

PREJUDICE TOWARDS AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN MILDRED D. TAYLOR'S *THE ROAD TO MEMPHIS* NOVEL

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Abstract: Prejudice has been a long-standing issue in our society. Although it is not essentially harmful, it can lead to various forms of antipathetic conduct such as talking against people, discriminating, or attacking them with violence. This study intends to investigate the problem of prejudice towards African-American characters portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. There are two objectives of this study, namely: (1) to identify the forms of prejudice towards African-Americans, and (2) to analyze how the African-American characters' response to prejudice are portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. In order to investigate the problem of prejudice, this study utilizes Gordon Allport's acting out prejudice and traits of prejudice victimization theory. The data were in the form of narration and dialogue, while the data source was only taken from primary source which was the novel itself. The result of this study showed that African-American in *The Road to Memphis* novel are portrayed to experience three forms of prejudice, namely: antilocution, discrimination, and physical attack. As for African-Americans' responses towards prejudice, it showed that extropunitive was the most dominant trait portrayed in the novel.

Keywords: prejudice, antilocution, trait of prejudice victimization, extropunitive, intropunitive

Abstraks: Prasangka telah menjadi masalah lama dalam masyarakat kita. Meskipun pada dasarnya tidak berbahaya, namun dapat menyebabkan berbagai bentuk perilaku antipati seperti berbicara buruk terhadap orang lain, melakukan diskriminasi, atau menyerang orang lain dengan kekerasan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki masalah prasangka terhadap karakter-karakter Afrika-Amerika yang digambarkan dalam novel *The Road to Memphis*. Ada dua tujuan dalam kajian ini, yaitu: (1) mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk prasangka terhadap orang Afrika-Amerika, dan (2) menganalisis bagaimana tanggapan tokoh-tokoh Afrika-Amerika terhadap prasangka digambarkan dalam novel *The Road to Memphis*. Untuk menyelidiki masalah prasangka, studi ini menggunakan teori perasangka dan teori sifat korban prasangka dari Gordon Allport. Data berupa dialog dan narasi, sementara sumber datanya hanya diambil dari sumber primer yaitu dari novel itu sendiri. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa tokoh-tokoh Afrika-Amerika dalam novel *The Road to Memphis* digambarkan mengalami tiga bentuk prasangka, yaitu: antilokusi, diskriminasi, dan serangan fisik. Adapun tanggapan Afrika-Amerika terhadap prasangka, itu menunjukkan bahwa ekstropunitif adalah sifat paling dominan yang digambarkan dalam novel.

Kata kunci: prasangka, antilokusi, diskriminasi, serangan fisik, sifat korban prasangka, ekstropunitif, intropunitif

A. INTRODUCTION

In the past of the United States, marginalized group of African-Americans are known to experience and suffer unfair treatments. As Tyson (367) recounts that extreme forms of overt violence against African Americans in the past of the United States—such as lynching, the assassination of black leaders, bombing of black churches, attacking on black homes “too near” white neighborhoods, and treating brutally against civil rights protestors—seem to be a thing of the past in the United States. According to experts, mistreatments towards other groups are the result of intense ethnic prejudice. As Allport says that prejudicial attitude may induce various forms of antipathetic conduct such as talking against people, discriminating, and even attacking them with violence (Allport 7).

The phenomenon of ethnic prejudice does not only occur in real life, but also it is portrayed in literature. One of the literary works that portrays the issue of ethnic prejudice is the novel written by African-American novelist Mildred D. Taylor entitled *The Road to Memphis* (1990). It stories a group of African American teenagers who try to protect one of their fellow friends, Moe Turner, from lynching. In order to protect Moe from lynching, they need to take him to Chicago. However, their journey to get Moe Turner to Memphis is not easy. They must deal with prejudice and a number of discriminations and even violence. Therefore, the writer chooses the *Road to Memphis* novel as the research object because it portrays the issue of ethnic prejudice against African-Americans.

This study aims to investigate the issue of prejudice against African-American characters portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. While there are two objectives of this study, namely: (1) to identify the forms of prejudice towards African Americans in *The Road to Memphis* novel. (2) to analyze how the African American characters' response to prejudice portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. In order to investigate the issue of prejudice, this study is conducted using Gordon Allport's acting out prejudice and traits of prejudice victimization theory. In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide benefits for the readers, (1) theoretically: this study is expected to be a reference for future researchers who wish to raise the same topic of prejudice. (2) Practically: the results of this study may be used as study material in a relevant academic study course.

