A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CONDITION ON BRITISH SKINHEADS AS A SUBCULTURE IN FILM, “THIS IS ENGLAND”

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan

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Abstract

The difficult condition of working-class youth is sometimes gave birth to the resistant of youth subcultures in the relation to mainstream society. Youth subculture might emerge in the society because of several factors. This thesis analyzes the film, *This is England*, to find out how the social conditions influence the British skinhead as a subculture. This thesis deals with the class division which is born the skinhead movement and the ideology of dominant society that shapes skinheads’ action. Based on this idea, Marxist theory will be an appropriate tool to analyze the class division and the ideology. Then, the resistance of the skinheads as subculture will be seen through the lens of subculture theory. Marxist and subculture theory are tools to analyze the social condition which may influence skinheads’ action, behavior and thought which contradict with the dominant society. Through this study, it reveals that the film portrayed the British skinheads as form of youth subculture which behaves differently from dominant society. The skinhead members are trying to resist the ideology of dominant society. This study find out that the social condition in British, like the dominant ideology and class division influence and affected several aspects of skinhead (style, activities, territory and violence).

Keywords: social condition, ideology, dominant society, subculture, skinheads

INTRODUCTION

“Enjoy your youth. You’ll never be younger than you are at this very moment.”
– Chad Sugg

The quote above for some people means that becoming ‘youth’ is the best time of your life. Young people or youth are sometimes describe as strong, full of energy, do not care about any problems and look forward to everyday in which they may try something new. The term of “youth”, according to Phillip Aries, is a relatively modern concept (as qtd. in “Sociology Factsheet”, 1). He stated that “it was only from the mid 17th century ‘young people’ started to be seen as both dependent on adults and as having special characteristics of
their own” (Aries, 1). Their special characteristic might be shown from their activities or their own identity which represents their style.

Another definition about youth is from Barker (364); he stated that adults or parents see youth as a transition condition, while youth believe that this is a special condition for them to build their own identity that differs with their parents or older people’s culture. This statement is supported by Hebdige (as qtd. in Barker 337) who said sometimes youth resists mainstream or “hegemonic” society through style, including clothing, demeanor, and vernacular. Furthermore, the way youth resists mainstream culture can be seen as the subculture. In a simple way we can say that subculture is a group of people whose behavior is different from the dominant culture.

Moreover, the resistance of youth from dominant society sometimes can lead older people to have negative views about them. It happens when they challenge demands for conformity from representatives of institutional authority in media, schools, police, and prison that spearheads efforts to label as deviant and sometimes criminals with certain forms of expression (Baxter and Marina, 94). However, the youth subculture can also show positive effects to society, Weinzierl and Muggleton stated that “a re-thinking of subculture as contested context for stylistic expression and identity formation helps reveal the variable commitment of participants to dominant culture or resistant subculture” (as qtd. in Baxter and Marina 94). So, rather than focus on the resistance, society can see that youth subculture participates in building the dominant culture or society.

Based on the resistance of youth to dominant culture, I am interested to conduct a study to find out the connection between youth subcultures and the society (dominant or mainstream culture). The study insists to find out how youth find their beliefs, style or even ideology which is different from the dominant culture. The youth subcultures might have
their own reason why they differ from dominant society. So, I try to find out the resistance of youth subculture to dominant society through film, because sometimes film represents the real society at particular time. This kind of film is called social realist film which has many characteristics like, a specific subject (working class lives), political orientation (leftist) or iconography (industrial city), (Seino, 2)

The film which I chose to analyze is ‘This is England’. The reason why I analyze this film is because the film represents the youth subculture, which is British skinhead movement in London around 1980’s. Moreover, the movie visualizes the real event that happened in 1983 and the youth subculture is not a fake group. Shane Meadows, the director of the movie stated that his film is about his memoir when he was 11 years old which represents the real event. He wrote in guardian.co.uk, “It is based on my own childhood and I tried to recreate my memoirs of being an 11-year-old kid trying to fit in” (the Guardian: Under My Skin). Meadows’ statement in the official website of The Guardian newspaper proved that his movie was based on real events.

The film shows that British skinheads are part of subcultures through their style and their daily life. Also, it shows that the skinheads group has different attitude and behavior with the society around them. So, based on those features in “This is England”, I attempt to find out and analyze how social conditions at that time (in 1983) influence the British skinheads’ characteristic as subculture. In answering this question, I would like to use Marxist theory which focuses on the ideology and class division. In addition to Marxist theory, I will use the theory of subculture to explain the phenomena and the concept of youth subcultures. Therefore, two theories above can be an appropriate tool to analyze the film, This is England.
The social condition in the film can be seen from the of class division in the British society and the dominant ideology at that time. Based on this explanation, this study would aim to describe the connection of social condition and the characteristic of British skinheads as subculture. In addition, this study is important to make the reader understood the concept of youth subculture. If the reader understands the concept, they will not only see the negative side of youth subculture just because the subculture has different perspective from the society around them.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

As stated in the introduction, this study will use Marxist and subculture theory to analyze the film. Those theories function as a tool to analyze and explain the skinhead culture which is featured in the film. Moreover, the theory is to give a clear direction for the issues that I will discuss in this study. Marxist is the theory base, so I will explain Marxist theory first and then the subculture theory. From Marxist theory, I mainly focus on the class division and ideology, since the theory has many branches.

Marxist Theory

Marxism is a theory coined by Karl Marx, a German philosopher and Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist. At first, they designed Marxism as an economic theory and it was not designed as a theory to interpret a literature text (Barry, 156). They developed an economic theory because Marx thought that the economic situation, the form of productive system, is the most important determinant of all other aspects of the society (Trainer, 1). As Dobie says, “Marxist is meant to be a set of social, economic and political ideas” (79). This means that the basic of Marxism is economic power in the society.
Moreover, based on Marxist perspective the economic power always determines social and political power as well in the society. This explanation is also supported by Tyson who said that Marxists believe getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, and media and so on (54). Moreover, Tyson stated that economics is the base which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built on.

The statements from many scholars above strengthen the idea that Marxist theory sees the particular society based the economic situation. This explanation means that economic is the base of how society works and the engine that drives society (Mazlish, 94).

Marxism also argued that the economic power has contribution to the construction of society. As Dobie states “... the moving force behind human history is its economic system, for people’s lives are determined by their economic circumstances” (82). The idea of the contribution of economic power will leads to how the society is build and how there are class divisions. In that way, the Marxist theory will be utilized in this study to analyze that the economic condition determines how the British society works.

Class Division

A society is shaped by its "forces of production", the way society provides food, shelter, clothing and other necessities creates groups of people social relation or the social structure in the society. The social structure will lead to class divisions in the society; the capitalism divides people into those who own property and control the means of production, the bourgeois, and those who are controlled by them is the proletariat, the workers who labor produces their wealth. (Dobie, 82). Furthermore, Marxist theory tries to explain the relationship between the rich (bourgeois) and the poor (proletariat).
In addition, the Marxist model of society is not only shaped by forces of production but it also constituted by *base* (the material means of production, distribution, and exchange) and a *superstructure*, which is the ‘cultural’ world of ideas, art, religion, law and etc (Barry, 157). If the dominant class controls the superstructure, they are by extension able to control the members of the working classes. Also because those who control production have power base, they have many ways to ensure that they will maintain the position of ruling the society (Dobie, 82). As Mbengo states, “the class which owns the mean of production and which has economic power usurps political power” (10). So, his idea means because of the dominant class which is mostly the bourgeoisie controlled the proletariat, the proletariat is economically oppressed and became subordinate.

From the explanation above, it reveals that Marxism divide the society into two classes: the dominant class (which includes the bourgeois) and the subordinate class (which includes the proletariat). In this study, I will use those terms to point out the name of the each class.

Furthermore, the division of society and how the dominant class controls the subordinate class with ‘the forces of production’ lead to the conflict between social classes, dominant and subordinate class or bourgeoisie and proletariat (Tyson, 54). As Bressler says “… there’s on going conflict between social classes, it is caused by various ways the members of society works and use their economic forces” (219). In addition, Mark stated that a class always viewed its own interest as opposed to those of other groups and had to be organized politically to fight for them (McLellan, 181). This means that these classes (bourgeois and proletariat) are all time in conflict and negotiation because one of them is dominate and the other is subordinate.
Ideology

The popular concept of ideology is delivered by Louis Althusser. He defined an ideology as a system of representation (images, myths, ideas, or concept according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society (Barry, 159). Similarly, Tyson explained that an ideology is a belief system, and all the belief system is products of cultural conditioning (56). Therefore, as Althusser and Tyson argue, ideology includes ideas, belief, system and culture.

The concept of ideology is not only about the system of representation. Althusser proposed another concept which is state that ideology is the way we live our relationship to the real conditions of existence. Ideology is no longer seen as body of ideas, but as a lived, material practice – ritual, customs, pattern or behavior, ways of thinking taking a practical form (Storey, 117). It means that ideology was reproduced through the repetitions of the lived practice (Phillips, 89). So, concluding from the two ideas about ideology, ideology is not only a system but is a lived practice that reproduces from repetition.

Furthermore, ideology is part of how society works. As Althusser says “ideology in general sense will always be an essential element of every social formation”(qtd in Hebdige, 14). So, the ideology needs to be examined in their material forms–the institutions and social practices through which we organize and live our lives (Turner, 19). The ideology also means to seek how power is distributed in the society and which groups and classes have how much say in defining, ordering and classifying out the social word (Hebdige, 14). Ideology is part of society and it is important to examine because ideology is a factor that shapes the social classes.

In relation with class division in society, Marxists see that ideology serves the interest of dominant class. The dominant class, using an ideology to oppressed the working class. It
means that the dominant make the prevailing system to be logical, nature one, entraps the working class (Dobie, 85). Moreover, the function of ideology to dominant class is to maintain their position as a ruling class.

Since Marxists aware that an ideology is used by dominant society to oppressed the subordinate people. So, Marxist approach seeks to oppose the dominant class, to demonstrate how the bourgeoisie’s ideology controls and oppresses the working class, and to highlight the elements of society most effected by such oppression (Bressler, 221). This means that Marxism exist to reveal the ideology that is made by the dominant class to control the subordinate class.

**Marxist as Literary Criticism**

Since the study that I conduct is based on film, it is important to know how Marx’s perspective can be a tool to analyze literature forms. One goal of Marxist critics is to identify the ideology at work in cultural production (literature, films, paintings, and etc). Marxism analyzed how that ideology supports or undermines the socioeconomic system (the power structure) in which that cultural products plays a significant role (Tyson, 60). Furthermore, the ideology that a text inevitably carries can be found in either its content or its form (Dobie, 87). The explanation by Tyson and Dobie can be a guideline to understand Marx theory in literature.

As was stated, works of Karl Marx focus on economics, but later on Marxism become a method to analyze literature because Marxism is providing a new way of reading and understanding literature. Marxism views that the writer’s social status will reflect their works. Moreover, Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer’s social class, and its prevailing ‘ideology’ have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class (Barry, 157).
Some Marxists criticize a text because they attempt to know how the text relates to the socioeconomic reality that it was born of, and see how a piece of literature might serve (or hinder) the cause of the socialist revolution. As Terry Eagleton says, “Marxist criticism is analyzing literature in terms of the historical condition which produces it.” (as qtd. in Szabadoz 6). Therefore, Marxist generally accepts that critics must do more than explain how a work conforms to certain literary conventions or examine its aesthetic qualities (Dobie, 87). It needs to be remember that to analyze a literature using Marxist perspective, we do not need to use all the Marx ideas, since Marxist has a lot of branches.

