

**SOCIAL CONFLICT AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN COLSON  
WHITEHEAD'S *THE NICKEL BOYS***

**THESIS**

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM  
MALANG  
2023**

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WHITEHEAD'S *THE NICKEL BOYS***

**THESIS**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled “**Social Conflict and Social Change in Colson Whitehead’s *The Nickel Boys***” is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, excepted those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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## APPROVAL SHEET

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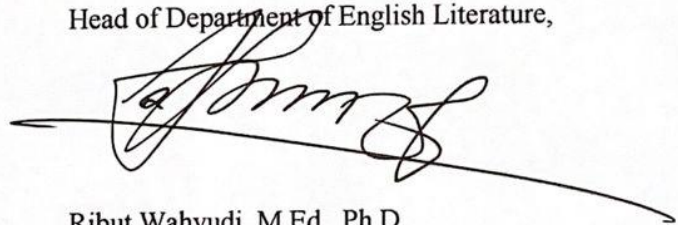
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## **MOTTO**

***“La yukallifullahu nafsan illa wus’aha”***

(Allah does not require of any soul more than what it can afford)

(Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 286)

***“Fa inna ma’al-usri yusra. Inna ma’al-‘usri yusra”***

(For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.

Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease)

(Q.S. Al-Insyirah: 5-6)

**“Push yourself, because no one else is going to do it for you”**

**“It’s not easy, but it’s not impossible”**

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is proudly dedicated to:

My beloved mother, Pujiati, always supports, advises, and prays for me, without  
her I am nothing,

My beloved father, Alm. Kasiman, who has always been my encouragement and  
wants to see me graduate from this university,

My whole family, who always keep supporting me,

I, myself, Wahyu Agustin Azizah, who has done her best to finish this thesis, you  
did very well and made it through,

And for those who are in difficult times, stay strong, this too shall pass, and you  
will get what you are fighting for.

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Malang, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Wahyu Agustin Azizah

## ABSTRACT

**Azizah, Wahyu Agustin.** (2023). *Social Conflict and Social Change in Colson Whitehead's The Nickel Boys*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Dr. Hj. Istiadah, M.A.

*Keywords: Social Conflict, Social Change, Nickel Academy, Ralf Dahrendorf*

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Social conflict is a common phenomenon in everyday life. Basically, social conflict occurs because of differences in interests between the two groups. As a result, this triggers the emergence of social change in society. Not only in real life but conflict can also be represented in literary works, such as in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. The novel tells about the social conflicts that occur in black and white US society, especially at the Nickel Academy. Furthermore, this study aims to determine the form and impact of social conflict on social change in the novel. This research is included in literary criticism, which uses the sociology of literature approach by applying Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. The data in this study were taken from the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead, which was published in 2019 by Doubleday, US. Research data were analyzed by identifying, classifying, interpreting, and making conclusions. This research resulted in two findings. First, the social conflict in the novel is represented through several acts of discrimination that occur at Nickel Academy. This social conflict occurred as a result of differences in interests and goals between groups in the social structure there, namely the Nickel Academy staff group, which has the above social structure (superordinate group) and the Nickel Academy student group, which has the lower social structure (subordinate group). Second, the social conflict that occurs in the novel has an impact on social change which is related to the social structure that exists in the Nickel Academy. This change is represented by the removal of the social structure that was there by the US government.

## مستخلص البحث

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الكلمات الأساسية: الصراع الاجتماعي ، التغيير الاجتماعي ، أكاديمية نيكل ، *Ralf Dahrendorf*

الصراع الاجتماعي ظاهرة تحدث عادة في حياة الناس. في الأساس ، يحدث الصراع الاجتماعي بسبب الاختلافات في المصالح بين المجموعتين. نتيجة لذلك ، يؤدي هذا إلى ظهور التغيير الاجتماعي في المجتمع. ليس فقط في الحياة الواقعية ، ولكن يمكن أيضاً تمثيل الصراع الاجتماعي في الأعمال الأدبية ، مثل رواية *The Nickel Boys* للكاتب *Colson Whitehead*. تحكي الرواية عن الصراعات الاجتماعية التي تحدث في المجتمع الأمريكي بالأبيض والأسود ، وخاصة في أكاديمية نيكل. علاوة على ذلك ، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد شكل وتأثير الصراع الاجتماعي على التغيير الاجتماعي في الرواية. تم تضمين هذا البحث في النقد الأدبي الذي يستخدم نهجاً اجتماعياً من خلال تطبيق نظرية الصراع لـ *Ralf Dahrendorf*. تم أخذ البيانات الواردة في هذه الدراسة من رواية *The Nickel Boys* للكاتب *Colson Whitehead*، والتي نُشرت في عام 2019 من قبل *Doubleday*، الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. تم تحليل بيانات البحث من خلال تحديد وتصنيف وتفسير واستنتاجات. نتج عن هذا البحث نتيجتين. أولاً ، يتم تمثيل الصراع الاجتماعي في الرواية من خلال العديد من أعمال التمييز التي تحدث في أكاديمية نيكل. حدث هذا الصراع الاجتماعي نتيجة للاختلافات في المصالح والأهداف بين المجموعات في الهيكل الاجتماعي هناك ، أي مجموعة موظفي أكاديمية نيكل التي لديها البنية الاجتماعية المذكورة أعلاه (المجموعة الفائقة) ومجموعة طلاب أكاديمية نيكل التي لديها بنية اجتماعية أقل (المجموعة التابعة). ثانيًا ، الصراع الاجتماعي الذي يحدث في الرواية له تأثير على التغيير الاجتماعي المرتبط بالبنية الاجتماعية الموجودة في أكاديمية نيكل. يتمثل هذا التغيير في إزالة البنية الاجتماعية التي كانت موجودة من قبل حكومة الولايات المتحدة.

## ABSTRAK

**Azizah, Wahyu Agustin.** (2023). *Konflik Sosial dan Perubahan Sosial dalam Novel The Nickel Boys karya Colson Whitehead*. Skripsi. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing: Dr. Hj. Istiadah, M.A.

*Kata Kunci: Konflik Sosial, Perubahan Sosial, Akademi Nickel, Ralf Dahrendorf*

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Konflik sosial merupakan fenomena yang biasa terjadi dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Pada dasarnya, konflik sosial terjadi karena adanya perbedaan kepentingan diantara dua kelompok. Akibatnya, hal tersebut memicu timbulnya perubahan sosial dalam masyarakat. Tak hanya dalam kehidupan nyata, namun konflik sosial juga dapat direpresentasikan dalam karya sastra, seperti dalam novel *The Nickel Boys* karya Colson Whitehead. Novel tersebut menceritakan tentang konflik sosial yang terjadi didalam masyarakat kulit hitam dan putih AS, khususnya di Akademi Nickel. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bentuk dan dampak konflik sosial pada perubahan sosial dalam novel. Penelitian ini termasuk dalam kritik sastra yang menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi sastra dengan menerapkan teori konflik Ralf Dahrendorf. Data dalam penelitian ini diambil dari novel *The Nickel Boys* karya Colson Whitehead, yang dipublikasikan tahun 2019 oleh penerbit Doubleday, AS. Data penelitian dianalisis dengan melakukan identifikasi, klasifikasi, interpretasi, dan membuat kesimpulan. Penelitian ini menghasilkan dua temuan. Pertama, konflik sosial dalam novel direpresentasikan melalui beberapa tindakan diskriminasi yang terjadi di Akademi Nickel. Konflik sosial tersebut terjadi akibat adanya perbedaan kepentingan dan tujuan diantara kelompok dalam stuktur sosial disana, yaitu kelompok staf Akademi Nickel yang memiliki struktur sosial diatas (kelompok superordinat) dan kelompok siswa Akademi Nickel yang memiliki struktur sosial dibawah (kelompok subordinat). Kedua, konflik sosial yang terjadi dalam novel berdampak pada perubahan sosial yang mana berhubungan dengan struktur sosial yang ada di Akademi Nickel. Perubahan tersebut direpresentasikan dengan adanya penghilangan struktur sosial yang ada disana oleh pemerintah AS.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The following chapter will explain the background of study, problems of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and definition of key terms.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

Social conflict is a common phenomenon in people's lives. Social conflict refers to conflicts that occur in groups of individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and people. Not only that, but social conflict also refers to interactions between parties that tend to cause damage, loss, or injury in achieving their goals (Oberschall, 1978). This conflict can only be resolved in a certain way according to the problems that occur. Furthermore, according to Coser (in Oberschall, 1978), social conflict is a scramble for values or claims to position, power, and rare assets, which has several purposes, such as obtaining desired value and neutralizing, injuring, or eliminating rivals.