B. METHOD

1. Research Design

Research design of this study was qualitative research. Kothari explains that qualitative is concerned with qualitative phenomenon, i.e., phenomena relating to or involving quality or kind. For instance, when researchers are interested in investigating the reasons for human behavior; i.e., why people think or do certain things (3). Based on Kothari's statement, it can be said that qualitative research is suitable to be used for a research that investigate phenomena relating to human life or nature. Related to this study a qualitative approach was the most suitable method for investigating the racial issue of prejudice against African Americans portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel.

Meanwhile, descriptive approach was applied in this study. The major purpose of using descriptive approach is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present

(Kothari 2). Based on Kothari's statement, it can be said that the descriptive approach is an attempt to provide a description of a phenomenon. As the implication in this study, descriptive approach was applied to describe the issue of prejudice portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. The description should be based on Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice.

2. Data and Data Source

In this study data were collected from narration or dialogue that indicated forms of prejudice and the traits of prejudiced victimization. Meanwhile, data source in this study were collected afresh and for the first time from a novel titled *The Road to Memphis*. Therefore, the types of data source in this study was 'Primary'.

3. Technique of Collecting Data

To attain data, a method called 'close reading' was used in this literary research. The method involved a process of reading with close attention, or simply said as attentive reading. Here are three steps of collecting data which was applied in this study, as follows:

- a. First, the writer read *The Road to Memphis* novel several times. By reading the novel several times, it helped the writer to deeply understand the story and the problem of prejudice which happen in *The Road To Memphis* novel.
- b. Second, the writer focused on finding the words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs which indicate the forms of prejudice and the types of traits suffered by African American characters.
- c. Third, the writer took note of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that had potential to be used as data in this study.

4. Technique of Analyzing Data

In order to analyze the data, a method called Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data analysis was used in this research. According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis consists of three current flows of activities which were data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing/verification (10).

- a. Data reduction: It refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions (Miles and Huberman10). In this study, the process of data reduction was done through two phases. First the data is conducted by sorting out the previously collected data in order to discard the data that did not meet standard. Afterwards, the data were classified according to the defined type; The data classification in this research falls into two portions, namely: (1) data of the forms of hostile actions and (2) data of the African American characters' response to hostile action.
- b. Displaying data: It is a process to assemble the selected data into an organized display. In this process, the classified data were arranged into an organized and systematic display of information. Displaying data can be in the form of matrices, graphs, charts, and networks (Miles and Huberman 31). In this study, the classified data were displayed through an organized table. The types

were comprised of hostile actions towards African Americans and the African American characters' response to hostile action.

- c. Conclusion: Drawing/Verifying: it included analyzing the data based on the principle theories used in the study. Miles and Huberman explain that it is the process in which the writer verifies the selected data to make sure its validity, then draw conclusions from the data which have been verified. Thus, "conclusions are also verified as analyst proceeds" (11). In order to verify the data, the writer conducted a deep analysis of each data based on the criteria of Gordon Allport's prejudice theory used in this study. A deep analysis carried out at this stage was crucial, because it would serve as validation of the data.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of Prejudice

In this section, the writer presents the analysis of prejudice towards African-American characters portrayed in *The Road to Memphis* novel. As explained that there are five forms of prejudice, namely: (1) antilocution is an act of talking against people includes gossips, derisive jokes, scorns, insults, and name-calling with such epithets like "kike", "nigger", "wop", (2) avoidance is an act of avoiding someone due to their racial group, (3) discrimination is an act of denying equal treatment of individuals or groups of people, (4) Physical attack is an act of violence includes physical threat and attack with organized violence, and (5) Extermination is ultimate degree of violent expression of prejudice (includes lynchings, pogroms, massacres, and genocide).

a. Antilocution

In the novel, antilocution was portrayed when Clarence who was an African American boy encounters Statler Aames and his two brothers in Strawberry. Statler Aames and his two brothers or also well known as Aames brothers were white boys in their twenties. In their encounter, Statler showed his hostile attitude by talking in a disrespectful manner towards Clarence. He was not pleased to see an African American in an army uniform. It can be seen in the following dialogue:

"You sorry, then what your cap doing on your head, nigger, when I'm talking to ya?"

