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**BLACK FEMINISM IDEAS AS PORTRAYED IN HOMAGE TO MY HIPS POEM  
BY LUCILLE CLIFTON**

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**Abstract:** This research discusses a poem written by Lucille Clifton entitled *homage to my hips*. The researchers aim to describe the portrayal of black feminism ideas inside the poem to raise awareness regarding the issues of discrimination toward the black community especially women. This study aims to answer the question of how is the black feminism ideas portrayed in the poem entitled *homage to my hips* by Lucille Clifton. This research used descriptive qualitative method typically library research with textual analysis since the data of this research are in the form of words and phrases within the stanza. The data source is the poem entitled *Homage to My Hips* poem by Lucille Clifton, and data sources are the poet's background of life, journals, and previous studies. This research used intersectionality and black feminism thought theory as the approaches. In order to answer the research question, the researchers used the parameters of black feminism ideas according to the black feminist thought and intersectionality theory to capture the ideas of black feminism in the poem. The results of this research show that the poem entitled *homage to my hips* by Lucille Clifton is portrayed the ideas of black feminism, which strongly ignores and rejects the continuous approaches of the oppression system both in practice and the ideas that justify it, based on the parameters that cover the existence of black feminism according to the black feminist thought and intersectionality approaches.

**Keywords:** Black feminism, Ideas, Inequality, Lucille Clifton, Oppression, Poetry.

## INTRODUCTION

Black feminism is one of the feminist branches. Rosem Brewer (2016) stated that black feminism's roots are radical. Rosem believed that black feminism's purpose in its practice and theory is basically in the liberation of all people. He also pointed out that black feminism in its contemporary and historical face(s) was born in struggle. In its development, the feminist movement not only fought for the rights of white women, but also black or coloured women. In this matter, the race is very influential on the occurrence of oppression. According to (Sivanandan, 1989) race is a central force in a discourse of labour, in which there is not only a relationship between class and gender, but there is also the role of race in an economic-political discourse. As a result of many depictions of racism issues in literary works, especially poetry, much of the African-American racial socialization empirical literature has focused more on the depictions of racism issue in poetry to analyse the way racial socialization affects beliefs and racial identity (Barr, 2010). In this research

the researchers used poetry as the object of the research, poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. Poetry is used to achieve artistic expression in several ways (Ollila & Jantas, 2006). Thus, understanding and studying the meaning plays an important role in poetry to take the messages (GulÖ, Rido, Wahyudin, 2017).

Lucille Clifton puts a lot of issues related to the inequality faced by women, especially black women, specifically, she tried to raise the black feminist ideas through the lyrics she wrote for black women equality and black women's right by describing her part bodies as a symbol. The cases of oppression toward black people are continuing nowadays, there are still many oppressions, discriminations, and inequality treatments against black people. According to Dean, (2020) the latest cases of oppression toward black people that resulted in death were the case of Breonna Taylor a 26-year-old African-American woman,

that was fatally shot in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment on March 13, 2020. Another case was the death of George Perry Floyd Jr, a 46-year-old African-American man killed during an arrest after a store clerk alleged. He had passed a counterfeit \$20 bill in Minneapolis. Thus, by looking at those facts, this study essentially matters to do in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement for equality and raising awareness for all parties to treat and being well treated. Black feminism comes out as an appropriate field to fight inequality.

This research used intersectionality, black feminism thought, and poetic devices theory as the approaches. Intersectionality is a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of colour. Yet intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics (Crenshaw, 1991). She also added in (Crenshaw, 1989) by stating that in feminist theory, black women are sometimes excluded. Any analysis

that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated, because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. Thus, intersectionality is a theoretical framework that used to understand one's aspects in political and social identities (race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, etc.) can be combined in creating the unique modes of discrimination in the society and used to understand how systemic inequalities and social inequalities occur.

