

THE PORTRAYAL OF AFRO-AMERICAN STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM IN *SELMA* FILM

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Abstract: Racism is a belief that some groups are superior and some groups are inferior. One of the literary works that tells about racist is *Selma* film. *Selma* is a film directed by Ava Du Vernay, written by Paul Webb, and was released in 2014. The film is talking about racism issues that happened in America in 1965. The entitled of this research is the portrayal of Afro American struggle against racism in *Selma* film formulate two research questions about kinds of racism and the way Afro-American people struggle against racism in *Selma* film. The purposes of this research is find out about kinds of racism and the way Afro-American people struggle against racism in *Selma* film. In this research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative method and racism theory. Furthermore, the data were generated from the script, dialogues, and the scenes in the film. The results of this research found two kinds of racism: individual racism and institutional racism. The finding also showed ways of struggle against racism, they are: coercion and refusal, domination and escape, subjectification and creation. The struggle of Afro-American was represented by characterization of the characters which showed racism treatment in the Film.

Keywords: racism, *selma*, struggle, afro-american

Abstrak: Rasisme adalah keyakinan bahwa beberapa kelompok lebih unggul dan beberapa kelompok lebih rendah. Salah satu karya sastra yang menceritakan tentang rasis adalah film *Selma*. *Selma* adalah film yang disutradarai oleh Ava Du Vernay, ditulis oleh Paul Webb, dan dirilis pada tahun 2014. Film ini berbicara tentang isu-isu rasisme yang terjadi di Amerika pada tahun 1965. Judul penelitian ini adalah penggambaran perjuangan Afro Amerika melawan rasisme di Amerika Serikat. Film *Selma* merumuskan dua pertanyaan penelitian tentang jenis rasisme dan cara orang Afro-Amerika berjuang melawan rasisme dalam film *Selma*. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui jenis-jenis rasisme dan cara perjuangan masyarakat Afro-Amerika melawan rasisme dalam film *Selma*. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan teori rasisme. Selanjutnya, data dihasilkan dari naskah, dialog, dan adegan dalam film. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan dua macam rasisme yaitu rasisme individu dan rasisme institusional. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan cara-cara perjuangan melawan rasisme, yaitu: pemaksaan dan penolakan, dominasi dan pelarian, subjektivitas dan penciptaan. Perjuangan Afro-Amerika diwakili oleh karakterisasi karakter yang menunjukkan perlakuan rasisme dalam Film.

Kata kunci: racism, *selma*, struggle, afro-american

A. BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of racism has existed since a long time ago, and it is written in history. The term “racism” first came into common usage in the 1930s when a new word was required to describe the theories on which the Nazis based their persecution of the Jews. At that time, racism was not a huge world problem, yet until the climax of racism came from the twentieth century. Racism in the twentieth century led to the passage of the suffrage law (Brown, 91). As happened in the history of the typical racism in America in 1965, which began with the typical struggle of minorities in Southern America to fight for their suffrage as a minority in the USA, this struggle was the one which created the racism case which is still a phenomenon since the beginning of racism in 1930.

According to Ramon, racism is a hierarchy of superiority or inferiority along the line of the human. It usually happens in westernized elites of the Third World, such as African, Asian, or Latin American. It proved that racist practices against the racial groups in the local history (10). Hence, racism itself can be defined as a group of individuals or institution which made racism phenomenon from history. Along with the issue of racism, literary works also write this phenomenon through each of their forms, and one of them is film. One of the films that talks about this racial phenomenon is Selma's film.

Selma film is based on a history of racism that has occurred in America. This film is directed by Ava Du Vernay which was written by Paul Webb and released 2014. Selma film also means a city. It tells of a small town in the west-central Alabama United States of America. Selma city is the second oldest city in the United States of America, and this city is famous because the majority of Black People live there. The "Black" has an identity which means a person who has the darkest skin.

Selma film talks about the work of racism that took place in 1965. Start from Lyndon B Johnson, who was the President of America at that time, in his policy stated that he did not allow Afro-Americans to have the right to vote in an election and make one of the characters in this film Martin Luther King Jr. as an American politician who is Afro-American to propose to the leaders of the country to give equal rights to all Americans, especially for African-Americans, without racism existed in the country. This tragedy made Martin Luther King Jr. and Afro-American citizens angry and took action against the policies of the State. Furthermore, all Afro-American citizens take action to fight and struggle for their rights against the US government. According to Lasker, struggle has desires to attain a purpose against resistance that can develop and regenerate (13). The struggle makes the Afro-American act, and carry out a goal of getting equal rights regardless of race in order to have equal rights to all American citizens.

