

The White's Felony in Five Poems by Benjamin Zephaniah

Thesis

*Submitted as Partial Fulfilment for the Requirements to Obtain Strata I
(SI Degree)*



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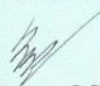
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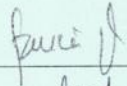


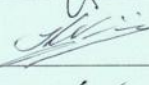

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ABSTRAK

The White's Felony in Five Poems by Benjamin Zephaniah

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Skripsi ini merupakan analisa lima puisi karya Benjamin Zephaniah berjudul *The Death of Joy Gardner* (1996), *Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death* (1989), *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us* (1999), *Biko the Greatness* (2001) dan *Walking Black Home* (1999). Masalah yang diangkat adalah sejauh mana kelima puisi ini merefleksikan isu tentang kejahatan orang kulit putih terhadap orang kulit hitam. Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah mengungkapkan sejauh mana kelima puisi menggambarkan kejahatan orang kulit putih terhadap orang kulit hitam dan sejauh mana elemen puisi seperti perumpamaan, ironi, dan pengulangan memberikan kontribusi untuk mengungkapkan hal tersebut. Analisa ini dikaitkan dengan konsep *Otherness* oleh Edward Said. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa kejahatan orang kulit putih memang terdapat di lima puisi ini. Kejahatan ini dilakukan oleh tiga golongan, yaitu; polisi, anggota parlemen, dan masyarakat.

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In the name of Allah SWT, The Beneficent, The Merciful. All of honors are just for Allah SWT, the writer is eventually able to finish her Thesis entitled *The White's Felony in Five Poems by Benjamin Zephaniah*. She also sends *shalawat* and *salam* to the prophet Muhammad SAW as a leader for human being.

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The Writer

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Despite the launch of equality before the law, it is still found these days that people tend to use skin color as a benchmark to judge others. It is still used as a measurement to determine whether someone should be placed in respectable position or not. Consequently, skin color also influences the way people act on others. This happens because some people think that their position is more respectable than others. This kind of attitude is still very much evident in how the light skinned race such as those from the Caucasian race tend to see and present themselves holier, more honorable and more ethical than those with dark skin color who are viewed as less ethical, uncivilized and are even seen as those who fulfill the criminals' criteria. After all, this condition shows that people with light skin color think that they are superior to the dark ones.

In general, there are two skin colors which are very contrast in this world. They are white and black. In Merriam Webster (2017), *the White* is defined as a member of a group or race characterized by light pigmentation of the skin. Commonly, the superior countries are occupied by the White. This condition makes the White consider themselves as the superior. While the ones considered as the inferior are the Black or colored people. It means that the black or colored people are not part of the White. Based on this consideration, the white people legalize themselves to commit felony toward the Black or colored people. Risa R.

Simanjuntak in SPEARA or Specific English for Academic Research Assistant (Dikti, 2016) says that *felony* means a serious crime such as murder. Ironically, the felony is enacted by involving the State's apparatus, such as policemen and parliament members. The felony is so barbaric since it affects the victims physically and mentally. Physically, the felony is enacted through bully, torture and even murder. Mentally, the felony was enacted through ignoring, humiliating, and marginalizing the Black. With their power as the State's apparatus, the White committed those felonies behind the mask of law. They acted as if their action was based on the law. Here, it can be seen that they manipulated and abused the law.

There are many evidences that prove the White's felony in reality. John Torode in his article entitled *When Deportation Means Death, Joy Gardner Died after Police Raided Her Home* (1993) states:

“Mrs. Gardner died on Sunday night, some days after an early morning raid by five police officers and an immigration officer attempting to serve her with a deportation order”. (p. 2)

This shows how crafty the policemen were because they used the law for killing Mrs. Joy Gardner. The reason behind this murder was not because she was an illegal immigrant, but just because she was a black woman.

The story of Stephen Lawrence also shows the White's felony. Richard Stone in his book entitled *Hidden Stories of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (2013) explains that Stephen Lawrence was a Black British man from Plumstead, South East London, who was murdered in a racially motivated attack while waiting for a

bus on the evening of 22 April 1993. Unfortunately, it took nearly 19 years of constant campaigning, two failed prosecutions, and tens of millions of pounds to convict just two of Stephen Lawrence killers. Here, it can be seen that the parliament members protected the murderers. There was only one reason; the murderers were the White.

