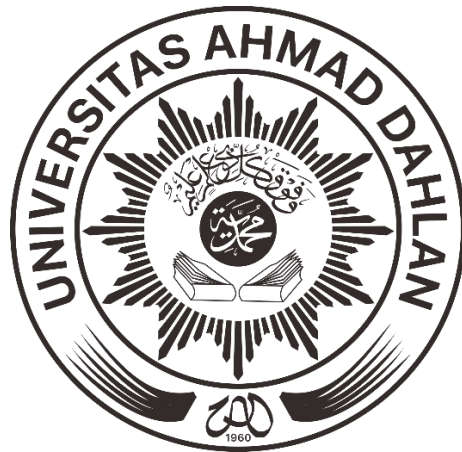


**RACISM TOWARDS BLACK PEOPLE REPRESENTED IN THE FILM**  
***IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK***



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyze the representation of racism in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*. This film is adapted from a novel by James Baldwin and raises issues of racism and racial injustice faced by African-American characters in the 1970s. In this research, there are two problem formulations. The first problem is how racism is represented in the film. And the second problem is what is the self-conflict that is faced by Tish, the black girl as the main character as a result of the racism she has experienced. This study used a qualitative analysis approach with a focus on narrative content, visual depiction, and dialogue related to racism. This research method involves content analysis and discourse analysis to identify themes related to racism in films.

Researchers used the theory of representation put forward by Stuart Hall and Karl Marx's conflict theory to assist this research. By using library research to collect the necessary data. The primary data in the thesis is a film entitled *If Beale Street Could Talk* as well as supporting data in the form of articles, journals, books, and several internet sites related to the research being conducted. The analysis in the discussion of this research is to find out how racism is represented through dialogue between actors in the film. As well as, what are the internal conflicts due to the impact of racism.

The results of the analysis show that the film *If Beale Street Could Talk* depicts various forms of racism, including institutional racism and individual racism. Institutional racism is seen through discriminatory treatment by law enforcement officials, difficulties in obtaining adequate housing, and unfair treatment in the justice system. Individual racism is reflected in the prejudice and discriminatory attitudes of non-African-American characters against African-American characters. And the impact of racism is very bad for individual victims of racism so that many experience prolonged self-conflict to live their future lives.

# INTRODUCTION

## A. Background of the study

Human beings who are born with different physical traits from every other are not a hereditary mistake. Any person in no way had a choice when he became born, including being born with a physically handicapped situation. All of this is a present from God. That is, the physical form and coloration of human pores and skin is a God-given proper that cannot be denied by using every person. These variations aren't something that serves to divide or avoid the creation of peace in human life, but range and variations need to be understood as racial pluralism which is a top-notch present from God. All human beings have been created identical with the aid of God and endowed with the identical person rights. Likewise for the proper of each human being born in the world to pick a perception to be embraced.

Prejudice is a person's perception of someone or another group and their attitudes or behavior without enough thought and knowledge (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). It can be judged as a form of racism if it has a certain effect on a person or group itself. Associated with prejudice, the function of the media is very crucial in shaping perceptions in a collection. Be it print media or digital media, each are very dominant helping equipment in forming a prejudice in society, in particular right now (Walgito, 1999, p.84).

Racism is a phenomenon that has passed off over the centuries, with a distinction races, tribes, and cultures around the world. One researcher confirmed that *“Because of stigmatization of racism after WW2, racist practices have frequently been*

*Reformulated in less conspicuous form Race has been replaced with culture, colonialism, has been replaced with immigration (Anna Maria Boileau, 2014, p. 6)”*.

As a shape of mass media, movie taken into consideration to be able to persuade the target market. Film is visible as having realism, influence emotional, and more popularity. Along the development of time, the film is likewise used as a propaganda tool. Film phenomenon as a propaganda device capable of inflicting the prevalence of social crises in numerous international locations. Racism is an accepted hassle that prompted through many factors from social, political, historical, and monetary. From long ago, a whole lot of racist incidents in round us due to variations in pores and skin shade, ethnicity, faith, race, and culture. So far nevertheless, there are still many activities that result into racism. There are so many movies that raised issues of racism including the assist, *Selma*, *The Butler*, *12 Years a Slave*, and lots of more each have a distinct way of lifting racism problem. The depiction of racism also can visible inside the film if *Beale Street* could talk.

