
The Racism of The Black Women in Audre Lorde Selected Poems Entitle *Power, Who Said It Was Simple, and A Woman Speaks*

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Accepted: 13 September 2021 / Approved 15 December 2021

Abstract

This study aims to describe the racism reflected in the poems entitled Power, 'Who Said It Was Simple and A Woman Speaks, and to reveal the power of black women against racism in Audre Lorde's poems entitled Power, Who Said It Was Simple and A Woman Speaks. The method used in the collection is the documentation method because the writer collected data from the poems. Data collection was carried out by reading the poem in a comprehensive manner to understand its entire content and find the meaning, especially the essence associated with the topic, identifying data which could be a sentence, then the data object can be separated from each stanza and found the value of racism on each line of poetry, after knowing the results of the analysis the writer will draw conclusions. While the data analysis steps the writer uses critical race theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), such as: racism, race and power. Second, identifying the power of black women by utilizing the concept of Black Feminist by Collins (2000), and the Black Power Movement edited by Joseph (2006), then the writer interprets the data, the final step is to draw conclusions. The author can draw some conclusions that the 3 types of poetry are classified into satire and are written based on the reality that occurs in the author's experience. In the poem 'Power', there are several aspects of racism, namely skin colour, injustice, segregation and racial discrimination. From the poem 'Who Said It Was', there are aspects of racism, such as gender, skin colour, and homophobia. In poem 'A woman speak' there are several aspects of racism contained in poetry, namely discrimination against race, sex, and skin colour. Apart from racist values, the three poems also contained 'The Power of Black Women' or what is called the power or means used by women to fight racism.

Keywords: Racism, Black Women, Poem



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1. INTRODUCTION

People are partitioned into isolated and elite natural entitles, called races. In understanding with biological determination, certain races can consider themselves as predominant and this presumption will bring very exceptionally vital social issues, which is racism (Dewi, 2009). Race could be a social development that misleadingly partitions individuals into distinctive bunches based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly colour) hereditary legacy, social alliance, social history, ethnic classification, and social, financial, and political needs of a society in a given certain period of time (Idris, 2017)

Racism has been organized between white individuals and black individuals in terms of predominance and inadequacy, great and fiendish, in terms of restriction and rights, but moreover all regions of life around the way in which black people endure from white people's preference and pitilessness (Zouankouan, 2017). Black people in America have struggled to get their proper status against racial discrimination that has not been resolved. Racial discrimination against coloured people has become popular in United States history, where white people against black people (Idris, 2017).

Literature includes any text worthy to be taught to the students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university', however the subjectivity of judgment is connected with some interpersonally confirmable qualities, since being worthy of teaching implies both valuation and popularization (Harmon, 2014). Literature has a set of characteristics called such as superior, aesthetic, creative, imaginative, expressive, valuable, and universal (Maharsi, 2016). One of the literary works that mostly people interested to is poem.

Poem is literary work in the form of metrics or patterned language, the art of rhythmic composition, written or oral, designed to produce pleasure through beauty, enhancement, imaginative thought, or depth (Irmawati, 2014). Poem is related to a person's emotional state and social expression phenomenon in aspects of life; therefore, poem usually describes the reality of human life that related to the environment (Ariwibowo & Yosiana, 2019).

The portrait of racism can be seen in several literary works that have a theme about discrimination against African-Americans. One of the literary works that has a discriminating theme is the poem by Audre Lorde. It reveals how black people – especially the black women - treated differently as white people during the late 19th by not admitting the black people as an America because of different race, skin colour and gender. These poems represent the black women feelings about the social phenomena that occurred around, and principal these poems is a form of fighting against racism. The topic of racism is interesting to analyze since it arises from various things that originally came from small things. By reading the poems, the reader can comprehend how the racism was encountered by black people during that time, especially to the black women and how the black people treated unequally as white people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To guarantee this research is original, the researcher would like to display other research that correlated with this research. The first research is conducted by Dewi (2009) entitled “The spirit to struggle against racism in Amiri Baraka’s poems entitled notes for a speech and ka’ba”. The aimed of this research is to revealed the anger of black African-American and the spirit to fight against racial discrimination, regardless the skin colour, religion, the citizen right to freedom, and the right to equality in politic, economy and social. by Marpaung (2009) entitled “An Analysis Of Racial Issues In Some Langston Hughes Poems”. The finding of the research is the racism in the poem regarding Skin Colour, Prejudice, Discrimination, Stereotypes, and Racial Segregation. The third research is conducted by Hardianti (2016) entitled “Racism Reflected in Maya Angelou’s Poem”. The major problem of the research is racism. The aim of the research is to indicate racism as it is show in few indicators such as diction, imagery and symbol. In this research, the writer decided to analyze racism in Audre Lorde selected poem entitled Power, Who Said It Was Simple, and A Woman speaks, since those poems represented forms of racism that faced by black people as an African-American – especially black women - in America during the late 19th to the early 20th century. the topic about racism is fascinating to discuss since it arises from the very small and common things that human being has, such as the differences of gender, races, skin colour, and etc.