This event is also exposed in many literary works, such as poem, novel, prose and drama. This analysis focuses on poems written by Benjamin Zephaniah. His five poems which are related to this topic are *The Death of Joy Gardner* (1996), *Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death* (1989), *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us* (1999), *Biko the Greatness* (2001) and *Walking Black Home* (1999). These poems are classified based on the cruelty level of the felony enacted by the white people upon the Black. It means that the first poem contains the cruelest acts of felony and the last one the least cruel. These five poems are interesting to be discussed because they expose the barbaric felony committed by the white people who consider themselves holier and more honorable than others.

1.2 The White's Felony

There are two main words used in this study. They are 'The White' and 'Felony'. In Merriam Webster (2017), *the White* is defined as a member of a group or race characterized by light pigmentation of the skin. While, in SPEARA (Dikti, 2016), *felony* means a serious crime such as murder. The White's felony in this analysis refers to the white people's crime toward the Black. In these five

poems, the White's felony is enacted by the State's apparatus –policemen and parliament members- and the societies.

1.3 A Brief Description of the Author's Biography

Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah was born on April 15th, 1958 in Birmingham, England. He is a Jamaican who is well known as a British writer, dub poet and Rastafarian. He spent his childhood in Jamaica. The distinctive culture of Jamaica, especially its musical heritage, really influenced his poetry. British Council in *Benjamin Zephaniah Biography* (2018) states that Benjamin used to have dyslexic when he was a child. He attended an approved school but left when he was 14 years old. After that, he found a consolation for himself. He was channeling his feelings through poetry.

He got interested in poetry before he knew exactly what poetry was. He liked to create sentences from combining many words. He explained it to Eric Doumerc as the interviewer for *Kunapipi* article in 2004:

“I got interested in poetry before I knew it was poetry. So there was a particular time when I would just say ‘I play with words’, ‘I have fun with words’. It wasn't till I came across people who read poetry or who said ‘you know, that's actually poetry’, but until then I was just playing with words, and I don't remember the time when I started, I was just doing it all the time.” (p. 138)

It can be seen from the quotation above that Benjamin is really competent in poetry. He knows how to create something from the words. The sentence */I play*

with words/ shows that he really understands how to change an ordinary word into a word which has deep meaning. The phrase */play with words/* reflects that for him, poetry is not only about combining some words into a sentence, but also about creating something new and meaningful.

His first performance was in church when he was eleven, and by the age of fifteen, he was already a well-established poet in his native Handsworth, cultivating a poetic style that came to be called as dub poetry. British Council in *Benjamin Zephaniah Biography* (2018) says “dub poetry is a form of oral performance poetry that is sometimes staged to music and which typically draws on the rhythms of reggae and the rhetoric of Rastafarianism.” In other words, dub poetry is a brand of oral poetry performed to the accompaniment of reggae music.

When he was 22 years old, he decided to expand his audience, and headed to London. He became actively involved in a workers co-operative in Stratford, London, which led to the publication of his first book of poetry, *Pen Rhythm* in 1980. Benjamin has said that his mission is to take poetry everywhere to people who do not read books. So, he turned poetry readings into concert like performances. His second collection of poetry, *The Dread Affair: Collected Poems* was published in 1989. He also wrote his first book of poetry for children, called *Talking Turkeys*. In 1999, he wrote a novel for teenagers, *Face*. (British Council, *Benjamin Zephaniah Biography*, 2018).

Benjamin won the BBC Young Playwright's Award. He has been awarded honorary doctorate by the University of North London in 1998, the University of

Central England in 1999, Staffordshire University in 2001, London South Bank University in 2003, the University of Exeter and the University of Westminster in 2006. On 17 July 2008, Benjamin received an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham. He was listed at 48 in The Times' list of 50 greatest postwar writers. He has released several albums of original music. He was awarded Best Original Song in the Hancocks 2008, Talkawhile Awards for Folk Music for his version of Tam Lin Retold recorded with The Imagined Village.

