

CHILD ABUSE ROOTED FROM RACISM IN TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE

(Kekerasan Terhadap Anak Berawal Dari Rasisme Dalam Novel The Bluest Eye Karya Toni Morrison)

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Abstrak

*Kekerasan terhadap anak yang terjadi dikalangan orang Amerika keturunan kulit hitam dipengaruhi oleh posisi inferioritas mereka. Sebagai korban rasisme, kaum kulit hitam hidup dalam ketertindasan termasuk kemiskinan, masalah alkohol dan prostitusi yang dapat mendorong mereka memperlakukan anak-anak mereka dengan cara yang salah. Penelitian ini membahas fenomena kekerasan anak yang digambarkan dalam novel **The Bluest Eye** karya Toni Morrison. Korban kekerasan anak dalam novel tersebut digambarkan melalui tokoh bernama Pecola, Frieda dan Cholly muda. Mereka mendapatkan kekerasan seksual, fisik dan psikologis. Penelitian ini menganalisis jenis kekerasan anak berikut sebab dan akibatnya. Pendekatan psikologis digunakan karena penelitian ini membahas tingkah laku dan kepribadian yang menjadi penyebab dan akibat tindak kekerasan terhadap anak-anak. Teori kekerasan anak oleh **Robin E. Clark, Judith Freeman Clark and Christine Adamec** diterapkan untuk menjelaskan fenomena kekerasan terhadap anak dengan menganalisis praktik kekerasan anak yang dilakukan oleh Cholly ke Pecola, Henry kepada Frieda dan ibu Cholly ke Cholly muda.*

Kata kunci: kekerasan anak, rasisme, hitam

Abstract

Child abuse which happens in America, especially for black children is inevitably connected with the inferior position of Afro-American people. Their oppressed life caused by racism produces poverty, alcoholism and prostitution that push them to treat their children badly. This research discusses child abuse phenomena described in Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The children named Pecola, Frieda and young Cholly get abused sexually, physically and psychologically. This research analyzes kinds of child abuse as well as the causes and the effects. The research uses psychological approach and the theory of child abuse by Robin E. Clark, Judith Freeman Clark and Christine Adamec is applied in order to explain phenomena of child abuse done by Cholly to Pecola, Henry to Frieda and Cholly's mother to young Cholly.

Keywords : child abuse, racism, black American

Rationale

Racism, in America, is a conflict between two races, the blacks (African American) and the white people. This practice of racism is in the forms of discrimination, segregation and negative stereotype. As the consequences, racism makes such kind of unequal relationship which places the blacks as inferior and the whites as superior. This situation makes the black suffers from repressive condition such as having low position and salary in jobs, less education and poverty. To escape from this condition, African American people usually release it by going to prostitution and alcoholism. This escapism actually does not solve their problems, even it aggravates and gives further

problems, such as child abuse. Alcoholism can make people lost consciousness which can lead to be temperamental. If this happens to someone, he will disturb and annoy people around him, including his family: child is no exception. Children who have less power is very possible to be the victims, like getting harassment or sexual practices. Prostitution may lead someone to be filthy and children which are easy to be deceived and also have less power are easy targets of getting sexual abuse. Poverty is almost the same case with those two factors, it makes people live in depressed condition for lack of finance. Poverty can make people angry easily, and children usually become the victims of wreaking the anger, which then leads to violence and child abuse. The child abuse actually affects seriously to the

child's development. The child may become introvert, mentally sick, moreover can be an abuser.

In conjunction with that phenomenon, literary works as reflection of human life, also portray the child abuse cases like what is described in *The Bluest Eye* novel. It describes African-American culture in the USA.

Thus, this study has three aims to discuss. They are: to identify child abuse phenomenon in the Afro-American society portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*. The second is to explain how racism suffered by Afro-Americans influences black parents and the society to do bad treatment to the black children reflected in *The Bluest Eye*. The third is to understand the behavior and personality as the consequences of the abuse on black children.

