

## “Killing an arab” by The Cure: is this a racism?

Rizqi Husaini<sup>1</sup>, Rida Fahas<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Education, Universitas PGRI Madiun

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out about everything that is in the song "Killing an Arab" which was popularized by The Cure. The research uses a qualitative approach that focuses on analyzing the content of the song. The data was obtained from documentation and observations of several articles both related to the song and articles about the phenomenon of racism. The result of the research is this song has a meaning that is difficult to interpret. Whether or not this song is racist depends on the perspective of each listener in interpreting this lag. The Cure's objection that this song does not contain racism clearly refutes everything that develops in society. But still for the racism in this song will never go away. Because everyone's perspective is different in interpreting this song.

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### Corresponding Author:

Rizqi Husaini,

Department of English Education,

Universitas PGRI Madiun,

Jalan Setiabudi No. 85 Madiun.

Email: [rizqi.husaini@unipma.ac.id](mailto:rizqi.husaini@unipma.ac.id)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Of the billions of people on earth, almost 90% would like music. Whether as just listeners, observers, or academics who are interested in exploring what is really in the music. This is inseparable from the function of music itself which is used as a medium of indirect communication between humans. Although it takes a good sense to be able to understand the message in the music. (Cross, 2014)

Cross, explained in his article that music is a medium of communication that can be accepted in all situations and conditions. Sometimes, even though there are some songs that were made many years ago, sometimes the content or the message can still be related to the current situation and condition. Although sometimes the songwriter himself just says it's just for entertainment. However, sometimes as listeners, especially observers or academics, catch something hidden in the song.

If you look at the explanation above, it can be distinguished, there are musicians who create songs just for entertainment, some are used as a criticism, or as a description of the situation and conditions around or within the musician himself. These expressions can be expressed directly or indirectly. This can be seen from the arrangement of words made or seen from the choice of words used in the song. One of them is the song "Killing an Arab" which was popularized by The Cure.

At first glance there is nothing wrong with this song. But if you look closely, you will see that there are some words that might be said to be a little vulgar. This can be seen from the choice of words that may not be suitable for some circles to be used as a song. Yes, even from a songwriter's point of view, this is commonplace. Especially their music genre, which is a bit loud, metal punk.

Therefore, the writer is interested in analyzing this song much more deeply. This is inseparable from some song lyrics that indicate acts of racism against certain groups. Then to make this a little clearer and understandable it is necessary to learn more about this song whether it is really like that or there is another meaning. But before that, it is also necessary to explain in advance what racism is and the relationship between songs and this racism.

Talk about racism, then of course this term comes from a word that is race. Race itself in general can be based on the biological and sociological conditions of a person against another person. Menaka and Sankar (2018) explain that race in terms of biology is not related to gender, but rather to physical conditions that arise, such as hair color, skin color, hair type, eyes, etc. This is what then gives rise to the

type of race that leads to the social aspect. Although no one can be sure that different aspects of biology affect a person's intelligence.

There have been so many cases of racism from various parts of the world, and all of them are almost the same with regard to a person's physical condition. Such as the tragedy of the national riots in the United States which was only caused by the death of a black man by a white police officer. And even in the sports world, racism is even more severe, because it covers almost everything from physical, religious, ethnic, etc. Although there is already an anti-racism campaign in all sporting activities.

Racism theory by Miles & Brown, (2003), they claimed the word over-emphasizes discrimination based on the color of the skin and neglects the large amount of discrimination based on the culture. Slavery is one of Social live is about all people who live in the world, who live in the community, who live with same right one each other. Based on Idris (2017), the main concept of racism is depending on social, historical, economic and political factors rather than a static reductionist biological concept. Racism can be also as a doctrine according to Arthur's view which ethic group and it is also an ideological-scientific system which divides the contemporary human species into sub-species.

