

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE IN “RABBIT-PROOF FENCE” FILM

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Abstrak

This study aims to find the racial issue that occurred in the Rabbit-Proof Fence film, particularly racial prejudice; how racial prejudice influences society, and how the racial prejudice conflict develops. This study applies the sociological criticism approach by Ian Marsh (2000). The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method. In addition, library research and internet sources are used to get some information that supports this study as well. Then, the data gained are presented in the form of a description. The result of this study shows that racial prejudice significantly leads to racial discrimination and violence. Thus, it creates a condition that makes the Aboriginal and half-caste descent suffer, depressed, and powerless because of losing their freedom in every detail of life. This existence of unequal treatment between White and Black people leads to the separation of the half-caste children forcibly from their native parents. The inaccurate assumption and treatment create a racist political system. While the separation of education facilities causes an education imbalance between White and Black people. Consequently, it makes most Black people illiteracy. Furthermore, the capitalist system has put the half-caste and Aboriginal descent into the labor class.

Keywords: Aboriginal Descent; Half-Caste; Racial Discrimination; Racial Prejudice; Sociology



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Introduction

Millions of literary works have been published as long as human life history. Undoubtedly, literary works are for people who want to improve their comprehension of another human life side. Nowadays, movie or film is more interesting and popular. By watching it, people can experience many of the other arts. These arts can be music, painting, and drama. Moreover, in film, people can know how society thinks during any particular era and how social issues influence of a certain society's life in a particular era. Although, the film is not a literature product, however, it has some similar characteristics to literature, particularly drama. As literature, drama is able to reflect the condition of society's life when it was made as well as film.

Society all around the world shows a variety of real physical colors. Birth characteristics such as skin color, the form of hair, the shape of the face, etc. appearing in the eyes cause the definition of "race". According to Giddens (2001, p. 277), "race refers to physical characteristics, such as skin color, treated by members of a community

or society as ethnically significant or as signaling distinct cultural characteristic". It can be said that race is a set of people who live together and has a common feature, particularly physical characteristic. Usually, each race has its own viewpoint characteristic including all of the life aspects because every group consists of a person who has different ideas. Consequently, this variety and plurality tend to encourage of a social problem caused by prejudice and threat to others based on that consideration. According to Adam and Jessica (1996), a social problem is unfavorable and dangerous conditions in a society. For instance, in 1997 a social problem occurs in the form of violence against the Tionghoa ethnic in Indonesia such as in Tangerang, Solo, and Jakarta. For the umpteenth time, in May 1998, the case of violence occurs in a different way. At this time, the violence received by Tionghoa ethnic in Indonesia is not only pillage, assassination, and burning of treasure, but also the rape of Tionghoa women. All of those are done because of native societies' negative prejudice which assumes that this ethnic would harm the Indonesian people.

Based on the oxford dictionary (2008) prejudice is an unfair dislike of somebody or something and it has a harmful effect on somebody or something. Socially, prejudice against a social group is a destroying attitude type because of this prejudice, each individual claims his/her race is the most powerful one. This power will affect every aspect of life in that society, for instance, aspects of economics, politics, education, and health. Ironically, the most powerful race will underestimate another race. In the end, this racial powerful concept leads to racism. Racism itself has caused so many of sadness and anxiety.

For instance, the discrimination towards the Tionghoa ethnic has impacted the lack of their freedom in every aspect of life including their safety of life. There are some prohibitions, such as a prohibition on becoming civil servants for this ethnic. Furthermore, a child of this ethnic descent who passes UMPTN in State Universities will be banned because of their physical characteristic. Moreover, up to now racism issue becomes a polemic of the multi-ethnic country, including Australia. The 2011 racism report explains:

"the report documented that 27.9% of Australians demonstrate racist attitudes towards Indigenous Australians, based on the proportion of Australians who stated that they would be concerned if a relative were to marry an Indigenous person. The report also revealed that 85.6% of Australians agreed that something should be done to minimize or fight racism in Australia".

This report examines the concept of racism and suggests how to minimize its adverse health impacts on Indigenous Australians. Racism believes in superiority based on white skin color justified by the framing of Indigenous Australians as inferior humans. Such politically racial attitudes cause the dispossession of Indigenous Australians from their native homelands. Awofeso (2011, p.3) argues "dispossession from country resulted in denial of land rights, loss of spiritual values, disrupted law, and disconnection from land, community, family and cultural values".

