Police Violence Portrayed in Jericho Brown’s Poem “Bullet Points”

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Abstract  
The aim of this study is to analyze depiction of police violence in a poem Bullet Points (2019) by Jericho Brown. Data collection and analysis used qualitative research that explains the data into essay description. This study used racial discrimination theory by Loomba (2015). The results of this study show that in Jericho Brown poem portray issues of police violence, such as received racial discrimination act countless times, positioned in lower classes of economic, and experienced the practice of killing.

Keywords: poem analysis, police violence, racial discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Police violence often becomes a polemic in society. On one hand, some people think that the police need to act “firmly” when it comes to controlling turbid situations, for example when there are demonstrations; but there are also those who feel threatened by excessive use of force. People's fear stems from the excessive use of force by the police. Excessive use of force includes beatings, torture and degrading treatment of human dignity, harassment, use of riot gear indiscriminately and disproportionately with threats of violence when securing demonstrations, to extrajudicial killings may occur to people causing victims. If the police use excessive force, people can become victims of torture, ill-treatment and even loss of life. For example, George Floyd died as a result of excessive violence allegedly based on racial discrimination by the US police. In Indonesia, according to Amnesty Indonesia, as many as 402 people were reportedly injured as a result of police violence during #ReformasiDikorupsi actions in various provinces in Indonesia.

Recent statistics show that in the US, 1,126 people were reportedly killed by police in 2020. In 2019, police in Rio de Janeiro killed 1,810 people, or an average of 5 people killed every day. In Indonesia, based on Amnesty's records, the police are the most alleged perpetrators of attacks on human rights defenders throughout 2021. From January to June 2021, members of the police are alleged to have committed acts of violence and intimidation against human rights defenders in seven cases and resulted in eight victims. During June 2020 – June 2021 there were also at least 17 cases of torture allegedly involving members of the police with 30 victims. Amnesty International's monitoring data also noted that there were at least 14 cases of alleged dispersal, arrests and violence against 108 Papuan students who expressed their opinions, both in the Papua region (five cases, 17 victims) and outside Papua. They only voiced the injustice they had experienced, including the exploitation of the natural wealth where they lived.

Police violence also often targets certain racial groups, as is often the case in America. Violence due to racial differences ultimately led to differences in treatment or discrimination against black people. Any action based on differentiation on physical characteristics, race, and ethnic identity against a group will create discrimination. The meaning of racial differences is separate or differentiate group of people based on their races (Greenblatt, 2018; Klages, 2012). According to Blum (2016), racism is different treatment of a person or group based on their attributes, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social class.
It means that someone's acceptance is influenced by the position of that person or group in society.

Discrimination can also be emerged because of prejudice. DeLameters, Myers, and Collett (2014) state "prejudice is the preconceived negative judgment of a group and its members." It means that prejudice is the irrational perspective, attitudes, and opinions from individuals or groups to others because they consider as certain groups, for instance, the perspective of white people against black people. White people in America often prejudice that black people are always connotated with many forms of crime, such as gangs, drugs, hold-ups, and so on. Many white Americans also feel that their group is superior while black is inferior due to their descendants from slaves. According to Sutton and Douglas (2020), racial discrimination is behavior or treatment of members of certain racial groups against other racial groups or their members based on culture, ethnicity, and attribute that usually unjust. Racial discrimination is a term used when a racial group thinks that their group is better and superior to other groups and considers their group to have special rights among other groups, thereby causing public fanaticism towards its members. Other factors that influence racial violence are hatred towards certain races; like the hatred of the Aryan German race against the Polish Jews which caused the First World War. Thus, it would emerge racial discrimination based on hate. According to Perry (as cited in Healy, 2018, p. 81), “hate crime is an extreme form of discrimination that has arisen as a consequence of a culture of segregation, discrimination and marginalization of those who are different.” It means that racial discrimination is often motivated by hate (Perry et.al, 2015).

In the realm of literature and in the dimension of literary works, issues regarding police violence that lead to racial discrimination are also often the topic of their writing. Many poets created some poems to express their feelings, ideas, and critic about the difference of class, race, and social condition in society. For instance, Jericho Brown chose to express their feeling about the practice of racial discrimination experienced by black people through poems. It can be seen from the poems entitled Bullet Points that tells about white police brutality that shooting black people.

METHOD

The writer used the qualitative method in analyzing “Bullet Points”. Results of analysis are presented in descriptive essay whereas it is one of characteristics of qualitative (Creswell, 2014). In collecting data, the writer took several methods. First, reading the poem by Jericho Brown. Second, identifying the uses of violence in the narrative. Third, taking notes of the racial discrimination issues that appear in the poem. The final stage is analyzing the data using Loomba's theory of racial discrimination. According to Loomba (2015), the causes of racial discrimination are contexts of identity, race, and class. Identity is the difference race that constructed to justify the practice of oppression. He also believed race and class are able to influence the social policies of people of race and ethnicity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This poem is about the brutality shooting by white police officers. It shows in line 1, “I will not shoot myself” this line indicates the violence against the speaker. The word “shoot” refers to violence that indicates to the death history by white police officers. This is inseparable from the legal system since colonialism, where black people are considered despicable, unworthy to live, and need to be exiled. On the other hand, white people consider they have no right to get violence.

