

Prejudice towards African American as Potrayed in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Novel Written by Mildred D. Taylor

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap jenis-jenis prasangka yang dialami oleh orang-orang Afrika-Amerika dan untuk mengetahui perilaku mereka ketika mengalami prasangka. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori *prejudice* dan *traits to victimization* dari Gordon Allport. Data di dalam penelitian ini berupa narasi dan dialog. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karakter Afrika-Amerika dalam novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* mengalami tiga bentuk prasangka, yaitu: *antilocution*, *diskriminasi*, dan *physical attack*. Tindakan prasangka terjadi karena kelompok kulit putih menganggap diri mereka sebagai mayoritas dan superior dibandingkan kelompok Afrika-Amerika. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa ada sifat *ekstropunitif* dan *intropunitif* yang direpresentasikan dalam novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, yaitu; (1) *Withdrawal and passivity*, (2) *Strengthening in-group*, (3) *Slyness and cunning*, (4) *Prejudice against out-groups*, and (5) *Aggression and revolt*.

Kata kunci: prasangka, sifat, Afrika-Amerika, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

ABSTRACT

This research aims to reveal the kinds of prejudice experienced by African Americans and to know the behaviors of African Americans when they experience prejudice. This research utilizes Gordon Allport's acting out prejudice and traits of prejudice victimization theory. The data in this research were in the form of narration and dialogue. The result of this research showed that African-American characters in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Novel experience three forms of prejudice, namely: *antilocution*, *discrimination*, and *physical attack*. Prejudice actions occur because white groups consider themselves as the majority and better than African American groups. The result also showed that extropunitive and intropunitive traits represented in the *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Novel consisted of: (1) *withdrawal and passivity*, (2) *strengthening in-group*, (3) *slyness and cunning*, (4) *prejudice against out-group*, and (5) *aggression and revolt*.

Keywords: prejudice, behaviors, African-American, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

A. INTRODUCTION

Prejudice against other groups becomes a common issue that occurs in a multicultural society. The difference of several aspects such as culture and race are two of the triggers to make prejudice happen. Furthermore, prejudice can affect a person's behavior towards the target groups which usually leads to harmful or hostile actions. As Allport says, if prejudice is more intense towards others, it can lead to negative or hostile action.

When prejudice turns into discrimination, it can create hierarchies that determine the access of certain individuals or groups to opportunities and benefits, most occur based on racial differences. For example, at the beginning of the emergence of the coronavirus disease, sentiment towards Asian groups, especially China was very strong. It is due to the circulation of rumors about the corona virus originating from China, although until now the news is not valid. As a result of this issue, some Asians have experienced persecution and discrimination.

According to Croucher, the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak has brought increased incidents of racism, discrimination, and violence against “Asians,” particularly in the United States, with reports of hate crimes of over 100 per day. Since January 2020, many Asian Americans have reported suffering racial slurs, wrongful workplace termination, being spat on, physical violence, extreme physical distancing, etc., as media and government officials increasingly stigmatize and blame Asians for the spread of Covid-19 (1). The statement above shows how the emergence of the corona virus caused negative prejudices against Asian groups. They are considered to be spreaders of the virus that infects almost most of the countries in the world.

In this research, the researchers take one of the literary works that portrays strong prejudice entitled *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel by Mildred D Taylor in 1976. This novel tells about social prejudice experienced by African American groups during the Great Depression Era in Mississippi. The story is seen through the perspective of Cassie, an African American girl. The hostile attitude towards African America is strongly shown in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel.

The researchers choose *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Novel as an object of this research because this novel is one of the best literary works and has won the John Newbery Medal. This novel is also based on a true story in the ‘90s during The Great Depression Era. The story is a reflection of social relationships which leads to the prejudice phenomenon because white people feel superior to black people. To find out the scales of prejudice that happen towards black people, the researcher uses prejudice theory by Gordon Allport.

