THE REPRESENTATION OF SKINHEAD SUBCULTURE IN "THIS IS ENGLAND" MOVIE

Puji Lestari[1]
Department of English Education, Indraprasta University
puji.indraprasta@gmail.com

Lambok Hermanto Sihombing[2]
Department of Communication, President University
lambok.president@gmail.com

Abstract
Movie sometimes constructs realities. We can see the way how people live, the way they think, and the way they dress through the movie. "This is England" is one of the movies that try to depict Skinhead subculture in England. In this study, the authors aim to analyze the representation of skinhead subculture taken from supporting scenes. To examine its representation, the authors applied qualitative approach by doing literature review. The authors utilized the elements of movie, Mise en Scene Theory from Manon de Reeper and Theory of Representation from Stuart Hall. As a result, this movie attempts to represent Skinhead community portrayed on the movie scenes.

Keywords:*Movie Element, Representation, Scene, Skinhead, Subculture*

INTRODUCTION

The definition of "culture" is expansive and intricate. Culture is defined in numerous ways. Some individuals assert that culture consists of the ideas, values, and artifacts of human groups. According to Williams in (Storey, 2021), culture can relate to a particular way of life, whether of a people, an era, or a group. The way we live day-to-day is sometimes referred to as culture. Williams argues that culture may be comprehended through observation and participation in everyday life (Williams, 2007). Based on the preceding definition, each community will develop its own culture, including religious beliefs, fashion, art, and many others. Furthermore, (Hall & Jefferson, 2006)stated that culture is how the social ties of a group are built and shaped, as well as how these shapes are experienced, comprehended, and interpreted. Human expression is facilitated by culture, which plays an active part in the formation of social systems. It cannot exist without human society, and neither can human society live without culture (Bada, 2003). Subculture as "a culture shared and actively practiced by a minority inside a larger culture" (Sidlova, 2014). He also stated that subculture could be viewed as a

diversion for youth because its ideals and practices are distinct from daily life and typically more enjoyable and stress-relieving. Subculture attempts to display its distinctions to attract the society. The subculture's different ideals, customs, and beliefs from most people could result in social estrangement (Sidlova, 2014).

According to (Barker, 2000), Subculture has five primary functions for its members. First, subculture brings remedies to be social, economic, and structural problems. Second, subculture gives a distinct group identity compared to school and the workplace. Third, subculture members may have access to space for alternate perspectives on social reality and unique experiences. Fourth, subculture offers meaningful entertainment activities that contradict school and work activities. Fifth, subculture completes the issue of an existential identity crisis. As stated by (Williams, 2007), there are four fundamental principles that can be applied to the analysis of subculture: style, resistance, space and media, and societal responses. There are many forms of subcultures in history, one of them is Skinhead. Thus, in this study, the authors are interested in analyzing the style of Skinhead subculture that is depicted in “This Is England” movie. The rise of Skinhead in the 1980s was related to the attempting to resolve societal issues is one of the subculture's professed functions. According to (Castles, 2009), "during the 1950s and 1960s in the United Kingdom, numerous immigrants from India and Africa arrived in England." From 1960s British origins to contemporary global interpretations of the subculture, the exhibition focuses on the visual manifestations of skinhead style, including dress, illustration, graphic design, photography, media, and publishing, as well as its connections to music genres, football, politics, and class (Mick Furbank, 1980). The 1980s Skinhead movement attempts to address these socioeconomic and structural issues. They worked in manufacturing, services, and other industries. The presence of immigrants in the United Kingdom reduces the number of job openings for British citizens. Skinheads of the 1980s attempted to address this issue as working-class individuals. In the 1960s, working-class adolescents in London, England, gave rise to the first generation of Skinheads, which quickly spread to other regions of the United Kingdom. The British Skinheads of the 1960s branded themselves as

Trojan Skinheads, a term derived from a record label. The record label released some of the popular music genres of the 1960s Skinhead subculture. This Skinhead enjoys music performed by black people who are typically non-racist. According to (Arbuckle, 2016), the second wave of Skinheads emerged in the 1980s and was "more menacing and supported fascist parties" because of their problems with immigrants in the United Kingdom.

