

DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS JESSE OWENS AS PORTRAYED IN THE *RACE* (2016) FILM

Novita Diah Purnawati^{1,*}, Singgih Daru Kuncara², & Eka Pratiwi Sudirman³

English Literature Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Mulawarman University

Email: novitadpn@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study focused on discrimination issues towards Jesse Owens as the main character in the *Race* film. The purposes of this research are to identify the types of discrimination and the types of responses against discrimination that happens to Jesse Owens in the *Race* film. The researcher used a qualitative method and mimetic approach in this research. To identify the types of discrimination and the types of responses against discrimination, the researcher used Feagin and Sikes' theory. There were four types of discrimination that occurred towards Jesse Owens, namely avoidance, rejection, verbal attacks, and the last are other threats and harassment. From all the types of discrimination found, verbal attacks were the most common type found in this research. In addition, there was no type of police threats and harassment in this film, because Jesse Owens rarely interacts with the police. Besides, there were two types of responses against discrimination shown by Jesse Owens in the *Race* film, namely withdrawal and resigned acceptance. From all the types of responses against discrimination, resigned acceptance is the most common type in this research. In addition, there was no verbal confrontation and physical confrontation in this film because the discrimination stopped after he did the resigned acceptance to against it.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Film, Race*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini berfokus pada isu diskriminasi terhadap Jesse Owens sebagai pemeran utama dalam film Race. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis diskriminasi dan jenis-jenis tanggapan terhadap diskriminasi yang terjadi pada Jesse Owens dalam film Race. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan mimetik dan metode kualitatif dalam penelitian ini. Untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis diskriminasi dan jenis-jenis tanggapan terhadap diskriminasi, peneliti menggunakan teori Feagin dan Sikes. Ada empat tipe diskriminasi yang terjadi terhadap Jesse Owens, yaitu penghindaran, penolakan, serangan verbal, dan yang terakhir merupakan ancaman dan pelecehan lainnya. Dari semua tipe diskriminasi yang ditemukan, serangan verbal merupakan tipe yang paling banyak ditemukan dalam penelitian ini. Selain itu, tidak ada jenis ancaman dan pelecehan polisi dalam film ini, karena Jesse Owens jarang berinteraksi dengan polisi. Disamping itu ada dua jenis tanggapan terhadap diskriminasi yang ditunjukkan oleh Jesse Owens dalam film Race, yaitu penarikan diri dan penerimaan pasrah.

Dari semua jenis tanggapan terhadap diskriminasi yang ditemukan, penerimaan pasrah adalah jenis yang paling banyak ditemukan dalam penelitian ini. Selain itu, tidak ada konfrontasi verbal dan konfrontasi fisik yang ditemukan dalam film ini, karena diskriminasi berhenti setelah ia melakukan penerimaan pasrah untuk menentanginya.

Kata kunci: *Diskriminasi, Film, Ras*

A. INTRODUCTION

In social life, discrimination is a social problem that often occurs in society. It happened because of differences in people's views on everything that happened in society. It occurs in many diverse environments and differences based on religion, gender, ethnicity, and race. The cause of discrimination is the feeling of being threatened by something. It can trigger rejection and differentiate between individual and group. Besides, discrimination also occurs because of the low tolerance of the society itself. That is why discrimination still occurs in society.

Therefore, discrimination does not only occur in human life, but also this phenomenon is recorded in many literary works. Literary works are a reflection of the reality of life in a society that contains facts in it. "The world of literary work is not an objective, but reality as actually organized and through experience by an individual subject" (Eagleton 51). It means that literary works cannot be separated from various problems experienced by humans in daily life, and one of them is the discrimination issue. Many literary works also portrayed discrimination, such as films.

In short, "film is a semi-textual form that is influenced by literature and literary criticism" (Klarer 56). It means that film is created through dialogue to convey the audience's imagination in music and moving images in a storyline to be more alive. Even though it was delivered in a different way, like other literary works, the film also aims to convey lessons in a story. In this case, many films raise the issue of unequal treatment in society, and one of them is the *Race* film (2016).

