

JOHN SINGER: A SYMBOL OF ANTI-RACISM EXPECTATION IN CARSON McCULLERS' *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

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Abstract

Some parts of society (e.g. the white race) believe that their races are the best than the other races. This causes many problems of violence arise. Although there has been a law which controls the civil right but it still does not work maximally. This discussion examines the problem of racism and anti-racism gained from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* novel written by Carson McCullers in 1937 when the Great Depression era took place. The setting of place is a small town in South America, called Georgia. Further, this article examines three problems, they are: John Singer's idea of equality toward the black race, the impact of John Singer's idea of equality toward the black's expectation in getting their freedom and the last is the condition of black race in South America in 1930s portrayed in the novel. To uncover those problems, Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic is used. From six basic tenets of that theory, this research only uses two of them: the social construction and voice of color because only those two items which have relation for the problems to discuss and give an understanding about the topic of discussion. It can be concluded from the discussion that the writer of the novel, Carson McCullers, through *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* shows that John Singer's role in treating the blacks well belongs to the third class of white men in the South called "the insane class", who believes that blacks are just men, nothing more and nothing less. As man, Singer has to respect other men, whether blacks or whites. This shows that Singer is an anti-racist white man. McCullers also shows us that Doctor Copeland's action in helping the black people and struggle for freedom entering him to the second class of blacks, composed of the farm renters and owners, preachers, teachers, students, professional and businessmen.

Key words: *Racism, anti-racism, critical race theory, Great Depression.*

Abstrak

Beberapa kalangan masyarakat (contoh: ras kulit putih) percaya bahwa kedudukan ras mereka paling baik dibandingkan dengan ras-ras yang lain. Hal ini menyebabkan timbulnya masalah kekerasan di berbagai daerah. Meskipun sudah dideklarasikan undang-undang yang mengatur hak asasi manusia tetapi undang-undang tersebut belum bekerja dengan maksimal. Berangkat dari hal itulah maka jurnal ini membahas masalah rasisme dan anti-rasisme dalam novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* yang ditulis oleh Carson McCullers pada tahun 1937 ketika terjadi era depresi (**the Great Depression era**) di Amerika. Latar cerita di novel ini adalah di Georgia, suatu kota kecil di Amerika Selatan. Selanjutnya, jurnal ini membahas tiga masalah, yaitu: Ide kesetaraan John Singer terhadap ras kulit hitam, dampak ide kesetaraan John Singer terhadap harapan ras kulit hitam dalam mencapai kemerdekaannya, dan kondisi sosial ras kulit hitam pada tahun 1930-an (era depresi Amerika). Penelitian ini menggunakan teori kritik ras (**Critical Race Theory**) dari Richard Delgado dan Jean Stefancic. Dari enam gagasan dalam CRT, penelitian ini hanya menggunakan dua gagasan yaitu **the social construction of race** dan **voice of color** karena dua gagasan tersebut yang bisa digunakan untuk memecahkan masalah dalam penelitian ini. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah adanya perlakuan baik dari John Singer kepada ras kulit hitam oleh sebab itu dia termasuk **the insane class** yang percaya bahwa ras kulit hitam adalah manusia, tidak lebih dan tidak kurang, maka juga harus dihormati. Singer adalah seorang anti-rasis. Sedangkan peran dokter Copeland, atas inspirasi yang diperoleh dari Singer, dalam memperjuangkan hak-hak ras kulit hitam termasuk dalam kelas kedua ras kulit hitam yang terdiri dari pemilik dan penyewa kebun, pendeta, guru, pelajar, tenaga profesional dan pengusaha.

Kata kunci: *Rasisme, anti-rasisme, CRT, Great Depression.*

Introduction

Racism in the Great Depression era in America in 1930s and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* have a relation. *The Heart*

is a Lonely Hunter represents racial actions happened to the black race in America in 1930s, where McCullers, as the author, wrote this novel in 1937. Although violence to the black race only happened in the past, it still gives a mark in

black American's mind. After they get their independence and become recognized people, today, the black and the white walk hand-in-hand each other. It is normal and it is not a taboo. Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 9-10) stated that many modern-day readers believe that racism is declining or that class today is more important than race. It is certainly true that lynching and other shocking expressions of racism are less frequent than in the past. It means when the various races exist in the world, it arises several racial issues.

Webster Dictionary (1966:1870) explains that racism is the assumption that psycho cultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to dominate over others. According to *Oxford Dictionary ()*, racism has two meanings, first, believe in the superiority of a particular race; prejudice based on this, and second, antagonism towards other races. While, Tyson (2006:360) said that racism refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices (for example, segregation, domination, and persecution). In the other hand, anti-racism is related to an action which rejected racism.