3. METHOD

This research belongs to descriptive qualitative, since the data are in the form of written word and can be descriptively analyzed. Qualitative and descriptive research methods have

become very common procedures for conducting research in many disciplines (Nassaji, 2015).

In gathering data, there are two types of data source in this research. The first source is called primary data. This is the source from which the object data of analyzing are taken, which is Audre Lorde's selected poem, *Power* (1978), *Who said It Was Simple* (1973), and *Woman speaks* (1997). The second source is called secondary data. This research also called library research which contains books, journals, library research and internet sources that supporting the data.

To analyze the racism in Audre Lorde poems, the researcher used critical race theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), such as: racism, race and power. Secondly, identifying the power of the black women by utilizing the concept of the Black Feminist by Collins (2000), and the Black Power Movement edited by Joseph (2006), and then the writer will be interpreting the data, the last step is drawing conclusion.

4. RESULTS

The research is aimed to analyze the racism and the power of black women in the poem, *The Racism of The Black Women in Audre Lorde Selected Poems Entitled Power, Who Said It Was Simple, A Woman Speaks*" written by Audre Lorde. The researcher had read and analyzed the poem, therefore the researcher found many data that contained racism and power from the 3 poems.

4.1. The Racism in Audre Lorde Selected Poems

Power

Based on the kinds of poem, 'Power' could be classified into satire because this poem contained criticism caused by racism or social crime. Written by Audre Lorde, this poem was a graphic and impactful poem based on reality that taken on racism in the justice system, police brutality, and white supremacy. „Power' was based on real-life murder and court cases. This poem was first published in 1978 but is still relevant today. The case mentioned in this poem revolves around the murder of a ten-year-old black boy named Clifford Glover who was murdered in 1973. The killer was an undercover racist policeman named Thomas Shea. The boy was shot when he and his stepfather were stopped on the street at 5 am on April 28, 1973. Suspecting the two of them were guilty of robbery, the undercover policeman stopped and pulled out his guns. Clifford and his stepfather fled, believing that they would be robbed themselves. The release of Thomas Shea, who was the first New York City police officer to ever stand trial for murder on duty, led to widespread rioting in parts of South Jamaica in Queens, New York.

Data 1: "A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood" (Lorde, 1978:line 21-22, stanza 3)

In the first line of the verse above was another verse of injustice that occurred in the poem. It showed how a ten year old boy was killed in Queen by the police officer the words" A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens" indicated the racism such as injustice, because an adult white man used his authority as a policeman to kill an innocent boy. A policeman who felt that he had power and authority that made him looked down on the little boy because he was just an ordinary citizen with no power and an authority. So that for that reason, even killing seems to be the truth for the police. The authority that policeman had, made himself such a justification or a tool to do whatever he wanted, so that it made them feel greater

and better than others who have no authority whatsoever. The role of a policeman was indeed as a safeguard in society, but in this poem the police used the authority to practice racism and harm the poor boy. He did not even half-hearted and have the heart to kill a child who were not committed to crime.

In the second line, the words “stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood” referred to the way the police officer treated a little boy just to put his shoes on top of the dead body, it simply showed how he looked down on the boy just because he was a policeman and the child was just an ordinary citizen who had no authority. The uniform that he wore and the authority he possessed made him feel as powerful and as the superior, so that it justified the heinous act he had done to the poor boy.