So, based on the explanation above, in this study I use the explanation which explained Marxist criticizes a literary work related to the socioeconomic at particular time. The socioeconomic in film, *This is England*, represents from the class division and ideology at 1980’s.

**Marxist and Culture**

In Marxist theory, culture is part of Althusser’s argument about society. This is explained by Turner (18) that Althusser argues there are many determining forces-economic, political, and cultural-competing and conflicting with each other in order to make the complex unity of society. Moreover, he stated that ideology produces our culture (Turner, 20). The explanation means that Marxist cannot separate its theory with culture or ideology. Culture is dealt with the large part of society, but in this research I want to focus to particular society that becomes a sub-set in culture. This kind of society is called subculture.

Based on the explanation above, I use another theory as a companion to Marxist criticism which is subculture. The use of Marxism in my research is to explain the British social condition in 1980’s and the social structure (dominant and subculture). Whereas, the use of subculture theory is more focus on explaining youth subculture which is the British
skinhead (their action toward dominant culture). In my opinion, the uses of two theories in my research is complimentary one another because subculture theory which focuses on youth culture has been influenced by Marxist thought. The subculture usually relates to the dominant class which has their dominance ideology as a ruling class.

Therefore to understand the theory and the definition of youth subculture, I will start my explanation from culture. The reason is because youth subculture is part of larger culture.

Culture and Subculture

First of all, the term “culture” has a broad and complex definition. There are many definition of culture. Some people said that culture is ideas, values and artifacts of groups of people. Williams (as qtd in Storey, 2) said that culture can refer to particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group. The way we live in everyday life is also called culture. This is why Williams believes culture can be understood through representative and practice of daily life (Williams, 64-5). Based on the above definition, particular society will build up their own culture, like religious beliefs to modes of dress, to art and many more. Moreover, Hall (11) explained that culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped; but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted. Culture plays an active role in the construction of social structures and it is a vehicle of human expression. It cannot exist apart from human society, and likewise, no human society can exist without culture (Bada, “Culture and Social Structures”).

Furthermore, the structure of social relationship in culture can also create the class or group. Then, the groups or classes which do not stand at the apex of power, nevertheless find ways of expressing and realizing in their culture their subordinate positions and experiences (Hall, 12). Hall explanation can be understood as the way to see how the subculture is ‘born’.
The subculture is born as the opposition of dominant culture or society. As Murdock explained, “subcultures are the meaning systems and mode of expression developed by groups in particular parts of social structure in the course of their collective attempts to come to terms with the contradiction of their shared social situation” (as qtd. in Brake, 66). The contradiction of the social situation can be seen as the contradiction with dominant culture or society.

**Subculture Theory**

The concept of subculture has been an important notion for researcher, which has been developed into an analytical model in which to interpret young people’s social lives for the subject such as, anthropology, sociology, criminology, cultural studies and education (Nayak qtd. in Bruin, 19). The curiosity of researchers emerged the theory to analyze the subculture. Furthermore, the theory of subculture attempts to find the relationship between young people and their lifestyle.

From the 1920s onwards, researchers have attempted to explain why and how young people become involved in a subculture, its meaning and its functions, and, in particular, its contribution to enabling young people to cope with transitions in their live. As early as the 1920s, the notion of a 'subculture' was recognized in youth research. However, it was through the work in 1970s of the British, Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) that the term subculture really became associated with the study of young people (Bruin, 20). In this research, I use the subculture theory that was derived from Birmingham CCCS. This is because the subcultural theory developed by the CCCS is a British concept, formulated with a view to study a specific section of British Youth and the research that I conduct focuses on British Skinhead.
The characteristic of subcultures, therefore, take shape around and distinctive activities and ‘focal concerns’ of group (Hall and Jefferson, 14). The group can be loosely or tightly bound. Some subcultures are merely loosely defined strands within the parent culture: they possess no distinctive ‘world’ of their own. When the tightly-defined groups are also distinguished by age and generation, we call them ‘youth subculture’. Youth subcultures form up on the terrain of social and cultural life. Some youth subcultures are regular and persistent features of the parents’ class culture. In addition to youth subcultures, adults or parents see youth as a transition condition, while youth believe that this is special condition for them to build their own identity that differs with parents’ culture or older people (Baker, 364). The members of the subculture might walk, talk, act, and look ‘differently’ from their parents and from some of their peers (Clarkos and Hall, 14).

There is a basic and fundamental relation about subculture and parents’ culture. Subcultures must be related to the parent cultures of which they are a sub-set. But, subcultures must be analyzed in terms of their relation to the dominant culture—the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole (Hall, 13). So, when talking about subcultures cannot be separated between the parents’ culture and relation with dominant culture. The general, shared, common culture (all ideological terms) can be realized as dominant culture and its transmission is handled by various state apparatuses which serve to reproduce its dominance (Jenks, 117). In this research, I will analyze the subculture related with dominant culture; the British society as a whole; the parents culture and the government.

The following mentioned subcultures – teddy boys, mods, punks, skinheads are notable for the way in which they focus on style of dress, manners and type of music, all of which provide some of the cohesiveness for the group and evoke images of particular
(rebellious) behavior (Bruin,20). Particularly, this thesis will analyze the skinheads group in British and their sub-cultural aspect.

“This is England” SUMMARY

The summary of the movie is like what Seino explained in his journal: “The story is the story of a summertime school holiday, those long weeks between terms where life-changing events can take place. It’s 1983 and school is out. Twelve-year-old Shaun (Thomas Turgoose) is an isolated boy growing up in a grim coastal town, whose father has died fighting in the Falklands War. When Shaun got back from the school he meets a skinhead gang and he asked to hang out with them. At first, he felt threatened because some of the gang members make fun of him. But, Woody, the gang leader welcomed him and tries to cheer up Shaun who had a fight in school at break time” (47)

Starting from the moment when Shaun met Woody, Shaun spent his holiday with Woody’s gang and they hung out together. Then he decided to join the gang. So, he needed to change his appearance before he could join the gang. First, Shaun asked his mom to buy him a pair of Dr. Marten boot but there is no size for him. Then, he shaved his hair off with the skinhead style with the help from Woody’s girlfriend, Lol. The next step, he needed to change his clothing style. After he did all the steps, he officially became a skinhead. When he was back at home, Shaun got a little problem when his mother did not accept his hair transformation. But, his mother accepted that Shaun hung out with Woody because she knew that Shaun was happy with Woody.

