



RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN LANGSTON HUGHES' SELECTED POEMS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to interpret racial discrimination in Langston Hughes' poems i.e., *I Too Sing America*, *Negro*, and *Let America Be America Again*. Langston Hughes, as a writer, has faced direct discrimination from white people in his literary work. Many of Langston Hughes's works of poetry tell the story of African Americans who lived as black people and faced discrimination throughout history. Some of his poetry depicts the racial, cultural, and educational discrimination that black people face. The data taken from the poem comes from Langston Hughes' poems including *I Too Sing America*, *Negro*, and *Let America Be America Again*. This study applies the descriptive qualitative method as well as the extrinsic

approach. Extrinsic approach, aligned with mimetic and pragmatic approaches. *I Too Sing America* depicts the oppression of black people through slavery, denial of rights, and inequality. *Let America Be America Again* depicts a focus on the idea of the American dream and how, for many people, achieving freedom, equality, and happiness, which the dream embodies, is nearly impossible. *Negro* depicts people of African American descent have the status of slaves. The conclusion is that the author accepts a great deal of discrimination as an African American and rejects differences in skin color status.

Keywords:

African American, Racial Discrimination, Langston Hughes

INTRODUCTION

Literature can be found as a written text because it fosters creativity through expression and mobility. Literature is commonly defined as a work of written art (Arafah & Kaharuddin 2019). According to Arafah, Abbas, and Hikmah (2021) some of the evidence presented in the produced literary works can be used to identify the fact that what is written in literary works is a reflection of real-life. This indicates that a fictional work of literature depicts human life in a manner that sometimes resembles reality. Literary works always relate everything that is presented and summarized to human life's personal and collective phenomena. Simply put, literature accurately reflects society in its good and bad aspects. In

a corrective sense, literature's function is to highlight the flaws in society and offer advice on how to fix them (Duhan, 2015). Human survival can be learned from many things. One of them is a piece of literature because it often reflects life at the time and has many positive effects on the life of the reader.

Additionally, literature serves as a form of communication in addition to being a product of ideas, events, and phenomena that depict human life. The language employed and the manner in which the author communicates his literary works both reveal the author's ability to create a literary work. Literature, according to Sell (2002), is a good way to learn about various cultures. As a result, there are two perspectives on literary works: one that considers the shape and content of a work (the "pure" side), and another that considers its potential for social function, particularly in language learning (the "applied" side). With the theory of literature as a method of communication, these viewpoints are combined. Although literature is normally considered of as a written work, in this instance, literature is known as a written work, but in this case, literature is a written work produced by the author aesthetically for communication (Arafah et al, 2021). The development of technology has changed the way people think and communicate. Therefore, the language used by an author means to explore the meaning that contributes to a better understanding as a means of communication (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019).

Literature with a communication theme influences people's thinking, behavior, and attitudes in everyday life. As a result, literature as a communication medium can be used to introduce culture, social life, and human reality. Through literary works, humans can enjoy literary works through social media, television, or live streaming not only through book. It is also one of the supports or branding of a literary work through technology so that more and more people can enjoy literature easily. When literary works can be enjoyed easily and with the use of beautiful language, it becomes an identity for literature (Hasyim, Arafah, & Kuswarini, 2020).

It is commonly known which there are some genres in literary works, such as prose, play, and poetry. Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and meant to tell a story or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being.

Poetry can help with artistic expression in a variety of ways (Ollila & Jantas, 2006). Furthermore, the languages and words used in poetry are frequently altered to sound beautiful (Arafah, 2018). However, in addition to using beautiful language in poetry, some authors also use other methods of writing in poetry. The authors adhere to linguistic and

grammatical rules in order to improve the poem's readability (Hasanah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2021). As a result, people who read a literary work, especially poetry, with zeal will learn more about it (Arafah et.al, 2020). Poetry is generally considered to be slightly different from other literary works because its language usage differs from other literary works' language usage. This is due to the fact that an author not only expresses the contents of his imagination and thoughts, but also pays attention to the language used. Poetry is a type of literary work with few words but dense meaning, as evidenced by the structure of poetry, which employs very few words, arrays, and stanzas (Arafah, B. & Kaharuddin 2019).

