

Chapter II

Literature Review

The focus of the study in Michael Jackson's *Black or White* is the issue of racism in America which is protested by Michael Jackson. The portrayal of the protest against American racism will be found by analyzing the song's lyrics supported by the video clip as one package. In this chapter, the writer mentions theory that used to analyze Michael Jackson's *Black or White* song. African American Criticism by Henry Louis Gates will be applied in the analysis.

In Film, Narrative are so important in our film viewing experience but there are other types of film form, and these are important in our lives as are narratives; they are nonnarrative formal systems (Bordwell & Thompson 89). *Black or White* song by Michael Jackson also contains narrative and nonnarrative parts. Narrative part is the lyrics as the main data, while the video clip is nonnarrative part of the song that will be analyzed using nonnarrative theory by Bordwell and Thompson.

2.1. Racism and African American Literary Works

Racism is a belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics are biological properties that differentiate races (Bracey 47)

In the United States race prejudice is predicated upon the belief that colored race is naturally inferior to the white race, physically, intellectually,

religiously, socially, and morally (Cashmore & Jennings 11). In addition, compared to other minority races such as Asian, European, Australia, Jews, the most glaring physical differences come from white and black American. The first impression is about the color of their skin and physical appearance. Ali Rattansi in *Racism a very short introduction*

By the time Marr penned his diatribe against the Jews in the 1870s, most of the elements of the modern concept of race were already in place. The idea that human biological characteristics such as skin colour, shape of nose, type of hair, and size of skull were associated with ingrained cultural and behavioural traits was well established (13)

The similarity between the facial angles of the Negro and of those of the ape is also developed since 1824 (Cashmore and Jennings 65). The belief that Negro people is similar as ape physically and morally has drawn the maintenance of racism in this case is white people against black people. Even, Molefi Kete Asante in his book entitled *On Racism* mentions that blacks have been described by racists as being lower than many animal species (52).

These kinds of belief make whites American consider that they are superior and hold the domination to blacks. As the result discriminatory practices occur with the center of victims are black American. "Several prejudices and discriminations must be faced by black American such as segregations, oppressions, and persecutions" (Tyson 175)

White power and dominance are spreads to African in various ways to ensure economic and political control, western tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, song, form of dances, and every form of expressions (Gates xi)

Literary works is one area which racism has been effectively discriminating against African Americans. African American literature can be defined as writings by people of African descent living in the United States of America. Discriminations in expressing Black arts, culture, traditions, and literature in the United States cause rebellions from African Americans writers during Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement in 1960s in order to prove they were equals of European American authors.

Loretta J Ross argues that throughout American history, African Americans have been discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. This experience inspired some Black writers, at least during the early years of African American literature, to prove they were the equals of European American authors (2)

2.2 Lyrics as Narrative Part analyzed using African American Criticism by Henry Louis Gates

Henry Louis Gates mentions in *Signifyin(g) Monkey a Theory of African American Literary Criticism* that there are several ways to expose the protest about inequalities faced by African Americans literalists they are novels, poetry, Music, blues, rap, sermons and many more. "African American writing has also

starts to develop their literary works within itself oral forms such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues and rap” (Gates 35). In Gates’ opinion, this presence happens as claims to freedom, democracy, equality, the inclusiveness. It can be said that African American Literature explores the issues of freedom and equality which were long denied to Blacks in the United States a long with further themes such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, and a sense of home.

African American criticism is created based on African American tradition which had been oppressed by whites. “Their purpose is to present protest against discriminations and racism by showing black aesthetics and characteristics which is different from white culture” (Gates 45)

The idea of the distinctiveness of black literature to which Gates refers was an important issue explored during the black art movement. In the black art movement argued that African American literature has its own unique quality, its own politics that cannot be fully explained within the larger framework of European literature.

“Some theorists believe that this uniqueness derives from African American oral storytelling, folklore, and oral history which has its roots in African culture or relates to an essential “blackness”, a way of thinking feeling, and creating shared history and culture (Gates 5)

Black writers started to make a literary works based on their own characteristics as black. The characteristics of African American literature are senses of “blackness” that derives from black oral tradition.

2.2.1 Black Vernacular

During slavery, African Americans are working as servants of the whites, because their masters are white, they should learn to use Standard English in order to communicate with their master. However, when African Americans meet other slaves from African descent, they tend to create such a new variation of idioms, dialect, pronunciations which adapted to colonial circumstances that represent the communicative competence of West African, and also the United States slave descendant of African origin. African Americans created their own language based on African tradition. As time goes by, the use of black vernacular is very significant because it refers to the study of black people language in all its cultural uniqueness.

