

Racial Discrimination in the Short Story Entitled “The Beautiful Thing” by Kit De Waal: A Critical Race Study

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the racism issue and character discrimination portrayed in a short story entitled "The Beautiful Thing" by Kit De Waal. The short story was chosen as the primary data source since it illustrated fairly how the racism issue occurred with black immigrants in England. The data was obtained using the documentation method and a note-taking technique. The note-taking technique used to find a result in the form of sentences and phrases quotations from the short story. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by referring to six basic tenets of critical race theory proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001). This study was merely focused on linking the storyline which presents a racism issue with six basic tenets of critical race theory. The analysis showed that the short story presented a comprehensive illustration of racism that occurred specifically to black people in America. The racism encountered including verbal abuse and racial discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are born racially different. No bodies are precisely the same as each other. The differences can be in the form of skin color, face shape, gender, traits, ability, habits, culture, language, race, dialect, or country. These are the uniqueness of every human and being differentiators of a human and another. Thus, humans live in diversity.

Diversity brings two effects to human life, both positive and negative. Diversity can lead people to unity in diversity where humans can be more tolerant, respect each other, be willing to help others, and complement others' shortcomings. Moreover, it does not create a monotonous life due to the

existence of various thoughts in every human being. However, diversities are highly possible to bring the human mind out of the positive ways that might distress society's concord. Humans possibly distinguish and classify themselves from others. Occasionally, humans believe themselves superior to other humans, which highly triggers a trivial view of other humans (Annamma et al., 2013). One of the most prominent examples is racism.

Racism is something ordinarily found in our social life. Racism is a term for the use of negative values to the traits commonly associated with a particular race and the subordinate ranking of race on the social hierarchy (Bell, 2000).

Simply put racism is prejudice or discrimination against other people because of their race, biology, behavior, or physical appearance (Reilly, 2003). Racism existed a few years ago, and we can learn how racism unconsciously has become a human habit throughout history, media, and culture. Unfortunately, over the years, it has remained attached to society up to today. Vidal (1996) believes that racism exists today through subtle covert behaviors which are ingrained through the various systems and socialization.

There are two popular issues of racism all the time. They are the race of the country and the color of their skin. Racial discrimination is based on the country where people are initially coming from. For example, people who are African are treated differently by other nations. It is because Africans have different characteristics, especially in appearance, with black skin compared to other countries. The racial discrimination often happened to Asian people as well. Looking at the world issue nowadays, COVID-19 is from one of Asian countries, China. The impact is that other nations now raise Asian people because they are considered a source of disease and disaster for the world. There are two popular issues of racism all the time. They are the race of the country and the color of their skin. Racial discrimination is based on the country where people are initially coming from. For example, people who are African are treated differently by other nations. It is because Africans have different characteristics, especially in appearance, with black skin compared to other countries.

Moreover, the racism of skin color also commonly occurs nowadays. An example of the matter is people whose black skin is discriminant against by white people. Black people are assumed to be despised, dirty, and seedy. They

reviewed the history where black people were often used to be slavery to white people (Orelus, 2012). In a conceptual review, racial differences are often a measure of a person's ability to create a change that should not be absolutely accepted (Jeyasingham & Morton, 2019).

Racism impacts almost every aspect of human life. It includes the economy, especially in jobs, business, education, justice, health care, and politics. In skin color terms, white people are preferable and get more privileges. Instead, black people face more difficulties in life (Orelus, 2012, p. 87). Even today, it has been affecting almost all human mindsets nowadays that white people are more beautiful than people with black skin color. However, many changes arise, and people can be more open-minded and accept that all humans are the same. Many activists work hard to declare that all people are equal, no more superior and inferior. They significantly resist discrimination. These situations become the pioneer of the existence of critical race theory that is widely used nowadays.

Besides being a social life issue, racism interests many writers to write literary work that presents the idea of racism. Literary work is a form of reflection of human life, but it does not mean that literary works reveal facts or truths (Mutmainnah et al., 2022, p. 350). A literary work that portrays racism is often created based on reality especially those around the writer's life (Yunitri et al., 2019). Apparently, many of the latest literary works exist by confronting the Critical Race Theory elements which were later observed in the Critical Race Theory Research (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Critical Race Theory embraces the oppressed, especially those whose skin is colored. Those who write work to challenge the racial power differences inherent in American legal culture (West, 1995). Therefore, many literary works,

including novels and short stories, use racism as the central theme. The themes are generally about discrimination in life, such as being hard to get a proper job or education by black people, certain races constantly getting bullied by others, and how ostracized people live their lives. Through the stories, the writers wanted to perpetuate how racism occurs in society and tell the moral value to the readers. They can be a history to be read by future generations.

