



**THE REPRESENTATION OF ANTI-SLAVERY IN COLSON
WHITEHEAD'S *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD***

THESIS

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**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS JEMBER**

2020



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THESIS

A thesis presented to the English Department, Faculty of Humanities,
Universitas Jember, as one of the requirements to get the award of
Sarjana Sastra Degree in English Studies

Written by:

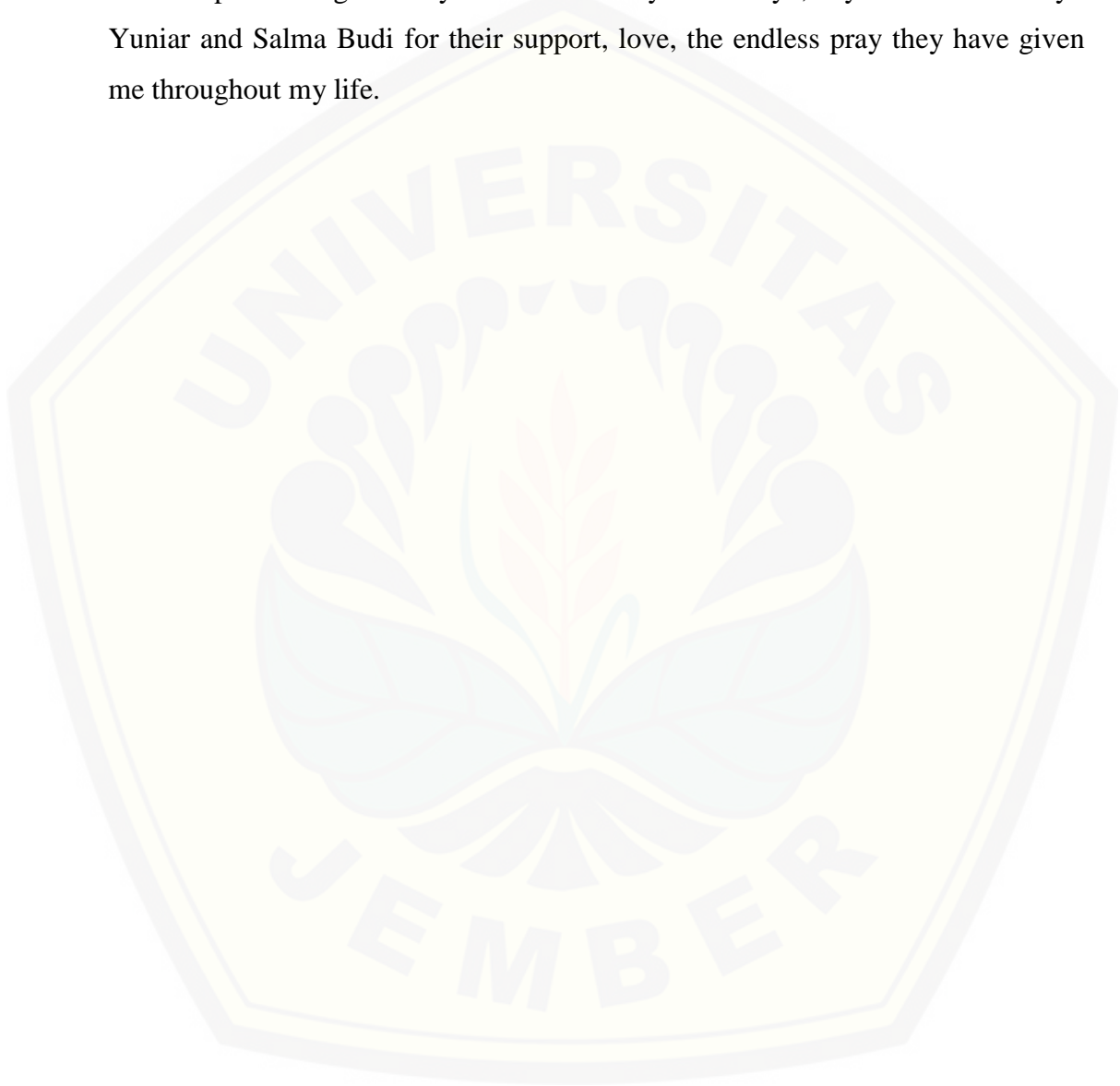
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Allah for the guidance, strength, power of the mind, protection, and for giving a healthy life. This thesis also dedicated to my beloved parents Agus Susiyanto and Sulistiyani Rahayu, my sister Frida Ayu Yuniar and Salma Budi for their support, love, the endless pray they have given me throughout my life.