By reading *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, we can find the proof which shows us that there is a close relation between society and literary work because it is a representation of human life. Most of black people live in poverty because of discrimination. They were neglected people. They could not prove themselves as a good race. They hardly got a chance for improving their social needs and their life. This stereotype makes blacks so suffer. Carson McCullers was inspired by the society around her when the Great Depression in America in 1930s took place and the black race also got the impact of this era. She took some moments and retold them in literary work and used it as the way to criticize the social environment in that era.

Research Methods

Qualitative research is the type of this research. In a qualitative research, the using of method is through interviews, observations, and the utilization of documents. Qualitative research tends to be associated with words or images as the unit of analysis (Denscombe, 2007:248). Furthermore, this study takes library research in collecting data concerning racism and anti-racism and the Great Depression issue. This article uses Critical Race Theory proposed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic and other books to support the analysis of the problems.

Moreover, making this article needs information from primary sources and secondary sources. Each of data is collected in the form of written material and it is non-numeric data. Thus, this is called documentary technique. Blaxter (1997:187) said that documentary technique proceeded by abstracting from each document, those elements which are considered to be important or relevant, by grouping together those findings as settings them alongside others which we believe to be related. The primary

data is *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, a novel by Carson McCullers, which talks about racism phenomena in South America in 1930s. The other books which are used namely *Sociology of Literature* by Laurenson and Swingwood (1972) and *Critical Race Theory: an Introduction* by Delgado and Stefancic (2001). Further, the secondary data are *To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression* by Greenberg (2009) and any references gained from papers, articles, essays and any other text.

This article analyzes the novel and concerns with Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory from Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic is used as a framework, specifically the social construction of race and voice of color, to make the general description to analyze it. This article does not only explain the idea of John Singer's equality between the black race and the white race but also racism and anti-racism portrayed in the novel. Those two parts tell the equality done by John Singer as a white race to the black race and the impact of his equality raising freedom expectation toward the black. Singer's said implicitly that there is no gap between white race and black race. This comes from his mind, his purity, because he is a deaf-mute so no one can influence him to do violence to the black race. Moreover, this article explains the condition of black race in South America in 1930s portrayed in the novel, whether the Great Depression era influences their life, socially and economically, or not.

The whole explanations also apply Laurenson and Swingewood's *Sociology of Literature* to break the analysis about the relationship between the author of the novel and the racism phenomena in 1930s in South America. Finally, the whole processes of the analysis or answering the article questions result the conclusion of the study which related to each other.

Result

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter shows that the Great Depression era had brought bad conditions toward the blacks. The bankruptcy of many companies make them truly hard workers. Their low incomes make them in pain. They do not have house, enough eat, and good facilities to fulfill their needs. Even, they are banned to have good education. Their lives are only dedicated for slavery. Their hard works do not be valued well. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* also shows that racism toward the blacks should be thrown away. This novel does not support racism. It is a very bad view if people believe in racism. However, racism cannot be accepted anywhere. In the novel, the violence of the blacks caused by some of their capriciousness as a society so the whites think that the blacks are the worst race with their low intellection.

Discussion

This part discusses the main problems. I would like to find out, how Singer's idea of equality gives any strength to the blacks. For the first, this discussion uses the social

construction theory. It holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. These constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:7).

In the novel, black and white's racial equality is infrequently happen. It is uncommon if we meet any good white person who respects the black. This case often results in a prolonged conflict between the black and white races. The conflict among the different group of race causes racism for instance. It leads to the racial tension, and finally causes racial discrimination to the other race exactly. The white people always assume that they are better in all aspects of life. The whites think they are superior over the blacks. They blame the blacks in many ways. On the other hand, the blacks feel inferior because the whites always regard them bad. Both the whites and the blacks cannot go hand-in-hand because the gaps among them are very wide. As the results, the racial harmony among them is just an empty desire. It is impossible for the blacks speak to the whites. Their desire in gaining respectability is become untrue.

Here, John Singer, as a white-deaf-mute man, becomes an expectation of anti-racism to the blacks. What he sees in the black people themselves only the good one. He never contaminated by the cruel white to do any violence. Singer is never affected by those other evil white against black people. He always appreciates the people around him. Because of his kindness, he raises the expectation of some black people to get their equality. His behavior is able to raise the black's desire in getting their freedom.

