

AN ANALYSIS OF RACIAL HEGEMONY IN RAP MUSIC CULTURE PORTRAYED IN 8 MILE FILM

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the racial hegemony portrayed in the film entitled "8 Mile" (2002) directed by Curtis Hanson. The portrayal of racial hegemony in the film is represented through the rap music culture that is known to be identical with the African-Americans in America. The qualitative research method is used in this study to present the data. Moreover, the ground theory of racial hegemony by Lee Artz (2000) is used in guiding the analysis provided in this research. The results of this research consist of the evidence that the rap music dominated by the African-American is the form of cultural practice that is involved as one of the manifestations of racial hegemony. Another result shows that racial hegemony is addressed through the fact that African-Americans as minority in America still get the lower wage and does not get the higher status in the society as easily as the white Americans. The consent of inequality between the white and black Americans is the cause which is one of the causes why discrimination and hegemony persists to this day.

Key Words: Discrimination, Literary analysis, Racial hegemony, Rap music, 8 Mile

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa hegemoni ras yang terkandung dalam film berjudul "8 Mile" (2002) yang disutradai oleh Curtis Hanson. Gambaran hegemoni ras yang diidentifikasi dalam film direpresentasikan melalui budaya musik rap yang didominasi oleh ras kulit hitam di Amerika. Metode penelitian kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini untuk menyajikan data analisa yang ada. Terlebih lagi, teori dasar terkait hegemoni ras oleh Lee Artz (2000) digunakan untuk memandu analisa yang disertakan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian ini terdiri dari beberapa poin. Poin pertama menunjukkan bahwa dominasi ras kulit hitam dalam musik rap di Amerika merupakan bentuk manifestasi dari hegemoni ras. Hasil lainnya menunjukkan bahwa hegemoni ras juga ditunjukkan melalui representasi realita dimana ras kulit hitam di Amerika masih kesulitan untuk mendapatkan upah minimum yang lain serta jabatan tinggi dalam kemasyarakatan jika dibandingkan dengan ras kulit putih di Amerika. Sebuah persetujuan atau konsen akan kesenjangan hak antara ras kulit putih dan ras kulit hitam di Amerika merupakan salah satu faktor terjaganya isu hegemoni ras hingga saat ini.

Keywords: 8 Mile, Analisa literature, Diskriminasi, Hegemoni ras, Musik rap

INTRODUCTION

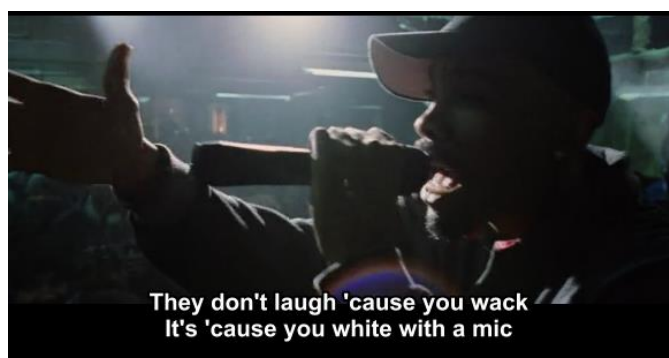
The issue of racial differences and domination of one race to another has been taken into various accounts of scientific studies. The differences between races tends to trigger the topic of discrimination as the groups are divided into the majority and minority where the dominant group is superior than the others. One of the examples where racial differences and discrimination are demonstrated is through the hegemony of popular culture. According to Artz (2000, p. 73) the condition of a cultural and racial hegemony happened when there are interactions between the interests and practices of the dominant and the sub-ordinate group. This means that hegemony in its general term relating to the cultural and other aspects involve the interactions between the superior and the inferior groups where the certain interests or practices are dominated by the stronger group. This further leads to the act of discrimination and stereotypes followed after the inferior group.

The characteristics of racial hegemony is related to the act of violence and exploitation. According to Coates (2007, p. 322) racial hegemony always involves the issues of violence and exploitation even when the hegemony is hidden. This means that racial hegemony has the basic causes of hate and aggression done by the dominating group towards those who are inferior to them in order to fully control the interests or practices they crossed in the first place. Coates (2007, p. 322) further explained that racial hegemony and discrimination are maintain throughout the era because there is some kind of consensus between the exploiter and the exploited where it is seen as a natural common sense. This certain

condition refers to the perception over racial hegemony and discrimination where the dominating race is normalized of being in control over the inferior group. It creates a gap in power and put the minority into a less beneficial and discriminated position in society.