Everything was working well until the arrival of Combo, an old friend of Woody who spent three years in the jail. Furthermore, Combo is a racist skinhead and he hated Margaret Thatcher’s government. Combo tries to influence the skinhead’s member to follow Combo’s
belief. Moreover, Combo arrived with the political issues which make the skinhead group split into two, Combo’s group and Woody’s group. And Shaun followed Combo’s group.

The rest of the story narrates how Combo’s group started to become a racist skinhead: sprayed painting racist slogans, attending political rallies and issuing threats to Pakistani shop keeper. On the contrary to his racist attitudes, Shaun still cares about his old friends, Woody and Milky. When Combo losses his temper and strikes Milky until he becomes unconscious, Shaun tries to stop Combo. Shaun’s mother later tells him that Milky is going to be ok and in the last scene Shaun is walking towards the see to throw away the English flag that Combo had given him.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Social Condition in *This is England*

The economic and social condition in 1980’s in England became the framework to the story of British skinhead that portrayed in the film, *This is England*. The film was set in 1983 and the opening scene of the movie portraying some events that happened in Britain around that time. It highlights several issue related to British culture and society. One of the scenes showed the prime minister at that time, who is Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher became a prime minister in 1979 (Green, 214). She ruled the political situation in England with the basic of conservative ideology which later on her ideology is called Thatcherism. The conservative people are the one who want to save and maintain what had been done and their status quo (Green, 65).

Besides the spread of conservative ideology in England, there is another popular belief which is Thatcherite ‘me’ culture. This belief is about being individual and not caring others. As Quart says “Thatcher promoted an individualist ethos and an entrepreneurial
culture where the acquisition of wealth and the consumption of goods become the prime values, while the ethic of social responsibility and mutual aid began to unravel” (20). Quart explanation gives a view that the government has important role to shape the society values or belief.

In the Thatcher era, England suffered severe recessions and the country was buckling under the strain of massive unemployment. It means that the economic condition under Thatcher government is not stable; many business are failed which made a lot of people did not have a job. Furthermore, the economic recession at that time created inequality of wealth and poverty in British society. Thatcher’s policies helped create an England where the rich got richer while the poor become more impoverished (Quart, 17). So, the economic condition in England showed the inequality in the society.

In addition, the inequality of wealth in British gave evidence that there is class division in the British society. Such society fits the Marxist idea about class division. As Dobie says, the capitalism divides people into the bourgeois, and the proletariat (82). The film, “This is England”, describes two classes based on the economic condition: the proletariat and the bourgeois. The proletariat class in this film is equal with the working class which means people who need to sell their labor to survive. Then, the bourgeois class is not always pointed out to the rich people but this class might consist of people who own a range of different types of capital (wealth, property, or shares) or people who have control over the society.

The film showed the evidence of the class division which is ‘created’ by Margaret Thatcher’s government by portraying the place where proletariat and bourgeois live. It means that there is separation of place of living. Mostly, the film portrayed the place where the

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1 UK Recession in 1980s by Angela Monaghan
working-class lived. Every house in the residence has similar type and characteristics. The houses have two floors with a little space for the front yard. This is showed by the scene when Shaun left his house and the rest of the neighborhood where he lived ("This is England", 00:04:29). Then, when Shaun went to work, the scene showed another residence ("This is England", 00:13:07). Shaun cycled in the residence for the rich people. The houses are big with a wide front yard and most of the houses have a car. Those scenes emphasize that the proletariat and the bourgeois lived in completely different places.

The effect of the class division in British society is the emerging of subculture. The subculture formed in the proletariat class as the resistance to dominant society. As Murdock stated, “subcultures are the mode of expression developed by groups in particular parts of social structure which attempts to come to terms with the contradiction of their shared social situation” (as qtd. in Brake, 66). Subculture in the film is fall into the category of youth subculture and represented by British skinhead. So, it means that the British skinhead is emerged because they want to show their resistance toward dominant society and build their own identity. The social conditions at that time affected the skinheads’ belief and thought. It also helps the skinheads built their own ideology. The skinheads’ ideology is the reflection of the resistance to dominant ideology.

Besides the class division, there is another factor why the subculture is born. The factor are about the emotion and reaction of solidarity. In the Thatcher era, individualism is more important than the belief of togetherness. Being individual in this explanation means that the people do not care one another and is reluctant to help others. The forming of skinheads group is the evidence that they developed solidarity value and oppose the idea of being individuals. The members are gathered as a group because they share similar condition for being oppressed and have same thought to oppose the dominant ideology.
In the movie the skinheads group consists of ten youth which makes them a smaller part of the society in which they are live. As a sub-set of the culture, the skinheads realize that they are in the subordination place where they do not have power to rule over the society. Realizing the fact, the group seeks to find a way to express their position in a way that can show their differences with dominant society. As Hall and Jefferson maintained that the characteristic of subcultures take shape around and distinctive activities with dominant society (14). Their differences represent by their opposite or contradict action to some dominant society values.

**Subcultural Aspects of Skinheads and the Influence of Social Condition**

In the section above, it is explained that social condition took an important part as the emerging of subculture. Furthermore the social condition at that time also influences several aspects of skinheads as a subculture. There are four aspects that will analyze in this study: style, territory, activities and beliefs. Those four aspects will be analyzed from the relationship between subculture and the dominant society, because, As Hall says “… subculture must be analyzed in relation to the dominant society” (13).

