
THE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION OF WHITE AND BLACK AS SEEN IN BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH'S POEMS

TEGAR RISADI CHALID¹
FEBY MEUTHIA YUSUF²
HELMITA³

Volume 1 Nomor 1
JILP
ISSN: 2581-0804
E-ISSN: 2581-1819

ABSTRACT

The problem in this thesis is the racial discrimination from white community against black community that was their former slave in the past, the author analyzes three poems by Zephaniah based on the issue of racial discrimination. Poem represents the poet's feeling about the social phenomena that surrounds him, and these poems are also the form of protest against racial discrimination.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the treatment from white communities against black communities that consider that their race to be superior compared to their former slaves. The manifestation of racial discrimination can be seen from the attitude of prejudice, insulting words and remarks, and the acts of oppression on black community. In this writing, library research is taken as the method of data collection. As for the method of data analysis, the author performs systematic procedures by

understanding of the poem, the theme of racial discrimination, and also the theory of psychology. Data collection technique uses qualitative techniques in finding the data in form of explanation on the phenomenon that occurs. In the technique of data analysis, the writer uses genetic structuralism techniques by analyzing the oppression of black society in Zephaniah's poems through psychology theory.

The findings in this thesis are: 1) in the poem of The Race Industry, white society always oppresses black society so that they have to work hard but do not get the result that they deserves, 2) in poem We Refugee, white society always have prejudice against black people because of their skin color and not because of their actions, 3) in Dis Poetry, white community always says provocative words and remarks to offend black people.

Keywords: *oppression, prejudice, and provocative remarks*

ABSTRAK

Permasalahan dalam skripsi ini adalah diskriminasi rasial dari masyarakat kulit putih terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam yang merupakan bekas budak mereka di masa lalu, penulis menganalisis tiga puisi oleh Zephaniah berdasarkan permasalahan diskriminasi rasial tersebut. Puisi merepresentasikan apa yang dirasakan oleh penyair terhadap fenomena sosial disekitarnya, dan puisi ini juga merupakan bentuk protesnya terhadap diskriminasi rasial tersebut.

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah menganalisis perlakuan masyarakat kulit putih terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam yang menganggap bahwa ras mereka lebih superior daripada mantan budak mereka. Perwujudan diskriminasi rasial bisa dilihat dari sikap yang selalu berprasangka buruk, kata dan ucapan provokasi yang menghina dan merendahkan, serta tindakan opresi atau penindasan terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam. Dalam penulisan ini, penelitian kepustakaan diambil sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Sedangkan untuk metode analisa data, penulis melakukan prosedur

sistematis dengan pemahaman puisi, tema diskriminasi rasial, dan juga teori psikologi. Teknik pengumpulan data mempergunakan teknik kualitatif dalam mencari data dalam bentuk penjelasan terhadap fenomena yang terjadi. Pada teknik analisa data, penulis mempergunakan teknik strukturalisme genetik dengan cara menganalisa ketertindasan masyarakat kulit hitam didalam puisi Zephaniah melalui teori psikologi.

Temuan dalam skripsi ini adalah: 1) dalam puisi *The Race Industri*, masyarakat kulit putih melakukan opresi atau penindasan terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam sehingga mereka selalu bekerja keras tetapi tidak mendapatkan hasil yang sepadan, 2) dalam puisi *We Refugee*, masyarakat kulit putih selalu beprasangka buruk terhadap masyarakat kulit hitam karena warna kulit mereka dan bukan karena tindakan mereka, 3) dalam puisi *Dis Poetry*, masyarakat kulit putih selalu mengucapkan kata dan ucapan kasar yang provokatif untuk menyinggung masyarakat kulit hitam.

Kata kunci: *penindasan, prasangka buruk, dan ucapan provokatif*

I INTRODUCTION

Human relationship was that every human was treated based on their actions, and not only from their looks. However, the problem came when the white people in the Americans treated the others based on their skins, they had racial tendency toward the black skinned people. Therefore, the writer analyzed this problem based on the description of racial discrimination from white to black from the poems of Zephaniah. The white people did not think the black community as their former slaves, the white people needed to respect the black people based on their actions, and not their skin color.