Next, in line 2 “I will not hang myself” refers to oppression against the speaker. The word hang indicates a lynching. Lynching is a victim. This act signifies that the status
level of white people is higher than the speaker, so they can do anything including against the law. Another racism portrayed in line 6-7 “In a police car while handcuffed, or in the jail cell of a town” these lines explain racism that occurs by a white police officers. These lines refer to the culture and systemic racism done by white police officers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I will not shoot myself</td>
<td>Police violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I will not hang myself</td>
<td>Practice of oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>In a police car while handcuffed, or in the jail cell of a town</td>
<td>Systemic racism</td>
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<td>8-9</td>
<td>Because I have to drive through it, To get home, Yes, I may be at risk</td>
<td>Oppressed in public places</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>But I promise you, I trust the maggots, who live beneath the floorboards, Of my house to do what they must</td>
<td>Police violence while in custody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>An officer of the law of the land</td>
<td>Inequality in law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>To shut my eyes like a man, Of God might, or to cover me with a sheet</td>
<td>Disrespectful death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>So clean my mother could have used it, To tuck me in. When I kill me, I will</td>
<td>Disrespectful death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Do it the same way most Americans do, I promise you: cigarette smoke, Or a piece of meat on which I choke, Or so broke I freeze</td>
<td>Living in inequality and discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Greater than the settlement</td>
<td>Worsening discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>A city can pay a mother to stop crying</td>
<td>Money to silence discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-33</td>
<td>And more beautiful than the new bullet, Fished from the folds of my brain</td>
<td>Violence victims will never forget</td>
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Then, racial discrimination portrayed in line 8-9 “Because I have to drive through it, To get home. Yes, I may be at risk” in these lines, the speaker tries to reveal racism that occurs in public places. These lines show that there is no law guaranty and no truly safe place for the speaker. Next, racism depicted in line 11-13 “But I promise you, I trust the maggots, who live beneath the floorboards, Of my house to do what they must” these lines states that the racism experience by speaker in police custody. The speaker prefers to trust the maggots that live under the floorboards for speaker death case.

Racial discrimination also contained in line 15 “An officer of the law of the land”, the word “officer of the law” refers to white people and the word “land” indicates the habitations of the speaker. This line expresses the inequality of the social system stand in the law, where the speaker cannot get equality. In lines 16-17 “To shut my eyes like a man, Of God might, or to cover me with a sheet” this line indicates the speaker death body will not cover by white people. Next, in lines 18-19 “So clean my mother could have used it, To tuck me in. When I kill me, I will” these lines indicate a complaining by the speaker because the speaker’s death body did not properly cover.

The lines 20-21, “Do it the same way most Americans do, I promise you: cigarette smoke, Or a piece of meat on which I choke, Or so broke I freeze”. These lines indicate the speaker hopes the racial discrimination will end. Furthermore, in lines 22-25 “In one of these winters we keep, Calling worst. I promise if you hear” refers to the racial discrimination that happen each year. These lines show that the speaker will always haunt of racial discrimination.

In lines 25-28, “I promise if you hear Of me dead anywhere near A cop, then that cop killed me. He took Me from us and left my body, which is” refers to the death of the speaker caused by white police officers These lines implies that white police officers did not responsible of what they do, they left the speaker’s body after the murder which they can twist as suicide cases. Meanwhile in line 30, “Greater than the settlement” shows racial discrimination as bigger than the original habitation of the speaker. This line refers to racial discrimination is getting worse. The line 31 “A city can pay a mother to stop crying” the speaker mentions racial discrimination is a common term. This line express money can silence the speaker’s sorrow. The last lines 32-33 “And more beautiful than the new bullet, Fished from the folds of my brain.” indicates violence against the speaker by white police officers.
will always haunt. These lines express the speaker think his life is useless and in the end, the speaker will die because of white police brutality, not a suicide.

This poem described how black people are often as victim of white police’s shootings. Loomba (2015, p. 132) points that "The superiority of the white races, one colonist argued, clearly implied that 'the black men must forever remain cheap labor and slaves'." It means that white supremacy’s ideas during the colonial period supported racial discrimination in the economic field, white people regards black people as slave who have the lowest economic system and do not deserve to have rights like white people in any aspect of life. Thus, the racial discrimination happened because the statements of white people in the past affect black people’s life today, slavery is a part of black people that never goes away.

CONCLUSION

Discrimination can be defined as the different treatment of individuals based on race, culture, or attribute. The differences also happen to races. As a result of the racial differences, the problem of racial discrimination will arise. Racial discrimination happened in every historical period and it will create a gap and generate any kind matter in society. In each history, racial groups have had ideological concepts about racial differences. This ideological concept became the beginning of the emergence of racial discrimination.

Based on the analysis, the poems entitled “Bullet Points” describe issues of racial discrimination, such as black people often received discriminatory behavior countless times, black people tend in lower classes of economic, and black people experienced the practice of killing. The social structure was playing unfairly in some fields for black people. Black people deal with mistreatment based on their race in many aspects of life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY