



**RACIAL PASSING IN AMERICAN RACISM IN SINCLAIR
LEWIS' *KINGSBLOOD ROYAL***

THESIS

Written by:

Calvian Nugroho Pangerti

150110101031

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS JEMBER**

2019



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THESIS

A Thesis is presented to the English Department Faculty of Humanities Jember University as one of requirements to get the award of Sarjana Sastra degree in English Studies

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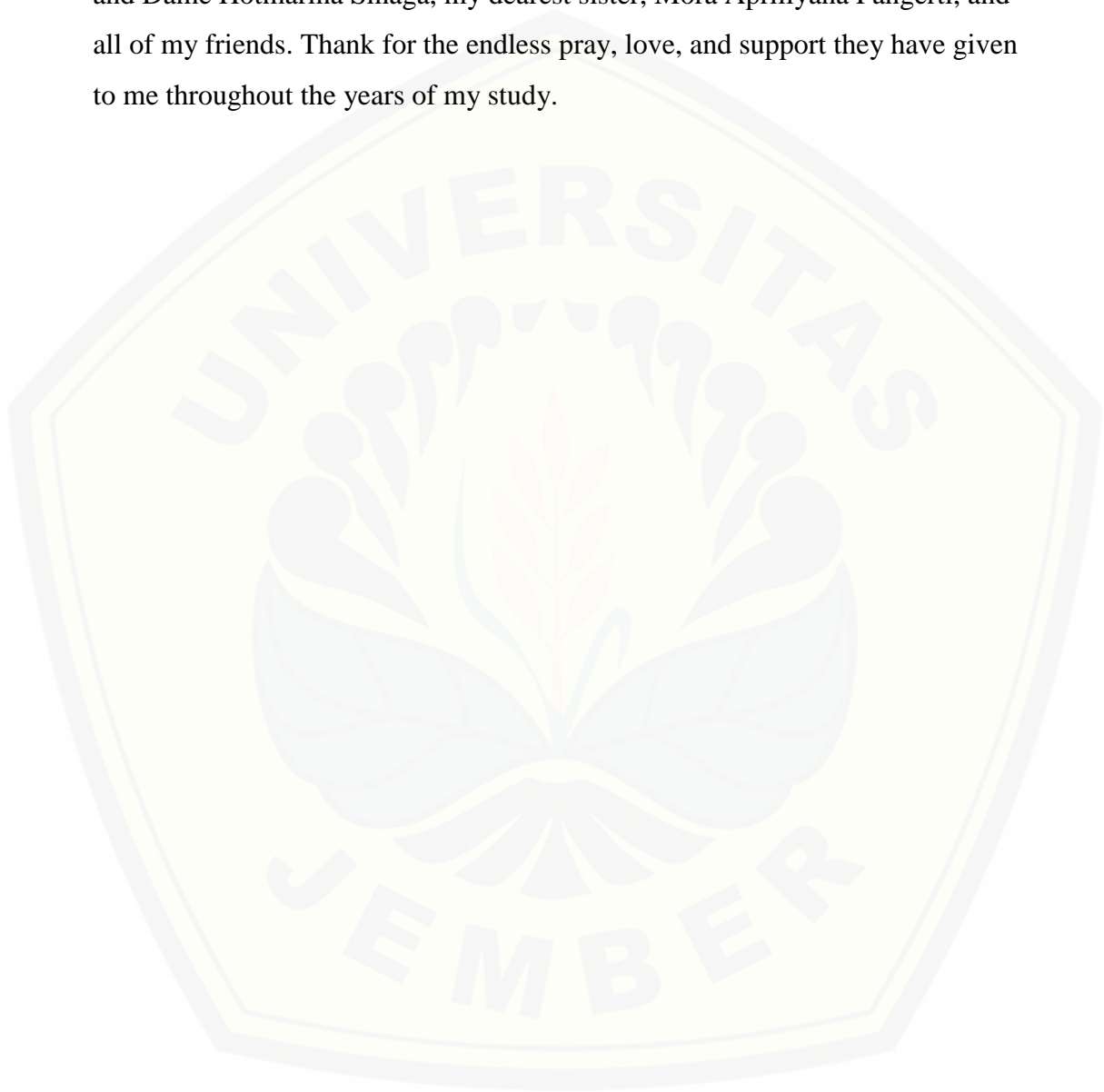
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, Budi Kristiano Pangerti and Dame Hotmarina Sinaga, my dearest sister, Mora Apriliyana Pangerti, and all of my friends. Thank for the endless pray, love, and support they have given to me throughout the years of my study.



MOTTO

Ora Et Labora – Pray and Work
(Benedictine Order)



DECLARATION

I sincerely declare that this thesis entitled “Racial Passing in American Racism in Sinclair Lewis’ *Kingsblood Royal* — is an original writing. The analysis and the research elaborated in this thesis have never been accomplished for any degree or publication. With all of my consciousness, I clarify that the sources applied and any assist received in the making of this writing have all been acknowledged.

Jember, 15th July 2019

The Writer

Calvian Nugroho Pangerti

APPROVAL SHEET

Approved and accepted by the examination committee of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember on:

Name : Calvin Nugroho Pangerti

Student Number : 150110101031

Day :

Date :

Place :

Jember, 15th July 2019

The Examination Committee:

Chairman

Secretary

Drs.Imam Basuki, M.Hum

NIP. 196309041989021001

Irana Astutiningsih, S.S., M.A

NIP.197407052005012001

The Members:

1. Dra. Supiastutik, M.Pd (.....)

NIP. 196605141998032001

2. Hat Pujiati, S.S., M.A. (.....)

NIP. 198009082005012001

Approved by the Dean

Prof. Dr. Akhmad Sofyan, M.Hum

NIP:196805161992011001

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6. All of my beloved friends of English Department 2015 who taught me the meaning of friendship and togetherness in my college life.
7. My special gratitude to Linda and Navyta for being good friends and also my motivators to finish my study as soon as possible.

Hopefully, this thesis will be beneficial to those who focus on literature research and analysis.

Jember, 15th July 2019
Calvian Nugroho Pangerti

SUMMARY

Racial Passing in American Racism on Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal*; Calvin Nugroho Pangerti, 150110101031; 2018:54 pages; English department, Faculty of Humanity, Universitas Jember.