"Niggers put on a uniform, make 'em get the big head. You got the big head, boy?" (116).

From the dialogue above, Statler shows his hostile attitude towards African-Americans which can be seen in the way he uses the epithet "niggers" to address African American people. Moreover, Statler seems displeased to see Clarence in an army uniform which can be seen in his utterance, "Niggers put on a uniform, make 'em get the big head. You got the big head, boy?" (116). These evidences clearly indicate that Statler has a deep-seated aversion towards African-Americans. Therefore, the dialogue above can be indicated as an act of antilocution since Statler's utterance reflects a hostile attitude and contains the epithet nigger.

b. Discrimination

Discrimination portrayed in the novel was when Stacey and his fellow friends needed to take Clarence to the hospital due to his severe headache. As they were on their way to find a hospital, they see an African-American boy and ask if there was a hospital around here. But the boy frowned, then muttered a word as if he never heard it spoken before. The boy's response implies that it is uncommon to hear an African-American ask about a hospital. Commonly, if an African-American gets sick at the time, they do not go to the hospital. The following dialogue shows the scene when Stacey and other African-American found a hospital and then encountered a white nurse who prevent them to go into the hospital.

"Y'all can't come in here"

Stacey glanced at Clarence, whom he and Moe were holding upright between them. "We know . . . but this fella here, he's a soldier, and he's sick something awful. Something wrong with his head. He was having some terrible headache, and then he fell hit his head, and knocked himself out."

The women looked at the blood through the handkerchief. "**Well, I'm sorry . . . but y'all can't bring him in here. We don't treat nigras here**" (205).

From the dialogue above, discrimination against African-Americans are portrayed when the nurse tells that they do not treat "nigras" in their hospital. The hospital policy of not serving medical care for African-Americans is an example of segregation. As known, segregation was an institutionalized form of discrimination, enforced legally or by common custom. Therefore, the dialogue above can be considered as discrimination because it reflects racial segregation against African-Americans.

c. Physical Attack

Physical attack was portrayed when Cassie is caught by the attendant for sneaking in the "whites' restroom" at a gas station. The attendant, who was a white man, got furious when he saw Cassie sneaking around. Afterwards, he threatens to call the police if Cassie does not leave the station immediately. As Cassie frantically rushes to leave, she accidently falls, but the attendant does not buy her time and kicks her like a "dog". It can be seen in the following narration.

"Now!"

"But—but my purse—"

The attendant squashed the purse under his foot, then he kicked at me with his other foot, like somebody with no heart would kick a dog. His shoe struck me sharply, but that's not what would wounded me. It was my pride that suffered. I was stunned by the hummiliation. "Leave it and get!" he cried (179).

The narration above shows the violent action done by a white attendant towards an African-American's girl, Cassie. It is an evidence and represented through the attendant's action in the following quotation "The attendant squashed the purse under his foot, then he kicked at me with his other foot, like somebody with no heart

would kick a dog” (179). Besides, the attendant’s derogatory utterance that says, “This here how ya do...putting your black butt where white ladies got t’ sit” (178) indicates his deep-seated aversion towards African-Americans. Therefore, the attendant’s action of kicking Cassie is considered a physical attack since it contains violence.

2. Traits Due to Victimization

In this section, the writer presents the analysis of African American characters’ responses to prejudice portrayed in *The Road To Memphis* novel? In order to analyze the responses, the researcher employs Gordon Allport’s theory of Traits of prejudice Victimization. As explained, this theory discusses the traits developed by the victims as a response to mistreatment. The traits take various forms, and Allport classifies them into two types. The first is *extropunitive* includes denial membership in own group, withdrawal and passivity, clowning, self-hate, in group aggression, sympathy with all victims, and symbolic status striving. The second is *intropunitive*, it includes obsessive concern and suspicion, slyness and cunning, strengthening in group-ties, prejudice against other groups, aggression and revolt, enhanced striving.

a. Obsessive Concern and suspicion

In the novel, obsessive concern portrayed when Cassie and Little Man were about to go to the Wallace Store. It was a store owned by a white man name Kaleb Wallace. As they approached the store, they heard laughter coming from inside, stopped, and glanced through the screen doors. They saw Kaleb Wallace, Jeremy Simms, The Aames brothers, and some other white man. This situation made Cassie and Little Man hesitated to step into the store since everybody in the store were whites. The following dialogue reflects Little Man hesitation of going into the store due to the presence of white people.