Most of these policies were backed up by legal provisions instituted by Australian state governments. A similar thing is going on in Indonesia, particularly, in the Orde Baru period. President Soeharto has issued some presidential regulations for the Tionghoa people such as the prohibition in school and publishing in the Chinese language. Regarding this case, the segregation program of Indigenous people in Australia in 1931 has shown a portrait of a racist government. Consequently, such racially driven policies create feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, psychological stress, and illness for the

group which becomes the object of such discrimination. Moreover, these racially discriminatory policies and practices are generally accepted as human by other Australians until after the Second World War.

By this time, racism existing in a particular society leads to racial prejudice towards the inferior group. Up to now, racial prejudice still exists and covers society life all around the world. It will give influence the superior group to do racially discriminatory attitude. Therefore, it becomes the writer's reason for discussing this topic. Awofeso (2011, p.2) states:

“Racial discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life”.

In this case, sociological criticism is used because this critic focuses on society and its problem both as an individual and a member of a certain group. Besides that, sociological criticism discusses societal values such as ideology, culture, and customs. The film analyzed is *Rabbit Proof Fence*. It is a true story of three aboriginal girls abducted from their families by Australian authorities in 1931 as part of official government policy. It is because those young girls are classified as half-caste children. Oxford dictionary (2015) defines a half-caste as a person whose parents are from different races. According to this film, white Australians think that black Australians are completely disadvantaged people. Because of this reason, they separate the half-castes forcibly from their native parents in order to abolish their black blood to be more advantageous. To reach this aim, the White people place the black as domestic servants, farm laborers, or company laborers with low pay.

The significance of this study is to expose a portrait of racial practice caused by racial prejudice in making policy. Especially, racial discrimination policy which is addressed to half-case generations. Thus, the result of this study is expected to help the writer to improve the knowledge of racial prejudice in Australia, to understand the differences between other communities who live together in a society, and to create a feeling of sympathy for each other. In addition, the writer is interested in analyzing the “*Rabbit-Proof Fence* film because it provides a social problem that recently this kind of social problem still exists in social life, particularly in multi-ethnic countries. Basically, the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film talks about stolen minority group identity which is called “The Stolen Generation”. This study analyzed the film under the following three research questions:

1. What kinds of racial issues are found in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film?
2. How does racial prejudice influence society in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film?
3. How does the racial prejudice conflict develop in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film?

According to the above research questions, this study has three main objectives. It aims to identify what kinds of racial issues are found in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film, to describe how racial prejudice influences society, and to explain how racial prejudice conflict develops.

Some related studies have discussed the same topic as the current study but they differ in some points. The first study was conducted by Sawitri (2009) from Sebelas Maret University entitled *Semiotic Analysis of Racism Representation in "Crash movie*. The research method used in her study is the qualitative method. This Analysis explains

symbols that are used to interpret racism in Crash's movie. The result of her analysis is that racism occurs because of prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination that lead to racial violence. This film can send various messages or symbols that show more complex racism. By learning from this film, it is found that racism can lead to fatal consequences. This study uses Roland and Barthe's semiotic theory combined with literature.

Another study was conducted by Hambali (2010) from State Islamic University entitled *A Sociological Analysis of "Felon" Movie Through the Characteristics of the Main Character*. The research method used in his study is the qualitative method. He analyzes the relationship between the stories in the film Felon by Roman Waugh, and the social condition of the main character, Wade Porter who has discrimination by his class, so he fights to represent his class. The result is that birth order may affect how a person's character sees life and how people treat him or her. It may also have a lot of influence on the profession they choose, and how they interact with other people.

Indrianti (2013) also conducted a study concerning racism especially cultural identity. The title of her study is *An Analysis of Cultural identity in Harry's character in When Harry Tries to Marry* film. The research method used in her study is the qualitative method. The writer analyzes how an Indian, like Harry, can struggle to keep his cultural identity. She also analyzes how the process of cultural change occurs in Harry's cultural identity. The result found in her analysis is that Harry accepts the new culture partly and mixes two cultures into his life; they are Indian culture and American culture.

By referring to some studies that were conducted by the previous colleges that have a correlation with the writer's study, some similarities are found in this analysis. First, the object analyzed is film. Second, the use of the research method is qualitative. Third, the topic of study is social problems. However, some differences with all mentioned studies above are found in this study. First, the main source of the study is the Rabbit-Proof Fence film. Second, the focuses of others are: symbols that interpret racism; discrimination of social class; and the change of cultural identity. In this chance, the writer focuses on racial prejudice. Third, the film setting of previous studies is in America, while this study is in Australia.