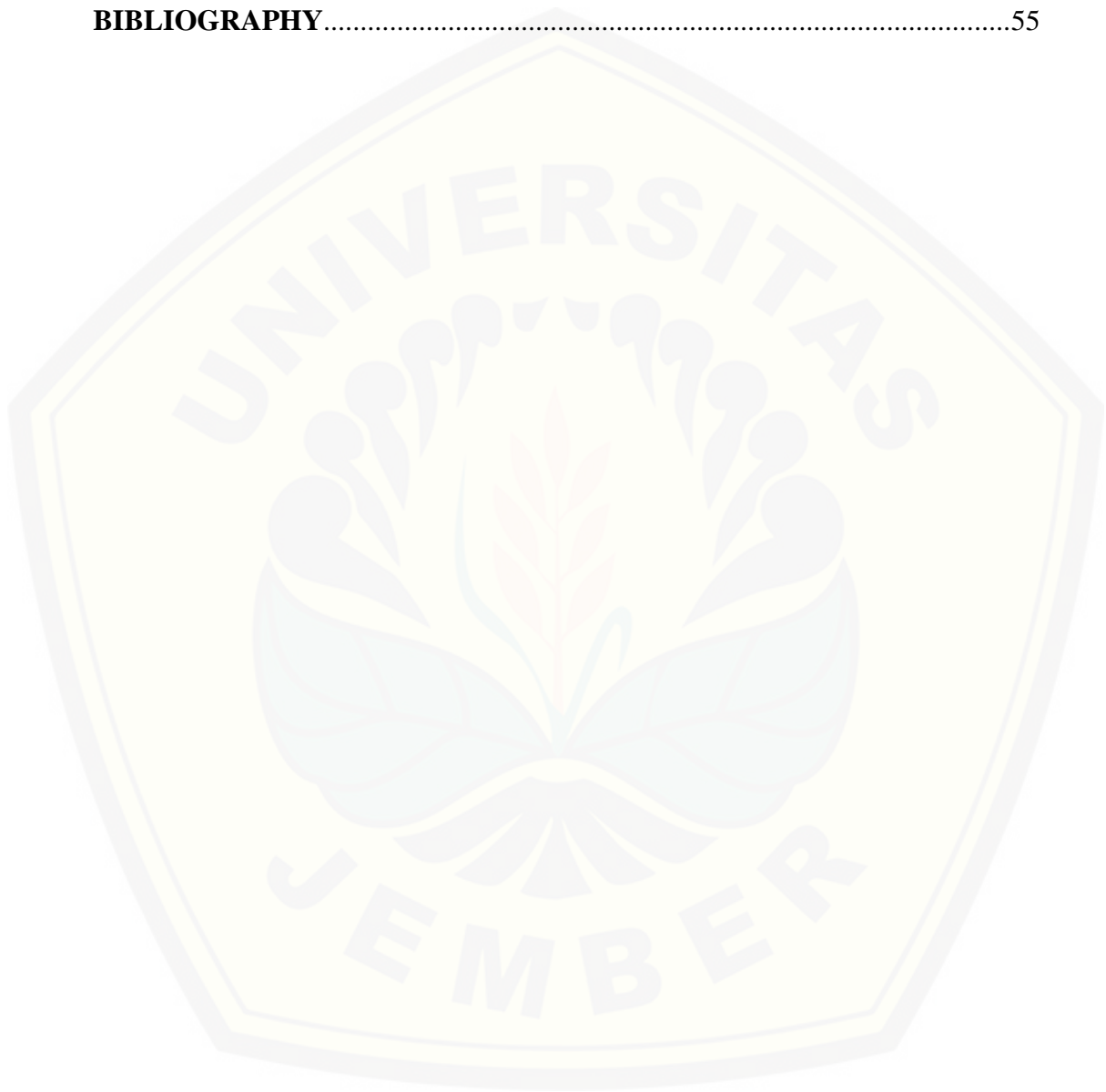
This research discusses Racial Passing that happens in the United States 1940s through Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal*. Racial passing is an action of passing which is classified as a member of one racial group and it is accepted as a member of it. The main problem of *Kingsblood Royal* is about the life of Neil Kingsblood, a White-American who tries to find his family origin. When Neil has discovered his family origin that he has a 1/32% mix-race with African adventurer, Neil feels that he is a part of Black and convert his race from white into black because of the social pressure. The impact of that case is he lost his job, his happiness, and he got a lot of racial discrimination in society. In this discussion, finds the works of racial passing through the novel becomes as a first object to find, and followed with the ideological interest of the author by the contributions of the result of first focus analysis and the background of the author that refers to his race orientation. This research uses Hall's representation theory with its discursive approach because the texts of the novel are used as an analysis object, and it has a relation with the specific historical event as a context. Because texts as the main data of the analysis, this discussion typed as qualitative research.

The result of this study is shown to the reader how Racial Passing works in U.S. 1940s because of the pressure of society, not as a choice or own decision, especially for biracial people. Then the critical position of the author through the novel inclined to White because the condition of society that the author lived under the racism pressure, and the author is a part of the culture in that time. This case can be found in his *Kingsblood Royal* that he still placed the white community in the perfect life and the bad life condition is placed for black in. Passing action placed in this novel as a good action for Neil, but it just makes him being miserable as a black. this case explains that the passing action can distract the racism thought because the life of white and black is the same, nothing changes.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the introduction of this research and the basic way to do the research. It contains four sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter is The Background of Study which explains the foundation and the basic explanation about the reason of choosing this novel and the topic. The second is Research Topic which discusses the main problem that will be discussed. Next, Research Question presents two questions which are used to do the research. The last sub-chapters is The Goal of Study shows the target in doing the research.

1.1 The Background of Study

Passing is the phenomenon of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category which is different from their own. It may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and/or disability status, also it may result in privileges, rewards, or an increase in social acceptance (Ginsberg, 1996). While successful passing may contribute to the economic security, safety, and avoidance of stigma, it may take an emotional toll as a result of the denial of the authentic self and may lead to depression or self-loathing (Gianoulis, 2010).

Racial passing is an action of passing which is classified as a member of one racial group and it is accepted as a member of it (Kennedy, 2001). This term was used especially in the United States to describe a person of color or multiracial ancestry assimilating into the white majority during the time when legal and social conventions of One-Drop Rule are classified the person as a minority or Blacks (Nix & Qian, 2015).

Based on the explanation above, I take the focus on passing of race as the main topic in Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal*. In the United States 1940s, the racial issue was a big problem in society, especially for blacks and other minorities. American Racism started from African slavery in American, and followed by Jim Crow's Law, segregation, the blacks' freedom, Ku Klux Klan, American's Civil War, Blacks matters, and the last was Racial Gap's resistance by Martin Luther King Jr. And Malcolm X (Nix & Qian, 2015). Moreover, Blacks' life was

the apprehensive life in American at that time. Logically, whites (white people and colonizer from Europe) had a comfortable and safest life, while Blacks became slaves under Whites' commands. When blacks set their freedom and got their civil rights, whites still fought against their freedom by doing any discrimination actions with a racial issue.