From the explanation above, it is very interesting to analyze the song "Killing an Arab" whether it contains racism or not. But again this analysis is not meant to corner either party, but only an academic study of what is in the song. And for more clarity and depth in the analysis of this song will be discussed in the discussion section.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand things that are understood by individuals or groups of social or humanitarian problems (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is words and actions; the rest is additional data (Badara, 2014). In this regard, the data source in this study is the lyrics of the song *Killing an Arab* by The Cur. Besides that the data is also about the results of research, news and information about the history of the song. Moreover, about what is happening in people's lives today? Data analysis in this study is organized and sorted into a unit so that it is easy to process, analyze and find patterns that emerge, decide what is essential and can be shared with others (Moloeng, 2017).

## 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Racism reflected on Killing An Arab song lyric

Before we discuss further about the song "Killing an Arab" from The Cure, let's look at some of the lyrics of the song which are very interesting to discuss. Please read the lyrics below:

*Standing on a beach  
With a gun in my hand  
Staring at the sea  
Staring at the sand  
Staring down the barrel  
At the Arab on the ground  
See his open mouth  
But hear no sound  
I'm alive  
I'm dead  
I'm the stranger  
Killing an Arab  
I can turn and walk away  
Or I can fire the gun  
Staring at the sky  
Staring at the sun  
Whichever I choose  
It amounts to the same  
Absolutely nothing  
Feel the steel butt jump  
Smooth in my hand  
Staring at the sea  
Staring at the sand  
Staring at myself*

*Reflected in the eyes of  
The dead man on the beach*

From the lyrics of the song actually not all contain controversy. Only a few fragments of lyrics that might be said to be controversial or even more directed to an act of racism. But is it true? Let's dive deeper into the song. Pay attention to the following song lyrics:

*Standing on a beach  
With a gun in my hand  
Staring at the sea  
Staring at the sand  
Staring down the barrel  
At the Arab on the ground  
See his open mouth  
But hear no sound  
I'm alive  
I'm dead  
I'm the stranger  
Killing an Arab*

It was the lyrics of this song that resulted in the emergence of controversy in the song. Even the title, Killing an Arab, already contains a controversy. But what is the history of this song, let's discuss one by one.

The song was composed by The Cure and released in 1978 on the album "Boys don't Cry". The Cure was born and grew up in one of the cities in England where their slightly sloppy appearance with their gothic makeup was unacceptable to society. This song also appeared when the National Front movement emerged with the "Keep England White" campaign. In the early days they performed this song, there was resistance from music listeners. Even this song by some youth groups is misinterpreted as a song to order discrimination. But gradually the listeners began to accept this song in their ears. ("Killing An Arab by The Cure," n.d.)

As expected, this song gave rise to waves of protest from various circles. Some of the school students even asked directly that The Cure not sing this song. Still in the same article, after 9/11 some news agencies even used this song as a background song for their broadcasts. This later became a protest from the Arab-American anti-discrimination committee.

Up to this stage, maybe it can be interpreted that this song does contain elements of racism. And when there is a moment related to what is done especially by Arab-American descent, this song will be used as a background song. But it's interesting to see how The Cure got the inspiration in this song.

In every interview with the mass media, that they were inspired by the novel written by Albert Camus entitled *The Stranger* (also known as *The Outsider*). One of which is as written by (Bradshaw, 2018) who explains that the song is inspired by the central action of Albert Camus' novel, which follows a protagonist who kills an Algerian man on a beach after a love dispute involving the victim's sister.

Until here, interesting things emerge that can be analyzed further. As described above, the song is inspired by the novel by Albert Camus. So first of all we will discuss about this novel. Especially the author himself, who if seen from several interviews indicates that he is indeed a person who is very opposed to Arabs, especially Algerians. Even outspoken he opposed the country's independence which was later denied by his daughter, that Camus was not a racist. (Bradshaw, 2018)

*The Stranger*, the first enigmatic novel by Albert Camus, was published in French as *L'Étranger* in 1942. It was published as *The Outsider* in the UK and as *The Stranger* in the United States. Camus uses *The Stranger* as a platform to explore absurdity, a concept that is central to his writings and central to his questions about the meaning of life. However, Camus did not identify himself as a philosopher. (Lohnes, 2018)