These two lines conveyed injustice, which is one aspect of racism that was very vulnerable to occurring in society, often ending with heinous murder, as happened in this poem. It was not a normal thing, people with the authority they have actually use it to hurt and harm others even often without unreasonable reasons, but because they felt that they had the right to do so, racism like this occurred.

Data 2: “and a voice said “Die you little motherfucker” and there are tapes to prove it” (Lorde, 1978: line 23-24, stanza 3)

In this verse clearly identified how the white male police practiced racism in sadistic ways by killing the little boy without mercy, and even cursed him with profanity and swore at him. This showed how sadistic the murder by the police was, even though the child and his stepfather had not done anything wrong. In the first line says “Die you little motherfucker” described how acted of racism brutally occur in the poem. The brutality of a racist policeman of killing the boy, swearing and harshing words was a picture of the sadistic experienced by that poor little boy. The oath spoken by the police depicted how he saw the little boy as someone worthy of being killed, as well as showing that the child has committed such a huge mistake and unforgivable that the only way to forgive was to take off his right to life.

Who Said It Was Simple

“Who Said It Was Simple” was published in Lorde's third volume of poetry, Based on the kinds of poem it could be classified into satire because this poem contained criticism to the society and written based on the reality experienced by the author. From a Land Where Other People Live in 1973. This poem focuses specifically on the flawed notion of a racism that faced by black women, addressing racial oppression through lines such as discussing the problematic women. Where the women treated unequally as the man. Audre simply, but lyrically, discusses the racism she witnesses in the feminist movement in this short poem, which was written in 1973. Lorde is a woman who was assigned female at birth and identified as such; a lesbian; and black. Her tone in this poem is sombre, but witty and a tad sarcastic.

Data 3: “An almost white counterman passes a waiting brother to serve them first (Lorde, 1973: line 8-9, stanza 2)

In the first lines of the verse, the words "an almost white counterman" indicated an aspect of racism such a skin colour and gender. And then continued with the words “a waiting brother to serve them first” the words showed depicted passing by and waiting for their other brothers to serve them first. The word "them" referred to the white males, which explained how they treated a man better than women. The verses " a waiting brother to serve them first " clearly stated that there was a more special treatment of men as well as those with white skin colour.

Here it is clear that there was racism between the differences between men and women, also between the black and the white people. Continuing the word "first" in the previous verses, the writer could also describe that the women in this poem as the "second" which means they will always be needed as the backward and never as the former. Those two related words referred to how the women were treated unequally with men, especially when the woman was black. The existence of women among men was not considered normal so they were treated unfairly. The different treatment between the two was evident in this verse, and at the same time it has confirmed how racism was experienced by black women through the poem.

Data 4: "and the ladies neither notice nor reject the slighter pleasures of their slavery" (Lorde, 1973: line 10-11, stanza 2)

Then proceed with the next line said "and the ladies neither notice nor reject" this line revealed how the role of women in dealing with the treatment that men are in the previous line, which simply showed the racism that faced by the black woman, which was gender and skin colour. Namely as it was clearly written in the poem that the women did not protest instead accept the fact that they being treated differently. Both of these lines have the meaning that being a victim of improper treatment did not make them fight back or defended themselves at that time, as it was written in the poem that they neither paid attention nor refused. But then going through poetry certainly implied resistance to racism itself. Then in the next line, there was written "slavery" which clearly described the women as the source of slavery in that era. Slavery was one aspect of the form of racism that was quite a lot experienced by black people, which were an African-Americans. Where women were victimized or treated like slaves or dishonoured, where such incidents were not uncommon for black women in America. In this poem the woman tried to explain how serious racism was experienced by black women and how sad the experience was as a woman in America in that era.

A Woman Speaks

Based on the kinds of poem it could be classified into satire because this poem contained criticism to the society and written by the author based on the reality who experienced racism and injustice. The poem *A Woman Speaks* was a poem of recognition and identity. The not only addresses internal battles and her own suffering, but also discussed the social injustices that African American – black women- suffered in the United States. The poem's fiction, on the surface, brings out the serene tone of the poem. The serenity facet of this poem was used to express how her struggle against injustice will not be fought with violence or hatred, and how she did not blame certain parties or institutions for her personal suffering. Instead, she planned to use the power and beauty of words to communicate the flawed image of women, fight injustice and racism, and alleviate her internal despair.