Research Method

This research is conducted by using the qualitative research. Qualitative research is disposed to be associated with words or images as the unit of analysis (Denscombe, 2007:248). The qualitative method is used in this research activity because the object of the research is a novel that the form is not dealing with number, but verbal or words description. It means this research describes or interprets the narration related to the chosen topic about racism portrayed in the novel to answer the research problems. In this case, qualitative research is appropriate to analyze the data related to racism depicted in *The Bluest Eye*.

The data are collected from library and internet research. Library research provides the data needed for the object of the study. The data and other supporting information are gathered from books because the data sources from various books are very helpful for the progress of theoretical reviews and the notion discussion. Therefore, the data collected in this research is divided into two kinds. Those are primary and secondary data. The primary data are collected from the statements and narrations which particularly refer to the chosen topic in the novel entitled *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The secondary data are supported by information taken from books, dictionaries, journals, biography, and internet resources in relation with the chosen topic of this research about child abuse rooted from racism. For the theory, uses Delgado and Stefancic's *Critical Race Theory: an Introduction* (2001) and *Theory of Child Abuse* by Robin E. Clark, Judith Freeman Clark and Christine Adamec. It is needed in order to get better understanding about the literary work itself and to make clear discussion of this research.

After all the data are collected, then the next process is analyzing data. The first is classifying the racial practices taken from the novel based on its kind of racial practices, such as discrimination, segregation, and negative stereotype. The second, in applying the theory of child Abuse, is analyzing how does racism influence the black parents and

the society to do abuse to children and the next step is categorizing and analyzing the effects of abuse on children taken from the novel.

Result

The study on Morrison's *Bluest Eyes* tells that there are three factors which encourage black Americans to do child abuse. Namely poverty, alcoholism and prostitution. African American people who have oppressed life has close relationship with those factors, so the child abuse cases mostly happen among African American people, as described in the novel.

The study also shows that there are four kinds of child abuse found in the novel. They are sexual, physical, psychological abuse and negligence.

In relation with child abuse phenomena described in the novel, Cholly's bad past makes him a child abuser. The neglect done by Cholly's mother is caused by poverty. Cholly is neglected by his parents, and then the oppressed life has led him to become a street man living homeless. Living in the street has constructed his wild personality, to do anything he likes. This encourages him to become an alcoholic and abuse his own daughter. The rape done by Cholly leaves Pecola, his daughter traumatized. The rape makes her turn into introvert and suffers from social disorder.

Next, in the novel, prostitution as the escapism from repressed life in the racist society becomes the cause of sexual abuse. It is shown through Mr. Henry who does inappropriate deed to Frieda by touching her breast and that makes Frieda more resistant after getting sexual abuse.

Abuser is not only from family, but child abuse rooted from racism is also done by the society. The beauty standard that people believes says that white is beautiful and black is ugly. The effect of white beauty standard is an alienation of black people, especially black children. The alienation suffered by Pecola in school is when she feels oppressed by white children who do not want to sit beside her nor want to glance at her for her black skin that means ugliness. Later, Pecola thinks that the feeling of her ugliness is because of not having blue eyes as the white people have.

Discussion

Child abuse in African American community, in *The Bluest Eye* novel, is caused by four factors which are bad past life, alcoholism, prostitution and poverty. Those factors are effects of discrimination, segregation and negative stereotypes, suffered by African American people, which are called racism. There are four kinds of child abuse found in the novel: they are sexual, physical, psychological abuse and negligence. Consequently to children as the victims, become

introvert, mentally sick, and can be resisting persons and abuser in the future.

In discussion, this research, tries to analyze child abuse evidences that the child abuse in black community especially in America is related to their social condition which is oppressed, segregated and discriminated. The condition has led black people into poverty and some kinds of bad behavior as alcoholism and prostitution. Based on the research, the three problems to discuss are: how racism influences the black parents and the society to do bad treatment to children in *The Bluest Eye*, the kinds of child abuse portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*, and the effects of child abuse on the children behavior in *The Bluest Eye*.