Singer kindness when facing the black people is very memorable in Doctor Copeland's memory. It makes Doctor Copeland's dream to achieve equality arises. Benedict Mady Copeland is a black physician who is very concerned about the state of the nation. His environment is a complex group of racially charged society from different walks of life: the whites, the blacks, the Greece, the Jewish, the facists, the poor employees and neighborhoods, etc. In Doctor Copeland's view, Singer is different from the other white races. Singer has a view that the white race and the black race are equal. Different skin colors do not mean they should be ostracized and detested. Black is not always a devil. Singer's treatment always gives mark in Doctor Copeland's mind.

Singer also has a great heart. He, although as a deaf-mute, inspires Doctor Copeland to ask assistance in searching institution that would nurture his deaf-mute patient. From Singer's respond in inviting him to come to the Kelly house, where he lives, to talk about ways should be done proves that Singer is welcoming Doctor Copeland's desire. He, in his restrictiveness, helps him to find the institution. This proves that Singer cares for the condition of the black people. Moreover, an impressive thing should be emulated by other white people come from Singer. He donates twelve dollars for the social service on Christmas day when Doctor Copeland held a charity for black people in

his house. It shows us that Singer is a generous person. He does not only contribute to the whites, but also wants to give help to the black people. He does not discriminate in contributing morally and materially, whether blacks or whites. It proves that he, as a white man, has a view of equality. He does not think that the black people are bad. He is truly a white man of intellect and true knowledge. There is none of the mean insolence.

Singer also helps Doctor Copeland comes out of the jail when he imprisoned for several days. It proves that he, as a white man, has an authority to expel Doctor Copeland from the jail. It also proves that the white people, although they are poorer than the blacks, are still appreciated by the majority races (read: the whites). An inadequacy white man is more acceptable than a smart black doctor. As the neglected blacks, they better keep their mouth shut and wait. There are no results if they act alone without any help from Singer. It also proves that without any assistance from the influential person, the black is difficult to get justice. A white is gold, but ten blacks are spread of mud.

On the other side, John Singer also respects Portia. Portia is Doctor Copeland's daughter. She works at Mick Kelly's family as the house assistant. Singer also looks up for the helper he met. Like Doctor Copeland, Portia feels that Singer is an angel for black people life. It proves that she as an obedient Christian believes that the blacks can rise from the whites' savage. Singer's equality toward Portia in giving extra money for his easy work, for washing his few clothes for instances, proves that he appreciates Portia's work well. He does not want to give her low wages like the other white's treatment toward the other black employers (read: the slaves). By this, Singer shows us that he disagrees for the slavery happens in the black people. The exploitation of the black's manpower has to be stopped. The slavery just makes the black sufferer. The black employers, wherever they work, have to get enough salary. Their works have to be appreciated.

Furthermore, Singer also helps William (called Willie), Doctor Copeland's son, when he is jailed. He and one of the visitors do a fight in a black brothel and he prods a knife to him. In the prison his legs are broken because they are cut by the white jailers. It happens because Willie and his two friends in the jail try to escape and finally they are caught again. The white jailers place them in an iced-cool room for three days. It causes Willie's legs swollen and crippled. Knowing this incident, Doctor Copeland accompanies Portia to Kelly's home, where she works as a house assistant, to meet Singer and collects his thought. Only Singer can know Doctor Copeland's mind and heart. In several days later, when Willie has already come, Singer tells Jake Blount, his new room-mate, about Willie's condition. They go to Willie's house. It proves that, by visiting Willie, Singer has a great attention for the black's pain. He wants to help him cure his pains, at least his coming can amuse Willie and forget his sorrow.

In the next discussion, the theory of Voice of Color by Delgado and Stefancic is used to answer the question. Voice of color means that the minority of people in a certain race are generally in a better position to write and speak about racism and race because they experience racism directly.

Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:9). In this case, Singer, as the white-kind main character, raises Doctor Copeland expectation to make any action in helping the blacks.

Doctor Copeland with his hard effort tries to find his people who want to rise from their savage. Unfortunately, he can not find them anymore. He wishes there are ten blacks people, just ten of his own people, with spine and brains and courage who are willing to give all that they have. He wishes his children could act with their passions, true qualities and power. He said to Portia that "The Negro race of its own accord climbs up on the cross on Every Friday" (McCullers, 2000:77) means that the blacks people, in their poorness, only a few people who give their action to gain their freedom. All of blacks want to free and equal but they do not recognize that action, besides praying, is more important than they sit down in their shelter only. They feel there is more fear when they face the whites.