The researcher is interested in using *Race* film as an object in this research because the story of the film is based on the true story of Jesse Owens' life and career. This film is a biographical sports drama that was released on February 19, 2016 from the United States and directed by Stephen Hopkins. In this film, Stephan James is the main character who played Jesse Owens. The story of the film is about an athlete who wants to participate in the Berlin Olympics but is then blocked by Adolf Hitler (German chancellor). This film focused on legendary black athlete Jesse Owens and his inspiring journey to overcome the discrimination that occurred in his life (IMDb).

As mentioned before, *Race* film is a representation of discrimination of an athlete in real life. The existence of such acts of discrimination raises several responses from people who experienced it. Many responses can be done and each person responds in different ways. Jesse is a person who undergoes discrimination In the *Race* film. He also responds with different actions in each act of discrimination, and one of the responses that show in the *Race* film is shown when he faced racial discrimination and ridicule from the white athlete, Jesse kept silent and ignored them.

B. RELATED LITERATURE

1. Theory of Film

Bennet and Royle stated that "Film is one of the literary works which provides innovative ways of thinking about literature in a matter of motion and a shifting scene that entails moving of mind, feelings, and emotions" (201). Based on the quotation above, the film expresses the story through dialogues of the characters and one of the expressions of a writer's sense of the natural surroundings with imaginative works and creativity.

2 Character and Characterization

Griffith (84) states that characterization is about the author's presentation and development of characters. From the statement above characterization is done to find out the description or character that is owned by the person participating in the story through their actions. Based on Kenan in *Narrative Fiction*, there are two general ways the author can reveal the characters, namely direct presentation and indirect presentation.

a. Direct Presentation

The first type is direct presentation. Direct presentation is how the author describes a character through what the narrator directly says or thinks in literary works. (Kenan, 61). Based on the explanation above, the author tells the reader straightly about the character's behavior through the narration in literary works.

b. Indirect Presentation

The second type is indirect presentation. Indirect presentation is when indirectly mentioning a trait, it displays examples in various ways. (Kenan, 63). It means that indirect presentation refers to the author informing through how the characters say or behave from the dialogue. According to Kenan, several ways will be enumerated in the following discussion:

3 Setting

Klarer stated that setting is one of the aspects that is included in analyses of prose fiction (24). Setting is one of the important aspects of literary works. The setting can describe specifically an event so the audience can feel the atmosphere in it. The setting includes location, historical period, and social environment contained in the story of literary work (24). It provides information to the audience regarding time clues to support the story in a literary work.

4 Discrimination

Discrimination is actions carried out by members of a dominant race or ethnic groups that differentiate and have a negative impact on members of subordinate racial or ethnic groups (Feagin and Eackberg 1-2). In this context, discrimination can occur by a group of people who are positioned lower than others based on several aspects of society.

Other experts stated that discrimination is prejudiced by other people to make a difference to the detriment of the person (Allport 14). In this case, one of the causes of discrimination is due to prejudice against other individuals or groups. The prejudice itself is related to bad perceptions of the attitudes and behavior of others.

5. Types of Discrimination

There are many types of discrimination that people often encounter in everyday life. According to Feagin, in *The Continuing Significance Of Race: Anti Black Discrimination In Public Places*, several types of discrimination will be explained as follow:

- a. Avoidance action is behaviour to avoid someone in certain situations.
- b. Rejection action is an act of denial from someone in social life, such as poor service in public accommodations.
- c. Verbal attack is an act of violence against feeling through spoken words, such as shouting racial epithets in the street.
- d. Police threats and harassment are inappropriate to act by a police officer against individuals or minority groups.
- e. Others threat and harassment is an act that intimidates or underestimates someone.

6. Types of Responses Against Discrimination

Minority groups respond to discrimination through different actions. According to Joe R. Feagin and Melvin P. Sikes in *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience*, there are four types of responses against discrimination, namely:

- a. Withdrawal is an act to avoid ongoing discrimination.
- b. Resigned acceptance is an act to ignore the discrimination then continue the action of the response.
- c. Verbal response is a response to fight discrimination against them, defending what they believe to be right.
- d. Response unclear is an act to respond the discrimination physically.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative method that described the data in the form of words. Based on Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge, qualitative research has focused on developing explanations of social phenomena (7). A social phenomenon is an event of social problems that occur in human life. One of the social phenomena that often occur in society is discrimination.

