



LAPORAN PENELITIAN

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN'S PROTEST AS IT IS REFLECTED
IN NOVEL OF NATIVE SON**

Oleh

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**FAKULTAS KEGURUAN DAN ILMU PENDIDIKAN
UNIVERSITAS LAMBUNG MANGKURAT
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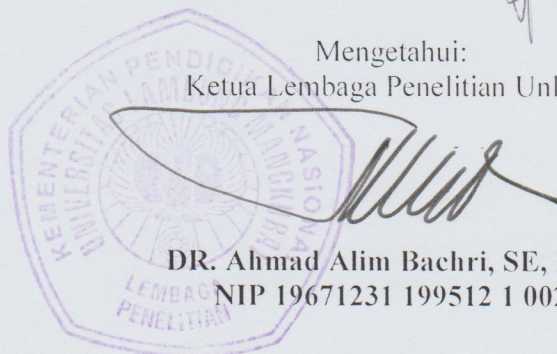


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Puji syukur kami panjatkan kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Kuasa, karena berkat rahmat-Nya jualah kami dapat menyelesaikan laporan penelitian ini.

Pada kesempatan ini kami menyampaikan ucapan terima kasih kepada:

1. Bapak Dekan FKIP Unlam yang telah berkenan memberikan bantuan dana untuk melakukan penelitian ini.
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Kami menyadari bahwa hasil penelitian ini masih banyak kekurangannya. Untuk itu, kami mengharap kritik dan saran yang konstruktif dari pembaca yang budiman.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

The history of the United States has recorded African-American experiences, especially grievances. The spirit of independence has been marred by the Americans enslaving the black people. Even after the Civil War, when the slavery was abolished, the black people were regarded as inferior citizens; they have still been treated unfairly by the white people.

Equality for all men in the United States is guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish,..." (Kerber, 525).

The quotation from the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence proves since the very beginning, the United States has proclaimed its appreciation toward the essence of humanity. Those lines have also stirred strong desires of African-Americans to strive for equality, liberty, and social justice.

In his Preface to *Social Problems: A Critical Power- Conflict Perspectives*, Joe R. Feagin states that one can see in the history of the United States a long series of people's movements seeking to take back control not only over the political system but also over the economic system under which they live -from the early farmer's

rebellion, to socialist movements, to union movements, to community action groups, to black ghetto riots. Among the deepest hopes in human beings are desires for freedom from the oppressive and alienating political and economic condition in which they live, for fully human development, for equality and democracy, and for happiness. Most Americans, especially African-Americans, have not yet secured the full range of these basic human rights. They continue to face class domination, race discrimination, and sex discrimination (xiv).

In the period of slavery, slaves were cruelly treated by the slaveholders or overseers . If they convicted any falsities, the overseer(s) would punish them. In short, slavery caused agony to slaves. The mistreatment of the slaves can be seen in "Narrative of the Life of an American Slave" by Frederick Douglass:

"If a slave was convicted of any high misdemeanor, became unmanageable, or evinced a determination to run away, he was brought immediately here, severely whipped, put on board the sloop, carried to Baltimore, and sold to Austin Woolfolk, or some other slaves remaining" (Baym, et al., 1885).

The condition of the slaves' lives had not improved up to the Antebellum Era. Abolition of slavery, as what Douglass had heard, had not been realized yet. During the Antebellum Era in the South, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Slaves, as they were described in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin'*, had poorer food and housing than the workers in the Northern part of the United States had, but not much poorer than the workers in the backward parts of Europe had. Slaves were treated worse on the large plantations under overseer and absentee management than on the smaller plantations under personal management (Logan, 20). The novel is categorized as an

abolitionist novel for influencing the readers to reject slavery.

Although the slavery was abolished after the Civil War, and slaves were proclaimed free, they were still regarded as inferiors who were discriminated and segregated by the white people. Facing this fact the black people struggled for equality. Peeks says that the African-Americans struggled for freedom, equality, emancipation and full participation in American life as citizens of this country. The struggle itself took in a range of ways and strategies which were in reference to the Declaration of Independence and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments of the Constitution and any other rules that ratify their struggle.

In the early-twentieth-century African-American writers raised those subjects in hopes of contributing to a social revolution. These writers' commitments to the political implications of their creative work are all the more apparent when we note that several of them maintained simultaneously as activists and as literary figures (Smith, 1993 : xi). They are, among others, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright.

In *Native Son*, Richard Wright makes use of violence in developing his story and this can be perceived as a reflection of his anger toward white people. In *Novelists' America*, Nelson Manfred Blake says: "The anger that Bigger Thomas felt was the anger that Richard Wright knew from his own experience." (226). In other words, violence committed by a black man is actually a reaction of that committed by the white people.