The film *if Beale Street could talk* is the work of Barry Jenkins released in 2018 in the romance drama genre, telling the story of the two couples, Tish (Kiki Layne) and Fonny (Stephan James). Have known each other and grew up together since childhood. When they grow up, they just feel if they love each other. But to manage life and love well is not easy for them in the era of the early 1970s in New York City which is still shrouded in the mist of discrimination. Told one night, Tish and Fonny were involved in an incident in front of the shop when a man disturbed Tish and made Fonny angry. The police who witnessed the incident tried to arrest Fonny but did not because Fonny and Tish were defended by the shop owner who even called the policeman a supporter of racism. Still Fonny was arrested by the police on charges of raping a woman named Victoria. Although Fonny has tried to make a strong defense if he is not guilty, still he was charged based on the testimony of the police and the victim. Tish often visited Fonny in prison, and once he told Fonny that she was pregnant. Fonny was both happy and sad to hear that. They immediately invited Fonny's parents to tell them about the good news at a dinner. Although Fonny's father is happy with this news, Fonny's mother is furious and says that the child Tish is carrying is a curse for a sin. Fonny's father is angry with his

wife and beats her before they all leave the Tish family's house in a commotion. Although at first glance it is implied that Victoria was forced by the police to charge Fonny, but she does not want to change her testimony and looks like she has a mental disorder. Sharon finally gave up on the case that befell Fonny, because all methods have been used to prove that he is innocent or at least reduce his sentence. The trial schedule was postponed several times, until finally Fonny accepted the negotiated agreement from the court regarding his sentence in detention. As for some of the problems related to racism in the film, the first is Racial Discrimination. This film depicts various forms of racial discrimination experienced by African American characters. They face unfair treatment and rejection based on the color of their skin. Second, African-Americans character are frequently the target of racial profiling by law enforcement officials. They are unfairly considered as suspects based solely on the color of their skin, without any clear reason. Third, unfair Justice System This film depicts how the unfair justice system affects the lives of the main characters. They were faced with unfounded accusations and unfairly processed in court. Fourth, social Inequality in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk* describes the social inequality that exists between races in the United States. African-American characters often face difficulties in obtaining decent jobs, good housing, and equal opportunities. And lastly, Police Violence against Racial Minorities. This film highlights police violence directed primarily at racial minorities, especially through scenes tense scene. The African American characters fall victim to the abuse of police power.

Based on this background, the researcher is interested in analyzing the depiction of any form of racism contained in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk* and there will certainly be many moral messages that we can get from the film that is packaged by the director to the audience.

## **B. Problem Formulation**

1. How is racism represented in the film *If Beale Street could talk?*
2. What self-conflict is the main character Tish experienced as impact of racism in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk?*

## **C. Objectives of the study**

1. To know racism represented in the film *If Beale Street could talk.*
2. To analyze the self-conflict experienced by the main character Tish as impact of racism in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk.*

## **D. Review of the Related Studies**

In conducting this research, the writer uses several previous studies as a reference. The first thesis entitled Representation of racism resistance in the film 12 Years a Slave was written by Ardian Widjaya, Universitas Diponegoro, and Semarang Indonesia. In this thesis, the research aims to describe the resistance of black people as a minority group in the film 12 Years a Slave against forms of white racism which are represented through visual and linguistic symbols in the film 12 Years a Slave. This research is included in a qualitative descriptive study with a semiotic analysis approach. And the results of this study indicate that the forms of black resistance occur in closed, semi-open, or open forms. Starting from the conversation that took place between black slaves who wanted to run away and fought for opinions by explaining and clarifying their opinions.

The second thesis entitled racism in the film Fitna (Semiotic analysis of racism in the film fitna) was written by Shinta Anggraini Budi Widianingrum, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran, and Yogyakarta Indonesia. This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a semiotic analysis approach. The method of semiotics, which is a science or method of analysis to study signs. The

data in this study were obtained through the selection of scenes in the film "Fitna" which contained elements related to this research, namely racism.

