

# TRACING RACISM TOWARDS THE BLACKS ON THE HELP (2011): A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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**Submission date:** 30-Apr-2020 01:50PM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1311918823

**File name:** JURNAL\_RACISM\_ok.docx (27.79K)

**Word count:** 3287

**Character count:** 17293

## TRACING RACISM TOWARDS THE BLACKS ON *THE HELP* (2011): A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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**Abstrak:** Masalah social adalah sebuah kondisi sosial yang menyengsarakan masyarakat. Salah satu masalah sosial yang masih terjadi di dunia adalah rasisme. Salah satu film yang berhubungan dengan rasisme adalah film *The Help*. Terdapat dua rumusan masalah dalam penelitian ini. Rumusan masalah tersebut adalah Tipe rasisme apa yang ditemukan dalam film *The Help* dan bagaimana orang kulit hitam melawan rasisme dalam film *The Help*. Selanjutnya untuk menjawab pertanyaan pertama digunakan teori rasisme oleh Ruth Wodak (2001) dan untuk menjawab pertanyaan kedua yaitu cara orang kulit hitam melawan rasisme, peneliti menggunakan teori perlawanan oleh James Scott (1990). Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis. Sebagai tambahan, peneliti juga menggunakan model penelitian kualitatif. Lalu, dalam menganalisa data peneliti mengatur, mengkode, mendeskripsikan, dan menginterpretasi data berdasarkan konteks dan situasi. Untuk data temuan, peneliti menganalisa data kutipan dari naskah. Selanjutnya, peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa tipe rasisme paling dominan adalah rasisme sehari-hari. Namun, untuk perlawanan tipe tertutup dan terbuka, hanya ditemukan tipe tertutup dalam film tersebut.

**Kata Kunci:** Analisis Wacana Kritis, Rasisme sehari-hari, Rasisme Institusi, Film

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**Abstract:** Social problem is a social condition that harms people in a society. One of social problem that still exist in this world is racism. One of the films that deal with racism is *The Help* film. There are two statements of the problem in this present research; (1) what are the types of racism found in *The Help* film, and (2) how do the black people resist racism in *The Help* film. Furthermore, to answer the first research question particularly used racism theory by Ruth Wodak (2001) and to answer the second research question in which the ways of black people resist racism, the researchers conducted resistance theory by James Scott (1990). The researchers employed Critical Discourse Analysis as the approach. In addition, the researchers employed qualitative research design. Then, in analyzing the data the researchers organized, coded, described and interpreted the data based on the context and the situation. In the findings, the researcher analyzed the data in some quotation from the script. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that the most dominant type of racism is everyday racism. However, for the hidden transcript and public transcript types of resistance, it only found the hidden transcript in the film.

**Key Words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Racism, Everyday Racism, Institutional Racism, Film

### INTRODUCTION

Social problem which becomes a part of life is born from an ideal social situation. In a heterogeneous society, it certainly encounters a lot of social problems. One of the social problems which exist among the people is the conception of race.

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A human race defined as a group of people with certain common inherited features that distinguish them from other of people. Obviously, the concept of race is an inevitable fact for geneticists and biologists refer to human beings (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:2). Various races can be a big power for

a country if the people can accept the varieties which exist among them because they have their own resources or skills to increase their life and their country. On the other hand, it also can cause a detrimental social problem if they cannot regard one to another. Racism is one of the worst social problems that still exist up in this world, nowadays. Further, it can be defined as the mistreatment of a group of people on the basis of race, color, and religion.

In addition, talking about racism is often related to the study of discourse in the enactment and reproduction of racial inequality which has slightly emerged in CDA. One of the most important aspects of CDA is that it sees language as a social practice and considers the context of language use to be crucial (Meyer and Wodak, 2001:8). When the language is seen a social practice anchored in the wider content that can be used not only to mean things but also to do things, and it is necessary to consider how the language impacts the reality. The relationship of power, ideology and language is an important issue for CDA, mainly how power and unequal power relations are expressed or subverted by language. So, the study of racism is theoretically and empirically relevant only when discourse structures can be related to properties of power, dominance, and inequality.

Since years ago, racism has put many people into misery and suffers from the race minority inequality treatment. Take an example, racism is still exists in America which the people are differed from the races, even today. Racism is caused by a problem involving white Americans and black Americans. Later on, the whites never treat the blacks as the true human beings because they have different features of bodies, skin color and also different economic, social, and educational background. One of the examples is accessed from Vox website that released an article on 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 about an analysis of the available FBI data by Vox's Dara Lind shows that US police kill black people at disproportionate rates: black people

accounted for 31 percent police shooting victims in 2012. Another phenomenon was after Barak Obama confirmed as President of America, the racial issues in that country are still going on. It released in the article on the website of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (19/11/2008) with the title "*Since Obama won the election, racial cases rise sharply.*" The victory of Barack Obama in the US presidential election did not immediately remove the racist attitude that seemed to have been roots among white citizens of the US.

