certain social groups are judged based on their appearance before their professionalism is revealed.

#### **d. Cultural Imperialism**

While exploitation, powerlessness, and marginalization involve the power relation because of the division of labor, cultural imperialism refers to the experience in which dominant meaning in the society causes the viewpoint of its group that remains invisible as they typecast and indicate one's group as the Other. In this sense, the dominant group universalizes their culture and experience, then determines them as the norm.

Differences in some group members, such as black or American Indians to Europe and females to males, are reconstructed as inferior and deviant, thus being indicated are signified as Others by the dominant group.

At the same time, those who are culturally dominated experience the paradox of this kind of oppression since they are stereotyped but made invisible.

Examples include women being better at dealing with children and gays being promiscuous.

Due to being stereotyped, the members of that group eventually experience double consciousness which Du Bois (1969) defined as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Young, 1990, p.60). Fundamentally, the oppressed undergo double consciousness because they reject to coincide with stereotyped, belittled, and objectified views of themselves. In other words, because culturally imperialized people are defined by both dominant and subordinate cultures, they could recognize and affirm each other for their similarity in viewpoint and experience. Because of their similarity, they usually maintain the sense that is considered positive subjectivity.

In other words, cultural imperialism includes the experience of being marked differently and invisible. Invisibility occurs due to the dominant group's inability to recognize the viewpoint that is encompassed "in their cultural expressions as perspective" (ibid, p.60). After all, these expressions hardly have a place for the other group's experience, mostly just referring to them in a stereotyped manner. The unjustness of cultural imperialism is that the ruling culture forces oppressed people with their interpretation and experience in daily life, but oppressed people "find little expressions that touch dominant culture" (ibid).

In the end, while cultural imperialism doesn't involve explicit power relations, such oppression can still be embedded unconsciously because the dominant meaning has been established. Therefore, the oppressed groups seemingly feel shared positivism against the dominant's negative stereotype.

**e. Violence**

One of the categories of oppression, violence, in this sense, refers to systemic violence. Group members that experience systemic violence have the knowledge to fear the unknown yet unwarranted assault since it would damage their property or people. There is no reason behind the assault but to harm, humiliate, or annihilate the person. Social groups in the USA (or some regions in it) such as Asians, women, lesbians, gay men, Blacks, Arabs, Puerto Ricans, and other Spanish-speaking Americans fear such threats in their lives.

Aside from the frequent physical violence, Young adds that less severe cases of violence include mockery, harassment, or intimidation which are intended to degrade, shame, or stigmatize the members of the group (Young, 1990). Additionally, humiliating and intimidating someone is considered psychological mistreatment (WHO, 2002). However, theorists don't consider such cases of violence and harassment as part of injustice since, to them, violence is persecuted by individuals such as deviants or extremists (Young, 1990). In other words, the less severe violence may be neglected by theorists or not considered as important as physical violence by extremists. Regardless, it still psychologically damages individuals and is one of violence.

Young proposes the reason violence is "a phenomenon of social injustice" is due to its systemic nature and being social practice (ibid, p.62). Firstly, the reason for its systemic nature is because it is aimed at certain group members simply due to being a member of it. This kind of oppression includes direct unjust treatment and shared knowledge among oppressed members in day-to-day life that "they are *liable* to violation" (ibid, p.62) just because of their group identity. Secondly, being social practice, everybody knows that violence occurs and will occur again. As an example, many men will think of raping hitchhiking women whom they pick up, or harassing gay students on their dorm floor will happen to straight male students. Thus, because of its rule-bound, preplanned, and social character, violence towards groups is being social practice. In other words, violence becomes a social phenomenon because they are systematically prone to it and they would experience it over and over.

Other than that, systematic and yet random violence has another crucial aspect which is irrationality. What makes systemic violence irrational is that the violations (e.g., killing, harassing, or hitting) towards group members are driven by hatred or fears. Thus, violence is enacted based on the violator's unconscious irrationality. Young believes this unconscious fear is connected to cultural imperialism (Young, 1990), due to its dominant meaning.

Fundamentally, violence is randomly enacted towards certain group members because of its characteristics which are the systematic nature, the fact being social practice, and the irrational hatred which are based on dominant



meanings. The members of subjected groups are usually aware of such violence onto them, regardless of how violence is enacted.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter answers the questions of the research, thus exploring the findings of this research in a discussion regarding Langston Hughes's play *Mulatto* (1930) by applying Iris Marion Young's oppression framework that had been explicated in the previous chapter. It contains the analysis of the oppression experienced by black people in *Mulatto* drama and the revelation of oppression through the central characters. In the process, the researcher examines the data through reading, then a closed reading on the drama itself.

#### **A. The Oppressions Undergone by Black People**

The following discussion contains the oppression of black people in Hughes's *Mulatto* with Young's Five Faces of Oppression framework which consists of Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, and Violence.

##### **1. Exploitation**

In Young's (1990) definition, the main view of exploitation is the ongoing process of transferring the fruit of labor from a certain social group to profit another group. This structural relation is enacted between groups to maintain the status, affluence, and power of the wealthy. Furthermore, since this term revolves around group relation, she proposes a classification of exploitation that isn't explained by the Marxists – exploitation of race and gender (Young, 1990). The wealthy or benefit one is the one who holds authority or, in this case, the white-

dominated society, mainly Norwood in the plantation of Polk County, Georgia. On the other hand, the disadvantageous social group, the African-Americans are suffering due to their race.

Considering the description of the characters and setting itself already establish that colonel Norwood is a plantation owner with a slavery background, black people as in men and women alike are suffering exploitation. Additionally, race exploitation or super-exploitation is classified as menial labor which indicates servant, servile, blue-collar, and low-paying work. According to Schneider and Schneider (2007), plantation laborers and black servants are considered slave workers. People of race, specifically black people in the play, are placed in such manual labors, i.e., being house servants or plantation workers. For instance, Norwood's house servants, such as Cora, Sam, and Livonia, are blacks. Cora's mother was said to be a nursemaid or house servant that had looked after the colonel which is also slave work. In other words, many black people are assigned to servile works in the play. Moreover, Norwood's lines specifically imply racial placement, that menial or servant works are served for black people.