The third thesis entitled racism in the crash film was written by Yaninta Sani Sawitri Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta Indonesia. This study aims to find out more deeply whether the signs used to represent the racism that occurred in the Crash film. By knowing and understanding the signs that show the symptoms of racism. This research includes a qualitative descriptive study with a semiotic analysis approach. The data in this study were obtained through the selection of scenes in the film "Crash" which contained elements related to this research, namely racism which was grouped based on racial prejudice, racial stereotypes, racial discrimination, and racial violence. And looking for data from various articles, books, and internet and so on.

And the last journal is Representasi Rasisme dalam Film Woodlawn by Ancilla Evelyn, Gatut Priyowidodo, Daniel Budiana Prodi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Kristen Petra Surabaya. In this journal, it is explained that the

Woodlawn film is a film with a sports drama genre with religious nuances set in Birmingham, Alabama at the Woodlawn School. This film tells about the desegregation process in Birmingham, Alabama at the Woodlawn School. This research was conducted to find out how racism is depicted in the film Woodlawn. The method used in this research is John Fiske's semiotics with 3 levels, namely the level of reality, representation and Ideology. The approach used in this research is descriptive qualitative to Describe the signs and symbols in the film. Based on 3 levels John Fiske can it can be concluded that the depiction of racism is divided into two fields, namely education and education Sport. Blacks are considered not smart in terms of academics and are considered to have no Ability in sports on a par with whites.

## **E. Research Method**

In this study, the researcher used qualitative methods with descriptive text in collecting data based on the theme that has been taken, namely racism in the film *If Beale Street could talk*. “The term qualitative research is used to describe a set of approaches that analyze data in the form of natural language (i.e., words) and experiential expressions (e.g., social interaction and artistic presentation).” (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 27). To complete this research, the writer used a qualitative descriptive method. According to (Creswell et al., 2018, p.27-28) he states that: “Qualitative data sets are usually drawn from fewer sources (e.g., participants) than quantitative studies, but include rich, detailed, and highly contextual descriptions of each source.” From this explanation, it is known that the description and analysis not only describe but also provide a clearer and detailed explanation and knowledge in it. The researcher explains what types of racist acts are contained in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

### **1. Data and Source of Data**

The data source is the film *If Beale Street could talk* (2018) by Barry Jenkins, the trailer of the film was found by the researcher on YouTube and then the film was watched and downloaded via the Netflix website. The researcher used scenes that show racism in the film as objects of research, which is depicted through action and investigated what types of racism exist in the film.

### **2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data**

The researcher used data collection through library research. In case study research, data collection techniques are usually collected from various sources. “As for the various data collection techniques, namely interviews, observation (direct and participant), questionnaires, and relevant documents” (Yin, 2014). In addition to library research, the author also used the internet as a data collection technique.



To find the data of this research the researcher used observation as the technique of collecting the data. After finding out, the writer used scenes in the film that depict racism to collect data. The steps in data collection is as follows:

1. Watching movies from the internet
2. Observing to ensure that the film contains scenes or depictions of acts of racism
3. Choosing any scene that depict acts of racism
4. Writing down the data on the racism scene in the film

### **3. Method and Technique of Analyzing Data**

After collecting data, to answer the problem formulation in this study, the writer analyzed the data by using qualitative research methods. According to Sugiyono (2014: 21) descriptive analysis method is a statistic used to analyze data by describing or describing the data that has been collected as it is without intends to make conclusions that apply to the public or generalizations. This is the most important step in collecting statistical data. To find answers from the formulation of the problem in this study, the researcher used descriptive analysis. In this case, the researcher described the data analysis of acts of racism contained in the film *If Beale Street could talk*. Here are the steps:

1. The researcher identified data related to acts of racism that have been collected in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*.
2. The researcher categorized the data and made an explanation about what types of racism are contained in the film.
3. The researcher analyzed and explained the types of racism found in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

4. The researcher made a conclusion from the data that had been filled in. And then she made conclusions from the results of this study.

