

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In our daily lives, we as human beings listen to music. Based on Hornby's (2015) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition* music is "Sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant or exciting to listen to." (p. 1019). Music is composed by musicians and distributed physically as well as broadcast digitally to listeners through different media like cassettes, CDs, radio, television or other musical platforms. For media such as CDs and cassettes, a musician makes an album cover in it in order to differentiate his or her work from others.

An album cover is "the front of the outer packaging of a record album, usually decorated and showing its title and the name of the artist" (Collins, n.d.). According to Barker (2017), the artwork in an album cover carries a huge importance of the album's success. Based on *Why Is Artwork So Important?* article on Horus Music (2017), despite the fact that an album cover is simply a cover, the artwork in the cover is one of the main factors that gives the first impression for the

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potential listeners before purchasing or listening to the music. Holly (2018) argues that the first impression reflected in the album is the central to its success.

According to Bolot (2019), the artwork in the album cover creates strong visual association with the musician's personal belief. One of the personal beliefs is racism. This is the element that is discussed in this thesis. According to ADL (n.d.), racism is "The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people". The kind of racism that is discussed in this thesis is racism that occurs in America which is internalized racism. According to Williams (2020), internalized racism is the type of racism that happens in personal level. He also adds that this type of racism is usually showed by feelings of superiority or inferiority, entitlement or exclusion towards a different race or culture. Based on Pollard and O'Hare's (1999) *America's Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, racial and ethnics that are considered to be minorities in America are African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Indians as the Native Americans. Among all the ethnic minorities that are stated above, the one that will be discussed in this thesis is African-American. Particularly, the topic of this thesis is racism towards African-American as reflected in Johnny Rebel's album cover.

Johnny Rebel is an American Country singer, songwriter, and musician. He is renowned for being openly racist. He shows his racism through his open support towards the white supremacy, the genocide of African-Americans, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) organization (Pittman, 2003). Based on ADL's (n.d.) article White

Supremacy, white-supremacy is the term that is used to characterize belief system that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races. Based on The Ku Klux Klan article in National Geographic (2020), KKK is a domestic terrorist organization founded shortly after the United States Civil War ended. This organization is notoriously known for its intimidation, violence, and murder towards African-American in order to maintain the white supremacy.

The reason why Johnny Rebel's album covers was chosen to be analysed is due to their many blatant signs that represent racism and white-supremacy belief within. I believe by analysing those signs, I could find the deeper meaning which could uncover more of the racism and white supremacy concept behind those signs. In this thesis, two album covers of Johnny Rebel were analysed since they all vividly present racism and white supremacy within. The albums are *It's the Attitude, Stupid!* which was released in 2003 and *It's the Attitude, Stupid!* re-released version which was released in 2006. The reason why I choose those two album covers is because those album covers are the only Johnny Rebel album covers which has many signs that represent racism and white supremacy while the others do not.

Semiotics was applied in analysing the two album covers deeply. According to Taylor (2015), Semiotics is the study of sign systems. It explores how words and other signs make meaning. In Semiotics, a sign is anything that stands in for something other than itself. Specifically, the theory which is used in this thesis is

Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic theory. According to Saussure (1983, p. 66), Linguistics is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept (signified) and a sound pattern (signifier). Saussure's theory analyses the sign in the form of a Dyadic model which consists of signifier and signified (Chandler, 2007, p. 14). Signifier is any material thing that signifies something such as words on a page, a facial expression, an image, while signified is the concept that a signifier refers to (Lanir, 2019).

Therefore, the significance of this study is to make people aware that an album cover may function more than simply an attention grabber. The album cover can represent the musician's belief, which may somehow be dangerous like those of Johnny Rebel's since they are related to racist symbols and prejudice towards the African-Americans.

(850 Words)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, there are several problems arising from this study, those are:

1. What are the signifiers and signified found in Johnny Rebel's album covers?
2. How do the signified in Johnny Rebel's album covers reveal the concept of racism towards the African-Americans?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the aims of this study can be formulated as follows:

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1. To find out the signifiers and signified found in Johnny Rebel's album covers.
2. To find out how the signified in Johnny Rebel's album covers reveal racism.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is Chapter One, which presents Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two presents Literature Review, which describes Saussure's Semiotics and the previous studies. Chapter Three is Methods of Research which consists of Research Design, Data Collection Technique, Framework for Analysis, and an example of data analysis. Chapter Four presents Analysis of Racism in Johnny Rebel's Album Covers. Chapter Five is Conclusion, which is used to give the concluding remarks of this thesis and followed by Bibliography and Appendices.