*NORWOOD: ...The rest of 'em had sense enough to keep out of my sight, and to speak to me like they should. . . . I don't have any trouble with my colored folks. Never have trouble. They do what I say, or what Mr. Talbot says, and that's all there is to it. I give 'em a chance. If they turn in crops they get paid. If they workin' for wages, they get paid. If they want to spend their money on licker, or buy an old car, or fix up their cabins, they can. Do what they choose long as they know their places and it don't hinder their work. And to Cora's young ones I give all the chances any colored folks ever had in these parts. More'n many a white child's had. I sent you all off to school. Let Bertha go on up North when she got grown and educated. Intend to let Sallie do the same. Gave your brother William that house he's living in when he got married, pay him for his work, help him out if he needs it. None of my darkies suffer. Sent you to school. Would have kept on, would have sent you back today, but I don't intend to pay for no darkie, or white boy either if I had one, that acts the way you've been acting. (Act II, scene 1, p. 38)*

Norwood states “if I had one [white servant]” suggesting that he doesn’t have a white person working under him, only black people serve as his subordinates. In addition, while black people are paid for their work, they must “know their places” and “not hinder their work” which means that these black people must obey the operating social rule. These rules are enacted to maintain the status, affluence, and power of the wealthy, which is Norwood’s. Moreover, Talbot could whip anyone on the plantation workers to force them to work for their superiors and Norwood holds authority which drives them to comply with their rules. Or, as Norwood said, they have “sense enough to keep out of my sight, and to speak to me like they should”. Therefore, super-exploitation exists since African-Americans are considered servants or subordinate to white people.

In conclusion, the exploitation that occurs in the play is in the form of the exploitation of race. Super-exploitation exists because black people are specifically placed in the servant or manual labor, thus experiencing unequal power transfer to benefit the dominant society. Regardless, they must work for their living despite the unjust treatment from their superiors.

## **2. Marginalization**

The second faces of oppression are marginalization, which is again related to power relation and labor. While it can be considered grave oppression for excluding people from contributing to useful social life and probably endangering them by extreme material deprivation even annihilation,

it can be mended with redistribution and welfare but creating new inequality which deprives their freedoms and rights as well as prevents their ability to be exercised in recognized ways (Young, 1990).

Marginalization in the society of Depression-era Georgia in the drama mainly occurs in welfare provision. The main area of the setting is the big house on a plantation, which itself demonstrates the background akin to slavery even though the black people there receive welfare, i.e., getting paid for work, having their house fixed, and using public service and facilities, such as post office. Nonetheless, with Norwood and other white people still functioning as the dominator in society, black people are compelled to obey their rules.

According to the theory, because they are depending on someone who holds the authority for the welfare, they need to comply with the enforced rules, i.e., letting themselves placed or following the work rules, and receive punitive and degrading treatment which takes their freedoms and rights until they are unable to exercise their ability in socially established and recognized manners which leave them in the state of boredom, lack of dignity, and uselessness. But they need to depend on their superiors and job for their welfare.

In other words, as to how it is defined, marginalization expels people from contributing to social life despite of the provision welfare. The case appears generally in the society to denote how the superior enacts this by

fixing a place for them, e.g., being worker or servant, so that they have their freedoms and rights taken away and have their ability unexercised.

*ROBERT: ...Back here in these woods maybe Sam and Livonia and you and mama and ever'body's got their places fixed for 'em, but not me. (Act I, p.32)*

Robert's words imply how African-Americans are intentionally placed, which somehow has a connection to labor and power relation, given that not only reserving the manual labors for black which cause them to be marginalized from useful social life and leave them being trapped, receiving injustice, and unable to exercise their ability in a recognized way.

In Cora's children's case, unlike the rest of the majority of African-Americans, they are given the privilege to go to school by Norwood. Despite so, behind the privilege they receive, there are some rules they must comply with.

*SALLIE: (Half-frightened) I just wanted to tell you goodbye, Colonel Norwood, and thank you for letting me go back to school another year, and for letting me work here in the house all summer where mama was. (NORWOOD says nothing. The girl continues in a strained voice as if making a speech) You mighty nice to us colored folks certainly, and mama says you the best white man in Georgia. (Still NORWOOD says nothing. The girl continues) You been mighty nice to your—I mean to us colored children, letting my sister and me go off to school. The principal says I'm doing pretty well and next year I can go to Normal and learn to be a teacher. (Raising her eyes) You reckon I can, Colonel Tom? NORWOOD: Stand up straight and let me see how you look. (Backing away) Hum-m-m! Getting kinder grown, ain't you? Do they teach you in that colored school to have good manners, and not to be afraid of work, and to respect white folks? SALLIE: Yes, sir, I been taking up cooking and sewing, too. (Act 1, p.22)*

The above passage suggests that Sallie follows the respecting white people rule. Hence, she doesn't try to aggravate the colonel, given that he is already angry before meeting her, and agrees with what he said. Aside from

the rule itself, her speech is somehow showing that she is degrading herself because she belongs to the minority group. Additionally, she had learned She adds "taking up cooking and sewing" in her lines to show her inferiority. According to Schneider and Schneider (2007), both sewing and cooking are skilled slave work. Admitting her inferiority by revealing her slave skills presumably conveys that she is respecting Norwood due to her status. Thus, she is granted to study. However, this rule appears to be a degrading treatment.

However, because she must comply with the rule too, he can rob her freedom and rights through career placement to make her segregated in social life. Sallie naturally complies with the rule solely for her chance to study not to slip away. The dialogues below indicate how dependence could lead one's freedom and rights to be robbed.

*SALLIE: ...But I want to live down here with mama. I want to teach school in that there empty school house by the Cross Roads what hasn't had no teacher for five years. (SAM has been standing with the door cracked, overhearing the conversation. He enters with whiskey and soda on a tray. He places it on the table, right. NORWOOD sits down, leaving the girl standing, as SAM pours out a drink for him)*

*NORWOOD: Don't get that into your head, now. There's been no teacher there for years—and there won't be any teacher there, either. Cotton teaches these pickininnies enough around here. Some of 'em's too smart as it is. The only reason I did have a teacher there was to get you young ones o' Cora's educated. I gave you-all a chance and I hope you appreciate it. (Act 1, p.23)*

Even though Sallie is given the privilege to study, the colonel doesn't allow her to choose her career. With the career placement, she is also expected not to utilize her skills recognizably. Despite the given discrimination, Sallie

just complies with what her father says and doesn't upset him more so that she could continue studying rather than stay in the oppressive state.

On the other hand, in Robert's case of marginalization, he doesn't want to comply with respecting white rules. As the result, the welfare he is supposed to receive is taken away by not allowing him to go to school anymore.

*NORWOOD: ...Schools for darkies! Huh! If you take that boy of yours [Robert] for an example, they do 'em more harm than good. He's learned nothing in 'em but impudence, and he'll stay here on this place and work for me awhile before he gets back to any more schools. (NORWOOD starts across the room) (Act I, p.20)*

To Norwood, school teaches Robert "nothing in 'em but impudence" which causes the boy not to respect Norwood anymore. To Robert, he is just teaching the black people "to think like men" (Act I, p.32), due to his experience of equality in Atlanta. Thus, he is expelled from contributing to useful social life to spread equality which is his inability to return to school. Robert's placement in the field serves as punishment due to (in Colonel's words) his "impudence", thus not respecting him anymore. Working in the field leaves Robert in a state of boredom, lack of dignity, and uselessness.