In order to support the author's argument, there are some terms that are used in this study such as sociological criticism, racism, and racial prejudice. According to Adam and Jessica (1996, p. 819), "sociology is the scientific study of society and of the aspects of human life that derive from society". Furthermore, Giddens (2001, p.248) defines "sociology as the study of human social life, groups, and society. In sociology, members of a minority group are disadvantageous...". Based on these explanations, this study describes sociological criticism as the study of human life in a society both individual and member of a group society. In addition, a group that dominates a certain society tends to consider that people who are from a minority group are disadvantageous.

Racism is a global issue and becomes an interesting topic to discuss. Interestingly, it has existed for thousands of years and has been transmitted from generation to generation. Giddens (2001, p.25) defines racism as "commonly thought of behavior or attitudes held by certain individuals or groups". It means that the difference of physical characteristics will determine types of reaction given by the superior group. This tendency limits the minor group in every aspect of life. This bias willingness might influence the policy-making that includes aspects of financial, social practice, health, and institutional structure. Race, racism, and racial discrimination attitude have a relation each other.

Prejudice refers to an attitude that shows beliefs about other group, dislike feeling, and a behavioral predisposition to behave negatively toward the object (Giddens, 2001).

Moreover, Stephen (2011) explains that prejudice may be neither overtly hostile nor objectively irrational, and a person motivated by prejudice may otherwise demonstrate strong personal commitments to egalitarian values and pro diversity social outcomes. Thus, this study views racial prejudice as subjective values proposed by people from particular race toward other group of race. This subjective thought tends to lead to a negative attitude.

Method

The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The primary data source of this study is the dialogues in the script of the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film. The secondary sources consist of some supporting data gained from the internet and libraries. In collecting the data, first the writer read the theories which associated with society. After that, the film was watched for several times while identifying every single of dialogue transcript showing racial issues, particularly racial prejudice. Then, some important notes such as the time in which the racial issues occurred were taken. Finally, some photographs that had a correlation with the event were taken.

The data gained by the writer were analyzed by applying Marsh's (2000) sociological criticism theory. Then explaining the content of the film through descriptive analysis technique was done. At the last step, the writer came to the conclusion of the analysis.

Result

The result of the analysis shows that the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film the existence of racial concept in West Australia society's view. The racial problems influenced by racism occur in this film. This racism occurs in the form of racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racial violence.

The life experience felt by the half-caste children in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film shows the existence of racial prejudices. They can be shown in the following example of dialogues:

Dialogue I

(In Mr. A.O. Neville's room)

Mr. A.O. Neville : "Just because people use Neolithic tools, Inspector, does not mean they have Neolithic mind". (14:47-14:50)

Dialogue II

(In Moore River settlement dining room)

Supervisor : "We'll have no wangka here! You talk English"! (19:25-19:29)

Dialogue III

(In the sewing room)

White nurse : "This is your new home. We don't use that jabber here. You speak English". (20:28-20:23)

The dialogues above show that racial prejudice has happened. These racial prejudices are addressed to Molly and her sisters who are half-caste children. The first dialogue shows that most White people think that the Indigenous descents have a primitive mind. This kind of opinion is based on the tools used by the native Indigenous people and the half-caste kids. The words of "Neolithic tools" and "Neolithic mind" have made it clear for such a view. Besides, the racial prejudice which says that the half-caste kids have a Neolithic mind, the Whites also say that their native language is a distinct

voice. This opinion can be seen in the second and third dialogues which use the terms “wangka” and “jabber” to show such language is indistinct voice. These three examples of dialogues show that the Indigenous’ cultures are considered as primitive by the Whites.

The film also portrayed racial differencing practice which is in the form of the government’s special policy for the half-caste descents. The content of this policy is that the White government authorizes regulating every detail of Aboriginal affairs including taking the half-caste kids forcibly from their biological parents. This authority has made the half-caste children’s parents become powerless. This racist policy can be reflected in the conversation between the Aboriginal chief protector and his secretary below:

Dialogue IV

Secretary : “The next batch. Nothing out of the ordinary. There’s two applications for section 63 exemptions. Police reports are there. William Harris is applying for permission to marry. She’s half-caste also. And Mary Wilson’s applying for permission to visit her child at Moore River. She’s quite agitated. Oh, and Gladys Philips has written for permission to buy some new shoes”.