The term "social conflict" consists of a combination of two words, namely social and conflict. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term "social" is defined as a term used to describe interactions between people as members of society. As social beings, humans cannot live alone. Therefore, humans must have a relationship or interaction with each other to meet the needs of their lives. It is based on the relationship of a group of people who gather in an equation of different races or ethnicities (Doda in Azizah, 2020). Meanwhile,

according to Ralf Dahrendorf, the term “conflict” can be interpreted as “the inequality of power and authority which inevitably accompanies social organizations” (Dahrendorf in Guclu, 2014: 152). According to him, this inequality of power and authority can lead to social conflicts in society.

Moreover, social conflicts that occur often have an impact on people’s lives. One of the impacts of social conflict is the occurrence of social change in society. According to Rogers and Shoemaker (in Siregar & Zulkarnain, 2022) social change is a process in which there is a change in the structure and function of a social system. Every element in society itself contributes to social change. It is because every society is always in a process of change that never ends. So, it can be said that social change is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from the life of every element in society (Siregar & Zulkarnain, 2022). Furthermore, this change has an impact on various aspects of the social system in society. Some of these changes occur in values, social attitudes, and patterns of behavior between groups in society (Soemardjan & Soemardi, 1974).

Ralf Dahrendorf is one of the sociologists who put forward conflict theory. In his theory, Dahrendorf focuses more on social facts and broader social structures (Dahrendorf, 1959). It is because conflict arises through social relationships involving connected individuals or groups. Dahrendorf’s theory explains that relationships in a social structure are determined by power and authority. Authority comes from people’s position in the social structure, while power comes from within the individual (Dahrendorf, 1959). It means that those



with power and authority can give orders and profit from those who do not. With this gap, there will be two groups that are always at odds. Conflict occurs when groups with authority try to defend it, while groups that do not have it try to find it (Dahrendorf, 1959). In the end, this leads to conflict and social change.

Furthermore, social conflict and social change can not only be seen directly in people's lives, but can also be seen in the form of literary works, such as novels. In the novel, the author can represent social conflicts and social changes that occur in society at a certain time into his or her work. One example of such a novel is a novel by Colson Whitehead entitled *The Nickel Boys* which was first published in 2019. This novel relates to real events that occurred at the Dozier School for Boys in Florida, United States. It was a reform school that had been operating for 111 years whose history was revealed by university investigations.

*The Nickel Boys* is one of the masterpieces of author Colson Whitehead which describes the social conflicts that occur in black and white US society. In addition, the novel also describes the social changes that occur as a result of the social conflict. This novel is very interesting to be analyzed because it represents the life of the black minority group among the white majority group. In this novel, there is a social structure in society where the white group (superordinate group) is considered to be the ruler among the black group (subordinate group). As a result, this led to conflict between the two groups of people, where white people tried to maintain their status while black people tried to create social change.

Furtherore, this novel is mainly set in The Nickel Reformatory School or also known as Nickel Academy. It tells the story of the life journey of a black young man, Curtis Elwood, who wants and tries to fight for civil rights. Unfortunately, he was fallaciously sentenced to attend Nickel Academy. There, he found several irregularities, such as racial discrimination against black people. It happens due to the social structure that is applied there, where the Nickel Academy staffs (superordinate group) has a social structure above the students (subordinate group). As a result, it made Nickel's staff the rulers and the students had to submit to them. However, they did not enforce the same rules between white and black students. They even carried out acts of racial discrimination against black students because they were considered a subordinate group in that country. The story then focuses on the life struggles of Elwood and his friends during and after leaving Nickel Academy. Then, in accordance with the things above, this study uses Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory to analyze the social conflicts and social changes that occur in the novel entitled *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead.

In this study, the researcher used several previous studies which had the same research object. Some of these studies use a psychological approach. In the studies conducted by Zahra & Rabbani (2022); and Bashir, Aurangzeb, & Bibi (2022), they both studied *The Nickel Boys* by identifying the effects of racism on black Americans. The results of both studies show that acts of racism have an impact on the lives of male and female protagonists, and traumatizes them. While the research conducted by Hopkins (2020) examines different things from the two

studies above, but still uses the same approach, namely psychology. In his research, Hopkins examines the character of Elwood in *The Nickel Boys* to compare it with the journey of the hero Joseph Campbell. The results of the study show that Elwood's story does represent the journey of Joseph Campbell or monomyth.

Furthermore, several other studies also use *The Nickel Boys* as the object of research. Some of these studies use a sociological approach, as in the research conducted by Putra (2020); Kpohoue, Azon, & Ahouangansi (2020); and Strickland (2021) that both analyzed racist discrimination by institutions against black people in the US. The results of both studies show that racial discrimination does occur in *The Nickel Boys*, especially those carried out by institutions. According to the study, Colson Whitehead uses his novel to describe the atrocities against black Americans represented by the Nickel Reform School as an institution. In the end, it affects the actions of black people who experience acts of racial discrimination.

In addition, there are also previous studies that use the same theory as this research, namely Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. For example, in research conducted by Alkana (2022), Dewi (2020), Putri (2018), and Cahyati & Subandiyah (2022). The four studies both use Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory as a theoretical framework but use different research objects. The four studies examine the causes, categories, and types of social conflict, as well as the concepts of Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. The results of the study show that

there are two factors that cause social conflict, namely the background of the conflict and the efforts of each group in each novel to become a conflict group, while the categories of conflict are exogenous conflict and endogenous conflict. There are four types of conflicts that occur, which occur between groups. Furthermore, there are four conflict theory concepts found in these studies, namely conflict and consensus, power and authority, groups involved in the conflict, and conflict and social change.

Based on the previous studies mentioned above, the researcher realizes that there are aspects that have never been studied in *The Nickel Boys* novel, especially in the study of sociological literary criticism. One of these aspects is the social conflict and social change contained in the novel. It is interesting to study because the novel discusses some of the social conflicts and social changes that occurred in the Nickel Reform School, especially those experienced by black Americans. In accordance with this topic and previous studies, this study uses Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory to examine the social conflicts and social changes in the story. Thus, this research is expected to be able to bridge the previous studies by conducting more in-depth research on *The Nickel Boys* novel, especially in the field of social conflict and social change.

## **B. Problems of the Study**

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulated several problems, such as:

1. What are the social conflicts represented in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*?

2. What are the impacts of social conflict on social change in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*?

### **C. Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to help other researchers, students, and readers theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is expected to be able to advance the understanding of how to do literary criticism, especially in studying literary works using Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. Practically, this research is expected to be an alternative means to increase knowledge in the sociology of literature, such as being used as a reference for other researchers who conduct research on the same topic using Ralf Dahrendorf's theory. Furthermore, the researcher expected that this research can be useful and provide insight to readers regarding the study of social conflict and social change in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead.

### **D. Scope and Limitation**

In this study, researchers studied a novel entitled *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. Furthermore, this study discusses the novel using concepts in Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. This research will focus on examining social conflict and social change in the novel *The Nickel Boys*, especially those that occur at Nickel Academy. Furthermore, even though discrimination is the main social conflict in the novel, the characters in the novel are divided into two groups. First, the superordinate group, namely the Nickel staff, who act as rulers. Second, the subordinate group, namely Nickel students, who played the role of

being controlled, where it was split into two groups, namely black and white students.