I find something unique and strange thought in *Kingsblood Royal* novel by Sinclair Lewis. It tells about Neil Kingsblood, American white who are a perfect life in America, but he decides to sign as black American. He finds the fact that his blood is 1.1/4% Negro. When he claims himself as a black, he loses everything. Everybody tries to leave him and he gets some racial issues in his life, especially in his civil rights. I assume that Neil changed his race identity because of the pressure of social condition that white as a majority does not like black. I give that assumption according to the United States conditions in 1940s when American white people had their stereotypes to Blacks that is captured in most American literature in that time.

By finding the issue above, I decided to discuss racial passing. All information of racial passing in this novel be found by analyzing the texts from *Kingsblood Royal* through Neil as a protagonist and the perpetrator of racial passing in this novel. Furthermore, I will find the conclusion that this phenomenon will give a positive effect to reduce the racism issue or not.

1.2 Research Topic

The description of racial passing is discussed in the background of study and it relates to the issue in the novel. The main concern of this research is racial passing in American Racism. The topic in the novel will be related to the contextual background of America which happened in 1940s (based on the novel's time setting).

1.3 The Research Questions

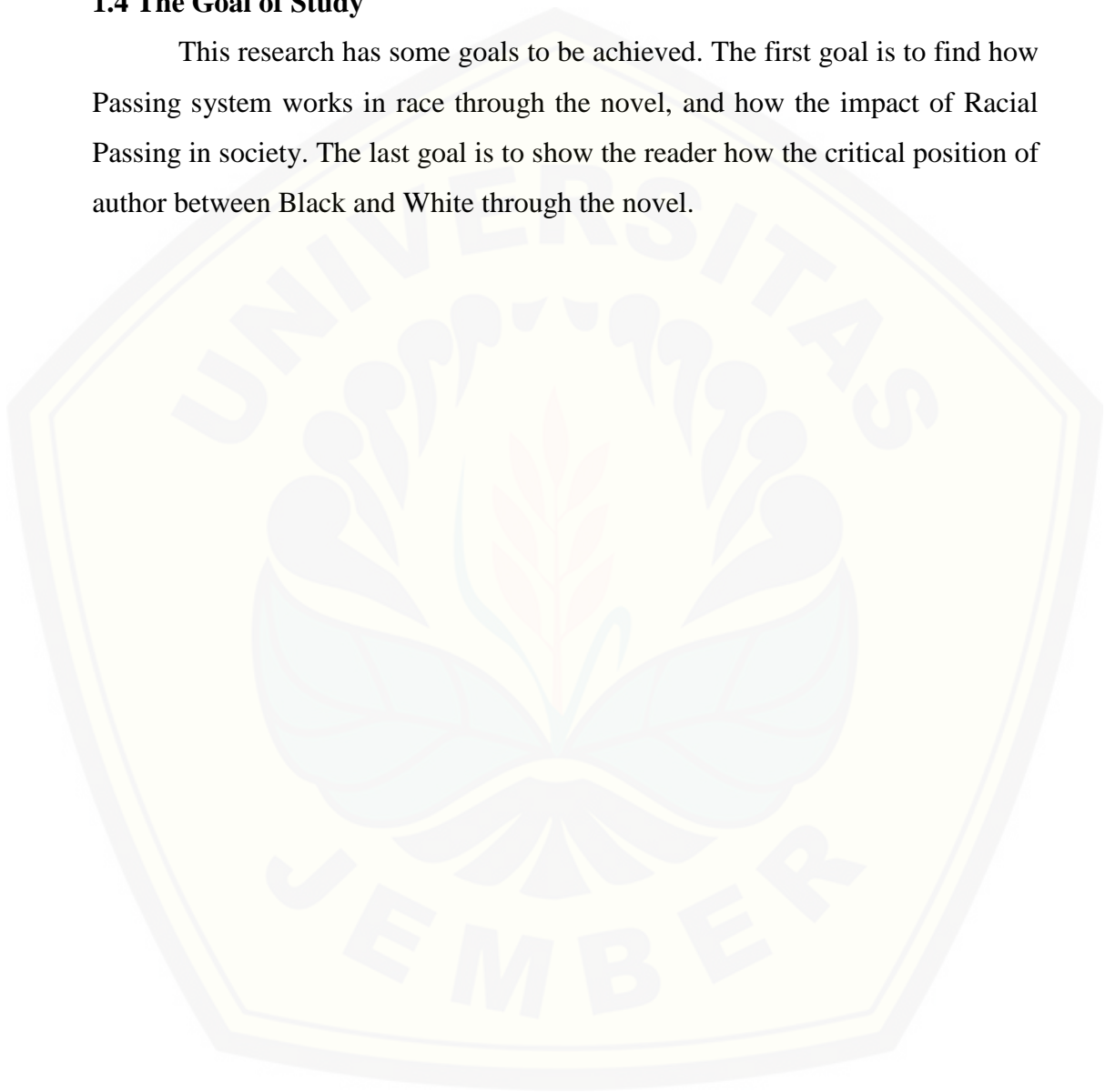
There are some problems to discuss in this research. Those problems are the result of social issues that happen in the novel and the main focus to do this

research. Therefore, the problems have formed into the questions and it will be classified as follow:

1. How does the racial passing happen in *Kingsblood Royal* through Neil?
2. How is the ideological position of the author through the novel?

1.4 The Goal of Study

This research has some goals to be achieved. The first goal is to find how Passing system works in race through the novel, and how the impact of Racial Passing in society. The last goal is to show the reader how the critical position of author between Black and White through the novel.



CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter tells about the previous researches, theoretical framework, and the approaches of racism and passing. It is separated into four sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter is the previous research which explains other researches which have a contribution to this research. The second sub-chapter explains the theoretical framework which elaborates the use of representation theory in this research. The last sub-chapter discusses the common information about racism and passing.

2.1 Previous Research

Thesis topic which discusses passing is so rare to find from Indonesia's university, especially in racial identity. I have found one thesis from University of Chicago that discusses passing in American life (black become white), also two theses from Universitas Jember which discuss American racism that can help me to get references in this study. These two theses are "The Impact of Ku Klux Klan as the White Supremacist Group in John Grisham's *The Chamber*", written by Stanly Reza Andhika (2011), and "Criticism Against Racism in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*" written by Merliya Dewi Sastrawati (2015).

The first thesis was written by Hobbs (2009) "When Black Becomes White: The Problem of Racial Passing in American Life". It discusses the cases of racial passing that turns blacks into whites. Her thesis and this study have the same topic in racial passing, but Hobbs' thesis concerns to the case of Blacks becomes White. In my study, I concern about the racial passing of White who becomes Black in Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal* which is used as the source of main data. The contribution of this first previous research for my study is the knowledge and information of racial passing in United States, and how the racial passing works. Moreover, it is also used as a guideline in racial passing act in racist society.