Mr. A. O. Neville : “Er, now this report from Constable Riggs about three little half-caste girls at the Jigalong fence depot. Molly Gracie, and Daisy. The youngest is of particular concern. She is promised to a full-blood. I’m authorizing their removal. They’re to be taken to Moore River as soon as possible”. **(05:57-06:25)**

Based on the dialogue above, it can be seen that the chief protector of the Aboriginal people regulates every aspect of Aboriginal life. Some authorities that the chief protector has are as follows: he has a right to determine whom Aboriginal or half-caste people may get married with, remove the half-caste children from their native parents forcibly, determine whether or not the parents of the half-castes may see them at Moore river Settlement, and give the other permissions for the half-caste people including the permission for buying a pair of new shoes. This kind of racial discrimination has limited the freedom of Aboriginal and half-caste generations in West Australia particularly in the 1931s period.

Based on this film, the White society’s racial prejudice has made an injustice in education as shown in the following dialogue:

Dialogue V

(At Moore River Settlement church)

(21:39-21:52)

Molly : “What are they doing now?”

Nina : “They checkin’ for the fair ones”.

Molly : “Why?”

Nina : “They gotta take them to Sister Kate’s. They’re more Clever than us. They can go to proper school”.

Dialogue VI

(In A.O. Neville’s meeting room)

(13:29-13:32)

A.O. Neville : “Ladies most of you are familiar with our work here, the training of domestic servants and farm laborers”.

From the conversation above, it can be concluded that school is just for White people and for Black who passes the skin test. Those who have fair skin will be considered clever. Therefore, they will be sent to school. But, those who have dark skin will not get a school education. They just will be educated to be domestic servants and farm laborers for White people. For them, this is the best way of making the black. Of course, such conditions will make the Black people illiteracy and less intelligent than White.

The story in this film also shows that psychological violence occurs in the form of punishment for half-castes. Those who violate the Moore River Settlement regulation will be punished.

Dialogue VII

(In Moore River dining room)

(19:30-19:35)

Supervisor : “Now, eat! EAT! Or I’ll hold your nose and force it down You”!

It is the first morning for Molly and her sisters to have breakfast at Moore River Settlement. They are still innocent completely. They do not know how to behave in such a place. When they are having breakfast, Molly’s sister grumbles in an aboriginal language. It makes the controller angry. The controller hit her table immediately and snaps her by saying that she may not speak an aboriginal language at this settlement. At the same time, Molly’s sister is shocked, startled, and really afraid of him. Seeing such a reaction, the controller hit her table again while lifting the harassment up. Because of this event, she tries to avoid such punishment by continuing to have her breakfast. Molly and her sisters feel depressed by saying the following expression:

Dialogue VIII

(In bedroom)

(28:14-28:42)

Molly : “Bad place. Make me sick. These people. Make me sick”.

From examples of half-caste’ expressions above, it can be seen that psychological violence is experienced by the half-caste children.

Conclusion

The film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, tenaciously, explores the moral nature of human beings, especially human’s struggle against racial prejudice and discrimination. The film is very effective in not only revealing prejudice, but also in examining the nature of discrimination, how it works, and what its consequences are. Even though racial prejudice is just an opinion or attitude against other races but it is quite possible that kind of opinion will lead to the actions known as racial discrimination in Western Australia during the 1931s as reflected in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film.

Based on the result of the analysis, it is found that there are many racial prejudices experienced by the Black race in Western Australia during the 1931s. One example is anti-miscegenation. White people disagree about the miscegenation idea because it will disrupt the purity and superiority of the Whites. Therefore, White people that have interracial marriages will be alienated from their race. Not only racial prejudice, but Black people in Western Australia also have to face racial discrimination and racial violence. In this case, the racist policy made by the White government that separates forcibly the half-caste children and their parents is a kind of racial discrimination that affects racial violence, both physical and psychological.

Another racial discrimination influenced by racial prejudice occurs in the aspect of economics and education. In the economic sector, the existence of some classes in

Western Australia places the Black race into the lowest class in society since they are just considered inferior by the Whites. Consequently, this condition puts them into the working class such as domestic servants and farm laborers. On the other hand, in the education aspect, racial prejudice contributes to White government regulations stating that those who are permitted to attend school education are White people only. Of course, it makes most Black people illiteracy. The conflict based on the racial prejudice that occurs between the White and Black races leads to the Aboriginal and Half-caste descents' freedom. In addition, the conflict experienced by Black people causes feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, psychological stress, and illness.

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