MOTTO

“If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.”

(Abraham Lincoln)

“Death is better than slavery.”

(Harriet Ann Jacobs)



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled *The Representation of Anti-Slavery in Colson Whitehead's The Underground Railroad* is an original piece of my own writing. I declare that many publications have never published this research and the analysis of the data described in this thesis. I certify to the best of my knowledge that all sources applied and any help received in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

Jember, 2020

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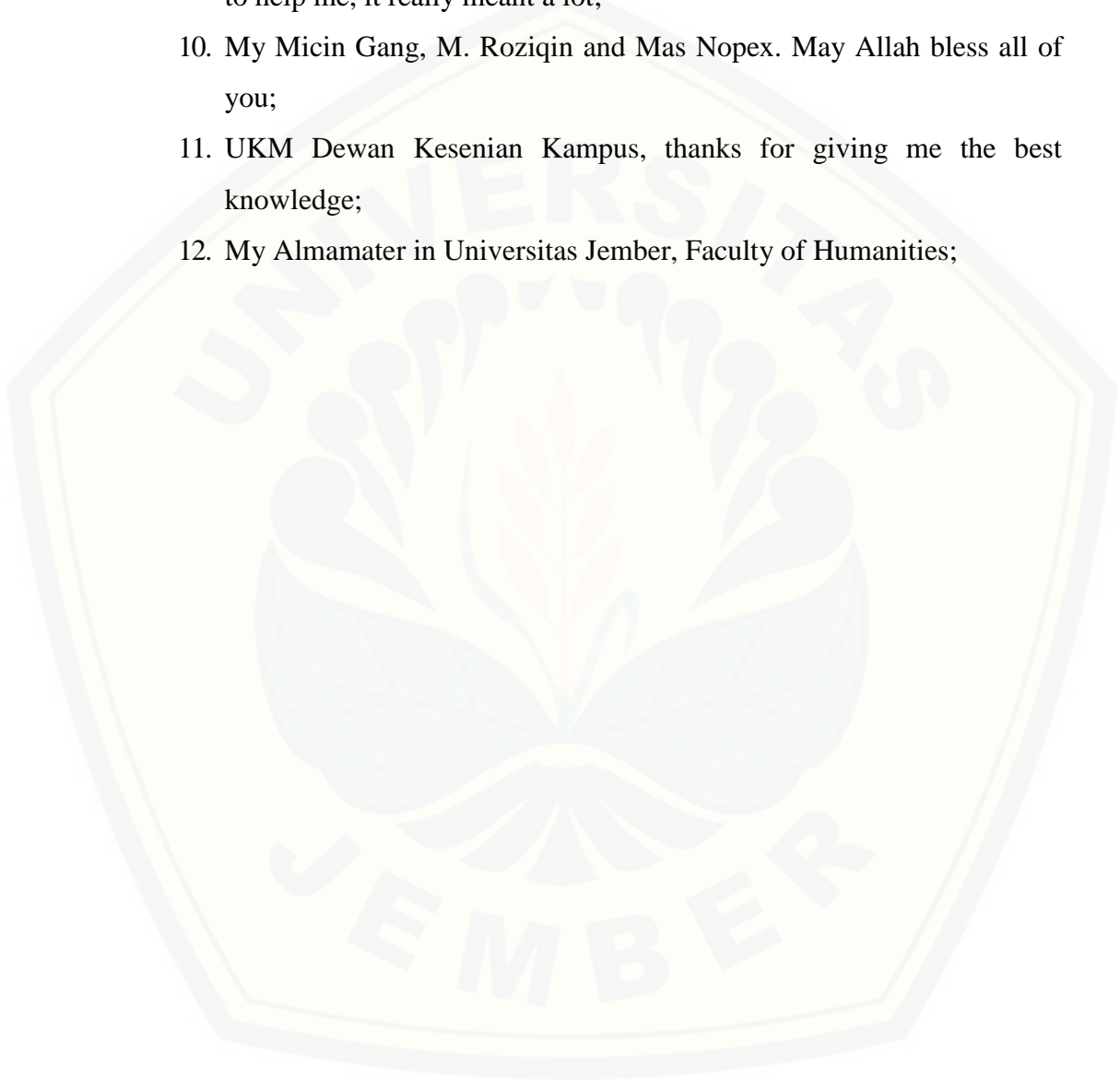
NIP. 196805161992011001