The articles above give an overview that racism still exists especially in America. Those phenomena become strong trigger to be the reasons why the researcher conducts this study under the racism topic in Critical Discourse Analysis field. To conveying social issues, including racism, not only can be delivered through a variety of news, both in print and electronic media, but can also be delivered through film. In addition, McQuail (1994: 13) stated that film is a form of mass media and the story of film is usually departed from social phenomenon that occurs around us because film also serves as a shaper of mass culture. One of the films deals with racism is *The Help* film. The film was released on August 2011 which is directed and written by Tate Taylor. The main concern of this film is racial discrimination that took place in Jackson Mississippi America during the 1960s. The story is adaptation of American historical facts from the Civil Rights movements and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. This present research concern to convince the types of racism found in *The Help* film and how do the black people resist racism in *The Help* film.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed qualitative research design since it presents a description about a social phenomenon and human interaction through language. As stated by Creswell (2009:3) that qualitative research design is plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed method data collection and analysis. And it also means for

exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribes a social or human problem. The characteristics of this present research are in line with characteristics of qualitative research stated by Creswell (2009:3) that exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribes a social or human problem. This research also discussed about social or human problem about racism that depicted in *The Help* film. Furthermore, in conducting the research the researcher considers analyzing racism which depicted on *The Help* film in approach of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach focused on discursive practices and it did not concern with evaluating what is right or wrong. It tried to make choices at each point in the research itself and make these choices transparent.

Furthermore, the source of data was derived from the script presented in the form of English of *The Help* film that is directed by Tate Taylor. Moreover, the data were taken from the script stated by the characters in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or utterances on the film which contained the racism based on Wodak's theory. In qualitative research, the primary instrument in data collection is the researcher self (Creswell, 2009:175). So, the researcher became the main instrument in this research because she conducted the research by herself from the beginning until the end.

There are some methods of collecting data that can be used in holding a qualitative research. Then, in collecting the data the researcher used some steps as follows; (1) Watching the film, (2) Identifying, and (3) Selecting data.

In conducting the process of analyzing data a researcher needs to identify the certain point to set and process the data that is collected in order to get final analysis of the research. The researcher used some steps that related to the theoretical concepts as follows; (1) Organizing, (2) Coding, (3) Describing, (4) Interpreting, and the last is Drawing conclusion

## RESEARCH FINDING

### . Types of Racism in *The Help* Film

The data that analyzed and described were taken from the script of *The Help* film. After read and watched the film, the researcher considers that there are two types of racism that found in *The Help* film based on Wodak's theory (2001). The details are as follow:

#### a. Everyday Racism

Everyday racism occurs when a person experiences discriminatory behavior from people he/she encounters his/her daily life. It can be as an integration of racism into everyday situations through practices that activate underlying power relations. The examples of everyday racism that is depicted in *The Help* film is:

#### ER

07:09 – 00:07:26

*Hilly (screaming upward)*

*“Momma! We're late for bridge! “*

*Hilly rolls toilet paper out from its holder. With a pencil, she places a dot on each sheet of paper, counting as she goes.*

Based on the first data above, Hilly did something in Minny's bathroom before she went to the bridge club. She placed and counted an each of sheet by giving dot in the rolls toilet paper. She wanted to limit the using of Minny's paper in order to decrease the paper cost. The limitation of the toilet paper was only purposed to her help Minny who has black skin. Whereas, she didn't does the same action to the other people in her house excepting her.

That situation can be categorized as everyday racism especially in discrimination behavior. What Hilly doing is clear one which very important point to consider. Intentionally, she discriminate one who has black skin by giving a limitation of the use toilet paper. Indeed, this discrimination occurs in the difference of treating someone. Moreover, that deed was suited with

Wodak's theory because it has been done in the context of everyday situations. As the boss and the owner of the house, Hilly thinks that she has an authority and power to manage everything what she want.

She didn't consider whether it harms another or not particularly to people who have different race with her. And, that act clearly shows that she didn't respect and regard to the Minny's personal daily needs in a good manner.

#### b. Institutional Racism

Institutional racism refers to the sometimes unconscious and unintentional embedding of discriminatory policies and practices within the institutions of a nations. It is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions. Additionally, institutional racism can institute and maintain differentials between ethnic and cultural groups, in terms of access to education, employment, residential areas, rights before the law, and medical care. The examples of institutional racism that is depicted in *TheHelp* film is:

00:36:25 – 00:36:54 Aibileen slowly turns.

Aibileen: "They set my cousin Shinelle's car on fire just cause she went down to the voting station."

Skeeter: "A book like this has never been written before."

Aibileen: "'Cause they's a reason. I do this with you, I might as well burn my own house down."

Skeeter: "I promise we'll be careful."

Aibileen: "This already ain't careful, Miss Skeeter! You not knowing that is what scare me the most. Scare me more than "Jim Crow"."

