

Racial Discrimination of White against Black in Jericho Brown and Emtithal Mahmoud's Selected Poems

Yunis Stia Andara ¹

Yan Ardian Subhan ²

¹² English Department, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

¹yunis.stia@google.com

²dosen00184@unpam.ac.id

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to depict the issues of racial discrimination from white to black and their struggle and resistance against it in selected poems. The poems are taken from *The Tradition* (2019) by Jericho Brown and *Eulogy* (2018) by Emtithal Mahmoud. This study collected and analyzed data using qualitative research that explains the data into essay descriptions. This study uses a Postcolonial perspective from Loomba's theory of racial discriminations seen from contexts of identity, race, and class (2015). The results of this study indicate that in selected poems from Jericho Brown and Emtithal Mahmoud describe issues of multiple acts of racial discrimination since colonial era, being positioned in the lower economic class, and experiencing genocidal practices. In the end, the discriminated black people struggle and resist against their oppressors for equality.

Keywords: *Postcolonial, racial discrimination, struggle and resistance*

Introduction

Discrimination is a problem that causes bad interactions between humans. Any action based on differentiation on physical characteristics, race, and ethnic identity against a group will create discrimination. Besides, discrimination can be emerged because of prejudice. As Myers (2010, p. 308) states "prejudice is the preconceived negative judgment of a group and its members." It means that prejudice is the irrational perspective, attitudes, and opinions from individuals or groups to others because they consider as certain groups, for instance, the perspective of white people against black people. White people feel their group is superior and other is inferior. Thus, it would emerge racial discrimination. According to Brigham (1991, p. 183), racial discrimination is unkind behavior or unfair treatment of members of racial groups against other racial groups or members based on culture, ethnicity, and attribute. Racial discrimination is a term used when a racial group thinks that their group is better and superior to other groups and considers their group to have special rights among other groups, thereby causing public fanaticism towards its members. Within the past decade, racial discrimination continues to grow rapidly. Racial discrimination is the phenomenon that occurs as the result of colonialism that happened a long time ago. White people always tend to perceive their race as highest to the others. This idea shows that white people are the highest race. Harris (1993, p.1713) states "becoming Whites means received the whole privileges both in private or public, and it is permanently guaranteed." It means that whiteness is the type of status property that continues to operate and protect the entrenched power.

Discrimination occurs due to legacy of colonialism. In literary studies, Post-colonial criticism is an approach that focuses on literary studies related to colonialism. The purpose of studying colonial and post-colonial theory in literature is to help identify the practice of colonialism in literary works. Post-colonial criticism tries to expose cultural issues and phenomena demeaning the former of the West colony. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1998, p. 168) the position of colonizers and colonized can be illustrated through the ideas of colonizers who feel they are superior while the colonized are inferior and the impact still occurs in presents. It means that the activities of colonialism lead by the colonizer's idea. The relation between post-colonial theory and literature is post-colonial theory seeks to reveal all forms of colonialism that occur in literary works. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (2007, p.168) point out, post-colonial criticism that appears in literary works are usually comes from people who have experienced the colonialism, such as marginality, violence, silent voice, and inequality. The problem that left behind after colonialism was racial differences. Racial differences separate or differentiate group of people based on their races. According to Theodorson & Theodorson (1979, p. 115-116), racism is unequal treatment of a person or group based on their unique attributes, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social class. It means that someone's acceptance is influenced by the position of that person or group in society. Social identity of black people amid white people resulted in the social stratification between black and white races. Black people have considered occupying the social lowest class due to political policy that occurred during colonialism. This political policy has occurred in Africa known as apartheid.

Racial discrimination have been around for a long time, the unfinished part of history that is still a sensitive issue for the world today and become a serious problem that should get more attention. The portrait of racial discrimination can be seen in some death cases of black people, such as Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and Ahmaud Arbery (Fausset, 2022). Moreover, black people are still considered as bad and often received unfair and discriminatory treatment. Poets created some poems with a concern about racial discrimination issues to express their feelings, ideas, and critic about the difference of class, race, and social condition in society. For instance, Jericho Brown and Emtithal Mahmoud chose to express their feeling about the practice of racial discrimination experienced by black people through the poems. It can be seen from the poems entitled *The Tradition* by Jericho Brown, and *Eulogy* by Emtithal Mahmoud. *The Tradition* tells about the practice of racial discrimination that occurs in the past and present. Then, *Eulogy* tells about the practice of racial discrimination in the term of genocide experienced by black people. Based on the explanation above, this writing is intended to reveal issues of racial discrimination of white to black people as part of legacy of colonialism in both poems; *The Tradition* by Jericho Brown and *Eulogy* by Emtithal Mahmoud.

Method

The writer used the qualitative method in analyzing *The Tradition* and *Eulogy*. In collecting the data, the writer took several methods. First, reading the selected poems by Jericho Brown and Emtithal Mahmoud. Second, identifying the lines that depicted racial discrimination. Third, taking notes of the racial discrimination issues that appear in the selected poems. Last, classifying the data found into descriptions of racial discrimination using Postcolonial perspective from Loomba (2015). Loomba divides

issues of racial discrimination into three contexts; those are the contexts of identity, race, and class.