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First of all, I would like to say thank you for my greatest Lord, Allah SWT, for the blessings given to me to finish my study in the English Department. Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember. In addition, I would like to give this gratitude to those who accompanied me with all their supports and during my study.

1. Prof. Dr. Akhmad Sofyan, M. Hum., the Dean of Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember;
2. Dr. Ikwan Setiawan S.S., M.A. the Head of English Departement, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember;
3. Drs. Imam Basuki, M. Hum, and Dr. Ikwan Setiawan S.S., M.A. as my first and second advisors. Also, Dr. Dina Dyah Kusumayanti, M. A as my first examiner, and my second examiner is L. Dyah Purwita Wardani SWW, S.S., M.A who have contributed their thoughts, time, and guidance to my academic thesis writing;
4. All lecturers of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember who have given valuable knowledge during my academic year;
5. My dearest family, Agus Susiyanto and Sulistiyani Rahayu, my sister Frida Ayu Yuniar and Salma Budi, my grandmothers Fatimah and Sri Suharti, my grandfathers Darmo and Saron, my aunts Evi Sri Indahwati and Nanik Sulistiyowati, my uncle Heru Sutjahyono, my cousins Amanda Septiyaning, Anindiya Kamila, Kinta Karina, Qory Iskandar for their support, love, and prayers;
6. My best friend Zulfani Addin Perdani, for her warmth and kindness;
7. All of my friends in the Faculty of Humanities, especially Sahwari, Atikah, Berty, Bayu, Retno, Haris, Amalia, Amrina, Dini, Nina, Aura, Ucha, Lita, Diana for their supports and laugh. May Allah give you all the bless and best;

8. Bramtara Valda Maranov, thank you for all that we have been through all the hurt, the pain, the struggles, and the happiness. You make me whole;
9. Rasha Albassir, my Arabian best friend. Thank you for taking the time to help me, it really meant a lot;
10. My Micin Gang, M. Roziqin and Mas Nopex. May Allah bless all of you;
11. UKM Dewan Kesenian Kampus, thanks for giving me the best knowledge;
12. My Almamater in Universitas Jember, Faculty of Humanities;



SUMMARY

The Representation of Anti-Slavery in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, Risa Ayu Pratiwi, 150110101013; 2020: 48 pages; The English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember.

This research tries to reveal the discourse of anti-slavery in Colson Whitehead's novel entitles *The Underground Railroad* published in 2016. It focuses on analyzing the experience of the character that lives in the Slavery era. Those characters are Cora, Caesar, and the people in Southern and Northern America. To analyze the discourse of anti-slavery, I use Stuart Hall's theory of representation and the discursive approach by Michel Foucault. This research employs qualitative data. The data of this research are divided into two types, the primary and the secondary data. The primary data are taken from the narrations and dialogues from *The Underground Railroad* novel by Colson Whitehead and the secondary data are taken from books, journal, articles, and previous research that have similar object or topics which are related to the topic discussion.

Firstly, I analyze the textual analysis of slavery anti-slavery in the novel from the characters' dialogues and narration. I apply Hall's theory of representation which will be assisted by Foucault's discursive approach. The representation theory is used to dismantle the discourse of anti-slavery in the text by seeing narrative signs in the novel. Then, those texts are related to the contextual background in the Slavery era that constructs the discourse of anti-slavery. Lastly, I want to reveal the critical position of the author represented in the novel. The critical position of the author is found whether the author supports or rejects the slavery system in the novel.