Spitzack and Carter 1987, in (Harris, Tina M, 2018) stated that black feminist thought is a theory that captures the unique experiences and standpoints of African-American women and came out of the continuing marginalization perpetuated in and by the feminist movement which aimed to capture the intersection of oppression and to recognize race and gender from the oppressive nature of gender construction and of race as a social construct, which can be affecting one's experience directly. If intersecting oppressions did not exist,

black feminist thought and similar oppositional knowledge would not have been necessary. As a critical social theory, black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women in the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Because black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppression is itself eliminated, black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that go beyond the specific needs of US black women. (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought is also against oppression, both in practice and the ideas that justify it. Poetic devices are needed in analysing the lyrics of the poem, the researchers need guidelines to reveal the correct meaning of the texts in the poem. According to (Brinks, 2019) poetic devices are the deliberate use of words, phrases, sounds, or even shapes to convey meaning. That has a very broad scope in which could encompass any kind of written expression, however, poetic devices generally, are used to convey the literal meaning of any written expressions by considering the form,

sound, and function. In this research, the researchers only put several types of poetic devices to analyse the poem. Many researchers had done their research about the feminism issues in the poetry. The difference is this study will focus on the ideas of black feminism that exist in the poem. By that, the researchers formulate the research question into how is the black feminism ideas portrayed in the poem entitled *homage to my hips* by Lucille Clifton. Thus, the research objective of this study aims to show the black feminist ideas as portrayed in the poem in poem entitled *homage to my hips* by Lucille Clifton.

## **METHODS**

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative descriptive research method. Qualitative descriptive method is a research design used to analyse the data that has been collected by using some relevant theories which written descriptively (Gulö, Rahmawelly, 2018). The researchers believes that the use of a qualitative descriptive research method will be appropriate to reach the goals of this study, since, this

research considered a textual analysis, which will analyse, and reveal the poem that shows the portrayal of black feminist ideas, so this research will fully use the descriptive qualitative method. Texts can be defined in a form of books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theatre, informal conversation (Samanik, Lianasari, 2016). The data and data source involved in this study is taken from a poem entitled homage to my hips by Lucille Clifton, and the data source is from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/homage-to-my-hips/>. The homage to My Hips poem has fifteen lines poem that is contained within a single stanza of text. The poem was firstly published in 1980. In collecting data, the researchers took several steps as follows: 1) Reading and understanding the poem entitled homage to my hips by Lucille Clifton; 2) Giving mark in every part of the poem which relates to the problem of the study, by identifying the expressions containing figurative language; 3) Gathering all the data that has been marked; 4) Understanding

every stanza of the poem dealing with the general meaning and detail meaning, by Implementing the theory used to see the relevancy of the data into the problem. 5) Arranging, cohering, and developing the data that has been collected with the theory used, to answer the research question. To answer the research problem, the researchers analyses all the data that has been collected systematically, by involving several prominent steps, as follows; 1) Read and study some theories on the symbol, figurative language, and black feminism; 2) Reread deeper the poem entitled homage to my hips by Lucille Clifton, and interpreting the poem to find the general and detail meaning by having an interpretation of word per word; 3) Analysing on the symbol, metaphor and simile, tone and about black feminism in "homage to my hips"; 4) Assessing evaluation data by elaborating the findings to answer the research question.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to reveal the black feminism ideas that exist in the poem, the researchers analysed every detail line

from the poem, especially the poetic devices element that appeared in the poem, combined with the information's about the background and the poet's life, subsequently the researchers relate it with the theory used in this study. The centre of the discussion in this study is black feminism.

### **The poem:**

#### **Homage to My Hips**

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places. these hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved,  
they go where they want to go  
they do what they want to do.  
these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.  
i have known them  
to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!  
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/homage-to-my-hips/>.