## **E. Definition of Key Terms**

### **1. Social Conflict**

Conflict that occurs in a collection of individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and people, who tend to cause damage, loss, or injury in achieving their goals (Oberschall, 1978).

### **2. Social Change**

The process in which there is a change in the structure and function of a social system in society Rogers and Shoemaker (in Siregar & Zulkarnain, 2022). It has an impact on changes in values, social attitudes, and patterns of behavior between groups in society (Soemardjan & Soemardi, 1974).

### **3. Ralf Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory**

It focuses on social facts and social structure broadly, which explains that relationships in a social structure are determined by power and authority (Dahrendorf, 1959).

### **4. Two Faces of Society (Conflict and Consensus)**

The concept of Dahrendorf's conflict theory which states that society consists of two faces, namely conflict and consensus. According to him, society cannot exist without these two things, in which there will be no conflict unless there is consensus beforehand (Dahrendorf, 1959).

## **5. Power and Authority**

The concept of Dahrendorf's conflict theory which states that relations in a social structure are determined by power and authority. Authority comes from the position of society in the social structure, while power comes from within the individual (Dahrendorf, 1959).

## **6. Groups Involved in the Conflict**

The concept of Dahrendorf's conflict theory which states that groups involved in conflict are divided into two, namely quasi-groups that do not have a clear structure and interest groups that have a clear structure (Dahrendorf, 1959).

## **7. Social Conflict and Social Change**

The concept of Dahrendorf's conflict theory which states that there are two factors that influence social change in society, namely exogenous factors that come from outside the community structure and endogenous factors that come from within the community itself (Dahrendorf, 1959).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter will explain the approach and theory applied in this research. It includes explaining sociology of literary criticism and Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory.

#### **A. Sociology of Literary Criticism**

In literary studies, there are several interesting branches, one of which is literary criticism. Literary criticism is a branch of literary studies which considers that the creation of literary works is to pamper the reader through the acuity of taste, aesthetic sensitivity, and understanding of knowledge (Muzakki, 2020). In its study, literary criticism applies certain rules in analyzing literary works (Wiranegara, 2021). Thus, it can be concluded that literary criticism is criticism of literary works carried out by applying literary theory.

Furthermore, to carry out literary criticism, there are several approaches that can be used, such as the sociology of literature approach. Basically, the term sociology of literature consists of a combination of two words, namely sociology and literature. The term "sociology" is defined as a science that discusses people's lives, such as social interactions, norms, ways of life, and others (Dewi, 2020). While the term "literature" is defined as a written work of art that has high artistic value and is sustainable (Wiranegara, 2021). Furthermore, the sociology of literature is defined as an approach that analyzes literary works through social phenomena that exist in people's lives (Wiyatmi, 2013). This approach also



includes literature with social aspects or values, such as human relations and the environment, community structures, and social processes (Azizah & Al Anshory, 2022). Thus, it can be concluded that this approach views literary works are closely related to social aspects in people's lives.

In the sociology of literature, there are several types of interrelated approaches. Wellek and Warren, in their book *Theory of Literature* (1994), suggest that there are three approaches in the sociology of literature (Wiyatmi, 2013), namely: the sociology of authors, the sociology of literary works, and the sociology of readers. The sociology of the author is a type of approach that pays attention to the author as the creator of literary works. In this study, researchers can look at several aspects of the author of a literary work, such as social status, social ideology, socio-cultural background, social position in society, the target audience, livelihood, and professionalism in writing. Furthermore, the sociology of literary works is a type of approach that examines the relationship of literary works with phenomena or social problems that exist in society. In this study, researchers can examine the content, objectives, and matters in literary works related to social problems; literature as a reflection of people's lives; and literature as a document of a society in a certain period. Moreover, the sociology of the reader is a type of approach that pays attention to the relationship between literary works and readers. So, in this study, researchers can analyze the problem of readers and the social influence of literary works; the extent to which literary works are based on social settings, changes, and social developments; and the extent to which literary values relate to social values.

Based on the several approaches mentioned above, this study will use one of them, namely the sociology of literature. This approach examines literary works as a reflection of people's lives, including the relationships between humans and the social institutions that cover them. It also analyze literary works related to social phenomena that occur in community. In other words, it assumes that what is implied in literary works is considered to reflect or redefine the reality contained in society, such as processes and problems or social phenomena in it (Wiyatmi, 2013).

### **B. Conflict Theory by Ralf Dahrendorf**

Conflict is a social phenomenon that is closely related to people's lives. Conflict will always exist in every space and time because conflict is inherent (Basid & Sari, 2018). Conflicts occur due to several factors, such as distinctions in character, distinctions in power between individuals, and economic distinctions (Basid et al., 2019). In addition, because there are no human beings who have exact similarities, such as in terms of ethnicity, interests, goals, and so on, it can also lead to conflicts in society. Therefore, it can be said that conflict cannot be separated from people's lives because of the differences that exist.

The term conflict is etymologically derived from the Latin *con*, which means together and *fligire*, which means collision. Thus, it can be said that conflict is a conflict of interest, desire, opinion, and others that occur in the social life of the community (Azizah & Al Anshory, 2022). Basically, social conflicts that occur in society have the same goal. They both want to gain power over the

other party (Basid et al., 2019). It is because individuals or groups who have power can do things freely in society.

Social conflict itself is a conflict that occurs in a collection of individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and people, which tend to cause damage, loss, or injury in achieving their goals. This conflict occurs due to differences regarding interests and goals between groups. The two groups compete with each other to achieve their respective goals. In the process, this conflict often occurs in the form of violent disputes and competition, such as civil wars, parliamentary debates, strikes, negotiations, and so on (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, the conflict triggers social change in society. Some examples include changes in values, social attitudes, and patterns of behavior between groups in society (Soemardjan & Soemardi, 1974).

One of the socts who proposed conflict theory was Ralf Dahrendorf. Basically, Dahrendorf's conflict theory starts from the perspective of Karl Marx regarding social class. He explained this much in his book entitled *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959). In this theory, Dahrendorf pays attention to social facts and broader social structures (Dahrendorf, 1959). Thus, it can be said that society consists of various social positions that have different authorities. According to Dahrendorf, relations in the social structure are determined by power and authority (Dahrendorf, 1959). In the concept of power, he uses Max Weber's definition which states that power is the role of the individual in social relations that allows him to do something of his own free will despite opposition from others. Furthermore, Dahrendorf uses Herrschaft's

opinion which states that authority is an individual role that allows an order to be obeyed by a certain group of people (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Furthermore, Dahrendorf stated that there is a significant difference between power and authority. He argues that power comes from within the individual, while authority comes from a position or role in the social structure (Dahrendorf, 1959). Thus, it can be said that power is only limited to factual relations. On the other hand, authority is a legitimate relationship of domination and conquest. In this case, authority can be referred to as legitimate power (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, authority is also closely related to the relationship between the group possessing power (superordinate) and the group being controlled (subordinate). It makes the superordinate group have the power or authority to control, give orders, or prohibit the subordinate group (Dahrendorf, 1959). Thus, when the subordinate group does not comply with the orders that have been given, they may be subject to sanctions by the superordinate group. In the end, there will always be conflict and social change because of this difference in authority, where the superordinate group tries to maintain the status quo while the subordinate group tries to create change (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Furthermore, Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory is divided into four concepts, namely:

### **1. Two Faces of Society (Conflict and Consensus)**

According to Dahrendorf, society consists of two different faces, namely conflict and consensus. He also argues that society cannot exist without these two

in which there can be no conflict unless there is a prior consensus (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, conflict examines the use of coercion and violence in society caused by interests and the use of power. This action aims to maintain the power of the social structure (Dahrendorf, 1959). While the consensus itself examines the value of integration in society because the structure of society is a functionally integrated system and the balance of society is maintained through certain processes. Thus, consensus can create equality of moral values and norms in society which play an important role in the survival and development of society (Dahrendorf in Surbakti, 1992: 150).