This research shows that there are the discourse of slavery and anti-slavery presented in the novel. Slavery in the novel produces discourses of slaves considered as chattel property, slaves have to work hard, mistaken slaves must be punished, sexual abuse against women, forbidding slaves to get an education and the oppression between slaves. Through slavery discourses that appear in the

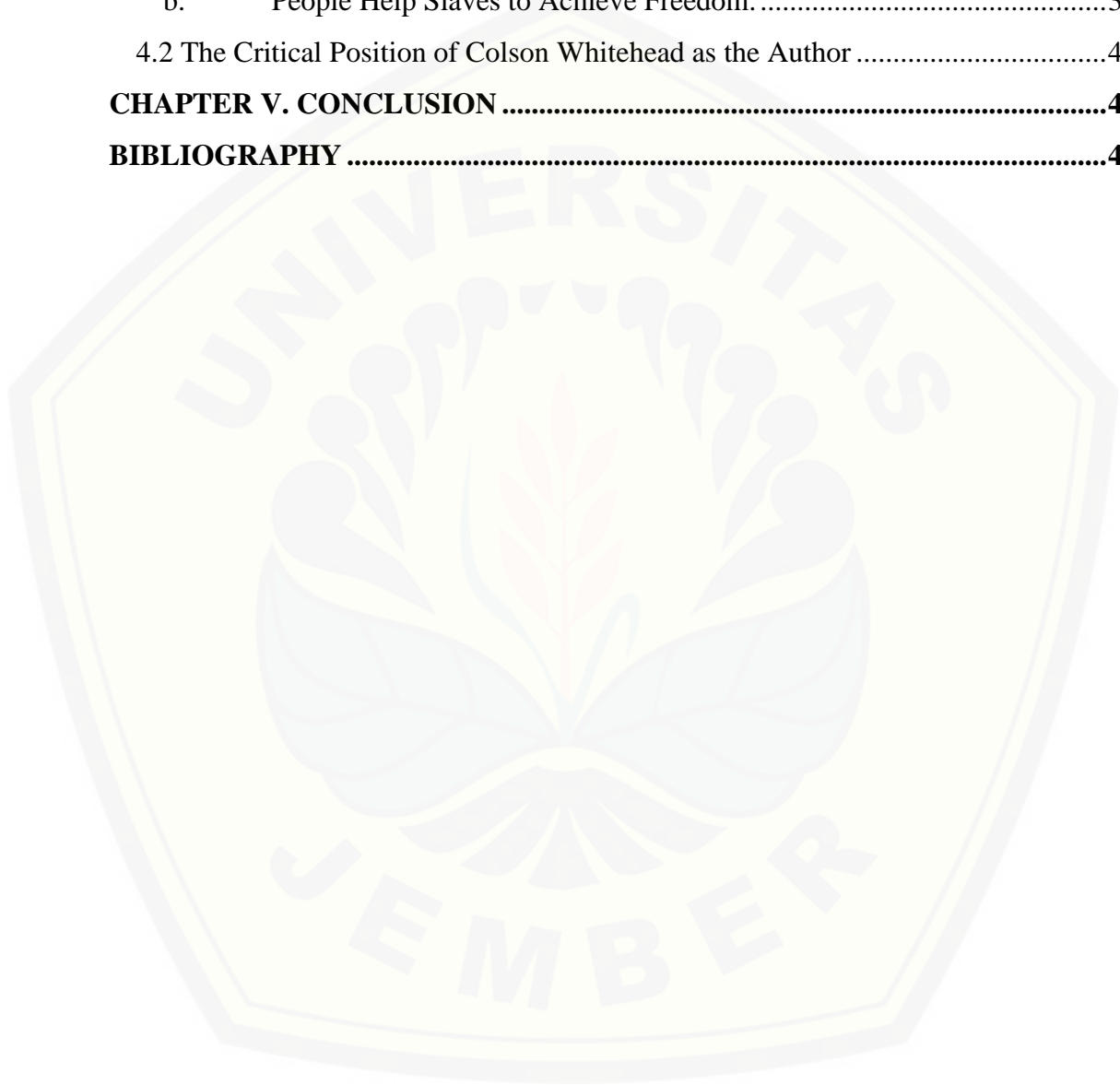
novel, anti-slavery discourse emerges in response to the rejection of the slavery system. Anti-slavery in the novel produces discourses of runaway slaves from their masters, and people who help slaves to achieve freedom.

