

RACISM IN *SUBURBICON* BY GEORGE CLOONEY

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ABSTRACT

In this research I discuss about racism in *Suburbicon* film by George Clooney (2017). The reason I analyze racism are because I realize that racism does not start from the environment, but racism starts with the people themselves and we should know more about racism, including its definition, the history, the impact, the causes of racism and the struggle of black people who experienced racism. The main theory that I used is the extrinsic approach to Literature: Literature and Society. The method that I used is qualitative descriptive. The result found that racism benefits the perpetrators which are superior, but it harms the victims of racism which are the inferior because the victim suffers a loss in the form of mental and physical. The concept of racism is a concept that distinguishes one race from another and considers one race to be superior to other races. Racism can occur because of differences. In this thesis, I conclude that there are three factors that cause racism. The first is because of the stereotypes in society. The second is because of an incident that happened to the Gardner Lodge family. The third is because of a lack of understanding of the meaning of difference. In addition, there are also impacts and consequences of the occurrence of racism in the *Suburbicon* film. The first is inequality. The second is divided into two, namely from the side of the race that benefits and the race that is harmed. On the one hand, racism brings "advantages" to the ruling race but on the other hand racism causes invaluable "losses" both mentally and physically for the harmed race.

Keywords: Racism, Representation, Literature, Society, Film

INTRODUCTION

As human beings, we need something that can entertain ourselves. In our daily lives, there are many interesting things that can make us happy. Watching films, reading a book, listening to the music, or doing sports can make us happy. Watching films is an activity that most people like. Today, people can visit a theater so they can watch the

films. However, people are also able to watch a lot of films from their homes, so that, people no longer need to come to the theater.

The film is one an entertainment because it offers something namely a storyline and message for everyone. By watching film, people will be entertained because in the film there is the storyline and message conveyed. Gerald Mast (1982:285) stated that "film is a modern 'language'- a complex communicative system for making and conveying meaning." Sometimes, films make people think about life lessons. The storyline in the film can be similar as in real life. In other words, the film conveys a message through its content. In this case, the film producer is determining the content and the storyline to be conveyed in his or her film.

The research material in this research is a film but I will analyze the film from a literary point of view. This explanation is very important because I will use this explanation as a foundation. This foundation is the first step to conduct this research.

In this research I discuss about racism in the film *Suburbicon* by George Clooney (2017). The topic of this research is racism as reflected in the film. *Suburbicon* by George Clooney was released on October 27th, 2017 in the United States. The film was written and directed by George Clooney, and co-written by the Coen brothers and Grant Heslov. This film will make us understand the struggle of being Black or other minorities. There are several scripts and scenes that show discrimination and racism between whites and blacks in this film. This film talks and shows us the discrimination and racism that occurred in the 1950s by white people. According to FixFX, a film production company in Glasgow, Scotland, *Suburbicon* film is loosely based on the 1957 incident in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Levittown, Pennsylvania, the United States.

The film tells the story of a black African-American family, the Mayers family. They move to a previously all-white neighborhood, which is *Suburbicon*. They are the first black family to live in the *Suburbicon*. *Suburbicon* was a large and elite housing in the 1950s. The *Suburbicon* is inhabited by white people. The black family, lives as a minority among white people. People live in *Suburbicon* because they want to find peace and tranquility. However, in *Suburbicon* they face racism from the neighborhood. In addition to facing racism, they also face violence. This new neighborhood of *Suburbicon* is also violent to this black family.

The reason I analyze racism is because I realize that racism does not start from the environment, but racism starts with the people themselves. Racism can arise through the way people think about different things such as skin color, race, religion, culture, and so on. Racism can also arise through the way people perceive themselves as a minority or vice versa. And racism also starts from people themselves as their way to judge others. The other reason I analyze racism is that we should know more about racism, including its definition, the history, the impact, the causes of racism and the struggle of black people who experienced racism. Therefore, I want to know what things can cause racism and also what are the consequences of racism. I want to analyze racism in *Suburbicon*. I also want to show the attitudes and actions which cause racism and the impact of racism in this film.

From the focus of the research above, I develop it into three research questions. The first is what factors cause racism in *Suburbicon*? Racism described in the *Suburbicon* can occur because there are factors that support the occurrence of racism. In other words, there are several things that cause racism. The second is how is racism reflected in *Suburbicon*? This research is to focus on how racism is reflected in this film. I want to find out and describe what scenes reflect the racist actions in this *Suburbicon*. The third is what are the effects and consequences of the racist attitudes and actions depicted in *Suburbicon*? Every action taken must have a cause and an effect. Therefore, I want to find out what are the effects and consequences of racist acts that are reflected in this *Suburbicon*, so that, the effects and consequences of the racist attitudes and actions can be analyzed.