Racism study is remarkably interesting, since it is related to our social life and there are various literary works talking about racism as its background of the story. The existence of literary works that talking about racism opens an opportunity to reveal the racism issue and character discrimination in a short story. This study focused on how the discrimination of particular characters is portrayed in a beautiful short story entitled "The Beautiful Thing" by Kit De Waal. This study has seen to be worth conducted after comparing to the result of the literature reviews that there is no study observe a short story in the context of racial discrimination, and the reviews also shows that the shory story entitled "The Beautiful Thing" by Kit De Waal have never been discussed in the Critical Race Theory by Delgado & Stefancic (2001). The racism issue were anlyzed by referring to six basic tenets of Critical Race Theory namely Everyday Racism, Material Determinism, Social Construction, Differential Racialization, Intersectionality, and Voice of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three previous pieces of research related to this topic have been read and reviewed; those are one undergraduate thesis and two publication articles.

An undergraduate thesis was written by Ulya (2015) with the aims to analyze

the representation of racist attitudes in LouAnne Johnson's *Dangerous Minds* and the construction of racism socially in 20th-century American society as represented in LouAnne Johnson's *Dangerous Minds*. The type of research is qualitative research. The study used library research in order to obtain the data. The primary data is novel, and the note-taking method was used to obtain all information dealing with racism. Furthermore, the secondary data of the article use books to obtain data related to racism in the U.S.A in the 20th century. The study used Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) theory to analyze the data. The result of the study found several racist attitudes that happened in LouAnne Johnson's *Dangerous Minds*; those were everyday racism, material determinism, and intersectionality. Furthermore, racism was socially constructed in 20th century of American society because of social status, race, power, money, and gender. The data analysis of the study is presented descriptively. The study is well-written and explains the data comprehensively with the theory chosen. The similarity between the study and this study is the theory chosen. Meanwhile, the difference between the study and this study is the focus and the object of study because the study used a novel as the object, while this study used a short story as the object. The technique used was also different. Nevertheless, the study contributes to this study in the form of references to support this research.

An article was written by Ratri et al. (2019), that focused on the racism reflected in *The Hate U Give* novel. The type of study is qualitative research. The study used observation and documentation methods. A note-taking technique was applied to collect the data in the study, and the data were presented descriptively. The study used Delgado's (2001) theory to analyze the data related

to critical race. The study found there were indicators of racism in *The Hate U Give* novel: everyday racism, material determinism, social construction, differential racialization, and intersectionality. Besides that, the novel also found unfair treatment and discrimination experienced by black people; black people are always blamed in society just because they are black. The study also explained that black people looked evil in society. The study and this recent study used Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) theory to analyze the data. However, there is a difference between the study and this recent study. The study used novels as the object, while this study used a short story as the object. Therefore, the study provides many references for analyzing the current research.

Another article was written by Anjasmara (2020) entitled "Racism Reflected in Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017): A Critical Race Theory" also reviewed. The study aimed to analyze the issue of racism in *Dear Martin's* novel by Nic Stone (2007) using the critical race theory from Delgado (2001). The study used qualitative research design and observation methods. The technique used in this study was library research since the study used several resources to support the analysis of the data, including online journals, a thesis, and research related to the study's topic and movie version of the novel. In *Dear Martin's* novel, there were several indicators of the racism issue as well as the way the main characters deal with racism, and it can be categorized into three types, namely institutional racism, interpersonal racism, and internalized racism. Indicators of institutional racism are the treatment punishment differences between black and white people in a criminal case. Indicators of interpersonal racism that is both races always look bad at each other.

White people underestimate blacks and think they are cruel—the indicator of internalized racism is underestimating themselves or their race. The study was professionally written with a simple explanation. Both the study and this study used Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) theory. The study differs from this study because of the chosen object and technique used. However, the study contributed to giving several references for this study.

METHODS AND THEORY

This study used a qualitative research method since the observation is focused on a non-measurable object. In this case, it is a literary work. This study used a short story entitled "The Beautiful Thing" by Kat De Waal as the primary data source. This novel is chosen since it presents a story about racism in the closest way to human life. The setting of this story was originally based on the writer's real experience in which she also experienced racism. Therefore, the primary data for this study is taken from the short story by quoting the sentences and phrases that confirm an act of racism.