The four subcultural aspects of skinheads mostly show the resistance and distinctive activities toward society around them. Like the previous explanation, the resistance and the distinctive activities are also part of the skinhead ideology. Furthermore, all the four aspects will be related with the dominant society that represented by the parents, the British society as a whole and the British government.

The two aspects that define skinheads as a subculture, style and territory, explained by Cohen, were also a main way of resistance of the subculture to the dominant society. As he says “subcultures were seen to do the resistance in two main ways: territorially, by winning and claiming their ‘own’ space (as distinct from owning property) and investing it with
‘subcultural value’; and it terms of style, by using commodities, the signs of ‘dominant culture’, differently” (as qtd. in Gelder, 90). So, the idea of Cohen showed that style and territory is the central part of skinhead’s life.

**a. Style**

Throughout the film, the skinheads group is showing that they have their ‘own’ style. The style in the film means their clothes and their hairstyle. The first appearance of the skinheads in the film is when Shaun walked from his school to his house. Then, Shaun met five skinheads (Woody, Milk, Puke, Kes and Gadget) who are sitting in the tunnel’s pavement (“This is England”, 00:08:27). At the first meeting with the group, Shaun was represented as a British society as a whole because he has not joined the group. It showed that the clothes which Shaun wore and the skinheads group are different. The style that is ‘standout’ from the skinheads is boots and shaved hair. From this scene the viewer was acquaintance with the skinheads group’s style which different from the society.

The skinhead’s members have similar dress or clothes. It means that they constructed their “uniform” with clothes that suitable with their characteristic. All of the members, boys and girls, wore a pair of jeans, boot, braces and shirts (“This is England”, 00:22:34). For the clothes they have specific label to wear, like Doctor Marten boots, Ben Sherman’s shirt and Fred Perry’s shirt. Furthermore, the hair style of the skinheads is semi-bald. If the boys shaved most of their hair, the girls left their bangs.

The style of the skinheads is also referring to Richard Allen’s explanation of skinhead fashion:

“The essential items that made up the skinhead uniform: denim jacket and jeans, Fred Perry sportshirts, Ben Sherman and Brutus shirt. Two tone suits and crombie
overcoats. And of course the item that above all others has come to symbolize the skinhead movement is the Doctor Marten boot…” (3)

The skinheads were constructed their own style or their “uniform” because they wanted to be better and different from their parents’ generation. Hall stated, “They (the skinheads) did not conform to what their parents considered “the norm”. It means that their style is contradicted with their parents’ view about style. The different perspective about clothes in the film is shown when Shaun and his mother have an argument when they bought a pair of shoes.

Shaun and his mother went to shop and he asked his mother to buy him a pair of Doc Mart boots. When his mother saw what kind of boot that Shaun want, his mother seems reluctant and disagreed with Shaun’s choice (“This is England”, 00:20:47).

Shaun run to the window of the shop and pointed out the shoes to his mom.

Shaun’s mother : “Which ones?”
Shaun : “The big red ones”
Shaun’s mother : “Oh, you’re not having them, sweetheart. Look at the size of them”
Shaun : “Oh Mom, come on you said…”
Shaun’s mother : “No, Shaun. They look like thug boots. They’re awful”

The conversation showed that Shaun want to have the Doc Mart boots because it parts of the skinheads’ uniform. Shaun’s mother did not approve of his choice because his mother preferred that Shaun wear a ‘normal’ shoe. After several arguments, Shaun got the shoes that are similar with the Doc Mart boot.

The other evidence that shows the style of the skinheads is contradictive with the parents’ perspective is when Shaun’s mother knew that Shaun shaved his hair. His mother was shocked when she saw that Shaun shaved his hair (“This is England”, 00:27:45). Then, the next morning Shaun’s mother came to the gang and was angry with them for what they did to Shaun’s hair (“This is England”, 00:28:14). Shaun’s
mother, who represents the parent figure, always disagreed with the style, but she couldn’t do anything about it.

Even though the style of skinheads is contradicting and oppose their parents’ idea about the proper clothes, they still wear it because they want to show that they are different with their parents’ generation. For the skinheads, style (clothes and hair style) is important because it shows their identity as skinheads. The group has several rules about the style and the members need to follow the rules. The rules about the clothes made the skinheads have similar style from each other. Their rules of style can be seen as a set of social ritual which underpin their collective and define them as group (Hall, 47). The skinheads’ member used the same style everyday, so it means that they repeated their action or ‘ritual’ everyday. This ritual or repeated action can reproduced the skinheads’ ideology because according to Althusser, ideology is reproduced through the repetitions of ritual; the ‘lived practices’ of everyday life (as qtd. in Phillips, 89). Based on Althusser’s explanation, I can conclude that the rules of style are important for the skinhead to obey because it might express their ideology as a group.

In the film, the important of style is shown in the scene when Shaun did not bring his Ben Sherman shirt. It is shown from the conversation of Woody and Shaun after Shaun shaved her hair off (“This is England”, 00:23:48).

Shaun : “So, I’m in the gang now?”
Woody : “No. Not yet. Get your shirt on. Let’s see your Ben Sherman”
Shaun : “I ain’t got Ben a Sherman”.
Woody : “You telling me you’ve not got a shirt? You’re gonna have to come back next week. I’ll see you mate.”

Woody praised Shaun when he shaved his hair off but angry when Shaun did not bring his Ben Sherman shirt. It indicates that to become a skinhead, Shaun needed
to dress according to the rule of the group. The skinheads made a rule that the members had to obey it. The reason why the similar looked is important in the gang is because it shows the unity between the members. Also the similar style shows the identity of the skinheads as a subculture. As Hall explained that the dress, appearance and hair cuts were made to form a unity with the group relation (Hall qtd. in Hebdige, 114).