Then, the second and third previous researches have the same topic which concerns in American racism. "The Impact of Ku Klux Klan As The

White Supremacist Group in John Grisham's *The Chamber*" written by Stanly Reza Andhika (2011) focuses on the existence and the effect of the extremist majority organization in that time (1800s-1940s) called Ku Klux Klan that tried to kill and discriminating minorities, especially the Blacks. And "Criticism Against Racism in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*" written by Merliya Dewi Sastrawati (2015) focuses on the criticism to racism in America, the injustice of black in law, and how to fight against it, in which the data were taken from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The contribution of these two previous researches is to give the depictions of racism situation in U.S. 20th century. Moreover, Stanly's research also gives information about the impact of KKK in U.S. social condition and Merliya's research give more information about law condition in 20th century to face the racism matters.

2.2 Stuart Hall's Representation Theory

Representation is the production of meaning through language.

"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 is produced and exchanged between members of culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs, and images which stand for or representing things"

(Hall, 1997: 15)

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* suggests two relevant meanings for the word 'representation': (1) To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination, to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses (2) To represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for, as in the sentence.

There are two processes, two systems of representation (Hall, 1997: 17). The first system is the mental representations which all sort of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts. Second is language, which is the concept to represent or exchange meanings and concepts.

“...Mental representation is the term that carried in our heads. The meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which stand for or represent the world. Language is the concept to represent or exchange meanings and concepts, we can only do that when we also have access to share language. Language depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts,”

(Hall, 1997 : 17-18)

According to Stuart Hall, thinking and feeling are a system of representation. It means that thinking and feeling also serves to mean something. Therefore, in order to mean something, a community has to have the same understanding of the concepts, image and ideas (cultural code) (Hall, 1997: 4). In some communities, they have their own style to understand something. Some communities who has different background will also have different. The readers are able to communicate because they share the same conceptual maps broadly and thus make sense of the world in roughly similar ways. Culture is sometimes defined in terms of shared meanings or shared conceptual maps (Hall, 1997: 18).

Moreover, a shared conceptual maps is not enough. The readers have to be able to represent meanings and concept when have access to a shared language. Reader shared conceptual maps must be translated in common language in order to correlate our concepts and ideas into certain written words, visual images and spoken sounds.

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related ‘systems of representation’. The first is giving us meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between ‘things’ such as people, objects, events, ideas, etc and our system conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondence between our conceptual maps and a set of signs arranged into various language which represent those concepts. The process which relates ‘things’, concepts and signs together to produce meaning in language is called ‘representation’.

Reflective, Intentional, and Constructionist Approach

There are three approaches in the theory of representation. As Hall stated, those are the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. Reflective approach - the meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world. The theory explains that language works by simply reflecting or imitating the truth that is already there and fixed in the world and it is sometimes called 'mimetic'. There is a certain obvious truth to mimetic theories of representation and language. Visual signs do bear some relationship to the shape and texture of the object which they represent. But, it was also pointed out earlier, a two-dimensional visual image of a *rose* is a sign – it should not be confusing with the real plant with thorns and blooms growing in the garden. In addition, there are many words, sounds, and images which we are well-understood. Although those are entirely fictional or fantasy, it refers to worlds which are imaginative including many people think now (Hall, 1997: 24-25).

The intentional approach argues the different case. It holds that it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. The author are presenting their own view, words, and images used to mean what they want. Each author has their own characteristics to express the meaning, but they have to back to the fact that language is a social system to communicate. but, there is some point to this argument which human do use language to convey or communicate things which are special or unique to us, to our way of seeing the world (Hall, 1997; 25).

The third approach recognizes this public- social character of language. Things do not mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems. Hence, it is called the constructionist approach. Moreover, constructionist approach has two major variants: the semiotic approach which was largely influenced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the discursive approach which is associated with French philosopher Michel Foucault (Hall, 1997: 25).

I choose discursive approach as the main approach of representation theory in this study. My first reason to choose discursive approach that *Kingsblood Royal* have linkages with the contextual in U.S. condition when racism became a big problem in 1940s. After that, textual analysis is the main process in this study, and discursive approach explains that discourse produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects, and practices of knowledge, which differed radically from period to period.

Discursive

In the discursive approach, we will recall discursive formation, power/knowledge, the idea of a regime of truth, the way discourse also produces the subject and defines the subject-positions from which knowledge proceeds and indeed, the return of questions about the subject to the field of representation.

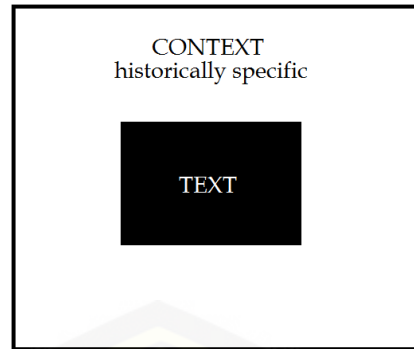
“Foucault studied not language, but discourse as a system of representation. By ‘discourse’, Foucault meant ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.’”

(Hall, 1997: 56).

This statement explains that discourse or text has a strong relation in historical moment as a context. In other side, this historical moment is not in general, and direct to the specific historical moment.

In there, Foucault argued, only within a specific historical context. He thought that, in each period, discourse produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects, and practices of knowledge, which differed radically from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them. Knowledge about and practices around all these subjects, Foucault argued, were historically and culturally specific. They did not and could not meaningfully exist outside specific discourse (Hall, 1997: 46).

There is the illustration of the Foucault's argues about discourse explains the historical context:



This illustration explains that discourse contains the context about the event which happens in that time. Text placed inside the context, it means that context has a wide knowledge in a specific period, and the text focuses on a specific event of its context which is related to this context.

In this study, this Foucault statement about the text and context will be used to analyze data which is the texts in *Kingsblood Royal*, and the historical context from this novel about United States 1940s and concerns in racism event.

After that, to analyze the text, it should be supported by other text which discusses about the same context. Foucault argued that discourse never consists of one statement, one text, one action or one source. The same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at one time, will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society (Hall, 1997: 44).

In his later work, Foucault became even more concerned with how knowledge was put to work through discursive practice in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others. This foregrounding of the relation between discourse, knowledge, and power marked a significant development in the constructionist approach to representation which we have been outlining (Hall, 1997: 47).

Foucault has a relation with Marxist theory and Gramsci's theory. Foucault disagrees with Marxist theory, and Foucault statement about discursive has some similarities with Gramsci's theory. Then both of Marxist and Gramsci, there is related with the Truth or the Regime of Truth.