I used the theory of the literature and its relation to film by using the Gerald Mast's theory (1982). This is necessary to clarify the analysis in this thesis as well as to form a solid basis or a foundation for my analysis. My research material is the *Suburbicon* film by George Clooney (2017), but I will analyze it from a literary point of view. Therefore, I can say that films can be considered as literary works. It can be said that the film is part of a literary work. Broadly, I can conclude that films have three main similarities to literature, as follows: First, film and literature both have artistic value in them. As I explained above, films are not only based on or resemble real life, but there is creativity and art in film and literature. Second, film and literature both have some purposes. First, film and literature aim to tell the story and conveyed the messages. Second, film and literature aim as an entertainment. In this case film and literature entertains the

audience. Third, film and literature aim to influence the audience. Last, film and literature aim as commercial. The last, film and literature have two main elements in literary works, namely intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. These two elements can be used as a tool to analyze literary works. To analyze the film from a literary point of view can be done in a textual framework. In this case the script in the film is the main data.

The main theory that I used is the extrinsic approach to Literature, i.e.: *Literature and Society*, as a literary theory by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1949). According to Wellek and Warren (1949), the relationship between literature and society is classified as follows: First is the sociology of the author, the author's profession, literary institutions, social background, author status and author's ideology which can be seen from the various activities of the author outside of literary works. The second is the content of the literary work, the purpose, and other things that are implied in the literary work itself and are directly related to social problems. The third is the problems of readers after reading a literary work. In the extrinsic approach, methods are needed to study literature. These methods relate to the environment or other external things. These methods apply from the past until now.

The extrinsic approach is an approach that is based on aspects outside the literary work being studied, by prioritizing the context of the literary work outside the text in question. Abrams in his book *The Mirror and The Lamp* (1953) put forward a theory of his universe towards literature. He said that literary works can be viewed from four points of view, namely: an expressive approach, a mimetic approach, a pragmatic approach and an objective approach. In this section, I only focused on the mimetic approach. According to him, in the process of creating literary works, writers make careful observations of human life in the real life. Then, the author or the litterateur who is interested in and knowledgeable about literature makes a reflection which in the end she or he realizes it in the form of a literary work. That is a view that refers to the universe. It means that this approach relates a relationship between the author's point of view on the environment around her or him, both the social environment and the natural environment which is manifested in the form of imaginative works. So, the reflection of the author is a real event that actually happened. In the mimetic approach, the universe and society's environment are the main focus. Literary works are an expression of what is happening in the universe. It is as the existence of a shadow in

water or a mirror. With another understanding, literature is a clear picture of a society. The picture of the social situation in society is reflected by literature. Literature is an expression of society in a certain time. The social situation in society is certainly different. In this case, place and time play an important role in influencing literature. For example, literary works produced by authors in different places and times will create different literary works.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, a descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the film. I use the content analysis. The data are in words or pictures, not in the form of numbers. Moleong (2001) explained that qualitative research is a research of which the data in forms of written or oral words are descriptively analyzed. Moleong (2001) also added that the qualitative research means to understand phenomenon about what is around the subject research holistically as well as descriptively in the forms of the words and languages, in particular context that is natural and to utilize science methods.

After finding the related parts of the scripts and the scenes of the film, which has the connection to racism as the main topic, I would discuss the factors causing racism in the film. Furthermore, I would discuss the effects and consequences of the racist attitudes and actions depicted in the film. The main data of the study are the *Suburbicon* film by George Clooney. It consists of the scripts and the scenes. I analyzed the extrinsic elements of the film and then how racism is reflected in the film. Therefore, I got much information taken from textbooks, such as literature theory and other sources which are derive from papers, journals, internet and also previous research related to the topic being researched.

I found all data from scripts and scenes on the film related to the topic of racism. It can be done by watching the film. After that, I have chosen which data are factors that cause racism and which data are the effects and consequences of the attitude and action section of racism. The procedures of collecting data are watching the film, reading the script and listing the dialogues which are related. After collecting data, I analyzed all data from scripts and scenes on the film related to the topic of racism. After that, I will answer research questions about the causes and factors supporting the

occurrence of racism, the effects and consequences of the racism attitudes and actions and the representation of racism in the *Suburbicon* film.