Clarke (1973) argues that the skinhead subculture began in the United Kingdom between 1968 and 1969, most likely in London and Southeast England. John Clarke is more precise, stating that it was the East End of London and that, "like the majority of other young cultural phenomenon, [the skinheads] were first a self-generated movement" (Clarke, 1973). The subculture later saw a renaissance in the early to mid-1970s, when it, so to speak, "cut its teeth" in street confrontations with other young subcultures, such as the mods and biker gangs such as the rockers and Hells Angels, or on the terraces of football stadiums (Bushell, 2010). During the 1970s, the counterculture extended geographically over most of Britain, primarily through face-to-face interaction between football supporters (Clarke, 1973). Skinheads originally appeared in newspaper articles and pulp fiction (Allen, 1970).

Style is an outward manifestation of subcultural expressions. People could determine whether a person is a subculture member based on their attire and manner of speech. The explanation of style includes how subculture members developed, disseminated, and consumed meanings. According to Williams (2007, p.578), the style "has four aspects: apparel, music, ritual, and argot." These aspects may be classed as objects and daily practices, respectively. The British subcultures, particularly Skinhead, symbolize the working class by their actions of self-distinction. They attempt to distinguish themselves because they have experienced inequity in life and attempt to confront or make society feel uneasy with their peculiar appearance. In conclusion, their unconventional look served as a type of resistance, which was most evident in their fashion (Williams, 2007).

The significance of style for subcultures lays in that the purposes of difference, criticism, and opposition to the majority's rules can be readily

observed by displaying a different daily lifestyle. Clarke et al. (1976, p.54)in (Williams, 2007) also identified style as one of the most significant concepts in subculture analysis, stating that:

> *The various youth subcultures have been identified by their possessions and objects. Yet, despite their visibility, things simply appropriated and worn (or listened to) do not make a style. What makes a style is the activity of stylization the active organization of objects with activities and outlooks, which produce an organized group-identity in the form and shape of a coherent and different way of 'being-in-the-world'.*

In this study, the authors are interested in analyzing how the style of skinhead subculture depicted in the movie "This Is England". This movie is directed by Shane Meadow in 2006. This movie has won numerous accolades, including BAFTA Awards 2008, Bangkok International Film Festival 2007, British Independent Film Awards, CinEuphoria Awards 2010, Dublin Film Critics Circle Award 2007, Empire Awards UK 2008, Ghent International Film Awards 2007, Gijon International Film Festival 2007, Golden Trailer Awards 2008, and Paris Cinema 2007 Writers Guild of Great Britain, Rome Film Festival (IMDB, 2007).

The story of "This Is England" takes place over a summer break from school, those protracted weeks in between terms when significant events can occur. It is 1983, and classes have ended. Shaun (Thomas Turgoose), a 12-year-old boy living alone in a depressing coastal town, lost his father while serving in the Falklands War. He discovers new male role models during the summer break when local skinheads take him in. Shaun explores a world of parties, first loves, and the pleasures of Dr. Marten's boots with the help of his new friends. Combo (Stephen Graham), an older, racial skinhead who just came out of prison, is there when he meets him. Shaun will be thrust from innocence to experience during a rite of passage while Combo's gang intimidates the local ethnic minorities (Education, 2007).

To analyze how the style of skinhead subculture represented in this movie, the authors used the theory of *Mise en Scene* from Manon de Reeper to observe the movie elements and the theory of Representation from Stuart Hall to see how

the process of representation utilized in this movie. Reeper (2016) argues that cinematic language is the means through which a film "speaks" to its audience. The film's social framework communicates messages on human relationships, communication, and culture (Manon de Reeper, 2016). Films are inherently tied to or based on human emotions and realities, which binds them to their audience, piques their interest, and impacts them (Jogezal, 2020). On the one hand, the film reflects our attitudes regarding specific topics (political, social, economic, etc.), while on the other, it influences our attitudes toward those subjects (Manon de Reeper, 2016).

