

## Constructing Black People in *The Clansman* Novel by Thomas Dixon (A Postcolonial Study)

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the construction of the black people in *The Clansman* novel written by Thomas Dixon. This study used a postcolonial perspective that is orientalism proposed by Edward Said. Orientalism that tries to see how the west constructs the east in stereotypical images is adapted to how racist America constructs black. This study combines library and media research by applying a descriptive qualitative method in analyzing the data. The data collected through the process of re-reading and classifying the data. This study found that the construction of black people in *the Clansman* novel is built in racist ideology. The author of the novel represents the white Ku Klux Klan to create the binary opposition of black as inferior and white as superior in the aspects of physical, mental, and intellectual. White is represented as a perfect creature because of their appearance, behavior and also knowledge, while black represented as a savage and brute, black skinned as the symbol of ugliness, and having intellectual deficiency. However, the construction of black in this novel is not regardless of the author's worldview about racism in the United States.

**Keywords:** *binary opposition, orientalism, postcolonial, racism, stereotype*

### INTRODUCTION

*The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* is a novel published in 1905 by Thomas F. Dixon, Jr. Dixon was a Baptist minister and author from the American South who attempted to counter the romanticized abolitionist messages of the novel and stage versions by portraying Southern whites not as villains but victims. *The Clansman* develops the true story of the Ku Klux Klan conspiracy which overturned the reconstruction regime and depicted the lynching of a black man by Ku Klux Klan for causing the death of two white women was popular in the North as well as the South. The Ku Klux Klan is the most prominent hate-based organization in American history who symbolizes the extremes of race and religious hatred in America where the Ku Klux Klan as heroes and blacks as a villain. The novel represent about the impact of American civil war which the major factors of this war are the problem of slavery and

the effort removal of slavery in the United State. In the end after the civil war, there are three (the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth) amendments to the United States Constitution were ratified which these amendments abolished slavery, granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and granted African American men the right to vote (as cited in Zlamalova, 2010:14). So that the emancipation of blacks came as a fast transformation for whites which they simply were not able to accept the abolition of slavery and black equality at the same time. Therefore blacks were still perceived as inferior, and whites still clung to white supremacy although the Slavery and Reconstruction was over but the concept of black inferiority was still in the minds of whites.

Based on the explanation above, it can be said that identity is a problem which is always there in every generation and every time. Identity describes the way individuals and groups define them-selves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (Deng, 1995:1). Therefore the ideology of racism is closely related to orientalism and colonialism, since generally colonialism enrooted on the Western superiority as race superior (white). It is also said that the colonizer was the superior group and colonized as the inferior group. It is linear with the theory of orientalism by Edward Said which according to Said (1979: 36) that orientalism is the practice of viewing the orient based on the western perspective. Orientalism is interesting to analyze because it is not only a created body of theory but also as a tool of the west having authority, defining and restructuring over the orient (Said, 1979:7). Then this concept of orientalism applied in seeing how racist Americans construct the image of black people in the United States. While the purpose of this study is to analyze the construction of black people in *The Clansman* novel by Thomas Dixon. This study can be a relevant reference for further study, especially for the analysis of the novel and other works of fiction who wants to investigate more black people especially in using the postcolonial study in this case orientalism by Edward Said. The study focused on analyzing *The Clansman* novel using a postcolonial perspective that is orientalism proposed by Edward Said. Orientalism that tries to see how the west constructs the east in stereotypical images is adapted to how racist America constructs black. In this study, the writer analyzed the construction of black people in *The Clansman* novel by Thomas Dixon.

The writer applied the postcolonial perspective that is orientalism proposed by Edward Said which the concept of orientalism by Edward Said above also can be applied in seeing how racist Americans construct the image of black people in the United States. The reason why the writer chooses *The Clansman Novel as the object is because*, the first, this novel is one of the orientalist texts. Second, the writer viewed this object as being able to change the stereotypes about black representation in society. And the last reason, the writer viewed that the object had significant correlation with one of the literary theories of postcolonial study.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, the author used a qualitative-descriptive method. The author used *The Clansman* novel that is written by Thomas Dixon as the primary data and also used books, journal, thesis, and some articles in websites that are related with *The Clansman* as the secondary data. In collecting the data the writer passed through the process of previewing, re-reading and classifying the data. While analyzing data, the writer used the theory of Postcolonial study to analyze the construction of black people in *The Clansman* novel by Thomas Dixon with the process of presenting the data, interpreting the data, describing the data and then concluding the result of data then given a suggestion.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