Furthermore, the use of language in poetry can be accomplished through a well-organized and detailed discourse analysis, which can assist students in comprehending the number of words used by the community (Ahmad, Arafah, & Kaharuddin, 2021). It has a very broad meaning despite the density and limitations of words used in poetry. The poetry meaning convention employs two dimensions of meaning at the same time, namely meaning dimensions of denotation and connotation (Takwa, Arafah, B., Syam, J., Kaharuddin, & Kadaruddin, 2021). This necessitates greater comprehension on the part of the readers in order to comprehend the poem's content and meaning. Most poetry uses figurative language, making it difficult for the reader to understand the poem after only reading it once. By using and understanding as much vocabulary as possible, the language used in poetry can be easily understood. Furthermore, understanding and knowing a variety of vocabularies can help someone understand ideas, messages, and so on (Kadaruddin., Arafah, B., Kaharuddin., Ahmad, D., & Iska, 2020).

The author attempts to describe human life through his or her literary work. The author's literary works describe various aspects of life such as economic, religious, political, and even social life. Literary works can be viewed as social products that address cultural, political, and social studies issues (Irmawati, Arafah, & Abbas 2020).

This piece of writing only discusses poetry. As with other literary works derived from an author's thoughts and imagination, the poet's writing of poems is heavily influenced by his surroundings, including religious, cultural, and social aspects. Because a literary work will only be meaningful and informative if it is observed in its context, such as by studying cultural discourse, the situation that occurred around an author affects the way an author uses words (Arafah, Thayyib, Kaharuddin, & Sahib, 2020). Poetry is the life of literary works, and literature is the vast territory in between, as vast as human life itself, where they interact and influence each other (Tymieniecka, 2000).

There are lots of things that can be talked about in poetry, such as; economic, religious, political, scientific, and social life issues. One of these social issues has been occurred for a long time and still happening today. What makes this research is different from the others is that the writer chooses the work of Langston Hughes as the object because the author is Afro-American, which means that he indirectly also experiences social discrimination as a black person. In line with Dougless (1845), the author of the literary work is ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry wood, sweep the chimney, or roll oil casks, all he did for nearly three years in New Bedford. Discrimination that happened to black people did not only happen in men, but women also experienced such things. It did not only happen in the ancient era, but even in the modern era, women also feel discriminated against. It has been rooted in ancient times. It was because of some discrimination issues that are existed within the society. The drops were rooted in some social changes, such as women who slowly start to gain popularity and get enlightened (Suleman, Arafah, Abbas, & Delukman, 2021).

Langston Hughes, as a writer, has faced direct discrimination from white people in his literary work. There was no work that was too difficult or too dirty. In the African American book. Many of Langston Hughes's works of poetry tell the story of African Americans who lived as black people and faced discrimination throughout history. Some of his poetry depicts the racial, cultural, and educational discrimination that black people face. One of the reasons for these acts of discrimination is the difference in skin and hair color between black people and white people. For centuries, white groups have defined black Americans as racially distinct.

Through the poetry of Langston Hughes as a literary work, it provides a description of the life experienced by black people for many years as a minority. Langston Hughes, the work's author, encourages readers to come in and indirectly experience their lives. As an author, he opens the doors to readers to the unknown and invisible worlds, not only by stimulating feelings and emotions, but also by assisting them in discovering the meanings of life and existence (Floriani, Arafah, & Nur, 2020). Furthermore, literary works as a social product have numerous advantages in life; everyone must learn from anything and everyone, including animals, because everything in the universe serves as a teacher (Irmawati & Arafah, 2020).

Langston Hughes' poems are literary works that depict the lives of black people who face discrimination. They are the form and result of the author's thoughts, imagination, and

experiences. The social phenomena in Langston Hughes' poetry have a historical and social context. This is consistent with Wellek and Warren's (1956) ideas that literature is a social product that reflects the phenomena of social behaviour in society, with language serving as the medium through which the author's thoughts are expressed. As a result, the historical process of creating a literary work is appropriate for its time.

The writers believe that Langston Hughes's works are the selection of the right research object to be used to analyse racial discrimination by white people against black people of African-American descent making real life in describing the sense of discrimination against black people. Research on racial discrimination by viewing, reading, and analyzing the history is still limited, therefore this is one of the significant reasons for the writers to describe and analyze it with a more detailed explanation.

