

**BREAKING THE HEGEMONY OF WHITE AMERICANS
REFLECTED IN SPIKE LEE'S *MALCOLM X* :
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted as partial fulfillment of requirement
for getting Bachelor Degree of Education in English Department

Written by:

ERVAN YUDHI TRIATMOKO

A 320 050 235

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA**

2009

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

A movie has the same position as the major genres in textual studies, like poetry or novel. In the human's development, reality and a movie have a strong correlations. A movie can represent the situation (politics, culture and social phenomena) at the time the movie produced, so movie can be a media or instrument to do social study. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972:9), argue that "literature is reflecting various fast and social phenomena and problem in society such as class structure, conflict family, relationship, possibility divorce and population phenomena that actually happened in society".

In a social relationship, more over in large scope like international relationship, human cannot avoid the cultures conflict or the clash. Culture itself refers to a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture was used by some to refer to a wide array of human activities, and by others as a synonym for civilization. Other basic conflicts in a society are religion, region, gender, and many other aspects. All of these groups seek to gain a power and use it to reshape society the way they see it of race and ethnicity that of domination. Most social classes do not form their ideologies in the same way.

Different groups will struggle in conflict over what they think is right, what the norms are, and their ideologies. The ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, where the ruling material force is the ruling intellectual force.

One of the movies that represents the social life and its problem, especially in the United States of America, is *Malcolm X*. *Malcolm X* is a biographical dramatic movie directed by Spike Lee in 1992. This movie is another version of the movies that bring up the story of Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz). The former movie, entitled *Malcolm X : Death of A Prophet* directed by Woodie King in 1981, also tells about the chronicles of Malcolm X until his assassination.

The different things between those movies are on the plot. Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* tells about Malcolm X's life completely. It starts from his early life, when he was a young boy, his life in the prison, his conversion to Islam, until his assassination. On the other hands, Woodie King's *Malcolm X : Death of A Prophet* just brings up the story of Malcolm X and Nation of Islam Organization until he was killed.

Malcolm X is a 1992 biographical movie directed by Spike Lee about the African-American activist and black nationalist, Malcolm X. The story is based on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley. From one of the best seller book in 1990, James Baldwin, Arnold Perl and Spike Lee bring up the story written in a book into the movie version. So, Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* is more attractive because it is closely similar to the biography of Malcolm X.

Malcolm X is an epic of one of the most remarkable men of his era and making clear why he continues to matter. The movie presents Malcolm (starring by

Denzel Washington) as a three-dimensional human being whose message is powerful. As the story spans the four decades of Malcolm's life, Denzel Washington captures with equal conviction and accuracy the sullen teenager, the hardened criminal, the fiery activist, and the mature martyr. Terence Blanchard's music score, combined with a stack of vintage music from Big Joe Turner and Louis Jordan to Ray Charles and Sam Cooke, is the perfect emotional match for this material.

Writer-director Spike Lee's epic portrayal of the life and times of the slain civil rights leader Malcolm X begins with the scene of Roxbury Street, Boston City. Black American (Afro-American) sees that they should live in a community as one to avoid the oppression of white American. So, there are many black American areas in the United States of America, like Roxbury Street in Boston or Harlem in New York. Never afraid to present controversial opinions or take chances, *Malcolm X* is also a deeply moving biopic that puts a human face on an often misunderstood man.

The movie simplifies Malcolm's life by showing easily dismissible stages of his life. At first, Malcolm tries to be white by conking his hair, sleeping with a white woman, doing white drugs, and stealing (living like an animal), which he later learns is all part of white oppression. The son of a Baptist preacher who was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, Little was raised by foster parents after his mother was deemed clinically insane, as an adult, he turned to a life of crime, which leads to his imprisonment on burglary charges.

In the prison, Malcolm received epiphany in the form of an introduction to Islam. He is especially taken with the lessons of Elijah Mohammed (starring by Al Freeman, Jr.), who comes to him in a vision. Adopting the name 'Malcolm X' as a rejection of the 'Little' surname, given his family by white slave owners, he meet the real Elijah Mohammed upon exiting prison, and begins work as a spokesman for the Nation of Islam.