Therefore, this film is interesting to be investigated because this film portrayed the struggle of Afro-American in Southern America to get equal treatment. Another reason is this film is one of the popular films in America since the history of civil rights for black people leads by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963. It was a huge movement for the Afro-American to get their rights.

Based on the illustration above, the researcher analyzed deeper the portrayal of Afro-American struggle against racism as seen in the film through racism analysis by using struggle and racism theory.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

In this research, the researcher used qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research study is a thing in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (3). In this research, the researcher used qualitative research because wants to focus on a deeper understanding of the words from a script in the film and look for the kinds of racism issues and how Afro-American struggle in the film.

This research used a qualitative descriptive as a method. It is a method characterized by its aims which is descriptive and relates in understanding some aspects of social life, and its methods, which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis (Patton and Cochran 2).

In this case, the researcher described the struggle of the characters in *Selma* film through racism theory. It is also conducted to figure out the struggle of Afro-American against racism represented by the characters in *Selma* film. The interpretation the struggle of the characters and the racism were analyzed from the script. Additionally, the representation of the struggle against racism in *Selma* film is represented through the characterization of the characters.

2. Data and Source of Data

In this research, the researcher used a film entitled *Selma* (2014) the film was written by Paul Webb, directed by Ava Du Verna, and released in 2014. This research analyzed the racism issues and the treatment of Afro-American struggles against racism. Furthermore, the data in this research were taken from a screenshot of the scenes based on the actions that related to the research problems in this study, dialogues or conversations among the characters in the script, and the narrations of *Selma*'s film.

3. Research Instrument

Instrument is an important part of this research, and also the instrument is one of the significant steps in conducting this research. In this research, the instrument is the researcher herself, because in conducting this research, the researcher reads, understands, and collected the data (Arikunto, 126). Furthermore, the data is processed in the form of an explanation to produce information. Finally, the researcher provided conclusions.

4. Data Collection

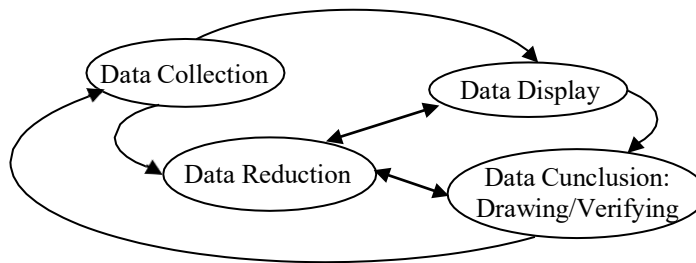
In this research, there are several steps to collecting the data in *Selma* film.

1. The researcher watched the film. The researcher focused on the struggle of racism issues in the film.

2. The researcher did the double reading check; reads the script of *Selma* film as well as reads the English subtitles in the film.
3. The researcher put and written down the screenshot of scenes, dialogues, conversations, and narrations of the characters that showed incidents of racism and the struggle of Afro-American in the film.

5. Data Analysis

After the writer collected the data from the movies as the main data, then the researcher analyzed those data. There are several steps of analyzing the data according to Miles and Huberman such as data reduction, data display and conclusion (429).



*Fig.3.1. component of Data Analysis: Interactive Model
 (Miles & Huberman, 1994:429)*

1. **Data Reduction:** The author notes that although the large amount of the data is to be recollected, the researcher may examine in detail selected cases or negative cases to test the theory. This describes analytic procedures researchers used to determine what the data mean. This procedure involves looking for patterns, links, and relationships. The researcher analyzed the data by writing more specific problems with selecting the data from the conversations, words, explanations, and actions.
2. **Data Display:** Data display is a critical and often underutilized means of analysis. That describes many forms of data display, illustrated with examples of actual data. Here the researcher can describe concrete data contained in the kinds of racism portrayed in *Selma* film and the way of the Afro-American struggles against racism in *Selma* film, which leads to the main goal of the problem by describing the struggle against racism in the film.
3. **Conclusion: drawing/verifying** is the process of concluding after the data had been analyzing. In this last step, after all of the data are valid and relevant in answering the research problems, then the conclusions are drawn.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Finding

a. Kinds of Racism Treatments in *Selma* Film

The kind of racism issues is more directed to the theory by Chaunda L Scott. Further, there are several kinds of racism in the film, such as; individual racism and institutional racism. Then the researcher shows racism treatments from kind racism in the film below;

(Data 1)

- Earnest White Man : **Dr. King. May I introduce myself?**
Dr. King : Yes. Of course (King looks at him and smiles).
Ernest White Man : **(gave his hand, landing a punch to the King's head and kick in the groin to Dr. King).**
Abernathy : This way, Doctor King! **That white boy dare hit you!**
Dr. King : This place is perfect! (min. 00:15:26-00:16:03)

According to the Data 1 that dialogue showed the conversation between Dr. King and a white male in the hotel lobby. He suddenly punched Dr. King without reason this action can be categorized into individual racism as the white male did. Thus, this statement is suitable with Chaunda L. Scott's theory of racism.

