ANALYSIS OF RACISM IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE* MOVIE DIRECTED BY STEVE MCQUEEN

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Abstract

The research aims to analyze racism in the *12 Years a Slave Movie* Directed by Steve McQueen. This research choose Structuralism theory to help finding the data such as character, setting and theme that contain racism in movie scenes. The research method used descriptive qualitative. The focus of this research is describing the racism attitudes are experienced in *12 Years a Slave* Movie to conduct this research. The step to obtain the data is collecting source of the data from *12 Years a Slave Movie* taken from the internet. After that, the writers watch, listen and taking note of some racial parts of the story in the film and will related it with the relevancies data from other sources to support my topic of research (such as books, the script of the movie, internet, etc).As a result of this research, it found 39 data about racism found in *12 Years a Slave* consist of 24 data from characters, such as white and black characters like Freeman, the Burch, black folks, (slave), slave dealer, and Epps family. The researcher found 7 data from setting, such as

the prison, slave trader room, ship, farm, and the Epps House. The researcher found 8 data from themes such as religion, sexual assault, identity, racism and slavery, survival and freedom.

Keywords: Racism, Structuralism, Slavery, Movie, Steve McQueen

Introduction

Racism is a concept that excludes a group of people based on their race or ethnicity (Toer, 1998, p. 50). If this understanding is correctly interpreted, it may lead to differences in how people view others based on a variety of factors, such as skin color, nationality, faith, and race.

Racism is still an issue in the United States (VOA Indonesia, 2005). Black people are seen as inferior and marginalized by them. The passage of time has not spared America from the problem of racism. Throughout the history of the United States, black people have always been the primary targets of violence perpetrated by their country or the majority of white people living there. Even though it was once led by a black president, it did not free America from racism and the action difference between black and white races because America has a long history of slavery that is still rooted in their minds, and black people are still treated as slaves by them. This started in 1861-1865, when slavery against black people, especially African-Americans, was practiced and legalized in the United States (Thompson, 2009, p. 190). Slavery to African-Americans was officially abolished after the formal abolition of slavery in America in 1865, but the difference still exists today. People of African-American descent are also stereotyped racially.

Based on KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia) racial discrimination is characterized as the belief held by certain racial groups that their race is superior to that of other racial groups, also known as racism. 3 Racism is a worldwide phenomenon formed by historical, social, political, and economic influences. Politicians often exploit racial problems in order to gain support.

This film depicts the life of an independent New York nigger who is abducted in Washington, DC and forced to work as a slave in Louisiana for *12 years*. He also defined the extent of cotton and sugar plantations in Louisiana, as well as slave market operation in Washington, DC and New Orleans. *12 Years a Slave* is a moving film that exposes the brutality of the slavery system, which did in fact exist. The audience would undoubtedly be moved by the portrayal of slaves' lives as insignificant in the eyes of their masters and those in positions of power.

It is interesting to analyze because racism is sometimes found in the real life. In another side, *12 Years a Slave*movie helps the people who watch this movie to understand that racism is something real, something that must be stop on the name of human right. In addition, racism become a part of

social conflict that usually happened in the human life and it is have influence to human interaction, human social life. In this research, I would like to find out and discuss the racism in *12 Years a Slave*in social aspect by using sociology literary approach, it is difference with the other research such Irawan' research, his research designed by problem statement "how big racism in the *12 Years a Slave*Movie", it means that he want to measure the level of racism. Based on these explanation, I would like to conduct a research with the title "Analysis of Racism in *12 Years a Slave*Movie Directed by Steve McQueen".

Previous studies can be related. The first one, Dewi Rahmawaty Abd.Latif Lusiana Dumbi (2019) Muhammadiyah University of Gorontalo entitled A (Racism in *Django Unchained* by Quentin Tarantino) using Socio-psychological approach. The analysis used only three types of racism from five categories in *Django Unchained*, which are Blatant Racism, Cover Condition around environment. The method is qualitative method.

Second, from ArdianWijaya (2016) the Student of the State University of Diponegoro entitled A (Representas iResistensi Rasisme dalam *Film 12 Years a Slave*. The main objective of his research is to describe the resistance of Afro – American as the minority group in *12 Years a Slave* movie to the racism from white people that is represented by sign both visual and linguistic in the movie. This research is a part of descriptive qualitative that is using Semiotic approach.

Methodology

In carrying out this study, a descriptive qualitative approach was used. Some researchers believe and advocate that qualitative description is a viable and acceptable label for qualitative research design.