A Woman Speaks was a warrior song for the unseen and the conversation between women from different cultures. It seek to affirm the life experiences of black women in the US and across the diaspora, and at the same time opened a dialogue about what could still be done in the feminist movement to improve the lives of women of colour. What was also important for this section was that there were no accusations, only statements about Lorde's own truth. This work was not meant to be condemned, but to open a world perspective to others who may not have experienced it in this way.

Written in 3 stanzas, the poem *A Woman Speaks*, from *The Collected Work of Audre Lorde*, was like the sea before a storm. Its tone and form create a serene surface, but as it

develops, it points towards the true conflict within. Lorde focused on the inconsistencies in the world view of black women and on her own struggles to define her identity outside the norms of society. There were many declarative statements that served as her own assertions of value, power, and vulnerability during the historical period of underrepresentation and prejudice she and the black women was experienced.

Data 5: "Moon marked and touched by sun, my magic is unwritten" (Lorde, 1997: line 1-2, stanza 1)

In the first line of the poem, the verses "Moon marked and touched by sun" paid attention to how the black women were perceived as equally unnatural, as an art form that lauds their features and beauty, yet at the same time, their history was largely forgotten. The woman depicted in this poem called attention to the need to understand and act rather than feeling sorry for this removal. The words "moon" and "sun" described that the women as a beautiful creature. In poetry these two words were often used to describe something that was beautiful and worthy of worship, for example women. Women were known to be beautiful creatures, because they have enchanting and extraordinary abilities that men do not have. Therefore, women were synonymous with beautiful things, such as having a gentle heart, beautiful body shape, cooking, being able to bear children and much more. But then followed by a second line that said "my magic is unwritten", this verse represented that the women were not considered to exist. They were looked down upon so that they were not seen and were treated unequally by men. The word "magic" referred to their existence, then the word "unwritten" has the meaning as not to be considered or acknowledged. Here it was clearly illustrated how women were beautiful creatures but at the same time their existence could be called as a "mistake". Which of these mistakes was their identity as women, which in fact should not be as if it were a mistake. However, because of the racism that occurred in that era, their femininity became a foundation in practicing racism itself.

Data 6: "but when the sea turns back, it will leave my shape behind" (Lorde, 1997:line 3-4, stanza 1)

These two lines illustrated how the women were forgotten because of their identity as women which clearly implied the aspect of racism. These lines reflected that no matter what the women have done, whether it goodness or even something greater than that, it would not make them reason to be called natural beings. The words "when the sea turns back it will leave my shape behind" it showed that at the end at the day they will remain creatures that were left behind and were not considered. All the achievements or struggles made by women could not be used as a benchmark for their acceptance of their existence. They had no right to do anything because they were women. In these lines illustrated how the value of a woman was so clear in terms of at all, actions like this they faced give insight into how men intimidate the existence of women, let alone black women. This poem explained about gender racism experienced by women but not only because of their identity as women but also because of their skin color.

4.2. Power of the Black Woven In Audre Lorde Selected Poems

As explained in the previous chapter, the concept of power in research is based on the concept of Black Feminist Thought by Collins and Black Power Movement by Joseph. In this section, the writer would find the value of the power of the black woman in the following poems according to these two concepts.

Power

Data 7: "The difference between poetry and rhetoric is being ready to kill yourself instead of your children" (Lorde, 1978:line 1-4, stanza 1)

The poem reflected the racial discrimination and segregation of African-Americans at the hands of white supremacists. The begins with the words "The difference between poetry and rhetoric" which indicated the contrast between rhetoric and poetry. The speaker here - referred to the women – it explained that poetry with its metaphorical and imagistic powers was able to speak of a brutality that was only discussed and forgotten. This woman expressed her anger and rage at a white police officer who shot a ten-year-old boy in Queens just for the colour of his skin, and there was evidence of this savagery too. The way she expressed the words to the poem was known as the power. However, despite having substantial evidence of the heinous crimes, the policeman was acquitted by a jury of eleven white men who thought justice was served. Unfortunately, white people have enjoyed this supremacy for centuries. The next lines said "is being ready to kill yourself instead of your children" these verses simply expressed the anger that was so strong within him that he saw the sad reality that this innocent boy experienced on the grounds that his skin was black. This woman as a black woman was furious at the sadistic and tragic events of racism. Her power as a black woman could be seen in the next word, "children." This word referred to her feelings as a woman and a mother, indicated a sad feeling to see a child. She expressed her power through words, such as poem. This method became one of the ways for black women to fight or protest against racism in that era. Since the existence of the black women was never valuable and not considered by black people, they were deemed incapable of resisting so they found their own method to combat the racist practices that occurred around them. It was called the power of the black woman.

