

## **THE PORTRAYAL OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION TOWARD AFRICAN-AMERICAN PEOPLE IN *POOR LITTLE BLACK FELLOW* SHORT STORY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In a multicultural society, there is a possibility of the appearance minority group and the majority group. The minority group often gets discrimination treatment from the majority group. This research aims to find the portrayal of racial discrimination toward African-American people as a minority that appears in *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story. This research uses qualitative research design and multiculturalism as an approach. The researcher uses two main theories for this research, they are racial discrimination theory from Blank, et al., and characterization theory from Keenan. In this study, the researcher analyzed Arnold, The Pembertons, and Mappleton Villagers' characters to see how the racial discrimination portrayed through their characterization. The results of this thesis show that there are several types of racial discrimination portrayed in the story through the characterization of those characters. Those types of discrimination are direct discrimination, subtle and unconscious discrimination, statistical discrimination and profiling, and organizational process. Those portrayals are presented mainly through indirect characterization and some direct characterization. Through the portrayal, it can be seen that racial discrimination can happen directly and indirectly.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, minority, racial discrimination, characterization, *Poor Little Black Fellow*

### **ABSTRAK**

*Dalam kehidupan masyarakat multikultural, terjadi kemungkinan adanya grup minoritas dan grup mayoritas. Kelompok ras minoritas kerap mendapat perlakuan diskriminatif dari kelompok mayoritas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan gambaran diskriminasi ras terhadap kaum Afrika-Amerika sebagai minoritas yang muncul dalam cerita pendek *Poor Little Black Fellow*. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif dan pendekatan multikulturalisme. Peneliti menggunakan dua teori utama dalam penelitian ini, yaitu teori diskriminasi ras dari Blank, dkk., dan teori penokohan dari Keenan. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menganalisis tokoh Arnold, Keluarga Pemberton, dan penduduk-penduduk desa Mapleton untuk mengetahui bagaimana diskriminasi ras tergambar melalui penokohan-penokohan mereka. Hasil tesis ini menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa jenis diskriminasi yang digambarkan dalam cerita melalui penokohan dari tokoh-tokoh tersebut. Jenis-jenis diskriminasi tersebut adalah diskriminasi langsung, diskriminasi halus dan tidak disadari, diskriminasi statistik, dan diskriminasi dalam organisasi. Penggambaran tersebut disajikan terutama melalui penokohan tidak langsung dan beberapa penokohan langsung. Melalui penggambaran-penggambaran tersebut,*

*dapat diketahui bahwa diskriminasi ras dapat terjadi secara langsung maupun tak langsung.*

**Kata kunci:** *multikulturalisme, minoritas, diskriminasi ras, penokohan, Poor Little Black Fellow*

### **A. Introduction**

Literature is the reflection of social life, like Wellek and Warren state that literature can imitate social reality, both the natural world and the world of an individual (89). Therefore, *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story that written by Langston Hughes in 1934 is one of many literary works that reflects the racial discrimination problems. The story follows Arnold, an African-American orphan that was adopted by a white wealthy family. He became the only African-American people in the village which made people around him always pitying him by calling "poor little black Arnie". The researcher indicates this short story can capture a lot of aspect of racial discrimination. Furthermore, it portrays that racial discrimination still exists even inside the act of kindness.

The focus of this research is based on the research question that is how do the characterization of characters in *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story portrays the types of racial discriminations toward African-American people. Along with the theory of racial discrimination from Blank et al., and characterization theory from Keenan, the researcher will find the kinds of racial discrimination portrayed in this short story and the way they are portrayed through the characterizations. This research is expected to provide benefits theoretically and practically in society. Theoretically, this research could provide a deep understanding of racial discrimination in *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story. Practically, this research can be used as a reference for other researchers who want to conduct similar research.

### **B. Related Literature**

This research is divided into several main points. It consist of the theory of short story, character, characterization, and racial discrimination. Short story is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the various narrative techniques of the novel are applicable (Abrams 331). In the short story, there are some of the important elements which play a crucial part in constructing the short story. The researcher would apply the elements of character and characterization of short story to understand the racial discrimination portrayed in *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story.

Abrams stated that, character is the person represented in a dramatic or narrative work. The character is interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it and from what they do (32). By using character, the author can make the story more alive.

The reader of a short story can conclude a character's details with characterization's help. According to Kay and Gelshenen, characterization can be defined as the way the author creates character through physical descriptions, speech, thought, actions, and observation from other characters (60). Furthermore, according to Shlomith

Rimmon-Keenan in *Narrative Fiction*, there are two types of textual indicators of character. They are:

**a) Direct Characterization**

Direct characterization occurs when the author mentions a character's qualities in the text directly. The author can mention the characterization throughout "an adjective (e.g., 'he was goodhearted'), an abstract noun ('his goodness knew no bounds'), or possibly some other kind of noun ('she was a devil') or part of speech ('he loves only himself')" (Keenan 61). The readers can see a character's characterization that is mentioned directly as long as it is from the authoritative voice in the text.

**b) Indirect Characterization**

In this type of characterization, the character's detail is not mentioned directly. Keenan stated that a characterization is indirect when rather than mentioning a trait, it displays and exemplifies it in various ways (63). The ways are action, speech, external appearance, and the environment.

The action itself is divided into two kinds; one-time actions and habitual actions. One-time actions tend to evoke the dynamic aspect of the character, while habitual actions tend to reveal the character's unchanging or static aspect(63). A character's speech whether in conversation or as a silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits both through its content and through its form (65). Also, the speech style of a character may indicate her/his "origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession (66)." Furthermore, the external appearance and environment of the character are also able to present a character's qualities. The external features that grasped the character's control such as height and color of eyes characterized through contiguity alone while the external features that depend on the character such as hairstyle and clothing have additional causal overtones (67- 68). A character's physical surroundings (room, house, street, town), and human environment (family, social class), are also often used to present a character's qualities(68).

According to Blank, Dabady, and Citro, the definition of discrimination includes two elements, they are differential treatment based on race that disadvantages a racial group, and treatment based on inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group (40). Blank, et al. further divided discrimination into some types:

**a) Intentional Discrimination**

People doing this type of discrimination realize and are conscious that they behave negatively toward members of another racial group directly. There are sequential steps of intentional discrimination, they are "verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination" (Blank, Dabady, and Citro 56). In most cases, people do not get to the later steps without receiving support for their behavior in the earlier ones (56).

**Verbal antagonism** includes casual racial slurs and disparaging racial comments, either in or out of the target's presence (56). Racial comments may not be regarded as serious enough to be unlawful but it creates hostility between races and lead to other discrimination. **Avoidance** is choosing the comfort of one's own racial group (the "ingroup" in social psychological terms) over interaction with another racial group (the "outgroup") (57). Avoidance can lead members of the disadvantaged racial group to be isolated. **Segregation** occurs when people actively exclude members of a disadvantaged racial group from the allocation of resources and access to institutions (57). **Physical attacks** on racial outgroups have frequently been perpetrated by proponents of segregation

and are correlated with other overt forms of discrimination (58). The extreme form of physical attack is **extermination** or mass killings based on race.

## **b) Subtle and Unconscious Discrimination**

Discrimination attitudes do not always result in discriminatory behavior with intentional effect. The persistence of such attitudes can result in unconscious and subtle forms of racial discrimination in exchange for more explicit hostility (Blank, Dabady, and Citro 58). These attitudes appear to be neutral and undiscriminating, but they can give a discriminatory impact on the disadvantaged racial group. In this type of discrimination, people's intention may be good but their mind is biased to blame the "outgroup" for their disadvantages.

## **c) Statistical Discrimination and Profiling**

According to Blank, et al., Statistical discrimination or profiling is "situations of discrimination based on beliefs that reflect the actual distributions of characteristics of different groups (61). In this case, an individual will be seen as a part of a group instead of as an individual itself. An individual or firm uses overall beliefs about a group to make decisions about an individual from that group (61). This may cause an individual treated differently because of the beliefs associated with their racial group membership.

## **d) Organizational Processes**

Organizational rules sometimes evolve out of past histories (including past histories of racism) that are not easily reconstructed, and such rules may appear quite neutral on the surface (Blank, et al. 63). But if these processes function in a way that leads to differential racial treatment or produces differential racial outcomes, the results can be discriminatory (63).

## **C. Research Method**

This research is using the qualitative research method. Qualitative research is "concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are" (Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge 7). This research tries to understand the social world on how race is discriminated against in *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story. The researcher uses multiculturalism as the approach of this research because it is compatible with the object that the researcher uses. In collecting data, the researcher uses three steps, they are; reading data source, taking notes of the useful information, then selecting the important and relevant data for analysis. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the collected data based on Miles and Huberman's guide. First step is data reduction, that is process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data taken during the research (10). The researcher gathers the data from data source and transforms them into explanation. Then the second step is data display, where the data is organized and analyzed. In this study, the researcher organized and analyzed the data related to the problem based on the types of racial discrimination and the characterization theory. Lastly, the researcher do the last step that is conclusion drawing and verification. In this step, the researcher can draw conclusion of the research and verify the finding to make sure it is the valid data to answer the research question.