Based on the background above, the aims of this study are: (1) to find out the hostile action of prejudice towards African American characters and (2) is to analyze the African American traits as the victim of prejudice depicted in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Novel. It was expected that this research can inspire another researcher to analyze a novel through multicultural point of view especially about prejudice and traits to victimization. Hopefully, this research can be a reference for future researcher.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Prejudice

The term of prejudice is often related to negativity. Allport defines prejudice as “thinking ill of other without sufficient warrant” (6). It means that the person puts judgment towards other individuals or groups carelessly without checking the facts. Furthermore, Allport increases prejudice as an aversive or hostile attitude towards a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group (Allport 7). In other words, prejudice is an ill judgment towards another individual and his group, based on feelings scorn or dislike, fear and aversion, and various forms of antipathy. This statement shows that any prejudiced person has the possibility to take further action towards an individual or targeted group. There are five points scale of prejudice from the least energetic to the most which will be explained below.

a. Antilocution

The first scale is antilocution, in which a group throws hate speech or verbal abuse to another group, especially minority groups. Allport said that a mild animosity reflected in antilocution includes gossip and derisive jokes. While a more intense hostility includes scorns and name-calling with such epithets like “kike”, “nigger”, “wop” generally issues from deep and long-standing hostility (Allport 50).

b. Avoidance

Allport states that the bearer of prejudice does not directly inflict harm upon the group he dislikes (Allport 14). This statement refers to avoidance. Furthermore, he also explains that avoidance occurs “If the prejudice is more intense, it leads the individual to avoid members of the disliked group, even perhaps at the cost of considerable inconvenience” (Allport 14).

c. Discrimination

According to Allport, discrimination involves denying or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish (Allport 51). In other words, discrimination can be described as unequal or unfair treatment towards a person or group, by preventing it from achieving goals, getting an education or jobs, etc.

d. Physical Attack

Physical Attack is known as a hate crime. In this case, the group doing physical harm to a member of a marginalized group includes hate crimes, vandalizing, lynching, etc. For example vandalism, properties are burning, or even violent attacks on the targeted group (Allport 59).

e. Extermination

The last scale is extermination. Extermination is mass killing based on racial or ethnic hatred. Allport’s example of this case is the Hitlerian program of genocide that marks the ultimate degree of violence expression of prejudice (Allport 15).

2. Traits Due to Victimization

When the hostile action of prejudice is done against an individual or group, this will affect the victim’s group, and the victims of prejudice have their way of defending themselves. It is because when the victims receive a certain trait, they also show particular behavior too. Allport also defines that the behavior originated from two traits, these are extropunitive and intropunitive (Allport 160).

a. Extropunitive

Extropunitive is the behavior that includes a mechanism that is essentially aggressive, outgoing, and indicating attacks on the source of difficulty (Allport 160). Extropunitive consists of several points such as obsessive concern and suspicion, slyness and cunning, strengthening in-group ties, prejudice against other groups, aggression, and revolt. Allport also says that aggression and revolt themselves are further divided into four specific behaviors, which are stealing, competitiveness, rebellion, and enhanced striving.

b. Intropunitive

Intropunitive is explained as the behavior in the introverted mode, intropunitive behavior tends to blame himself or even take responsibility upon himself for adjusting the situation (Allport 160). Intropunitive consists of several points such as denial of membership in own group, withdrawal and passivity, clowning, self-hate, in-group aggression, sympathy, symbolic status striving, and neuroticism.

3. Prejudice in The Great Depression Era

African American community experienced strong racist effects during the Depression Era. Schools for African Americans lacked adequate supplies and were given the recycled goods of white schools. Many black people were fired from their jobs and replaced by whites, this is because the whites are considered more important and should get a chance before other races.

Sharecropping was no longer a majority African American occupation as many were replaced by Caucasians who intimidated landowners into terminating the farmer's land contracts. African Americans were expected to behave like second-class citizens, to wait for service, and to stay quiet about their situation (Harris 4).

4. Character and Characterization

Character and characterization have an essential role and cannot be separated in a literary work. According to Bennet and Royale, a character is a person in the narrative, then characterization is the representation of a person in the narrative. Characterization can make a character's life unique and different from the others. The kind of conversation they have, the things they do, their appearances, and so on are the particular ways in which the author has chosen to characterize his or her character (65). Meanwhile, Reams states that there are five ways of presenting characters' traits, namely: (1) physical description, (2) action, (3) reaction, (4) thought, and (5) speech/dialogue (Reams 4-13).

