

**RACIAL CONFLICT IN MICHAEL PUNKE'S *THE REVENANT*
NOVEL (2002): A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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RACIAL CONFLICT IN MICHAEL PUNKE'S *THE REVENANT* NOVEL (2002): A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

This study is about racial conflict reflected in Michael Punke's *The Revenant* (2002). The purpose of this study is to reveal and analyze the issue of the racial conflict based on the Sociological in Literature perspective. The object of this study is *The Revenant* novel. This study use two kinds of data source: primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is *The Revenant* (2002) novel written by Michael Punke in English language version. The secondary data source is any references from books, journals, and articles that related to this study. The technique of collecting data is using library reasearch and note taking method. The data of this study are analyzed by using descriptive qualitative method. The result of this study showed that the conflict in this novel fulfilled two criterias of the conflict as the indication i.e. *armed attack and victims*. Based on the analysis, the racial conflict happened because of an attack started by Arikaras against RMF Company. It gives another conflict to the characters of the novel. Michael Punke wanted to show the conflict issue happened in the society in that time through the historical background of his works including *The Revenant*.

Keywords: Racial conflict, Sociology, *The Revenant*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas tentang sebuah konflik rasial yang tercermin dalam Michael Punke's *Revenant* (2002). Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisa isu konflik rasial berdasarkan perspektif Sosiologi dalam Literatur. Objek dari penelitian ini adalah novel *The Revenant* (2002). Dalam penelitian ini menggunakan dua sumber data, yaitu: sumber data primer dan sekunder. Sumber data primer adalah novel *The Revenant* (2002) yang ditulis oleh Michael Punke dalam versi bahasa Inggris. Sumber data sekunder adalah referensi dari buku, jurnal, dan artikel yang terkait dengan penelitian ini. Teknik pengumpulan data penelitian ini menggunakan metode *Library Research* dan *Note-taking*. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini dianalisa dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa konflik di dalam novel ini memenuhi 2 kriteria konflik sebagai indikasi yaitu serangan bersenjata dan korban. Berdasarkan analisis tersebut, konflik rasial terjadi karena serangan yang dilakukan oleh suku Arikara terhadap perusahaan RMF. Hal ini memberikan konflik lain pada karakter novel tersebut. Michael Punke ingin menunjukkan bahwa konflik terjadi di masyarakat pada masa itu melalui latar belakang sejarah karyanya termasuk *The Revenant*.

Kata Kunci: Konflik ras, Sosiologi, *The Revenant*

1. INTRODUCTION

In human life, forms of conflict very often occur from ancient times to the present. Conflict among humans or group is ingrained in humans, because it is already a part of human's ego. According to McLeod (2016:1), human's ego is about seeking pleasure and avoiding pains, in other words, it is to reduce individual tension. Basically a conflict occurs because of a difference. It can be initiated by a difference of opinion, interest, equality, etc. As we know, human nature will defend the interest and welfare of the group or individual. They were fighting to get their needs and pleasure until the conflict happened.

Such conflicts may occur at a higher level when an individual has the same interests and goals that is at the group level. It is not much different from the previous one, the difference is the quantity of individuals and scale. One is a racial conflict. Racial conflict is actually a form of discrimination that is taboo in the world. Racial conflict is actually a form of conflict that occurs because of differences of race or ethnicity where each of them more prioritize the interests of their own group.

In this study, the author connect the issue of racial conflict with sociology theory in literature. In the literature, sociology learn about relationships and phenomenas in the society of the novel. Wellek and Warren (1962:110) said that "Literature is a reflection of society, a force in society, or simply separated of social life". Basically, the phenomenon happened in society influence the literature works in the form of issue. *The Revenant* has a racial conflict issue. It is the one of many phenomena of forms of social relations between racial groups 1 with other racial groups. In the sociological approach, a conflict became a complex social phenomenon because many forms of conflict and also many factors that cause conflict. Issues of conflict are also presented in the works Michael Punke others such as "Fire and Brimstone" and "Last Stand".