According to Hall, Foucault's main argument against the classical Marxist theory of ideology was that it tended to reduce all the relation between knowledge and power to a question of class power and class interests. Secondly, he argued that Marxism tended to the truth. But Foucault did not believe that any form of thought could claim an absolute truth of this kind, outside the play of discourse (Hall, 1997: 47-48).

After that, Gramsci's theory has some similarities to Foucault's position. Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of the truth but has the power to make itself true - The Regime of truth (Hall, 1997: 49). Secondly, Foucault advanced an altogether novel conception of power. The reader tends to think of power as always radiating in a single direction and come from a specific source. It is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization. This suggests that the reader are all, to some degree, caught up in its circulation-oppressors and oppressed (Hall, 1997: 49-50).

2.3 Racism and Passing

Racism thought is used as a supporting concept in this study to see the thoughts of society in *Kingsblood Royal*, such as like the stereotypes of race, and the contextual events of racism in U.S. 1940s. Then, Passing is used as the main topic to discuss in this study that analyzing the race conversion which it calls as a racial passing.

According to the Wolf and Guin's project (2012), they explain that racism can be defined as an action, understanding, attitude which attacks or subordinates someones and communities/groups based on their race. Then, Paula Rothenberg offers this more pointed definition of racism

"Racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people. While individual persons of color may well discriminate against a white person or another person of color because of their race, this does not qualify as racism according to our definition because that person of color cannot depend upon all the institutions of society to enforce or extend his or her personal dislike. Nor can he or she call upon the force of history to reflect and enforce that prejudice. . . .

History provides us with a long record of white people holding and using power and privilege over people of color to subordinate them, not the reverse."

(Rothenberg)

That statement means that everyone who is a cultural member shares many aspects of the ideology of race because racism is an ideology that is entwined within the cultural. That belief system plays out in our day to day interactions with each other, even though we are conscious to racist or not.

Racism has two occurrences which made it popular. First, it was used as propaganda against anti-Semitism and the racial eugenics that targeted Jews in Germany in the 1930s, especially in the Second World War period (Blaut, 1992). Second, it came from U.S. civil rights activists during the 1960s which they saw the political independence of former colonies in Africa and Asia as hollow prizes that did not change the economic dependence of newly independent states on their former colonial masters (Nkrumah, 1965). Domestic U.S. civil rights victories did not lessen economic inequality between Black and White Americans in the South or elsewhere. In addition, a civil rights movement shortcoming was not having a specific strategy to effectively combat the covert and indirect ways that racial hierarchy was maintained in the North and Midwest; this shortcoming was the basis of the "black power" critique of the civil rights movement, like Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X (Levy, 1998).

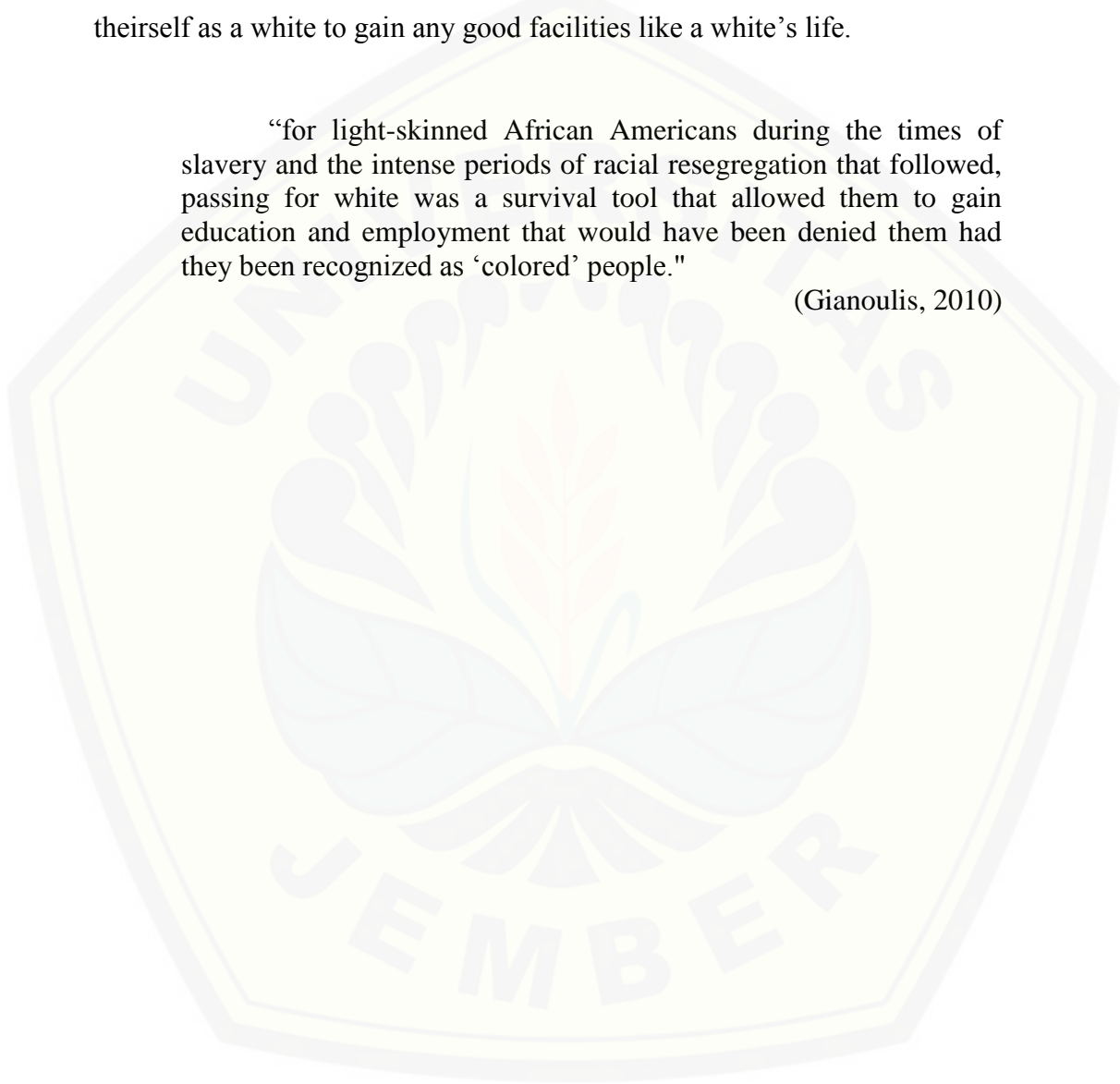
Passing is an ideology that gives everyone the right to choose their own identity or community. In more specifically, passing gives the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own, which may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and/or disability status. Passing may result in privileges, rewards, or an increase in social acceptance, or be used to cope with stigma. Thus, passing may serve as a form of self-preservation or self-protection in instances where expressing one's true or authentic identity may be dangerous. Passing may require acceptance into a community and may also lead to temporary or permanent leave from another community to which an individual previously belonged. Thus, passing can result in separation from one's original

self, family, friends, or previous living experiences. While successful passing may contribute to economic security, safety, and avoidance of stigma, it may take an emotional toll as a result of the denial of the authentic self and may lead to depression or self-loathing (Ginsberg, 1996).