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas was convicted of raping. Which might have occurred anywhere in the world. In America, for instance, the crime could have been committed by both whites and blacks. However, it becomes very complicated if a black male is accused of raping a white woman. In such situation,

justice might be obstructed by racism, and the penalties can be severe as experienced by Bigger Thomas who had to face a death penalty because he was accused of raping and killing Mary Dalton. This was a tragedy for Bigger Thomas, a poor black man. In this case, it can be said that in white-black relationship, the white people predominate over the blacks as reflected in *Native Son*. This might cause a dilemma. Such condition could lead to a tragedy for the black man in America.

Unlike most critics, Joyce Ann Joyce presents a strong case for *Native Son* to be considered as a tragedy. The main character, Bigger Thomas is portrayed as the rebellious young black man from Chicago's South side who despite the valiant efforts of his lawyer, was condemned to the electric chair for killing the liberal white daughter of his employer and his alcoholic black girl friend. The readers are induced to regard Bigger Thomas either as a victim of his environment who is doomed to self-destruct from the first day he drew breath or a tragic hero who before he dies discovers the meaning of being responsible for his own decisions (Hamilian,1992).

Beside violence, Richard Wright through his *Native Son* also implies that both blacks and whites are 'blind' people. Mrs. Dalton is portrayed as physically and a metaphoric blindness is aimed at the other characters.

White American people are those who have domination on the other races in United States of America. Violence and metaphoric blindness are the representation of the protest directed to the dominating White American people.

C. The Objective and Scope of the Study

This study aims at depicting the condition of the African-American life in the early twentieth century up to the decade of the 1940s which Richard Wright presented in *Native Son* and it also explores the action of protest, as it is reflected in *Native Son*.

It is hoped that this study can be a contribution to the field of knowledge of American literary and cultural studies and can be used as a preliminary research for the study on Richard Wright's works.

D. Presentation

This thesis will be presented in five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction which presents the background of choosing the subject, objectives and scope of the study, and presentation. Chapter two presents the condition of African-American life in the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter four presents African-American's Protest as It is Reflected in Novel of *Native Son*, and Chapter five is the action of protest by African-Americans. Chapter six is the conclusion.

CHAPTER II

AFRICAN-AMERICANS' LIFE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Black Americans were African people brought and sold as slaves by people who involved themselves in the colonization of America (Curti and Todd, 1972 : 64). They and their next generations are called Negro American or Black Americans or African-Americans.

Although America got its independence and slavery was abolished by the Federal government, the enslaving of African Americans still continued. The abolition began from the Northern states and most people seemed to accept it. However, the Southern states tried to maintain slavery. It took a long time to abolish slavery in the Southern states, because the white people still depended on slave labors. After the defeat of the South in the Civil War, the slavery period in the South ended and the slaves were freed. However, they were not considered equals by the whites (Curti & Todd, 1972); Hraba, 1979; and Franklin and Moss, 1988).

The African-Americans had to struggle for their civil and equality rights. Although the slavery period ended after the Civil War, the freed slaves did not automatically acquire the same rights as those of the whites. Hawkins says that the War had given the Negro freedom, but not his equality. The two amendments to the Constitution and a dozen years of 'Reconstruction' did not significantly change the situation. Equality in education, economic, politics, the exercise of civil rights, and in the regard of his fellow citizens was not conferred on the blacks. Since 1865, the blacks have struggled to attain equality (Curti & Todd, 1972 : vi).

The Civil War and Emancipation resulted in the freedom of slaves. The

Thirteenth Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery and gave full citizenship to African-Americans (Thernstrom, 1997 : 27). However, the end of the Civil War and Emancipation and those three Amendments did not resolve racial oppression of African-Americans. Their exploitation simply took other forms. Economic and political claims of newly freed black fanned pervasive racial fears and hatred, spawning a segregated Southern, Jim Crow culture, lynch law, vigilante justice, and limited educational opportunities (Smith, et al, 1993 : xi). Furthermore, W.E.B. DuBois states that a Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-son in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double- consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1980 : 364-365).

The above statement shows DuBois' conviction that African-Americans were regarded as inferiors. On one hand, it was difficult for the whites to accept their existence as equals. On the other hand, the blacks also had difficulties in striving for equality.

American history shows us that the founding fathers of the United States had made an agreement that "all men are created equal" but the fact is that the nonwhites were not equally treated as the whites were. Feagin states: "Native people were intentionally killed off and/or driven from their land. By the end of the 17th century, the enslavement of black Americans were fundamental to the economy of the American colonies, and slave revolts were a recurrent problem" (1980 : 111).