## **2. Power and Authority**

Dahrendorf argues that there are differences in the division of power and authority. According to him, power is related to the one's personality, while authority is related to the position of the individual in the social structure of society (Dahrendorf, 1959). In the concept of power, Dahrendorf uses Weber's definition which argues that power is the role of individuals in social relations that allows them to do things of their own accord despite opposition from others. While in the concept of authority, Dahrendorf uses Herrschaft's definition, which argues that authority is an individual role that allows an order to be obeyed by a certain group of people (Dahrendorf, 1959). Thus, it can be said that power is only a factual relationship, while authority is a legitimate relationship of domination and submission, which is ultimately called legitimate authority (Dahrendorf, 1959).

### **3. Groups Involved in the Conflict**

According to Dahrendorf, groups involved in the conflict are divided into two. The first is a quasi-group, which is a group of people who do not have a structure but have the same way of behaving. The second is the interest group, which is a group of people who have a clear program, purpose, and structure (Malinowski in Dahrendorf, 1959). The formation of the two conflicting groups is based on group interests whereas quasi-groups have hidden interests. The purpose of their interests is determined by ownership or lack of ownership (Dewi, 2020). Furthermore, from this quasi-group, interest groups were formed to defend or attack the legality of the authority structure that emerged. In the end, the two groups came into conflict.

### **4. Social Conflict and Social Change**

The existence of social conflict does have an important influence on social processes. It is in accordance with one of the concepts of Dahrendorf's conflict theory discussed earlier, namely conflict and consensus. Consensus contributes to the integrity of the social system, while social conflict can cause social changes in people's lives (Dahrendorf, 1959: 206). Thus, it can be said that social conflict does not only play a role in creating stable social relations but also has negative impacts, such as the breaking of consensus between groups and the existence of conflicting values of interests between groups. Based on this, Dahrendorf argues that social conflict has positive and negative impacts on social changes that occur in society (Dahrendorf, 1959).

The social change referred to by Dahrendorf focuses on structural changes that can come from within or outside the structure of society. According to Dahrendorf, there are two factors that influence social change in society, namely exogenous and endogenous (Dahrendorf, 1959). Exogenous factors are factors that come from outside the structure of society. It was generated through military conquest and deliberate intervention into existing social structures, but can also be the result of cultural diffusion that is not accompanied by military or political force (Dahrendorf, 1959). While endogenous factors are factors that come from within the group itself. It is due to social changes between organized groups or between representatives of the disorganized masses.

Furthermore, these structural changes are things that play an important role in social conflict. According to Dahrendorf, there are at least three ways to carry out structural change, namely: total change, partial change, and structural change through class conflict (Dahrendorf, 1959). Total change is a change in personnel from a dominant position in a group as a whole. Furthermore, partial change is the change of some personnel from a dominant position which tends to signify evolutionary rather than revolutionary change. On the other hand, structural changes through class conflict are changes that do not involve personnel exchanges because the changes do not allow anyone from a subordinate position to be in a dominant position.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this chapter, the researcher will describe how the researcher investigates the novel. It consists of an explanation of the research design, data sources, how the data were obtained, and how the researcher analyzed literary works.

#### **A. Research Design**

This study is a literary criticism, which is used as an analytical framework. The researcher uses the sociology of literature approach by applying the conflict theory designed by Ralf Dahrendorf as the theoretical framework. By applying this theory, researchers can examine the social conflicts and social changes that occur in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*.

#### **B. Data Source**

The source of data in this study was obtained from a novel entitled *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. This novel was first published in 2019 by the publisher Doubleday, United States. Sources of data in this study are presented in the form of quotations, which include words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues. The data were obtained from the novel *The Nickel Boys*, which deals with social conflict and social change.

#### **C. Data Collection**

In this study, the researcher went through several steps to collect data. It begins with reading and understanding the novel as a whole to understand the storyline. Then, the researcher reread the novel to find out the overall storyline



and find data related to social conflict and social change in the novel. Next, the researcher make notes and highlight the data found; and collect all the data that has been found.

#### **D. Data Analysis**

The researcher took several steps in analyzing the data in this study. After getting the data collection, the researcher identified and classified the data based on the concept of social conflict and social change. Furthermore, the data analyzed using the conflict theory designed by Ralf Dahrendorf. After carrying out these steps, the researcher draw research conclusions.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter represents the analysis and answers to research problems through findings and discussion. These findings and discussions are related to social conflict and change represented in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* novel. It is divided into two parts, namely: 1) social conflict represented in the novel, and 2) the impact of social conflict on social change in the novel.

#### **A. Social Conflict Represented in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys***

According to Dahrendorf (1959), there are four concepts in conflict theory, namely two faces of society (conflict and consensus), power and authority, groups involved in the conflict, and social conflict and social change. In discussing social conflict, the researcher finds several findings that are in accordance with the three concepts of Dahrendorf's conflict theory, namely two faces of society (conflict and consensus), power and authority, and the groups involved in the conflict.

Basically, the social conflict represented in the novel occurs due to differences regarding interests and goals between groups in a social structure. In the novel, there is a social structure that is enforced at Nickel Academy, namely the group of Nickel Academy staff who have the social structure above (superordinate group) and the group of Nickel Academy students who have the social structure below (subordinate group). The superordinate group is the power owner group, while the subordinate group is the group controlled by the power owner. The two groups compete with each other to achieve their own goals, such

as gaining power and authority over the other. Furthermore, this results in two groups that have opposite positions, namely the group that has power (superordinate) and the group that is controlled (subordinate) (Dahrendorf, 1959).

### **1. Two Faces of Society (Conflict and Consensus)**

In Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory, there are four interconnected concepts. At the first level, there is the concept of two faces of society. According to Dahrendorf (1959), this concept consists of two parts, namely conflict and consensus.

#### **a. Conflict**

In this section, it is shown that there is a social conflict that occurs between the characters in the novel *The Nickel Boys*. The conflict is described by the use of coercion and violence in society caused by interests and the use of power (Dahrendorf, 1959). The two groups compete with each other to achieve their respective goals, where the superordinate group tries to maintain the status quo while the subordinate group tries to create change (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, it is found that there are several forms of social conflict that occur in the novel. It happened between groups of Nickel Academy staff against groups of Nickel Academy students, and also among groups of students themselves, namely groups of white and black students. The social conflict between the two groups is illustrated by the act of discrimination committed by the superordinate group against the subordinate group.

In the novel, the social conflict that occurs in white and black society does not only occur in adults. In fact, this conflict has started to occur in children, as was done by Nickel Academy students (white and black students). Basically, it happens because white student groups felt they had power (superordinate) so they often acted arbitrarily against black student groups (subordinate). They often make fun of subordinate groups and treat them as they please. It happened like when they bullied the weak. They do this only for their own satisfaction and to gain recognition that they are the ruling group. It is like an act of intimidation carried out by a group of white students, including Lonnie and Black Mike (superordinate group) against a group of black students, including Corey and Elwood (subordinate group).