METHOD

Research design

This research is qualitative research where the focus of this research is focused on racial discrimination experienced by African Americans in Langston Hughes' selected poems. Qualitative research is research that is packaged in words or actual situations without other additions such as symbols or numbers and in general, the main goal of a study is to find and uncover a problem that has not been known systematically, neatly arranged and can be accounted for by the writers themselves.

Data and Data Sources

Racial discrimination is the main data of this research, where the data is obtained from selected poems by Langston Hughes. In this research, the writer analyzes racial discrimination contained in Langston Hughes' selected poems. Writers use several reference sources such as books, previous studies, and online journals which contain several theories related to the research topic so that they are used by writers to achieve research objectives.

Data collection

There are several steps taken by writers to collect the necessary data. The first step is to read all of Langston Hughes' selected poems. Second, the writers identified racial discrimination contained in Langston Hughes' selected poems. In the third step, the writers look for and studies reference sources related to racial discrimination. The final step is to group the data based on the research topic and record the important parts related to the research.

Data Analysis

After all the data was collected, the writers carried out the following analytical steps: first, the writers identified and then studied the racial discrimination contained in the selected poems by Langston Hughes. Second, the presentation of the data in this study is by describing and analyzing the data. The data displayed in this study is in the form of a description. Fourth, the data that has been selected is then analyzed based on theories related to the research topic. After analysis, the writers conclude after all relevant data answers the research problem

RESULTS

Racial discrimination contained in Langston Hughes' selected poems: *I, Too Sing America*, *Negro*, *Let America Be America Again*

a. Racial discrimination in *I, Too sing America*.

2nd stanza:

I, too sing America

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

The quotation above shows that the poet states that he is aware and knows that he is also an American citizen where a citizen also deserves the same rights as other people, regardless of the background he has. Apart from that, this line seems to emphasize that African-Americans also have a stake in fighting for their rights as American citizens and also have a stake in building and developing America. As American citizens, African-Americans also sing the national anthem with pride and have an attitude of patriotism which is the same as what white people do.

"Darker brother" or black people is a term used in countries that are socially made up of various races and ethnicities. This term is generally attached to citizens of African or African-American descent. So based on the quote above, there is a statement from the poet stating that he is a dark-skinned American or in other words, he is a boy who has darker skin than his other siblings. This is supported by what is written in the first line of the poem "I, Too Sing America" which shows that the writer is one of the dark skinned people who live among American society which is dominated by white people.

Racial discrimination experienced by black people is increasingly visible in the quote above. From the quote above shows that black people do not get equal rights in American society. White people don't like the presence of dark-skinned people in a place that is attended and dominated by white people and they don't even want to be at the same table with white people. They always think that they are superior to the race that opposes them. Sending someone to the kitchen to eat is very real discrimination and hurts that person's feelings, even a very simple thing becomes a place of discrimination for white people against black people. Generally, someone who eats in the kitchen is only reserved for those who have a lower social status, so it can be said that white people regard black people as slaves and slaves should eat in the kitchen or at different tables with their masters because they are not socially equal.

b. Racial discrimination in *Negro*.

2nd stanza:

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.

I brushed the boots of Washington.

In the second stanza, the first line the Poet says '*I've been a slave*'. There is the word 'slave' which denotes the historical status of African Americans for black people. Black African Americans were made slaves from the time of Julius Caesar to George Washington by the conflicting and unreasonable wishes of white Americans. The poet was heartbroken by the forms of slavery that were deeply felt during their reign. Those in power turn black people into people who are despised and dehumanized, as if their group has the right to enslave black people.

3rd stanza:

I've been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose.

I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

In the third stanza, the Poet describes black African-Americans regarding their duties and occupations. They are forced to work, live and eat like slaves. There is racial discrimination in this third stanza, namely the difference between the duties and jobs of

black African-Americans and the duties and jobs of white people. Even the position of black African-Americans and white Americans was different and they also refused to cooperate with black African-Americans because they had a lower, unequal and unworthy position, namely slaves. So, it can be concluded that in this quote the inequality of decent work to be obtained by African-Americans was felt at that time. Differences in skin color and background have always been the reason why this inequality must be experienced by black people in America. Even though as American citizens, black people should also have the same rights, but white people do not care about this. A discrimination that really hurt black people.

5th stanza:

I've been a victim:

The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.

They lynch me still in Mississippi.

