

**AGAINST RACISM IN JODI PICOULT'S *SMALL GREAT THINGS* NOVEL (2016): SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**



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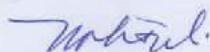
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## **AGAINST RACISM IN JODI PICOULT'S *SMALL GREAT THINGS* NOVEL (2016): SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas rasisme yang tercermin didalam novel *Small Great Things* (2016) dengan menggunakan perspektif sosiologi. Dalam penelitian ini menggunakan dua sumber data, yaitu: sumber data primer dan sekunder. Sumber data primer yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini diambil dari novel *Small Great Things* (2016) milik Jodi Picoult dan sumber data sekunder diambil dari referensi jurnal, buku, artikel di internet dan sumber lain yang dapat mendukung penelitian ini. Teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan metode *library research*. Analisa data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan analisa deskriptif kualitatif. Berdasarkan hasil dari penelitian, menunjukkan bahwa: (1) ada lima indikator rasisme yaitu stereotip, prasangka, diskriminasi, mengkampong hitamkan, kata-N, penindasan dan marjinalisasi. (2) rasisme dalam novel diilustrasikan melalui karakter, kejadian dan tempat. (3) alasan penulis mengangkat isu rasisme dalam novel adalah dia ingin mengungkapkan bahwa kata rasisme bukanlah sinonim dari kata prasangka tapi itu lebih dari diskriminasi berdasarkan warna kulit dan mengajak pembaca yang belum berpengalaman tentang rasisme menjadi lebih peduli terhadap isu tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** *Rasisme, Jodi Picoult, Perspektif Sosilogi*

### **ABSTRACT**

This research aimed to discuss the issue of racism reflected in *Small Great Things* (2016) novel by using sociological perspective. This research used two kinds of data sources: primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source was from Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* novel (2016) and the secondary data sources such as references from journals, books, internet article and other sources that could support this research. The technique of collecting data was library research method. The data analysis technique of this research was descriptive qualitative analysis. The result of the research, showed that: (1) there were five indicators of racism in the novel namely: stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, scapegoat, N-word, oppression and marginalization; (2) Racism was depicted in the novel through the character, events and setting; (3) The reason why the author addressed the issue of racism in the novel was she wanted to reveal that the word racism was not only the synonym of prejudice word, but it related on the discrimination based on skin color and to invite the reader who had not experienced about racism to became more caring to that issue.

**Keywords:** *Racism, Jodi Picoult, Sociological Perspective, Small Great Things novel*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research was about a protest against racism in Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* novel (2016). This novel was never analyzed until July 21, 2018. There

had been some researchers dealing with racism. Firstly, the research entitled *Racism in Robert Towne's Ask the Dust Movie* (2006). That research analyzed the portrait of racism in America (Minarti: 2010). Secondly, the research entitled *Racism Against African American Slave in Solomon Northup's Twelve Years As A Slave*. It analyzed the forms of racism against African American slave in the nineteenth-century (Adawiyah: 2015). Thirdly, the research entitled *The Portraits of Racism in America as Reflected in the Novel Kingsblood Royal by Sinclair Lewis*. It analyzed parents, society and mass media that had influenced on shaping children's racial idea and racial attitude (Kumala: 2015). The last research entitled *Rasisme Dalam Pelaporan Akuntasi*. The research analyzed about racism phenomenon in the financial report of *Perusahaan Gas Negara, and Aneka Tambang* (Tri Utomo: 2011).

All of the previous studies above explained racism in the social and economic field. But the researcher was interested in analyzing racism issue in literary works. One of the novels revealed a deep story about racism issue was from Jodi Picoult's novel entitled *Small Great Things*. The researcher and the previous study had the similarity and the differences. The similarity in analyzing racism as the focus object of the study. The difference of this research was about the subject of the study.

To raise the issue of racism in this research paper, the researcher tried to conduct the study with the sociological perspective. In this study, the research aimed to analyze how racism was represented by Jodi Picoult in her *Small Great Things* novel.