*The Clansman* is not just the historical novels. It is a story in which the author represents the imperialistic attitude of an American man, in this case white who wants a superior position to dominate others (black). Actually, the construction of the white and the black are different. In this novel, Dixon deals with colonialism by representing a terrorist organization (Ku Klux Klan) who symbolizes the extremes of race and religious hatred in America. Colonization causes parties who feel dominating and dominated or known as superiority and inferiority. This is due to the stigma of racism which is created that Whites are superior to Blacks. It is like the process of recognizing the knowledge between two worlds which divided two important parts, the East (Orient) and the West (Occident). This idea of orientalism cannot be innocent because it does not represent the encounter between equals. The white in this case the west has always been the dominant and more civilized one.

According to Melani Budianta (1995), binary opposition is one of the western philosophical heritages of thought which means two different and contradictory things. In this case are the White and Black. Therefore, the binary opposition in orientalism focuses on the occident versus the orient or west versus east is used to analyze the occident hegemony toward the orient. In this case, the use of orientalism that is related to racism, the incident is the people who have white skin versus the orient who has another skin tone or black.

### **Black as Savage and Brute**

Discussing about black is never regardless of the white, which black always represents as the uncivilized people while the white as the civilized. It is consistent with Jones (2005:9) that the meaning of being a black male is that one can never fully cross a line that separates civilization and the savage. It's the same with this novel which presents the black as a figure who has always been a brute. Said (1979:54) also states in his book that the east is assumed as the land of barbarian. There is Gus who is described in this novel as a black which always interferes with the white. Like the conversation below:

"And Gus, the young scamp we used to own; you haven't forgotten him? He is back here, a member of the company of negro troops, and parades before the house every day to show off his uniform. Dr. Cameron told him yesterday he'd thrash him if he caught him hanging around the place again. He frightened Margaret nearly to death when she went to the barn to feed her horse" (1905:191).

Based on the conversation above, it shows the circumstances of the disruption of white women because of the behavior of black who often make them fear. The conversation above between Mrs. Cameron and Mrs. Lenoir talks about Gus who interferes with the comfort of white with parades before the house every day to show off his uniform and frightened Margaret. It also represents how the black wants to resemble the white. It can be said that the author wants to represent the black people as the annoying people. While the white in this novel represent as the victim of black. It can be seen in the quotation above that the author wants to present the white as a victims of the black's violence. Black in this novel also represent as the robbery, as can proof by the quotation below:

I sent you an enclosed order for the last dollar of money we have left. You must hoard it. Make it last until your father is safe at home. I dare not leave it here. Nothing is safe. Every piece of silver and everything that could be carried has been stolen since we returned

(1905:116).

Based on the quotation above, it shows Mrs. Cameron to her husband about the condition of their home in which their money had been stolen. Of course that statement doesn't mention who the thief is but we can conclude that the robber is the black because it happened at the release of black. This is because of the effort removal of slavery in the United State which in this novel describe that the black after abolished slavery became a crime. It can be said that the author wants to construct the black as a robber which steals the property of white. That also represents the white as the victim of the black, where in this section white is the victim of stealing the white's property. In addition as a robber, the black also construct as the arson like the quotation below:

The big rambling hostelry had been burned by roving negroes, pigs were wallowing in the sulfur springs, and along its walks, where lovers of olden days had strolled, the cows were browsing on the shrubbery (1905: 188).

The statement above explicitly mentioned that the Negro or in this case black as the actors of the burning the hostelry. It clearly shows that the authors want to construct the black as the arson which is a crime in the area that occupied him. It is also supported in the conversation below which the black as the arson. The quotation is below:

"Eight more fires were seen from town to-night."

"You only guess their origin."

"I know their origin. It was done by the League at a signal as a celebration of the election and a threat of terror to the county. One of our men concealed a faith-fulnegro under the floor of the school-house and heard the plot hatched. We expected it a month ago — but hoped they had given it up" (1905: 262).