Social condition of black Americans led them to poverty and some kinds of bad behavior. Poverty becomes a problem of black people. It happens because of discrimination in jobs which places the blacks under the white people. A black person deserves to be a maid, a servant and a worker while white person deserves to be the boss, the master and the manager. This discrimination makes the blacks get low income and lack of money to fulfill their needs. This poor condition provokes the black's bad behaviors, as alcoholism and prostitution, as the escapism of their problems. Poverty is a factor that may cause depressed parents abuse their children.

Poverty leads black people to other problems in life especially in a family. In the novel, financial problem becomes the cause of neglecting Cholly. The family conflict between his irresponsible father and desperate mother supports the child abuse. Poor Cholly gets abused when he was just born. What Cholly's mother does to his son is called neglecting. This kind of child abuse is an act in which the parents ignore the child physically or psychologically. The neglect done by Cholly's mother is caused by poverty. Cholly's parents cannot fulfill their baby needs. They also cannot fulfill their own needs.

Another Cholly's bad past is shown when he was a boy, he had sex with a girl named, Darlene. Cholly got his first sexual activity which was then interrupted by two white men. These two men forced Cholly to perform sex with Darlene while they were watching. Cholly and Darlene felt powerless knowing that the two white men had guns and lamp while they were having sex. The two white men asked Cholly to continue his activity, to perform sex for their viewing pleasure just for fun. In that sexual act, it is a humiliation by whites to black people.

Cholly feels humiliated by two white men because they forces him to perform sex with Darlene. There are terms or names which are told to discriminate, marginalize or underestimate black people. The blacks are called by certain names associated with something bad. The names are coon, jigaboo, nigga, nigger, nigra, spade. These are ethnic slur which are extremely offensive name for black people. Coon is the same spell with "coon" which means north American raccoon.

"Get on wid it, nigger," said the flashlight one.

"Sir?" said Cholly, trying to find a buttonhole.

"I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good."

(Morrison, T, 1970:134)

"Hee hee hee hee heeee."

"Come on, coon. Faster. You ain't doing nothing for her."

"Wait," said the spirit lamp, "the coon ain't comed yet."

"Well, he have to come on his own time. Good luck, coon baby."

(Morrison, 1970:135)

The quotation above states that there are two white men who call Cholly "coon" and "nigger". The name "nigger" is a racist term in disparaging black person. White people have this term in order to separate them from black. This also makes black as "the other one", excluded from the white community. Coon is also identical with raccoon, the typical animal from North America. The black people is associated or analogized with animal. This is a view which underestimates black people. This becomes Cholly's bad memory which influences his personality and his consciousness of being an oppressed man.

Child abuse has led a child into a damaging condition development. The child cannot grow properly because his/her mental is damaged. The child abuse experienced by a child will be a bad memory which impacts his/her perspective in facing life. Child abuse is a serious case which needs to be solved or otherwise destructs the children personality development and this can go on until they are adult. It is described in Cholly's case that his bad past influences his decision to have a life of a freeman and also influences him to be an alcoholic father which causes problems in his family.

The victim of child abuse has possibility to be a child abuser because that person may have mental disorder. The victim cannot develop normally because of the trauma of the child abuse he/she has suffered in the past.

Child abuse rooted from racism make effects to the personality and behavior for the victims. Cholly's characterizations which are a bad father as well as a bad husband, an alcoholic and a child abuser is inevitable from his past. This condition makes him to become an alcoholic. One day, Cholly comes home drunk, then that makes him quarrel with his wife.

"Cholly had come home drunk. Unfortunately he had been too drunk to quarrel, so the whole business would have to erupt this morning. Because it had not taken place immediately, the oncoming fight would lack spontaneity; it would be calculated, uninspired, and deadly."