## 2. METHOD

This study was a descriptive qualitative method. There were two objects of the study for this research: material object and formal object. The material object of this research was *Small Great Things* novel by Jodi Picoult published in 2016 by Ballantine Books. The number of pages of this novel was 534. Then, the formal object of this study focused on racism based on a sociological perspective. The type of the data was a text from *Small Great Things* novel (2016) which

included narration and dialogue in the novel. There were two kinds of data sources in this research namely; primary and secondary. The primary data source was taken from Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* novel (2016). The secondary data sources were references from the research paper, journals, books, internet article and any other source that could support this research. The technique of collecting data, the researcher took some steps as follow: (1) Reading the *Small Great Things* novel by Jodi Picoult, (2) Reading some related sources of *Small Great Things* novel to know the previous study of the novel, (3) Finding the big issue of the novel, (4) Constructing an outline with break down the title, (5) Selecting the data which supports the issue of the research, (6) Making a conclusion and suggestion of the analysis. For the technique of the data analysis, the researcher uses a word, phrase, clause, and sentence as the data research.

### **3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Indicators of Racism**

There were five indicators of racism namely stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization. The following was the indicators of racism according to Fredrickson (2002) depicted in the novel.

##### **3.1.1 Stereotypes**

The stereotype is people's opinion who judged a group through their thoughts toward a person without knowing the fact (Hilton and Hippel: 1996). This novel on page 62 told about the black people who were difficult to look for a job. They were also considered as persons who liked violence to solve the problem. While, white people in this novel were depicted as prosperous people.

##### **3.1.2 Prejudice**

Prejudice is a negative or positive thinking to someone (Baron and Byrne: 1997). The novel told about the negative thinking of the shopkeeper to Ruth. Ruth was suspected in any action. Then, when she

wanted to leave the store the security asked her shopping list and checked the things in her bag.

### **3.1.3 Discrimination**

Discrimination is an act that distinguishes an individual or a group because of the physical differences (Theodorson & Theodorson 1979: 115-116). It described someone who was rejected because of their skin color. This novel on page 24 told about an Africa-America nurse named Ruth Jefferson who got rejection by the white spouse who wanted to give birth in the hospital. The father of white child asked the supervisor of Ruth that he did not want all of the black nurses in the hospital to touch his son.

#### **3.1.3.1 Scapegoat**

The scapegoat is a term to blame an innocent people. This novel told about the white people who made black people became scapegoat. Ruth was a black nurse in the hospital. She was blamed by Turk Baeur and the lawyer of the hospital because she was suspected of killing white child.

#### **3.1.3.2 N-word**

N-word is a term of a nigger or a negro. It was a humiliation that used to against black people. Black people do not like to be called negro or nigger, because the word nigger and negro was the term that used during the period of the American homicide. This novel told about Turk was jailed because of the ownership of marijuana in his car. In the prison, he had a black friend named Twink. One day when Turk was watching TV in a common room, he said that the nigger guys were stupid and nonsense unconsciously. Twink heard it and he looked unhappy. Other people also hated the word nigger, even the word nigger was spoken by a child who did not know anything. When Raine and his daughter named Mira was in the grocery store, Raine's daughter spontaneously said nigger to the black people behind them. Then, all of the people in the store looked at him with judgmental eyes.

### **3.1.4 Oppression**

Oppression is violence and threats against others (Hoyt: 2012). In this novel, the oppression took place on a black labor nurse. She faced a violence and coercion when the police came to her house. The policeman came to the house in the middle of the night and immediately arrested Ruth and Edison. Both of them were tied up and their house was a mess because of the police. Ruth was dragged out to the police station.

### **3.1.5 Marginalization**

Marginalization is to get rid of some people from their life need (Iris Young: 2004). This novel told about the black people who were marginalized. The Church Street South was an area that black people stayed. The area had a cheap apartment rental price. Most of the black people in that area were living in poverty. They had to take a dangerous job by selling drugs to fulfill their daily needs.