In the film, the skinheads showed that their style is important for their identity as subculture. It is because their style is made to reflect, express and resonate the aspects of group life (Hall qtd. in Hebdige, 113). So, what they wear is reflected an identity to the society. The skinhead style: “the boots, braces and cropped hair were only considered appropriate and hence meaningful because they communicated the desire qualifies: hardness, masculinity and working classness” (Hebdige, 114). Hebdige’s definition means that the skinhead were not chose the clothes and the hairstyle just because it looked good on them. The skinheads’ style is a tool to speak or communicate to the dominant culture. So, what being communicate through the style is the pride to be a skinhead.

Through style, the skinheads also express their resistance toward the dominant society because the clothes that they wear are different from the society around them. This idea is supported by Hall, who said that style can be an expression of opposition to the values of wider society (177). At that time, the society might see that their style look messy or not appropriate but that is their way to oppose the conventional style of dominant society. They resisted to wear same clothes that the dominant society is also wore and they also resist to wear neat clothes like rich people. Style as a way to oppose the dominant society can reflect their ideology. So, it means that the skinheads
develop anti-mainstream ideology through their style. In this case, the skinhead’ ideology is defined as a system of representation through image (Althusser qtd. in Barry, 159).

b. **Territory (Meeting Place)**

Skinheads have ‘special’ places as their meeting place or place to hang out. The special place means that the place they chose was mostly far from public spaces or crowded area. For example, the tunnel’s pavement where is Shaun met the skinhead for the first time. Besides the tunnel, they like to hang out in abandoned areas like many houses left empty by the owner (“This is England”, 00:17:00). This place seems really quiet and far from the public area. The other interesting place that they chose is the narrow street (“This is England”, 00:26:29). They chose that kind of place because the place is free and they do not need to spend their money. As a working class, their economic situation does not allow them to spend too much money. Marxist sees that the contrasting place that the skinhead chose, reveal how economic difference determines social interaction.

The movie showed two places that become their main place to hangout and to do their internal conversation. The places are Ollie’s café and one of the member’s houses (“This is England”, 00:22:58, 00:29:50, 00:44:32, 01:05:30, 1:17:58). In the morning, all of the members of the group (the boys and the girls) like to meet in Ollie’s café. This place is a small café that is located in the small shopping area (“This is England”, 00:27:58 and 00:38:01).

Their choice of Ollie’s café implies that they did not want to go to the place where rich people could get benefit, for example in the big restaurant which the rich people owned the place and they employed labors. Apparently, the café symbolizes
working-class’ business, so the skinheads group will support the café rather than go to the place where is owned by rich people. They thought if they go to the restaurant they support oppression of rich people to the working class.

Based on the above example, all of the places that the group chose as their meeting place were places that were quiet and there were not many people come there. This condition shows that the skinheads do not want to be a part of the society as whole because they excluded themselves from the larger part of the community where they lived. It is part of their resistance toward dominant society. And their resistance reflects their ideology which opposes society values.

The places that the skinheads chose is not only as their place to hangout but they also claimed and marked it as their territory. They use graffiti to mark their territory. They sprayed the paint on the wall and they written their name or things that relate to the skinheads movement (“This is England”, 00:24:57). For example, “Lol 4 Woody”, “Cheesekes”, “Madness Pukey von Twerp”, “The Maytals” (a reggae band), “Oi!”, or “The Skins”. All of the names that they put in the wall are function to give notion that those places are the skinheads’ territory. The graffiti can also to specify which group has power over which territory. Apparently, there is another point and purpose behind skinhead’s graffiti. With the graffiti, the skinhead declared their existence and identity as a subculture. Besides that, the claiming of the place or territory with the graffiti also shows that they wanted to be separated with the dominant society

The skinhead sprayed the graffiti as a way to express their thought but the society might see that they do vandalism and ‘destroy’ the public spaces. What the skinheads did might contradict with the dominant society values that is trying to
maintain the public spaces. According to Macdonald, the members of subculture oppose the values of dominant culture using their resistant activities, like the graffiti (176). When they oppose the values of dominant society, it means that the skinheads standing apart from the society. This idea matches with the definition of subculture which according to Macdonald, subculture may be defined as the group that standing apart from others (the society as a whole) (152).

c. Activity (Daily Life)

The film, *This is England*, portrayed the skinheads as a group who like to do leisure activities. This statement is also supported by Gelder who said that the skinhead activity is tied to leisure and enjoyment (80). It means that the activities include doing something fun and they are just playing all day long. For example, when the boys in the group decide to go to the abandoned houses, they dressed like they are a hunter and they are brought fake guns, bats or hammers. Then, they came to the empty house, smashed everything that left in the house and laughed together ("This is England", 00:16:41). Their laughter indicates that they smashed things as part of their fun activities. Moreover, if they did not smash the things in the emptied house, they were hung out in the corner of the street or their friend’s house. They were just smoking, joking around and talking everything. As Hall stated that their leisure activities are form of expression of the whole experience of the class (176). The experience is about the unemployment. Because they do not have a job, they use their time to do leisure activities.

The people outside the skinhead might think that what they are doing indicates that the members of the group are lazy to go to work or to go to school. In the other hand, the skinheads do their activities as a part of the resistance to dominant society
who has conservative ideology. Through the film, it implicitly stated that the reason why they are jobless is because the government just gave them little space to work. So, rather than bothered with the job that the government wouldn’t give, the skinhead did leisure activities. It also means that the skinhead activity was also a part of their protest to the government that they believe did not care about them.

The skinheads’ leisure activities can reflect their ideology which is “anti-establishment”. They think that people, who are established, will oppress them just because they are belong to subculture. So, they are opposing the rich people’s idea about establishment. Furthermore, what they are doing in daily life implies that they do not care if they are jobless. Since there is no job offered to them, working activities become their second priority in their daily life.