The main character in the novel *The Underground Railroad* is a black named Cora. In the beginning, as a slave, she always obeys her master's orders. During her life, Cora gets maltreatment by her master. Various bad treatments are received by Cora to become a reason for her to get out of the slavery system. As a result, she chooses to achieve her freedom, by running away from her master. Cora's escape becomes an action against the slavery system to achieve her freedom. Through the elements of the story, such as characterization, setting, and character's experiences which show the struggle of escaped slaves, it means that research shows the anti-slavery discourse in the novel. In the last conclusion, the author wants to give the critic toward the existence of the slavery system in the novel.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Slavery had existed throughout the history of human life and given many contributions to human civilization. Slavery was a condition in which a human being was owned and controlled by other people who were considered as the dominant. The intended control was in restricted freedom as a human being, forced labor, or worked without compensation such as a decent salary or other forms of respect. Someone who was enslaved by a dominant was called a slave. In the Slavery era, a slave was considered as property and the right of a slave was deprived by the dominant. It had commonly happened in that era.

Throughout the 17th to 18th centuries people were kidnapped from the continent of Africa, forced into slavery in the American colonies and exploited to work as indentured servants and labor in the production of crops such as tobacco and cotton. Throughout the 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more plentiful labor source than indentured servants, who were mostly poor Europeans. Enslaved Africans worked mainly on the tobacco, rice and indigo plantations of the southern coast, from the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Maryland and Virginia south to Georgia. By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion and the abolition movement provoked a great debate over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the bloody Civil War(<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>)

Slavery had become a controversial and prominent issue in America. There are so many inhuman treatments experienced by slaves in the era. From 1830 to 1870, many people started to make organized a movement to end slavery practices as a rejection of the slavery system called the abolition movement.

In 1863, the sixteenth president of America, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation was made to free all slaves in America (<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lincoln-issues-emancipation-proclamation>).

Slavery was a problem experienced by African (Blacks) during the Slavery era. The slavery system caused the suffering of Black's life. In this era, African slaves got inhuman treatment from White Americans. Whites are considered as superior to Blacks and also took physical control of Blacks.

The Underground Railroad is a novel written by Colson Whitehead in 2016. The novel discusses the anti-slavery issue. The representation of anti-slavery in *The Underground Railroad* talks about all the Black on a cotton plantation in Georgia. During the period, life is hell for all the Blacks in America, but especially bad for Cora. She endures difficulty throughout her life. One day, she decides to flee the Georgia plantation by following the Underground Railroad with her friend named Caesar. Caesar is a person who tells her about the Underground Railroad. Then, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape and have to deal with a dangerous slave catcher during their escape.

According to the issue above, the author explores the struggle of Black to escape from the slavery system. Whites have control to Black because they have power domination toward Black. I am interested in figuring out the discourse of anti-slavery as my research topic because it is a chance for me to show that the slavery system caused Black's suffering, and to support the abolition of the slavery system.

The Underground Railroad's novel has a historical background about the slavery system in the 19th century and describes an important phenomenon of American history. Colson Whitehead as the author of the novel shows the horrible life in the Slavery era. Slavery becomes a depiction of the dark side in the story America. The character presents in the story is proof of Black's suffering condition in the novel. The story of the novel represents about anti-slavery discourse. Suffering experienced by Black becomes the reason to get freedom from the slavery system. It proves that anti-slavery discourse is the main problem of the story. Therefore, the problem of anti-slavery that appears in literary work is interesting to analyze.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, this research studies about anti-slavery. As a result, this research will discuss specific questions. I expect to find the answer to the research questions in this research. The following problems are:

1. How is the representation of anti-slavery in the novel?
2. How does the novel construct anti-slavery discourse?
3. How is the critical position of the author?

1.3 The Scope of the Study

This research focuses on analyzing the representation of anti-slavery in the 19th century on African-American slavery. The analysis above leads to knowing the American's Black slaves that represent in the novel. Stuart Hall's representation theory applied in this study is to dismantle the problem to discuss.

1.4 The Goal of the Study

The main goals of the study are to answer the problem, which are:

1. To find the description of anti-slavery that is shown in the novel
2. To find how the novel constructs the anti-slavery discourse
3. To dismantle the critical position of the author.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains an explanation of the literature review. It discusses the theory that I use in my research and previous research. The previous research is important to support my research because it shows the gap between my research and previous research. Furthermore, the theoretical framework helps me to clear the theory that relates to my research.