DISCUSSION

In this part, the discussion is divided into three main sections, i.e (1) the Racism in *Suburbicon*, (2) the Factors that Cause Racism in *Suburbicon*, and (3) the Effects and the Consequences Racism in *Suburbicon*. The objectives are represented through the description and explanation of data findings.

A. The Racism in Suburbicon

Racism is an important topic. The representation of racism can be drawn in the *Suburbicon* film. From several theories about the notion of racism that I have conveyed, I can interpret racism as an attitude or action that is unconsciously a social aspect and intersects with everyday life where this attitude can favor or even be hostile to community groups, especially because of racial identity. In addition, because racism is related to race in society, the actions and attitudes of racism can divide races in the society. The concept of racism is a concept that distinguishes one race from another and considers one race to be superior to other races. The view that other races are lower is called "inferior", then the attitude and view that their race is higher is called "superior".

POSTMAN: "Hey, fellows."

THE HOUSEKEEPERS: "Sir."

POSTMAN: "Here we go. Got all the utilities and a new subscription to good housekeeping. Is Mrs. Mayers about?"

Mrs. MAYERS: "I'm Mrs. Mayers."

POSTMAN: "Well, all right! Uh, welcome to Suburbicon. Hope you enjoy your stay."

Mrs. MAYERS: "Is that our mail?"

POSTMAN: "Oh... Sorry."

....

POSTMAN: "Have you met your new neighbor?"

(Script 2, 02:20-02:57)

The first racism shown in this film is shown in script 2. In script 2 it is explained that the postman's treatment of Mrs. Mayers obtained when he found out that Mrs. Mayers is a black woman who lives in Suburbicon. It is from the family in scene 3:14 and scene 3:16, where the postman and Mayers' neighbors see Mrs. Mayers was surprised. They seem not to believe in the existence of black people living in their neighborhood. I explained that black people were identified with the lower class and also with slaves. Postman and the neighbors looked amazed and seemed to question how the Suburbicon neighborhood had a black family living around them.

THE WOMAN: "And a fire truck hit and killed a man down on Lafayette street. And three or four others ended up in the hospital. And Rose Lodge! This... None of this ever happened before the Mayers moved here. This is a peaceful town."

THE JOURNALIST: "Have you heard any rumors about the Mayers?"

THE MAN: "Oh, dozens and dozens of rumors. Oh, that he was being paid by the NAACP. That the reds were behind it, that the Jews were behind it, that this group and that group were behind it. There were all kinds of rumors. I guess some of them were being spread deliberately. Some were just the result of hysteria."

THE WOMAN: "I don't feel that they should be oppressed. But I moved here. One of the main reasons was because it was a white community. And that..."

(Script 6, 1:34:21-1:35:12)

In fact, it shows that Suburbicon is a town of great wonder and excitement. Suburbicon was built with the promise of prosperity for all. However, the white people at Suburbicon do not heed this after the arrival of the Mayers family. This is reinforced by script 6, where journalists interviewed several neighbors in Suburbicon after the riots that occurred at the Mayers family's house. The riots are shown in scene 1:12:07 and scene 1:13:32. They consider that the presence of the Mayers family is unlucky in the neighborhood. In fact, to reject the Mayers family, the neighbors whose houses are adjacent to the Mayers family's house build a guardrail which is intended as a form of rejection of the black family in their neighborhood. After a few days of the Mayers family staying at the Suburbicon, the Gardner Lodge family had an incident. The incident began with Rose's death. Until the end of the entire Gardner Lodge family died except for Nick.

THE HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE: "Calm down! Hey, come on, I can't hear you! I can't... One at a time, one at a time! Right? Chuck! Chuck!"

THE MAN: "We don't want them here. Can I ask who thought this'd be all right? Can I ask who thought this'd be all right?"

THE MAN OF THE COMMITTEE: "Well, I think we thought that the community would tolerate them."

THE HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE: "Not we. Him!"

THE MAN: "You?"

THE HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE: "Quiet down! We've spoken with the city planners. And the adjacent homes will be supplied fencing to block the view of the Mayers."

THE MAN: "And who's gonna pay for that?"

THE HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE: "We'll pay for it, Jackson. The Housing Committee."

THE MAN: "Because we ain't gonna pay for it."

THE HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE: "You're not gonna pay for it, god damn it! But there's not much we can do about these folks."