The data for this study were collected by applying the documentation method supported by the note-taking technique. The documentation method was seen to be the most suitable method since it allowed this study to obtain data from books, documents, and any piece of writing including literary work (Sugiyono, 2015). The note-taking technique is used to collect the data in the form of a quotation script from the short story entitled "The Beautiful Thing" by Kat De Waal. The note-taking technique is used since it allows this research to record the key information in detail and permanently to be used as the source of the analysis.

In analyzing the data, this study applied a descriptive analysis technique.

This technique was used to give a brief description of the data found. The qualitative analysis allows this study to give a proficient description of the answer to the research problem (Creswell, 2014). This study focused on observing the short story by applying the Critical Race Theory according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001). The data found were classified according to 6 basic tenets of Critical Race Theory. Moreover, the results of the data analysis are presented in the informal method by presenting the data descriptively.

Frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory firstly emerged from the movement to fight for equal rights, especially for black people in America (Lynn & Dixon, 2013). Critical Race Study includes studies of race in literature and culture, ethnicity studies, studies of minority literature, and specific traditions in literature and philosophy. It is a component also of legal theory and explicitly addresses questions of racism and racial discrimination." (Nayar, 2009: 287). Critical Race Study theoretically examines how social problems are rooted in ethnicity and race. In practice, CRT includes research objects ranging from ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, legal studies, and the humanities (Martinez, 2020). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), there are six basic principles of critical race theory that they used to overview the phenomena of racism. They are:

1. Everyday racism

Delgado and Stefancic believe that racism is something that is ordinarily found in our daily life. It happens every day, every time, everywhere, and involves everyone (mostly black people in the USA) which makes it difficult to cure. In a conscious condition or not, every single activity

that someone did both verbally and orally which contains violence are racist.

2. Material determinism

Racism covers something related to human desire. In the USA, white people exploit black laborers by paying them less than white workers. It set a new psychological perspective that black people are the target of racism in the economic industry. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) refer to this issue as material determinism. It is a point of view where racism occurred based on convergence interest.

3. Social Construction

The term 'race' is generally understood as human classification based on biological qualities by putting appearance and social background as an identity. However, racism treats race as a product of social thoughts and relations. Racism makes its own rules of group classification by referring to gender, race, and finances.

4. Differential racialization

Delgado and Stefancic (2001:145) state that differential racialization is a process by which racial and ethnic groups are viewed and treated according to race or ethnic group which is influenced by their mainstream. Mainstream here is understood as a set of beliefs to a certain stereotype of a racial category, which is not always factually true.

5. Intersectionality

Someone's racial identity covers various points including gender, skin color, national origin, and sexual orientation. All of these elements can be the judge of racism. When someone suffers from racism because more than one of those elements is involved, they encounter intersectionality. Furthermore, this issue is directed to one viewpoint that intersectionality is

discrimination that overlaps (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001)

6. Voice of color

The notion of critical race theory is connected directly to those who have experienced racism. This idea performs a movement from various people, from activists and educators to writers. Delgado and Stefancic believe that people who speak up more about racism are people from minority classes. For instance, writers from India, Asia, and Latino write better than white Americans since they understand that their fellow citizens are the fundamental object of racism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This research is interested in examining the racism that exists in a short story written by Kit De Waal entitled *The Beautiful Thing*. Kit De Waal is a contemporary British writer who was born in 1960. She is famous for her short stories and novels which have won several prestigious international awards. One of her works is a short story titled *The Beautiful Thing* which is inspired by her life story. Her father is Caribbean, and her mother is Irish. This short story was published in 2015. In general, the writer draws upon the first-person point of view, an open ending, and a backward plot with a racism theme. In short, this story is about a father who told his experience when moved for the first time to his daughter. Her father was a black man. His presence was disliked by the people there which made his future uncertain. He was ridiculed and always got low-paying jobs, worst, he was rudely fired so white people could work there. Implicitly through this short story, Kit De Waal criticized British people who are racist and unfair towards immigrants. She hopes that this rhetoric will disappear immediately to create a just and prosperous society.

Referring to the six tenets of Critical Race Theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), the short story entitled “*The Beautiful Thing*” by Kit de Waal illustrated various acts of racism, particularly how society treated immigrant black men in the United Kingdom. The deviation of the human race perspectives is portrayed in each racism principle which are everyday racism, material determinism, social construction, differential racialization, intersectionality, and voice of colour. The pieces of evidence of racism in this short story were quoted from the story’s narration and dialogues, including the social background of the writer, Kit de Waal.