C. METHOD

The design of this research is qualitative research. Qualitative research can be constructed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in collecting and analysis of data. According to Emzir, qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical case studies, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that described routine and problematic moments and meaning of an individual's live (Ezmir 1). To view prejudice as a social issue in literary work, the researcher uses a mimetic approach. The mimetic approach is the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe or in other words, the art is reflecting the real world (Abrams 7).

1. Data and Data Source

The data of this research were taken from *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel which included a form of narration and dialogue that contained prejudice value. Whereas, the data source of this research was *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel by Mildred D. Taylor, published in 1976 by arrangement with Dial Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

2. Data Collection

To get the data in this research, the researchers used a 'close reading' method. The method involved a process of reading with close attention, or simply said as attentive reading. Here were three steps of collecting data which was applied in this study, as follows: (1) read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel several times (2) focused on finding the dialogues and sentences which indicate the forms of prejudice and traits suffered by African American characters (3) took note of words, dialogues, or sentences that had potential to be used as data in this research.

3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is displayed when all the data research has been collected. The researchers used five steps data analysis by Powell and Renner (2-5).

1) Get to know the data

In this step, the researcher read and re-read the novel to fully understand the data.

2) Focus the analysis

In this step, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the evaluation and focused on the first and second research questions.

3) Categorize information

The data were arranged into an organized and systematic display of information. The researcher classified the dialogues or sentences from the novel which related to the research questions.

4) Identify

After organized the data into research question categories, the researcher identified all the patterns and connections between information on the note and highlighted every single data related to prejudice and traits to victimizations towards African American.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Prejudice

a. Antilocution

The first hostile act in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel is antilocution which is thrown by the whites children in the bus towards six African Americans childrens, namely T.J, Claude, Cassie, Stacey, Christopher John, and Little Man.

Little Man, chest-deep in water, scooped up a handful of mud and in an uncontrollable rage scrambled up to the road and ran after the retreating bus. As moronic rolls of laughter and cries of “Nigger! Nigger! Mud eater!” wafted from the open windows, Little Man threw his mudball, missing the wheels by several feet. Then, totally dismayed by what had happened, he buried his face in his hands and cried (Taylor 32).

The narration above shows the hate speech uttered by white children. The utterance indicates racial slur towards African-Americans which can be seen from the way the white children use a form of “Nigger” to ridicule the African-American community. An American law professor Randal Kennedy traces the history of the word nigger. He states that Nigger is “the nuclear bomb of racial epithets,” a word that whites have employed to wound and degrade African Americans for three centuries (86). As we know, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel is set in Great Depression-era, where racial tensions and prejudices are very strong between whites and blacks. It means the epithet nigger that whites use to address blacks is an antilocution based on prejudice. Besides the epithet “Niggers”, they also express a hateful opinion that is “mud eaters”. Therefore, the antilocution in this data shown by White Children is represented through the speech of the character.

b. Discrimination

For the discrimination, the researchers found several data which correlated to an unfair treatment towards African American community. The first discrimination was experienced by Cassie, T.J, and Stacey and done by Mr. Barnett. It can be seen below.

“Mr. Barnett walked to another counter and began filling the order, but before he finished a white woman called, “Mr. Barnett, you waiting on anybody just now?” Mr. Barnett turned around. “Just them,” he said, indicating us with a wave of his hand. “What can I do for you, Miz Emmaline?” The woman handed him a list twice as long as T.J.’s and the storekeeper, without a word of apology to us, proceeded to fill it” (Taylor 75).

The narration above shows an unfair treatment committed by Mr. Barnett towards Cassie, T.J, and Stacey. The behavior of Mr. Barnett is an indication of discrimination against Cassie, T.J, and Stacey. He gave special treatment and prioritized the woman just because she was white. Meanwhile, these three African-Americans kids had to wait until all white people had been served. Therefore, the Discrimination in this data shown by Mr. Barnett is represented through the action of the character.

c. Physical Attack

In this novel, an act of violence was done by Lillian Jean and Mr. Simms. Physical attack is portrayed in the case of Cassie's bump into Lillian Jean.

let her pass, Lillian Jean,” said Jeremy. “She ain’t done nothin’ to you.” “She done something to me just standing in front of me.” With that, she reached for my arm and attempted to push me off the sidewalk. I braced myself and swept my arm backward, out of Lillian Jean’s reach. But someone caught it from behind, painfully twisting it, and shoved me off the sidewalk into the road. I landed bottom first on the ground. Mr. Simms glared down at me. “When my gal Lillian Jean says for you to get yo’self off the sidewalk, you get, you hear?” (Taylor 78).