The conversations above also support the statement of the black as the people who executed the eight more fires in South Carolina. Where from the conversation above, mentioned that the executed of the fires is League as a signal of celebration and threat of terror. Which the League had been taken by Negro, as describe in this following quotation:

"Since the League has taken in the negroes, every Union white man has dropped it like a hot iron, except the lone scallywag or carpet-bagger who expects an office. In the church, the social circle, in business or pleasure, these men are lepers. How can a human being stand it? I've tried to grind this hellish spirit in the dirt under my heel, and unless you can do it they'll beat you in the long run! You've got to have some Southern white men or you're lost" (1905: 238).

Based on the quotation above, it shows in the first line that the league has taken by the Negro or

in other hands the league is a black people. So, the quotation above, purpose to support the quotation before the arson is the black. It's clear that the image of the non-west as the unsafe condition which always occurs in the unpleasant atmosphere. In addition to the arson, the black also constructed as brutal people. It can be following in the quotation below:

Delicate and cultured women are living on cowpeas, corn bread, and molasses — and of such quality they would not have fed it to a slave. Children go to bed hungry. Drove of brutal negroes roam at large, stealing, murdering, and threatening blacker crimes. We are under the heel of petty military tyrants, few of whom ever smelled gunpowder in a battle. At the approaching election, not a decent white man in this country can take the infamous test oath. I am disfranchised because I gave a cup of water to the lips of one of my dying boys on the battlefield. My slaves are all voters. There will be a negro majority of more than one hundred thousand in this state. Desperadoes are here teaching these negroes insolence and crime in their secret societies. The future is a nightmare." (1905: 215)

Based on the statement above, it shows that the author represent the black as a brutal people who act like the stealing, murdering, and threatening blacker crimes. It can be said that the author of this novel wants to display black as brutal people. Therefore, the representation of black as the brutal is the result of the construction of black by the author who creates a stereotype that the black are the brutal people. The victim of the black's savage is the white.

### **Black Skinned as the Symbol of Ugliness**

Black as a slave is an ethnic of Africa-America who an ethnic groups in the United States who his ancestors came from Africa. Talking about Africa is never about white who are western. The differences of physical appearance are a major problem about identity from time to time. Through the differences then make a stereotype that there is a superior group and inferior group which black skinned represents as the symbol of ugliness while white skinned as the symbol of daintiness. The quotation below presents the physical appearance of black people.

Phil watched him with disgust. He had the short, heavy-set neck of the lower order of animals. His skin was coal black, his lips so thick they curled both ways up and down with crooked blood marks across them. His nose was flat, and its enormous nostrils seemed in perpetual dilation. The sinister bead eyes, with brown splotches in their whites, were set wide apart and gleamed apelike under his scant brows. His enormous cheek-bones and jaws seemed to protrude beyond the ears and almost hide them (1905: 216).

Based on the quotation above, it describes the physical appearance of black which black people have kinky heads, black skin, thick lips, white teeth, and flat noses. Where the physical appearances of black always make a white disgusted, white always equates blacks like animals. It

can be said that the author wants to represent black as disgusting people.

"No, I've the funniest yellow dog that comes here at night to pick up the scraps and things. He isn't my dog -just a little personal friend of mine — but I like him very much, and always give him something. He's very cute. I think he's a nigger dog." "A nigger dog? What's that?"

"He belongs to some coloured people, who don't give him enough to eat. I love him because he's so faithful to his own folks. He comes to see me at night and pretends to love me, but as soon as I feed him he trots back home. When he first came, I laughed till I cried at his antics over a carpet — we had a carpet then. He never saw one before, and barked at the colors and the figures in the pattern. Then he'd lie down and rub his back on it and growl. You won't let anybody hurt him? (1905: 200).

The quote shows the conversation between Elsie and Marion about her pet. Marion tells Elsie a funny dog which came at night to pick up the scraps and things. Marion thinks that is the nigger dog which comes to see her at night and pretends to love her, but as soon as she feed him he trots back home. It can be said that Marion state the dog is nigger dog because the dog same like the black who faithful to his own (Masters) and also because of the dog's color. So, between the nigger dog and the black are same. Or in other words, the author wants to present the black must like as an animal who is faithful to his own. In addition of Negro, there are the mulatto who is the first generation offspring of a black person and a white person. Both of Negro and mulatto in this novel is the representation of the non-white. Mulatto is described as the same figure of the black.