Identity is the difference race that constructed to justify the practice of oppression in colonialism. Loomba (2015, p. 112) asserts "the construction of vast numbers of people as inferior, or 'other', was crucial for constructing a European 'self' and justifying colonialist practices." It means that racism is constructed by West that creating "others" or inferiors. West defines "others" as races others than white. In race and class, Loomba (2015, p. 131) asserts "there have been two broad tendencies in analyses of race and ethnicity: the first, which stems from Marxist analysis, regards social groupings, including racial ones, as largely determined and explained by economic structures and processes." It means that racial and ethnicity differences can be constructed by majorities and can be assessed from an economic perspective.

Results and Discussions

Racial Discrimination in *The Tradition*

This poem declares as the reflection of racism against black people that always happen to the speaker. This poem tells about the tradition of racism towards black people. The speaker tells white people considering black people as lower and weaker communities, mentioning that they have the worst experience of a social system, such as education in the present and the past that mentions through several symbolizes of nature.

The first line "Aster. Nasturtium. Delphinium. We thought" these three flowers indicates symbolism to the innocence black people to get justice and freedom from racism. The word "Aster" symbolize black people's expectation to get justice against mistreatment and grief. Next, the word "Nasturtium" means independence, it symbolizes black people that await their freedom or equality in any social aspect of life. Then, "Delphinium" means possibility, it symbolizes the wishes of black people for the opportunity to get justice for their communities. After that, the word "Stargazer" means innocence, it symbolizes the innocence of black people when they are being discriminated against.

Next, racial discrimination as portrayed in line 2 "Fingers in dirt meant it was our dirt" refers to the spirit of black people to tend their land or habitation. It can relate to colonial racism that is called colonial cultivation, which includes the practice of slavery and racism. Therefore, in this line, the speaker reveals racism experienced by black people about civil rights.

Table 1. Discrimination in *The Tradition*

Line	Verse	Meaning
1	<i>Aster. Nasturtium. Delphinium. We thought</i>	No justice and freedom
2	<i>Fingers in dirt meant it was our dirt</i>	Practice of slavery
3	<i>Names in heat, in elements classical</i>	No education
5-6	<i>Summer seemed to bloom against the will, Of the sun, which news reports claimed flamed hotter</i>	Oppressed because poor
12-14	<i>Brought in seconds, colors you expect in poems, Where the world ends, everything cut down. John Crawford. Eric Garner. Mike Brown</i>	Shooting victims

Other racial discrimination depicted in line 3 “Names in heat, in elements classical”. This line refers to the social gap in education. The education system of black people is lower than white people's education because they are prohibited to school. Another racial discrimination depicted in line 5-6 “Summer seemed to bloom against the will, Of the sun, which news reports claimed flamed hotter” these lines explained the racism of habitation and media. This line clearly defines racism against black people who are being oppressed because they are poor. The racial discrimination also depicted in line 12-14. “Brought in seconds, colors you expect in poems, Where the world ends, everything cut down. John Crawford. Eric Garner. Mike Brown.” in these lines, the speaker reveals cases of shooting based on skin color. Black people often get discrimination based on their skin color and their lives were forced to end by shooting because they are black people. This poem indicates racial discrimination constructed by identity and race differences.

Racial Discrimination in *Eulogy*

This poem is about black people community become victim of discriminatory acts. The speaker delineates the worse treatment of white people against black people that lead to the genocide act. In stanza 1 line 1, “Black girl writes eulogy in the flesh.” It can be defined that the speaker writes eulogy to remember and praise people who died in her communities because they were victims of discriminatory behavior. The lines 2-5 “They took my skin; Paraded it around the town square; pinned their desire, their hatred to it; Hung it on their clothes line;” indicates kind of discriminatory behavior against black people's identity. These lines refer to the unpleasant or painful experience. It is revealed that the speaker got discrimination against based on their skin color. Another racial discrimination portrayed in stanza 1 line 6-7 “Fastened it over the eyes of their children so they wouldn't see me.” these lines indicates the violence was witnessed by the children of white people. These lines refers to the discriminatory behavior that is lynching witnessed by the white generation, it means that white generation has been instilled about violence since they were kids. This stanza ends with a period to show the emotion.

In stanza 2 line 1-3 “Blanket. Burial Shroud. Body. My mother gave birth to me in a casket. I never grew out of it.” The word “Body” can indicate the deep sadness that the speaker feels. This line means the speaker never gets their happiness, the sadness always haunts them, and the murder continues to happen so that becomes a terror for the speaker; the speaker is unable to be happy. In stanza 3 line 1-3 “I had a dream last night: they strung me up, like a psalm, but this time, The noose said” indicates the attempts murder against the speaker. This line refers to the speaker will not die in hanging because it is just a dream. Next, in stanza 4 line 1-2 “The poplar tree leapt from her place, and carried me to my mother.” indicates the resistance by the speaker. These lines refers to resistance by the speaker against discriminatory behavior and bring her back to her habit. Then, in stanza 4 line 3-5 “Spoiled fruit to an unknowing owner. She couldn’t see me. They had taken her eyes, Her mouth, her feet.” indicates brutal violence. It means many people were killed and their identity is unknown.