Through his work, Benjamin Zephaniah tries to against any kind of wickedness and injustice which happened in this world, particularly in Britain. He did it because for him, people should be equal no matter who they are or where they come from. This is what he said in the interview with Eric Doumerc in 2004:

“Being black and all that, being British and all that stuff, it's not really that important to me. I mean, it's important, but the most important thing is being a human being, and if there's a French person that's suffering, they mean more to me than an English person that's living okay. I'm gonna be concerned about the person that's suffering. I'm not gonna say 'They're in France and I'm in England' because, to me, the important thing is being a humanitarian.” (p. 144)

The quotation above explains how Benjamin thinks that human is human, no matter what skin color they have. For him, all people are equal and deserve to be respected by others. Benjamin says that he prefers to concern to person's condition. He is going to give a hand to those who need it. Benjamin will do it without looking at the skin color of that person. In other words, the most

important thing for him is anyone deserves to get human right as long as they are human being.

1.4 *The Death of Joy Gardner (1996), Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death (1989), What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us (1999), Biko the Greatness (2001) and Walking Black Home (1999)*

Five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah show the issue of the White's felony. The White's felony in this analysis refers to the crime imposed by the white people toward the Black. Their crimes are so barbaric, and many lead to death. Ironically, the crime is even committed by the State's apparatus such as policemen and parliament members. As the State's apparatus, they commit the crime behind the mask of law. They act as if their action are based on the law. In another word, they try to build an image that they have done the right thing. However, some people who are represented by the speaker of each poem realize that the apparatus has done something wrong. They know that it is a barbaric crime. Unfortunately, the victims cannot do much since they have no power. They are only citizen who cannot defeat the apparatus. Here, it can be seen that the white people are so crafty that they look like devils. In this analysis, the White's felony is enacted by the policemen, parliament members, and the societies.

The first is the policemen's felony. This topic is analyzed by using imagery, irony and repetition. The policemen commit violence to the Black when they arrest them. Then, the policemen torture the Black when they investigate them. The last, the policemen torture the Black in jail. They act brutally to the

victim in jail. These felonies are enacted physically and mentally. This issues are exposed by poem 1 (*The Death of Joy Gardner*), poem 2 (*Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death*) and poem 3 (*What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*).

The second is the parliament members' felony. The poetic elements which are used in this topic are imagery, irony and repetition. The felony of the parliament members can be seen from how they protect the White's crime. They cover up the felony committed by the white people toward the Black. They also ignore the Black, they do not care about the Black's suffering. The last, the parliament members subordinate the Black, they humiliate them. These acts of felony are exposed by poem 1 (*The Death of Joy Gardner*), poem 2 (*Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death*), poem 3 (*What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*) and poem 4 (*Biko the Greatness*).

The last is the societies' felony. This topic is also analyzed by using imagery, irony and repetition. The felony of the societies can be seen from how the white societies marginalize the Black. They do not want to interact with the Black as the way they do among them. Then, they also kill the Black. These acts of felony are exposed by poem 2 (*Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death*), poem 3 (*What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*) and poem 5 (*Walking Black Home*).

1.5 Problem of the Study

The White's felony is an important issue in five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah entitled *The Death of Joy Gardner* (1996), *Dis Policeman Keeps on*

Kicking Me to Death (1989), *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us* (1999), *Biko the Greatness* (2001) and *Walking Black Home* (1999). Hence, there are two research questions used to analyze the White's felony which are formulated as follow:

1. How do the five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah expose the issue of the White's felony?
2. To what extent do the elements of poetry such as imagery, irony and repetition give contribution in revealing the White's felony?

1.6 Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on two main points. The first is to find out how the five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah expose the issue of the White's felony. The second is to know to what extent the elements of poetry such as imagery, irony and repetition give contribution in revealing the White's felony.