Another case of marginalization involves the prioritization of white Americans in social services, such as public facilities like roads, shops, or post offices. The prioritization intends to segregate the white and black Americans in the public, which fundamentally is meant to degrade them.

*HIGGINS: Well, he's sure got mighty aggravating ways for a buck his color to have. Drives down the main street and don't stop for nobody, white or black. Comes in my store and if he [Robert] ain't waited on as quick as the white folks are, he walks out and tells the clerk his money's good as a white man's any day. (Act I, p.26).*



In the excerpt, Robert considers this prioritization unfair. His complaints suggest that he had waited at the same time as the white people in the store, yet they were prioritized in lines. Possibly, he wants the clerk to treat him fairly and not discriminate against him because of his ancestry that he belongs to. Even though Robert's complaint might have an important point, society considered it rude that Higgins complains about his behavior. No one naturally cares about his complaint since his freedom as a black person is restricted and taken away.

A similar case is also reflected when Robert is in the post office. However, the case isn't just about the prioritization of white people, but the inability to voice their issues about the goods they receive due to their restricted rights and freedom.

*ROBERT: The tubes was smashed when I got 'em, and I had already made out my money-order, and so the woman in the Post Office wouldn't give the three dollars back to me. All I did was explain to her that we could send the tubes back—but she got hot because there were two or three white folks waiting behind me to get stamps, I guess. So she yells at me to move on and not give her any of my “educated nigger talk”. So I said, I'm going to finish about these tubes before I move on—and then she screamed and called the mailclerk working in the back, and told him to throw me out. (Boasting) He didn't do it by himself, though. Had to call all the white loafers out in the square to get me through that door.*

*CORA: (Fearfully) Lawd have mercy!*

*ROBERT: Guess if I hadn't-a had the Ford there then, they'd've beat me half-to-death, but when I saw how many crackers there was, I jumped in the car and beat it on away. (Act I, p.33-34)*

The occurrence suggests that Bert's rights and freedom to voice his complaint about the refund are denied for he had got the service and delivery item. "Educated nigger talk" might hint that he tries to use his background as an educated individual to bravely enough confront white people. An educated

person might connote the fact that he regards himself to have a higher standard compared to normal black people in Georgia. Regardless, Robert is still viewed as a merely black person who receives the same treatment as black people normally. In addition, according to Higgins's description of the event during his talk to Norwood, he said, "—rule against it." (Act I, p..25) which indicates a black person's suspended right to get a refund for the broken delivery item. In this case, again, because Robert doesn't comply with the rule of the service provider, he receives punitive treatment in which he was expelled from the service.

The data above mostly show the power relation of white and black people, in which white hegemony has the power. Even though the oppression is mitigated through welfare provision, they must comply with certain rules to gain it from the service provider, for example respecting white people or treating them as important. However, at the same time, some rules imply traces of discrimination e.g., the inability on choosing their career or segregation and prioritization in the queue. It happens because their rights are taken, thus being unable to have equal rights to white people. In Robert's case, his denial of the rules causes him to receive punishment in which he has to work on the plantation. Consequently, this causes their rights and freedom to be deprived and their ability to be usefully exercised.

### **3. Powerlessness**

According to Young (1990), powerless people lack dominance or power, privilege, status, and recognition. This state is created through the

constructed division between nonprofessionals and professionals from labor division, in which nonprofessionals suffer powerlessness. Privilege and recognition exist in racism and sexism in which race people and women tend to be downgraded (thus being powerless) before their respectability and professionalism are revealed.

In *Mulatto's* case, given that black people are in their subordinate and inferior position, they are in the powerless category. Meanwhile, with the white ruler is in the professional category, they have the privilege in which they can access power over the black citizen and exert it to make them more powerful and superior, e.g., threatening or intimidating them. Thus, black people have reason to fear their power. As the result, they obey the white people who essentially dominate the society and don't refuse them.

One of the examples of powerlessness is remarked at the beginning of the play when Sallie converses with the Colonel before departing to school. It shows that, with or without order, the power of the superior still lingers due to having the authority. As the result, they are still unable to resist or refuse the power of the superior. In this case, Sallie still feels powerless whether any white superior commands her or not since they have the aspect of being more powerful than the inferior her. The following excerpt gives such an example;

*NORWOOD: ... (Straightening up) You know I tried to do something for those brothers of yours, too, but William's stupid as an ox—good for work, though—and that Robert's just an impudent, hard-headed yellow young fool. I'm gonna break his damn neck for him if he don't watch out. Or else put Talbot on him.*

*SALLIE: (Suddenly frightened) Please, sir, don't put the overseer on Bert, Colonel Tom. He was the smartest boy at school, Bert was. On the football*

*team too. Please, sir, Colonel Tom. Let brother work here in the house, or somewhere else where Talbot can't hit him. He ain't used. . . .*

*NORWOOD: (Rising) Telling me what to do, heh? (Staring at her sternly) I'll use the back of my hand across your face if you don't hush. (He takes another drink. The noise of a Ford is heard outside) Bert now, I reckon. He's to take you to the railroad line, and while you're riding with him, you better put some sense into his head. And tell him I want to see him as soon as he gets back here.*

*SALLIE: Yes, sir, I'll tell him. (Act I, p.23)*

“Straightening up” and “Staring at her sternly” in the Neben text denote his commanding gesture or his power which corresponds to his threats. Without seeing Talbot’s power, Talbot is connotated to be able to whip any field worker which makes him more powerful than black laborers on the plantation which she knows. Thus, it causes her to fear Robert's safety. Although, Sallie's plea to her father is denied since he has the power to both threaten and order her what to do. Showing his power through his gestures and warnings in Neben's text shows authority and power over her to remind her how powerless she is. As the result, she backs up after his glare and complies with his words when he later orders her to remind Robert of his place rather than dissuade him more. In this case, Sallie feels powerless to Norwood’s and the connotated Talbot’s authority.

Previously, in Marginalization, the intentional placement of African-Americans that Robert mentioned was also intended to maintain labor division and power relations. However, it also causes the black people on the plantation to feel powerless and bound to submit to the commanding or dominant people because of being placed in a lower position than them, especially, due to being labor or servant. As the result, white people can

preserve their authority over black people. The condition of the authority of white society is implied through William's words.