Michael Punke concern of conflict written on one of his work entitled *The Revenant*. It takes the historical event named American-Indian War as the background of the story. The conflict between the Americans and Indians give

an influence to the economic relations between RMF company and Arikaras. The conflict between white and red skin race on this novel started by an attack from Arikaras against RMF company. In face to that attack, RMF company committed to give fightback. As the mirror of the age, The literature works created by Michael Punk explain the conflict issue that give depiction of the conflict that happened in the society at that time, especially in America.

The aim of this study is to reveal and analyze the racial conflict issue in the novel based on Sociological of Literature perspective. The major problem of this paper is about racial conflict reflected in Michael Punke's novel "*The Revenant* (2002)" broken down into three question: (1) What is the indicator of Racial Conflict in this novel? (2) How the Racial Conflict portrayed in this novel? (3) Why did the author address Racial Conflict in the novel?

Based on questions above, the objective of this study is to explain the indicators of the racial conflict, the depiction of racial conflict in the novel, and the reason of Michael Punke addressed the racial conflict on his novel. Theoretically and practically, this study can give benefits to the researchers, readers, and the next researcher in developing the study about the same object or issue in other perspective.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of the study is descriptive qualitative study. The object of this research is *The Revenant* (2002) novel written by Michael Punke. To analyze the novel, this research using sociological in literature perspective and descriptive qualitaive research. This study use two kinds of data source: primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the narration texts and dialogues in *The Revenant* (2002) novel written in English version. The secondary data source acquired from books, journals, and articles which related to the issue of the research to develop the study. The researcher collected the data by use two techniques: Library Research and Note-taking. The researcher analyzes the data into three categories; to identify the indicators of racial conflict in the novel, to describe the depiction of racial

conflict in the novel, and to reveal the reason of Michael Punke addressing the racial conflict.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Indicators of the Racial Conflict

3.1.1. Armed Attack

Armed attacks are one of many indications of the conflict that occurred in this novel. Michael Punke as the author of this novel takes the background story about the war that occurred between America and the Arikara tribe that belongs to the Indian race. He presents the manifest conflict so that the level of conflict has reach the war and armed attacks.

In the first attack, it can be known through a letter written by William H. Ashley addressed to James D. Pickens. William H. Ashley explains the betrayal and assault committed by Arikaras. So William H. Ashley as the person in charge of trading activities ordered its members to retreat. And planning to do a counter-attack by gathering strength and weapon.

In the second attack, indications of race conflict in this novel also found in the second attack. After what happened to the first attack made the condition heating up between RMF company and Arikaras. The second attack occurred when the main character Hugh Glass and his companions, Red, Chapman, and Pig, traveled to find John Fitzgerald who had left Glass while he was dying and also took all Glass's equipment. On the trip, they tried to pass through the tribal region of Arikara carefully but the conflict still happened.

3.1.2. Victims

Victims can be an indication of the intensity of a conflict. In a conflict there must be a victim of either party or both parties. The intensity of a conflict can be known from the number of victims. In this novel, the victims of racial conflicts become an illustration of the intensity of the attack started by the arikara tribe.

At the previous point, it has been explained that the Arikara tribe started the attack. It is considered as a betrayal and also as a declaration of war with the RMF company. In the attack caused casualties and property of the RMF company.

In the second attack, it has been explained that there has been a firefight between the Arikara tribe with Hugh Glass and his companions, Red, Chapman, and Pig. They are RMF company members. This novel explains the victims on RMF Company side.

3.1.3. Hiding

Hiding is an indication of conflict because it is a one-party effort to avoid direct contact from others. The reason why they avoid direct contact from other parties because there is conflict between them.

In this novel, hunters from RMF company hide their existence after attacking the Arikara tribe. This makes the existence of the RMF company becomes a threat to the Arikara, and vice versa.

3.1.4. Supervising/Scouting

Supervising is one of defense efforts by securing the perimeter of the area around their location. This is a way to avoid any enemy threats. Guard is one indication of conflict because in a conflict, the existence of a party becomes a threat. So they try to secure their location as a preventive measure.

In this novel, the trappers of the RMF company make efforts to secure their location. They do prevention efforts to make them undetected and avoid direct contact with the Arikaras.