Based on Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, there are four types of literary criticism: mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective. In this research, the researcher uses a mimetic approach. The mimetic approach sees that literary work as an imitation or reflection of the real life of humans (51). The *Race* is a biopic film, which means that this film is based on a true story. Related to this research, the mimetic approach is used to describe based on the aspect of discrimination in the film and connect to reality.

2. Data and Data Source

This research uses *Race* film (2016) as the main source of data. The data of this research obtained from some dialogues and conversations with the explanation of actions of the characters which shows the types of discrimination and the respond against discrimination in the *Race* film (2016).

3. Data Collection

The researcher collects the data in several steps. The first step is the researcher watched the film and tried to understand the *Race* film. In these steps, the researcher focused on the discrimination issues portrayed through the main characters. The second step is the researcher focused on every conversation and action to find out some required data on the film through some conversations in the film that deal with the types of discrimination and the response against discrimination in the *Race* film. The last step is the researcher taking notes of the important information data based on the problem of the study.

4. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data. Mimetic critics claimed that literature is an imitation of reality through the setting, utterances, and interactions of human beings (Abrams 294). From that statement, it can be concluded that mimetic views are literary studies that focus on the study of the relationship of literary works with realities outside of literary works. In this case, it relates to the *Race* film that tries to connect aspects of discrimination in the film with reality.

- a. The researcher watched the film repeatedly and identified the data collected from the *Race* film that contained discrimination issues.
- b. The researcher classified the types of discrimination by the main character in the *Race* film using theory by Joe. R. Feagin
- c. The researcher categorized the types of responses against discrimination by the main character in the *Race* film using theory by Joe. R. Feagin and Melvin P. Sikes.
- d. The researcher made conclusions. In the last step, the researcher drew conclusions from findings and discussions based on the data analysis types of discrimination and responses against discrimination in the *Race* film.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Discrimination

a. Avoidance Action

(Data 1)

- Jesse : Sir, where are the colored dorm?
Desk Clerk : **(Desk Clerk did not answer Owens' question and ignored him)**
Marty Glickman : There are no colored dorms.



Figure 1, Time 01:21:25, The Desk Clerk ignored Jesse Owens, Race (2016).

The Desk Clerk action above shows a avoidance through action toward Jesse Owens. It proves when he turns his head the other way to divert the situation. It looks like the Desk Clerk does not want to interact with Owens just because he is a black person. The Desk Clerk should explain something to Owens if there is no colored dorm even though Marty Glickman has answered. Because in this case, he is an officer who should be able to serve his guests.

b. Rejection Action

(Data 2)



Figure 2, Time 00:32:53, Whites Audiences gave their thumbs-down for Jese Owens, *Race* (2016).

The scene shows that the whites audiences are giving their thumbs-down for Owens. Thumbs-down action indicates disapproval of something, negative judgment, a symbol of rejection towards something or someone. The scene above occurs when the athletes are getting ready at the starting line. There is Owens and some white athletes. Then, when Owens is ready to run, they give a thumbs-down for him. It means that white audiences disagree or dislike Owens' existence. It seems that they only support white athletes. From the explanation above, the white audiences' action shows a rejection towards Owens.

c. **Verbal Attack**

(Data 4)

Trent : Now, where do you boys think you're going?
Dave : Just using the showers
Jesse Owens : (Pointing to the bathroom)
Trent : Not until we're through, you're not. You **niggers** can wait your turn.
Trent's friend : Yeah, can you believe they let these. **Jiggaboos** share our locker room now.