In the fifth stanza, the poet describes black African-Americans as disadvantaged. They have always been victims and treated unfairly by white Americans. Racial hatred of black African Americans became acts of violence and cruelty. White Americans executed and killed black African Americans because they fought to defend democratic principles that were not enforced in their own countries. Until in the end, they maintain their status as slaves in order to avoid unwanted acts of racist violence and the opportunity to get a job, even if it is as slaves. Therefore, black people are treated like people who are born with all the shortcomings and are destined by society to be the most despicable human beings in the world. As part of the society of a country, black people or African-Americans deserve to be treated the same in front of other people.

c. Racial discrimination in *Let America Be America Again*.

10th stanza:

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.

I am the Negro, servant to you all.

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—

Hungry yet today despite the dream.

Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,

The poorest worker bartered through the years.

In the tenth stanza of the poem *Let America Be America Again*, the poet clearly states the forms of slavery experienced by him and other African Americans. The forms of slavery experienced were slavery to farmers who were exploited by their masters. Farmers cannot feel freedom in working because their masters only prioritize profits compared to the comfort and happiness of the farmers. Furthermore, the poet also reveals that black people become servants and money printing machines for their masters.

DISCUSSIONS

In this study, it can be found several important points that become the meaning of each of Langston Hughes' poems. Essential points that contain racial discrimination are the focus of the main discussion of this research. In this poem, the author describes the life and history of black African Americans in various aspects of life, namely race, skin colour, economy, social and religion. In accordance with the study of Wellek and Warren (1956) that literature reflects the phenomenon of social behaviour in society, with the language used to express and describe the author's thoughts. Langston Hughes as the author of these three poems, namely *I, Too Sing America*, *Negro*, and *Let America Be America Again*, is descended from a family of black African Americans who was slaves and victims of racial discrimination against white people in their communities and their own country. From the discussion it was revealed that racial discrimination is the main focus used to analyze the meaning of the three Langston Hughes poems. Racial Discrimination is not only useful for research but also plays a role in contributing to readers' attention to literary works. Literary works that have broad meanings and influence each other in human life.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that Langston Hughes' poems such as *"I, Too, Sing America"*, *"Negro"*, and *"Let America Be America Again"* have strong themes of racial discrimination and are reflections of the realities of life in African-American society. Hughes uses strong language and imagination to showcase his personal experiences of African-American society in general, which is filled with discrimination and social inequality.

Through his poetry, Hughes spoke about issues such as civil rights, racial discrimination, and social justice. He uses metaphors and symbols to express feelings and views about an unjust world. In particular, the poem *"I, Too, Sing America"* expresses Hughes' hope to become part of American society without racial discrimination. Meanwhile, *"Negro"* emphasizes the importance of African-American history and culture, as well as how

they shaped and influenced American culture. the poem "Let America Be America Again" deals with Hughes' disappointment with America that was not yet independent and his wish to make America what it should be.

These three poems highlight the presence of black people throughout history, emphasizing their contributions to the world. This long period of slavery, people's suffering, and inability to be free shaped the history of black African Americans. In their community, they are victims of racism. The difference in skin colour between black and white people is the source of racial discrimination. Racism in Langston Hughes' poetry demonstrates how poetry can be a powerful tool for expressing feelings and opinions on social and political issues. Hughes' works have a broad range of meaning and are still relevant today.

The writer hoped this article serve as a reminder of the importance of combating racial discrimination and fighting for every citizen's right to equal justice. Furthermore, the writer hoped that this article could serve as a starting point for further research on several poems by Langston Hughes that deal with racial discrimination. In addition, this research is expected to add insight to connoisseurs of Langston Hughes' poems and provide additional information for future researchers who wish to study more about Langston Hughes' poems.

Based on the research results obtained from existing data, basically this research is going well. But it is not wrong if researchers want to put forward some suggestions that are expected to be useful for the advancement of education in general. As for the suggestions that the researchers put forward are as follows: In future research it should be able to deepen theories related to racial discrimination because the authors are aware that the results of this research do not fully provide a theoretical explanation regarding racial discrimination experienced by African-Americans.

Furthermore, future researchers should further develop the scope of the research, bearing in mind that this research has not been able to fully describe the forms of racial discrimination experienced by African-Americans in Langston Hughes' poetry, especially in the poem "I, Too, Sing America," "Negro ", and "Let America Be America Again". . In the data collection process, it is better to use techniques that are estimated to be more optimal in obtaining the required data.

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