3.1.5. Vigilance

According to Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of Vigilance is the action or state of keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties. In life, Vigilance is a natural human response as a self-defense system against all possible dangers or threats.

In this novel, Conflict between RMF company and Arikara tribe is the reason for the RMF company to be more alert to avoid danger. Of

course, the existence of the Arikara tribe is a threat and a danger to members of RMF company.

3.1.6. The Fear

In her online magazine article entitled *Understanding the Self and Understanding the Therapy: an Attachment Perspective*. McCluskey (2010:30) explains that the fear as human psychological response system within human self defence system. Basically, Fear is a natural human response to a danger that threatens them. Humans generally express fear with a variety of actions that they think have the potential to keep them safe.

In this novel, the fears experienced by RMF company members are the result of conflict with the Arikara tribe. From what has been explained earlier, that in the conflict, the existence of a party becomes a threat to the other party and vice versa. RMF hunters know that their existence is a threat to the Arikaras, so they feel the fear of danger that resulted from direct contact with the Arikaras.

3.2. The Depiction of the Racial Conflict

3.2.1. Through Characters

3.2.1.1. Attacker

The author explains the conflict in the novel through the cause and effect relationship within the conflict itself. This causal relationship is illustrated in a letter written by William H. Ashley in the first chapter. In the letter, Ashley reported that there was an attack started by the Arikara tribe when doing trade transactions.

The attack was regarded as a betrayal by the Arikaras. In the attack, the RMF company got life loss and material loss. As the person in charge of the RMF company, Ashley decided to counterattack the betrayal by the Arikaras.

The counterattack was a reaction caused by the actions of the Arikaras. The theme used by this novelist, as if describing the causal relationships within the conflict itself. That begins with an attack by the

Arikara tribe and is followed by a counterattack by RMF company. So the cause-and-effect relationship within the conflict makes the status of both parties into the attacker in a different time.

3.2.1.2. Victims

In addition to the indications of conflict, the victims in this novel are the novelist's way of explaining the existence of racial conflict. As explained in the previous point, the causal relationship presented by Michael Punke on this novel gives an image of the attacker's relationship with the victim at different times. Where there is an attacker there must be a victim and vice versa. In this novel, the relationship of the attacker and the victim is clearly explained in the first chapter. While Ashley reported an attack from the Arikara tribe, the RMF company became the victim. So Ashley ordered its members to retreat.

At different times, the RMF company did a counterattack against the Arikara tribe. In this case, the Arikara tribe became the victim of a counterattack by the RMF company. The victims are the images of the causal relationships presented by Michael Punke in this novel. In addition, the victim is a picture of the impact that occurred that explains the continuity and also reinforce the issue of conflict that occurred in the novel.

3.2.2. Through Events

3.2.2.1. The RMF Company's Member Hide After the First Attack.

In this novel Michael Punke presents a picture of conflict that has been manifest. In other words, the novel does not tell the beginning of how the conflict took place in detail. So Michael Punke creates a storyline that lays out the process of consequence and continuation after the first conflict or attack occurs.

From what has been previously explained about the counterattack by RMF company to Arikaras, after the attack the RMF company must return to Fort Union or their headquarters undetected by the tribe Arikara. Due to limited supplies and equipment, and also their position at that time

still in the territory of the Arikara tribe, the hunters did not want to take risks and they move stealthily and undetected to avoid direct contact with the Arikaras.

On the way back to Fort Union, Captain Hendry had to make sure the members returned smoothly and safely. Therefore, they should avoid direct contact with the Arikara tribe at risk of casualties by sending two members to find a safe path, and selecting camp sites that have the potential to hide and protect them. In other words, they did so to avoid attacks from the Arikaras. This explains that there is indeed a conflict between the RMF company and the Arikara tribe.

3.2.2.2. The RMF Co. Member had a Firefight Against Arikaras

In this novel, there is a firefight event experienced by RMF company member Hugh Glass with his Red, Chapman, and Pig associates with the Arikara tribe. These events raise the issue of racial conflict in this novel.