(Data 2)

- Klansman #1 : **You know what I hate more than niggers?**
Klansman #2 : **What's that?**
Klansman #1 : **White Niggers.**
White Man : Look, we don't want trouble, okay?
Klansman #1 : No. You came here stirring trouble.
Klansman : **Now you know what being a nigger feels like 'round here', boy!** (min. 01:33:35-01:35:1)

The dialogue above shows conversations between the haters of black people and white men supporters of Afro-American. Based on Chaunda L. Scott's theory, that racism treatment in the scene shows individual racism because of action and dialogue classified as racism appeared within in person.

- Wallace (Governor) : Will Clark listen to you directly?
Lingo : **Now, if you want to get a handle on this? Find a reason to send some of my troopers in there. See what Jim don't understand is this is about dominance. He puts 'em in jail. But King's lawyers get 'em out in**

a day or so. **Now, if you want fear, you need dominance in Selma. Find a reason to send us in there, scare some real sense into those fuckers (Afro-American)!**

The dialogue is in line with Chaunda L. Scott's theory regarding institutional racism because it occurred based on a government institution that the government deliberately planned to create a strategy to weaken Afro American in their resistance to the government.

- Sheriff Clark : **You all deliberately causin' and obstruction! If you don't disperse, you'll be arrested! I promise you!**
- Dr. King : No, Sheriff Clark. We're going in the front and we're waiting right here. Segregation is now illegal in this country, sir.
- Sheriff Clark : **Keep the sidewalk clear! Get over there!** You! Over against the wall!
- Jimmie : **Sheriff**, ain't now here to go. **He's tryin' to sit.** You askin' him to walk through walls. **He can't do that!**
- Sheriff Clark : Well, what we got here? You got problem, boy?
- Sheriff Clark : **Get that nigger woman!**
- Sheriff Clark : **Kill that nigger bitch.**
- Annie Lee Cooper : Get your hands off of me!

That dialogue shows between Afro-American and Sheriff. According to Chaunda L Scott's theory, this kind of racism refers to institutional racism because that was a resistance between institutions toward Afro-American when the Courthouse had been heavily guarded by a government agent they are Sheriff and his members.

b. The Struggle of Afro-American Action in *Selma* Film

According to Peter & Andre, the concepts of struggle are divided into three. First, coercion and refusal are a struggle to carry out orders that are communicated between individuals into a group. In this research, it is represented by all actions commanded by Dr. King as a leader of Afro American. Second, domination and escape, the basic way of this struggle is action by identifying ways with strategies to achieve goals through the action. Like the Afro-American groups who use several strategies to struggle for their rights. The last way is subjectification and creation. This way of struggle is based on identity. This identity focuses on a struggle by having an advantageous position because they can connect several struggles. Therefore, the following data are shown to provide clearer explanations of the struggle concepts.

- Dr King : **Now? Voting in Selma.** one struggle ends just to go

right to the next and the next. If you think of it that way, it is a hard road. But I don't think of it that way. **I think of these efforts as one effort. And that one effort is for our life. As a community. As a nation. For our lives. We can do this. We must do this!** Those that have gone **before us say "no more!"** No more! That means **protest**, that means **march**, that means **disturb the peace**, that means **jail**, that means **risk! We will not wait any longer! Give us the vote!**

Afro-American people : **Give us the vote!**

Dr. King : **We're not asking, we're demanding! Give us the vote!**

The dialogue above shows when Dr. King speech at the pulpit in a church at night to 700 Afro-American people. He commands his people to protest and take the risk against the government so that the Afro-American can vote as it is part of their right. In the conversation above, it can be categorized as an act of *coercion and refusal* struggle, this action is carried out based on of being communicated between individuals into a group.

Bevel : **SNCC want to join or not?**

Dr King : But what we do is to negotiate, demonstrate, and refused. And the big all of that is raising white consciousness. **The only way to stop doing that is we'll be on the front page of the national newspaper every morning and we'll be in the tv news every night, and it requires drama.**

According to that dialogue showed when Dr. King and his group invited the SNCC group to join together therefore they have a strategy to struggle against the government. This struggle can be categorized as *domination and escape* because all of group of Afro-American takes an action of struggle by identifying ways with strategies to achieve goals through the action.