*“The younger boy being bullied, Corey, was not someone he’d met before. The bullies he’d encountered at his breakfast table: Lonnie with his bulldog face, and his manic partner Black Mike. Elwood went into the first-floor bathroom to urinate, and the taller boys had Corey up against the cracked tile wall. Maybe it was because Elwood didn’t have any goddamned sense, as the Frenchtown boys said. Maybe it was because they were bigger and the other guy was smaller. His lawyer had persuaded the judge to let Elwood spend his last free days at home; there was no one to take him to Nickel that day, and the Tallahassee jail was overcrowded. Perhaps if he’d spent more time in the crucible of the county jail, Elwood would have known that it is best not to interfere in other people’s violence, no matter the underlying facts of the incident.”*

*“Elwood said, ‘Hey,’ and took a step forward. Black Mike spun around, slugged him in the jaw and knocked him back against the sink.”*

*“Another boy, a chuck, opened the bathroom door and yelled, ‘Oh, shit.’ Phil, one of the white housemen, was making the rounds. He had a drowsy way about him and usually pretended not to see what was right in front of his face.” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 37)*

From the quote above, it can be seen that Corey and Elwood belongs to a group of people who are weak and powerless (subordinate group). Thus, they were easily intimidated by Lonnie and Black Mike who considered themselves superordinate group. It shows the social conflict in the novel. It is due to acts of violence committed by power-holding groups, namely Lonnie and Black Mike, to

maintain their power. Seeing themselves as part of the dominant group, Lonnie and Black Mike treat Corey and Elwood lightly. In fact, when Elwood wanted to help Corey, they did not accept it and made Elwood their next target. Even though they did not really know Elwood, they were annoyed because they thought that Elwood was interfering in their affairs with Corey.

Furthermore, the people at the Nickel Reform School seemed indifferent to what was happening, even if it was violence. It was proven by the indifference of the people there when they learned about the acts of violence committed by Lonnie and Black Mike against Corey and Elwood. People there tend not to interfere in other people's problems even though they know the truth. They prefer to pretend they do not know anything rather than get into conflict with other people, especially with the superordinate group. It is because dominant people have power and they tend to get violent when someone else bothers them. Therefore, those people preferred to avoid and not interfere even if the incident happened before their eyes.

Furthermore, as a result of this conflict, it led to another social conflict that occurred between the Nickel staff group and the student group. It is because Spencer and Earl, Nickel Academy staff, know the social conflict between these students. As a result of this incident, Spencer, as Nickel's superintendent, gave the students punishment. Unfortunately, Spencer's punishment crossed the threshold. He even physically abused them by beating them. It is what happened in the following quote:

*“Spencer and Earl took Black Mike in first. Spencer said, ‘Thought you’d be done after last time.’”*

*“Earl said, ‘Piss himself again.’”*

*“The roar began: an even gale. Elwood’s chair vibrated with energy. He couldn’t figure out what it was—some sort of machine—but it was loud enough to cover Black Mike’s screams and the smack of the strap on his body. Halfway through, Elwood started counting, on the theory that if he knew how much the other boys got, he’d know how much he’d get. Unless there was a higher system to how many each boy got: repeat offender, instigator, bystander. No one had asked Elwood for his side of the story, that he was trying to break up the fight in the bathroom—but maybe he’d get less for stepping in. He counted up to twenty-eight before the beating stopped and they dragged Black Mike out to one of the cars.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.40)*

The quote above shows that Spencer and Earl, as a group of Nickel Academy staff, committed acts of physical violence in the form of beatings. They performed the act on a group of Nickel students, including Lonnie, Black Mike, Elwood, and Corey. Even though the students were involved in rioting, Spencer should be able to choose the right punishment for them. In fact, the act of violence that he did was not the right solution to the punishment of the students. He should have been wiser in choosing the type of punishment given to students so that they would feel deterred. It is because physical violence can not only physically injure students, but can also traumatize them.

Based on the explanation above, it shows the existence of the social conflict that occurs at Nickel Academy. It is because the subordinate group (students) experienced acts of violence due to the use of power by the superordinate group (Nickel Academy staff) (Dahrendorf, 1959). Apart from that, the discussion above also shows that students are forced to obey the policies of the owner or Nickel Academy staff. In the end, it shows that the position of the subordinate group is always marginalized by the superordinate group, so that it can trigger social conflict.

Not only that, but Spencer, as Nickel's staff, also committed other acts of violence. As if he did not realize his mistake at the time, he repeated his actions to another student, namely Elwood. It was like what happened when Elwood tried to reveal the truth behind the violence and abuse of authority within Nickel Academy towards the inspection officers who came there.

*"Elwood's second White House beating was not as severe as the first. Spencer didn't know what damage the boy's letter had caused—who else had read it, who cared, what sort of repercussions roiled down in the capitol .... He gave the boy twenty licks then, distracted, handed Black Beauty to Hennepin for the first time .... Hennepin beat the boy briefly before Spencer stayed his hand. There was no telling what was happening in Tallahassee. They took the boy to the dark cell." (Whitehead, 2019, p. 121-122)*

It shows that the punishment of physical violence has become a culture there. As one of Nickel Academy's staff, Spencer has the authority to give punishment to students. Unfortunately, Spencer always gave corporal punishment to students. Like his actions above, he ordered one of his subordinates, Hennepin, to beat Elwood using a whip called Black Beauty. He did this because Elwood's actions were considered to threaten Nickel Academy's well-built reputation. In fact, the various abuses of authority and acts of violence that exist at Nickel Academy are true. In addition, this is also not in accordance with applicable law. Therefore, it can cause social conflict in society.

Based on this, it can be seen that the quote represents social conflict. It was due to acts of violence committed by the superordinate group (Nickel staff) against the subordinate group (student). It happens due to the use of power by the superordinate group in order to achieve their interests. In the end, it can be said

that the subordinate group uses their power by committing acts of violence so that the superordinate group can obey their orders.

The social conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy was not only perpetrated by Spencer and Earl against the students but also by other staff. It was done by the former director of Nickel Academy and one of the psychologists who worked there. The incident occurred as in the quote below:

*“He possessed a fervent belief in the miracle of a human specimen in top shape and often watched the boys shower to monitor the progress of their physical education.”*

*“‘The director?’ Elwood asked when Turner told him that last part.”*

*“‘Where do you think Dr. Campbell got that trick from?’ Turner said. Nickel was gone, but Dr. Campbell, the school psychologist, was known to loiter at the white boys’ showers to pick his dates. ‘All these dirty old men got a club together.’” (Whitehead, 2019, p.62)*

Based on the quotation above, it can be seen that there is social conflict in the form of sexual harassment. It was experienced by Nickel Academy students. The harassment was perpetrated by Trevor Nickel, former director of the Nickel Academy, and Dr. Campbell, school psychologist. It they do when the students are taking a bath. Under the pretext of monitoring the progress of the students’ physical education, Trevor Nickel often saw students taking a shower. Unlike Nickel, Dr. Campbell wanders through the student bathrooms picking his dates. Nickel and Dr. Campbell showed that they sexually abused students for their own interests, that is, to satisfy their lust. Based on this, it shows that there is social conflict in Nickel Academy. Even though there was no physical violence, the act was included in sexual violence. It is in accordance with Dahrendorf’s statement (1959), where social conflict is described by the use of violence in society caused by the interests and use of power of subordinate groups.



Not only the things above, but there are other social conflicts within Nickel Academy. This conflict is the biggest social conflict that happened there, namely murder. It occurred between the Nickel student group and the Nickel staff group. It happened at a time when Nickel's students, Elwood and Turner, wanted to escape from there. It is as in the following quote:

*Turner zagged and put his head down as if he could duck buckshot. Can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man. He looked back again as Harper pulled the trigger. Elwood's arms went wide, hands out, as if testing the solidity of the walls of a long corridor, one he had traveled through for a long time and which possessed no visible terminus. He stumbled forward two steps and fell into the grass." (Whitehead, 2019, p. 127-128)*

The quote shows that there is social conflict in the form of murder committed by Nickel's staff, namely Harper and Hennepin. They did that to Elwood and Turner, who tried to escape Nickel Academy. At that time, Elwood and Turner wanted to run away from there because Turner had heard that Elwood would be killed by Spencer. So, he asked Elwood to run away from there. However, their plan was discovered by Nickel's staff, so the staff looked for them to stop them. Unfortunately, only Turner managed to escape at that time, while Elwood was killed by Nickel's staff shot.

Based on this, it shows the existence of social conflict there. It was shown by the acts of violence in the form of murders committed by Nickel's staff towards students. In accordance with Dahrendorf's statement (1959), social conflict is related to acts of violence committed by the superordinate group (Nickel Academy staff) against the subordinate group (Nickel Academy students). Therefore, it can be concluded that the act of violence in the form of murder is part of a social conflict.