(Morrison, T, 1970:40)

Being a drunken, Cholly is also a trigger of his complex family problems. An unfinished financial problem aggravates the condition of the family. Alcoholism is closely related to African American people. There is a relation between alcoholism and their oppressed life. Social disorganization and subordinate position in society lead them to alcohol as escapism of their problems. Cholly's oppressed life and his family problems make him an alcoholic. He actually wants to run away from the problem and thinks that alcohol gives the solution of his problems. In fact, it just makes his condition worse. Alcoholism may cause conflict in a family not only between Cholly and Pauline but also with his daughter. Since alcoholism makes Cholly cannot control himself that he forgets his roles as a husband and also as a father. As a husband, he doesn't fulfill his family needs and as a father, he does not look after Pecola well, he even does child abuse to Pecola by raping her.

When Cholly rape her, Pecola is fainted. Cholly who is drunk comes to Pecola, he crawls on his knees and catches her foot in an upward stroke which makes her fall and faint. Being drunk, he is in half-conscious condition and his rage loses his tenderness and he rapes her then leaves her unconscious. This is an effect of alcohol which makes someone goes wild to the point of raping his own daughter. In this case being related to Cholly's background, his past of being discriminated as an African-American, and his family problems lead him to alcoholism. It is also the cause of Cholly committing sexual abuse to Pecola. Alcoholism becomes the cause of Cholly's unconsciousness in committing a rape. The effect of alcohol has made Cholly wild and crazy that he does sexual child abuse to his own daughter.

The rape also makes Pecola, Cholly's daughter, traumatized of her father. There is a bad memory of being abused which affects the child's mindset of her social setting, the child can become asocial or introvert. The rape done by Cholly results Pecola's pregnancy and gets traumatic personality. The traumatic feeling of Pecola is shown in the quotation below.

"Then leave me alone about Cholly.
O.K.
There's nothing more to say about him, anyway. He's gone, anyway.
Yes. Good riddance.
Yes. Good riddance.

(Morrison, 1970:180-181)

Based on the quotation above, Pecola does not want to talk about Cholly because she is traumatized. Trauma is a psychological wound caused by distressing event. This can change someone's personality. If someone faces a repeating event he/she has suffered before, it will evoke his/her feeling that can make him/her stressed, angry and scared.

Pecola thinks that her bad life is because she is black. She does not have blue eyes which make her ugly. These bad

conditions lead her to insanity. She imagines that her wish is granted. Pecola's insanity is shown through her imagination of having blue eyes. Her blue eyes imagination makes her acting silly. In fact, Pecola can never have blue eyes she wishes. In the end of the story, Pecola's insanity is shown through her question about love. She thinks that the rape is a kind of love from Cholly. In fact, this is a kind of sexual child abuse done by a father to his daughter.

Abuser is not only from family, but child abuse rooted from racism is also done by the society. Racism tends to indoctrinate the psychological mindset of an individual. The discourse of racism which states the white supremacy and the black subordination are internalized and it influences someone's view to see white and black people. This is regarded as a truth in which this is a construction of discourse practice. Discrimination and negative stereotype done by the white society is about the beauty standard of white superiority for having blue eyes. In the novel, Toni Morrison describes the beauty standard through an analogy of blue eyed baby doll.

"It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls.

The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish.

(Morrison, T, 1970:145)

The beauty standard is made to give big impact and marginalize the other group. The blue eyes beauty shows how white people want to dominate over the black. The impact of the white beauty standard is called internalized racism. It is a kind of racism in which the black agrees with the black subordination and the white supremacy. This is a kind of psychological influence because it is processed in someone's mindset.

The standard of beauty is a constructed value. It does not naturally or essentially exist. The value is constructed with some intentions. The construction of the white beauty standard is a form of racism practice by means of discourse. This means racism works in people's mind. Racism which is a kind of repression to Black people emphasizes the domination of the white.

Another effect of white beauty standard is an alienation for black people especially for their children. Alienation here means a condition in social relationship reflecting isolation between individuals or groups. In the black child case, there is an imagination of having blue eyes as beauty standard. The alienation suffered by Pecola in school is when she feels oppressed by white children who do not want to sit beside her nor want to glance at her for her ugliness. Pecola is being alienated in school by white people, not only by students but also by the teachers. Later, Pecola thinks that her feeling of ugliness is because of not having blue eyes.