A qualitative method related with the research itself. Siswantoro (2005, p. 55) states that a method can be defined as a procedure or the steps that systematically doing by a researcher in order to answer the pro

The writers analyzed the data source in this study from the scene/dialogue from *12 Years a Slave Movie*. After that, the writers watch, listen and taking note of some racial parts of the story in the film and will related it with the relevancies data from other sources to support my topic of research (such as books, the script of the movie, internet, etc).As a result of this research, it found 39 data about racism found in *12 Years a Slave* consist of 24 data from characters, such as white and black characters like Freeman, the Burch, black folks, (slave), slave dealer, and Epps family. The researcher found 7 data from setting, such as the prison, slave trader room, ship, farm, and the Epps House. The researcher found 8 data from themes such as religion, sexual assault, identity, racism and slavery, survival and freedom.

Findings

This research found 39 data about racism found in *12 Years a Slave* consist of 24 data from characters, such as white and black characters like Freeman, the Burch, black folks, (slave), slave dealer, and Epps family. The researcher found 7 data from setting, such as the prison, slave trader room, ship, farm, and the Epps House. The researcher found 8 data from themes such as religion, sexual assault, identity, racism and slavery, survival and freedom.

Bellow is the example;

A. Characters

1. Burch

Prejucide(Feeling of Superiority)

Burch: *"Resolve this. Produce your papers. You're no free man. And you ain't from Saratoga. You're from Georgia. You ain't a freeman. You're nothing but a Georgia runaway. You're just a runaway nigger from Georgia. You're a slave! You're a Georgia slave! Are you a slave"?*

(00:13:58,338 --> 00:14:47,561)

Then Solomon Northup was subjected to physical abuse by his defenders, who beat him regularly and forced him to confess that he was from Georgia. He was subjected to physical and psychological violence for the first time.

Relating to the idea of Blummer (1958) who proposed four feelings that always appear in racial prejudice of the dominant group, i.e. the feeling of superiority. The feeling of superiority is the feeling that there is a self-assured that dominant racial group is superior and better than the subordinate group.

2. Clemens Ray

Prejudice (Prejudice In Education)

Clemens: *"If you want to survive, do and say as little as possible. Tell no one who you really are and tell no one you can read and write. Unless you want to be a dead nigger".*

(00:21:40,758 --> 00:21:50,193)

Clemens: *"Three can't go against the whole crew. The rest here are niggers. Born and bred slaves. Niggers ain't got no stomach for a fight. Not a damn one".*

(00:22:22,633 --> 00:22:33,277)

This is because if slaves could read and write, it would be impossible for white people to deceive slaves, putting them in danger. Solomon Northup had firsthand experience with this problem, and he was forced to conceal his ability to stay healthy.

According to Simpson &Yinger 1985: 337 from Prejudice in Education the quality of blacks' education is lower than whites' in past. In 1870, less than 10 percent of southern Blacks from 5 to 20 were enrolled in school

3. **Theophilus.**

Prejucide (Prejucide in Economic Life)

Theophilus: *"Ah, yes. A thousand for Platt. This is a nigger of considerable talent, I assure you. 700 for Eliza.My fairest price".*

(00:29:55,669 --> 00:30:06,393)

Racial prejudice also prevented African American Workers from obtaining the same quality of work preparation and from securing satisfying employment.

According to (Lomotey, 2010: 130).African Americans often occupied jobs with low status, low financial reward, little chance for upward mobility, and jobs that no one else would perform.

4. **John Tibeats**

Prejudice (Prejudice in Education)

Tibeats: *Are you an engineer, or a nigger?*

(00:36:37,737 --> 00:36:40,490)

Whatever black people did, they were always wrong in the perspective of White people. They didn't regard them as human beings, and they didn't trust all they said. Because they were black and no longer needed in social life, black people were typically attributed to unequal treatment, marginalization, and powerless.

According to Shelby, 2003: 186 white people did not want to socialize with blacks people because such beliefs that blacks are inherently of low intelligence and on the one hand, the beliefs about black's laziness, aggressiveness, immature and unreliability of black people.

5. **Mr. Epps**

Prejudice (Prejudice Feeling of Superiority)

Mr. Epps: ***"I'll cut your black throat"!***

(01:10:35,815 --> 01:10:37,567)

Mr. Epps: *"It's the Lord's day. Ain't nothing Christian in us carrying on like this. I concede to you. In the name of valor help your master to his feet. I'm gonna kill you"!*

(01:11:33,372 --> 01:12:00,691)

Solomon knew that Epps would simply create his way to hassle Patsey which might cause her to induce another harsh treatment from Mrs. Epps. The physical attacks done by Epps was he pushed Solomon onerous enough to own him bit the bottom and threatening him by shoving a knife to his throat. There was no injury came out of this, however Epps' behavior was still enclosed as physical attack since he inflicted murder arrange to Solomon

6. **Mrs. Epps**

Prejucide(Feeling of Superiority)

Mrs. Epps:*"You will sell the niggers"*

(01:00:33,755 --> 01:00:36,258)

Mrs. Epps, who was driven by her jealousy at the dance party at the Epps' house, quickly threw an empty bottle of wine right at Patsey's forehead. Then she told her husband to sell Patsey by using the insulting term "Niggers." Mrs. Epps had evidently practiced physical attacks on Patsey as a result of her jealously. Patsey suffered a physical injury as a result of her violent attacks, as the bottle wine cut her forehead.