All of the activity that they did, they only did it with the group. Rarely do they have contact or communicate with other people outside their group. The society might judge them as a group that has anti-social behavior. But their behavior is the influence of the society itself, because at that time people became more individualistic and they were busy with their own life (the influence of Thatcher ‘me’ culture). The skinheads realize that people outside the group might do not care with them. So, the skinheads group chose to do their activities with their own group rather than socialize with people who did not care with their existence.

The idea of skinheads which prefer to do their activities separate with the society is related to Marxist class division. Marxist sees that the class division creates a gap between each classes and each class has their own space to do their activities based on their life style. According to Muschert, working class youth might not identify with social norm and thereby, exhibit a form of deviant subculture (3). In this
case, the class division is not form from the economic situation, but this class division is based on the social norms; who follow and who do not follow the norms.

Furthermore, the society judgment of skinhead activities can be seen as the ideology of dominant society that wanted to control the skinhead to stay in their subordinate position. By judging the skinheads through their activities, the dominant society pushes the skinheads to do their activities with their own group. It means that the dominant society uses their judgment to maintain their position. This idea was supported by Althusser who said that the dominant use an ideology to maintain their position as ruling class (qtd.in Shelby, 30)

d. Violence and Racist Attitude

The activities of skinheads is identical with leisure activities which the activities that require fun as the main activities. At some point, their activities are not merely about leisure. Later on, the film portrayed that their activities engage with violence. They do violence as a form of disagreement with the government policies about immigrant in England. The immigrants in the film pointed out to the people who have darker skin from the skinhead. The immigrants came from the Eastern country, like Indian or Pakistan.

The film did not explain how the immigrants came to England, but the film just implicitly told that the immigrant is part of British society. Since the early 1950’s, England has been the destination of immigrants. As Moran explained, “The result of public policies in Britain encouraged immigrant came into Britain from many countries of the former empire; parts of Indian sub-continent and from the Caribbean Islands. The reasons they came to England are because hunger, war and persecution”
The British government accepted the immigrants from Indian and Pakistan because they are part of The British of Commonwealth Nations.

The explanation of how immigrant came to England is the background information to understand Combo’s speech to other skinheads’ members. Combo is the former skinhead who had been in jail for three years and when he back no one in the group knew that Combo has changed into racist skinhead. He tried to influence the other members to follow his perspective. One morning, he asked the other skinheads member (Woody, Shaun, Lol, Puke, Kes, Milk and Gadget) to come to his flat. In his flat he gave a speech about the problems of immigrants that came to England which made the British citizens, especially the working class, lose their jobs and homes. He ‘brings’ Thatcher in his speech. This means that he hates Thatcher for her decision to let the immigrant came to England. When he gave his speech, he is full of anger.

"Two thousand years this tiny island has been raped and villaged by people who came here and wanted a piece of it. For what? So we can stick our flag in the ground and say, yeah this is England!" (he pointed out his chest and his head).

“What for? So, we can just open the floodgates and let them all come in and give them spaces to build their shop and give them flats. When there’s a single parent out there, who can’t get a fucking flat and we’re giving these flat to these fucking Pakis, right?”

“There are three and a half million unemployed out there who can’t find work. Cos they’re taking them all. Cos it’s fucking cheap labor.”

“And that Thatcher sits there in the fucking ivory tower and sent us to the phoney war! The Falklands” ("This is England”, 00:42:44)

The words “them” and “Pakis” in the conversation refer to the immigrants that mostly came from Jamaica and Caribbean island. Then the words “we” and “us” are refer to the British citizens. Those words also indicate a form of othering; they blame immigrants for what happened to the skinhead. Moreover, by emphasizing those words, Combo tried to make the group realize that the skinhead and the immigrants are different. Based on Combo’s perspective, the skinheads need to take an action...
because the government did nothing about the problem of immigrant and the working class.

Based on Combo’s speech, he wanted to emphasize that the government gave the immigrant a special place in England and he believed that the government did not treat the skinheads equally. The government offered a protection to immigrants under the welfare state. Because of that, Combo wanted to make his group against the immigrant and reclaim their place. However, after he finished his speech, not all the members followed and joined Combo’s perspective, the members that stayed in Combo’s side are Shaun, Puke and Gadget. They believed what Combo said is true and they need to stand up for it. Combo’s speech made the group split into two directions: Woody’s group and Combo’s group.

After the skinhead groups split into two, the film described several acts of violence that the Combo’s group did to the immigrants. Specifically, they were attacking the immigrants with the skin darker than them and have Eastern culture. The first thing that they did to the immigrants was sprayed some racist words in some tunnel where many people can see it ("This is England", 00:59:02). They wrote those words to threaten the immigrants.

Moreover, when the gang met three Pakistani boys on the street, the group insulted and threatened the boys ("This is England", 00:59:48). Even, Combo put his knife to one of the boys’ face and threatened him. He said, “If I see you on my streets again, I’ll slash you. Now, run home. Cos, mommy cooking curry. Go on!” (“This is England”, 00:59:58). This dialogue indicates that he want to give a message to the immigrant to get away from his territory. The word ‘curry’ here, related with Indian
people, so, Combo specifically disliked the immigrant who came from Eastern culture.

The third violence they did is robbing a local shop with the owner is Pakistani immigrant ("This is England", 01:03:00). Shaun even swore to the owner by saying “Paki bastard” and Combo swung his big knife to the shop owner.

From the three actions that they did to the immigrants, mostly they threatened the immigrants by using words. The threatening words or language that the skinhead sprayed in the wall or was directly said is indicating that they declared or identified themselves as anti-immigrant. They believe by using threatening words they could scare the immigrants away. Then, this belief can create an ideology of skinheads that were related with racist attitude.