## **D. Finding and Discussion**

This part is going to discuss the collected data and analyze them through the multiculturalism approach. The researcher will find the types of racial discrimination portrayed in *Poor Little Black Fellow*. The researcher is also going to find the way of author portrays racial discrimination in his short story through characterization of Arnold, The Pembertons, and Mapleton villagers' characters.

### **1. Types of Racial Discrimination in *Poor Little Black Fellow* through Characterization**

#### **a) Intentional Discrimination**

In this type of discrimination, the researcher found three sequential steps of intentional discrimination that are verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation.

##### **Verbal Antagonism**

The researcher found 3 data which belong to verbal antagonism that identified. Here is one of the example of exploitation.

Data 2:

**“He’s a black devil,”** said Mr. Pemberton. (Hughes 99)

The data above shows the rude speech of Mr. Pemberton after learning Arnold was sneaking to Claudina Laurence's room. Speech can be a way to construct an indirect characterization of a character. In this case, the speech of Mr. Pemberton by calling Arnold 'black devil' shows the indirect characterization of Mr. Pemberton as a racist character. A rude speech toward a racial minority can be categorized as a verbal antagonism either in or out of the target presence (Blank, Dabady, and Citro 56). Instead of saying, "He's a devil", Mr. Pemberton added the word 'black' to assert that Arnold is a bad boy (devil) and worse, he was a Black.

##### **Avoidance**

The avoidance treatment to Arnold's character happened when Arnold began to grow up as a teenager.

Data 4:

Everything might have been all right forever had not Arnie begun to grow up. The other children began to grow up, too. Adolescence. The boys had girls. They played kissing games, and learned to dance. **There were parties to which Arnie was not invited—really couldn’t be invited—with the girls and all.** And after generations of peace the village of Mapleton, and the Pembertons, found themselves beset with a Negro problem. Everyone was a little baffled and a little ashamed (Hughes 92).

The data above explains that Arnold's friends began to behave like teenagers in general, such as dating, dancing, and going to parties, while Arnold was never invited to any party and never danced with any girls. The racial discrimination in this short story can be seen in Arnold's indirect characterization through human environment. In his environment, all the children had been taught to do 'very kind' to Arnold by pitying him, not to treat him as an equal human. Then as they grew up, they realized that Arnold was different from them. Then came a feeling of confusion and embarrassment because there was someone different from them in their village, so they chose to avoid Arnold. In that case, they never invited Arnold to the party.



### Segregation

Another step of intentional discrimination emerged in the form of separation between the whites and the African-American.

Data 8:

**The two rooms over the garage made a fine apartment for a growing boy. His pennants and books and skis were there. (93)**

The data above shows the situation of Arnold's room as his place of living. Arnold lived in the room above the garage that was no longer in use. The room is a physical environment of Arnold's character. Arnold had to live in an unfeasible room with all his belongings there while the rest of the family lived in the decent room in the house. By the separation between Arnold's room and the other family members, the researcher indicates that Arnold got racial discrimination treatment. Segregation occurs when there is a separation between blacks and whites. Usually, African-American's facilities will be much worse than White's. In this case, Arnold experienced inequality in the form of his room which was in much worse condition and separated from the other rooms of family members.

### b) Subtle and Automatic Discrimination

In this section, the researcher found that there are also discriminations that do not have a direct adverse effect.

Data 13:

**“Poor little black boy,”** they said. **“An orphan, and colored.** And the Pembertons are so good to him. **You be nice to him,** too, do you hear? Share your lunch with him. And don't fight him. Or hurt his feelings. **He's only a poor little Negro who has no parents.**” So even the children were **over-kind** to Arnie (Hughes 92).

This situation presents Mapleton villagers' characterization in the form of indirect characterization through speech. As in the data, they told their children to be always kind to Arnold because they feel sorry for him. These speeches were a form of giving Arnold unfair treatment in the form of giving excessive pity. However, the feeling of pity that appears even greater because Arnold is black is a form of Mapleton villagers' automatic reaction toward African-American people. They believed that African-Americans were lower than them, the whites. So when they saw Arnold, both orphan and black, they pity him too much. Furthermore, this racial discrimination on the surface does not appear to be harmful. But, it subtly had a negative effect on Arnold's character, who was a minority, that felt excluded and insecure about being black.