Homage to my hips was published in 1980 and written by

Lucille Clifton, the poem entitled homage to my hips is a 15-line poem that contained within a single stanza of the text. The perspective and narrator of this poem are written from a first-person female's point of view, and it is written in the present tense. Homage to My Hips poem is one of the examples of a free verse poem. This poem does not follow any kind of form, rhyme scheme, or meter. Nor does it follow the convection rules for punctuation or capitalization; this poem also sometimes omits commas, semicolons, and end-stop periods. The irregularity in the writing of this poem describes a refusal for lack of freedom that faced by the author or/and the women's experiences during that time. The rejection of form and structures of writing in this poem is also intended for supporting the meaning of the poetry that expresses the demands for justice and freedom for the female body from all the existence of social limitations.

#### ***The Portrayal of Black Feminism***

According to the theory of intersectionality and black feminism,

there are several fields or areas, under the approach, that become the foundation of the approach. Those points can be used as the parameter to determine whether or not the movement can be called black feminism. Thus, the researchers used that to analyse the ideas of black feminism portrayed by Clifton in her poem, which consists of against the oppression, support social justice and equality, and generalization of human. The interpretation of the poem using those three aspects is combined with the analysis of poetic devices element and the information about the background of the poet to strengthen the proofs of the existence of black feminism inside the poem. The analysis is presented below.

### ***Against the Oppression***

The approach of intersectionality strongly rejects the oppression system (Crenshaw, 1991). The approach believes that there are multiple sources of oppression, which are class, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers (Crenshaw, 1989). By looking at the approach of

intersectionality and black feminism that against the practice and ideas of oppression, it can be concluded that both of the approaches decline the prolonged cruel and/or unjust treatment or control that given to certain people. The unfair treatment of a group of people because of their identity markers that make those people have no control is the thing that is against by the approach of intersectionality and black feminism. The researchers, in this research, analysed the existence of the field against oppression using poetic devices. Lucille Clifton in her poem used repetition that appears in the phrase 'hips'. It can be clearly seen in lines (1), (11), and (12). According to Brinks (2019), repetition fairly self-explanatory, and it is the process of repeating certain words, phrases, lines, and stanza. There are two types of repetition found in the poem, the first is the repetition of a word within one line and the repetition of phrases from the whole stanza. The repetition that found within one line in the poem entitled homage to my hips are in the line:

- Line (1) these **hips** are big **hips**
- Line (9) they **go** where they want to **go**
- Line (10) they **do** what they want to **do**
- Line (11) these **hips** are mighty **hips**
- Line (12) these **hips** are magic **hips**

The author starts the lyric of the poem by introducing to the readers that her hips are big, meaning she claimed that she has a very big power to do anything. From the repetition found in the poem, the author only focuses on the same thing which is hips, the word they, go and do also refer to the author's part of the body which is her hips. As the repetition defined for emphasizing the message that the author still wanted to express the same thing, and in this poem, by that spotlight, it is obvious fact that Lucille Clifton wrote this poem indeed about the homage, as the symbol of empowerment, or a kind of appreciation to herself as a female. The repetition of the word 'hips' and the symbol of empowerment in the poem showed how the author wants to convey that everyone, or her, has the power to

against oppression.

Meanwhile, the repetition of the phrase from the whole stanza found in the poem entitled homage to my hips are from the line (1), (11), and (12);

- Line (1) '**these hips are** big hips'
- Line (11) '**these hips are** mighty hips'
- Line (12) '**these hips are** magic hips'

In this repetition, the author also wants to emphasize to the readers in which, women can do things that refer to the power that women also have, including any kinds of aspects, that also aimed for demanding equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, treatment, and assessment of themselves, and also the freedom to choose opportunities that are desirable without pressure from other parties, equal position and opportunity in decision making and in benefiting from the environment, by repeating a phrase '**these hips are**'.