1.7 Previous Study

The study about the White's felony in five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah has not been found yet. However, there are two studies which have given contribution in analyzing these five poems. The first is study by Barbora Vidasicova entitled *Immigrant Experience in West Indian British Poetry* (2015). She analyzed poems by three poets: James Berry (*Migrants in London, Beginning in a City*, and *On An Afternoon*), Benjamin Zephaniah (*No Problem* and *The Death of Joy Gardner*) and John Agard (*Palm Tree King* and *Remember the Ship*). This study deals with the concept of racism by Glynne Gordon. Barbara involves

the elements of poetry such as tone, imagery and paradox to analyze the poems. The result of the study is, there is a different experience of the first generation of West Indian immigrants and the second generation in facing racism. The first generation appears to have adopted an attitude of passive resistance toward the discrimination and stereotypes. On the other hand, the second generation actively resists and rejects the stereotypes. They also challenge the mainstream society to change their mindset and attitude and shift their attentions toward the real people and their stories.

The second study is by Ria Resky Hardianti entitled *Racism Reflected in Maya Angelou's Poem* (2016). Ria uses all poems written by Maya Angelou to be discussed in her thesis. There are 13 poems by Maya Angelou, which are analyzed by using the concept of sociological approach in racism perspective by Rene Wellek. This concept helps her to understand the connection of racism in Maya Angelou's poems and Maya Angelou's background. The poems are; *My Guilt*, *The Calling of Names*, *On Working White Liberals*, *The Thirteens (Black)*, *The Thirteens (White)*, *Harlem Hopscotch*, *Africa*, *America*, *One More Round*, *Ain't that Bad?*, *Our Grandmother*, *Riot:60s* and *Sepia Fashion Show*. In order to reveal the issue of racism in these poems, she uses elements of poetry such as diction, imagery and symbol. The study focuses on exposing the action of racism specifically the action of the white people toward the black people. The result of the study shows that racism exists in 13 poems by Maya Angelou. There are some kind of actions which show that racism felt by the black people. They are slavery, discrimination, segregation, hegemony, prejudice and stereotype.

Both of the studies above give contribution and inspiration in analyzing the issue of the White's felony. Unlike the previous study above, this analysis focuses on the felony enacted by the white people toward the Black. It exposes how the white people commit the felony to the Black. Furthermore, this study exposes the crafty felony which is enacted by the State's apparatus whom should have been the ones responsible to take care of the citizens.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study reveals the issue of the White's felony. The analysis is supported by text and context-based interpretation. In text-based interpretation, the elements of poetry give contribution in exposing the White's felony within the five poems. They are imagery, irony and repetition. Imagery is the use of vivid description, usually rich in sensory words to create pictures and atmosphere in reader's mind. Klarer in his book entitled *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2004) states:

“Imagery refers to a predominantly visual component of a text which can, however, also include other sensory impressions.” (p. 30)

It indicates all the sensory perceptions in the poem. Hence, imagery helps the readers to visualize what the text going to tell. There are 7 kinds of imagery, such as visual (sight) auditory (sound), tactile (touch), thermal (temperature), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), and kinesthetic (movement).

Furthermore, he says that not all of the imagery can be found in poetry. There are only one or two kinds of imagery which appear in a poem. For the researchers, imagery is very important since it helps them to find the deepest meaning of the poetry. By visualizing the detail of event in the poetry (such as the blood which flows, the skin which is ripped, the screaming, the weeping and many else), the researchers will be able to draw a map about what is happening and finally find the truly meaning behind that. In this analysis, most of the imagery which appears is visual imagery. The imagery can be found in all the poems, especially in the first and the second poems. In the first poem for example, the sentence in stanza 1 */They put a leather belt around her/* helps the researchers to visualize how the belt binds the body of the victim so that she cannot move. It is even possible to imagine the bruise in her body because of the belt. This visualization leads the researchers to find the deepest meaning behind the line. It shows how cruel the people who commit that action. Moreover, it is enacted to a woman. Here, the imagery clearly shows that the action is totally barbaric.