In The Nation of Islam Organization, Malcolm became as one of the most influential figure in the development of the organization, especially, and Islam, generally. He often holds a speech to the people in order to introduce NOI (Nation of Islam) and Islam.

Beside introducing Islam to the Americans, Malcolm also speaks about the position of black American, who becomes as a minority. Malcolm sees that there is injustice in the social development, between black and white American. As majority, white American views that black American as 'second class citizen', and they make a constraint for black American. The point of view of white American brings up the hegemony that white American has a power, a dominant importance, and they are the owner of America.

Malcolm is aware of this situation and he thinks that he should give the new point of view to the Americans. He speaks about the equality of human rights and how to make America becomes the land for everyone, as they are dreaming.

After having enough experience in overspreading his idea, Malcolm begins to know what is the core of his movement. He knows that he has different views about the social condition of America with Mr. Elijah Mohammed, the leader of

NOI. Mr. Mohammed stated that black American (including Moslem) should break the hegemony of white American and become the dominant society in order to controlling America. Malcolm does not agree about this dogma, he wants the equality of human rights and there is no constraint between black and white American. This condition rises a conflict in NOI, especially Malcolm and Mr. Mohammed.

After having a different argument with Elijah Mohammed, Malcolm decided to leave the Nation of Islam. He decided to go on a pilgrimage to Mekkah. In Saudi Arabia, he had experienced what amounted to the second life changing epiphany in his life as he accomplished the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mekkah, and discovered an authentic Islam of universal respect and brotherhood. The experience changed Malcolm's world view. There is dissension in the ranks, however, X was targeted for assassination by other Nation leaders, and even Elijah Mohammed fears Malcolm's growing influence.

During a 1965 speech, Malcolm X was shot and killed, reportedly by Nation of Islam members. Unfortunately, Malcolm's struggle must be ended by the people whom their existence was Malcolm struggling for

In 1992, *Malcolm X* became one of the most wanted movies, especially in the United States. Although the production was controversial for years before it was released, most of it involving the legacy of Malcolm X. Some movie assessors also stated that there is an anger inside the movie. It is look like giving a judgment to the white American. Although many controversial points escorting the premiere of the movie, *Malcolm X* became one of the movie that could reach the attention

from many viewers, not only from the United States but also from the outside of the United States of America. Recorded, Nelson Mandela also appreciates this movie by taking one scene in the end of the movie.

Malcolm X was released for the first time in November 18th 1992, under the production house of Warner Bros. The actors and actresses who played in this movie are ; Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett, Albert Hall, Al Freeman Jr., Delroy Lindo, Spike Lee himself and many more. This 202 minutes of running time movie need US \$ 34,000,000 of budget and in the end, this movie can reach more than US \$ 48,000,000 gross revenue.

Malcolm X was nominated for Oscar 1992 and received an Academy Award Nomination for Best Documentary Feature. Denzel Washington was nominated for Academy Award Best Actor for his role in *Malcolm X*.

Many issues stemmed from a rise in the importance of *Malcolm X* as a symbol of the black struggle, after what were viewed as setbacks for the African-American community during the Presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, there was a rise in interest in his message, particularly among the African-American community and ranging from the rap community to academia. In the years before the movie's release, sales of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* had increased 300 percent, and four of his books saw a nine fold increase in 1990.

The character of *Malcolm X* is one of the most attractive sides of the movie. Started by a bad boy who has no convictions, he becomes the remarkable figure of his nation and bring a change to the world. *Malcolm X* is not just a movie which was made to entertain the viewers, but it teach the viewers how to

appreciate the dissidence and how should the people give respect to each humans rights, deeply.

Based on the case above, the writer is interested in examining the chronicles of Malcolm X and how he fights against American's system to defend the humans rights. That is why the writer conducts a research entitled **BREAKING THE HEGEMONY OF WHITE AMERICANS REFLECTED IN SPIKE LEE'S *MALCOLM X*: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

Based on the research in the library of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Sebelas Maret State University of Surakarta, State University of Semarang and Gadjah Mada University, there is no research paper which examining *Malcolm X* movie directed by Spike Lee. So, the writer concluded that there is no one writer who wrote a research paper or thesis which examining the movie.