B. The Settings

1. The Prison

Prejudice (Prejucide In social Structure)

Burch : *"You're not any free man".*

Solomon :*"I promise you upon my liberation. I will have satisfaction for this wrong".*

Burch : "*Resolve this"*

Burch :*"Produce your papers. You're no free man. And you ain't from Saratoga. You're from Georgia. You ain't a freeman. You're nothing but a Georgia runaway. You're just a runaway nigger from Georgia. You're a slave! You're a Georgia slave! Are you a slave"?*

(00:13:24,012 --> 00:14:11,517)

The liberty that was owned by Solomon Northup was not trusted by Burch. Solomon even got physical abuse from the Burch for being dispute. This occurrence was the beginning of Solomon Northup's journey as slave.

According to Marger, 2009: 50, In most multiethnic societies, ethnic groups are arranged in a hierarchy in which the dominant group receives privileges because of greater political, economic, and cultural power to enforce its power and sustain its privileges, the dominant ethnic group employs certain tools such as by doing actions against minority ethnic groups, including avoidance, denial, threat, or physical attack which is called discrimination.

2. Slave Trader Room (Theophilus House)

Eliza: *"You will not take them from me"!*

Theophilus: *"God damn you! Get her out of here, Cape"!*

Elliza: *"Please! No! No"!*

Theophilus: *"Get her out of here, god damn it!Platt, get your fiddle. Play, play, play something. I will give you something to cry about, you goddamned witch! Get her out of here, Cape! Out, now"!*

(00:31:36,019 --> 00:31:52,415)

Theophilus, who is annoyed by his slaves. He can't control his anger, so he yells goddamn you, goddamn it, and goddamned at her. These are considered offensive words. They should obviously not be said in an informal setting or in a profane manner. In He has a fiery personality. He has no sympathy for their slaves. He just focuses how to raise the price of the slaves.

3. Farm

Epps: *"A good day's labor would average 200 pounds".*

Armsby: *"Yes, sir".*

Epps: *"I'm sure in time, you'll develop as a picker. But it takes effort, boy. Put some damn effort into it".*

Armsby: *"Yes, sir".*

Epps: *"Take them out, get to whipping".*

(01:29:10,345 --> 01:29:30,415)

This dialogue in this scene showed when it came time to weigh the cotton, Solomon only picked around a hundred and sixty pounds, while Armsby (a white man) only picked around sixty-four pounds. Obviously, if they followed the rules, they would both be beaten for failure to reach the minimal average. Epps, on the other hand, treated Armsby differently. He just advised (rather

than chastised) Armsby to work more in the future in order to meet the minimal average of cotton collected.

Epps' actions were in direct contradiction to Solomon's when he ordered Treach to have Solomon and another black worker lashed owing to their incapabilities. Segregation in the workplace was described as Epps' racial behavior toward his black and white employees. He refused to treat his employees equally, black and white. He was much nicer to Armsby than he was to Solomon and other black workers. Even if they all had the same status as Epps' workers (Armsby and black workers). This segregation occurred as a result of Epps' prejudiced attitude toward those who were not of his race.

4. Epps House

Prejudice (Prejudice Feeling of Superiority)

Mrs. Epps: *"Sell her"*

Epps: *"What's all this"?*

Mrs. Epps: *"You will sell the negress.*

Epps: *"Sell little Pats? She pick with more vigor than any other nigger. Choose another to go"*

Mrs. Epps: *"No other. Sell her"*

Epps: *"I will not"*

Mrs. Epps: *"You will remove that black bitch from this property...or I'll take myself back to Cheneyville."*

(01:00:31,294 --> 01:00:54,614)

This scene happens in Mr. Epps'main house in the night where all slaves gathered to dance. Mr. Epps forces them to dance and twirl on the floor. Mistress Epps, who was controlled by her jealousy during the dance party at Epps' house, suddenly threw an empty bottle of wine right at Patsey's forehead. She then told her husband to sell Patsey by calling her a "Black bitch," which was insulting. Mistress Epps had definitely practiced physical attacks on Patsey as a result of her jealously. Patsey suffered a physical injury as a result of her violent attacks, as the bottle wine cut her forehead.

According to Pearson, et.al. 2007: 148, the prejudice toward blacks is higher in the legal process when blacks commit a violent crime against whites. Blacks could easily sentenced a death penalty. Traditionally, blacks and whites have not been treated equally under the law especially in the United States.