The Blacks were originally brought to America in chains to work as slaves on plantations to cultivate cotton, tobacco, rice and other crops that were the foundation of the Southern agricultural economy. Many decades passed by since the formal abolition of slavery in America, but fair and equal opportunities do not belong to the manifestations of a clause: "... all men are created equal" as it is stated in the Declaration of Independence.

In short, the dominant view in the 20th century, perceived by the blacks, is the problem of color line, namely: the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men (DuBois, 1986: 372).

The problem of color line was clearly seen in the implementation of the Jim Crow Laws which was supported by the doctrine: "separate but equal". But, in fact, the doctrine: "separate but equal" referred to 'inequality'.

In preventing the social injustice and in demanding equal rights, some blacks were forced to commit violence; others had to work hard and study hard to improve their lives. For the Black intellectuals and leaders, violence was not necessary. They launched movements in order to realize the acknowledgments that Blacks are the citizens of America who are equal and have the same rights as others do.

Based on the racial hierarchy, white European origin groups are at the top and groups of African or Native American origin is toward the bottom. White people predominate over non-European groups in relation to such resources as income, wealth, jobs, housing, and political positions (Feagin, 1982 : 112).

On the basis of the whites' view on the "separate but equal" doctrine, segregation between whites and blacks was not considered to violate the Constitution if the

segregated accommodations were "equal". Ternstrom and Abigail T. state that the implementation of the doctrine showed "inequality" and the doctrine itself showed blacks' inferiority (1997 : 32).

The Blacks' inferiority can be observed from the fact that they were regarded as people positioning at the bottom of racial hierarchy; that their children were confined to second class schools; that they were addressed as 'nigger', 'boy', uncle or by using their first name if the white speakers knew them, and young black women were referred to as 'girl', and older ones as 'auntie'; and that they were forbidden to eat together with the whites and to shake hands with the whites; and also that they had to address the whites with 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', or Miss (Ternstrom and Abigail T., 1997 : 41-42).

The writer uses the expressive approach in order to focus on the novelist's imagination, insight, and spontaneity. This is based on the expressive theory which considers a work of art as essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the novelist's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a novel therefore are the attributes and actions of the novelist's mind (Abrams, 22).

The biographical approach refers to the necessity for an appreciation of the ideas and personality of the author to an understanding of the literary object. On the basis of this approach, a work of art is a reflection of a personality, that in the aesthetic experience the reader shares the author's consciousness, and that at least part of the reader's response is to the author's personality. Consequently, we attempt to learn and to apply this knowledge in our attempt to understand his writings (Kohlerger and Woods, 8).

Another approach used in this study is micro to macro approach by which a

CHAPTER III

APPROCH AND METHODS OF STUDY

3.1 Approach of Study

In discussing Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the writer uses several approaches: expressive/ biographical approaches, micro-macro, mimetic/ sociological-historical, and interdisciplinary approaches.

The writer uses the expressive approach in order to focus on the novelist, his imagination, insight, and spontaneity. This is based on the expressive theory which considers a work of art as essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the novelist's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a novel therefore are the attributes and actions of the novelist's mind (Abrams, 22).

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Another approach used in this study is micro to macro approach by which a

study begins with the microcosm, a small world to explain the macrocosm, a larger world (McDowel, 1948:92). In *American Studies Descriptive*, a literary work is regarded as a mental evidence to explain American culture as a whole; a literary work is regarded as a microcosm which is used to explain a macrocosm. Richard Wright's *Native Son* is a literary work portraying a black man's life. Thus, Bigger Thomas as a black man in the novel is a representative of the black people; whereas the Dalton family is a representation of the white people.

The writer's attention is also focused on the relationship between the work of art and the universe that it pretends to produce. This approach views art as an imitation of aspects of the universe, of external and immutable ideas, of eternal and unchanging patterns of sound, sight, movement, or form (Lewis, 46).

The sociological-historical approach refers to an approach that locates the real work in reference to the civilization that produced it. Civilization here can be defined as the attitudes and actions of a specific group of people and point out that literature takes these attitudes and actions as its subject matter (Rohrberger and Woods, 9).

As suggested by Sklar, American Studies explores the arts, ideas, culture, society, literature, realities of America (*American Quarterly* 22, Summer (1970):597-683). The creation of work of art for example literary work cannot be separated from the environment where the author lives. Thus, it can be said that there is a close relationship between the author, the work, and social, economical and political condition (Hardjana, 71). In this type of relationship,

an approach pertinent to American Studies is the interdisciplinary approach as suggested by McDowel, stating that the course in American Studies is interdisciplinary in approach and employs the resources of history, philosophy, the social sciences, and literature, art and architecture, music, the dance, and the motion picture (71-72). In this study, the writer uses interdisciplinary approach that involves literature, history, sociology; educational, political and economical problems.