Another element of poetry which gives contribution in this study is irony. Brooks in *Irony as A Principle of Structure* (1971:2) says that irony is the obvious wrapping of the statement by the context. It is created because of the presser of the context. Irony also refers to the statement which appears to be in opposition to what they actually mean. It gives contribution to analyze the ridiculous fact which is exposed by the poem. Sometimes, this meaning is really hard to be believed, but that is what exactly happen in the poem. In this study, the irony can be found in all the poems. In the first poem for instance, the sentence in stanza 1 */Nobody*

killed her and she never killed herself/ shows a very beautiful irony. It is ridiculous that someone died without any reason. It is impossible that she died without killer. In fact, the treatment of the policemen leads the victim to death. Unfortunately, no one takes responsible for that, as if it is normal. This is obviously ironic since it is enacted by the policemen, the ones who are supposed to prevent a violence.

The last element is repetition. According to Richard Nordquist (2017), repetition means “an instance of using a word, phrase, or clause more than once in a short passage”. It refers to the repeating of word or sentence in a poem. The repetition aims to emphasize an important aspect of the poem. The repetition even often creates a more emotional experience for the reader. Hence, it need to be discussed deeper and serious. In this analysis, the repetition can be found in the second, third, and fourth poems. Such as in the fourth poem, the sentence */wickedness tried to kill greatness/* is repeated three times. Here, the ‘wickedness’ is referred to the White, while the ‘greatness’ is referred to the Black. This repetition is used to emphasize that the white people are really barbaric. They do every strategy to block the movement of the Black. The repetition also gives highlights for the readers that the white people are so crafty.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that the three elements of poetry: imagery, irony and repetition, are really useful in revealing the meaning behind the text. They lead the researchers to look beyond the text and finally find the deepest meaning of each poem.

In context-based interpretation, the study of the White's felony relates to the concept of 'Otherness' by Edward Said in post-colonial approach. Based on the historical event, the West colonized the East since they were considered as the weak countries. Some of these weak countries were Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. While the West refers to Europeans. Said in his book entitled *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) states:

As I shall be using the term, "imperialism" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; "colonialism", which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory' (p. 9)

The quotation above refers to the West which colonized the East in order to control the Eastern. The phrase *distant territory* strengthen that the destination of the colonization was the East. Since they colonized the East, the West had greater political power. So that, the West controlled the East just like what they want.

Post-colonial era begins when the colonization era ended. It indicates that the West must not colonize the East anymore. However, the West still think that they are superior to the East. They do not want to be equal with the East in any aspect of life. Hence, the term *Otherness* emerged. Said in his book entitled *Culture and Imperialism* (1993:210) mentions that the construction of *Self* and *Other* are constructed by cultural imperialism image and literary text that reflect other as barbaric, uncivilized, uneducated, and full of mistakes.

Moreover, the idea of *otherness* deals with the sociological analysis of how majority and minority identities are constructed. Staszak in his study entitled *Other/Otherness* (2008) says:

“Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us,” the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them,” the Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.”
(p.2)

The quotation above shows how the term *Self* and *Other* are constructed. It begins by considering one group is better in any aspect of life than the other groups. As a result, they stigmatize the other groups as the one who have no identity. This cause *the Self* can discriminate *the Other*. Therefore, in the condition of otherness, people who are considered as *the Other* are marginalized.

Furthermore, the term *Other* also can be defined into some definitions. It can be defined as people who are not part of the group, or even people who are not considered as human being. It means that their position is very contemptible. In this study, the one who is considered as *the Other* are the Black. It means that they are not part of the White. Consequently, the white people can do anything toward the Black. This legitimates the white people to commit felonies toward the Black. It begins by ignoring, humiliating, and marginalizing the Black. Then, it even extends to the serious act such as bully, torture and even murder. The white people do not feel guilty to commit that felonies since they consider the Black as others.

1.9 Methodology

The analysis of five poems by Benjamin Zephaniah entitled *The Death of Joy Gardner* (1996), *Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking Me to Death* (1989), *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us* (1999), *Biko the Greatness* (2001) and *Walking Black Home* (1999) is done through text and context-based interpretation. These poems are analyzed by combining the elements of poetry; imagery, irony and repetition. Each of that element contributes to reveal the White's felony. Imagery is used to reveal the condition and the atmosphere in the poems. Irony shows the unexpected behavior from the White as apparatus. Repetition is use to confirm the barbaric felony of the White. These literary devices are also connected to context-based interpretation. It deals with the concept of *Otherness* by Edward Said in post-colonial approach.