

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The issues of racism are the problems faced by many countries around the world. From time to time, race becomes the most controversial topics to be discussed. 'Race' is a cultural and historical category, a way of making difference signifies between people of a variety of skin tones (Storey 167). However, the nature of the race is always being questioned. At first race was thought as a natural phenomenon, but lately race was considered as the social and political phenomenon. According to John Storey, race has to be socially and politically constructed, and elaborating ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of "racialization" which have characterized capitalist development (ibid).

Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies (Winant 3). Winant through his journal entitled 'Race and Racism: Toward Global Future' argues that although the racism is based on human beings' biologically characteristic, actually there is no biological basis that distinguishes human beings, but it is necessarily a social and historical process (ibid). Racism is a term that usually defined as views or practices which reflect the beliefs that human beings are distinguished by a biological distinct called race which makes some groups became superior and the other become inferior.

Racism, also known as racial discrimination, is often used to describe the discrimination towards particular group or ethnic; it happened from long time ago and still exists in this modern era. Racism process is actually started by one's prejudice and stereotyping toward the others (Utama 5). Prejudice is a stance of making decision before knowing the actual facts about something. While stereotype is the verbal expression of a certain conviction or belief directed toward a social group or an individual as a member of that social group (Reisigl and Wodak 378). If we started to stereotype people negatively, then it would be followed by a negative prejudice. After that, we would do a negative act toward that people. This kind of attitude is actually considered as one of the racism.

Racial identities seem to be less solid and ineffable than they did in previous ages (Winant 3). In the past, racism deals with slavery. At first, racism developed in England as a defense of slavery and the slave trade. In other words, racism firstly emerges as a defensive ideology, promulgated in order to defend the economic profits of slavery and the slave trade (Storey 168). In the present day, slavery is prohibited around the world. If the racism issues are no longer used for the intention of slavery, so how the concept of racism occurred in this present day? This point makes the writer of the study interests in analyzing the racism issue. Racism is an important issue to be discussed because its ideology is still spread out freely to the people in the worldwide.

The United States of America (USA) is one of the multicultural countries in the world. The people who live in the USA are from many countries around the world. With the fact that there are so many people with different background and

origin live in USA, the racism issues must be very common or probably become big issues in its society. Since the differences of the biological term in USA become the important determining factor of human abilities and capabilities, they make the racism issues become hot topics to discuss. The American believes that the 'white race' is more superior than other races in many aspects in society (Anggreny 13). The issue of racism in the U.S. heated up when in 2008; Barack Obama has declared victory in the presidential election .Considering that Barack Obama is the first black U.S. president who successfully beat his competitors who is white people; it is believed as the turning point of the status of African American people in the U.S. This occurrence seemed to be a major blow to those who are still considered more dominant than African American people, so that they try to look for more subtle way to spread out their racial ideology .

In the past, the racism issue was applied in the term of slavery. Slavery is a system which people are treated as property to be bought and sold or being forced to do some works (Storey 168). This phenomenon happened for long time but then in this modern time there is no longer slavery around the world. Extreme forms of violence against African Americans, such as slavery, the assassination of black leaders, the bombing of black churches, and the brutal treatment of civil rights protestors, seem to be a thing of the past in the United States (Tyson 367). Although those attitudes toward black people in USA and all around world has been prohibited by United Nation and also all races obtained the same rights for life, but still the western (Europeans and Americans) consider themselves more superior than others. In other words, the racism issue in USA has not

disappeared, it's just gone 'underground' which means it's simply become more dangerous and less visible than it used to be (ibid). This racism ideology becomes the fundamental belief of 'the white' that tried to be spread out to all people in the world.

In what ways the Americans try to distribute their racism ideology to other people in this modern era? Actually, there are many ways to spread out the issue of racism in this modern era. Media is the best way to do such purpose to spread their ideology of racism. One of them is through the film. In this modern era, film is the best way to infix the issues of racism in such soft ways. Films play crucial role in delivering some racial ideology through its representation of race. It makes the concept of delivering the issues of racism becomes more and more difficult to be detected. Required a very sharp observation to detect or reveal that colonial discourse that slips in the movie. But the concept of delivering the issues of racism often missed from the lens of many researchers. In this chance, through this study the writer tries to show us the concept of delivering the issues of racism through the movies that we can enjoy anytime.