THE MAN: "Oh, we can do something about it. James, read the petition!"

JAMES: "We defy the supporters of Mr. Mayers to say our fears are groundless. We favor racial integration, but only at such time the Negro shows he's ready for it. They don't seek to better themselves. This community has come too far to move backwards. We demand our civil rights to live where we want and with whom we want, and with God's help, we will overcome!"

(Script 3, 03:28-04:50)

Even the early arrival of the Mayers family at Suburbicon was rejected by the residents. It is shown in script 3 where the residents make a petition filed to reject the Mayers family in their neighborhood. In addition, other objections made by white people to the Mayers family are shown in scene 44:30 and scene 51:11, where they sing songs intended to protest the existence of the Mayers family in the Suburbicon neighborhood.

THE STORE MANAGER: "That's \$20."

Mrs. MAYERS: "Well, sir, that wasn't the price on the display."

THE STORE MANAGER: "The price went up."

Mrs. MAYERS: "To \$20?"

THE STORE MANAGER: "I believe that's \$20 also, isn't it, Margaret?"

MARGARET: "Mmm-hmm. It's \$20."

Mrs. Mayers : "May I ask you a question?"

THE STORE MANAGER: "I think you'll find the prices much better elsewhere."

Mrs. Mayers : "I imagine that's true."

THE STORE MANAGER: "Don't worry. We'll put these back! Have Jimmy restock!"

(Script 4, 49:22-50:28)

The form of hatred by Suburbicon residents or white people towards the black Mayers family was addressed when Mrs. Mayers was shopping at the store. This is shown in script 4, where all prices in the store increase to \$20. This is done by the store manager because the store manager aims to prevent Mrs. Mayers from shopping at the store. The store manager thought that the shop was only for white people.

THE WOMAN: "...And we understood that it was going to be all white. We were very happy to buy a home here."

THE MAN: "Do you think a Negro family moving here will affect the community as a whole?"

THE WOMAN: "Definitely."

THE MAN: "In what way?"

THE WOMAN: "We used to live in Washington, Dc, and we saw a very good example of that there. The whole trouble with this integration business is that, in the end, it probably will end up with mixing socially. And you will have... Well, I think their aim is mixed marriages and becoming equal with the whites. But the only way they're gonna do that is by education and by bettering themselves, not by pushing in the way they have here."

(Script 5, 51:07-51:45)

Another form of hatred directed at the Mayers family is described in script 5. Script 5 explains that white people claim that the Suburbicon is only for white people on the assumption that blacks lack education and blacks are not the same as whites. The script also explains that in order to gain equality, black people must improve their education and improve themselves.

The racism reflected in this film shows that racism occurs in the inferior group, namely black people or the Mayers family. Meanwhile, the residents of Suburbicon who are white people or superior consider that the white people group is superior to the black people which are inferior. The superior group tried to use all means to protest the presence of black people in the Suburbicon neighborhood.

B. The Factors that Cause Racism in Suburbicon

Performing acts of racism as the explanation above occur for several reasons. One of them occurs because of the understanding of the community from the past that still likes to stereotype and have bad thoughts about a certain race or group, which is still carried over to this day. This is reinforced in script 5. As is well known, this film is set in the 1950s and set in America. America has a long history of racism dating back to the 16th century in the form of black slavery. But over time the functions of the people they work for change. Many people began to act arbitrarily until finally many had victims because of inhumane attitudes. Due to the increasing number of victims who fell as a result of slavery in America, the American government issued regulations to abolish all kinds of slavery in the country. And it is hoped that this regulation can be implemented and the victims will decrease, but the reality is very different. Because in the 1950s setting black people were considered as slaves by white people, therefore, as shown in script 2 and scene 03:14, the postman was surprised at Mrs. Mayers. Postman thought Mrs. Mayers was a maid in the house.

The first reason someone can commit acts of racism is stereotypes. The stereotype in this film, for example, is the assumption that black people are slaves. Black people are a race or group that lacks education. Black people are a low group of race. In this film, the stereotype in Suburbicon about black people is that they are criminals or evil people. Many people think that everyone in a race or group has the same characteristics, so that a new stereotype will emerge that all black people are bad people. This is not true. In reality bad people cannot be seen by the color of their skin. There are still many black people who are not bad, and not a few white people who are bad.