## **F. Theoretical Approach**

In this study, the researcher used the American Studies approach. American studies as a multi-perspective study is applied in this study to gain a deep understanding of American studies. American Studies is the study of American culture. Smith (1957) in his essay "*Can American Studies Develop a Method?*"

*"American studies is a collaboration between people who work from within existing academic disciplines but seek to expand the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry".*

Smith (1957) also stated that "Students of literature must consider sociological, historical, and anthropological data and methods". The statement shows that to understand American Studies must use more than one approach. In this study, the researcher used a cultural approach to see how racism is represented in the film. In addition, the researcher also used a psychological approach to see the internal conflict faced by the main character.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Representation of racism against black people**

The analysis of representation of racism in this discussion is based on the theory of representation by Stuart Hall in his essay *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* said that representation in film is a product of social construction that plays a role in shaping our view of the world. Through choice, emphasis and interpretation, films can influence our understanding of social reality, social groups and identity (Hall, 1997). The film *If Beale Street Could Talk* by Barry Jenkins is a cinematic work that presents a powerful representation of racism in the United States in the 1970s. Through a poetic

narrative and beautiful visuals, the film successfully depicts the damaging and crippling effects of systemic racism on black individuals and communities. In the film, we witness the damaging effects of racial profiling by law enforcement officers. Fonny, the main African-American male character, falls victim to arbitrary detention and harsh interrogation. The cruelty and injustice shown by the police show how this system often restrains and torments black citizens, and destroys their lives for no good reason.

*If Beale Street Could Talk* also highlights the housing discrimination that plagues the black community. The main characters, Tish and Fonny, face unfair rejection while trying to find a decent place to live. The film clearly illustrates that the color of one's skin can be a barrier to equal and fundamental opportunities, thus depriving them of their right to live with equal dignity and well-being. The film also presents a harrowing depiction of a discriminatory prison and justice system. Fonny was imprisoned without strong evidence and faced violence and inhumane conditions. The humiliation and mistreatment she experiences in prison reflects the reality that still exists, where the prison system continues to oppress and perpetuate the cycle of oppression against black people.

Through powerful dialog and scenes, the film also explores the racist language and stereotypes used by white characters to demean and corner black characters. These representations highlight the widespread injustice and unfairness in a culture that belittles the black community, and underscore the need to fight back and change the paradigm. Overall, *If Beale Street Could Talk* succeeds in presenting a powerful and influential representation of racism in American society. The movie invites viewers to reflect on the damaging effects of systemic racism and question the injustices that continue to persist today. With its visceral cinematic style, the movie evokes a sense of empathy and a desire to fight against discrimination and create change for the better.

## **1. Individual racism**

Individual racism is an attitude, action or prejudice shown by an individual towards people of a particular race or ethnic group. This includes unfair treatment, discrimination, or negative judgment based on a person's race or ethnic group (Tatum, B. D, 2003: p.361). Based on this theory, the researcher found several examples of scenes or dialogues that show the occurrence of acts of racism that belong to the individual type of racism.

## **2. Institutional racism**

Institutional racism refers to systems, policies and practices within institutions that systematically support or perpetuate racial injustice. This racism involves unfair or unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on their race or ethnic group (Angela Davis, 1997).

### **B. the Self-Conflict Experienced by Tish as the main character in this film**

In the second discussion the researcher analyzed the internal conflict faced by Tish as the main character as impact of racism in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*. The researcher used the theory of conflict put forward by Karl Marx. Tish Rivers lives in a society that is still trapped in racial prejudice and discrimination. As a black woman, Tish experienced deep racial identity conflicts. He had to fight against demeaning racial attitudes and treatment that came from various parties. This conflict affected his confidence and shook his belief in creating a better life. In the film *if beale street could talk* an explanation of why this is an internal conflict experienced by tisk. Tish faces several complex self-conflicts. Such as The Conflict between Love and Responsibility Tish faces internal conflict when she learns that she is pregnant and her partner Fonny is wrongfully arrested on a rape charge. He loved Fonny deeply, but also realized that he had a responsibility to care for the child that was about to be born. Tish feels caught between a strong love for Fonny