Mise en Scène is the filmmaker's vision for the scene and the film. As effectively as conversation and narrative, mise en scène can transmit meaning to the audience. It is essential for media and film studies analysis because it explains how to identify significant visual codes and how some may have used them to create meaning (Insider, 2020). According to Reeper (2016), we must assess who and what is present in a scene and their relative places; we must also take into account makeup, facial expressions, wardrobe, setting, appearance, props, sounds, and lighting (Manon de Reeper, 2016).

Stuart Hall defined representation as "the process of constructing meaning by combining language to generate the intended meaning." This is intrinsically linked to the ideology that supplies meaning; hence, discourse analysis, the study of ideology, and the study of representation are intertwined. Put another way, the meaning obtained from depicting a certain thing exists due to its ideology. Stuart argues that ideas are established and evolved through representations, with events occurring verbally and visually occurring. Not only do individual concepts exist in the representation system, but there are also methods for organizing, adding, and grouping ideas or concepts and varying degrees of relationship complexity. According to Hall (1997) cited in (Supandi, 2017)two things have become the primary focus of representation research: the representative and the represented.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study analyzed the representation of Skinhead subculture in “This Is England” movie. *Mise En Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper and theory of

representation and were used for this study. To figure out how This Is England represents the portrait of Skinhead subculture, the authors did several steps in this study. First, the authors analyzed This Is England using the film elements, *Mise En Scene*. The authors analyzed the scenes, angles, and editing on the movie. The author selected scenes that symbolize Skinhead subculture that includes style. Second, the authors connected the movie elements with the interpretation supported by the representation theory from Stuart Hall. The last, the author concluded the whole observation as the representation of Skinhead subculture.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fully understand the result of this study, firstly, the authors observed the elements of the movie in "This Is England" scenes, angles, shots, lighting, editing, etc.

First, to see how this movie represents Skinhead subculture, the authors started their observation from scene on minutes 22:01-22:07 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Shaun was looking for boots
Source: youtube.com/thisisengland

In this scene, we can see that Shaun was looking for shoes. He looked excited when he saw Dr. Marten's boots. He visited the store with his mother and approached the shopkeeper to ask about the Dr. Martens boots. The conversation confirms that Skinheads have a predilection toward their clothing labels and one of them is Dr. Martens' boots. The quality and durability of these boots are exemplary.

The following analysis goes to the scene on minutes 22:03-22:08 (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Dr. Martens boots store
Source: youtube.com/thisisengland

In this scene, we can see the display of Dr. Martens boots. These boots have various colors but their colors are identical with black and brown. In our point of view, we see that the characters in This Is England wear Dr. Martens to represent that they are the Skinheads that feel proud of their country, England. Our argument is supported by (Rusina, 2014). She explains, "their support for the working class and the army"(2).Thus, by wearing these boots, Skinheads demonstrate their support and symbolize their nationalism and pride for England, given that these boots are commonly worn by soldiers and factory workers in England.

The next observation is taken from scene on 23:10-24:22. (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Shaun got his hair shaved
Source: youtube.com/thisisengland

In this scene, we can see Shaun wanted to get his hair shaved. That is one of the characteristics of the Skinheads. This scene represents an important ritual that a typical Skinhead member would do. Shaun got his hair cut by Lol. Initially, he was apprehensive and uncertain about the matter. Lol was also hesitant to shave Shaun's head out of concern that Shaun's mother may be angry. Even though his mother might be angry, Shaun advises her to do it. This discussion and scenario show the procedure as a type of sacrifice to become a Skinhead member. However, society would disagree and view them with suspicion due to the association of the haircut with gangs. Finally, Lol began shaving him by turning on the razor. As Shaun agrees to perform a specific ritual in Skinhead, the other members admire his haircut and stare at him with admiration (Fahmi, 2018).

For further analysis, we can see three women with their unique outfit. They are the Skinheads. They have a key slogan; "Skinhead: a way of life". It is a key slogan of racist (and other) skinheads with multiple interpretations. The most visible is the racist skinhead 'uniform'—shaved heads, black bomber jackets, tight bleached jeans or combat pants, and heavy, typically steel-toed boots—and their confrontational 'attitude' towards non-skinheads, which marks them apart from the rest of society. Males and females referred to as "skin girls," are also portrayed as living a drug-free, heterosexual, working-class lifestyle. Homophobia and antipathy toward all forms of drug use, except cigarettes and alcohol, are constants in the racist, neo-Nazi culture but are most apparent among skinheads. This 'puritanical' stance has its roots in the British working-class skinhead subculture, which was a reaction to and rejection of the more fashionable mod subculture as well as the hippy, hedonistic culture in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.42 Skinheads, in contrast, tended to identify many aspects of the permissive society or sexual revolution as 'perversions'(Clarke, 1973).