In the poem *We Refugees*: "I come from a beautiful place, where they hate my shade of skin, and my brother had been tortured, by my brother in my land" (3-6), it showed that the poet came from the place where the people hate his black skin, and they discriminate and torture him and his family. The second sample of data was

taken from the other poem of Zephaniah, *The Race Industry*: "Without Black suffering they'd had no jobs, without our dead they'd had no office, without our tears they'd had no drink" (19-21), this quotation also showed that the white people still indirectly enslaved and discriminated the black society.

Benjamin Zephaniah had a strong sense in rejecting all kinds of discrimination, especially racism. He was a rasta, rap and performance poet, as well as an artist in various other fields. He was politically active and campaigns for a green environment, for women's rights, for equality and against racism, discrimination, police brutality etc. In 2003 he turned down an Order of the British Empire since accepting such an award might be seen as condoning the establishment which instituted it. Benjamin was included in *The Times* list of Britain's top 50 post-war writers in 2008, he had finished full

time education at the age of 13. His poetry was strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and what he calls 'street politics'. His first real public performance was in church when he was 10 years old, by the time he was 15 he had developed a strong following in his home town of Handsworth where he had gained a reputation as a young poet who was capable of speaking on local and international issues.

Dis Poetry, We Refugees, and The Race Industry, was because these poem was the reflection of African-American community, or loosely called Black community, in the Britain. Benjamin, through his works, always preaches about the sufferings of Black people in his own hometown, later he sought a wider mainstream audience. At the age of 22 he headed south to London where his first book *Pen Rhythm* was published by Page One Books. The book sold well going into 3 editions but it was in performance that the Dub (Reggae) Poet would cause a revolution, a revolution that injected new life into the British poetry scene and attracted the interest of many mainstream publishers. Benjamin's poetry could be heard on the demonstrations, at youth gatherings, outside police stations, and on the dance floor.

Benjamin writes his poems based on his personal experience on racism as the racial

discrimination from white people to black community. Benjamin says that: This was personal. It started when I was about eight years old. I was walking on Farm Street in Hockley, Birmingham, where my family lived. I was in my own little world, having poetic thoughts and wondering what the future held for me. Then, bang, I felt an almighty slap on the back of my head and I fell to the floor. A boy had hit me with a brick as he rode past on his bicycle. As I lay on the ground with blood pouring from the back of my head, he looked back and shouted: "Go home, you black bastard." I had no idea what he was talking about. I was going home. Who was black? What was a bastard? At home my mother sat me down and explained to me that there were some people in this country that didn't like people who were not white, and they wanted us to go back home. I spent the next few months wondering where my "real" home was, I thought it was in Birmingham, and what was so great about being white, and why would anyone want to hit someone because of the colour of their skin? (Zephaniah, 2016:1). Therefore based on the reasons above, the writer chooses "Psychological Analysis of Racial Discrimination from White People Against Black Community" as the title of this thesis.

II METHOD

In the collecting data, the writer applies library research. Data collection was the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. The data collection component of research was common to all fields of study. Pradopo in *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra* (2001:153) states:

Penelitian pustaka adalah observasi yang dilakukan dalam pustaka, dimana penulis mendapatkan data dan informasi tentang objek penelitian melalui buku dan media audiovisual yang berhubungan dengan topik.

The library research was the observation that was executed in the library, which the writer gains the data and information about his object

tought the books and other audiovisual equipment that related and relevant to the topic (translated by writer).

Successful library research was defined as the systematic study and investigation of some aspect of library and information science where conclusions were based on the analysis of data collected in accordance with pre-established research designs and methodologies.

In the procedure of analyzing the data, the primary data was taken from poems itself, the writer tries to analyze it by using the information based on the poems. In doing this research, the writer starts by analyzing some intrinsic elements of these poems, after that tries to find extrinsic element which becomes the basic of the problem that will be analyzed.