Then, there are some of the goals to do passing in United States 1940s, in which for the black who has a light skin than a normal black, and claim theirself as a white to gain any good facilities like a white's life.

“for light-skinned African Americans during the times of slavery and the intense periods of racial resegregation that followed, passing for white was a survival tool that allowed them to gain education and employment that would have been denied them had they been recognized as ‘colored’ people.”

(Gianoulis, 2010)



CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains about the method to collect and analyze the data in this research. There are three sub-chapters in this chapter. The first sub-chapter talks about the type of research. Then, the second sub-chapter tells about how the data are collected. Finally, the last sub-chapter will explain how the data are processed and analyzed.

3.1 Type of Research

Qualitative research is done in this study using the Representation theory. Qualitative research is disposed to be associated with words as the unit of analysis (Denscombe, 2007). The qualitative method is used in this analysis because the object of the research is a novel that the form does not deal with numeric data but verbal or words descriptions.

3.2 Data Collection

In this research, I do close reading as a way to collect and to analyze the data. The main data are taken from the texts of *Kingsblood Royal* in this study. That textual data concern about the way of passing happens in this novel's story, and how passing works under the condition of racial discrimination were stated in the novel. Then, this study needs to collect the supporting data to support the contextual events which explain in textual data. This supporting data are taken from some books about United States in 20th century, songs lyrics which criticize the racial condition in United States, and the background of American important people and artists which have a relation in racial passing.

3.3 Data Processing and Data Analysis

Analyzing the textual data help me as a researcher to explain the discourse of racial passing that happened in *Kingsblood Royal*. It will give the depictions of the character, plot, situation, and the partisanship of power according to Hall's statement about how the meaning is constructed through language. This study uses discursive approach of representation theory because

it explains that textual analysis focuses on power relationship in a society which is through language and it has a relation with the historical context.

My first research question is the opening of this thesis. The first step is finding the Neil Kingsblood (the protagonist in the novel's story) thoughts when he was a white-American who represents the perspective of the white to black in U.S. 1940s, and when he became a black American which it also represents the black-American's thoughts to whites in the 1940s. Then, I find the process of passing from Neil's race changes in the *Kingsblood Royal's* story and explains the impact of his passing action. After that, it explains the racism condition and the works of racial passing in this social condition. Then, I separate it in some explanations to answer this first research question, there are the construction of racism in the novel, and the rules of the race which it controls the social life in this novel's plot, for example like One-Drop Rule, race stereotypes, and rule of race status.

In the second research question, it concerns the ideological interest of the author through this novel. It will be answered by the contribution of the first research question result, and use the supporting data in the form of context which gives the depiction of the racial condition in United States 1940s. After that, the partisanship of the author will be depicted by finding who are the superior and the inferior. when this process finishes, it will explain the position of the author about which is his side.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The result of the analysis of racial passing in American racism in Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal* gives several understandings. We get the information from this study that there is a stereotype to other race from generation to generation. This stereotype made the social condition in U.S. 1940s being separate according to their race. Neil as a White thought that Black is a bad creature, disease spreader, and criminal. This separation worked under Jim Crow Law in which this law also created by the White-American as a major people in this novel. White got a worthy facility in a public place, public transportation, and also in the office or school. In another side, black got the public service with bad service and nasty.

This study also finds the fact that passing is not just a personal choice, but it could be a compulsion in the social component. Racism in U.S. 1940s has a big influence to control the condition of society, specifically in racial identity. This case is portrayed in Neil's life that he does not have any choice to turn as a Black after discovered his blackness. The concept of One-Drop Rule in that time used to classify race identity in which anyone who has a mix-race with negro, they will automatically turn as a part of black people. In another side, passing concept explained that human has a decision to choose their identity, unfortunately passing worked because of the coercion of society in U.S. 1940s.

Then, other information was found in this study is the author's ideological interest in which he takes side to white. Even though Sinclair Lewis as a white-American did not get in serious for racism issue, he still placed the white community in the perfect life and the bad life condition is placed for black in *Kingsblood Royal*. In another side, the author mentioned the racial passing as a main focus in the storyline to disguise these racist thoughts. Passing should be used as a solution to bring Neil Kingsblood to get a better life but made it even worst. After that, passing as a choice is not applied by the author, but it created as coercion for the protagonist to be black in which categorized as a race with a horrible life.

APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1. Hypodescent

The scheme of the Hypodescent system: hypodescent system works in family branch (scheme.1), hypodescent system works in Black and White community (scheme.2)