This evidence can be categorized as a physical attack because it involves verbal action that indicates a threat and physical action towards Cassie. It shows that Lillian and Mr. Simms’s prejudice against Cassie is getting stronger even though she had apologized. The act of physical assault is the root of Lillian Jean and Mr. Simms’s hatred of African Americans. Lillian hates black people and thinks they are always inferior to her group Therefore, the physical attack in this data is shown by Mr. Simms and Lillian Jean which are represented through the action of the character.

2. Traits Due to Victimization

a. Withdrawal and passivity (Intropunitive)

The first trait that the researchers found was withdrawal and passivity. It is a behavior where the victim conceals his true feeling of resentment behind a façade of passive acquiescence. In other words, the victims agreed to their adversary to avoid humiliation. Withdrawal and passivity are portrayed by Big Ma and Cassie when they confronted Lillian Jean and Mr. Simms in the incident at Strawberry. In that incident, Cassie received hostile actions in the form of antilocution and physical attacks from Lillian and her father.

*Big Ma looked at me again, her voice cracking as she speaks. “Go on, child. . . apologize.” “But, Big Ma—”
Her voice hardened. “Do like I say.”*

I swallowed hard.

"Go on!"

"I'm sorry," I mumbled.

"I'm sorry, Miz Lillian Jean," demanded Mr. Simms.

"Big Mama!" I balked.

"Say it, child."

A painful tear slides down my cheek and my lips trembled.

"I'm sorry . . . M-Miz . . . Lillian Jean." (Taylor 79).

The narration above shows Big Ma told Cassie to apologize in front of the crowd to Lillian and her father, even though he had received psychical act and hate speech from Lillian and Mr. Simms. Big Ma's response above is identified as withdrawal and passivity, Big Ma just resigned herself to the hostile action that happened to her and Cassie. Big ma realizes that she is just an old woman who cannot do much and fights Mr. Simms. She also realized that dealing with white people would be difficult so he relented to avoid bigger problems. Moreover, a trait of withdrawal and passivity is shown by Big Ma which is represented through the speech of the characters.

b. Strengthening in-group (Extropunitive)

In this novel, special solidarity was portrayed by Mr. Logan to Mr. Morrison. When Mr. Morrison gets discriminated and fired from his job, he is not able to find a new job. Mr. Logan, who knew about it, then brought Mr. Morrison to his house to protect him and give him a work.

"Mr. Morrison lost his job on the railroad a while back," Papa continued, "and he ain't been able to find anything else. When I asked him if he wanted to come work here as a hired hand, he said he would. I told him we couldn't afford much—food and shelter and a few dollars in cash when I come home in the winter." Mama turned to Mr. Morrison, studied him for a moment, and said, "Welcome to our home, Mr. Morrison." (Taylor 25).

The narration above shows Mr. Logan introducing Mr. Morrison to his family and tells the bad things that happen to him. After a case of fight with several white men, Mr. Morrison is having a hard time finding another job. Mr. Logan who works hard to pay his land taxes still helps Mr. Morrison by employing him on his farm. It is because Mr. Logan feels empathy for Mr. Morrison who is also a member of his group and experienced prejudice that also happened to him. Moreover, the trait of strengthening in-group shown by Mr. Logan is represented through the speech of the characters.

c. Slyness and cunning (Extropunitive)

As a white girl, Lillian Jean felt that she was superior than her little African American friend. Meanwhile, Cassie is annoyed with Lillian's treatment that makes her like a slave, but she has her way of tricking Lillian Jean. Cassie is acting by agreeing to her bondage.

When we were alone, she confided her secrets to me: the boy she had passionately loved for the past year and the things she had done to attract his attention (with no success, I might add); the secrets of the girls she couldn't stand as well as those she could; and even a tidbit or two about her elder brothers' romantic

adventures. All I had to do to prime the gossip pump was smile nicely and whisper a “Miz Lillian Jean” every now and then. I almost hated to see the source dry up (Taylor 121).