### c) Statistical Discrimination

In this type of discrimination, people draw conclusions about an individual based on the statistics of a group. The researcher indicates statistical discrimination occurs when Arnold and the Pemberton family want to board a ship that has been booked to go to Paris.

Data 19:

But with all their careful planning, things weren't going so well about the European trip. **When the steamship company saw the passports, they canceled the cabin that had been engaged for Arnie. Servants always went second class, they wrote.** That Arnie wasn't a servant, it was revealed ultimately, made no difference. He was a Negro, wasn't he? (Hughes 95)

The indirect characterization of Arnold as a discriminated character is presented through the steamship company's action. In the data above, when Arnold and the Pemberton family wanted to board the ship, the steamship company prohibited Arnold from going to the same cabin as the rest of his adoptive family. The action of steamship company showed how statistical discrimination worked toward Arnold. At that time, most African-American people lived in America as a servant. Then when the steamship company saw Arnold's passport, they assumed Arnold was a servant too. In this case, the steamship company does not view Arnold as an individual itself but as part of a group of African-American people who statistically live in America as a servant.

### d) Organizational Process

In this type of discrimination, discrimination occurs when regulations in a company or organization can have a discriminatory effect on an individual or group. In this short story, Arnold, as a minority, gets discriminatory treatment from Boy Scout Camp.

Data 20:

Then there had arisen that problem of the Boy Scouts. When Arnie was sixteen the Pembertons applied for him to be admitted to a Summer camp for the Scouts at Barrow Beach, and the camp had refused. **In a personal letter to Mr. Pemberton, they said they simply could not admit Negroes. Too many parents would object.** So several of Arnie's friends and classmates went off to camp in June, and Arnie could not go. (Hughes 92)

In the data above, Arnold's indirect characterization as a minority who gets discrimination treatment is presented through the action of Boy Scout Camp toward him. The action of Boy Scout Camp is based on their organizational rule to provide comfort for parents of students. However, all of the parents of student are whites, who have a biased mind towards black people. Then, they have an uncomfortable feeling if there are black children who join. Based on that, the Boy Scout Camp decided to reject Arnold from joining the camp. In this case, the organizational rules have no points on the prohibition of African-Americans joining the program. However, along with the implementation of regulations that prioritize the interests of the majority in the organization, it creates a discriminatory effect on minorities. Therefore this regulation makes Arnold can not participate in the summer camp.

## 2. Discussion

In this study, the researcher found four types of racial discrimination toward African-Americans in *Poor Little Black Fellow's* short story. They are intentional discrimination, subtle and automatic discrimination, statistical discrimination, and organizational process. Those racial discriminations are portrayed in the characterization of Arnold, The Pembertons, and Mapleton villagers characters.

From the whole process of this research, the researcher found that the racial discrimination that appeared in this research was mainly intentional and subtle. The subtle racial discrimination shows up in the various kindnesses that The Pembertons and Mapleton villagers do in the form of kindnesses to pity Arnold. So that indirectly Arnold became alienated. Meanwhile, intentional discrimination appears mostly through verbal antagonism and avoidance. However, the intentional discrimination that occurred did not

reach the stage of physical attack and extermination.

In addition, the characterization of the characters of Arnold, The Pembertons, and the Mapleton villagers, which portray racial discrimination, is mainly in the form of indirect characterization. The indirect characterizations from those characters were mostly presented from environment and speech. Meanwhile, direct characterization to portray racial discrimination in this study only appeared slightly.

### **E. Conclusion**

In this short story, intentional discrimination develops from the verbal antagonism, avoidance, then segregation. Then subtle discrimination emerged in the form of kindness treatment that had a discriminatory effect on Arnold as an African-American. These two types of discrimination appear in indirect characterization through speech, action, environment, and also with the direct characterization. Meanwhile, statistical discrimination and organizational discrimination, which are a small part of the data found in this research, arise through indirect characterization throughout actions.

*Poor Little Black Fellow* short story can portray all of the types of racial discrimination that researcher mentioned. This proves that a short story consisting of only a few pages is able to deliver many messages that the author wants to convey to the reader. This is because short stories focus only on important moments that the author wants to show. In the *Poor Little Black Fellow* short story, the author focused on the moments where racial discrimination existed, and he portrayed it through the characterization of the characters.

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