Not only used repetition to convey the message against the oppression, but



the author of the poem also used another poetic device, which is a metaphor. In the poem entitled homage to my hips by Lucille Clifton, the researchers found several words which include the category of metaphor. Abrams (1999) was clear to point out that, metaphor is a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing that is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison as a rhetorical or figurative expressions from the similarities or dissimilarities that is made between one to another thing, and metaphor aims to describe a thing by referring to other things that are considered to have characteristics similar to something or someone who wants to be described. The poem entitled homage to my hips contains several words and phrases that belong to metaphor, those words can be found in the line:

- Line (1) these hips are **big hips**
- Line (6) **are free hips.**
- Line (11) these hips are **mighty hips.**
- Line (12) these hips are **magic hips**

Lucille Clifton is clearly seen that she wanted to open groups of people who opposed feminism at that time, by repeatedly focus on the power, capability, confidence, and power that women are also capable of those matters. In addition, all the metaphor used by the author in the poem aims to emphasize the freedom. It is in line with the field against oppression because oppression means to take over the control that was taken by everyone else or called taking over the freedom.

### ***Support Social Justice and Equality***

The approaches believe that supporting social justice and equality is the basic need in the movement of feminism (Collins, 2000). The discrimination in society leads to the occurrence of social inequalities, which is why the approach of black feminism focuses on the support of social justice and equality. As a movement of feminism, the approach strongly agrees with the occurrence of social justice and the development of equality among society. The existence of the support of equality and social

justice is found by the researchers by using the poetic device personification. According to Abrams, (1999), personification is a type of figure of speech that describes inanimate objects as though having human behaviour. Personification is also defined as an abstract concept of inanimate objects as if endowed with life and with human attributes and feelings. Personification occurs when the author of the poem assigns inanimate objects or abstract ideas within human behaviour, actions, and qualities. In the poem entitled *homage to my hips*, the researchers found some personifications that exist in the poem, the personifications can be found in the line:

- Line (2-3) **they moved around it**
- Line (8) **these hips have never been enslaved**

The first personification that the researchers found from the poem entitled *homage to my hips* taken from the second and third line of the poem, with the lyric ***‘they need space to move around it’***. It belongs to the kind of personification because the

word ***they*** refer to the ***hips***, and what can see from the use of personification here is that hips cannot move around by itself without the control by the person, and it is related to what Abram (1999) said about personification, he stated that personification describes inanimate objects as though having humanness behaviour. At this point, the poet is obviously focusing on the freedom she wanted to have. In the line (8) the personification is in the phrase ***‘never been enslaved,’*** called as personification, because the phrase *never been enslaved* refers to the hips, and the point of view that can be taken from the phrase is that, literally, the hips cannot be enslaved, but it more likely is what can be enslaved is the person, not the hips. At this point, again the poet focuses on herself and represents female's ability to do something that society or white people believed women cannot make it, another thing that she wanted to emphasize that she does not deserve to be enslaved, as it has been so far that the women faced. It proved how the author captures her support in social justice and equality, where

she believed every woman deserves to be treated equally, to get social justice and freedom, and to not get discrimination or inequality behaviour. The meaning that the author wants to convey is in line with the idea of social justice and equality, where everyone deserves equal rights, treatments, and opportunities.

### ***Analysis of Tone***

To strengthen the point that the author portrayed black feminism in her poem, the researchers also analysed the tone of the poem. The tone in the poem contains an attitude of how the poem is read (pitched) whether it is advice, criticism, satire, ridicule, or story. The use of tone is used to understand the expression of a literary work to show that there are speakers who have to define personal qualities, and who express good attitudes towards the characters and material in the work and towards the audience to which the work is aimed (Abrams, 1999:215). In identifying and analysing the poem entitled *homage to my hips*, the researchers look at two important things, the first in the context of each line, and the