Data 8: "I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds and a dead child dragging his shattered black, face off the edge of my sleep" (Lorde, 1978:line 5-7, stanza 2)

In the first line, the words "I am" referred to the woman who witnessed the racism incidents experienced by an innocent boy that happened in this poem. The words "I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds" implied that she had a desire to defend and seek justice for the child victim of racism. These verses were found to be the power of black women, the woman expressed and protests against the occurrence of racism around. The defence made through literary works, namely poetry, they poured out all their feelings of anger and as an act of disrespect for the racism experienced by the little boy. Then, followed by the word "of raw gunshot wounds" which described that the woman could feel the pain and misery that the little boy felt. There was such a physical pain in these words, as if she had personally experienced the sadistic murder. Here also showed how strong a woman's desire was to expressed her feelings as being hurt. The power that women have through this poem was clearly reflected in each line. In the second and the third lines said "and a dead child dragging his shattered black face off the edge of my sleep" the woman described the situation of the boy who had been killed on the grounds that he was black. The word "dead child" clearly meant that the state of the child's body which was lifeless. And then followed by the word "dragging his shattered black face off the edge of my sleep" these verses simply illustrated that the condition of a poor little boy being killed tragically haunted the woman's mind and feels like defending the poor little boy as the victim of racism. The way the woman poured her feelings and anger into the poem became the power of her as the black woman.

Who Said It Was Simple

Data 9: “There are so many roots to the tree of anger that sometimes the branches shatter , before they bear” (Lorde, 1973:line 1-3, stanza 1)

In the first line of this poem written “There are so many roots to the tree of anger” it described the anger that black women had, the anger appeared from the various reasons for racism experienced by the black women. Some of the reasons why women fall victim to acts of racism which were gender, skin colour and lesbianism. The value of the power black woman in this poem could be seen in the first line that described the anger of a woman as a victim of racism. This poem described a black lesbian woman who was treated unworthily from the people around her, then the woman did not accept it and ventures her anger through the poem. The woman described protesting against the mistreatment she experienced because she was different from others. Being looked down upon and unworthy made her have to pour her feelings into the form of poem as a protest and power to fight racism.

Data 10: “and sit here wondering, which me will survive, all these liberations” (Lorde, 1973: line 16-18, stanza 3)

In the last stanza in this poem said “and sit here wondering” it depicted the power of the black woman pouring her thoughts as awaiting an end to the unfair treatment they received. This line explained that anger or protest did not always have to be expressed with anger but also that sometimes the power of women lies in the words they utter, either gently or harshly. The word "survive" in the next verse showed that the strength of black women in fighting against racist acts that occur, by believing that whatever happens they would be able to survive and they call it as a power. They seemed to be wondering if they would be able to survive and accept all the mistreatment they received, sounding like sighing and hoping that they would be able to face the reality. The word "liberations" in the last line of the stanza referred to the hope that black women want to achieve, namely to be like other people and be treated fairly and properly. The word contradicted with the words "in prison" which indicated that being under the pressure of racism made these women feel imprisoned and bounded. To get out of "prison" they need the power to resist, then with this method, namely fighting racism with poem, could be named as power of black women.