*WILLIAM: A nigger's just got to know his place in de South, that's all, ain't he, ma?*

*CORA: Yes, son. That's all, I reckon.*

*WILLIAM: And ma brother's one damn fool nigger. Don't seems like he knows nothin'. He's gonna ruin us all round here. Makin' it bad for everybody. (Act I, p.31)*

The words "know his place" suggest their intentional placement which results in their powerless position in the white-dominated society. They essentially submit to the dominant people and respect them since respectability exists in the workplace and even in public. In addition, "Makin' it bad for everybody" signifies that Robert might cause trouble for everyone on the plantation for they are already powerless. While the fact Robert doesn't want to be left powerless like black people normally and want to gain respectability is understandable, the said disobedience only causes white authority to exert their power through threat thus making black people more powerless and white hegemony more powerful, i.e., during the escapee scene in Act II. Meanwhile, black people keep a low profile. Consequently, the African-Americans realize their powerless position because respectability towards white people exists outside of the workplace, thus staying in their powerless position to avoid conflict against white hegemony.

Additionally, due to their place as servants whose degree is lower than the dominant white and their lack of autonomy, they just consent to their superior's order. For example, Sam is both black and a servant, thus lacking

respectability. As a result, he is expected to accede to the command of his white superior, which is shown in the following excerpt.

*UNDERTAKER: ...Ain't nothin' but niggers left out here now.*

*SAM: (Very frightened) Yes, sah! Yes, sah! You's right, sah! Yes, sah! Nothin' but us niggers, sah!*

*UNDERTAKER: The Colonel didn't have no relatives far as you know, did he, Sam?*

*SAM: No, sah. Ain't had none. No, sah! You's right. No, sah!*

*UNDERTAKER: Well, you got everything o' his locked up around here, ain't you? Too bad there ain't no white folks about to look after the Colonel's stuff, but every white man that's able to walk's out with the posse. They'll have that young nigger swingin' before ten.*

*SAM: (Trembling) Yes, sah, yes, sah! I 'spects so. Yes, sah! (Act II, Scene 2, p. 43-44)*

The Neben text already perceives how Sam feared the white people because respectability exists through racism and professionalism. So, aside from the dreadful situation in which the runaway Robert just murdered Norwood, Sam's position as a black servant causes him vulnerable to his superior's order. Even though Sam works for Norwood, he is regarded as lower-ranking by other white people due to his profession. That also goes with the other African-American characters. In consequence, he also just agrees and complies with whatever the Undertaker said for his safety. However, his fear arises again after Cora refuses to give the liquor because she dares to oppose them.

Later, Sam goes panics and afterward decides to run away, which is followed by the house cook Livonia, the fieldworker William, and all of the field hands. They are all aware of their position as manual labor and inferior race status that makes them have nonprofessional status, compared to the superior white who have professionalism, power, and privilege. Hence, they fear and flee from them during the second act of the second scene. Given these

points, they are aware of their unprofessionalism as subordinates and their lack of authority that they couldn't refuse the order of their superiors for the superiors have power over them.

Based on the data above, African-Americans in the play are systematically made powerless because of their lower position in the labor system, thus affecting their lives outside of the workplace. Initially, the fact black people must know their places isn't just to create power relations through division of labor, but also to create power differences outside of the workplace. Because respectability toward white people exists in the public, black people still end up powerless and have a lower position. Not to mention, their place as a subordinate and their lack of autonomy causes them to submit to their superior orders, even it means for their goods to avoid their superior's power. As the result, they have no choice but to obey them and couldn't resist their orders. As in the theory, their powerlessness is beyond the workplace due to their connotated unrespectability culture, that might be related to the dominant meaning in society which will be continued in the Cultural Imperialism section.

#### **4. Cultural Imperialism**

The previous sections explain how the labor system affects the power and privileges of the dominant society. However, based on Young's theory (1990), this type of oppression doesn't involve the power relation of labor since it is concerning an embedded dominant meaning in everyday life e.g.,

stereotype and being *Othered* by the dominant group because they universalize their culture and determines them as the norm.

The *Mulatto* play strongly signifies holding Black people in Georgia to be perceived inferior and indicated as Other by the white dominant society. Compared to the power relation, cultural imperialism is enacted in daily life and possibly maintained to cause the dominant society to have higher status than the black people.

Hence, due to their inferiority view, African-Americans are expected to respect the members of the ruling group because white society implements superiority over them and sets it as the norm.

*NORWOOD: ...Do they teach you in that colored school to have good manners, and not to be afraid of work, and to respect white folks?*  
*SALLIE: Yes, sir, I been taking up cooking and sewing, too. (Act 1, p.22)*

Norwood's words already explicitly demonstrate the idea that African-Americans must obey white people. "Not to be afraid of work" may link to the ideology that their main job as manual laborers or white people's subordinates which Sallie affirms that she did with cooking and sewing which is skilled slave work (Schneider &, Schneider, 2007). Not only showing subordination in power relations, but she also agrees with the "respecting white folks" social etiquette due to her race which causes him to sound powerful and superior.

Another example of the inferiority of African-Americans is that they are not supposed to talk back to white people. Such concepts may be derived



from the fact that arguing with someone whose position is superior is useless in the perspective of the inferiors and improper, as in the following excerpt:

*ROBERT: ... 'Bout a dozen colored guys standing around, too, and not one of 'em would help me—the dumb jiggaboos! They been telling me ever since I been here, (Imitating darky talk) “You can't argue wid whut folks, man. You better stay out o' this Junction. You must ain't got no sense, nigger! You's a fool” . . . . Maybe I am a fool, ma—but I didn't want to come back here nohow. (Act I, p.34)*

The scene occurs after Robert was thrown out of the post office due to voicing his complaint about the broken tube which led to his arguments with other clerks. They don't defend Robert's right to complain about the paid broken item because they probably assume that there is no point to "argue wid whut folks". Their criticism of Robert's attitude to talk back to white people is stemmed from the established inferiority value against them. They even criticize Robert's actions because his attitude doesn't follow the attitude of black people in society. In addition, in the perspective of a white person regarding the incident, Higgins comments it as Robert's impudence during his talk with Norwood that he supposes that Bert "needs a damn good beating—talking back to a white woman" (Act I, p. 25). In other words, black people who are talking back to white people are considered to act disrespectful towards the superior group.

Another type of white superiority is in Norwood's refusal of paternity. The denial is prevalent because the children themselves are illegitimate children from the exploitation of enslaved black women, who carry black blood. Even if they have traces of features from their white parent, e.g., Sallie

has light skin and Robert has his father's eyes, they are still regarded as their black side. However, the refusal causes conflict between him and Robert.

