

**DISCRIMINATION AS REFLECTED IN KENNETH REXROTH'S  
"DISCRIMINATION"**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how discrimination happens in society and causes a lot of horrible effects to people. This final paper uses the intrinsic elements such as imagery to imagine the detail of discrimination in Rexroth's "discrimination". The writer also used library research in collecting the data. In analyzing the extrinsic elements, the writer used Racism and Discrimination concepts to see that there were indications of racist and discriminative behavior in this poem. The result of this academic paper shows that discrimination is still common in the society because of many things especially racism.

Keyword: discrimination, racism, society, hypocrisy, imagery

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1. Introduction

Kenneth Rexroth's "Discrimination" clearly describes the condition of what people think about discrimination. Rexroth can describe discrimination using his own perception by using poetry as the medium.

Discrimination has become a major issue since a long time ago, but the action still occurs up to now. One of the reasons which cause discrimination is human race. The shape of people's bodies, skin colors, daily languages or their lifestyle can distinguish someone to other people. Discrimination, in a serious way can make a new prolonged problem. Human race problem, for example, can develop to racism. Originally, race is not so serious because the problem is only in physical and biological, but the problem is develop in serious way, the problem becomes bigger than before and racism raises a new problem, one of them is discrimination. The topic discrimination becomes interesting to analyze because it appears from various things that originally come from minor things.

The writer is interested in analyzing the view of discrimination seen from a perpetrator of discrimination. The writer is also interested in analyzing about how Kenneth Rexroth delivers his feeling about discrimination, and how he can describe details about discrimination by his own straightforward words

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Intrinsic Elements

The writer finds it essential to figure out intrinsic elements in a poem in order to understand the poem well. Imagery concerns about the description by using human senses, so that the readers can understand the depth of a poem. According to Laurence Perrine, imagery maybe defined as “the representation through language of sense experience” (1956: 54). In “Discrimination”, Kenneth Rexroth uses imagery to make an imagination in this poem about discrimination to the readers. For this poem, the writer chooses four kinds of imageries; they are kinesthetic, visual, olfactory and organic imagery.

### 2.2 Extrinsic Elements

Extrinsic aspects of literary work are the elements or factors which can be found outside the literary works but it is indirectly influence the structure of the literary works. It is a device to emphasize the importance of the context of the text. In this thesis, the writer analyzes extrinsic aspects of Rexroth’s “Discrimination” and concerns about racism and discrimination.

To explain about the relation of racism and discrimination, the writer takes Solomos quotes as follows:

Specifically in the case of black and white people, the term racism is usually seen as synonymous with discrimination or prejudice against black people by white people. (2000:373)

From the quotation above, racism is considered as discrimination. Indirectly, the practice of racism is also shown in the practice of discrimination. Racism cannot be separated from discrimination because racism is the dislike of another race with the result that the superior race wants to discriminate the inferior race.

Initially, discrimination’s prejudice is caused by the behavior of a group of people beginning to act in a discriminatory manner to other groups. However, if it is observed over there is correlation between people’s degree of prejudice and their propensity to engage in discriminatory behavior. In understanding the concept of discrimination, it can be drawn into three forms of discrimination as stated in the Bernard’s book, *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*; they are blatant discrimination, subtle discrimination and covert

discrimination, but in this thesis, the writer's analysis only focuses on blatant and subtle discrimination (Bernard, 2010:372).

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Intrinsic Aspects

##### 3.1.1 Imagery

###### 3.1.1.1 Kinesthetic Imagery

The following stanza contains a kinesthetic imagery,

I don't mind if they sit next  
To me on streetcars, or eat  
In the same restaurants

The word "*sit*" in line four indicates that there is a movement between the upper body with the lower body to make a seated position. This position is usually supported by feet and something below the buttocks like chair or something that can be sat on.

While in the line five we found word "*eat*" that shows a kinesthetic imagery. "*Eat*" is an activity involving the use of all part of the mouth to chew anything until it is swallowed and processed in the body.

###### 3.1.1.2 Visual Imagery

Their art is interesting,  
But certainly barbarous

Dancing with one of them. I've  
Tried asking them to my home  
Without success.

In line sixteen, there is a visual imagery that is represented by the word *interesting*. This word shows that there is something which can be seen with visual sense. "*Interesting*" which lies on the six to tenth line shows that it represents the visual imagery. The word "*interesting*" comes from the speaker's mind after he sees the art of the people who are discriminated. The sensation of visual art and the response of visual sense can be captured by the speaker's brain so he can meet the conclusion that their art can attract his heart to love it.