There have been many articles discussing this novel. Some articles will be discussed in the following discussion section. There have been many articles discussing this novel. Some articles will be discussed in the following discussion section. The first, as discussed by Bora. In his article, Bora (2020) explains that Albert Camus indeed adheres to existentialism, a philosophical theory or approach that emphasizes the existence of individuals as free and responsible agents who determine their own development through acts of will. Camus demonstrates his existentialism belief by using his character to make social comments on a variety of social situations, including marriage, time and society itself. Through the protagonist of Meursault's novel, existentialist beliefs are reflected, his life experiences,

which show that Meursault's life is meaningless. This is what some fans of The Cure have adopted who call themselves Skinheads. This group is too far in implementing this song for things that have a negative connotation, or can be said to lead to racism. ("Killing An Arab by The Cure," n.d.)

In his article, Hooti & Torkamaneh (2012) it is explained that Camus in his writings often highlights things that we as readers may find difficult to interpret and implement his thoughts. Besides that, sometimes there are many criticisms that are shown to Camus, most of his writings touch sensitive things in society. This is what appears in this song The Cure. Starting from their appearance, the title of their song, and the lyrics touch a lot of sensitive things among the public even though it's just for entertainment.

Then (Patel, 2013) in the same article before, he discusses the perspective used by Camus in writing this novel. As in the previous two articles, almost all of them discuss how Camus gives a character description that is full of question marks. Camus frees the reader to interpret for themselves about the characters that appear in the novel. In addition, readers are invited to reflect on their lives with what is around them. One thing that is interesting in Camus' novel is that it wants to show that life has only two choices, life and death, and the rest is meaningless.

Back again to the song "Killing an Arab", just like the novel that inspired the writing of this song which is full of controversy, this song also raises a lot of controversy. One of them is as written by a contributor to The New York Times, Pareles (1987), which states that until a national campaign emerged, especially from the groups who were cornered in this song, that this song really contains hateful things, especially against Arab-born descendants. America. Although this song actually has nothing to do with it.

The message of this song that it was only inspired by Camus' novels is often conveyed by The Cure through various interview platforms. They firmly say that this song is not only a visualization of what is in the novel that Camus wrote. Even for this, The Cure together with the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, added a sticker containing an affirmation that this song has absolutely no racist overtones at all. It's a song that condemns the existence of all prejudice and the violence it causes. The Cure condemned its use in advancing anti-Arab feelings. (Bradshaw, 2018)

Cure co-founder Lol Tolhurst said in a 2016 interview that it was about alienation and existentialism, things that were more relevant to us at the time. It is clear that the events of the last two decades have changed the perception of the meaning of songs. I may add wrongly, because this has nothing to do with racism or murder at all. (Bradshaw, 2018)

The various objections conveyed by The Cure and its management so far, it is clear that this song does not actually contain elements of violence or racism against certain groups. This song can only be said to be a visualization in the form of what songs are the contents of the novel "The Stranger" by Albert Camus. But also inseparable from the novel, this song, admit it or not, also brings out different meanings and interpretations from each listener depending on how they see this song from their point of view. For groups like skinheads as described above, this song may be a kind of encouragement for them to discriminate against anyone. But for those non-Camus readers, non-racist The Cure fans, the song is enjoyed without undue consideration. And this song is just an entertainment that they should be able to enjoy without any tendency to lead to other things. Even in several concerts and re-sings of this song the title and lyrics containing the words "Killing an Arab" were changed to "Kissing an Arab" so as not to cause further controversy. ("Killing An Arab by The Cure," n.d.) (Bradshaw, 2018).

### 3.2 Racism in past and new era

Talking about the song "Killing an Arab" performed by The Cure, it certainly cannot be separated from the controversy inherent in it. One of which is the lyrics which may explicitly indicate a form of racism. This can be seen from some of the songs in it. Although this has been disputed by The Cure itself. However, still that assumption will never go away.

Discussion on the issue of racism is a very sensitive matter for some circles. This is of course because many things affect and are affected about this. The issue of racism, especially in terms of music, may be an interesting topic to discuss. Because sometimes a lot of things that we might not think at all appear in the lyrics of a song. Although sometimes what the songwriters and listeners think is different, sometimes when you look closely, there will be relevance.