2.1 Previous Research

The first previous research is a thesis written by Novarina (2011) entitled "Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave." She analyzes Northup's novel about a Black man against slavery systems in America in the Slavery era. Northup is born free in New York State, but he is kidnapped and becomes a slave for 12 years. The result of her study shows the construction of anti-slavery discourse through Northup's experiences of inhuman practice in the Slavery era. Mia uses Lucien Goldmann's theory of Genetic Structuralism to analyze Solomon Northup's world view and as a tool of criticism in which slavery practices.

I use Novarina's thesis because it has a contribution to my research. We have the same background that talks about the Slavery era and the same topic discussion but have different theories used. This research also helps me to get references about American society in the 19th century.

The second is a thesis entitled "A Genetic Structuralism Analysis on Racism in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*" (2016) written by Khusnia. She analyzes racism which occurs in America in the 19th century. The author of *Kindred* describes that the main character, Dana, as the Black who comes from a society in 1976. She experiences the time travel to Antebellum South, where the practice of extreme racism happens. This research concludes that Whites thought that they are superior to Blacks based on their color, nationality, or race. This thesis shows the discourse of racism and the slavery system. Khusnia uses Lucien Goldmann's

theory of Genetic Structuralism to analyze Octavia Butler's world view and as a tool of criticism in which racism practice.

I use Khusnia's thesis because it has the same background in America in the 19th century and also talks about racism and the slavery system. It helps me to comprehend the superiority of Whites to Blacks and gives more depiction of America in the 19th century. However, we use different topic discussions and different theories.

In 2018, a thesis entitled "The Criticism against Dehumanization in James Patterson's *When The Wind Blows*" is written by Novitasari. She analyzes the representation of dehumanization in human experimentation through a male main character named Dr. Peyser and his people to schoolchildren as unwitting subjects of human experimentation. She uses a theory of representation by Hall (1997) to analyze the discourse of dehumanization and applying a discursive model by Foucault. This research focuses on the analysis of dehumanization in human experimentation, she emphasizes on the critic of human experimentations that the author portrayed in relation with the contextual background and the critical position of the author of dehumanization issue.

Novitasari uses the same theoretical framework as I do, the theory of Representation. It will help me to apply the theory of representation to reveal the anti-slavery discourse. However, she used different topic discussions from my research.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Theory of Representation

Representation is a literary theory proposed by Stuart Hall. Representation theory becomes the tool to analyze the representation of anti-slavery discourse in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*. According to Hall, through his book titled *Representation: Cultural and Signifying Practice* states:

“Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to

other people . . . Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning produced and exchanged between members of the culture. It does involve the use of the language of signs and images which stand for or represent things."

(Hall, 1997: 15)

It means that Hall's quotations above indicate that representation is the main part of the use of language as media to say something or meaning from the concepts that exist in our mind into language. Language is one of the media through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in culture (Hall, 1997:1) Based on the quotation above, we have to know the definition of culture. Culture is sometimes defined in terms of shared meaning or shared conceptual maps. Some people who have a different culture, they have a different concept to interpret the material world to other people. It means that we should be able to translate the concept in our minds to understand the meaning of things into the language. The language here functions as a sign. In this case, the signs that form of sounds, written, words, images used to stand for or represent our concepts, ideas, and feelings to make other people understand. By explaining this theory, language has an important role in constructing the meaning that is used to represent something meaningful.

Representation has a significant role to occupy important case to the study of culture. The representation connects meaning and language to culture (Hall, 1997: 13). The meaning, language, and culture are related to each other. Through the concept of mind, we can imagine in our mind to understand the meaning. However, the meaning can not deliver without language. Thus, to deliver what in our mind, we need to communicate it using language. Language as the medium so that we can understand the meaning. This makes language as an essential part to deliver the message and to understand the meaning itself.

According to Hall, there are two systems or processes of representation that become necessary to construct the meaning. They are; the mental representation and language. Hall states that:

"Mental representation; all things which we carry around in our heads. Meaning depends on the systems of concepts and

images formed in our thought, which can stand for or represent the world. Language depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into the various language which stand for or represent those concepts.”

(Hall, 1997:17-18)

Mental representation and language have a close relationship with each other. Mental representation means the system that connects between the object, people, and events is correlated with a set of concepts that exist in our mind. Language is a system that involved in the overall process of construing the meaning. To understand what people say, we should communicate by using language.