Verbal Racism

Everyday racism is the behaviour of racism verbally or orally in everyday life. This is very common and ordinary racism. The term ordinary here means that this type of racism is still difficult to relieve. In the short story “*The Beautiful Thing*” coloured and black people were seen as criminals, the difference in skin colour is also one of the bullying materials in this story because black people are seen to have bad behaviour. The statement of verbal racism against coloured and black people can be seen in the following quotation.

[Data 1]

“We don’t need boys that can’t take orders. I thought you would have known how to take orders, *jigaboo*. Thought it would be in your blood.” (Waal, 2015)

Data 1 shows that the type of racism is not just simple as everyone thinks. Racism happens in everyday life and we can notice it, whether it is oral racism or verbal racism. In the quotation above, the word ‘*jigaboo*’ according to Meriam-Webster Dictionary is a term used to insult black people. White people always

think that black people do not have the ability to do anything. Moreover, white people do not hesitate to insult black people with bad words, such as *jigaboo*. It shows that racism still happens in social life and is hard to cure. The dominant group, like white people, always thinks they have more power than the minority, especially in matters of work in everyday life as a society.

Discrimination in Human Desire

Material determinism is a type of racism that is related to human desire. In this type, black people are being exploited by white people because white people pay black people less in their job. In the short story “The Beautiful Thing”, the white people seem to enslave black people by forcing their energy to do work without stopping. This statement can be seen in the quotation below.

[Data 2]

“By the afternoon, all you want is your bed. All you want is to stop. All you want is the easy job the white man gets. But you’re not white and you have your cavewoman on your shoulder, and you have a mother in Antigua with diabetes. So, you make your pile grow, hour after hour you make it grow and to make the time pass you start racing yourself. Then you race the clock, then you race the man next to you.” (Waal, 2015)

Data 2 shows that material determinism is discrimination related to human desire and the quality of a job. The dominant always gets the easy job, while the minority is always enslaved by the dominant. That is the reason why black people are always treated unfairly at work and unable to choose the same jobs as white people. In addition, black people also do not get the same rights in the working world as white people. It

causes the lack of job opportunities given to black people. Furthermore, white people always think that black people do not have money or in other words are poor in society.

The Quality Gap in Different Social Classes

Social construction distinguishes people according to race, social status, gender, financial, and sexual orientation. However, race grouping is not biologically referred to but as a social thought construction. The gap created is built according to intersectionality such as poverty. In the short story, ‘The Beautiful Thing’ poverty became one of the social conditions which were portrayed by the main character’s family. The narrator’s family was an immigrant to the UK with a low financial background. The narrator’s father was an underpaid porter, in which this type of job was usually given to immigrants who were trying to grow their pecuniary better. The poverty that the narrator’s father has experienced was illustrated in the quoted narration.

[Data 3]

“Some of this I’d heard before; my father, twenty days on the ship, getting colder and colder, with bad food and good company, marking time on a bed as narrow as a prison bunk waiting to see the Motherland.” (Waal, 2015)

In the social community, poverty has been seen to be a lower class both financially and in development ability. This creates a new social class with a low perspective of poor people quality. This group of social class has directed other people's mindset to think that poverty is an identity of people with low working ability, low education, and inequality treatment.

Stereotypes of Race

Humans are born with different biological identities which now we agree as a race. The race we understand as the identity we live with, we carry everywhere, and we use it to balance life with others. However, racism views race with a stereotype that grows from a psychological effort by putting expectations in mainstream beliefs. Differential Racialization differentiates a group of races by clearly distinguishing the dominant group and the minority group. The short story "The Beautiful Thing" once illustrated the different racialization through an act of oppression by the narrator's father. The story told that the narrator's father was a black immigrant who worked as a warehouse hand. This character represents the minority group in England in comparison with the white men who hold a dominant power. Minority group in this case the black immigrant has become a target of discrimination according to their race and social class. The story told by the narrator's father, simply illustrates them.

[Data 4]

"We were coloreds to them. We were blackies. And they asked us a whole lot of questions about where we were going and how much money we brought and things like that. Eventually, we got out on the street. People were staring at us. Stopping and pointing, white men in gangs looking at me and Judas and the rest of us. We heard more names, worse ones, 'nigger', 'monkey', 'wog'. I didn't like it". (Waal, 2015)

This one quotation from the short story is enough to show how local people see immigrants, especially black people. So many bad perspectives were directed at them as if black immigrants are dangerous, intimidating, and

unbelievable. Those groundless assumptions are only creating gaps between races, and they are agreed upon more and more.