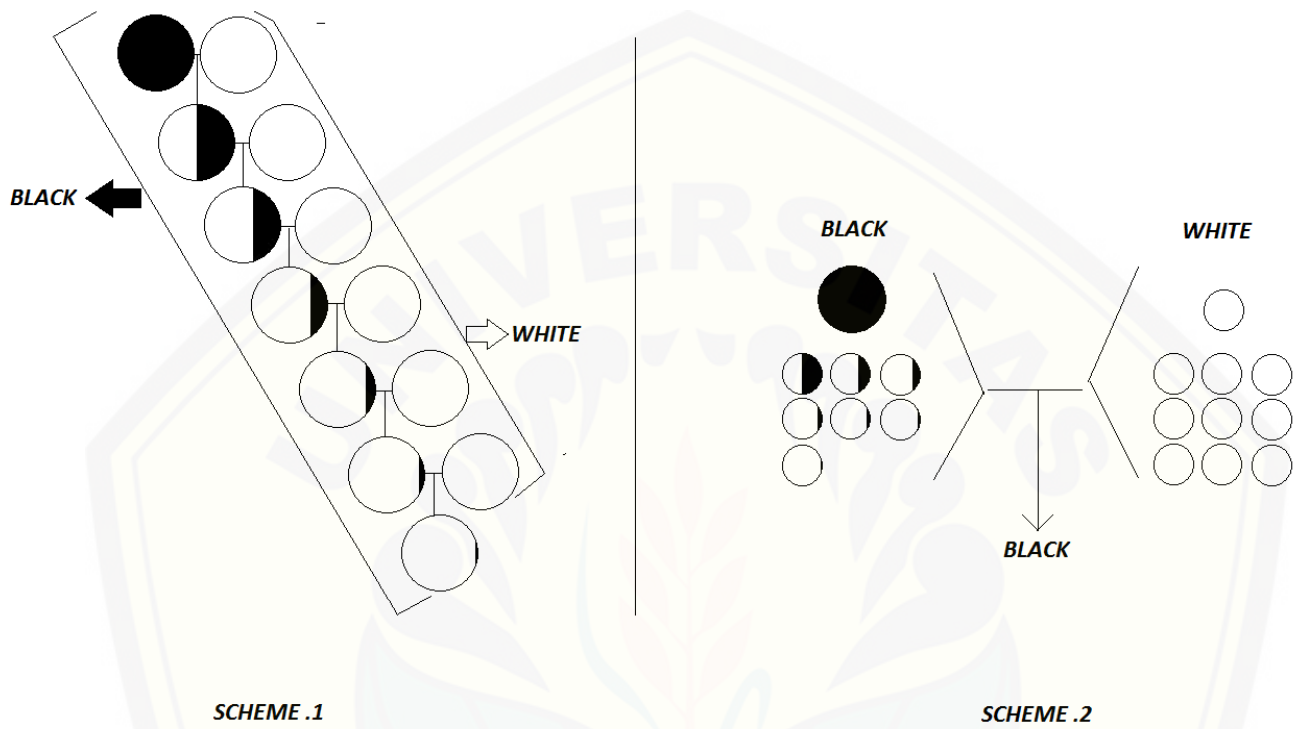


Illustration 2. The Branch of the Kingsblood Origin

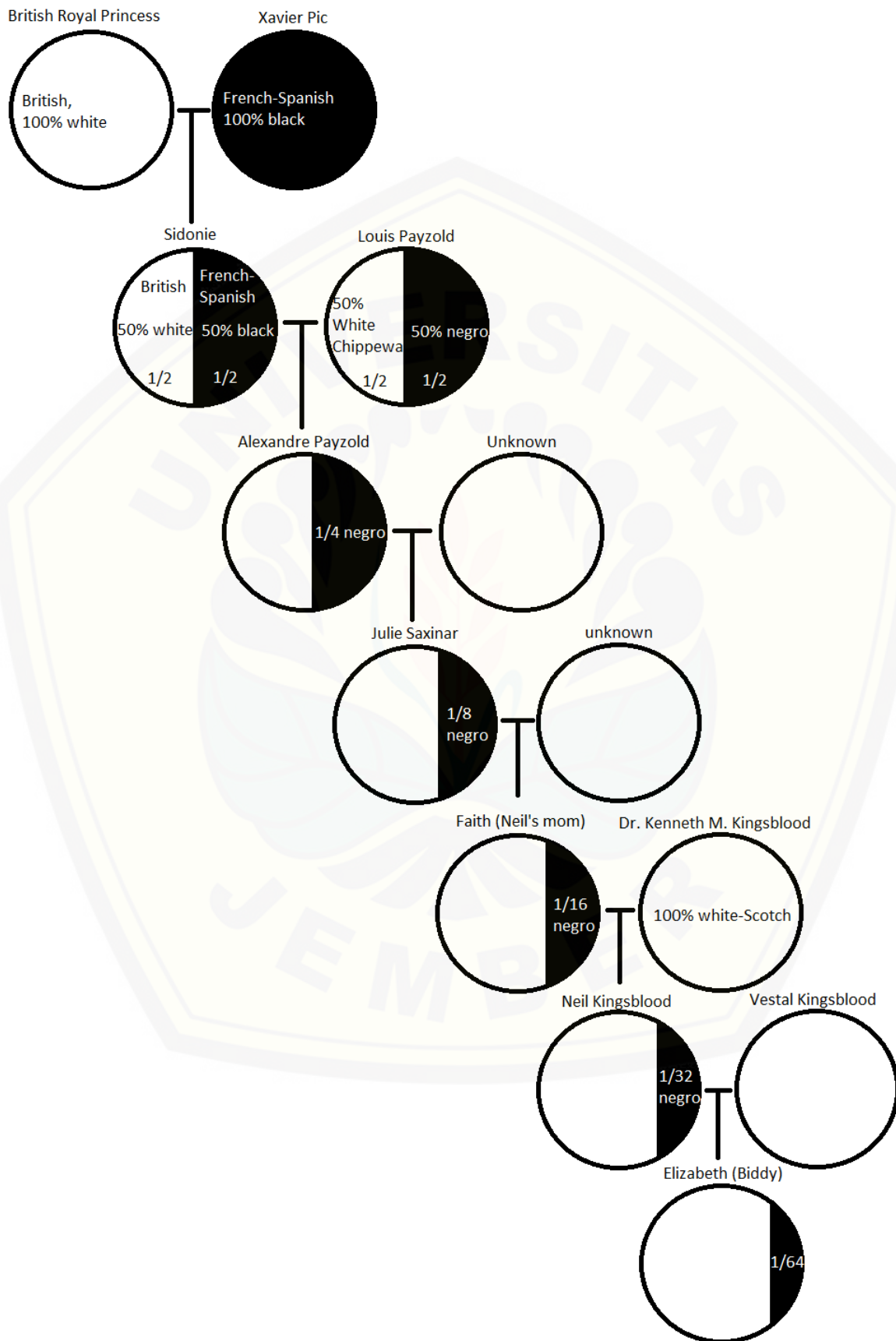


Illustration 3. The system of Hyperdescent