Moreover, language helps us to understand the concept of our mind, without language, we cannot understand the meaning of things. For instance, we have a concept in our mind about: "table," and we know the meaning or the function of "table." So, we share the meaning of "table" by using language (for example, a thing used to the convenient placement of a book, small lamp, glasses, etc.). So, without language, the meaning cannot be understood to other people.

To analyze how representation works that focus on producing and exchanged meaning, people must have the same background about the cultural codes. If they have a different understanding background about the cultural codes, it will make a difference in the production of the meaning.

There are three important approaches in theory representation. Hall states there are the reflective approaches, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach (Hall, 1997:15). The first is **the reflective approach**. It means that language has a function as a mirror to reflect the true meaning as it works by reflecting the truth in real life (Hall, 1997:25). It can be called as mimetic because language works by imitating the truth which has already in real life. Therefore, people produce meaning by using language trough ideas, media, symbols, and so on. The second is **the intentional approach**. It means uses a language to represent of the author's purpose or language expresses by the author in unique meaning on the world through the language As Hall states, in his book (Hall, 1997:25), "The speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning

on the world through language." The meaning of words depends on the author or the speaker means. The last is **the constructionist approach**. This approach is different from other approaches. The constructionist approach has its own perspective toward the meaning of things or objects. As Hall states in his book: "Things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational system-concepts and signs. We must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practice and processes through which representation, meaning, and language operate." (Hall, 1997:25) It indicates that the meaning, which is detailed by the author, not only depends on the material quality but symbolic function. As Hall describes a particular sound or word stands for, symbolizes, or represents concepts that it can function, in language, like sing and convey meaning – or, as the construction say, signify (1997:26). It means, meaning constructed by using the language as a function to deliver our mind and also to create and to communicate that the world is meaningful to others. Meaning not built itself; there is always supporting by environmental factors.

According to the explanation above, Hall explains that the reflective approach and the intentional approach are not appropriate to use in analyzing the novel. Hall thinks that the reflective approach shows the language works by imitating the truth which has already in the world. The intentional approach is considered as an approach that has laxity.

Based on the explanation above, the constructionist is capable to resolve the topic of the study. Moreover, Hall also stated, there are two main concepts in this constructionist approach. The first is called a semiotic approach by Ferdinand de Saussure, and the second is the discursive formation by Michael Foucault.

In the application of the constructionist approach, I choose the discursive approach by Michael Foucault to analyze the meaning that is constructed by text through the language. The discursive approach is more reliable to analyze the discourse of anti-slavery.

2.2.2 Discursive Approach

I use a discursive approach proposed by Michael Foucault. According to Foucault, he divides into three main ideas in discursive formation to representation, which is: the concept of *discourse*, the issue of *power* and *knowledge*, and the question of the *subject* (Hall, 1997:43).

As Foucault explains in Hall's book, the state about representation does not only use language to construct the meaning but, representation needs discourse as a system of representation to analyze the meaning by using knowledge.

“By ‘discourse, Foucault meant a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.”

(Hall, 1997:44)

The concept of discourse is about language (what someone says) and practice (what someone does). Discourse constructs topic, it defines and produces the object of our knowledge to create a topic that can be meaningfully and discussed reasoned about (Hall, 1997:44). Foucault also states that discourse appears across a range of the text, and forms of conduct, a number of different institutional sites within society, discourse never consist of one text, one action, one source, or one statement only.

Foucault emphasizes that he concerned with the production of knowledge and the meaning, not through language but by using the discourse (Hall, 1997:44). As have explained before, the construction of meaning is concerned through the discourse. Foucault also explains in Hall's book, "We can only have knowledge of things if it has a meaning, it is discourse – not the things itself – which produces knowledge." (Hall, 1997:45) It means that the knowledge that we have in our mind is produced by discourse. Thus, the use of the discursive practice is to analyze the representation because it uses discourse as a system of representation.

The representation theory is suitable for my research because the discourse in the novel will be revealed and easy to understand. By using those approaches, the discourse of anti-slavery within the story will be revealed.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design and methodology in this chapter describe the way to collect the data and the ways to do analysis. This chapter deals with the three subchapters. They are; type of research, data collection, and data processing, and data analysis.