Racism also make blacks suffer repressive condition such as having low job, less education and lack of poverty in their life. In order to escape from this condition, black people usually release it by going to prostitution. The second case is Mr. Henry. He does not have regular work and he is an unmarried man. He suffers segregation in job. These factors have made him need to have such kind of entertainment, and he chooses prostitution. Mr. Henry habitually has sex with prostitutes. Mr. Henry's lecherous side is shown through his deed which secretly invites prostitutes to the MacTeer's house when they are not home. He invites prostitutes who live in the upstairs of the Breedlove's apartment building. Prostitution is regarded as a kind of escapism of the problems. Prostitution is related to the problems of African American people such as poverty, discrimination and racism. Mr. Henry's subordinate life and his unmarried status lead him to prostitution. This is Mr. Henry's escapism. Prostitution is still regarded bad in society. In *The Bluest Eye*, prostitution becomes the cause of sexual child abuse. It is shown through Mr. Henry who does inappropriate deed to Frieda by touching her breast.

Mr. Henry's deed is categorized as sexual abuse. It is because it engages with a child's genital, a girl breast. This abuse aims to give sexual pleasure to the perpetrator. In this case, Mr. Henry who has control over Frieda wants to have his sexual pleasure by touching her breast.

Another effect of child abuse is behavioral consequences, this affects how a child acts and behaves. In the novel, it is shown through Frieda's character who resists after being abused. After getting sexual child abuse, Frieda thinks of what makes this happen to her community especially in black community. Claudia and Frieda resist this color ideology and internalized racism. Frieda's resistance is an effect of sexual child abuse she gets.

"We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us—not then. Our only handicap was our size; people gave us orders because they were bigger and stronger. So it was with confidence, strengthened by pity and pride, that we decided to change the course of events and alter a human life."

(Morrison, T, 1970:169)

The quotation shows the resistance of the two sisters, Frieda and Claudia. After what they saw about the phenomena of black community which has less pride, they have different perspective of themselves and human life. Especially Frieda, after she gets abused by Mr. Henry, her will to resist the common perspective of black people who regard white as superior grows. She, as a black girl, does not

regard herself as an ugly girl even though people look at her ugly, especially the white people.

Conclusion

This research which discusses about child abuse evidences that the child abuse in black community, especially in America, is caused by four factors: bad past life, alcoholism, prostitution and poverty. Those factors are effects of discrimination, segregation and negative stereotypes, suffered by African American people. It is called racism. Based on the research, the racism influences the black parents and the society to do bad treatments to their children. It affects the children behavior.

The research finds that child abuse happen because of family problems, like financial problems which leads the parents to bad behaviors. Bad behavior by perpetrators such as alcoholism, and prostitution are the main factors leading to child abuse. Child abuse may happen because the perpetrator also gets abused in the past such as in Cholly's case. In the past, he is neglected by his parents, then it has led him to become a street man living homeless. Living in the street has constructed his wild personality to do anything he likes. This encourages him to become alcoholic and do child abuse to his own daughter.

Child abuse rooted from racism is also done by the society. Racism tends to indoctrinate the psychological mindset of an individual. The beauty standard saying that white is beautiful and black is ugly leads to alienation of black people, especially, for black children.

The study also finds that the characters in the novel who get abused have less power than the perpetrators. Like Cholly's rape to Pecola and Henry's bad treatment to Frieda. Therefore, the abuses have different consequences to every character.

African American people are the victims of racism happened in America. This racial has placed them into inferior position which actually leads them into deviant behaviors such as alcoholism, prostitution even child abuse, because actually when they are in repressed position they need something to release. Segregated job places them in low income which can lead into poverty, is one of the factors that encourage child abuse. Children becomes the victim of family problem, and it is a phenomenon which inevitable with racism happened to African American people. So setting is really influencing someone behavior. Racism must be abolished in order to make people equal each other and when racism is erased, at least, this will reduce child abuse cases as happened to African American people.

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