## **b. Consensus**

Consensus is closely related to social conflict. It is following the statement of Dahrendorf (1959), which states that there will be no conflict unless there is prior consensus. So, it can be said that consensus is needed to prevent conflict. Furthermore, in the novel, there is a consensus before the occurrence of social conflicts, such as an agreement between the school board. They made the agreement to avoid social conflict, as in the following quote:

*“All those guys on the school board, they have us do chores.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.56)*

The quote shows that there is a consensus among all members of the school board. They agreed that Nickel students had to do assignments or work while at Nickel Academy. It includes work done inside Nickel, such as work in Nickel farms, printers, and brick factories; or outside Nickel, such as peonage. Here, it can be said that the consensus was made to avoid social conflicts in the future, as Dahrendorf (1959) said. So, with this consensus, it can avoid social conflicts with students regarding the workload they have to do. In addition, it also makes the conditions there more peaceful because there are no disputes between the school board members and the students.

## **2. Power and Authority**

Furthermore, the second level of Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory concept is power and authority. Dahrendorf (1959) divides the concept into two parts, namely power and authority.

### a. Power

In this section, it is shown that there is power practiced by the characters in the novel. This power relates to the individual's role in social relations that allows them to do something of their own free will despite opposition from others (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, in this novel, it is found that there is a type of power practiced by the staff of Nickel Academy. Here, the power possessed by the staff of Nickel Academy is used to control student actions. Unfortunately, this power is widely used to discriminate against students, where most of the victims are black students. It happened to Spencer, a superintendent of Nickel Academy, who controlled the actions of Griff, a black student, as in the following quote:

*“Turner sat up in surprise when he heard Spencer tell Griff to take a dive.”  
(Whitehead, 2019, p.63)*

*“Finally the superintendent told Griff that his black ass had to take a dive in the third round or else they'd take him out back.”  
“‘Yes, sir, Mr. Spencer,’ Griff said.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.63)*

The quote above shows Spencer, as a superintendent of Nickel Academy, has power over students. Thus, this allowed him to order Griff to lose the final boxing match with a white student representative. Because of the power he has, he threatens that Griff must follow his orders or else he will be killed. Thus, this made Griff say that he would obey his orders. In fact, Griff actually went against his orders and wanted to win the match. Based on this, it can be seen that it shows the existence of the power. As Dahrendorf (1959) said, the power of an individual allows them to do something of their own free will despite opposition from others. Therefore, it can be stated that Griff agreed to Spencer's orders because Spencer had power and he wanted to avoid social conflict.

## **b. Authority**

In this section, it is shown that there is authority practiced by the characters in the novel *The Nickel Boys*. This authority relates to individual roles that allow an order to be obeyed by a certain group of people (Dahrendorf, 1959). Furthermore, in the novel, it is found that there are four types of authority practiced by the characters in the novel. The four types of authority are authority from the government, authority from the institution, authority from the staff of Nickel Academy, and authority from the police. Here, this authority is described in various forms of action, such as ordering and making decisions. In addition, there are also several authorities that make discriminatory rules against students.

### **1) Authority from the Government**

In the novel, the government's role greatly influences the overall life of the people in the US, including in the Nickel Academy. It is because the government has full authority in the government system and is able to create various rules and laws for the continuity of people's lives. In this case, Dahrendorf (1959) stated that authority can be referred to as legitimate power, which is closely related to the relationship between groups possessing power (superordinate) and groups controlled (subordinate). It makes the superordinate group the authority to control, give orders, or prohibit the subordinate group.

Furthermore, the concept of authority in this novel is represented by the authority of the US government. Here, the US government (superordinate group) has authority over Nickel Academy (subordinate group). Thus, the government

has authority over all matters related to Nickel Academy, including the social conflicts that occur within it. It is what happened in the following quote:

*“Every few decades a newspaper report about embezzlement or physical abuse at the school initiated an investigation by the state .... The administration instituted a stricter accounting of school supplies, which had a tendency to disappear, as well as the profits from the various student businesses, which also liked to disappear.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.107)*

The quote above shows that the US government has the authority to inspect Nickel Academy. It started with reports regarding social conflicts that occurred at Nickel Academy, such as embezzlement and physical violence. As a result of the report, the government began to carry out inspections of the academy. During the inspection, the government found various irregularities, as well as policies and facilities that needed updating. So, they imposed new policies on the academy, such as a ban on physical violence and stricter accounting.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that this shows the authority owned by the US government. Here, the US government has the legal authority to regulate society to avoid social conflict. It is in accordance with the statement of Dahrendorf (1959), where the owner of authority has the authority to control and make orders to society. In the end, this authority made society, including Nickel Academy, subject to orders from the US government and avoid similar social conflicts.

## **2) Authority from the Institution**

In the novel *The Nickel Boys*, most of the story is set in a reform school called Nickel Academy. Thus, the institution plays a major role in the overall storyline. Here, Nickel Academy has various authorities as an official institution

in the US. One of them is the authority for setting sanctions or punishments for students who break the rules. As Dahrendorf (1959) stated, it is because the superordinate group (Nickel Academy) has the authority to control, give orders or prohibit the subordinate group (students). Thus, it makes Nickel Academy have authority over students. One of them is like authority over the type of work to be done by students. It is as in the following quote:

*“Burn the bricks in all these buildings you see here, lay the concrete, take care of all this grass’ .... Nickel’s printing press did all the publishing for the government of Florida, from the tax regulations to the building codes to the parking tickets.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.28)*

*“All those guys on the school board, they have us do chores. Sometimes it’s some bullshit, but I’ll take being out here over any job back at school.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.56)*

The quote above shows that students at Nickel Academy are asked to do various jobs, both inside and outside the academy. In fact, students only need to do the work that is in the academy. On the other hand, work done outside the academy is actually a business in the form of Community Service. It managed by Nickel Academy. Thus, it can be said that the academy opened the business for their benefit only as they earn their income from the work of the students. In fact, it is very controversial and can trigger social conflicts, such as embezzlement of funds by the academy. It is different from the work done within the academy, where the work is done for the state.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that there is authority carried out by Nickel Academy. It is indicated by the existence of orders regarding the division of work that must be carried out by students. As stated by Dahrendorf (1959), authority plays a role in giving orders to subordinate groups,

which are represented by Nickel's students in the novel. In the end, it can be concluded that the authority possessed by Nickel Academy makes students obey orders given, including orders that can trigger social conflict.

Furthermore, there are other forms of authority practiced by Nickel Academy, such as the authority over setting sanctions or punishments for students who break the rules. Even so, the punishment seemed to show that Nickel Academy had discriminated against students. It is because the punishment was not given equally to all students because white students usually get less punishment than black students. As a result, this made black students feel that there was discrimination which eventually led to social conflict. It is what happened in the following quote:

*"The demerit scale varied from dormitory to dormitory. Smoking, fighting, perpetuating a state of dishevelment—the penalty depended on where they'd sent you and the whims of the local housemen. Blaspheming cost a hundred demerits in Cleveland—Blakeley was the God-fearing sort—but only fifty in Roosevelt. Jacking off was a flat two hundred demerits in Lincoln, but if you were caught jacking someone else off, it was only a hundred."*

*"Only a hundred?"*

*"That's Lincoln for you," Desmond said, as if explaining a foreign land, jinns and ducats." (Whitehead, 2019, p.51-52)*

The quote above shows that Nickel Academy has different punishment rules than usual. These rules do not apply equally to all students. It is because it is based on their boarding house origin, whether they come from white student dormitories or black student dormitories. Usually, students from black dormitories (Cleveland) get more severe punishments than students from white dormitories (Roosevelt). Thus, the existence of these differences will lead to the emergence of conflict. It shows the existence of the authority in the quote, where Nickel

Academy (superordinate group) has the legal authority to make rules for students (subordinate group).