As in the song "American Idiot" sung by Green Day, there are many implicit and explicit things contained in it. This can be seen in one of the articles written by Husaini, et.al. (2020) that many things can be seen in the song if it is related to what happened both at the time the song was created and in the present. Seeing this, it is very interesting to see the things contained in the song "Killing an Arab" if it is related to what happened at the time the song was created and now, especially regarding the issue of racism.

As explained above that this song was created or popular in the 1980s. Many things happened that year, especially regarding the issue of racism that appeared in the song. If examined further, it is seen that the songwriter himself feels uncomfortable when there are other people who are different from himself around him. This can be seen from some of the lyrics of the song. Although the author himself does not admit this. It will certainly be interesting about the issue of racism that arose that year.

The issue of racism has long emerged in the world, especially in the United States. If you look at some of the articles that have been written, there are so many issues of racism in the United States. Both biologically and sociologically based racism. Biologically based racism can be said to be the most prevalent racism. This usually happens to those who have a different body shape compared to the majority in the area. While sociological racism can be seen from the background of work, family, religion, etc. If it is related to what is in the song, it can be said that this can be related to religious sentiment. This can be seen how one religion feels dominant over another religion and also the bitter memories of the past that cause this kind of sentiment to emerge in society.

According to a study conducted by Byrd and Clayton (2001) from the 18th to the 20th centuries, many scientists from every historical era, either directly or indirectly, have contributed to the rise of racial issues, especially in America. Most often experienced by people of African-American descent. Even since they came as immigrants this racial issue has arisen mainly related to the treatment of unfair treatment because of this racial act. This is also what causes racial issues to develop and move from just biology to a sociological aspect.

Robert W Terry's investigations into racism have evolved over the past three decades, crystallizing in the concept of societal and individual racism. Combining many of his original theories, Terry focuses on the social and institutional mediators of racism defined through power relations. These mediators include:

1. Power, unfair distribution or disproportionate capacity by the dominant white/Anglo group to make and enforce decisions.
2. Differently control resources such as money, education, information, and political influence by the dominant racial group.
3. Setting societal standards according to the definition of dominant white/Anglo, automatically marginalizes the norms of other groups.
4. Misdefining the problem by the dominant white/Anglo group so that perceptions and solutions are distorted, imprecise, can be manipulated, and don't work.

This is what may have caused several events to occur, especially in the United States to eliminate this act of racism. As summarized in National Geographic, this activity has even begun to appear starting in 1968 or even when the Second World War occurred. And almost all cases are the same, namely sentiment towards the African-American race. Even the newest one in 2020 yesterday, there are still racist actions carried out by police officers against a black citizen in America which then triggers a national riot.

Of course, this must be eliminated immediately because there are many negative impacts that arise. Then the musicians in creating a song may be able to avoid words that can certainly cause controversy so that there will be no mutual suspicion between one another.

Then we as music listeners, are expected to be wiser in listening to music. Especially for some songs which may contain more or less sensitive matters for some circles. Although sometimes they, the songwriters, just make it as entertainment, but of course we as listeners must have thoughts and desires to relate it to an event. This is not a problem as long as it is acceptable logic and does not have a negative impact on others.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that whether it is racist or not, it depends on the point of view of how to interpret the song. This can be seen from the many pros and cons that appear in this song and the strong denial of the songwriter, The Cure, that the song does not contain racism. The confusion in the meaning of the song is related to the author's inspiration in making the song, namely the novel "The Stranger" by Albert Camus, in which the novel itself is also full of ambiguity.

This research still has many shortcomings, including the limitations of the authors on data sources and limited access to search for relevant data sources. In addition, this research still has not touched the deepest thing in the analysis of the song because of some of the limitations mentioned above.

Therefore, for further research, we can explore why The Cure chose Albert Camus' novel as inspiration in writing the song, then need to find a lot of data that might appear in the future related to the song, both in terms of meaning, history and the things that happened involving the song.

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