C. Theme

1. Religion

Prejucide (Prejucide in Social Structure)

Mr. Epps: *"I am deeply sadness to hear about your misfortune. Your price don't reflect your concern. Listen up. You're Judge Turner's for the season. More, if need be, until my crops return. Y'all bring no disrespect to me. Don't bring no biblical plagues to him, you hear? Or I'll take it out on your skin. Get out".*

(01:22:35,617 --> 01:23:00,521)

Meanwhile when during a difficult period for Mr. Epps' plantation. Mr. Epps are blame his slaves for this damnation.Salomon had tried many resistances in an attempt to get him free, Firstly he was almost giving up but finally he realized only Lord could change everything.

According toLomotey, 2010: 98, this mixing of the races would result in the mongrelization of white race . Whites could not accept the mongrelization of race because they believe that blacks are inferior.

2. Sexual Assault

Prejucide (Prejucide in Social Structure)

Mr. Epps: *"Strike her, Platt, strike her! You will strike her until her flesh is rent and meat and blood flow equal or I will kill every nigger in my sight. You understand me? Strike her! Strike her! Until I say no more. I ain't said nothing! Give me the whip! Ge up"!*

(01:13:29,980 --> 01:15:25,371)

As in the scene Patsey was forced to succumb to Epp's sexual and physical assaults as a female slave. She belonged to him not only as a tool of picking cotton, but also for sexual pleasure. This inspires the jealousy that leads to the violence Epps whips her until she is unconscious.

According to (Lehman, 2009: 52)In the deepest recesses of the minds of white Americans, Negroes are associated with lowly and debased objects or with sexuality and violence. Also, African Americans were considered as a race that have bad behaviors such as laziness, stealing, or sexual transgressions.

3. Identity

Prejucide(Feeling of Superiority)

Burch: *"Resolve this. Produce your papers. You're no free man. And you ain't from Saratoga. You're from Georgia. You ain't a freeman. You're nothing but a Georgia runaway. You're just a runaway nigger from Georgia. You're a slave! You're a Georgia slave! Are you a slave"?*

(00:13:58,338 --> 00:14:47,561)

Northup is no longer able to move around the world as he likes, and is instead forced to conform to what white people demand of him. His identity, at least outwardly, is forced to completely change. Northup, on the other hand, remembers his prior identity, which motivates him to live. He finds value in the violin; he never gives up trying to escape, he is faithful to his wife, he always remembers who he is and what he wants to return to.

4. Racism and Slavery

Prejudice (Prejudice in Economic Life)

Clemens: *"After we arrive, we'll be put to market. And beyond that...Well, I suppose once in a slave state, there's only one outcome".*

(00:18:39,368 --> 00:18:46,935)

Treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work. Exploitation was usually done when a group had the power and the other was not. In the *12 Years a Slave* movie, exploitation was made in order to profit from Black. Slaves, who were black, were sold into the market, and treated them as property.

According to Lehman, 2009: 52). White people's prejudice toward black people in the economic life emerged in the way whites think that blacks are the symbol of laziness, poor, homeless and incapability in running a good job. White people exploited the economy of black people.

Conclussion

This study reveals that the novel also reflects the racial prejudice in its social aspects of social structure in Southern America in the 1950s.In the economic life, racial prejudice in this movie can be found on how white people feel and think that they are superior and better than black peopleregarding their occupation, their skill, and their opportunity in the economic life. In political and legal process, racial prejudice in this movie can be seen on how racismagainst black people is fueled by stereotypes of black people as weak, dumb, and in need of assistance.

According to the results of the characters, settings, and themes analysis, this research found there are types of racism represented in the film. These are: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and abuse.

Racism in *12 Years a Slave* was practiced through the seizure of human rights, the restriction of using one's own or family name, giving exceed hours of work, treating like property and animal, prohibition of reading and writing skill. Racism was given by white people to their colored slave without any reasonable cause. The slaves often accept some racism that is causes by the absence of stratification from their master. Racism was also handed down to slaves by white people who created a large gap between master and slave. White people resided in a luxurious home known as the great house, while their slaves lived in a filthy camp with no property facilities. The dominating group's mentality makes the minority groups, in this case slaves, look weak and obligated to obey their commands. The belief that his group is the best and most powerful, as well as social conditions that have made slaves a second-class citizen and white people more dictatorial, all to the harm of minority groups. Minority groups recognized that there was no way for them to rebel and that they had no choice but to accept their fate.

Suggestions

In the significance of the research and the result of the research, the writers propose some suggestions. The writers expect that this research is useful for the further writer especially Students of English Literature to learn more about how is racist attitudes in the societies. And also can be a reference for the next researcher to to make more depth analysis about racism. Indonesia, in fact, as a multicultural country, we have a lot to learn about how to live harmoniously in diversity, because no matter who they are or what blood types they have, the most important thing is that we are all God's creation.

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