As racial hegemony is apparent through the clash between the superior and inferior in terms of certain practices or interests, the case relating to racial hegemony varied. One of the example to this case is the issue of Rap music that is dominated by the African-American people. According to Henderson (1996, p. 309) rap music is identical with black people community is united state where its existence channelled the nationalism of Black America youth. This means that the existence of rap music does not only viewed as particular genre of music but also as cultural identity and nationalism for the Black American. This leads to the domination of rap music which further reinforces stereotypes relating to the matter. Murwantono (2011, p. 22) explained that the origin of rap music being identical to the African-Americans does not only relate to their culture and nationalism but also often used to address the topic of slavery that they went through. The hegemony or domination over rap music by African-American is influenced by the history and their cultural identity that causes perceptions that the white people are not welcomed or being put aside when it comes mastering the rap music.

The issue of racial hegemony based on rap music in America is represented through the film entitled 8 Mile (2002) directed by Curtis Hanson. This film tells about Eminem as a jimmy smith jr. (rabbit) who pursues his career as a white rapper while having to deal with the fact that rap music is dominated by African-Americans. The film further portrayed the racial hegemony, domination over the genre, and discrimination between the African-Americans and the white rappers. The storyline captured that there is a gap between the dominating group and the inferior one as they do not only deal with competition but also deals with the issues of hegemony relating to their culture and identity. This particular issue is seen through the scene and dialogue taken from the film in the following,



Picture 1 - Lil' Tic's Rap Dissing Rabbit

[00:06:50]

Lil' Tic: *"They don't laugh 'cause you wack. It's 'cause you white with a mic"*

The line taken from the rap made by Lil' Tic who is an African-American rapper when he is up against Rabbit who is a white rapper reflected the hegemony in which the domination over rap music by the African-American are almost explicitly delivered. Moreover, from the rap line, it is also implied that white rapper in between the environment where colorism where the Black and the White American crossed is discriminated. The discrimination is seen from the stereotype where the White American is considered bad at rapping if compared to the Black American who take rap music as a part of their cultural identity. According to Artz (2000, p. 80) the issue of racial inequality and hegemony is maintained to the nowadays society from the negotiation of popular culture where the relationships between the Black and

White Americans consent to the cultural hegemony. This means that both parties play role in maintaining the consent of inequality. In this matter, hegemony and racism thinking is maintained in individuals who are believing that racism is the product of the past while in fact, the separation of the White and Black still exists in every aspects of life. This is seen from the racial hegemony seen from the rap music culture where Rabbit as a white man does not get welcomed into the competition that is dominated by the African-Americans.

Based on the example of data analysis taken from the film, this research is specifically focuses on the portrayal of racial hegemony found in *8 Mile* where rap music becomes the media where inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination between white and the African-American still happen. The perception of racial hegemony by Artz (2000) is used to identify the data of racial hegemony found from the scenes and dialogues of the film.

METHOD

This research applied qualitative research method in gathering and presenting the data analysis. This research includes the analysis of racial hegemony phenomenon represented through film as literary work which requires detailed analysis in the forms of comprehensive text. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 41) explained that qualitative research method includes the analysis from an emerging question relating human relationships or certain social problems. In other words, qualitative research method is suitable to be used in research that investigates particular matter relating to human beings and their society. Moreover, Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 50) explained that qualitative research method involves the use of texts, images, and narrative followed by ground theory that becomes the base of interrelationship between the emerged question and the facts gathered from the object. This means that qualitative research method allows the research to gather facts from the object before relating it to the supporting theories in a comprehensive analysis based on the formulated research problem. Therefore, qualitative research method is considered suitable to be applied in this study to provide comprehensive analysis based on the formulated research question of the portrayal of racial hegemony of rap music found in the film *8 Mile* (2002).