and a difficult decision about the future of their child. Identity and Self-Image Conflict Tish feels caught in a racial identity conflict. While he is proud of his black heritage and culture, he also feels burdened by the stereotypes and prejudices that exist in society. Tish tries to find a way to stay true to himself and build a strong self-image, while dealing with unfair social expectations. And A Conflict between Hope and Reality Tish has dreams and hopes of a better life with Fonny. However, the harsh realities of life and the unjust legal system dashed his hopes. Tish must face an internal conflict between accepting the harsh reality or continuing to fight to achieve the expected justice and happiness. Conflicts in Receiving Family Support Although Tish has a supportive family, he sometimes finds it difficult to accept their full support. He feels guilty for burdening his family with his own problems and struggles to accept the help and love offered by those closest to him. The Conflict between Personal Decisions and Right Decisions Tish is often in a moral and ethical dilemma in this film. He must face difficult questions about the decisions to be made in difficult situations. For example, should he lie or cover up the truth to protect those he loves. This conflict reflects Tish's inner battle to weigh the values he espoused against the real consequences of the actions he takes. The following are some examples of scenes or dialogues that show the internal conflict Tish is facing as a result of the racism he has experienced. The following are some examples of scenes or dialogues that show the internal conflict Tish is facing as a result of the racism he has experienced. Starting from her boyfriend being accused of a crime he never committed so he had to be arrested. His relationship with his girlfriend, Tish, experienced an internal conflict, how was he going to say this to his family, because the consequences of some of the things he went through made Tish feel worried and insecure.

Before finally Tish dared to talk about her pregnancy to her family members, Tish experienced an internal conflict within her because in the midst of a complicated relationship between herself and Fonny, her lover, where it was discovered that Fonny was involved in a problem that had absolutely nothing to do with her, but Fonny had to be held responsible. while in the detention cell, of course,

Tish didn't want to worry about the burden on his family, but after much thought and thought, Tish dared to be honest with his mother first, then in the end he was honest with all his family members. At first, of course, his mother and other families were worried. Against Tish, but Tish assured that everything would be fine, Tish was sure that he would be able to go through conflict with himself and also kept thinking about how to get his lover to be free soon and in the end, of course, Tish's family gave full support to Tish and everyone. The problem Tish is currently facing. Furthermore, an example of an internal conflict due to racism experienced by Tish was that there was no certainty about the future because when she was pregnant, her boyfriend had to be detained and Tish felt insecure to work alone for himself because of the many acts of racism aimed at black people at that time.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion that has been carried out by the researcher, this chapter concludes all the formulation of the problems that have been discussed. The first problem is how racism is represented in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk* which has been analyzed in chapter III using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall. And the second problem is what is the internal conflict faced by the main character as a result of the racism he experienced.

From the first problem, the researcher finds that racism is represented through dialogue between the actors in the film, and the researcher classifies two types of racism represented in the film. The first is individual racism, individual racism is an attitude, action, or prejudice shown by individuals towards people of a particular race or ethnic group. This includes unfair treatment, discrimination, or negative judgment based on a person's race or ethnic group. In this case the researcher found two film scenes that show acts of racism into individual forms of racism in which racism was experienced by Tish, Fonny, and Fonny's black friends. They experience difficulties in doing many things such as finding a job to

experiencing violence from white people just because they are considered inferior because they come from the black race. Tish, who plays the main character of a black girl in the film who works in a jewelry store, often experiences acts of racism from visitors who come to where she works, then when Tish and her boyfriend want to find a place to rent, they have trouble finding people who want to rent a place for them. Because white people don't want to rent out places to black people. The second researcher found acts of racism a form of institutional racism that refers to systems, policies, and practices within institutions that systematically support or maintain racial injustice. This racism involves unfair or unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on their race or ethnic group. In this case the researcher found injustice in the field of government institutions, namely government law which was aimed at black people, Fonny and his black friends had to accept accusations of crimes that could not even be proven true but they both had to be detained and received bad treatment from elements the police simply because they are of the black race.

The second problem is what is the internal conflict faced by the main character due to the act of racism he experienced. In this case the researcher found 4 scenes in the film which emphasized the internal conflicts faced by Tish as a black girl and the main character in the film. Tish experienced fear, worry, anxiety, and lack of confidence. In this case, it is emphasized that Tish must remain strong to fight for his life while his lover is also being held for a mistake he did not commit, Tish, who turned out to be pregnant, had to tell this to her family and also her lover's family. Face it every day Tish have to fight conflict against himself. When Tish met a lawyer who was white, it was very visible how Tish felt very anxious and worried about the consequences of racism from white people so that Tish couldn't easily believe in himself and was always afraid and also unsure if the lawyer could free her boyfriend.

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