A Woman Speaks

Data 11: “I have been woman for a long time beware my smile, I am treacherous with old magic” (Lorde, 1997:line 25-28, stanza 3)

In this third stanza of the poem “I have been woman for a long time” described the situation of women who have been under the oppression of racism for a long time, the word "for a long time" in the second line has a very deep meaning, simply because black women were fed up with the mistreatment that they received just because they were a woman. This verse reflected that as if they were tired of the practice of racism they experienced as black women, there were complaints and hatred in every word that was written. In the third line said "beware my smile" it referred to the power of the black woman, indirectly they emphasized through these words that they were not afraid and express their power through words. The word "smile" here referred to the beauty that women have, and the woman wanted to define that behind their beauty there was hidden power and anger. At the same time “smile” can also indicated as the power of women who were fighting as women to be treated like ordinary people. The last line of the stanza reflected the powerful words. The word "treacherous with old

magic" indicated that apart from the beauty that women have, they have a dangerous side and were not easy to be beaten. This verse described how the black women had the great power and should never underestimate a woman just because of they look weak, inside they have power and strength, of them was being able to create the method to fight the racism and the injustice they suffer which was racism.

Data 12: "and the noon's new fury with all your wide futures, Promised I am woman and not white" (Lorde, 1997: line 29-34, stanza 3)

In the last part of this poem "and the noon's new fury" it described how angry women were towards racist and racism perpetrators that continue to befall women in that era. The second line referred to what would happen in the future, promising a bright future to women even though they were not considered humanly due to differences in gender and skin colour. It also talked about the women who experienced acts of racism because of differences in race, culture, gender. Instead of actual warning, these lines represented a statement of mysterious power, with a hint of sarcasm to dismantle the idea of black women as dangerous. She seemed to yearn for the "broad future" in the sixth line, and it was written in the line 4 to 6 "I am a woman and not white " it represented to boldly present her different self, beyond the reach of this "promise" but and remained a woman, engaged in a similar struggle for equality, however, it must be realized. In the last line it was again emphasized that this poem talked about black women, which clearly described the reasons why they were victims of the oppression of racism. Then also, it referred to the power that women have by being able to fight racism by expressing their feelings and anger and protest against the racial discrimination they received as black women. This poem simply showed that the women were not weak in words, but they were able to turn beautiful words into their power to fight racism.

Those three poems above contained racism values that focus on black women, in addition to racism, these poems also revealed the value of power that black women have as a method to combat racism that occurs around them, or even themselves as victims of unequal treatment that they face for years.

The researcher examined by interpreting every word written in these poems. The result is that there are several aspects of racism that are found but it is more focused on black women, as well as the power of the black woman.

5. DISCUSSION

After analyzing the aspect of racism and the power of the black woman in Audre Lorde selected poems by using the theory by Delgado and Stefancic called Critical Race Theory, and to analyze power of the black woman using Black Feminist Thought by Collins and Black Power Movement by Joseph. The writer could draw several conclusions, as follows: Based on the kinds of poem, „Power“ could be classified into a satire because the poem contained criticism to the community described from reality when little boy who is brutally killed because he is black. In this poem there are several aspects of racism, namely skin colour, injustice, segregation and racial discrimination.

In the poem "Who Said It Was" the writer grouped the poem into satire because this poem had criticism issue to the society and written based on the reality that happened to the author. Simple revealed about the oppression experienced by women because of gender, skin colour and lesbianism. In this poem, there are aspects of racism, such as gender, skin colour, and homophobia.

The poem „A woman speaks“ counted into satire because this poem expressed criticism and written by the author based on the reality who experienced racism and injustice. In the poem A Woman Speaks reflection of women who experience racism because of differences in gender, race, culture and skin colour. There are several aspects of racism contained in poetry, namely racial discrimination, gender and skin colour.

Apart from the values of racism, the three poems also contain "power of the black women" or what is called the power or method used by women to fight racism. These three poems contained the power of the black women, but not every stanza in the poems contained the value "power of the black women".

In this research, the researcher realized that this research has several weaknesses. This ensued because of the capable limitation of the writer knowledge and experiences. Indeed, in this research the writer still needs corrections and suggestions. This research expected to be more beneficial for the student of literature and could be the references to the future writer.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the poem 'Power', there are several aspects of racism, namely skin colour, injustice, segregation and racial discrimination. From the poem 'Who Said It Was', there are aspects of racism, such as gender, skin colour, and homophobia. In poem 'A woman speak' there are several aspects of racism contained in poetry, namely discrimination against race, sex, and skin colour. Apart from racist values, the three poems also contained 'The Power of Black Women' or what is called the power or means used by women to fight racism.

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