The influence of the previous attacks made the RMF company consider the Arikara tribe a dangerous threat and vice versa. This is shown in the above quotation. There we know that one of Glass's friends warned of an attack that started from the tribe of Arikara. So they, especially Hugh Glass, plan to fight by preparing their weapons and there is a firefight between the two. Until the victims arise between the two sides.

3.2.3. Through Styles

3.2.3.1. Diction

Diction is known as word choosing; generally the chosen word to show the author's idea. Michael Punks used the word like attack, forces, shot, rifle, and murdered. These words explain there is a conflict that really exist in the novel. In addition, these words explain the the level of the conflict. It made the reader knows that there is a war between RMF company and Arikaras.

3.2.3.2. Imagery

There is some imagery used by Michael Punke in the novel such when explain about the events/plot of the novel. There is personification imagery, because it is giving human qualities to *the stealth* as human ally. Indirectly, Michael Punke provides a depiction of the conflict through RMF company's hunters hiding events as one of the way to avoid another attacks. The next is organic/subjective imagery because the words *burning sensation* explain the sense of pain. Through this imagery, Michael Punks explain that Red attacked by the Arikaras. The last is imagery called visual imagery because the word *black ink* means the colour that only explained visually. Indirectly, Michael Punke explain that Red was killed in the firefight against Arikaras.

3.3. The Reason of Addressing the Racial Conflict

The Revenant is a fictional novel that takes the theme of a real incident in 1823 on the life of Hugh Glass, an American frontiersman alive after being attacked by a grizzly bear. But in this novel, the reason Hugh Glass to survive is to avenge his partner John Fitzgerald who left him for dead and took all his equipment. Behind it, the story of this novel takes the historical background of the war between Americans and Indians called the American-Indian Wars with the period of 1622-1924.

As a reflection of society, Literature gives an overview of social conditions of the author's environment. Michael Punke wrote *The Revenant* novel in 2002 in USA. At that time, USA was led by George W. Bush as the 43rd president. During his leadership, there was a famous event of the destruction of the twin towers of the WTC on September 11, 2001 and known by the name of 9/11 events. Bush said the incident was an act of terrorism that threatened the United States's security, led by Saddam Hussein, to declare war on Iraq. In other words, the 9/11 event started a conflict between America and Iraq.

The 9/11 event indirectly affected Michael Punke. The influence can be seen in the background of the conflict that occurred on the story of *The*

Revenant. The beginning of the conflict between the RMF company and the Arikara tribe was explained in a letter written by William H. Ashley to James D. Pickens at the beginning of the chapter who reported that the attack was being carried out by the Arikaras. Ashley thought the attack was a betrayal in their trade relations so Ashley declared war on Arikaras. In other words, the attack started by the Arikara tribe became the beginning of a conflict between the RMF company and the Arikara tribe.

Social relationships depicted through the conflict process between Arikaras and RMF company, indirectly Michael Punke illustrates the conflict between America and Iraq. which is packed through a causal relationship and the effects experienced by the novel character of *The Revenant*.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, the study comes to the following conclusions. Firstly, the novel illustrated a racial conflict that can be identified through three indicators, namely armed attack, victims, hiding, supervising/scouting, vigilance/awareness, and fear. Armed attacks and victims in a conflict are inseparable. Victim is one of the real effects of an attack, especially the Armed Attack. Hiding, supervising, and vigilance are the continuing effects of the conflict that took place in the novel. This happens because of the traumatic effects on the attacks that have occurred. In other words, The fear is the main cause.

Secondly, the novel depicted the racial conflict that can be identified through the depiction of the events and the characters of the novel. The depiction of the events is the author's way to explain the issues through the events that occur in the novel. It illustrated some social issue in the play. The depiction of characters is a character's characteristic and role, which illustrated the social issue in the play.

Thirdly, the racial conflict addressed in the novel because it is the social issues that usually happening in our social life. Michael Punke raised that issue to show the conflict happened between America and Irak that

began with the tragedy of 9/11 in 2001. He portrayed that conflict through *The Revenant* that takes the historical event of the American-Indian war. Through his work, he wants to raise the public awareness of the social problem, especially in the conflict. He carried out his mission as WTO ambassador and Security Council staff through the messages that served in the novel issues.

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