The racist attitude of the skinhead showed from all of the action that they did to the immigrants and when they attacked people for their race. The skinheads do violent aggression against Pakistani or Indian community members, who according to the group, see the immigrants as so ‘recognizably’ different. According to Covey, immigrants of Pakistan are convenient targets and they represent as an easy population for scapegoating (83). So, it means the skinhead used the immigrant as their violence target because they are an easy target to blame. The skinheads blamed the immigrants, because they assume that the immigrants took the working class job. In this case, the skinhead might develop racist ideology.

Based on the above explanation, the society might judge the skinheads were developing anti-immigrant or racist ideology which they discriminate other people or race. In other hand, the skinhead committed in the violence action was because several reason that related to the British government and the British society as whole.
The violence action that the skinheads did in the film indicated that the skinheads feel victimized of the political situation in Margaret Thatcher’s government. The government did not treat the working-class and the immigrants equally. Furthermore, the skinhead believes that the government gave the job to the immigrants rather than the unemployment British citizens. So, the skinheads’ violence action is their struggle with the inequalities and injustice that they experience in their life (losing jobs and their homes). Also, their violence action is part of their resistance to Thatcher’s government.

The other reason why they became racist is that the skinhead were felt being exploited by some right-wing politician, the people who contradicted with the Thatcher’s politic. In the film, it was showed that the Combo’s group followed the National Front meeting. The National Front is the organization that wants to chase away the immigrant from England. As Fielding said that the National Front is anti-immigrant organization (9). The skinhead group joined the organization because they were abandoned by the society and they feel that the organization is their place to say their aspiration. Actually, this organization contaminated the skinheads with quite thick racist attitude.

Other than as the victim of political situation, their violence action is fear toward people who want to take their place. They are afraid that the immigrants will take control their nation. So, they tried to threaten the immigrants and make the immigrants afraid of them. Their violence can be seen as their feeling of nationalism. The skinheads want to prove their “Englishness” and defend their nation. The Englishness means that the skinheads want to prove their national identity as British
citizen and proud to be real British (Morley, 47). By showing their Englishness, they have hidden action to make England ‘free’ from the immigrants.

All of the reason behind their violence action is lead to the conclusion that the skinheads are opposing the British government. They took separate way with the government and they do not want follow the government’s order and direction. If the government did not care with the problem of the immigrant and the working class in England, they will take their own action. They will fight for what they believe and take their rights.

The skinheads oppose the government policies about the immigrants can reflected their belief system toward British government. The skinheads believe that the government did not treat them equally, so they try to oppose the government and try to get the equality by using their own way (using violence). The skinhead’s belief system is reflected an ideology. As Tyson maintains, an ideology is the belief system that produced by relationship of society (56). The relationship between skinheads and the government shaped skinheads’ ideology. Their ideology is using violence to get back their position.

CONCLUSION

Youth subculture is usually seen as the group that resist toward the mainstream society. I was interested with the youth subculture movement. So, in this study I tried to explore the youth subculture based on the film, This is England. This film features British Skinheads which fall into the category of youth subculture. Through this study I found out the answer of how the social condition at that time influence the British Skinhead that portrayed in the film. In analyzing the film, I applied two theories: Marxist and subculture theory.
Based on the film analysis, I concluded some points concerning the social condition in England in 1980’s and the British skinheads.

First, the social condition in England is the factor that form British skinhead as subculture. Based on the film, the social condition in England was represented from the economic situation at that time, the class division in the British society and the dominant ideology that spread in the England. Apparently, Margaret Thatcher’s government gives contribution to the emerging of the skinheads and shapes the skinheads’ ideology in the film, *This is England*. This movie, reveals that the ideology is not only ‘owned’ by dominant society but it also owned by the marginalize people or the subculture. The British skinheads have an ideology that reflected their resistance toward dominant society.

Secondly, from the discussion above, the social condition also influences four sub-cultural aspects of skinheads. Those aspects are style, territory, activities (daily life) and violence. The skinheads’ style might reflect the group’s identity as a subculture and through style they try to oppose the dominant society. The territory or meeting place dealt with the place where skinheads like to spend their day. Then, the skinheads’ activities are related with leisure activities and their reason why they do not care about working. The last aspect is violence, their violence action is related with the problem of immigrant that came to England. The skinheads are pointed out to the immigrant who has darker skin than them and came from Eastern country.

Furthermore, in the analysis above, I related those four sub-cultural aspects with the dominant society or the dominant ideology in England in 1983. I found out that those aspects are showing the skinheads’ resistance toward dominant society and the skinheads’ opposition of dominant ideology. Also, their opposition and resistance action toward dominant society shapes the skinheads’ own ideology.
From the discussion, it is explained that the society can influence the youth subcultures’ action in some aspects. The subcultures’ action is usually related to the condition around them, and they are not suddenly emerging but they are formed by the condition around them. This thesis offers to readers another perspective to see and analyze the youth subculture’s actions and behavior.

Moreover, the analysis and the discussion of this study are important for the reader to understand the concept of youth subcultures. If the reader has understood about the concept, they will have critical thinking and not simply underestimate the subculture just because they have different attitude from the society around them. The reader might also understand that the emerging of subculture is the reflection of society where we live.

I conducted this study based on the subculture that emerged in England. This study is not intended to be a conclusive study of skinhead subculture as a whole, because this study has a limitation. This study is based on the film, so it might not give a thorough picture about skinhead as subculture. If some researchers make inquires to analyze further about subculture through film, I would suggest that the future study is analyze deeper about individual’s story why they join some subculture or the study can be about the idea of masculinity in the subculture, since many subcultures are dominated by man.

Through this study, I also hope that there are further studies that analyze other subculture in other countries besides America or England, particularly in Indonesia which is known as multiethnic country. Indonesia might have some subcultures that emerged due to the social condition. This would be an important goal for the future studies about subculture. In one hand, the study of subculture is to see that different social condition in another country could affect how the subculture is emerge. In other hand, the study can be a tool to prevent
negative attitude and actions from the oppressed people. Since I believe that there are many subcultures around the world that might need to explore further
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