Racism on Various Objects

The form of racism in intersectionality is bad judgment in terms of gender, skin colour, national origin, and sexual orientation by the major society against minors. Commonly, those four aspects of humans are usually objects of racism. It is also shown in the short story entitled *The Beautiful Thing*. The writer shows clearly how minority people are treated badly and even bullied verbally. The racists are experienced by the main character, a father with his friend named Judas. They are a black man from Antigua, the Caribbean region, and part of the United States where most of the population is of African descent. They are insulted by the white England people for their dark skin colour and their ethnicity, which also humiliates the nationality they originally come from. This is proved by the father's utterances:

[Data 5]

"We were coloureds to them. We were blackies. And they asked us a whole lot of questions about where we were going and how much money we brought and things like that. Eventually, we got out on the street. People were staring at us. Stopping and pointing, white men in gangs looking at me and Judas and the rest of us. We heard more names, worse ones, 'nigger', 'monkey', 'wog'. I didn't like it". (Waal, 2015)

Data 5 shows how the discrimination and bullied both father and Judas got. It is expressed that they received strong intimidation from England migration officers by asking a lot of questions. This is not only because they are immigrants,

but it is also triggered by the black skin they have which is opposite from the British who are white. From this situation, it can be seen that if they have light skin colour, perhaps, they would get only some questions. Moreover, they underestimate black people who are poor and unable to live in England by asking a question about money. In addition, the ridiculous given by British society is also clearly depicted through cynical and condescending stares and even pointing at them impolitely while saying harsh words "monkey, wog" that are ethically rough to be uttered to humans. Another misery is they do not have enough to bully the skin but worse the nations of father and Judas. It is captured by the word 'nigger' given to them which indirectly harassment to their ethnic ancestry namely Africa, and implicitly to their nation and country, Antigua.

Literary Works as the Voice of Racism

Another important part of racism is the voice of colour. Literature is one of the many ways to express the experience of racism. The short story entitled *The Beautiful Things* by Kit De Waal is one of the literary works that sparks the racism phenomenon in the society. The short story tells about someone who encounter racism as the minority race in a social space. The story specifies on telling how black people becomes the main target of racism just because of their look and stereotypes.

More specifically, it is taken from its writer, Kit De Waal. From her biography, it is known that her father is a Caribbean person and the island of this ethnicity is part of North America. Her mother is Irish and originally comes from Ireland. Her father emigrated to the United Kingdom at a young age before marriage. He is a black man who experiences racism. At that time, he got verbally bullied by the English people. He was

tough to get a prosperous job, instead by his ethnicity and black skin he could only get a cobble and low job with little wedges. People there do not respect him. The white people looked strangely and underestimated him. The most interesting thing is, he did not surrender even though had many bad experiences. Her father finally met an Irish woman who also lived in England for work. Eventually, they got married.

Thus, Kit De Waal was born in the United Kingdom. This is the reason why she is famous as a British writer. All of her family experiences are portrayed well in this short story, *The Beautiful Thing*. Moreover, seeing the bad experiences of racism her father had in the past, she criticized and refused all kinds of racism both verbally and not. The way she chooses expresses all her opinions through the story, one of which is this short story entitled *The Beautiful Thing*. In addition, she wants to increase society's awareness that all humans are basically the same. All humans have the right to live, receive equitable treatment, and get a decent job without discrimination, therefore they can live in prosperity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis on the short story "The Beautiful Thing" by using Critical Race Theory, it can be concluded that the short story portrayed various acts of racism. In accordance with the Critical Race Theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), namely Everyday Racism, Material Determinism, Social Construction, Differential Racialization, Intersectionality, and Voice of Colour. These six types of racism are found in the short story "The Beautiful Thing" and the targets of racism are black people. Therefore, it can be proven that acts of racism can occur anywhere, including even in literary works. In addition, acts of

racism can occur verbally and non-verbally. In the short story, acts of verbal racism occur when white people insult black people with animal names, such as “monkey”, there are also those who call black people “nigger”. Meanwhile, non-verbal racism occurs when white people exploit black people’s energy to keep working. By the results of the data from the short story, “The Beautiful Thing” it can be seen that racism can occur anywhere and anytime, racism at that time was always felt by black people, and differences in status and social class also became a trigger for racism, white people always exploited black people and racism occurs because of differences in gender, skin colour, national origin, and sexual orientation.

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