*ROBERT: (Still standing) What do you mean, talk right.*

*NORWOOD: I mean talk like a nigger should to a white man.*

*ROBERT: Oh! But I'm not a nigger, Mr. Norwood, I'm your son.*

*NORWOOD: (Testily) You're Cora's boy. (Act II, Scene 1, p.39)*

The dialogues suggest that Norwood regards Robert as his black blood rather than his white or mixed-bloods, considering how he addresses him as "nigger" which is an insulting calling for black people. His refusal is something common in society. Given that in the one-drop rule, African-American ancestry needs to follow their black one (Hollinger, 2005). In other words, mulattoes like Robert are trapped in his black blood and receive an inferior status. This refusal symbolizes the denial of equality to portray the superiority of white people towards children with black blood since they are racially in the lower class. Robert's wish for his father's acknowledgment may have stemmed from his wish to be treated equally as a white child, rather than some black person. Accordingly, the refusal of white parents works in the means to implement the belief that they are more powerful than the mixed offspring.

Moreover, the implemented powerful image of white superiority which leaves the African-Americans to be inferior and belittled causes the inferior must fear them, which is a common norm for them, especially if they want to avoid trouble from them. The normality of black people's fear is shown in the excerpt below.

*CORA: I's scared to death for de boy, Willie. I don't know what to do. De Colonel say he won't send him off to Atlanta no mo'. Say he's mo' sassy and impudent now than any nigger he ever seed. Bert never has been like you was, and de girls, quiet and sensible like you knowed you had to be. (She sits down) De Colonel say he's gonna make Bert stay here now until the Draft Board call him, and make him work on this plantation like de rest of his niggers. He's gonna show him what color he is. Like that time when he beat him for callin' him 'papa'. He say he's gwine to teach him his place and make de boy know where he belongs. Seems like me nor you can't show him. Colonel Tom has to take him in hand, or these white folks'll kill him around here and then—Oh, my God! (Act I, p..30-31)*

As mentioned in the previous points, talking back to white people is considered rude and hence poses a threat to the dominant society. Because Robert isn't "quite and sensible" as the rest of Cora's children, his placement working in the field serves as a punishment to force this dominant norm onto him in the belief that the punishment might make him realize his inferior position. Additionally, the beatings on Robert in the past also were carried out for this reason. Given that Cora fears that Robert's disobedience would lead him to his death, they are led to believe that resistance would risk their safety.

Some previous cases that are stated in the play that involve punishment for the black person's impudence to the white superiority norm are the death of a colored boy for "hugged a white girl" (Act II, Scene 2, p.46) and the lynching due to "race trouble" that highly suggests rebellion during Higgins and Norwood's conversation in Act I, page 25. As a mother, Cora doesn't want such an incident to occur to her son so she worries about his behavior in the white-dominated climate. To put it briefly, black inferiority in this sense is enacted through punishment as the common norm to remind them of their inferior position so that they fear white people.

Furthermore, while the dialogue above signifies Cora and her children are still accepting the view of the dominant culture of being inferior, Robert doesn't take it the way they do since he isn't "quite and sensible" as the rest of Cora's children, which indicates that Robert experiences double consciousness. Theoretically, double consciousness is experienced by the individual who lives in two different cultures which are dominant and subordinate. Such individuals can see themselves from the perspective of dominant, in which they are stereotyped and belittled, and of subjective, in which they gain positive subjectivity.

*ROBERT: And I'm gonna act like my white half, not my black half. Get me, Kid?*

*WILLIAM: Well, you ain't gonna act like it long here in de middle o' Georgy. And you ain't gonna act like it when de Colonel's around, either.*

*ROBERT: Oh, no? My stay down here'll be short and sweet, boy, short and sweet. The old man won't send me away to school no more—so you think I'm gonna stay and work in the fields? Like fun! I might stay here awhile and teach some o' you darkies to think like men, maybe—till it gets too much for the old Colonel—but no more bowing down to white folks for me.*

*(Act I, p..32)*

Robert's words in the two excerpts indicate his wish not to be devaluated since he doesn't want his identity to be taken negatively or degradingly. Hence, throughout the play, he wishes for his father's acknowledgment, as an equal human being. His action of skipping work on the plantation is a sign of rebellion against white superiority. Additionally, acting like his white blood signifies the character of white people. Cora even comments that Robert's attitude is similar to Norwood's in which he is "Goodlooking, and kind, and headstrong, and strange, and stubborn, and proud" (Act II, Scene 2, p.49), which are all positive and not degrading

attitude of himself. In addition, he also wants the black people to share similar positivity so that they aren't downgraded, thus possibly leading to equality. Then, Robert experiences double consciousness because he is objectified in the dominant culture as inferior while gaining a sense of positivity in the subordinate culture.

Another point of his double consciousness is visible before he speaks to Norwood, in which he adopts the characteristics of both his black and white self.

*(...He looks at the library door. It opens. NORWOOD enters. He is bent and pale. He looks across the room and sees the boy. Suddenly he straightens up. The old commanding look comes into his face. He strides directly across the room toward his son. The boy, half afraid, half defiant, yet sure of himself, rises. Now that ROBERT is standing, the white man turns, goes back to a chair near the table, right, and seats himself. He takes out a cigar, cuts off the end and lights it, and in a voice of mixed condescension and contempt, he speaks to his son. ROBERT remains standing near the chair.)*  
(Act II, Scene 1, p.38)

In the Neben text above, Robert is showing both his identity through the culture of dominant and subjective. The youth being afraid indicates the typical reaction of a black person who fears a ruling white person while being defiant signifies his resistance towards the white community which is a positive subjectivity for an oppressed person to end the tyranny. Indeed, his contradicting reactions show his identity as both black and white offspring, as well as his experience in both dominant and subordinate cultures. However, he manages to resist his dominant reaction through his defiant and sure attitude. Hence, his contrasting expressions reveal his double consciousness.

Given these points, the dominant society enacts a concept in which they are superior to the African-Americans. First, black people must not talk back to white people and respect them. Then, paternity denial of white parents to mulattoes represents how the children are inferior compared to them. Also, fearing the superior isn't a unique belief for the minorities as they are more powerful and can decide a punishment if the minorities defy the norm. On the other hand, Robert faces double consciousness due to perceiving himself in the different cultures which are the dominant and subordinate cultures. At the same time, this white superiority value explains their powerlessness towards them, as priorly explained in *Powerlessness* that they must "know his place in de South" (Act I, p..31). Therefore, since Cultural Imperialism is implanted in daily life, it may have strengthened other faces of oppression such as *Powerlessness* and *Violence*.

## **5. Violence**

Young (1990) considered this kind of injustice as a social phenomenon due to the systemic nature and the fact being a social practice that people from certain social groups are aware of and afraid that they would experience violation over and over due to being a member of that group. In this sense, a certain group is being targeted for physical or psychological harm, e.g., harassment, raping, hitting, and killing. The irrationality of violence can be unconscious which is connected to the dominant meaning of Cultural Imperialism, as it is based on the violator's hatred or fears toward group members.