The term racism in film mostly associated to the representation of non white (mostly black) characters in the movie. There was a time when the Hollywood film industry is dominated by films that used black culture, directed by blacks and even played by black people, that familiar with the term *Blaxploitation* film. *Blaxploitation* or *Blacksploitation* is the morphing of the words 'Black' and 'Exploitation'. It refers to a film genre in 1970s which used the culture of urban Black life and mainly used black casts that repackaged by white

artist to be sold to audience (Terry 83). Many experts have analyzed this film genre, some of them considered Blaxploitation films as a form of anti-racism of blacks. But some others consider that these films even more degrading black's position through their representation in the film which are actually unconsciously showing the bad side that refers to the negative stereotypes of black.

According to Manthia Diawarra in his book entitled *Black Cinema*, the *Early Black Cinema* is a term that refers to the films which made by black filmmakers, directed and starred by black men, showed the aesthetic culture of black, and targetted to the black spectators (8). But by the time, because of economical and social condition, since the white had also took role in the film making, this concept had changed into an attempt to degrade the blacks status in society. The whites played the role of showing the negative stereotypes of black people to build social perspectives about them. In line with Diawarra, Tommy L. Lott in his concept of *A No-Theory of Contemporary Black Cinema* argued that there was a major shift that made a contemporary black cinema showed more negative stereotypes of blacks rather than the aesthetic culture as in the early period (92). Even actually he still could not define what was the meaning of Black Cinema itself. There was confusion whether it depended on biological criteria (which meant it all made by black people) or based on cultural criteria (told about black culture, but involve some whites in the film making) (Lott 92). It led him to formulate the new kind of Blaxploitation genre, which called *Third Cinema*, that refers to the film that not only contained both black aesthetic culture and also the well-packaged black negative stereotypes to satisfy both side (blacks and whites),

but also contained such political orientation within hegemonic structures of postcolonialism (ibid).

Blaxploitation era films slowly began to fade, the 1970s were the culminated point of the era and it starts to disappear over time. This film genre is believed to be lost at the end of the 1990s. But the film contained racism issues and black stereotypes still exist. It's no longer uses black people as main characters and black culture, but it played by white casts. As reported in the Michael Danes list of Hollywood racist film, there are a lot of films that still contain racism issues, such as; *The Matrix Trilogy*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Toy*, *300*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, etc (Danes). But there is one well-known Hollywood movie that missed from the list of racist film because this movie delivered the issue of racism in a very good way, tidy, soft and vague. Re-raising the black cast as its main character and the central idea of the story, a film entitled *Hancock* launched.

Lott's *Third Cinema* concept of Blaxploitation is well represented in "*Hancock*" movie which later will be discussed in this study. *Hancock* is a Peter Berg's film produced by Columbia Picture. This movie was presented and widely released on July 2, 2008 (IMDb). According to IMDb, this movie is one of successful movie which received 9 nominations and won 4 awards, and gained average rating about 6.5 for user ratings (ibid). The movie talks about a black vigilante superhero, named John Hancock, starred by Will Smith, from Los Angeles whose reckless actions routinely cost the city millions of dollars. Eventually, one person he saved, Ray Embrey wanted to change Hancock's image

better. This movie showed the audience how African American people in USA were represented. Hancock was represented as a 'superhero' not accepted by the people around him because of his attitude. He was a criminal, alcoholic, rude, lazy, anti-social, who was living alone far from society in a broken trailer home. Almost everybody hates him, including the people he saved. However, there was one man who had faith that Hancock could be a good hero for the people. In this case, the one who cared and tried to make Hancock accepted by the society was an idealistic white man. Ray Embrey, starred by Jason Bateman, proceeded to 'civilize' the 'uncivilized Hancock' by persuading him to be more kind to people, behave and socialize in a good way, help people kindly, make him look good, etc. This point leads this movie into the racism issues provided in this movie.