The writer uses qualitative in collecting the data. This technique was attempted to trace the source of information in the form of

document which were relevant to the object of the research. Creswell (1998:41) says that:

“One undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher was an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzed them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that was expressive and persuasive in language.”

Qualitative research involves studying a small number of individuals or sites, it was conducted in a natural setting, it was focused on participant perspectives, it had the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection, it uses multiple methods of data collection in the form of words or pictures, it involves extended firsthand engagement, it focuses on the centrality of meaning for participants deals with dynamic systems, it deals with wholeness and complexity and assumes that change was constant, it was subjective, and it uses an emergent design

The data analyzing procedures concern

III DISCUSSION

The oppression was the cruel or unjust use of power or authority. It was the offense, committed by a public official, of wrongfully inflicting injury, such as bodily harm or imprisonment, upon another individual under color of office. The oppression, which was a misdemeanor, was committed through any act of cruelty, severity, unlawful exaction, or excessive use of authority: the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner; an act or instance of oppressing or subjecting to cruel or unjust impositions or restraints; the state of being oppressed; the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions, anxiety, etc.

Oppression was treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing was perceived to belong to rather than on individual merit. This includes treatment of an individual or group, based on their actual or perceived membership in a certain group or social category, "in a way that was worse than the way people were usually treated". It involves the group's initial reaction or interaction going on to

with the way of the writer to conduct the analysis of the data. This analysis uses genetic structuralism, it looks the external factor of the literature that conveys the internal element of literary work such the actions of the main character, such as characters and author. Pradopo (2001: 54) states that “Peneliti bertugas menjelaskan karya sastra sebagai sebuah struktur berdasarkan unsur-unsur yang membentuknya, seperti masyarakat dan kehidupan sosial.” “The researcher had a chance to explain literary work as structure based on the elements that formed them, which were society and social life.” From the explanation, structural method had two functions which explain the internal factor of literature and show the relation of this internal factor with the external factor such as psychology.

From the theoretical framework, the analysis of racial discrimination was focused on psychological background. It was divided into three kinds of racial discrimination, which were oppression from white to black, prejudice from white to black, and the provocation from white to black. This showed that there was the racial discrimination toward black community.

influence the individual's actual behavior towards the group leader or the group, restricting members of one group from opportunities or privileges that were available to another group, leading to the exclusion of the individual or entities based on logical or irrational decision making.

In Zephaniah's *The Race Industry*, the oppression could be seen in the following lines: “Without Black suffering they'd had no jobs, without our dead they'd had no office, without our tears they'd had no drink” (19-21), this quotation also showed that the white people still indirectly enslave and discriminate the black society.

In this the poems, it begins with the description of race industry, it was the representation of industry in America that only gives benefit to the white people, while the black people had to suffer in their jobs. This poem showed that there was a clear fact of discrimination from white people to black community in the employment and job salary. The white people live happy while the black people live in despair:

The coconuts had got the jobs.
The race industry was a growth
industry.
We despairing, they careering.
We want more peace they want
more police.

The racial was portrayed in the poem, Zephaniah says that the white people still enslave the black community in this modern era, the black people were the victim here, they work harder, but they earn salary lesser than the white people. The poet says that:

They take our sufferings and earn a
salary.
Steal our souls and make their
documentaries.
Inform daily on our community.
Without Black suffering they'd had
no jobs.
Without our dead they'd had no
office.
Without our tears they'd had no
drink

Discriminatory traditions, policies, ideas, practices, and laws exist in many countries and institutions in every part of the world, even in ones where discrimination was generally looked down upon. In some places, controversial attempts such as quotas had been used to benefit those believed to be current or past victims of discrimination, but had sometimes been called reverse discrimination. In the USA, a government policy known as affirmative action was instituted to encourage employers and universities to seek out and accept groups such as African Americans and women, who had been subject to discrimination for a long time.