Skeeter tries to hand Aibileen a piece of paper. Aibileen nervously surveys the area. A woman pushing a baby

carriage walks by and looks on with suspicion

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From the first data above, it can be seen that Aibileen emotionally told to Skeeter that her cousin Shinelle's car was on fire just because she went to the voting station.

But, Skeeter ambitiously makes Aibileen to participate in her book project. She promised to her that they would be careful. Aibileen denied her by uttering "This already ain't careful, Miss Skeeter! You not knowing that is what scare me the most. Scare me more than "Jim Crow". Based on what she stressed to Skeeter, she wants to reveal how scary she is toward the Skeeter's persuasion. That scares her more than "Jim Crow" laws about the segregation between the blacks and the whites American citizens. However, Skeeter tried to give her a hope by trying to hand Aibileen a piece of paper that contained her phone number and Aibileen nervously took it.

From the description above, what Aibileen stated above can be categorized as institutional racism. She told to Skeeter about

her cousin who participated in voting station but her car had burned by the whites. That was clearly shown the institutional racism especially in political aspect. As we know that institutional racism refers to discriminatory policies and practices within the institutions. They give unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts based on race. That theory strengthens what

Aibileen's cousin got in that voting election. As a black citizen, she didn't have same opportunity as the white to participate in political region. The human being was born in the same condition, automatically she has free and equal especially in rights. But, the institution makes a rule which banned the blacks to participate in voting election. Cruelly, they burned the black's car just because she wants to vote the election.

## **B. The Ways Black People Resist Racism in *The Help* Film**

5 Scott (1990:4) argues that resistance includes any acts by members of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims made on that class by super or 21 orate classes or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) from those super-ordinate classes. It means that the resistance will be carried out by community groups or individuals who feel oppressed, frustrating, and unfair situation in their life. Scott (1990: 5) has made a categorization which builds on the two main forms of resistance; the hidden and the public transcript.

### **a. Hidden Transcript**

Hidden transcript 6 in the hidden form as everyday resistance expressed safely only offstage. The offstage transcript of elites is like counterpart among subordinates. It consists in gestures and words that deflect, contradict, or con 13 in what appears in the public transcript. Each hidden transcript is actually elaborated among a restricted public that excludes that is hidden from certain specified others. The examples of hidden transcript that found in *The Help* film is:

## **HT**

00:43:29 – 00:43:34

*Hilly leans into the bathroom door.*

*Hilly: "Minny, are you in there?"*

*Minny: "Yes, ma'am..."*

*Hilly: "And just what are you doing?"*

*Minny's eyes narrow. She flushes the unused toilet. Hilly beats on the door. Minny slams down the toilet lid to further antagonize Hilly.*

*Hilly: "Get off of my toilet! You are fired, Minny Jackson!"*

From the fourth data above, it can be described that Minny entered Hilly's bathroom silently. But, Hilly skeptically comes and leans into the bathroom door. Then, she calmly asked Minny is she in the bathroom. Even shocked, Minny answered

Hilly's question that she is in the bathroom. She angrily ask 3 her what Minny's doing in there. Minny's eyes narrow. She flushes the unused toilet. Hilly beats on the door. Minny slams down the toilet lid to further antagonize Hilly. Hilly was very angry and she hardly scream by uttering "Get off of my toilet! You are fired, Minny Jackson!" Then, Minny left the bathroom and Hilly's house as soon as possible.

Based on the data above, the situation was included in hidden transcript. From what Minny's attitude in the bathroom showed that she was intentionally flushes the unused toilet to make Hilly angry. And, she wants to resist Hilly even she couldn't hit her directly. Whereas, she just only want to use the bathroom for a while but Hilly was too stingy toward her. As we know that the resistance will be carried out by community groups or individuals who feel oppressed, frustrating, and unfair situation in their life. If their unfair situation and frustration reached its peak, it would cause a resistance from someone who feels oppressed. So, it

was appropriate with Minny's situation that was frustrating toward Hilly. Her anger was reach in peak and she could not handle it anymore.

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## CONCLUSION

Based on the research finding and discussion in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes that the types of racism that found in the data collected based on Ruth Wodak's theory which is divided into two types include everyday racism and institutional racism. And, the most dominant types of racism that found in *The Help* film is everyday racism because the discrimination, the prejudice and the stereotype dominantly depicted in the film. Furthermore, for how the black resist the racism, the researcher concludes that the types of resistance are not completely employed on *The Help* film. As we know that there are two types of resistance; hidden transcript and public transcript. However, the researcher only found the hidden transcript that depicted in the film. By watching all the story of *The Help* film can be seen that the racism and the critical discourse consider portraying negative acts and harms not only the oppressor and the oppresses but also the society. Most of the whites in the story are described as the people who would like to everything to maintain their power and reputation in the public without considered the blacks feeling. The plot of the film also gives a lot of knowledge about what racism is and how they resist the racism.

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