Little man now hesitated. **“You know, Cassie, maybe Christopher-John’s right,” he said, calmly assessing the situation without the heat of his sometime fiery temperament. “Maybe we best not go in, not with Statler and them in there anyway. You know how they like to start messing (10).**

From the narration above, Little Man was hesitant because he feels insecure by many white people and especially the Aames brothers in the store. It is proven when he said “Maybe we best not go in, not with Statler and them in there anyway”. This indicates that Little Man is worried about the possible humiliation he would get if he goes into the store. Therefore, the feeling of insecurity shown by Little Man in the dialogue above can be considered as obsessive concern. Moreover, the trait of obsessive concern shown by Little Man is represented through the speech of the character, which is Little Man himself.

b. 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

in order to avoid humiliation. Withdrawal and passivity may take various forms including talk less, being reticent in front of the dominant group, avoidance, and another one is cringing and sycophancy.

In the novel, withdrawal and passivity portrayed when Harris was in the Wallace Store to buy shells. In the store, there were several white men, including Statler and his two brothers. In this case, a white boy named Statler Aames tried to ridiculed Harris who was an African-American boy in front of other white men. So, Statler made up a story about 'the coon and the monkey' which purposely to tease Harris. Harris was aware that the joke was made to tease him. Once Statler finished his story, everybody in the store howled with laughter, except "Harris who only smiled politely" (12). The following narration shows Harris trying to avoid further confrontation with Statler and other white people.

"Now, just which one are you, boy? The monkey or the coon?"

Harris grinned awkwardly and step away from the counter. Statler laughed again and didn't press him to answer. But Kaleb Wallace said, "Where you goin', Harris? You ain't yet got your shells" (12).

From the narration above, it can be seen that Harris simply does not want to be in the store for long, especially not with Statler in there who just trying to make fun of him. In the narration where "Harris grinned awkwardly" after Statler taunts him, it shows his passivity towards ridicule. Moreover, Harris also shows a response of withdrawal, as it is evidence in the narration when Harris "step away from the counter" (12). Therefore, Harris' passive behavior towards the ridicule can be considered as withdrawal and passivity. Moreover, the trait of withdrawal and passivity shown by Harris is represented through the reaction of the character towards the ridicule carried out by a white boy, Statler.

c. Fighting Back/Aggression and revolt

The representation of aggression and revolt was portrayed in the incident in Strawberry where Moe Turner who was an African-American encountered the Aames brothers. In this case, the Aames brothers were making fun of Moe Turner in public. They Knock Moe Turner's hat off, goosing and knocking his head with their fist. At this rate, Moe was unable to bear the humiliation he was enduring from the Aames Brothers. As a result, he lost control of himself and furiously knocked the tree of the Aames brothers with tire iron. It is shown in the following narration.

"suddenly the anger in Moe burst forth like a thunderstorm. **He knocked Statler's arm away with the tire iron; then smashed it full force into Statler's side**"

I said, get hold of him!" hollered Statler, and both Leon and Troy rushed at Moe, who swung as hard as he could. **As Troy came at him Moe laid the crowbar upside his head. Leon came at him, and he smashed the crowbar into his chest.** Both brothers went down (123-124).

The narration above portrays Moe's rebellion against the humiliation shown in his action where he injures the Aames brothers with an iron, as seen in the narration, "He knocked Statler's arm away with the tire iron; then smashed it full force into Statler's side" (124). Moe's rebellion and aggression are the result of his frustration in dealing with humiliation. Moreover, Moe's response towards the humiliation is considered as action instead of reaction because his action carried a huge effect throughout the story. Therefore, the trait of aggression and revolt shown by Moe Turner is represented through the action of the character.

d. Strengthening In-group Ties

In the novel, the trait of strengthening in-group ties was represented in a group of several African-American characters, namely Cassie, Stacey, Little Man, Moe, Clarence, Harris, and Little Willie. These characters develop special solidarity where they were portrayed to protect each other from persecution. One of the examples was in the case of Moe Turner. As narrated, Moe Turner was humiliated by three white boys known as the Aames brothers. As result, Moe rebelled against the humiliation and he hit the tree of the Aames brothers. Because of this, he was wanted by the masses and would likely be lynched. Other Moe's fellow African-Americans tried to help and protect Moe from lynching. Even though, they also risked themselves if they were caught helping Moe. The following dialogue shows where Stacey and other fellow African Americans risk themselves to help Moe Turner leaving Mississippi and going to Chicago in order to avoid lynching.