Furthermore, the determination of punishment for students is also based on the dormitory guard who manages their dormitory and where they take the students. It is because there are several places to carry out the punishment. For example, such as a place where students will only get punishment that physically injures them and a place where students will not be safe if brought there. It is what happened in the following quote:

*“In the summer of 1945, one young boy died of heart failure while locked in a sweatbox, a popular corrective at that time, and the medical examiner called it natural causes. Imagine baking in one of those iron boxes until your body gave out, wrung. Influenza, tuberculosis, and pneumonia killed their share, as did accidents, drownings, and falls. The fire of 1921 claimed twentythree lives. Half the dormitory exits were bolted shut and the two boys in the dark third-floor cells were prevented from escaping.”*  
*“The dead boys were put in the dirt of Boot Hill or released into the care of their family. Some deaths were more nefarious than others..... These deaths were never investigated” (Whitehead, 2019, p.90-91)*

The quote above explains that some students who were punished in certain places, such as sweatboxes and iron bars, did not survive. It shows the authority that Nickel Academy has. Because they have legal authority, they can control and give any kind of orders to the students. In fact, this action is an abuse of authority by Nickel Academy. They punished the guilty students very cruelly. In fact, after the incident, Nickel’s officers only put their bodies in one of the academy areas without any prior investigation. To make matters worse, some of the bodies were returned to their families without any original information regarding the cause of death. In the end, this abuse of authority triggers social conflict in society.



### 3) Authority from the Staff of Nickel Academy

Furthermore, there is another form of authority that is practiced in Nickel Academy, namely from the staff of Nickel Academy. One of them is like the authority practiced by the superintendent of Nickel Academy. As a superintendent (superordinate group), Spencer had the legal authority to manage Nickel Academy students (subordinate group), as suggested by Dahrendorf (1959). One form of authority that he has is the authority to punish Nickel Academy students, especially those who make mistakes. It is as in the following quote:

*“They came at one a.m. but woke few, because it was hard to sleep when you knew they were coming, even if they weren’t coming for you .... They knew where their beds were—the bunks were only two feet apart, and after occasions when they grabbed the wrong ones, now they made sure beforehand. They took Lonnie and Big Mike, they took Corey, and they got Elwood, too.”*

*“The night visitors were Spencer and a houseman named Earl, who was big and quick, which helped when a boy broke down in one of the back rooms and had to be put back on course so they could proceed .... Spencer driving Lonnie and Black Mike and Earl taking Elwood and Corey, who had been weeping all night.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.39)*

*“The White House, in its previous use, had been a work shed. They parked behind it and Spencer and his man took them in through the back. The beating entrance, the boys called it.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.40)*

The quote shows that Spencer has authority over the punishment given to students who make mistakes. As a result of the previous riot, Lonnie, Black Mike, Elwood, and Corey were punished. As superintendent of Nickel Academy, Spencer had the legal authority to punish students. So, on the night after the riot, Spencer and Earl, a Nickel staff member, look for the students involved in the riot to punish them. Unfortunately, Spencer punished the students wrongly, he should not have given them corporal punishment. It is because it not only physically injures students, but can also traumatize them. Even though the punishment made them feel deterred, it actually triggered new social conflicts.

Based on the description above, it can be said that it shows there are parties who have authority in the novel. It is because Spencer, as the superordinate group, can freely organize and control the students who act as the subordinate group, as stated by Dahrendorf (1959). So, with this authority, students can submit and obey the punishment given by Spencer.

Furthermore, the authority within Nickel Academy is not only exercised by Spencer. However, another Nickel staff member, Harper, also did that. He works on the Community Service staff at Nickel Academy. As a staff member, he has the authority to arrange the work to be done by students. It is what happened in the following quote:

*“A new paint job was in order. Mrs. Davis gave Harper a broom, Harper gave Elwood the broom, and Elwood swept the decking while Turner got the paint from the van.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.56)*  
*“‘We’re going to paint?’ Elwood said.”*  
*“‘Yeah, man.’”*  
*“‘He’s leaving us here?’”*  
*“‘Yeah, man. Mr. Davis is the fire chief. He has us out here a lot, doing little stuff. Smitty and I did all the rooms on the top floor.’ He pointed to the dormer windows as if it were possible for Elwood to appraise his handiwork.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.56)*

The quote above shows that students do not only work within Nickel Academy but also in other areas. As experienced by Elwood and Turner, they were given jobs to take care of community homes. It is due to the existence of a Community Service made by Nickel Academy regarding peonage carried out by students. Furthermore, as a Community Service staff, Harper has authority over that service. Thus, he can order students, including Elwood and Turner, to do work outside of Nickel Academy. Based on this, it can be said that Harper’s actions are included in the concept of authority. It is because Harper

(superordinate group) has the authority to give orders or control the actions that must be carried out by students (subordinate group), as said by Dahrendorf (1959).

#### **4) Authority from the Police**

In the novel *The Nickel Boys*, it is told that there was a social conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy, including the killing of students. As a result of these actions, it triggers new social conflicts in society. The act of killing the students created a social conflict regarding the truth behind the incident. Thus, it encourages the attitude of the authorities, such as the police, to investigate this matter. It is what happened in the following quote:

*“The press conference was at eleven a.m. According to the paper, the sheriff of Eleanor was going to give an update on the investigation of the grave sites and an archaeology professor from the University of South Florida would speak on the forensic examinations of the dead boys. And some of the White House boys were going to be there to testify.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.133)*

The quote shows that the police have authority over social conflicts that occur at Nickel Academy. There, they have the authority to investigate the truth behind the death of the students who are in Nickel’s secret grave or known as Boot Hill. In addition, the authority possessed by the police also allows them to give orders to subordinate groups. It was like when they asked University of South Florida archeology professors and students to cooperate in the investigation. Because these students had died dozens of years ago, so only the bones remained. So, the police need the help of these professors and students to carry out a more detailed forensic examination.

Based on this, it can be seen that the police are included in the superordinate group, while archeology professors and students are included in the subordinate group. Thus, the police have the authority to give orders to the professors and students. It is in accordance with the statement given by Dahrendorf (1959), which states that the superordinate group has the legal authority to control, give orders or prohibitions to the subordinate group. In the end, it can be concluded that the authority of the police allows them to carry out investigations and give orders to professors and students to investigate social conflicts in the form of murders that occurred at Nickel Academy.

### **3. Groups Involved in the Conflict**

At the third level of Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory concept, there is the concept of groups involved in the conflict. According to Dahrendorf (1959), the groups involved in the conflict are divided into two, namely quasi-groups and interest groups.

#### **a. Quasi-Groups**

In the novel, there is a quasi-group that appears during the course of the story. According to Dahrendorf (1959), quasi-groups are groups of people who do not have a clear structure and goals, but they have the same way of behaving. Here, the group is represented as a group of students involved in social conflict. It is shown in the following quote:

*"The younger boy being bullied, Corey, was not someone he'd met before. The bullies he'd encountered at his breakfast table: Lonnie with his bulldog face, and his manic partner Black Mike." (Whitehead, 2019, p.37)*

From the quote above, it can be seen that Lonnie and Black Mike are in the same group, namely the group that intimidated Corey. Thus, they are included in the quasi-group. It is because they are a group consisting of several people but do not have a clear structure, goals, and program (Dahrendorf, 1959). In addition, they usually also have a hidden purpose. Like the quote above, they did the bullying intending to intimidate Corey and show that they were the ruling group there.

### **b. Interest Groups**

In *The Nickel Boys*, interest groups are shown by the existence of organized groups. According to Malinowski (in Dahrendorf, 1959), an interest group is a group of people who have clear programs, goals, and structures. These groups include, a group of former Nickel Academy students who reunited after the emergence of an investigation into Nickel Academy's grave or commonly known as Boot Hill.