Then, in this poem, Zephaniah also bring up a flaw of society and argues how unjust the system was leading to the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. "the uncle toms were getting paid" "We despairing, they careering" This showed how certain groups of society were prospering while other groups were suffering at their expense. "Without our dead they'd had no office. Without our tears they'd had no drink." This part of the poem was showing that the rich could not be where they were without the poor, and again showed how unfair the system was for the less fortunate.

In the poem *We Refugees*, prejudice could be seen from the following lines: "I come from a beautiful place, where they hate my shade of skin, and my brother had been tortured, by my

brother in my land" (3-6), it showed that the poet came from the place where the people hate his black skin, and they discriminate and torture him and his family.

The poet tells about his life as the refugees, Zephaniah was not a refugee himself, but he hears a lot of the suffering of black community that they were pushed aside by the white people to the ghetto, a place that far from the central city. The poet clearly says that he come from the place where the people will hate others only from the color of his skin. The white people also forbids the black community to express themselves, even in forms of song and poem.

Nobody was safe,
We could all be refugees
We could all be told to go,
We could be hated by someone
For being someone.

The line "We could be hated by someone, For being someone" represents the poet's feeling that was hated by white people just because he was black. The news reports make refugees into a problem to be dealt with and seldom did we consider their desperation and individual stories. *We Refugees* had a first person narrator and an almost musical rhythm, so while it deals with serious subjects, it was not full of doom and gloom. There was a tone of regret, thoughts of what was lost and a tiny glimmer of hopefulness that a return could be possible at some point. The narrator could be any age or gender, actually, though my first impression was of a young person. Then the poet also says that he had no country, that place was belonged by white community, and every black people as to struggle and live in fear.

We all came from refugees
Nobody simply just appeared,
Nobody's here without a struggle,
And why should we live in fear
Of the weather or the troubles?
We all came here from somewhere.

The poet cannot understand the reason that white people hate them. The black people only want to live in peace alongside the white community, Zephaniah says that "Sometimes it only took a handshake."

We could all be refugees
Sometimes it only took a day,
Sometimes it only took a handshake
Or a paper that was signed.

It points out how random and out of our control circumstances could be that creates refugees. And how timeless, too. The very places that were refusing people now were once full of people fleeing themselves not so long ago. The end of the poem showed how the narrator was viewed by others: "I am told I had no country now I am told I am a lie" This was how refugees were looked at, as a statistic, not as individual, as if their identity was erased, their family ties and names forgotten from both their homeland and the new places where they seek asylum. The final lines reiterate how it was just luck or good fortune which prevents others from facing a similar situation and offers a wish that those listening to the narrator will understand the connections that we all have, just by being human.

The provocation refers to the use of racial term toward black people in order to insult and provoke them, such as ghetto, dreadlock, nigger, and so on because they were the former slaves of the white people. However, Africans were not originally considered inferior. When Portuguese sailors first explored Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries, they came upon empires and cities as advanced as their own, and they considered Africans to be serious rivals. Over time, though, as African civilizations failed to match the technological advances of Europe, and the major European powers began to plunder the continent and forcibly remove its inhabitants to work as slave laborers in new colonies across the Atlantic, Africans came to be seen as a deficient "species," as "savages." To an important extent, this view was necessary to justify the slave trade at a time when Western culture had begun to promote individual rights and human equality. The willingness of some Africans to sell other Africans to European slave traders also led to claims of savagery, based on the false belief that the "dark people" were all kinsmen, all part of one society, as opposed to many different, sometimes warring nations.

In the poem of Dis Poetry, the poet tries to explain that his poem was just a poem without any hidden meaning. Zephaniah says that this poem was just a rhythm for expressing his mind, saying everything he feels into the poem. The poet emphasizes that he will not use this as the tool for preaching or politic. However, Zephaniah cannot make a beautiful poem like Shakespeare, he just writes the poem the way he wants.