He, to gain his dream, has to open his family's eyes first that without any effort the black race will not get their equal. They will get any more violence from the whites. Because he often sees and feels the violence from the whites he has to work harder in order to have any appreciation from his people or even the whites. Doctor Copeland also named his second son Buddy Karl Marx. "Someone naggd his elbow: 'He the one your Buddy named for?' He answered yes" (McCullers, 2000:195). It means that he likes Karl Marx. In his mind, Karl Marx is a man who has great ambitions in helping many people by regarding the races. His effort in helping all of human life makes Doctor Copeland mad in him. Karl Marx always keeps his eye open for the social milieu, like Singer does. Marx helps the people who work and suffer and work until they die. Although he is a white man, he considers himself as the brother for all of people he met. Indeed he divides the world into two classes, the poor and the rich but he does not divide the world into Negroes or white people or Chinese.

Benedict Mady Copeland, as a black doctor also learns and understands the development of every new theory. From his own money he gives the devices to his patients himself. This proves that he is the black doctor who has thought about his people and his environment. He always explains, tells and gives anything he can give. He also helps two births every week. He believes there is only one point. He knows every reason for his working. He has to teach his people. Even he has to bring his bag all day long from house to house, he wants to do that. Upon all things he wants to talk to them.

Often facing brutality makes Doctor Copeland prudent. When he talks to Jake, one of his relations, he ever thinks to make a battle but he abandoned it. "Why, by getting out and doing things. By calling crowds of people together and getting them to demonstrate. ... Doctor Copeland held up his hand. 'Let us not get so overheated,' he said. 'Let us attempt to see eye to eye with each other'" (McCullers, 2000:302). It shows us that he ever thinks about chain letter but he knows that it will be ineffective. The blacks can not understand it. Besides, it is a childish way to provoke the black make any fight or demonstration. Although he is a solid man but he

always keeps peaceful in facing injustice. He sacrifices the thinks in hand for the beneficence of the blacks. He believes his tongue instead of his fist. He does not like any sanguinary. Fighting against oppression he teaches his patients and faith in the human soul.

Moreover, after Doctor Copeland's effort is explained above, it is better to know that the blacks also divided into three classes. In accordance with <http://04SP3090-Briggs.htm> (accessed on 25 November 2011 at 1:59 pm), the second class of blacks is composed of the farm renters and owners, of preachers, teachers, students, professional and businessmen. Doctor Copeland belongs to the second class of blacks. He believes that blacks should be educated in many trades and professions. He believes the blacks should own homes, pay their taxes and perform civic duties like any other white citizen. They should also have all of the rights and privileges that are delegated to "all men" under Constitution of the United States.

Furthermore, this is the last part in this discussion. This part discusses the condition of the blacks in South America in 1930s portrayed in the novel. According to Anderson (in Rothbard, 2000: 257), 1930s is the time where the Great Depression era happened. The Great Depression era started in 24 October 1929 in America when the stock market crashed. The depression era gained its peak in 1931 and because of it, 1931 was called "the tragic year".

In the novel, it was said that the origins of black people in South America were from African continental. The dark and green jungles represents African continental. Africa is still being the biggest natural landscape in the world. The people and the environment were still difficult to be stretched. That is why the white people bought the black slaves very cheap. Further, in accordance with Al Rizal (2012:9), the statement above strengthens the history that the first black people who arrived in United States were bought by Spanish explorers. The first black people landed at Jamestown in 1619 were actually worked as servants and finally as slaves. After the long sea journey, they stepped the land of United States. They were needed to work in farm and plantation. Most of them had lived in the South where plantation grew very well. This condition then was called as the slavery era.

During this slavery era, white in the South did the practice of discrimination to separate whites and blacks in every aspect of life. The discrimination became common in most of the Southern states (Al Rizal, 2012:9). The black labors were also paid very cheap. Their black skins represent to, in the white's sight, their ugliness, stupidity, immoral, and clamp life so the whites can exploit them at the discretion of the whites. Necessarily, this bad condition also made some of strong black people struggle their life. They did not want to be exploited any more. As they have power, they still stand for looking justice and freedom. Although they come from the black continent they want to be equal with another race. In the laborious life, they also face many harassments and social problems. From that slavery era, the history of blacks flourishes until the Great Depression era.