The violence in *Mulatto* is unjust yet irrationally only directed at them, given that the play mostly represents black people as the victims of the violence whether it is physical, psychological, or sexual harm. Such harms are enacted as if they are social practices and the norm that black people would undergo.

Firstly, sexual violence that is experienced by black women appears to be prevalent in the society of *Mulatto*. Some cases of sexual violence are mentioned in the narrative or even experienced by the characters of the play. Since it occurs in many occurrences, the assault is considered violence due to its existence as a social practice that everyone realizes. The victims are bound to be violated, given the inferior status of black people and women. Thus, having both identities risk themselves getting assaulted by the superior white man. The major incident of sexual assault in the play is experienced by Cora.

*CORA: [...] (She goes to the window, returns, sits down, and begins to speak as if remembering a far-off dream)...Colonel Norwood. I'm just fifteen years old. Thirty years ago, you put your hands on me to feel my breasts, and you say, "you're a pretty little piece of flesh, ain't you? Black and sweet, ain't you?" And I lift up ma face, and you pull me to you, and we laid down under the trees that night, and I wonder if your wife'll know when you go back up the road into the big house. And I wonder if my mama'll know it, when I go back to our cabin. [...] Then I cried and cried and told ma mother about it, but she didn't take it hard like I thought she'd take it. She said fine white mens like de young Colonel always took good care o' their colored womens. She said it was better than marryin' some black field hand and workin' all your life in de cotton and cane. Better even than havin' a job like ma had, takin' care o' de white chilluns. [...] I knowed you wanted me. I was full with child by you then—William, it was— our first boy. And ma mammy said, go up there and keep de house for Colonel Tom. Sweep de floors and make de beds, and by and by, you won't have to sweep no floors and make no beds. And what ma mammy said was right. It all come true. Sam and Rufus and 'Vonia and Lucy did de waitin' on you, and me, and de washin' and de cleanin' and de cookin'. And all I did was a little sewin' now and then, and a little preservin' in de summer, and a little makin' of pies and sweet cakes and things you liked to eat on Christmas. And de years went by. And I was always ready for you when you come to me in de night. (Act II, Scene 2, p. 48)*

Based on the flashbacks through her monologue, young Cora didn't fight back because she realizes her inferior status. Thus, she was quite distressed by the event that she cried and wished her mother to understand her situation because her virginity is forcibly taken away. The fact she is still recalling it suggests that she is still very distressed of it that the memories are still etched in her mind until the present day of the play. However, back then, her mother instead suggested her to work in the Big House for the welfare and security of her and her children despite still being subordinate in status to Norwood. Her suggestion may have been based on the experience of the raped women who had achieved security from white men.

This experience itself suggests that sexual violence towards black women is a social practice and known by everyone. Moreover, the house's cook Livonia who also had been assaulted by Norwood refers to the assault as "practice o' sleepin' with white men" (Act II, Scene 2, p.46). Aside from Cora and Livonia, Norwood's friend Higgins also had pleased himself with several black women in his twenties and Norwood's father had a black woman which indicates how exploiting black women is common in that society. Consequently, the play depicts that sexual violence is experienced by many black women and is realized by the community in that era.

At the same time, physical violence from beatings to the point of murder is prominent in that society. Such example of murder is the mixed-raced boy who is punished for hugging a white girl (Act II, Scene 2, p.46).



Additionally, the lynching of black people that was prominent in 1930s Georgia is stated several times in the play. Some of the examples are the blacks who are lynched are due to jailbreaking, doing "race trouble" (Act I, p. 25-26), and murdering a white man, in this case, Robert though he escapes from it through suicide as the finale. However, while beatings from white people might not end up killing the person, the occurrence is still unsettling. For example, such physical violence is experienced by Robert when he was young.

*CORA: ... (Musing sadly in a low voice) Time Bert was 'bout seven, warn't it? Just a little bigger 'n yo' Billy.*

*WILLIAM: Yes.*

*CORA: Went runnin' up to Colonel Tom out in de horse stables when de Colonel was showin' off his horses—I 'members so well—to fine white company from in town. Lawd, that boy's always been foolish! He went runnin' up and grabbed a-holt de Colonel and yelled right in front o' de white folks' faces, "O, papa, Cora say de dinner's ready, papa!" Ain't never called him papa before, and I don't know where he got it from. And Colonel Tom knocked him right backwards under de horse's feet.*

*WILLIAM: And when de company were gone, he beat that boy unmerciful.*

*CORA: I thought sho he were gonna kill ma chile that day. And he were mad at me, too, for months. Said I was teachin' you chilluns who they pappy were. Up till then Bert been his favorite little colored chile round here. (Act I, p. 29)*

Because Robert was still young, he presumably didn't understand the norm of the superiority of white and inferiority of black before receiving the punishment. Cora also points out that the Colonel did a "beatin' in his heart," (Act II, Scene 1, p.49), signifying that her son's terrible experience is still etched in his heart. The horrifying experience causes the victim to have father-son conflict throughout the play and attempts to gain acknowledgment. One of them is by publicly referring to himself as a Norwood rather than Lewis.

Aside from the violence that involves physical damage, the black characters in *Mulatto* receive treatment that is simply degrading and shaming them through harassment and intimidation (Young, 1990). WHO (2002) takes these less severe cases of violence as psychological mistreatment. Being the ruler of the plantation that has many subordinates working under him, Norwood could exercise such treatment towards them. Cora and Sallie (at a different timing) attempt to defend and plead not to punish Robert when Norwood affirms his attempt to punish and threaten him in front of them. However, he responds as follows.

*CORA: Yes, sir, Colonel Tom. (Hesitating) But he's [Robert] just young, sir. And he was mighty broke up when you said last week he couldn't go back to de school. (COLONEL NORWOOD turns and looks at Cora commandingly. Understanding, SHE murmurs:) Yes, sir. (Act I, p. 20)*

*SALLIE: (Suddenly frightened) Please, sir, don't put the overseer on Bert, Colonel Tom. He was the smartest boy at school, Bert was. On the football team too. Please, sir, Colonel Tom. Let brother work here in the house, or somewhere else where Talbot can't hit him. He ain't used. . . .*  
*NORWOOD: (Rising) Telling me what to do, heh? (Staring at her sternly) I'll use the back of my hand across your face if you don't hush. (Act I, p. 23)*

Norwood's gestures in the two different excerpts, such as his commanding and stern look, work as intimidation and a reminder not to talk back to him. This gesture also is meant to degrade them as both Cora and Sallie belong to a minority group. In Sallie's case, additional threats are meant to intimidate her, thus causing her to fear him. Nevertheless, this kind of mistreatment is a psychological trick to remind them of their degrading nature and silence them.