*"In recent years, some of the former students organized support groups, reuniting over the internet and meeting in diners and McDonald's. Around someone's kitchen table after an hour's drive. Together they performed their own phantom archaeology, digging through decades and restoring to human eyes the shards and artifacts of those days. Each man with his own pieces."*  
(Whitehead, 2019, prologue)

The quote indicates that former Nickel Academy students formed an organized group, which was named the White House Boys. It belongs to interest groups because it is an organized group, which usually has a certain structure and purpose. In the novel, the group aims to show the world the truth about what happened to them while at Nickel Academy. Apart from that, they also demanded that the government conduct an investigation and apologize to all students.

Furthermore, there are also other forms of interest groups in the novel, such as the US government. It is shown in the following quote:

*“Every few decades a newspaper report about embezzlement or physical abuse at the school initiated an investigation by the state.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.107)*

As the quote above shows, the US government, including state inspectors, has the legitimate power to regulate society and its existing institutions. One of them is by inspecting the Nickel Academy. In this case, the US government is included in the official system of government that has a clear structure and program. In addition, as stated by Dahrendorf (1959), interest groups have specific goals. In the novel, it is shown that the US government has a specific objective when it comes to inspecting Nickel Academy. The aim was to examine reports of abuse and physical violence that took place there. Therefore, it can be stated that the US government is included in the interest groups.

## **B. The Impact of Social Conflict on Social Change Represented in Colson Whitehead’s *The Nickel Boys***

In general, every conflict must have an impact on the occurrence of social change in people’s lives. It also happens in the novel *The Nickel Boys*. As a result of the conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy, it had an impact on several social changes in society. Furthermore, the discussion on this matter is in accordance with the last concept in Ralf Dahrendorf’s conflict theory, namely social conflict and social change. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dahrendorf (1959) stated that social change focuses on structural changes that can come from within (endogenous) or outside the structure of society (exogenous). In this novel, only

changes in social structure in society are found due to endogenous factors. On the other hand, there is no change in social structure in society due to exogenous factors.

Furthermore, changes in social structure due to endogenous factors occurred as result of social conflicts that occurred at Nickel Academy. These changes were made by the US government, which is included in the organized groups (interest groups) in the novel. Here, both the US government and the Nickel Academy are in the same social structure, namely the social structure that exists in society. Thus, it can be said that social change originates from within the social structure itself. It is in accordance with the statement of Dahrendorf (1959), which states that endogenous factors are social changes originating from within the group itself, namely organized groups (interest groups) or between representatives of the masses who are not organized (quasi-groups).

Moreover, due to the social conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy, it made several accusations leveled against the academy. One of them is the accusation of embezzlement and physical violence. Accordingly, it sparked a reaction from the US government to take action against Nickel Academy. It is because the US government has a social structure position above Nickel Academy in the social structure of society. Thus, it makes the US government have authority over the academy. Therefore, the US government decided to carry out a sudden inspection of Nickel Academy regarding the accusations that had been filed. It is as in the following quote:

*“Every few decades a newspaper report about embezzlement or physical abuse at the school initiated an investigation by the state. In their wake came prohibitions against ‘spanking,’ and the use of dark cells and sweatboxes. The administration instituted a stricter accounting of school supplies, which had a tendency to disappear, as well as the profits from the various student businesses, which also liked to disappear. The parole of students to local families and businesses was terminated and the medical staff increased. They fired the longtime dentist and found one who didn’t charge by the extraction.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.107-108)*

The quote shows a change in the social structure at Nickel Academy. As a result of sudden inspections by the US government, it was revealed that Nickel Academy staff physically abused students and embezzled funds related to tooth extractions. So, the government made new policies, including replacing old dentists with new ones, which did not need to pay for tooth extraction. In short, it shows a change in the social structure at Nickel Academy, where the government replaced the staff who acted as dentists there.

Based on the description above, it shows that social conflict has an impact on changes in social structure (Dahrendorf, 1959). It is shown by the structural changes in Nickel Academy, namely the structure of the medical staff. This change was made to prevent similar social conflicts from reoccurring, namely regarding embezzlement of funds in student tooth extraction. Furthermore, these changes are included in social change due to endogenous factors. It is because the social change comes from within the social structure of society itself, namely the US government.

Furthermore, even though the US government has attempted to replace the existing social structure at Nickel Academy, other social conflicts continue to occur there. Several years after the inspection, Nickel’s staff continued to



physically abuse students who violated the law. In fact, there are some students who died as a result of the incident. Therefore, this triggered a reaction from the US government to officially close the Nickel Academy. It is as in the following quote:

*“The state of Florida closed the school three years ago and now it was all coming out, as if everyone, all the boys, had to wait for it to be dead before they told the tale.” (Whitehead, 2019, p.133)*

The quote shows a change in social structure in society, especially at Nickel Academy. As a result of the repeated social conflicts there, the government finally closed the academy. It is done so that similar social conflicts will not occur again. It is because the social conflicts that occur at Nickel Academy have a major impact on social conflicts that occur in society, such as the controversy regarding physical violence by Nickel staff against students.

Furthermore, due to the closure of the Nickel Academy, it can be said that there has been a change in the social structure there. It is because the closure has an impact on the loss of the social structure that exists at Nickel Academy. Thus, in the end there is no social structure where Nickel Academy staffs occupy the upper social structure and Nickel Academy students occupy the lower social structure again. It shows that Nickel Academy, including its staff, which has a higher social structure must still be subject to the social structure that is above it, namely the US government. Therefore, when the US government decides to close Nickel Academy, they must comply with the decision.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that the change in social structure occurs due to social conflict, as stated by Dahrendorf (1959). The social

conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy made the US government make changes to the social structure that existed there. It was done by the US government closing the academy to eliminate the existing social structure, namely the upper social structure (Nickel staff) and the lower social structure (Nickel students). In short, this change includes social change due to endogenous factors because it originates from the US government, which is included in the social structure of society itself.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter discusses the conclusions and suggestions. The conclusion will be drawn from the results of the analysis in the previous findings and discussion chapter as an answer to the research question. Furthermore, this chapter also provides suggestions from researcher for future readers or researchers who research the topic of conflict and social change.

#### A. Conclusion

Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* is a novel that shows that there are social conflicts that occur between white and black groups in America. As a result of the social conflict, several social changes occurred there. It is in accordance with Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory which explains that social conflicts that occur in society will lead to social change. These changes can be in the form of structural changes in society or changes in people's mindsets, behaviors, ways of interaction, or actions.

Furthermore, the results of the analysis in this study will be divided into two parts, namely social conflict and social change as a result of social conflict. In the first finding, it was found that there were several social conflicts in the form of discrimination represented in *The Nickel Boys*, especially at Nickel Academy. This social conflict occurred due to differences in interests and goals between groups in the social structure there, namely the Nickel Academy staff group which has the above social structure (superordinate group) and the Nickel Academy

student group which has the lower social structure (subordinate group). The two groups are involved in social conflict because they compete with each other to achieve their own goals, such as gaining power and authority over the other.

Moreover, in the second finding, it was found that there was an impact of social conflict on social change that occurred in *The Nickel Boys*. These social changes are related to the social structure that exists at Nickel Academy. In this case, it was found that there were endogenous factors to changes in social structure, which were carried out by the US government. Furthermore, the social conflict that occurred there led to the closure of the academy by the US government. Therefore, it can be said that the social conflict that occurred at Nickel Academy had an impact on social change, namely the removal of the existing social structure at Nickel Academy.

## **B. Suggestion**

This research focuses on the social conflicts and social changes that occur in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. However, other topics can be explored by using this novel as an object of research, especially for future researchers who want to analyze this novel. For example, it can be analyzed using other approaches in literature besides sociology, such as structuralism, psychology, or others. Furthermore, for future researchers who are interested in the topic of social conflict research, especially social change, the researcher recommends using the same theory, namely Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory. In addition, future researchers can also examine the topic of conflict using other

theories, such as Karl Marx's conflict theory, Lewis A. Coser's conflict theory, or George Simmel's conflict theory.

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE**



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