In order to support the observation, Black (2006) stated that teens and young adults who shave their heads and identify with an alternative youth subculture are called "skinheads" or "skins." Shaving the head typically represents social solidarity and the countercultural attitude of most skinheads in a society that values hairstyles or imitates elite, individualized tastes. Shaved heads convey a

working-class or military aesthetic and are frequently interpreted as aggressive. In addition to shaving their heads, skins adopt other folk life expressions, such as dress, language, and music (Black, 2006).

The last observation is taken from the scene on minutes 25:02 (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The Skinbyrds walked with their gang.
Source : youtube.com/thisisengland

In this scene, we can see women of Skinheads were walking on the street. They wore unusual outfit. They also had Chelsea cut. Based on our point of view, we see that this scene attempts to portray their daily routines as a symbol of existence to the environment such as doing sports or wander around by car until night comes.In Skinhead subculture, the women members or Skinbyrds also have a special haircut called 'Chelsea cut.' Metareligion (2014: 6) describes a Chelsea cut as "short on the crown with fringes on the front, back, and sides"(Metareligion, 2014). Sometimes it is nearly shaved, with only fringes and bangs remaining at the front. Thus, we could interpret that this scene attempts to represent the style and habit of women Skinheads.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, some scenes in This Is England represent the style of Skinhead subculture.We can see how they dress up, how they have their hair cut, and what boots they usually wear. Those are the portraits that vividly show how this movie attempts to represent Skinhead subculture. However, the storyline, the lifestyle, the setting of the movie can also be utilized to deconstruct actual history. It means that all types of Skinhead subculture representation are the product of filmmakers' imaginations and cannot be taken as historical facts without intensive historical research. As discussed above, this study focused on the representation of

subculture in England. It will be far more intriguing if further researchers expand on the topic of the English government in the past and the present or delve deeper into the history of skinheads.

REFERENCES

Allen, R. (1970). *Skinhead.* New English Library.

Arbuckle, A. (2016). *1970-1990 British Skinhead Portraits*.

Bada, M. (2003). Culture and Social Structures. *The 44th Annual International Studies Association Convention*.

Barker, C. (2000). *Cultural Studies – Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.

Black, P. (2006). *Skinheads.*

Bushell, G. (2010). *Hoolies: The Stories of Britain's Biggest Street Battles.* John Blake Publishing.

Castles, S. (2009). *Indians in Britain.*

Clarke, J. (1973). *'Football hooliganism and the skinheads'.*

Education, F. (2007). *THIS IS ENGLAND*.

Fahmi, F. (2018). *THE REPRESENTATION OF SKINHEAD STYLE DEPICTED IN "THIS IS ENGLAND" FILM BY SHANE MEADOWS (2006).*

Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (2006). Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain. In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357057

Insider, T. M. (2020). *How to read mise en scéne; Visual film analysis explained!*

Jogezal, F. (2020). *Film Theory and Its Application.*

Manon de Reeper. (2016). *Film Analysis For Beginners: How To Analyse Movies.* (Kindle Edi).

Metareligion. (2014). *Question About Skinheads*.

Mick Furbank, E. al. (1980). *Where Have All the Bootboys Gone? Skinhead Style and Graphic Subculture*.

Rusina, T. (2014). *The Skinhead Movement*. www.spence.saar.de/courses/institutions/skinheads/skinhead_handout.pdf.

Sidlova, B. (2014). *British Cultural Studies and the Development of Subcultures in 1960s.* Ceko. Masaryk University.

Storey, J. (2021). Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003011729
Supandi, M. (2017). Perempuan Dalam Novel Dakwah. *Lakon*.
Williams, J. P. (2007). Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts. *Sociology Compass*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00043.x