A curious fact about this place on the Capitol hill was that his housekeeper, Lydia Brown, was a mu- latto, a woman of extraordinary animal beauty and the fiery temper of a leopardess (1905: 57).

Based on the quotation above, Lydia brown as mulatto is described as a figure like an animal. Both of black and mulatto were the villains which represent this novel. It can be said that the author want to confirm that well the Negro and also mulatto are inappropriate the equal position with the white. On the other hand, the west is superior whereas the east is inferior. So, based on the proofs above, it can be said that the stereotype of black always represented in negative ways. Different from black people who always represent in negative ways, the white people in this novel represent in positive ways. The proof will be shown in the following quotation below:

"Suddenly this boy sprang on the breastwork. He was dressed in a new gray colonel's uniform that mother of his, in the pride of her soul, had sent him. "He was a handsome figure — tall, slender, straight, a gorgeous yellow sash tasseled with gold around his waist, his sword flashing in the sun, his slouch hat cocked on one side and an eagle's feather in it. "We thought he was going to lead another charge, but just as the battery was making ready

to fire he deliberately walked down the embankment in a hail of musketry and began to give water to our wounded men (1905: 7).

In the quotation above, it tells about a conversation between Elsie and the surgeon. They talk about a young confederation officer upon his action in the war who is being hanged by court-martial as a guerilla. It described that the white man is a figure who cares for others. The character of the boy in this case is Ben Cameron who came from the South is a white man who has a good appearance and attitude where he gave water to his enemy at the time of war and risked himself. It can be said that the author of this novel wants to represent the white people with a good appearance and attitude. Based on all the proofs above, it can be said that the stereotype of white always represents in positive ways. So that from time to time the black generation is taught to have some perception that all the white people are superior. It is also supported by the quotation below that the white believe in physical differences between white and black. As Dixon portrays in this novel:

"I believe that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which will forever forbid their living together in terms of political and social equality. If such be attempted, one must go to the wall" (1905: 45).

Based on the quotation above, it shows the statement of Abraham Lincoln who is the President of the United States who believes in physical differences between white and black. It can be said that the author of this novel wants to present Abraham Lincoln as the part of theirs to support that between black and white never be equal. So that, with the support of Abraham Lincoln who is the President, it's clear that the author wants to show that the white is superior more than the black which between white and black never can be equal.

### **Black as Intellectual Deficiency**

Knowledge is the key of civilizations in which people develop their ways of life from time to time by the development of their knowledge. Knowledge to Balfour (as cited in Edward Said, 2003: 32) means "surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline". From that statement, it is understood that knowledge brings, changes or transforms people into civilization. The proof intellectual deficiency of black can be seen in the following quotation:

Southern doctors have always been pioneers in the science of medicine. Dr. Crawford Long, of Georgia, you know, was the first practitioner in America to apply anesthesia to surgery."



I owned a rascally slave named Gus whom I used to watch stealing. Suddenly confronting him, I've thrown him into unconsciousness with a steady gaze of the eye, until he would drop on his face, trembling like a leaf, unable to speak until I allowed him" (1905: 213)

The quotations above in the first line state that the southerner doctors have always been pioneers of medicine. On the other hand it can be said that the southerner as a white has knowledge. It shows that the southern is a perfect's creature which has knowledge. Where this knowledge make them used his knowledge to control or dominating the other in this case black, like represent in the second quotation which the Doctor Cameron doing to his slave, Gus. As what Said states that the west through their superior knowledge and accommodating power, control, contain, and otherwise give an authority to the other (Said, 2003: 48).

So, knowledge is the important thing in this life. Like the quotation below about education.

"Education, sir, is the development of that which is. Since the dawn of history the Negro has owned the continent of Africa — rich beyond the dream of poet's fancy, crunching acres of diamonds beneath his bare black feet. Yet he never picked one up from the dust until a white man showed him its glittering light. His land swarmed with powerful and docile animals, yet he never dreamed of a harness, cart, or sled. A hunter by necessity, he never made an axe, spear, or arrowhead worth preserving beyond the moment of its use. He lived as an ox, content to graze for an hour. In a land of stone and timber he never sawed a foot of lumber, carved a block, or built a house save of broken sticks and mud. With league on league of ocean strand and miles of inland seas, for four thousand years he watched their surface ripple under the wind, heard the thunder of the surf on his beach, the howl of the storm over his head, gazed on the dim blue horizon calling him to worlds that lie beyond, and yet he never dreamed a sail! He lived as his fathers lived — stole his food, worked his wife, sold his children, ate his brother, content to drink, sing, dance, and sport as the ape! (1905: 292)