The words "dancing with one of them" explain that the speaker sees the dancing activity between them. The dancing activity is something visible and the speaker can see it

through the visual sense. The movement of the body is recorded by the speaker's visual sense. The writer can conclude the words "dancing with one of them" as visual imagery because the activity is clearly seen by speaker's eyes and the speaker does not approve the dancing activity.

#### 3.1.1.3 Olfactory Imagery

They'd kill us all in our beds.  
And you must admit, they smell

The word "*smell*" is an olfactory imagery which explains about the smell of something. The smell of them comes inside to the speaker's olfactory sense and he makes the conclusion that they are smelly. It clearly explains to the writer that the smell of their whole body is really bad. In this case, the speaker wants to emphasize that there is an unpleasant smell when he is with them.

#### 3.1.1.4 Organic Imagery

However, I don't approve  
Of a woman I respect

The word "*respect*" is the word that indicates internal sensation that we can feel through our body as an organic sensation. Respect appears from deep feeling or deep admiration for someone. This happens when the speaker knows the woman and he has close relation with the woman in the poem. The respect feeling comes up because he has know and close with her so his feeling of respect arises. He knows her like before someone knows her more, so he feels respectful and he knows how to treat her. However his respect will be hurt if the woman dances with the man with different skin color and she accepts the request to dance together.

I shouldn't  
Care to see my own sister  
Marry one. Even if she  
Loved him, think of the children.

"I should not care" is the expression that indicates organic imagery. The words "should not care" appear because there is inner sensation inside the speaker. The speaker shows that words because he is worry about the marriage of his sister. The speaker enters in the phase of dilemma where he stands in the center between he should care with his sister's marriage or not. His mind is confused because what he says becomes what he actually thinks now. There

is internal sensation inside the speaker's body, the feeling that appears because of doubts and regrets that he should care about his sister's inter racial marriage.

Their art is interesting,  
But certainly barbarous.

From his reaction, in the next line he shows us about his mind if they will kill him if they have a chance. From the barbarous word that he says, he reaches the conclusion that they can kill him because they come from the barbarian world and lives like barbarian. In the line sixteen until twenty is the line of emotion, the speaker speaks in this line very emotionally, and he shows how hatred controls him and brings up bad prejudice.

### 3.2 Extrinsic Element

#### 3.2.1 Racism

There is correlation between discrimination with racism; because the racism is usually seen synonymous with discrimination. The main focus of the discrimination in this poem is how racism influence people's mind to do discrimination. Racism raises discriminative attitudes because there are some differences biologically that trigger people to discriminate people depends on the race itself.

At the first time, the speaker said clearly about human race, "*I don't mind the human race*" even though the statement means that he does not mind with human race but at that time the writer knows that the first problem that he wants to show is human race. Racism becomes anxiety of the poet so this raise as a major issue in this poem.

I don't mind the human race.  
I've got pretty used to them  
In these past twenty-five years.

In the first line, the speaker shows us about how he does not think about human race, why he should think so hard about it. The writer assumes that there is a problem with human race. The speaker says that "I don't mind the human race", but after the writer read the first line, the writer starts to think that the cause of this discrimination is human race because it feels like the speaker openly explains his problem with discrimination based on the race.

However, I don't approve  
Of a woman I respect  
Dancing with one of them.

Their hypocrisy that they do not pay attention in human race begins to appear. In this case the speaker starts to act racist; the speaker says that "I do not approve of a woman I respect dancing with one of them" the word one of them shows that they are not in the same race. The speaker shows a denial between them because there is tendency that the "I" and "one of them" is different in race. If she continues to accept them and then she is dancing with them, she will be ostracized with them.

Their art is interesting,  
But certainly barbarous.

In the next line above, racism is very clearly shown by the poet. "*Their art is interesting but certainly barbarous*", the word barbarous refers to one race. The writer can conclude that the race which have barbaric characteristic is the black and in this condition this poem was published in America in which the issue of racism in America was very strong at that time. The speaker can conclude that the word barbarous is from their origin where they came from even their historical background. The black is equal with apes, in history the white found the black live in Africa where most of animal live in there.

I'm sure, if given a chance,  
They'd kill us all in our beds.  
And you must admit, they smell.

In this line the speaker says that if given a chance they'd kill us all in our bed. The writer assumes that there is a historical background so the speaker can say that words. The stigma of the black because of the slavery that happens in the past time still attached in their life. The negative mind that the black will kill the whites is still visible in the white's mind because from the past time the black will do anything to make them free from slavery includes killing their master when their master is sleeping. This stigma becomes anxiety for the whites even though the slavery is completely remove they still assume that the black will kill them. In America, the blacks are described with their habit in making a group in a narrow alley, and even they often commit crimes at night.