"If the police are watching the train and the bus station," said Stacey, "then I figure the best thing to do is to drive Moe out myself."

Moe spoke for the first time since we had learned about the police. "No, Stacey, I won't let you do that."

"No other way. I'll drive you to Memphis, and you can get a train from there to Chicago and Uncle Hammer. Once you in Chicago, you don't have to worry. They'll have a hard time getting you there."

"Look, it's me in trouble, and I got no right bringing y'all in it. You got any idea what'll happen if we get picked up? You'll be going to jail too! No, sir! I'm not gonna let ya do it!" (161-162).

From the dialogue above, it portrays Stacey and other fellow African-Americans try to help Moe Turner by driving him to Memphis, although it was also risky for themselves. It shows the in-group solidarity between African-Americans against the persecution. In addition, the solidarity within these African-American group is portrayed in the whole story which makes up one of the themes of the story. Their journey to drive Moe Turner to Memphis in order to free him from lynching is marked with a number of humiliation and discrimination that color almost the entire story of this novel. Therefore, the dialogue above is indicated to contain the trait of strengthening in-group ties since it reflects the in-group solidarity of African-American. Moreover, trait of strengthening in-group ties shown by Stacey and other fellow African-American is represented through the speech of the characters.

3. Discussion

In this section, the writer discusses the findings of the study and the comparison to the previous findings. Based on the findings of the study, there are three forms of prejudice against African-American characters found in *The Road to Memphis* novel, namely: (1) Antilocution of racial slur, derisive jokes, insult, and name-calling with bad epithet like “nigger”. (2) A number of discriminations portrayed in the novel, namely: racial segregation, inequality in treatment and access to public facilities, and inequality of job opportunity. (3) physical attack, the findings show both violence and semi violence against African-American characters in the novel.

Compared to previous findings, the three forms of prejudice found in this study were also found in previous studies. For instance, antilocution described in Rohmah's study was similar to this study where both found insulting remarks in the analysis. Discrimination described in Maureen's study also shared similarity to this study, both found segregation towards marginalized groups of African-Americans. While physical attack described in Maureen's study, the similarity lied in the physical threat against African-American characters.

In addition, the findings find four types of traits of prejudice victimization represented in African-American characters, namely (1) obsessive concern, (2) withdrawal and passivity, (3) aggression and revolt, and (4) strengthening in-group ties. Of these four traits, withdrawal and passivity is the trait most commonly reflected in African-American characters when dealing against prejudice. This trait is related to the passive attitude of the victim in the presence of the dominant group.

Compared to previous findings, the previous study that has similar findings relating to the traits of prejudice victimization is Rohmah's study. In Rohmah's study, she finds two types of prejudice victimization that are similar to the findings of this study, namely (1) withdrawal and passivity, (2) aggression and revolt. She concludes that withdrawal and passivity is the most common traits found in the *The Hundred Food-Journey* novel. Similar to this study where withdrawal and passivity is also the most common traits found in African-American characters in the *Road to Memphis* novel. In terms of differences, the findings of this study find two other types of prejudice victimization that are not found in previous findings, namely (1) obsessive concern and (2) strengthening in-group ties.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of prejudice towards African-American characters in *The Road to Memphis* novel, the writer concludes there are three forms of prejudice experienced by African-American characters in *The Road to Memphis* novel, namely: (1) antilocution, (2) discrimination, and (3) physical attack. Of these three forms, antilocution is the most common form of prejudice found in the novel. Meanwhile, the other two forms of prejudice, namely: avoidance and extermination, are not found in the novel.

In addition, the findings find four traits of prejudice victimization represented in African American characters, namely (1) obsessive concern, (2) withdrawal and passivity, (3) aggression and revolt, and (4) strengthening in-group ties. Of these four traits, three of them belong to the category of intro-punitive, namely, obsessive concern, withdrawal and passivity, and strengthening in-group ties. While aggression

and revolt belong to the category of extropunitive. Thus, it can be concluded the most common traits represented in African American characters in *The Road to Memphis* novel is intropunitive.

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