There are several steps done in order to collect the data from the chosen film. First, the researcher watches the film. Secondly, the researcher watches the film again while marking the scenes and dialogues relating to the issue of racial hegemony. Thirdly, the researcher sorts the data based on the most relevant data regarding the portrayal of racial hegemony in the film. After the data is sorted out, the researcher begins to categorizes the data based on the perception of racial hegemony by Lee Artz (2000).

The data that are gathered is validated based on the method of theory triangulation. According to Denzin (as cited in Noble and Heale, 2019, p. 67) one of the methods of triangulation in qualitative is referred as theory triangulation which involves the application of several theoretical schemes in order to interpret the data or phenomenon based on the guiding theories. Thus, this research specifically applied theory triangulation in the process of analysis to validate the data gathered from the object. Moreover, there are several steps followed in analysing the data. Firstly, the researcher categorizes the data based on the racial hegemony perception by Lee Artz (2000). Secondly, the researcher explains how the scenes and dialogues taken from the film relates to the issue of racial hegemony. Thirdly, the researcher relates the interpretation with the guiding theory. Lastly, the researcher draws a comprehensive conclusion based on the analysis made in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The film 8 Mile portrayed the realistic environment where the two races of White Americans and the African-Americans crosses in the practices of living and interests. This film does not only bring up the topic of racial hegemony from the domination of rap music by the African-Americans but also the gap between the two races where there are still traces of racism against Black relating to the history of slavery. The data taken from the film which represented the racial hegemony present in the culture of rap music is seen below,



Picture 2 - Lil' Tic's Rap Dissing Rabbit's Skill

[00:07:24]

Lil' Tic: *"Cause this is hip-hop. You don't belong, you're a tourist"*

The scene above shows the situation of a rap competition between Rabbit and Lil' Tic. The theme of rap battle requires the contestants to diss their opponent. From this regulation, Lil' Tic who is known as the African-American rapper brings up the topic of Rabbit as a white rapper. The line implies that white American does not belong to the rap music community and the skill from the white rapper is looked down. This is represented from the particular rap line, *'you don't belong, you're a tourist'*. This portrayed the consent of inequality by the representation of African-American where hegemony and racism still carried along within the society.

The fact that black people or the African-American is the main target of racism yet the concept of racism itself carried in their social functioning is related to the work of hegemony. According to Artz (2000, p. 81) the structure of hegemony and racial discrimination is carried not only the white people but also from the black Americans who have lived their life based on the Americans' standard and culture to the point that racism is institutionalized. This means that the idea of hegemony or domination of one race to another still carried within individuals and reflected through their behaviour. This is seen from the clash interaction over rap music between the white American rapper and the black American rapper. Another data that portrayed racial hegemony is seen in the following,



Picture 3 - Rabbit Diss Rapping against His Co-Worker

[00:54:28]

Rabbit: "This guy style's a doo-doo. You've worked here longer than me and I get paid more than you do"

From the scene and the rap line taken from the film above, it is shown that Rabbit is on a rapping session against his African-American co-worker. They both work in a factory where every morning they receive food from the truck. The rapping session is started by a female co-worker and got replied with a diss rapping from the male co-worker who ended up not only dissing Vanessa but also the men there whom he labelled as 'gay'. From this situation, Rabbit jumped into the beat and diss rap against his male co-worker and delivered the fact that he, as a white American worker got paid higher than his male co-worker who is an African-American. This particular line implies the condition of hegemony and oppression that is although addressed lightly, still presents as a serious issue.

The issue of hegemony and oppression against the African-American is related to inequality consent. According to Artz (2000, p. 82) the African-American or the black Americans mostly consent to the inequality to secure their place within the capitalist hegemony environment while also facing the fact that only a minority of black families receive proper wage while the others are still below the minimum range. This particular condition is seen through the diss-rap by Rabbit as a white American which is received by the black Americans while accepting the truth that both parties acknowledged. The fact that racism and hegemony within American society still exists and maintained to the modern days further proven that the consent of inequality exists. Another evidence of cultural hegemony is seen from the following data,



Picture 4 - Lyckety's Diss Rap against Rabbit

[01:29:58]

Lyckety split: "You ain't Detroit, I'm the D. You the New Kid on the Block"

From the scene and line taken from the film presented above, Lyckety who is the opponent of Rabbit in the rapping battle includes the fact that Rabbit as a white American does not belong to 8 Mile where the rap music is dominated by the African-American rappers. This is related to how rap music and hip-hop is known to be the part of the Black American cultures. There are also the areas that are considered identic with the rap music culture which is included from the lyrics, Detroit. According to Artz (2000, p. 82) the black community in America is known to take residence in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York where black political and intellectual leadership are still progressively maintained. This is related to Lyckety's lyrics that implied that a white American boy does not represent Detroit where black community and culture are flourished.