On the other hand, the writer found some movie reviews about Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*. The first movie review written by Nigel Watson on *Talking Pictures : Movie Review*, which was published on 2001. Watson sees *Malcolm X* as justification to the errors and ignorance of the white man's version of religious and American history. As he argues that "the movie can be read in lots of different ways. Lee can argue that Malcolm X becomes more moderate and rational, at the close of the movie, and that he was not so anti-white before his death. These tones down the worries of a white audience but the same closing scenes then start showing the rifts between black groups". Other movie review, written by Brian

Webster (posted on *ApolloGuide.com*), discuss about the disrupted childhood of Malcolm X and his character changing after charged in to the prison.

From some of movie reviews above, the writer concluded that Malcolm X has an important role in the American history, especially in social aspect. Likewise the personage, *Malcolm X* gave the images of humanity and explained how to appreciate the dissidence and how should the people give respect to each human rights.

In this research, the writer tries to give an explanation about the personage of Malcolm X, which is captured by Spike Lee on his movie. Beside discussing the character of Malcolm X as a person, the writer tries to discuss the impacts of the movie to the social life of American, viewed from sociological perspective. The writer also discuss the motivation behind Malcolm's movement in order to defend the equality between black and white American. These matters are the difference between those movie reviews above with this research.

C. Problem Statement

Problem statement is one of the most essential part for the research, because it makes the study clearer and focus. The main problem statements which are emerged in this research are :

1. What does the structural elements in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*?
2. How does Malcolm X lead the movement in order to break the hegemony of white Americans and defend the equality of human rights?

D. Limitation of the Study

The writer limits the research in the hegemony which is surfaced by white Americans and Malcolm X's movement to break it.

E. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study of the research are:

1. To describe the basic structural elements of Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* movie.
2. To describe how Malcolm X leads the movement in order to break the hegemony of white Americans and defend the equality of human rights based on Sociological Theory.

F. Benefit of the Study

1. Theoretical Benefit:

To give information about the movie and what are the messages behind the movie to the readers.

2. Practical Benefit:

To give a deeper understanding about social problems viewed from sociological theory.

G. Research Method

1. Type of the Study

In conducting the research, the writer applies qualitative type of research, because it is a subjective research and without any calculation. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific

information about the values, opinions, behaviors and social context of particular population.

2. Object of the Study

The object of this study is *Malcolm X* movie which is directed by Spike Lee in 1992.

3. Type of the Data and the Data Sources

In doing the research, the writer use two sources of data, these are:

- a. Primary data source: Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* movie which is produced in 1992.
- b. Secondary data sources: *Malcolm X*'s movie script and all data which are related to the research.

4. The Data Collection

In conducting the research, the writer collects the data by using library research. The important data which related to the research are collected and recorded in a sort of document as evidence.

Furthermore, the techniques of collecting data are follows:

- a. Watching the movie
- b. Browsing to the internet to find the related data.
- c. Taking notes.
- d. Reading the movie script.
- e. Arranging the data in to several parts according to its classification.

- f. Selecting particular parts which are considered important and relevant for the analysis.
- g. Drawing conclusion

5. Technique of the Data Analysis

Technique of data analysis is descriptive analysis, which the writer tries to analyze the structural elements of the movie and identifies the correlation between the movie and social background according to sociological perspective.

H. Research Paper Organization

Research paper organization is an important part of a study. Research paper organization is a framework to give an explanation about the content of a study. In this study, the writer organizes the content of the study in to several chapters.

Chapter I is introduction, which consists of background of the study, literary review, problem statement, objective of study, limitation of the study, benefit of the study and research paper organization. Chapter II is underlying theory, which consists of notion of hegemony, notion of sociology of literature, major principles of sociology of literature, structural elements of the movie, and theoretical application. Chapter III is the United States of America in 1990's. Chapter IV is structural analysis. Chapter V is sociological analysis. VI is conclusion and suggestions.