Another type of harassment that African-Americans experienced in the play is calling them “nigger”, “darkie” (Act I, p.20), or “pickaninny” (Act II,

Scene 1, p.40). Based on the definition in dictionaries, both nigger and darkie are very offensive words to describe a black person, while pickaninny also has a similar definition but is directed to black children (Cambridge Dictionary; Oxford Learners Dictionaries, n.d.). The mockery isn't only referred to by white people such as Higgins, Norwood, or Undertaker, but also the black people themselves, e.g., William refers to Robert as "one damn fool nigger" (Act I, p.31). Nonetheless, aside from violence, the harassment also functions as an implementation of the inferiority of black people on daily basis as in Cultural Imperialism. Such violence is probably considered a less severe case because it still damages their self-esteem.

Furthermore, the African-Americans subconsciously know that they are prone to be violated for the behavior that is considered wrongdoing by the whites. The beating incident, as pointed by the above passage, is the reason why Cora worries about Bert's well-being throughout the play. Not just Bert, the blacks are also worried of they become subject to violence even though they are not involved in any of the rebellion that Robert does, as in Cora's words below when he refers to himself as a *Norwood*.

*CORA: (Utterly serious) I believes you goin' crazy, Bert. I believes you wants to get us all killed or run away or something awful like that. (Act I, p..32).*

Cora's words in the dialogues above signify that Robert's craziness isn't going to lead to his death but to others as well. Given how black people are aware of the violence that is directed at them as social practice, Cora attempts

to convince Robert to act like his black blood before seeing Norwood out of fear of what might happen to him if he doesn't. Additionally, she probably doesn't want to risk the safety of other African-Americans. Hence, when her fear comes true after Robert choked Norwood to death, she has a breakdown throughout the second act of the second scene because she knows that Robert might end up lynched.

Thus, Cora's words that they might receive violence from the white party because of Robert's action are proven true, considering that the Undertaker threatens them as below.

*UNDERTAKER: ... (To CORA and SAM) Don't you-all go to bed until you see the bonfire. You niggers are getting besides yourselves around Polk County. We'll burn a few more of you if you don't be careful. (Act II, Scene 2, p.45)*

Even though during the scene only Cora and Sam are present, another house servant Livonia and the oldest son William, as well as the field hands are running away from the white mob and avoiding being caught and provoked. Their action is rooted in their knowledge of random attacks that might be directed at them even though they are not related to the murder case. After all, they want to prioritize their safety above others. Thus, their knowledge and fear of harm symbolize that violence is a social phenomenon. At the same time, the violence towards other uninvolved African-Americans shows the irrationality of systemic violence.

Based on the data above, violence is about physical and psychological harm, as well as the knowledge of certain social groups that

they are prone to receive it. Hence, it has systemic nature and is being social practice. The play shows sexual assault toward black women, physical harm that involves killing and beating, and less severe type of violence which involves intimidation and harassment toward black people. Their knowledge of violence as a social practice is indicated in Cora's words which later occur. Hence, they flee from white people to avoid random attacks for an incident that doesn't involve them.

### **B. The Cause of the Oppression**

The following discussion will expose how the play reveals the cause of oppression in 1930s Georgia of the South. Compared to the first answer of this research, the researcher will explicate the reason for these Five Faces of Oppression to occur in the society that is portrayed in the play until they are in the state of oppression.

According to the theory, oppression occurs when one's development is institutionally restricted. In other words, it has "systematic institutional processes" that restrain some individuals from gaining and utilizing skills as well as the ability to communicate and express their perspectives to the people who listen. In other words, these actions are "immobilizing and diminishing a group" due to the restriction. Additionally, it is executed by the institution in daily life. Hence, Young referred to the term Structural Oppression (Young, 1990).

Given how the unjust phenomena are barely resolved as it is still occurring by the end of the play, it demonstrates that these oppressions are having structural

nature and are performed institutionally since eliminating the leader couldn't remove it (ibid). Hence, the mob still punished Robert even though he had murdered the plantation boss Norwood. As previously mentioned, slavery still transpires seven decades after the end of the Civil War (Maulood & Barzani, 2019). Providing the cause of the oppression is unquestioned culture, e.g., practice or convention, the oppression in the play was sourced from the unjust experience from the slavery era that can still be maintained. Thus, the oppression that the black people in the play suffered is structural.

The cause of structural oppression is the unquestioned rooted practice, convention, and symbols in the assumptions based on the institutional regulation and the collective outcome for following the rules. It mostly results from subconscious beliefs and reactions in everyday life, i.e., stereotype in interaction and structural attributes (ibid). In other words, these five faces of oppression somehow exist due to the society rather than just because of the ruler.

The play reveals the structural attribute of subordinate and superior through the white characters Norwood and Higgins, especially their conversation which suggests that they wanted the whites to still dominate the society, as shown in the excerpt below.

*HIGGINS: ...A darkie's got to keep in his place down here. Ruinous to other niggers hearing that talk, too. All this war propaganda on the radio about freedom and democracy— why the niggers think it's meant for them! And that Eleanor Roosevelt, she ought to be muzzled! She's driving our niggers crazy— your boy included! Crazy! Ain't been no race trouble in our county for three years—since the Deekin's lynching—but I'm telling you, Norwood, you better see that that boy goes away from here. I'm speaking on the quiet, but I can see ahead. And what happened this noon about them radio tubes wasn't none too good.*

*NORWOOD: A black ape! I—I. . . . (Beside himself with rage)*

*HIGGINS: You been too good to your darkies, Norwood. That's what's the matter with you. And then the whole county suffers with a lot of impudent black bucks who take lessons from your crowd. Folks been kicking about that, too. Guess you know it. Maybe that's the reason you didn't get that nomination for committeeman a few years back.*

*NORWOOD: Maybe 'tis, Higgins. (Rising and pacing the room) God damn niggers! (Furiously) Everything turns on niggers, niggers, niggers! No wonder Yankees call this the Black Belt! (He pours a large drink of whiskey) (Act.I, p.26)*

"Keep in his place" suggests the rule that black people must comply with as well as their lower position in the society that works as prevention and immobilization to their freedom. Being subordinate indicates that they are prone to oppression, such as slavery or fathering mulatto children. Such practices are stemmed from the one in the antebellum era and prevail post-Civil War throughout the play. While these unethical actions might be intentionally existed and perpetuated because the white people still desire to hold their supremacy, the oppression somehow can go on because the public followed the rules. As the result, the blacks were even oppressed. From the white people method, they possibly use the hierarchy of superior and subordinate to implement the power relation and dominant meaning due to having the higher ranking.