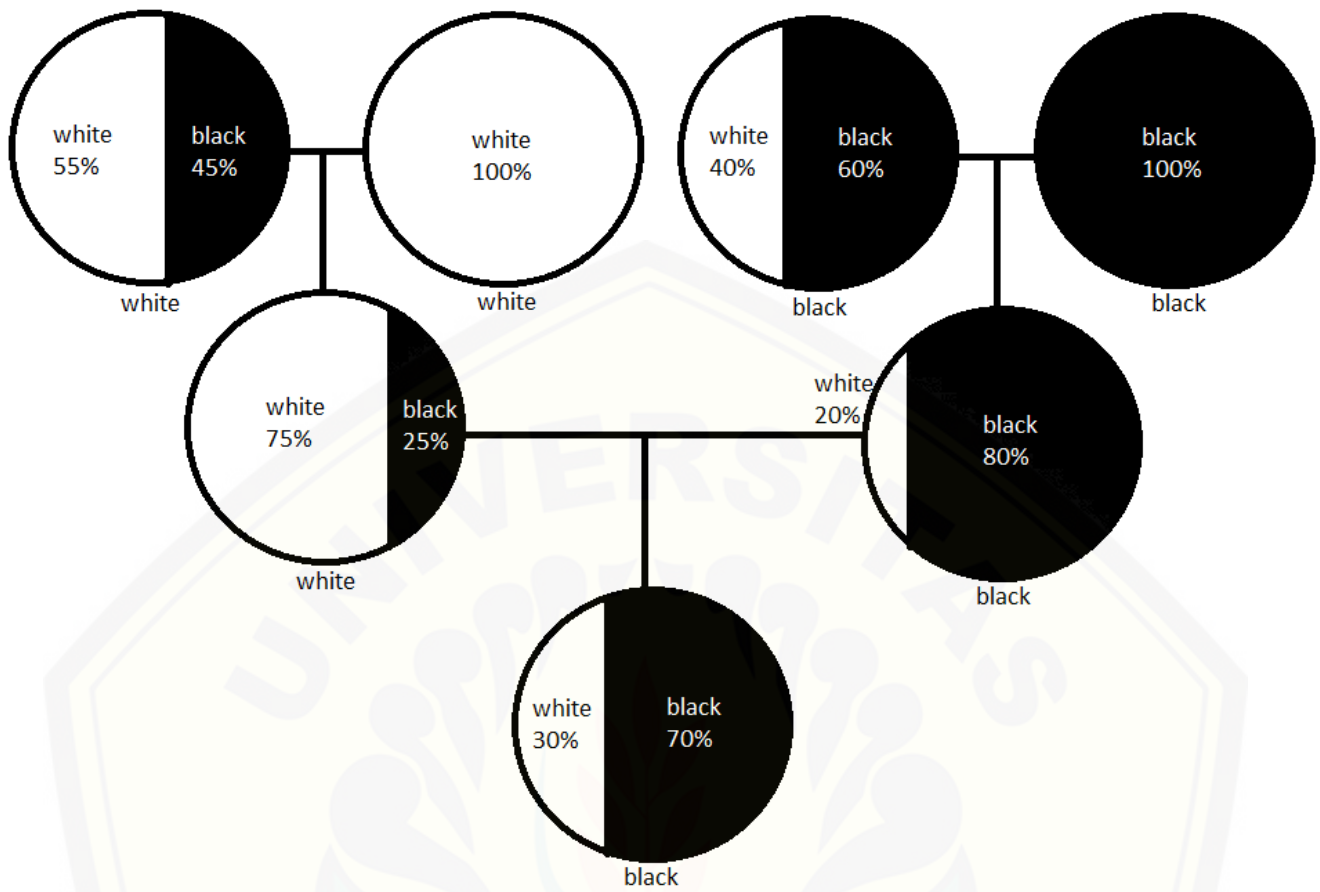
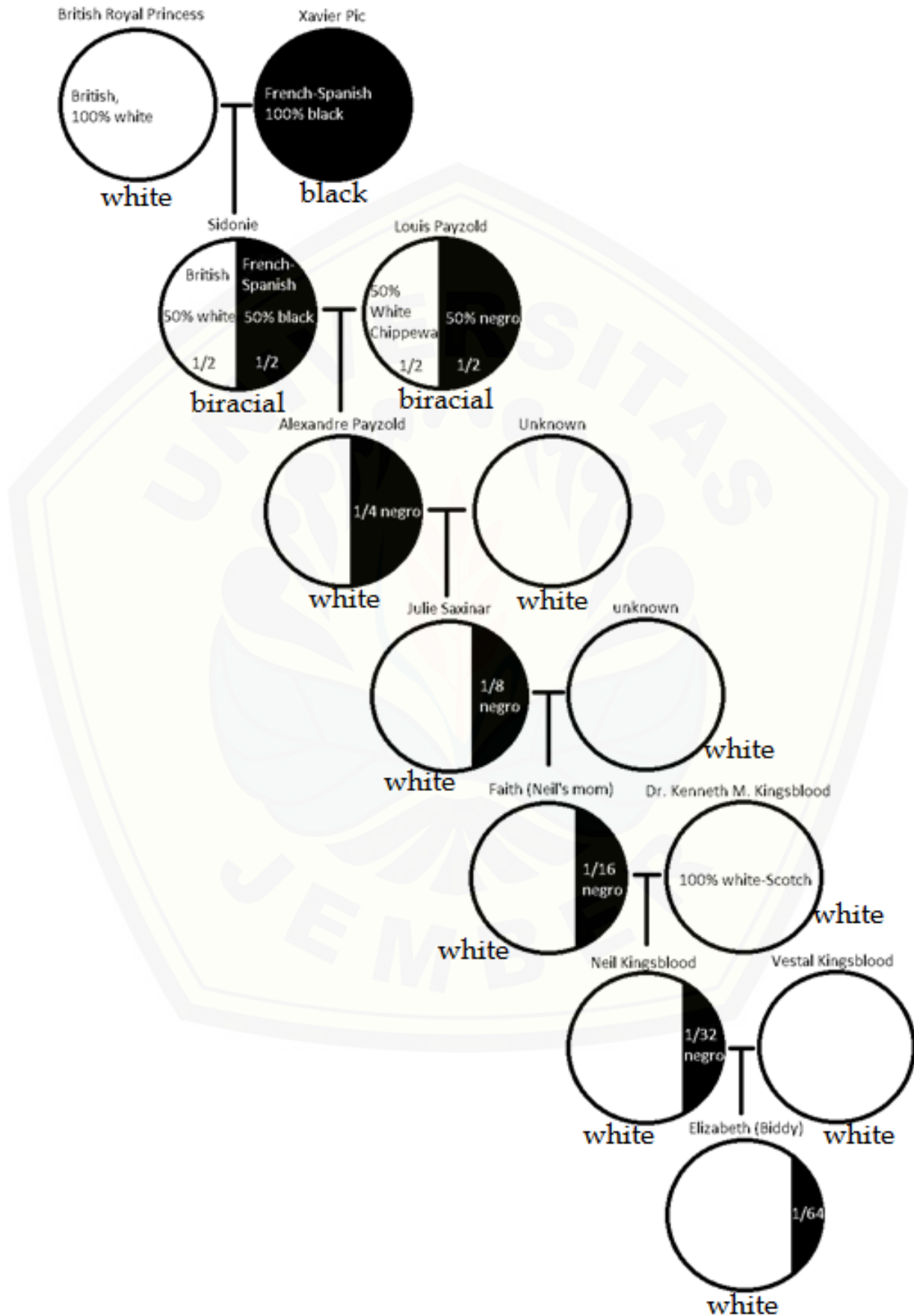


Illustration 4. The Branch of Kingsblood Origin in Hyperdescent



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