In the narration above, Cassie succeeds in tricking Lillian Jean. The relationship between Cassie and Lillian Jean which is getting closer makes Lillian believe in Cassie, she told some of her secrets to Cassie. Cassie was satisfied and kept triggering Lillian Jean to tell her secret. The secret is used by Cassie to threaten Lillian Jean if she told anyone about their fight. Finally, Jean realized that Cassie had been pretending to be his slave all along. Therefore, the trait of slyness and cunning is shown by Cassie which is represented through the speech of the character.

d. Prejudice against out-groups (Extropunitive)

Prejudice against out-group is carried out by Stacey and his siblings toward Jeremy Simms. Jeremy Simms is a white boy, but he never rides the bus. He is also Lillian Jean's brother. He would like very much to be Stacey's friend, but Lillian always scolds him when he is close to an African American. Prejudice against out-groups is depicted when Cassie and her brother receive a hostile attitude from students and the Jefferson School bus driver. The narration can be seen below.

*When Jeremy Simms spied us from his high perch on the forest path, he ran hastily down and joined us. “Hey,” he said, his face lighting into a friendly grin. But no one spoke to him. The smile faded and, noticing our mud-covered clothing, he asked, “Hey, St-Stacey, wh-what happened?” **Stacey turned, stared into his blue eyes and said coldly, “Why don’t you leave us alone? How come you always hanging ’round us anyway?”** Jeremy grew even more pale. “C-cause I just likes y’all,” he stammered. Then he whispered, “W-was it the bus again?” No one answered him and he said no more (Taylor 32).*

In the narration above Stacey and her siblings have prejudice against Jeremy. Jeremy tries to join and make friends with them, but Jeremy's presence gets a rejection from Stacey, this is because Jeremy is a white man. Stacey thinks that Jeremy is the same as other white children. These four African Americans realized that the relationship between blacks and whites was always problematic. Therefore, the trait of prejudice against Out-Groups is shown by Stacey and his siblings who are represented through the action of the characters.

e. Aggression and revolt (Extropunitive)

The representation of aggression and rebellion is depicted in the incident of a fight between Lillian Jean and Cassie. Cassie wants to avenge Lillian's actions that made her angry and embarrassed when she was at Strawberry. The narration can be seen below.

*I flailed into her, tackling her with such force that we both fell. After the first shock of my actually laying hands on her, she fought as best she could, but she was no match for me. I was calm and knew just where to strike. **I punched her in the stomach and buttocks, and twisted her hair, but not once did I touch her face;** (Taylor 123).*

The narration above shows Cassie taking Lillian to the forest where no one can see. Afterward, Cassie beat up Lillian and punched her stomach and buttocks. Cassie also twisted

her hair. A fight ensued, Lillian fought back by hitting Cassie. Cassie asked Lillian to apologize about what happened at the Strawberry, but she refused. Cassie's action is indicated as aggression and revolt. It is Cassie's response against Lillian for the hostility she did at Strawberry. Therefore, the trait of slyness and cunning is shown by Cassie that is represented through the action of the character.

D. CONCLUSION

After analyzing prejudice towards African American and their behavior, the researchers conclude that there are three forms of prejudice experienced by African-American characters, namely: (1) antilocution, (2) discrimination, and (3) physical attack. During the research process, the researcher does not get avoidance act data which leads the whites to avoid African American members and there is no data in the novel that tells about removal of the African Americans group through genocide or ethnic cleansing. In other words, the other two forms (avoidance and extermination) of prejudice are not found in the novel.

As for the African-Americans' responses towards prejudice, the researchers conclude that there are four types of traits due to victimization represented in *The Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel, namely; (1) withdrawal and passivity, (2) strengthening in-group, (3) slyness and cunning, (4) prejudice against out-groups, and (5) aggression and revolt.

Furthermore, characterization theory in this research is used to show how African American traits are depicted. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* novel, African American's responses to prejudice are represented in two ways, namely: through the character's speech and action. The most dominant trait is portrayed through the character's speech or dialogue.

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