Dis poetry was like a riddim dat

drops
De tongue fires a riddim dat shoots
like shots
Dis poetry was designed fe rantin
Dance hall style, big mouth
chanting,
Dis poetry nar put yu to sleep
Preaching follow me
Like yu was blind sheep,
Dis poetry was not Party Political
Not designed fe dose who were
critical.
Dis poetry was wid me when I gu to
me bed
It gets into me dreadlocks
It lingers around me head
Dis poetry goes wid me as I pedal
me bike
I've tried Shakespeare, respect due
dere
But did was de stuff I like.

Dis Poetry by Zephaniah was one of a kind. It was simple, yet looks like complicated. The poem was just spoken straight out from his mind. The poem itself says that there was no rhythm and in case, found any that was pure coincidence. The poem was juts flatly put, to showcase that the poet was not that specific about any particular event or thought, but yet words and thoughts in mind were much stronger than words put out. The first part of the poem says that the poem does not hold any specifications as it was not for preaching, nor for following, it was not for putting you to sleep or for reciting after me. Loved Shakespeare and his work, but this was my style and I like it.

Then, in the middle of the poem, the poet says that as the representation of his feeling, he want the other people to read his poem. Zephaniah admits that he uses the rhythm of reggae music into his poem. However, he will not tell the story of love, he prefers to tell the story of himself as he compares the poem with his life. The lines of "But you've heard it all before, Pages of written words not needed" showed that this poem was about his life, the life where the black community was discriminated by the white people, but he does not say it verbally, Zephaniah says that written words were not needed in his poem to express his true feeling. Then he makes with his poem into reggae rhythm, with a lot of similar sound in the beginning of lines (alliteration): de tounge, de

body, dis poetry, dis poetry, dis poetry, don't stretch, dis poetry. Then, Zephaniah provided the clue in his poem: "An den I got a dread degree, In Dreadfull Ghettoology." Ghetto was the place where the black people live, they live separately from the white people community because of their discrimination. By adding the word dreadful into ghetto, it could be seen that these black community does not feel safe, they were still treated as inferior by the white people. This was the story of the poet's life, because it was "Dis poetry's from inside me."

Dis poetry was not afraid of going
ina book
Still dis poetry need ears fe hear an
eyes fe hav a look
Dis poetry was Verbal Riddim, no
big words involved
An if I hav a problem de riddim gets
it solved,
I've tried to be more romantic, it
does nu good for me
So I tek a Reggae Riddim an build
me poetry,
I could try be more personal
But you've heard it all before,
Pages of written words not needed
Brain had many words in store,
Yu could call dis poetry Dub
Ranting
De tongue plays a beat
De body starts skanking,
Dis poetry was quick an childish
Dis poetry was fe de wise an
foolish,
Anybody could did it fe free,
Dis poetry was fe yu an me,
Don't stretch yu imagination
Dis poetry was fe de good of de
Nation,
Chant,
In de morning
I chant
In de night
I chant
In de darkness
An under de spotlight,
I pass thru University

I pass thru Sociology
An den I got a dread degree
In Dreadfull Ghettoology.

In the second stanza he says that, he was not afraid was this poem gets published, for it does require imagination to understand. He tried being romantic, but since it was of no good to him, he even left that subject. He tried to be personal, but all those had been discussed earlier and there was no use in discussing repeated words and thoughts. He says the poem was for all alike, the child and adult, the wise and the fool, anybody could take it for free and read as it was just for you and me. In spite of all these, you yet honored from Universities under a spotlight.

Dis poetry stays wid me when I run
or walk
An when I am talking to meself in
poetry I talk,
Dis poetry was wid me,
Below me an above,
Dis poetry's from inside me
It goes to yu
WID LUV.

Lastly he says the poem was within him and would be with him all the time, no matter what or where he is, it was from him to you, just like that. This poem had depicted his own life and he had put that in simple format as just a saying through this poem. If the entire poem was summarized and compared with Zephaniah life, it does had a lot of resemblance, he does clearly say that he had not come for preaching or to be followed, yet he would like to spread the message, similarly, the poem says it was not specific for any character or subject, just like not for any age categories or politic, but for the Nation. He had clearly said in the poem, it was within me and no words would be from the past, where he showed that his ideas were not with anyone and not like the famous poet Shakespeare, but it had derived from within him and had been with him day and night. The poem was just the depiction of his life and the message that he wants to convey to all, penned down beautifully and simply.