Basic Characteristics of Black Vernacular

- (1) African American vernacular tends to drop the (g) from words like thinking, drinking, signifying. It will become "thinkin', drinkin', signifyin'".
- (2) The use of *be* refers to the use of an uninflected *to be* to denote habitual or regular action. For instance, stating "She be here everyday" in black dialect implies continuous action.
- (3) Black Vernacular also tends to omit the final *-s* and *-d*. For instance, a speaker of Black Vernacular might say, "He hear you" rather than "He hears you." "You and me" becomes "You an me".
- (4) Negatives are formed differently from standard American English. The use of *ain't* as a general negative indicator. As in other dialects, it can be used where Standard English would use *am not*, *isn't*, *aren't*, *haven't* and *hasn't*. However,

based on Prentice Hall in marked contrast to other varieties of English in the U.S., some speakers of AAVE also use *ain't* instead of *don't*, *doesn't*, or *didn't* (e.g., *I ain't know that*) *Ain't* had its origins in common English (Thompson 15)

2.2.2 Metaphor

Metaphor is the use of word or phrase denoting one kind of idea or object in place of another word or phrase for the purpose of suggesting a likeness between two. However, Metaphor here as one features of black literature which is rooted from African American tradition has more specifically function. Metaphor in African American Criticism is always connected to racism (Gates xii). Gates describes metaphor as a way to say indirect sign especially to criticize white racist ideology. In other words, a metaphor is an analogy between two objects or ideas, conveyed by the use of a word instead of another connected to racism.

Ralph Ellison was a modernist: He believed that the complexities, ambiguities and uncertainties of human experience could be represented by ambiguous, metaphorical language and a complex narrative with multiple layers of meaning (Tyson 387)

For example in Ellison's novel *Invisible man* contains metaphor as indirect sign. "Man" suggests a more mature and stronger status than either son or boy (Gates 106). Ellison's man is "Invisible" means an absence rather than a presence, which is how black people historically have been treated by White America as if they were invisible.

2.2.3 Repetition

Repetition, with signal difference is a fundamental to the nature of signifyin' (Gates 51). Repetition is important in signifyin' because it implies meaning to get attention and respect toward black literature which had been oppressed by Eurocentric definition (Gates 60). Repetition is used to get attention in black literature. Something which is repeated several times implies meaning as something important. Repetition is one characteristic of black literature which is rooted from African American habit. According to Thompson in his book *A History of English Language* page 382-84, African American tends to repeat their speaking and speak fast toward other black. Isolation and discriminations toward black traditions makes them develop their originally habit and oral tradition toward other black American. Repetition is one characteristic that come from African American oral tradition. Gates mentions that AAAAAA is pretty boring (49) Here Repetition brings signal different in Signifyin' (Gates 51) means the structure of the rhyme is not well arranged as other repetitions.

2.3 Video Clip analyzed using Nonnarrative theory David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson

Nonnarrative is another element beside narrative. According to Brordwell and Thompson in *Film Art an Introduction* Mise-en-ecene is an important in nonnarrative theory. "Setting, costume and make up, lighting and figure expression and movement those are elements of Mise-en-scene" (Bordwell 141).

(Setting) Since the earliest days of cinema, critics and audiences have understood that setting plays a more active role in cinema (Bordwell &

Thompson 130). They mention that setting is created in order to build a situation wanted by the director that represented by the actors or actress (130). For example snow or fire is set to make the audience feel these conditions as real snow or fire.

(Costume and Make up) “Costume it has specific function. It brings certain message such as in film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the Cesare wears a black jacket and the woman he abducts wears a night gown” (Bordwell & Thompson 130). Here, Cesare's costume brings a message as manly clothes while the woman's costume represents a noble. In this part, Bordwell and Thompson argue that costume is functioned to represent social status, masculinity, femininity that represented by clothes (133). Make up aims to complete realism. “As the example Dracula's flapping cloak combines with his long, pointed incisors to create the image of a vampire, and in general, bizarre make up plays a big role in the convention of horror genre” (Bordwell and Thompson 133). The purpose of make up is to complete the costume. For example in ghost movies, the figure of a ghost is wearing scary clothes completed with scary make up in order to build a sense of horror.

(Figure Expression and Movement) Bordwell mentions that expression of the actors or actresses is very important in the movie. Happy, sad, satisfied, angry can be caught by facial expression of the actors (134). Movement part in the movie also brings certain messages as nonnarrative form. For example smiling refers to happiness, crying refers to sadness and many more.

(Lighting) In cinema lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the

overall composition of each shot and hence guide our eyes to certain objects and actions (133). Lighter and darker scene is created to show the important part of the movie that want to emphasize by the director.

(Color) We are all familiar from our experiences with painting with the importance of color in a composition. “Black and white films use color in a different but comparable way. The colors register on the film as brighter or darker areas, and these in turn provide cues us as we scan the image. Black and white was considered more “realistic” ” (200), Bordwell and Thompson state that black and white color refers to realistic than wangle (203)

2.4 Related Studies

Many writings and critics have been made concerning *Black or White* song by Michael Jackson. Some of the critics are written by Robert Burnet & Bert Dievert entitled *Black or White: Michael Jackson's Video as a Mirror of Popular Culture*. The second is written by A D Gresson with his journal entitled *Black or White Why do White America Opposite Race, Targeted Policies?* All of these critics agree in one conclusion: that this song is criticizing racism which always looks on something from opposite side.

The feature that distinguishes this study from those related studies is the use of African American Criticism by Henry Louis Gates which concern to explore the appearance of black literary features as a sense of “blackness”. And because of that, this study will be focuses more on the appearance of black literary features represented by Michael Jackson who was born as an African American.