In implementing those approaches, the writer of this thesis comprehends Richard Wright's *Native Son* on the basis of its written text, then regards it as Richard Wright's experience, feeling, imagination, perceptions, etc. After that the writer relates it (the novel) to the universe, and to the American life as the background of the production of the novel, supported by several disciplines.

3.2. Method of the Study

In this study, the writer analyzes the novel *Native Son* as the main source based on literary research. The secondary sources or data are books, articles, and other resources that are related to the topics such as *Sociology of Black Experience* by Daniel T. Thompson, *The Souls of the Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro in the United States* by Rayford W. Logan, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* and *Uncle Tom's Children*, by Richard Wright, and some other references mentioned in the bibliography.

CHAPTER IV

AFRICAN-AMERICAN'S PROTEST AS IT IS REFLECTED IN NOVEL *NATIVE SON*

Richard Wright, through his characters in *Native Son*, presents a lot of social injustice committed by the white people such as racial prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and bad or unfair treatments such as subordinating, oppressing, exploiting, and violence against African-Americans.

His protest against all the injustices is reflected in *Native Son* on the relationship between Bigger Thomas, a black man, and Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone, white Communists. Mary Dalton assumed that Bigger was a Communist. With curiosity Bigger responded to Mary's statement:

"After all, I'm on your side. I'm going to meet a friend of mine who's also a friend of yours" (Wright, 1966 : 65).

The narrator describes Mary as "she was an odd girl, all right. He [Bigger] felt something in her over and above the fear she inspired in him. She responded to him as if he were human, as if he lived in the same world as she. And he had never felt that before in a white person. ... The guarded feeling of freedom he had while listening to her was tangled with

the hard fact that she was white and rich, a part of the world of people who told him what he could and could do." (Wright, 1966 : 66). Bigger had never been touched by, and so close to white persons but Mary Dalton; he had never sat in the same seat (place) with white persons but with Mary and Jan; and he had never eaten together with white persons but with Mary and Jan (Wright, 1966 : 68 - 71). Then, Mary Dalton says: "You know, Bigger, I've long wanted to go into those houses and just see how your people live. You know what I mean? I've been to England, France and Mexico, but I don't know how people live ten blocks from me. We know so *little* about each other. I just want to *see*. I want to know these people. Never in my life have been inside of a Negro home. Yet they must live like we live. They're human.... There are twelve million of them. They live in our country.. In the same city with us." (Wright, 1966 : 70). Almost in the same attitude as Mary Dalton, Jan forbade Bigger not to address using 'Sir', and he shook Bigger's hand and regarded Bigger as human (Wright, 1966 : 70).

Mary's and Jan's statements and the narrator's description of Mary Dalton as above implies that Mary Dalton, a white woman, was concerned Bigger, a black man. It also implies that a black man was regarded as a human by some white people but as an apelike animal by some others. And, it also denotes that black and white people should live as equals, should have the same rights, and should have the same opportunities. These are the sameness that the black people never enjoyed.

To maintain white domination or white superiority and black inferiority, white people keep social or physical distance with black ones by using the mechanisms of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. Thus, they try to avoid shaking hands, being addressed by their first name, and sitting at the same place and living in the same area

and eating at the same table with the blacks. Richard Wright shatters the symbols of respect and of white superiority through characterization of Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone.

It is through Mary and Jan that Richard Wright protests against white domination in which the white people regarded themselves as superiors and regarded the blacks as inferiors. Through Jan, he says: "And when that day comes, things'll be different. There'll be no white and no black; there'll be no rich and no poor" (Wright, 1966 : 69). In other words, Richard Wright claims that both white and black people should be regarded as human beings; and as equals between one and another; they should be treated and protected in the same manners as the whites. Thus, he protests the inequality and inferiority of the blacks. Richard Wright employs "Communism" represented by Mary and Jan Erlone as a means of protesting and refusing social injustice, inequality and inferiority against the blacks. According to Alan H. Carling in his Social Division, Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse and for the first time consciously treated all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals. Its organization is, therefore, essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity; it turn existing conditions of unity. The reality, which communism is creating, is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals, insofar as reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves (351). Thus, a certain society regards individuals as "creatures" of its social and material conditions, but in communism, social-material conditions are the "creatures" of the individuals. The sameness or equality