This film becomes more interesting to be discussed because the racism discourse in this film is well organized. The whole package of this movie had succeeded to spread the idea of racism to the audience unconsciously. But for those who have a sharp critical contemplation, they might be categorized this film as one of the racist film and could considered this film as a blaxploitation genre film. Another interesting thing that leads this movie important to discuss is how the director, Peter Berg, who is a white man, represents the black man as a superhero, and uses his 'blackness' to be sold to the viewers that lead this movie gains high income from it. As noted, *Hancock* movie gained approximately \$625 million dollars at the box-office, while it was 'only' cost about \$150 million dollars for its production budget (Julian). Considering the time when this movie released, 2nd of July 2008, close to US independence day and presidential

election, the possibility of political view inserted in the movie was also interested to be discussed. The director itself, Peter Berg, is famous for his involvement in some films that featuring black figures in it, both as an actor or as director. Some other famous films that he produced such as *Collateral* (2004), *Battleship* (2012), and *Lone Survivor* (2014) were also successfully gained high income and many awards.

Actually, many studies that discussed the racism issues in the movie had been conducted by some researchers. One of them conducted by Dianita Rachmawati, a former student of Faculty of Humanities, in her thesis entitled “*The Representation of Blackness in Megamind Character of Tom Mcgrath’s Megamind*”. She examined the main animated character, Megamind, who represented as a ‘purple’ creature from the other planet and revealed the blackness on him. Rachmawati determined that Megamind character referred to black man through its stereotypical, social, and psychological representation of him. She argued that a racial issues could be found in any media especially film, even in the animated movie that actually targetted to build children’s unconcious social perspectives toward blacks. Another study discussed the racism issues in movie conducted by Desy Anggreny entitled “*The Construction of Whiteness Through The Representation of White and Black Americans in The Dark Blue Movie*”. She emphasized on the construction of whiteness through the representation of black and white. She focused on how the character was represented in the movie by their behaviour, misconduct that led this movie constructed the whiteness.

The studies mentioned above have similarities with this study since the main topic is the racial issues inserted in the movie and mostly discussed the negative stereotypes of blacks. The difference from this study is the previous researchers did not relate their discussion to the blaxploitation concept. This study shows not only the racial stereotypes but also discussed the constructing identity of black by white which then related it to the most probable context around the time the movie released. Therefore, the main focus of this study is on analysing the representation of *Third Cinema* concept of Blaxploitation in Hancock character. The representation of Blaxploitation in Berg's *Hancock* is identified from black stereotyping, the influence of white characters, and the construction of hero identity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In regard to the background of the study above, the writer proposes the statement of problem:

1. How is the representation of Blaxploitation in Peter Berg's *Hancock* movie?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the research question above, the writer determines the objective of the study is:

1. To discuss how the blaxploitation represented in Peter Berg's movie entitled *Hancock*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research becomes important to be discussed because the concept of racist discourse inserted through the movie should be revealed in order to support the world's effort to reduce racism in the worldwide. By analyzing this movie, hopefully this research could give the readers more understanding about what actually racism is, what racism issue is, and shows the readers how the racist ideology spread out to the mankind. Therefore, the people can prevent the spread of racism issues in this world and becomes more critical or no longer easily absorbed with the racist ideology in whatever ways, especially through the movie.

This study is also important to give contribution toward the study of cultural studies in the English Department of Universitas Airlangga (UA). Besides, this study can be one of the sources and also an attempt to stimulate more people to be interested in analyzing this similar study.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

There are some terms in this study that may not be familiar in everyday life vocabulary. So, these are the definitions of those unfamiliar terms:

African American : The term African American refers to the approximately thirty-five million Americans of African descent living in the United States in the 1990s (Cashmore 13).

- (Black) Stereotypes* : An act of over simply generalization about someone's attitudes that refers to some groups' attitudes (Reisigl and Wodak 378).
- Blaxploitation* : A film genre in 1970s which used the culture of urban Black life and mainly used black casts that repackaged by white artist to be sold to audience (Terry 83).
- Racism* : Views or practices which reflects the beliefs that human is distinguished by a biological distinct called race, which make some groups became superior and the other become inferior. (Storey 167)