According to the year, it was in 1930's, the segregation in the United States had an effect on him. At that time, black people facilities and services were usually separated from white people. In the conversation, Trent and his friend also mentioned the word "Negro" and "Jigaboo", which strengthened their previous statement. The word 'Negro' used to a black person. Besides, they are shouting Owens with the word 'Jigaboos'. According to *dictionary.com*, the meaning of 'jigaboo' is a contemptuous term used to refer to a black person. The two words show that Trent and his friend offend Jesse with his black skin. After that, Owens and Dave left the room. Trent and his friend shout at Owens and Dave when they walk out. Calling Negro can be offensive to black people because this is also supported by conditions in the 1930's where the existence of racial segregation determined the general order of life. In public places strict rules of separation between whites and blacks were established. Education and employment are also regulated by race. Almost from all aspects blacks get jobs and facilities that are lower than whites.

d. **Others Threat and Harassment**

(Data 12)

Brownshirts : **Look at this**



Figure 6, Time 00:19:11, *Jesse Owens kept walking and was ignoring Brownshirt* (2016).

The statement above indirectly shows a other threats and harassment from Brownshirts' speech towards Jesse Owens. When Owens is walking to meet Mr. Snyder, he meets three students. The setting in this scene takes place in a staircase, and many people pass when going out or entering the room. From that place, discrimination may occur by new people who see and react to each other. As happens to Owens, when Owens meets Brownshirts, they look at Owens with a surprised look, until one of them says, "Look at this". In this case, it seems that there are rarely black people at that place. In these words, it seems to underestimate Owens as a black person, which indicates that they do not like the presence of Owens in that place. It is inappropriate for black people to be there. Thus, when there are black people, they feel that their presence is disturbing. Brownshirts' word shows that they do not want to interact with Owens because he is black.

2. Responses Against Discrimination

a. Withdrawal

(Data 14)

- Trent : Now, where do you boys think you're going?
Dave : Just using the showers
Jesse Owens : (Pointing to the bathroom)
Trent : Not until we're through, you're not. You niggers can wait your turn.
Jesse Owens : **Let's go outta here**

According to Feagin and Sikes, Owens' response is classified as a withdrawal. The withdrawal is an act to avoid ongoing discrimination. In the conversation above, Owens shows that action. From the way Owens responds to the discrimination, he wants to avoid them. His speech shows that he is indirectly characterized as a self-possessed person. The sentence "down blow it" above also shows that Owens is a person who thinks before he acts. Owens also says to Dave to Just smile and play nice so that Dave does not get emotional. After that, Owens cleaned his body with a towel.

b. Resigned Acceptance

(Data 19)



Figure 10, Time 00:09:02, Jesse Owens walked to meet Mr. Snyder, Race (2016).

The scene above shows Owens' response to the verbal attack he gets. When Owens wants to meet Mr. Snyder, one of the white students of Ohio University looks at Owens in surprise then says, "what's this a pickaninny parade?". The meaning of 'a pickaninny parade' is as a black child. It is a swear word. If people say those words, they can be offended and hurt when they hear it. These words are included in the form of a verbal attack. Every victim who experiences a verbal attack can respond differently. The picture above shows Owens responds by ignoring them and keeps walking. When Owens walked up the stairs, he met three students. They see Owens then one of them says, "Well look at this". Owens responded in the same way by ignoring them and kept walking.

E. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the types of discrimination towards Jesse Owens and how he responded to the discrimination in the *Race* film using Feagin and Sikes' theory, it can be concluded that four types of discrimination occur towards Jesse Owens, namely, avoidance, rejection, verbal attacks, and the last is other threats and harassment. Verbal attacks were the most common type found in this research of all the types of discrimination found.

Furthermore, by using the theory of responses against discrimination of Feagin and Sikes' theory, it can be concluded that there are three types of responses against discrimination shown by Jesse Owens in the *Race* film, namely withdrawal, resigned acceptance, and verbal confrontation. Resigned acceptance is the most common type of all the types of response against discrimination found.

As explained before that in the *Race* film, Nazi Germany used the 1936 Olympic Games for propaganda purposes. In this case, the researcher also concludes that the discrimination that occurs towards Jesse Owens in the *Race* film is because the impact of the influence of certain groups who have the importance. It makes society difficult to accept the differences in social life.

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