IV CONCLUSIONS

The racial discrimination of one social group against another, backed by institutional power. It occurs when one group was able to enforce its prejudice throughout society because it controls the institutions. The white people in the Americans often treat the others based on their skins, they had racial tendency toward the black skinned people. Therefore, the white people should not think the black community as their former slaves, the white people need to respect the black people based on their actions, and not their skin color. The writer then provided the findings from this analysis:

4. Oppression was the treatment of an individual or group, based on their actual or perceived membership in a certain group or social category, "in a way that was worse than the way people were usually treated". The racial was portrayed in *The Race Industry*, Zephaniah says that the white people still enslave the black community in this modern era, the black people were the victim here, they work harder, but they earn salary lesser than the white people.
5. Prejudice was also the belief that a particular race was superior or inferior to
- 7.

another, that a person's social and moral traits were predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. In the poem *We Refugees*, it showed that the poet came from the place where the people hate his black skin, and they discriminate and torture him and his family. The poet clearly says that he come from the place where the people will hate others only from the color of his skin.

6. The provocation refers to the use of racial term toward black people in order to insult and provoke them, such as ghetto, dreadlock, nigger, and so on because they were the former slaves of the white people. In the poem of *Dis Poetry*, ghetto was the place where the black people live, they live separately from the white people community because of their discrimination. By adding the word dreadful into ghetto, it could be seen that these black community does not feel safe, they were still treated as inferior by the white people.

Bibliography

- Abrams. 1993. *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and The Critical Tradition*. London : Oxford University Press.
- Cedro, Quecile. 2015. *Psychoanalysis*. Retrieved from the website: <https://prezi.com/ukuwdlowhx0j/psychoanalysis/> on October 24th, 2016 at 08:19 PM.
- Creswell, John W. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London: Sage.
- Daiches, David. 1990. *Critical Approaches to Literature*, Singapore: Singapore Publisher Ltd.
- Fromm, Erich. 1992. *The Revision of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Open Road.
- Giddens, Anthony. et.al. 2009. *Introduction to Sociology*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.
- Kennedy, X.J. and Dana Gioia. 1995. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Linda, C. Stanley. 1995. *Ways to Writing*. Cambridge. University Press.
- Lockhart, Anne. 2017. *Analysis of Benjamin Zephaniah's Poem. Neighbours*. Retrieved from the website: http://www.academia.edu/12862485/Analysis_of_Benjamin_Zephaniahs_poem_Neighbours_ on October 24th, 2016 at 08:19 PM.
- Marie, Adele. 2016. *How to Analyze a Poem in 6 Steps*. Retrieved from the website: <http://teacherpop.org/2016/04/analyze-poem-6-steps/> on October 24th, 2016 at 08:19 PM.
- Pradopo, Rachmat Djoko, et.al. 2001. *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: PT. Hanindita Graha Widia.
- Tate, Gregory. 2012. *The Poet's Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry 1830-1870*. Oxford: English Monographs.
- Valera, Poonam. 2016. *Psychological Study of Sylvia Plath's Poetry*. Retrieved from the website: http://www.academia.edu/10299936/Psychological_Study_of_Sylvia_Plath_s_Poetry on October 24th, 2016 at 08:19 PM.
- Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. 1996. *Theory of Literature*, New York Harcourt Brace and World Inc.
- Zephaniah, Benjamin. 2000. *Wicked World!* London: Puffing Books.
- ~ 2016. *What Was so Great About Being White?* Retrieved from the website: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/28/if-we-did-nothing-we-would-be-killed-on-the-streets-benjamin-zephaniah-on-fighting-the-far-right> on October 24th, 2016 at 08:19 PM.