## **3.2 How Racism is Depicted in The Novel**

Racism in the *Small Great Things* novel was depicted through three things, such as creating characters, creating event and creating setting.

### **3.2.1 Creating Characters**

#### **3.2.1.1 Black and White characters**

There were two kinds of characters namely black character and white character. In this novel the black characters such as Ruth Jefferson, Adisa, Edison, Ms. Mina, and Wallace Mercy. The author described black character was the character who had a low job so, they had little or minimum wages and they were categorized as the poor. They were depicted as a violent character also. This novel told about Ruth's mother named Ms. Mina who worked as a housemaid at the house of a white family and Adisa was Ruth's sister who lived in the dangerous place. It was a place where the shooting among black gangs happened at the night.

On the other side, there were some white characters such as Turk Braeur, Ms. McQuarrier, Marie, Lucille, Brittany, Corinne and Jack DeNardi. The white character was the characters who had a good life, they had a high social level in society. So, they had more opportunity to be promoted at work. This novel told about white labor nurse named Marie. She was Ruth's superiors nurse and she worked for about 10 years but she became Ruth's superiors. Moreover, Ruth had been worked for about 20 years in the same hospital the same as Marie but she was only one to be promoted.

### **3.2.1.2 Racist characters**

The racist character was the characters who commit acts of discrimination based on the differences in skin color. The researcher described a racist character in four characters namely; being discriminating, being discriminated, *a priori* and negative thinking. Here are some characters of racist that are dominant in the novel.

The first character was character being discriminating. This character was depicted through an elderly woman. In the novel page, 50 told about the old woman who was afraid if her bag was taken by a Ruth. Actually, Ruth intended to help her to open the jar.

The second character was character being discriminated. This character was depicted through Ruth Jefferson. In the novel page, 56 Ruth got humiliation and refusal to occupy a house. She and her husband chose the neighborhood of white people who had a good education to live. However, when they chose a list of the apartment. Suddenly the list disappears when the seller saw a black person who will buy his apartment.

The third character was a priori character. It depicted through the character named Adisa. In the novel page 241 told about Adisa felt that all white people were still wanted to use black people as their servants. They were pressuring black people to not to took a risks to against them. From this conditional, she assumed that Kennedy was the

same as other white people. Ruth lost her job and her house for her conditional exemption when Kennedy became Ruth lawyer. In addition, she thought that Kennedy did not think about whether Ruth has money or not.

The fourth character was negative thinking character. This character was depicted through Turk Beaur. The novel told about when Turk met the hospital's lawyer. He said that the black nurse killed his son by beating his chest. In that time, actually Ruth wanted to help Davis to breathe by CPR to him, but Turk considered it as an action to kill his son.

### **3.2.1.3 Being the target of scapegoat**

Being the target of scapegoat character is the character came from someone who looked for a person to be blamed. The people who have a physical difference were targeted to become scapegoats. In addition, someone who was suspected of having a relationship with an event could be targeted as a scapegoat. In this novel page 48 told Turk's brother named Tanner. He died in accident car and his family blamed a black man who caused it. It was actually Tanner's fault because He was driving when he drunk and hit a black man's car.

### **3.2.1.4 Caring characters**

Caring character is the characters that had a role to give some support and advocacy for Ruth. The author described a caring character through Christina, Adisa and Wallace Mercy. In this novel page 245 Christina was the daughter of Ruth mother's boss. She was a white people and became Ruth's friend also as her sister. She wanted to help Ruth, but her husband would nominate as a local official and they could not deal with any scandal so, she could give only some money to Ruth. Still, Ruth rejected the money that given by Christina.

## **3.2.2 Creating Events**

There were six events that can be found in the novel that depicted racism issue. Firstly, the death of a white child and the suspect was a black

person. Davis was Turk and Brittany's son. He died in the hospital after a circumcision surgery. Ruth was accused to kill Davis, because she was the last person who stayed with Davis. Second the suspicion of store employees for the black people. Ruth intended to invite Ms. McQuarrie to go shopping. Then, in the store she was supervised by the shopkeeper and Ruth's bag was checked by security when they left the store.