Based on the conversation between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stoneman about a Negro in this case black people, it shows that black need white because without the knowledge of white they could not do anything. Like black never picked one up from the dust until a white man showed to him its glittering light. So that for white, black can't be equal with them. It is shown that the non-west is a fool which they easily fool of white. It can be following in the quotation below:

"Do you know what's written on this paper, Uncle Aleck?" Margaret asked. "Cose I do. Dat's de deed to my farm er forty acres in de bender de creek, what I did stuck off wid de red, white, an' blue sticks de Gubment Gimme."  
"I'll read it to you," said Margaret (1905:242).

Based on the quotation above, it shows that old aleck has been fooled about forty acre of land for his vote. This happens because Old Aleck cannot read and write, so he is easily fooled by others.

It can be said that the author wants to present the blacks in his novel who have intellectual deficiency as the portraits of old Aleck above. It is also support in the quotation below:

Aleck made up his mind to go to Columbia, make the laws himself, and never again trust a white man from the North or South. The agent of the Freedmen's Bureau at Piedmont tried to choke him off the ticket. The League backed him to a man. He could neither read nor write, but before he took to whiskey he had made a specialty of revival exhortation, and his mouth was the most effective thing about him. In this campaign he was an orator of no mean powers. He knew what he wanted, and he knew what his people wanted, and he put the thing in words so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, couldn't make any mistake about it (1905: 248).

The quotation above, shows that Aleck can't believe again either northern or Southern because he has been cheated on the ground given to him. Based on this description about Aleck, represent that the black are easily fooled by white because they didn't have good knowledge. In addition, this quotation explicitly mentioned that it is not easy to believe white people. It can be said that the author wants to represent black as a people who don't have a knowledge or in the other hands black is a stupid so that the black can easily in fooling by the other people. The statement that the black didn't have knowledge also describe in this following quotation:

The space behind the seats of the members was strewn with corks, broken glass, stale crusts, greasy pieces of paper, and picked bones. The hall was packed with negroes, smoking, chewing, jabbering, pushing, perspiring. (Dixon, 1905: 264) The uproar was deafening. Four to six negroes were trying to speak at the same time. Aleck's majestic mouth with blue gums and projecting teeth led the chorus-as he ambled down the aisle, his bow-legs flying their red-sock ensigns (1905: 265).

The two narratives above show how the riot in the master's hall under the black government was conducted by black. Based on the narrative above, to represent the black when having a position, they can't implement the government properly but create chaos. It can be said that the author wants to represent a black as a figure who is inappropriate to have a position. Or in other hands, the black only deserve to be regulated not to be regulated. It is clear to show that the black are inferior more than the west, whereas the west is superior more than the east. Based on all the proof of black as intellectual deficiency, it can be said that the black in this novel was constructed by the author to present black as intellectual deficiency which differs from the white who present as higher intellectual. So, although this novel represents the blacks taking over power, the concept of black was inferiority was still in mind of whites because of their intellectual deficiency. Or in other word, the black it does not really have power because behind blacks there

are whites where blacks are only made as pawns. It can be said that the White who is always portrayed in positive ways (superior), while the black who is portrayed in negative ways (inferior). Or in other words, the white portrayed as civilized while the black portrayed as uncivilized.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the results of the study it can be concluded that the author represents the imperialistic attitude of an American man, in this case white who wants a superior position to dominate others (black). Discussing about black is never regardless of the white, which black always represents as the uncivilized people while the white as the civilized. Black as a slave is an ethnic of Africa-America who an ethnic groups in the United States who his ancestors came from Africa. Talking about Africa is never regardless of the white who are western. The differences of physical appearance are a major problem about identity from time to time. Through the differences then make a stereotype that there are a superior group and inferior group which black skinned represents as the symbol of ugliness while white skinned as the symbol of daintiness. It can be said that the black in this novel constructed by the author to present black as intellectual deficiency which differences the white who present as higher intellectual. So, although this novel represents the blacks taking over power, the concept of black was inferiority was still in mind of whites because of their intellectual deficiency.

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