Table 2. Discrimination in *Eulogy*

Line	Verse	Meaning
Stanza 1		
1	<i>Black girl writes eulogy in the flesh</i>	Praise for victims of discrimination
2-5	<i>They took my skin; Paraded it around the town square; pinned their desire, their hatred to it; Hung it on their clothes line</i>	Practice of discrimination
6-7	<i>Fastened it over the eyes of their children so they wouldn’t see me</i>	Witness of discrimination
Stanza 2		
1-3	<i>Blanket. Burial Shroud. Body. My mother gave birth to me in a casket. I never grew out of it</i>	Sadness seeing victims of discriminations
Stanza 3		
1-3	<i>I had a dream last night: they strung me up, like a psalm, but this time, The noose said</i>	Dreaming become a victim of discrimination
Stanza 4		
1-2	<i>The poplar tree leapt from her place, and carried me to my mother</i>	Resistance to discrimination
3-5	<i>Spoiled fruit to an unknowing owner. She couldn’t see me. They had taken her eyes, Her mouth, her feet</i>	Victims of discrimination
Stanza 5		
1-5	<i>Run. Run, run, run, run, run. I’ve been stuck</i>	Community becomes

here for so long and no one came. 300 of my sisters disappeared and no one came victim of discrimination

Stanza 6

1-5 *Black girl dies no one knows. Black girl funeral is an empty house. The spectacle of my body is an empty threat. Black girl don't make headlines, Build no search parties* Resistance to discrimination

Stanza 7

1-2 *They dragged my body out of the river, but it was the wrong girl* Struggle against violence

In stanza 5 lines 1-5, it says "Run. Run, run, run, run, run. I've been stuck here for so long and no one came. 300 of my sisters disappeared and no one came." indicates the violence against the speaker and her communities. The whole lines in this stanza imply the genocide behavior against the speaker communities. In stanza 6 line 1-5 "Black girl dies no one knows. Black girl funeral is an empty house. The spectacle of my body is an empty threat. Black girl don't make headlines, Build no search parties." refers to the death of the speaker communities are not important to know and it show the resistance act by the speaker. These lines imply there is resistance from the speaker, she speak up about the inequality treatments.

Last, stanza 7 line 1-2 "They dragged my body out of the river, but it was the wrong girl" emphasize the speaker's struggle against the oppressor. These lines indicate the struggle and the resistance of the speaker towards racism. This poem indicate that the discrimination and resistance against majorities or anti-colonial nationalism. This resistance is an effort against colonialism domination and its legacies or to find independence of a country. As Loomba (2015, p. 187) states "the anti-colonial nationalism was not modeled upon simple imitation but also by defining its difference from Western notions of liberty, freedom and human dignity." It can be defined that anti-colonial nationalism as an idea to provide justice to minorities, because minorities are aware of the oppression they experience to get their liberty.

Conclusion

Discrimination can be defined as the different treatment of individuals based on race, culture, or attribute. The differences also happen to races. As a result of the racial differences, the problem of racial discrimination will arise. Racial discrimination happened in every historical period and it will create a gap and generate any kind of matter in society. In each history, racial groups have had ideological concepts about racial differences. This ideological concept became the beginning of the emergence of racial discrimination. Based on the analysis, the poems entitled "The Tradition" and "Eulogy" described issues of racial discrimination where black people often received discriminatory behavior countless times since the colonial era, black people tend in

lower classes of economic, and black people experienced the practice of genocide. The social structure was playing unfairly in some fields for black people. Black people deal with mistreatment based on their race in many aspects of life. However, in "Eulogy" the speaker shows struggle and resistance act against the oppressor to get equality.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* Second Edition. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Brigham, J. C. (1991). *Social Psychology*. HarperCollins Publishers
- Brown, J. (2019). *The Tradition*. Copper Canyon Press.
- Fausset, R. (2022). What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html>
- Harris, C. L. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106, 1707-1791.
- Healy, J. C. (2018). On the periphery of hate crime: Disability at the intersections of marginalisation, vulnerability and difference. *Criminology and Sociology School of Law*. Retrieved from <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/25907/>
- Loomba, A. (2015). *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge Publisher
- Mahmoud, E. (2018). *Sister's Entrance*. Andrews McMeel Publishing.
- Myers, D. G. (2010). *Social Psychology* (10 ed.). McGraw- Hill Higher Education.
- Perry, B. (2001). *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes*. Routledge.
- Theodorson, G. A., & Theodorson, A.G. (1979). *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books.