Third, the demands for the death of a white child. Turk was Davis' father he suspected that Ruth had committed violence to the Davis death. Moreover, because of his hatred of black people and he also wanted someone to compensate for Davis's death. Then he demanded Ruth on charges of murder and negligence work. Fourth was looking for justice. Ruth seeks justice for her freedom. She did not want to come back to jail anymore. She has a child who needed her, to educate him and to have a good influence person for her son. Then she met Ms. McQuarrie as the white lawyer. She helped Ruth for her conditional freedom.

Fifth was the lawyer. Ms. McQuarrie was white lawyer. She had worked in the public defender's office for about four years. She handled a particular case like robbery, criminal offenses, and identity theft, but it was the first time she handle the murder case. It was Ruth case and twice she dreamed of Ruth and she felt this case was a different case, so she wanted to help Ruth by became her lawyer. The last was about white cop. There were two cops who wanted to ask some question to Ruth. They were detective MacDougall and detective Leong. Detective Leong was an Asian-American woman. They wanted to hear the real Ruth's statement, why she killed a white baby.

### **3.2.3 Creating Setting**

Setting in this novel was divided into three places. First, was in Mercy West Haven Hospital. The setting could be seen when Ruth said in her inner voice that her shift is from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. at Mercy West

Haven Hospital. Second place was T.J. Maxx store. The setting could be seen when the security only check Ruth's bag from many people who left the T.J. Maxx store. The last was in the court. It could be seen when Ms. McQuarrie tried to suggest Ruth to not bring racist issue in the court.

### **3.3 The Reason of Addressing Racism in The Novel**

There were four reasons why Jodi Picoult addressed racism in this novel. First, to raise the issue of racism in her novel she was inspired by the real incident that exists in NYC. Second, she had a desire to give a racism story in narrative form, so the person who had not experienced racism became more caring about that issue. Third, she realized that the racial issue in America was an important issue and it included the issues that burden the hearts of many people. So, they did not want to talk about it because it made them uncomfortable. Fourth, she wanted to reveal that the word of racism was not only the synonymous of prejudice word, but it was more than just a discrimination based on skin color.

### **3.4 Discussion**

After analyzing the findings in *Small Great Things* novel, the researcher found there was a strong relationship between this novel and social reality in America. From the literature perspective according to Swingewood and Laurenson, this novel can be regarded as a reflection of the society problem and social phenomenon. Related to the social phenomenon, this novel has an issue about racism.

The racism issue that occurred in this novel was about racism between white people and black people. The issue came up because first, Jodi Picoult was inspired by the real incident in NYC. It was because the author read a news story about an African-American police in hiding for his work and he was shot four times in his back on the subway by his white police colleague. Second, she had a desire to give a racism story in narrative form, so that the person who was never experienced racism

became more caring to that issue. Third, the author was realized that racial issue in America was an important issue and it included issues that burden the hearts of many people. So, they did not want to talk about it because it makes them uncomfortable. The last, she wanted to reveal that the word of racism was not only the synonymous prejudice word but, it was more than just a discrimination based on skin color. She thought that racism was different because it included on any action that hurt and harm others or a certain race.

In relation to the sociological of literature perspective aspect based on Swingewood and Laurenson (1962) in *Theory of Literature* book, the researcher focused on the sociology of the society. It means the sociology of the society was reflected in social phenomena where she lived. In another word, the work of the author and their society could not be separated because they got inspired by the society life.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the previous chapter, the researcher found that there were three conclusions to answer the problem statements. First, there were five indicators of racism in the novel as follows: stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, oppression and marginalization. The second, there were three things depicted racism namely creating character, creating events, and creating setting. The last, was the reasons why Jodi Picoult addressed racism in *Small Great Things* novel because she wanted to reveal that the word of racism is not only the synonymous of the prejudice word, but it was more than just a discrimination based on skin color and to invite the reader who had never experienced about racism became more aware to the racism issue.

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