They smell, that expression explains anything. When the speaker says that they are smell in our brain suddenly thought that they are black. Why? In America, they are smelly because they are Niger, African – American people and they are black. They used to live in a hot-temperature country, sweaty with no knowing of perfume or deodorant. Their historical background and the effect of racism make negative view that they are smelly. The black work as slave in the past and work all day under the sun make them sweaty and smelly. The speaker gives the word smell because he knows it points to the black race, and he knows that people will have the same ideas. So in this final line the words barbarous and smell clearly explains that they are racist.

### 3.2.2 Discrimination

Discrimination is behavior; it deals with how people act toward members of other groups. The theory is the same as the title of the poem “*Discrimination*”, discrimination arises because some aspect, one of the aspects is racism.

*However, I don't approve  
Of a woman I respect  
Dancing with one of them*

The feeling of the speaker in this line shows that the “I” in this poem is a man. The jealousy and unacceptable feeling arises like a man who in the process of loving a woman. He will be so protective to the woman and does not let the woman walking or even dancing with another person.

*I'm sure, if given a chance,  
They'd kill us all in our beds.  
And you must admit, they smell.*

The last three lines are enough to prove that there is an indication that the discrimination in this poem is between the white and the black. The stigma of the black still gives an effect to the racism whereas racism relates with discrimination.

*I don't mind the human race.  
I've got pretty used to them  
In these past twenty-five years.*

The first phase of this poem explains about what the real point of this poem. “I don't mind the human race” clearly emphasizes that there is something that is covered up behind

the words don't mind the human race. In this phase, the speaker shows that he is sure about what he said will affect to the people who hear his statement.

*I shouldn't  
Care to see my own sister  
Marry one. Even if she  
Loved him, think of the children.*

The anxiety of the speaker appears in this line. After the lines before, the speaker shows that he is so discriminative. His hypocrisy cannot be hidden anymore even though he tries with his nonsense statement in the first line. "I shouldn't care" is only nonsense statement, the speaker wants to show to people that he becomes the witness of his sister inter racial marriage. The speaker clearly explains that he regrets about his decision to approve his sister marry one of them. He shows that actually over think after his sister marry the black. In this condition the speaker tries to change the context to their child. He will not care about his sister marriage life, but he worries about her child now.

*They'd kill us all in our beds.  
And you must admit, they smell*

The stigma that never lost for the black people, "they'd kill us all in our beds". The speaker is openly speak about something that can trigger racist sentiment. He brings up the old stigma of the blacks as a reason why people should stay away from the blacks. The writer thinks that the fears of the past are able to make people think and start to discriminate the blacks. The same fear also shown by the speaker, frontally he act so racist and this is the reason why he discriminate the black. He fears of death if he does not discriminate against them, he feels anxious because any time they can kill him.

The second thing why the speaker discriminates the black is because they smell. The word smell is also the racist thing that relates with discrimination in this poem. The old assumption that the black is equal with the apes combined with negative stereotype reaches a conclusion that the blacks are smelly. Those words are enough to make the speaker discriminate the black. The writer imagines that sometimes smell becomes one of the many reasons why someone does not want to stay close or even be a friend with people who are smelly.



### 3.2.2.1 Blatant Discrimination as reflected in “Discrimination”

Blatant is something bad that can be seen easily and documented, this discrimination usually appear in the public accommodation, school or even at workplace. In this poem, we can see that discrimination work at street car and restaurant.

*I don't mind if they sit next  
To me on streetcars, or eat  
In the same restaurants, if  
It's not at the same table*

The speaker speaks about what in his mind in that time. The speaker's mind starts to imagine about discrimination. In this situation the speaker unconsciously acts discriminative in the place where people can notice what the speaker does. Streetcars and restaurant have been chosen by the poet because discrimination often occurs in that place. The writer thinks that Rexroth does not merely input the street cars or the restaurant, Rexroth see clearly that discrimination often occurs in places like that so he puts the speaker in a position that people never expect it before. The perpetrators of discrimination utilize public space to show there is a gap between people who discriminated.

Furthermore their blatant discrimination can be shown from their act to the children of discriminate people.

*Even if she  
Loved him, think of the children.*

The speaker talks about his sister's children in the future and this thing is also indicate that he begins to discriminate his sister's family. He has the perception that their children will grow up badly. The children's life will disturb by their parent's problem. When they are growing up and begin their school life, the first thing that appears in the writer mind is if they register in the school, are they able to be accepted in that school because the principal knows that they are black and they have bad behavior or even they rejected them and suggest them to apply in the other school. The second thing is if they have accepted in the school where they want, will they get the same treatment from the teacher or other students or even they will get their own special class and school facilities.