As said by 04SP3090-Briggs.htm (accessed on 25 November 2012 at 1:59 pm), finding a job was almost impossible since there were no factory jobs really to speak

of, except in the larger cities of Charleston and Birmingham. The South's lack of industrial advancement and its deficiency in an experienced waged-labor force prevented any possibility of earning a decent living. From the fact above, McCullers wrote in her novel that the Great Depression era made the condition of black people more suffer. The rich men and the owner of factories want to decrease the output to solve their bankruptcy. One of their ways is giving little salary to the workers (the black people) and asking them to work harder. The black labors have to fulfill their factory's goods. The blacks have to supply the goods well without caring their pains. As people in common, they definitely have dreams such as peaceful life, comfortable home, and good education but they just have a little money and freedom. As slaves, if they escape, they will be killed. The less money they have also give them little chance to have recreations. Their joy is lack because they have no money whereas they have served and work hard. A man who has worked hard should get an entertainment but neither the blacks. The factories only exploit their labor without caring of their prosperity. That is why the blacks sometimes lie to the ticket-seller when they want to enter the fair.

Moreover, in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that the American South "represented the nation's number one economic problem." Although rich in physical and human resources, the southern states lagged behind other parts of the nation in economic development (Carlton and Coclans, 1996:92). It means that Southern industries do not have the investment capital to turn their resources into commodities. Manufacturers are limited to produce goods in the textile and cigarette industry and they only rely on the cash crops of cotton and tobacco for the economy.

When the depression gained its top of terrible race relations, it made the suffering of the black people severe. The Southern Blacks feel the worst of this economic despondency, as seen by the exalted migration of blacks to the north and west. Moreover, that is a complaint of extreme hunger; one problem seemed to show quite often among African-Americans (*04SP3090-Briggs.htm*, accessed on 25 November 2012 at 1:59 pm). Furthermore, Shaw in her article (2003:631) stated, "As the former slaves were questioned about their lives 'in the old time days,' they talked about the hunger they were feeling as they spoke". McCullers also said that, "... The five patients had not been lost because of any negligence on his part. The blame was in the long years of wants which lay behind. The diets of cornbread and sowbelly and syrup, the crowding of four and five persons to a single room" (2000:252). It is very difficult for them to get their freedom because much of black population is enduring from malnutrition and starvation. A simply strict quote also made by Andrew Boone who said "It's all hard, slavery and freedom, both bad when you can't eat" (Shaw, 2003:631). For all the citations prove that the problem becomes worst when there are many diseases arise because of the lack of consumption. There is also not a good hospital for them to go to because they are black.

Many crimes also happened among the blacks and the whites because of their poverty and hatred. The crimes become increasing when the blacks do not have enough

salary to fulfill their needs. They become angry and mad in their limitedness. The whites do not take care of their condition. This makes the conditions of the black people become worst. There is a big gulf between those two races. The social discrepancy happens in almost the whole town. Another crucial problem was the lack of housing. In accordance with Greenberg (2009:1-2), "By the time of the Depression, less than a quarter of black families owned the homes they lived in, compared with half of all white families. African Americans generally still earned less than whites, had lower rates of literacy, and clustered overwhelmingly in the worst-paying and least desirable jobs". That statement is strengthening McCullers' statement in her novel, "The streets become narrow and unpaved and they were not empty any longer. Groups of dingy, hungry looking-children called to each other and played games. The two-room shacks, each one like the other, were rotten and unpainted" (2000:61). It proves that some slaves have living quarters and residences, but many suffer in leaky homes and decrepit barns. Some of the older blacks who work inside the homes of their masters are able to stay there as wage workers, but those that are strictly farm hands, the vast majority of the slaves, have no place to go except inhumane and unsanitary shacks.

Finally, all of the explanations above prove that in the Great Depression era the condition of the blacks, economically and socially, are the worst compared by the other era. Fortunately, nowadays the blacks and the whites are equal. In fact, humans are created equal although there are whites, blacks, yellows, curly hair, etc. There are no bad races in the world.

Conclusion

For the bad conditions depicted by the blacks in the Great Deression era, Doctor Copeland, by John Singer's help and inspiration, struggles to improve his people. Singer, because of his kindness, has a special place in Doctor Copeland's heart. His equality toward the black people makes him admired. Although in the whites' sight he belongs to "the insane class", he is truly a god who helps the blacks arise from their suffering. His deaf-mute does not lack him to do good thing. Because of Singer's spirit, Doctor Copeland as the only black doctor also helps his people to keep their life. They as black people have same level with the whites. Nothing can be differentiated them with the other races. The difference color of skin does not mean they are devils. The idea of laws which forbidding the blacks hand-in-hand with the whites in all situations is not good idea. The racial separation in the South is a great violence for the blacks. Furthermore, the blacks also have to keep their freedom and life so that they can be an order society. Their laziness and fear have to be thrown away so they never get any violence and pleasantry from the whites.

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