The second reason people in Suburbicon can commit acts of racism is due to an incident that befell the Gardner family. This is evidenced in script 6, when the neighbors were interviewed by journalists about the incident that happened to the

Gardner Lodge family. They assume that the incident that occurred was caused by bad luck from the arrival of the Mayers family.

The third factor that causes racism is a lack of understanding of the meaning of difference. Suburbicon residents think that the Mayers family is a different group from them, because of differences in skin color. This is evidenced by figure 3:26 who was surprised and did not expect that the Mayers family lived side by side with them. By realizing that everyone is different, then we will not be possible to commit racism. Racism arises because of differences. One of these differences is racial or group differences. A person with his or her own racial or group identity is likely to be hostile to other races or groups. This can be because a race or a group wants to make themselves the best, most superior and excellent. Residents of Suburbicon consider only white people worthy of living in Suburbicon. This is reinforced in script 6 where the woman assumes that white people buy houses in Suburbicon because Suburbicon is claimed as a settlement for white people. They consider other races or groups to be inferior to their own race or group. Even a small difference that occurs between races or groups can cause problems. One of the problems is racism.

C. The Effects and the Consequences Racism in Suburbicon

As a result of racism, society will bear the consequences. Basically, racism has the negative impact on social relations in society. The impact caused by racism can be seen from two sides, namely from the side of the race that benefits and the race that is harmed. On the one hand, racism brings "advantages" to the ruling race but on the other hand racism causes invaluable "losses" both mentally and physically for the ruled race.

The first effect of racism is inequality. In this film, the inequality shown by white people to Mrs. Mayers in script 4, where all the items that Mrs. Mayers raised in price by the store manager. Racism indirectly makes a person unprofessional in carrying out daily activities. In this film, one of the unprofessional actions has been exemplified by the store manager when he faced Mrs. Mayers. Professionalism is one of the benchmarks for a person's quality, and the quality of a person can be seen from the attitude and behavior of the person.

Racism affects various areas of life, is negative and its impact is very detrimental to certain community groups. Racism should not be developed in a heterogeneous world

society, because the goal is to prioritize one party and harm the other. The second impact caused by racism is that victims of racism will experience mental losses, for example, when Mrs. Mayers was evicted subtly while she was shopping at the supermarket. It can be seen in script 4. Maybe she looks fine because she doesn't put up a fight. However, there may be a possibility that she will experience the trauma of going back to shopping at the supermarket. Another example is, when the Mayers' house is damaged by white people or demonstrations, it can cause stress, depression and even feelings of suicide. It can be seen in scene 1:12:07 and scene 1:13:32.

The victims of racism will experience physical harm. An example of physical harm in this film is when the Mayers family's house is damaged by white people as a demonstration. This could be because white people wanted to eliminate the Mayers family. They are trying to destroy the Mayers' house and they even want to enter the Mayers' house. However, the efforts of white people could be thwarted because there were several the police who secured the demonstration, so that only material losses were received by the Mayers family. In this case, victims of racism can be injured due to physical violence that is carried out and can even be killed. In addition, victims of racism also become ungrateful with what identity they bear. Victims of racism perceive their identity as a bad identity. In fact, whatever their identity, what humans should do is respect each other and respect other races or community groups. So that, there will be harmony in a heterogeneous society. Because with the differences that are increasingly diverse, it will lead to a wealth, for example, race, culture, language, religion and so on.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data, I conclude that:

1. Racism is an attitude and action caused by considering one group as the best and looking down on other groups by unfairly treating different groups. The attitude and treatment of racism occurs to minority or inferior groups of society. Perpetrators of racism are superior groups or groups who think their class is better than other groups. Racism makes people classified into several sections. These sections are the superior class and the inferior class.

2. There are factors that cause racism that I have found in the *Suburbicon* film. The first reason someone can commit acts of racism is stereotypes. The stereotype in this film, for example, is the assumption that black people are slaves. The second reason people in *Suburbicon* can commit acts of racism due to an incident that happened to the Gardner Lodge family. The third factor that causes racism is a lack of understanding of the meaning of the difference. *Suburbicon* residents think that the Mayers family is a different group from them, because of differences in skin color.
3. In addition, there are also impacts and consequences of the occurrence of racism that I have found in the *Suburbicon* film. The first effect of racism is inequality. The second impact caused by racism is divided into two, namely the impact for the superior group who gets benefits and the recognition that a group is categorized as a superior group and the impact for the inferior group is the victim of racism will experience mental losses. It can cause stress, depression and even feelings of suicide.

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