Dr. King : **We will continue to demonstrate until you take action! And if our President won't protect our rights, we will take this fight to court!**

Johnson : **You know I'm trying here. We're getting close to figuring something out on this voting thing, but will not have this!**

Dr. King : **You're the man dismantling your own legacy with each passing day. They'll remember you saying "wait," and "I can't." unless your act, sir!).**

When Dr. King was on the call with President, this is an act of struggle for *subjectification and creation* he represents all Afro-Americans to end acts of racism against them because there have been many victims in every demonstration, Dr. This King has a very influential power over the President's decision to make voting rights policies for the African-American people.

2. Discussion

This part presents the discussion based on the findings of the research. As mentioned before, the researcher presents the racism theory from Miles and Chaunda L. Scott to answer the first research question. In the second research question, the researcher used the concept of struggle by Lasker, Pater & Andre's theory to understand the Afro-American characters in *Selma* film. For the first, it was found the kinds of racism that happened in *Selma* film. They are individual racism and institutional racism. Furthermore, the second researcher found the several ways of Afro-American struggle against racism, such as; *coercion and refusal, domination and escape, and subjectification and creation*. For the first one is *coercion and refusal*, this way was the individuals who order to the group to take an action against racism. The second is *domination and escape*, this way how the group which makes a strategy to struggle against racism. The last one is *subjectification and creation*, this way is if there is someone who has an important position in the act of struggle against racism itself.

The research is concerned about how the portrayed of Afro-American struggle against racism with the kind of racism happened in the film. Elaborating this, it was founds two types of racism are clearly happened in the film, they are; individual racism and institutional racism. In short, individual racism meant the racism which lies within an individual. Individual racism also a person has a sense that comes from within him/herself, like a white person, to intimidate or unjust for the different race towards black people. In this film, the researcher saw the racist actions inflicted by white people towards Afro-American.

In the findings, it is found in the data from the main character of Afro-American, he is a Dr. King and he did resisted individual acts of racism, it can be seen through when Dr. King fought against individual acts of racism that committed by a Klansman or the white man who killed one of the supporters of Afro-American voters. Essentially, Dr. King tells this issue to the President of America so that the President gave a suffrage policy for Afro-American to avoid continued racism, especially for individual racism treatments. Through this way, the researcher can categorized that this struggle into the *subjectification and creation* as a form to struggle of Afro-American against individual racism.

Furthermore, the researcher also found that other kinds of racism, namely institutional racism. In this case, institutional racism is institutions that are racist towards an individual or group towards Afro-American people. The portrayed of Afro-American struggle against racism can be seen through the Afro-American characters. In which the finding showed the characters of Afro-American they are Bevel, Dr. King, SNCC group (civil right movement), and other of Afro-American people. It happened when they are against institutional racism in America. In the

first part of the story, they held a cooperation meeting to make a strategy plans against institutional racism whose carried out by the government towards them, in the results of the meeting were realized when the 525 of Afro-American gathered in the Selma city and carry out to demonstrations against the Troopers. Troopers here can be seen as a part of the government agency or institution of government. In this case, the struggle is included in *domination and escape* by making plans/strategies to fight institutional racism against Afro-Americans. Another moment relates to institutional racism by the Governor that made a speech to all Americans (See in pages 7) in his speech, he said that he would not tolerate a group of Negro agitators trying to regulate disturbances in the states of America. This statement was made all the supporters of the Afro-American suffrage were angry and took actions against racism that happened in institutional racism. Moreover, the finding showed struggle against racism can be seen through the Afro-American characters. When the Dr. King provoked all citizens of American to support Afro-American suffrage and also join to the demonstration for against institutional racism. He asked for supporters to gather in Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama. The struggle of Dr. King is included in *coercion and refusal* because this struggle is carried out through communication between the leader of Afro-American to a group or citizen.

D. CONCLUSION

After the researcher presents findings and discussion on the previous chapter, in this chapter, the researcher can finally draw the conclusion according to the research questions and the purposes on the study. The purposes are to identify the kinds of racism portrayed in *Selma* film using the theory from Chaunda L.Scott and also to analyze the way of the Afro-American struggles against racism in *Selma* Film. The ways struggle of Afro-American includes three ways. All of those ways are against racist treatments from two kinds of racism that they are, individual racism and institutional racism. The first, *coercion and refusal*, which focused on commands communicated between character individual to a group. It is when the Dr. King provoked all Americans which the supporter of Afro-American to join the demonstration against institutional racism to gather in Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama (See in pages 12). Second, *domination and escape* is identifying a strategy to achieve goals through the action when Dr. King, SNCC group (civil right movement), and other of Afro-American people make plans/strategies against institutional racism. The last, *Subjectification and creation*, this way focused on a struggle by advantageous position when Dr. King against the individual racism committed by a Klansman who is a white man by killing one of the supporters of Afro-American voters.

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