3.1 Type of Research

This research uses qualitative research to collect the data which are relevant to the topic discussion about anti-slavery discourse. The data are collected in the form of words, sentences, and dialogues that construct anti-slavery in *The Underground Railroad* novel that have been classifying previously. The analysis is constructed in the form of a quotation from primary and secondary data. Furthermore, I used this type of research to analyze the sorted data by using the theory of representation by Hall (1997) to find the representation of anti-slavery in the novel.

3.2 Data Collection

There are two types of data use to support this study, the primary data, and the secondary data. The primary data are taken from the narrative structure in *The Underground Railroad* (2016), the data are some dialogues, statements or dialogues that relate to the slavery and anti-slavery topic. The secondary data are taken from books, journals, theses, articles, books, magazines, and internet sources, whether those are in the form of an e-book or printed book. Primary data and secondary data are collected by doing a close reading. The close reading is done to help the researcher to collect and comprehend the data.

3.3 Data Processing and Data Analysis

According to the data processing and analysis, there are some steps in conducting the research. It starts with the activity of close reading and classifying data that I have been found from the primary data. After classifying the data of slavery and anti-slavery discourse in the text. I have to found the relation between slavery and anti-slavery knowledge that are constructed in the text and the

context. The primary data are supported by secondary data which are taken from articles, journals, books, web, and previous researches.

After that, I analyze the textual analysis of anti-slavery that is constructed in the novel from the characters' dialogues and narration. To analyze the data, I use the theory of representation by Stuart Hall which will be assisted in Foucault's discursive approach. I use the discursive approach to find how the meaning of slavery is produced through characters and the event happens in the novel. The production of meaning will produce knowledge of anti-slavery.

In the next step, I continue to find the contextual background of America about slavery in the 19th century. In this step, I will relate the collected data in the novel with the contextual background in the Slavery era. These data can be found in some book, journals, web, and articles which talk about slavery in America.

The last step is to find the critical position of the author to answer the third research question. This step focuses on the position of the author as a member of a culture that produces the discourse. This critical position of the author is analyzed to find whether the author pro or contra about the slavery system in the novel. I have to relate the anti-slavery discourse in the text with the contextual background about how anti-slavery is constructed in the context. Therefore, the critical position of the author will be found.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The story in *The Underground Railroad* shows the condition that represents the Slavery era before the civil war. Colson Whitehead's novel shows anti-slavery discourse. The author's opinion about anti-slavery discourse can be seen through the characterization, plot, the elements of the story, and the experiences of Black's character. The main character represents a Black who lives in the 19th century in South America under the harsh slavery condition. Several events shown in this novel are the depiction of the real situation in America at that time.

President of America, Abraham Lincoln declares the Proclamation of Emancipation which ends the slavery system, but it does not end the practice at all at that time. Slavery is something that cannot be abolished from American culture. Slavery still exists in Blacks' life in the 19th century, especially in South America which supports the slavery system.

The Underground Railroad is a novel that represents the slavery system in American society during the 19th century. Cora is the main character who experiences the horrible life of a Black. Various harsh treatments are got by Cora to become a reason for her to decide from the master. She wants to achieve her freedom by escaping the plantation with her friend, Caesar. Cora is the evidence of the struggle of an escaped slave. She is a representation of human (Black) who is treated inhumanly by Whites. In the 19th century, Whites thought that they are not equal to Blacks. Whites consider that their position is higher than Blacks. Therefore, Blacks should be obeyed by any commands of Whites. If Blacks refuse White's rules or make any mistake, Blacks will be penalized by Whites. Blacks do not get opportunities in all aspects of life. Southern Americans own this way of thinking. Meanwhile, anti-slavery is related to the Northerners' way of thinking, who rejects the bondage practice.

In discussing the problem in the novel, it is necessary to discuss the contextual background of the novel, because it has a big impact on the author's writing, especially how the slavery system causes much inhuman treatment

toward Blacks in the Slavery era. Colson Whitehead as the author shows his protest and resistance toward the slavery system that experienced by the main character. The protest can be seen at the end of the story in the novel. Through the struggle of the main character to escape from the master, the author shows the meaning of freedom for each person is necessary to fight for, and it should not tie by law or anyone else.



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