Additionally, the hierarchical view also is indicated in Higgins and Norwood's aversion towards propaganda which they believe to be directed at the African-Americans ' liberty since they fear it to affect their hegemony. Justice for the blacks seemingly is slowly brought up due to the Amendment though slavery couldn't be removed directly as it needed processes. Norwood and Higgins's case as an example shows unwillingness towards it. As the result, they are afraid that the current processes would overthrow white supremacy. Additionally, as Elam and Elam (2009) explained, the "belt" in Norwood's line refers to the black people

that "hold up the pants of white men", so Robert's attempt to pull up his pants means claiming his manhood instead of enabling someone's and can "dress down his father" (p.96). This vulnerability of white dominancy expresses the oppression that Norwood is oppressed and letting himself to (ibid). Hence, according to Higgins, his loss in the nomination is because he is being "too good to your darkies". Given Robert's attempt to stand up against the whites during the radio tube incident, they worry that Robert would influence the rest of the African-Americans on the plantation.

Thus, Norwood decides to do something about Robert, e.g., threatening him in the first scene of the second act before his supremacy as plantation owner as well as white's hegemony had gone worse. Furthermore, the radio tube incident, in which Robert has his radio broken, possibly symbolizes the suspension of freedom as the propaganda on the radio means to promote emancipation. Overall, the fear of the collapse of white hegemony in the setting of the play is presumably the motive to maintain the social system of white hegemony.

Furthermore, in the perspective of African-Americans, the fact that black must be in "his place" isn't only expressed by Higgins but the black William during his conversation with Cora, suggesting the agreement on following the rule whether they like it or not.

*WILLIAM: A nigger's just got to know his place in de South, that's all, ain't he, ma?*

*CORA: Yes, son. That's all, I reckon.*

*WILLIAM: And ma brother's one damn fool nigger. Don't seems like he knows nothin'. He's gonna ruin us all round here. Makin' it bad for everybody.*



*CORA: Oh, Lawd, have mercy! (Beginning to cry) I don't know what to do. De way he's acting to these white folks can't go on. Way he's acting to de Colonel can't last. (Act I, p.31)*

Cora also acts in accordance with the practice in the belief that it was for Robert's safety. Letting it remain is possibly the cause it had become a regulation. In other words, they are aware of the regulation because it was an unquestionably rooted practice in their setting. Thus, this regulation causes the hierarchy to prevail. Alternatively, violence is the factor for black people to follow the practice. Because they are aware of the random assault, Cora often reminds Robert to follow the rule as in acting like his black blood so she can keep him from potential violence. However, complying with the convention of *being in their places* doesn't only end up being regulation, but also restricting and immobilizing them. Hence, they keep oppressed. Basically, they follow the convention and regulation of being in their places which results in restriction of black people, thus strengthening white hegemony.

In other words, even though the hierarchical structure may be responsible for the oppression to persist, the society's action in following it also causes the oppression to be a regulation. In the play, the white hegemony may have perpetuated the structure or system, e.g., the rule for blacks to be in their places to limit their movement, for they are against blacks' freedom. On the other hand, African-Americans in the play, through William and Cora's conversation, appears to follow the rule which keeps them oppressed. Consequently, the oppression that is represented in the play indicates how the action of the people in it could impact society, such as white hegemony.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As the closing of the research, this chapter consists of two points which are the conclusion of the findings and discussion of the research questions, and suggestions for the readers for further research with a similar topic or drama.

#### A. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the researcher discovers that the African-Americans in Hughes's *Mulatto* experience five types of oppression from Iris Marion Young's framework – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Additionally, these oppressions can be performed institutional because society causes them to happen, especially in a white-dominant society. For that reason, structural oppression manages to be maintained.

Firstly, the black people in *Mulatto* are suffering these five oppressions, namely, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Exploitation occurs in the form of super-exploitation in which black people are placed to do manual labor. Then, marginalization is enacted through service or welfare providers by complying with certain rules which deprive their rights, freedom, and ability to be usefully exercised. For instance, Sallie and Robert must comply with the respecting white people rule if they want to go to school though Robert doesn't comply which results in his freedom being robbed by his placement on the plantation, Sallie couldn't choose her career,

discrimination, and white prioritization in public service is meant to undermine their right to obtain the service at the same time as the white people, and Robert's right to voice his complaint about the broken COD item is denied solely due to his race.

Subsequently, because their condition of being subordinate in the labor system creates power differences outside of the workplace and leads them to be powerless, African-Americans in Georgia are aware of their placement and must obey the superior's orders. Aside from the labor system, African-Americans being in a lower position also might have been caused by the implemented dominant meaning in the society which is Cultural Imperialism. In this case, the white people are implemented to be superior to black people, i.e., respecting white people, not arguing with them, parental rejection. At the same time, Robert experiences a double consciousness because he is suffering the view of cultural domination while gaining a positive subjective view of himself through his white blood that causes him not to degrade himself.

Lastly, violence against black people consists of sexual violence towards black women, physical violence that involves lynching black people and beatings, and psychological which contains harassment by name-calling and intimidation. Additionally, the black people realize that they can be the subject of irrational violence if Robert keeps bringing trouble to white people. For that reason, Cora reminded Robert to act like his black toward Norwood. Overall, in the setting of the play, African-Americans experience these five faces of oppression, even Cora

and her children who receive privilege and protection under Norwood are still experiencing these oppressions like the other black people.

Secondly, the researcher discovers that these five faces of oppression are still enacted due to society. Initially, the white people might have established the structural hierarchy of subordinate and superior by keeping them in their places to immobilize them. Moreover, it persists post-Civil War era because they don't want the propaganda for black liberation to harm their hegemony. Eventually, the action of black people in following the rules reinforce this dominancy. Cora and William may have referred to violence if they, especially Robert, are against the hierarchy. However, it results in their situation remaining oppressed. Therefore, both black and white people's influence in society impacts the prevalence of oppression in the play's setting through the established rules.

## **B. Suggestion**

Considering the limitation of the research, this research only focuses on the oppression of black people in *Mulatto* play. Further research is encouraged for the researchers who attempt to apply Iris Marion Young's oppression framework and to study Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* with different topics that can be discussed more than this and other studies priorly. This research indeed has many flaws in explicating or interpretation. Therefore, for future researchers, the researcher expects more accurate and detailed interpretations in the following research. Meanwhile, for this research, the researcher accepts criticism and suggestion to conduct a better analysis.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE



**Rediani Aisyah Irwanda** was born in Bekasi on October 15th, 1999. She graduated from 72 Senior High School Jakarta by 2017. Her interest in English grew during Junior High School when she attended English course in LIA. Thus, she continued her interest by enrolling Department of English Literature in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Her dedication into studies led her to learn that English literature can promote the awareness of social justice in society which drives her in the composition of this thesis. She also gains translation skills which she applies on her contribution on an English translation of psychological research.