### 3.2.2.2 Subtle Discrimination as reflected in “Discrimination”

In this poem the writer can see that the discrimination in this poem is subtle discrimination because it is often unnoticed because people have internalized subtle behaviors as normal, natural and customary.

*I don't mind if they sit next  
To me on streetcars, or eat  
In the same restaurants, if  
It's not at the same table.*

As the line above, their discrimination seems unnoticed by people because they have already accustomed with that condition. They unconsciously discriminate against them, or ignoring their existence. At the first time they avoid them and after a long time it is accustomed them unconsciously. In this poem perhaps the speaker sit next to them because he accustoms with the discrimination in the streetcars. The same event that always repeats will make a habit and a custom. In the restaurant they grouped them this is our table, that your table, do not even think we can eat in the same table. Actually these things happened in almost people life sometimes we doing this thing unconsciously.

*Care to see my own sister  
Marry one. Even if she  
Loved him, think of the children.*

The second thing is subtle discrimination to their ancestry. Inter racial marriage is the first problem, people will think the bad effect of inter racial marriage. Even if the inter racial marriage, their child will take the bad effect of their parents. The assumption of the bad effect that will be taken by the children from the result of inter racial marriage is begin from the past. The bad effect of inter racial marriage like discrimination or racist treatment will appear more often than normal marriage. This assumption is internalized by people so they cannot agree with inter racial marriage. In this context the effect is when their child grown up, they innocently will take the negative stereotype from their parents.

*Their art is interesting,  
But certainly barbarous.  
I'm sure, if given a chance,  
They'd kill us all in our beds.*

*And you must admit, they smell*

The third thing is they do not want to admit that their work is beautiful. “*Their art is interesting, but certainly barbarous*”, at the first time the speaker praises their art, but suddenly he mocks it, as if they not admit that their work is unique. Indirectly, the speaker unnoticed that they act discriminative; the speaker feels like nothing happen. It will be different if they stand on the opposite side. This thing is also categorize as subtle discrimination because the speaker think that the black does not have a particular talent especially in art. The effect of the exploration and slavery in the past are become the problem of the blacks so the speaker is only think why this thing can called as art, it is only the result of their barbaric behavior.

The last thing why the black is discriminate by the people is their smell. There are two probabilities the speaker gets the word smell, first the word smell can be obtained from personal experience then it will distribute to the speaker’s friend or his child. Second, it internalized from the speaker’s past from what he heard about that stereotype before until then he never stay close to the blacks. These two probabilities can be categorized as subtle discrimination because these two things are become a culture either through experience or just from what he heard without any courage to prove it. Almost people do not like bad odor, they avoid it. Naturally they avoid people who smell so bad; people directly avoid someone who stinky even less in this case the black.

Although subtle, but discrimination is still discrimination. People have internalized subtle behaviors as normal, natural and customary. Old assumptions that survive until this day have contributed to the discrimination.

#### 4. Conclusion

Kenneth Rexroth’s “Discrimination” is one of the poems which express the condition of human life globally as they live in diversity. The discrimination issue is chosen by Rexroth because discriminatory behavior as more and more developed in the community.

Rexroth’s “Discrimination” tells the condition how the discrimination work and control people mind to act discriminative. He successfully mix the issues of racism and discriminative at the same time. He uses straightforward word in his poem to make to bring

the atmosphere in the real condition. He uses some real things that usually happen in the real world to bring up the atmosphere of discrimination itself.

Rexroth uses imagery in the intrinsic aspects because he wants to show what actually happens in this poem and also to make sure the writer will imagine and feel the same thing like in Rexroth poem. Rexroth also emphasizes at the feeling of the perpetrators of discrimination that said nothing problem with human race and he wants to make the reader feels that she or he also involved with the issue. For the extrinsic aspects, the writer used the type of discrimination. The extrinsic aspects show that discrimination can be divided into several forms as blatant, subtle and covert discrimination. The discrimination in this poem is categorized in blatant because it happened in public room and easily documented and subtle discrimination because the speaker doing discrimination because there is something that internalized before.

The poem tries to criticize the society, how they act discriminative to other races. How the people use their mask and said they do not care about human race but in reality they avoid to make contact with them. Rexroth makes his word so sharp to some people but sounds funny to people who think the same thing with him. He means that this poem intended for hypocrites who could only speak but not reflected in the behavior.

In brief, the hypocrisy will reveal, and the real identities will show up. Rexroth is able to give an example in his poem and show the real discrimination in the real world. This poem can use as social criticism or as a self introspection.

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