The domination of rap music in 8 Mile by the African-American demonstrated what a hegemony in society looks like. The way that Rabbit as a white American deals with discrimination regarding his race as well as how he is discriminated for his rap skill fully describes the concept of racism that is still maintained by the characters portrayed in the film. According to Artz (2000, p. 84) social formation where hegemony and discrimination exist has the capacity for different aspects in economy, politic, and cultural practice. This is related that the gap over the rap music reflected the hegemonic cultural practices. In shorts, as Black Americans are discriminated for their sources and status, the Black Americans also developed their own hegemony over their culture against the White Americans. Another data shows another evidence of racial hegemony,



Picture 5 – Lyckety’s Diss Rapping against Rabbit

[01:30:35]

Lyckety split: *“I didn’t know why they let you in the dark. Take your white ass across 8 Mile to the trailer park”*

From the scene and line taken from the film above, Lyckety who is an African-American, dissed Rabbit for being a white American boy who is daring to compete in 8 Mile where the rap music is dominated by African-American rappers. From the line ‘I didn’t know why they let you out in the dark’, it is implied that Rabbit as the white American rapper is discriminated in terms of rapping skill which is being related to his cultural identity as ‘white’. This particular discrimination is taken from a hegemony practiced within the African-American environment against the white. It is demonstrated how racial hegemony is both maintained by the black and white Americans under the condition of inequality consent.

According to Artz (2000, p. 83) the consent regarding inequality and racism is socially constructed. This means that the values that involves discriminative behaviour is maintained from one generation to generation and further practiced within the society. Although the discrimination does not come in the form of slavery as it was back in the history, the concept of racism and hegemony is still maintained, not only by the white Americans, but also by the African-Americans who are adjusted to the social structure established in America where the white Americans are considered as the majority. The last evidence of racial hegemony in the film is seen below,



Picture 6 - The Rap Battle of Rabbit Against Lotto

[01:36:00]

Rabbit: *"You see how far them white jokes get you. "How's Vanilla Ice gon' dis you?". My motto: "Fuck Lotto. I'll get the seven digits from your mother for a dollar tomorrow"*

From the scene and line taken from the film above, it is seen that Rabbit is addressing the racial slurs that he received from the opponents in the rap battle. The use of jokes that include racial slurs are risky to use as it involves a whole history between the white Americans and the African-Americans where the Black Americans receive an overwhelmingly heavy burden of slavery, oppression, violence, and discrimination. It also does not clear the fact that white people still control over the black Americans in some way as it is implied from the line, *'I'll get the seven digits from your mother for a dollar tomorrow'* which refers to a low paying job that mostly given to the African-Americans as minority in American society.

According to Artz (2000, p. 86) racial hegemony and hierarchy is maintained through the application of cultural practices. This means, as long as the members of society keep treating each other with the ideas and concepts of racism and hegemony, both issues will keep persisting throughout the years. Relating from the scene and line from the film, such environment where the white Americans and African-American go along together is reflected yet the topic of racism and the consent of inequality still exists on both parties.

CONCLUSIONS

After analysing the data gathered from the film, the conclusion from the analysis is drawn. The racial hegemony represented from the competition of rap music between the White American and African-American is reflected through cultural practices. The idea of racial hegemony and discrimination is seen from how the African-American, especially in the 8 Mile dominated the rap music and discriminated Rabbit who represents white American rapper. The rap music dominated by the African-American is the form of cultural practice that is involved as one of the manifestations of racial hegemony. Meanwhile, in several occurrences in the film, Rabbit also brings in the topic of African-Americans' minority in America where they get the lower wage and does not get the higher status in the society as easily as the white Americans. From the two conditions and based on Artz (2000) perception of racial hegemony, it is known that both the white and black Americans have consent of inequality which is one of the causes why discrimination and hegemony persists to this day.

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