second is the word choice or diction that the speaker used in the poem, and more focuses on the attitude of the poet. From the whole line within one stanza of the poem, the context that can be inferred by the researchers are that here the poem entitled *homage to my hips* has serious subject matter, there is a conflict rooted in hatred that the speaker faced, but the speaker expresses a hopefulness or willingness to still be confident, and strong by emphasizing through the lines that prided her own hips, and not let it impact her. Those attributes are the message that leads the researchers to select words that show confidence and optimistic expression as tone words of this poem that can reveal about the tone, those words are; the verb that refers to her hips in the line (1, 11, 12) these hips are big hips, these hips are mighty hips, and these hips are magic hips, those selected lines are showing the confidence of Lucille. Another word that the speaker can found to be representing about the tone of the poem is the word *enslaved* from the line (8), the researchers noted that the conflict

faced by the speaker is physically harmful. The confident expression and strength of the speaker is a revival that Lucille wants to do in the future. Hence, the researchers believes that the tone of this poem is aggressive or confrontational. Thus, the speaker's tone of Lucille Clifton's poem *homage to my hips* is both confrontational and confident as the speaker is optimistic in her approach to the conflict that she faces.

### ***Black Feminism Existence***

In the poem entitled *homage to my hips* by Lucille Clifton, the researchers will reveal the disadvantages of gender, race discrimination, and also the struggle of black women to fight for freedom and justice faced by the black women community through the poem by Lucille Clifton entitled *homage to my hips*. Based on the results of interpretation by using poetic devices approach, the researchers found that the poem entitled *homage to my hips* holds the ideas of black feminism. Start with the use of the word *my* (determine) in the title refers to the author's hips, and

the particular reason for the word diction that the poet chose is to lead the readers to know that the word *hips* in the poem belongs to the writer herself. Lucille Clifton tells how black women deserve better treatments and are able to do and get the same things fairly with other communities. The researchers believes that Lucille Clifton deliberately wanted to express her restlessness that she faced during her life. It is closely related to the background of the poet's life, during her time (1936-2010) and when the poem was published (1980) the rates of poverty in the United States is dominated by the black community since 1959-2019. In early 1965, the black community dominated the highest number of poverties with 40% domination of the whole population in the United States, (Creamer, United States Census, 2020). It demonstrates that during her life, Lucille Clifton faced and see how the black community struggle and became the lowest community in America in terms of economic and financial conditions. It happened because the other communities' perspectives and treatment are given

to the black community was invariably put the black community in a low level of society, moreover, black women faced multiple injustices, and black women were put at the lowest class of the society. It happened because, in the history of American slavery, the white community needs many workers to build and improve infrastructures and plantations sector. The white community found that the black community was the right resolution to fulfil the lack of workers that the white community need. The white community prefers to choose black women to be enslaved rather than black men because the white community thought that black women more valuable rather than black men, for a particular reason, black women were used to produce as many children as possible, and children were used to multiply slave properties. The white community was also sexually discriminate against by the black women community to produce many children in order to keep the number of slaves in balance with the needs of the workers they continued to need. It is clearly seen that the discrimination toward the

black community especially black women terribly happened during that time. In 1910, The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) legitimation of the landmark Civil Right act in 1964 and the Voting Right act in 1965. The black community in the United States demands the policy of civil rights and treatment that fairly equal in housing, schools, occupations, and accommodation of the public, Collins (2000:58).

The explanations reveal by the researchers above are the particular reason why Lucille Clifton wrote the poem entitled homage to my hips, Clifton demonstrates the equal rights and freedom for the black community especially black women to get justice treatment and opportunities in all aspects of social life be must be applied and understood by all levels of society regardless of any status.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion the black feminism ideas exist in the poem entitled homage to my hips by Lucille Clifton, because by looking at the result of analysis and further appropriate explanations done

by the researchers, the meaning and the message that Lucille Clifton wanted to emphasize are in line with the intersectionality and black feminism theory's goal. Lucille Clifton gives the ideas of black feminism to the readers to have new understanding of thinking and point of view toward black community especially black women. In the other hand, Lucille Clifton wanted to raise the confidence of black women so they will not be underestimated, oppressed, and they will get equal treatment of a better life to live within the society.

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