

## **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SHORT STORY CLARA (2014) BY SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA**

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### **Abstract**

Racial discrimination is a social phenomenon that is rooted in socio-psychological processes related to social cognition, group dynamics, and socialization among ordinary people. Seno Gumira Ajidarma's 2014 short story "Clara" explores the pervasive and widespread nature of racial prejudice and its disastrous effects on modern society. The story reveals the intricacies of discrimination that Clara experiences, ranging from unintentional slights to ingrained prejudices that affect the course of her life. This study employs Pieterse and Powell's (2016) postcolonial theory to identify examples of racism in the novel using descriptive and content analysis. In the final analysis, the writer aims not only to illuminate the deepest aspects of human nature and inspire us to take a more proactive, understanding, and empathic approach to combating racism, but also to draw parallels to the broader context of Indonesia and the world.

**Keywords:** Racism, Discrimination, Violent

### **Introduction**

Stories in the world of literature act as windows through which we can see the complexities of human existence, frequently reflecting the society from which they originate. Among these stories, Seno Gumira Ajidarma's "Clara" (2014) stands out as a potent example of the craft of storytelling and a window into a pervasive social problem: racial discrimination. Ajidarma skillfully captures the tragic difficulties of a young woman named Clara, whose life is ruined by the pernicious effects of racial hatred in Indonesia, in this poignant short story.

The story of "Clara," which is set against the colorful Indonesian archipelago, develops as a tale that goes beyond its fictitious boundaries to reveal the painful realities of racial persecution. We find ourselves navigating Clara's experiences, aspirations, and vulnerabilities as we read farther into the novel. We are allowed to see the world through Clara's eyes through the author's skillful prose and sympathetic storytelling—a world where prejudice and inequity cast heavy shadows.

In this article, the writer will dive deep into Seno Gumira Ajidarma's "Clara" (2014), analyzing the multiple levels of racial prejudice that permeate the story. We investigate the intricacies of discrimination that Clara experiences, ranging from unintentional slights to ingrained prejudices that affect the course of her life. We also examine Ajidarma's narrative choices and symbolism in an effort to reveal the larger social critique weaved into the story.

Through the writer's analysis, the writer aim not only to illuminate the pervasive issue of racial discrimination within "Clara" but also to draw parallels to the broader context of Indonesia and the world. In doing so, the writer hope to spark a vital conversation about the impact of discrimination on individuals and communities, and the imperative of confronting and dismantling such prejudices.

Utilizing breaking down the layers of "Clara," we hope to show how the fight against discrimination is a global cause that speaks to people all across the world. By having this conversation, we hope to raise awareness among all parties of the urgent need to address and eradicate the causes of

prejudice in order to create a society in which people of all races and ethnicities can prosper. "Clara" by Ajidarma serves as a platform for this conversation, serving as a mirror that reflects not just the socioeconomic issues facing Indonesia but also the universal need for justice, empathy, and equity. The term discrimination comes from the English word discriminate and was first used in the 17th century. The root of the term comes from Latin, namely *discriminat*. The act of discriminating or treating someone differently who tends to be negative is considered bad behavior. (in Denny, 2013: 6) According to Theodorson & Theodorson (in Danandjaja: 2013) discrimination is unequal treatment of groups or groups based on something, usually categorical, or distinctive attributes, such as based on race, ethnicity, religion, or class membership. social class. This term usually describes an action by the dominant majority in relation to a weak minority, so that it can be said that their behavior is immoral and undemocratic.

According to Brigham (Kuncoro: 2008) states that discrimination is treatment differently because of membership in a certain ethnic group. These ethnic groups include ethnicity, language, customs, religion, nationality, and others. Another opinion expressed by Banton (in Sunarto, 2009: 157), discrimination is defined as different treatment of people belonging to certain categories which can create social distance. According to Ransford (in Sunarto, 2009: 156), discrimination is divided into two, namely individual discrimination and institutional discrimination.

A race or group that experiences racist treatment is also called ethnicity. Ethnicity in Greek refers to an understanding (identical) on a geographical basis within a regional boundary with a particular political system (Rudolph, 1986:2). The word ethnicity becomes a predicate for the identity of a person or group. A person or group who becomes Javanese, Bugis, Sundanese, English, Dutch or African, or becomes Madurese, Papuan, Chinese, at the same time cannot ask to become Javanese, Batak, or Malay and so on. This predicate is something that is taken for granted from the beginning of creation. According to John W. Santrock, ethnicity is culture, citizenship characteristics, race, religion and language. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, an ethnicity is a large group of people identified as having similar biology and traditions.

## **Methods**

This study adopts Pieterse and Powell's (2016) postcolonial theory and adopts a postcolonial perspective to investigate racial discrimination in the short story "Clara" (2014) Throughout the data collection approach, sentences and paragraphs from the work of writing are taken out. The research uses content analysis and is mostly descriptive. The method of data analysis used is a descriptive one in which the researcher decodes and understands the textual material.

In this study, data relating to racial discrimination was gathered from Gumira Ajidarma's short story "Clara" (2014) through an assortment of steps: first, multiple readings of the short story: second, the collection and organization of data about the characters' encounters with racial discrimination; third, the identification of data about racial discrimination in relation to postcolonial theory; and finally, the analysis of information about racial discrimination in Clara short story.

The short story "Clara" (2014) is the primary source of important sentences and paragraphs that are extracted for the data gathering approach. To guarantee a thorough comprehension of the book, the procedure entails reading the story more than once. The researcher carefully gathers and arranges information about the characters' encounters with racial discrimination during these readings. With great care, we hope to convey all the richness and complexity of racial dynamics in the story.

The main methodology used in this study is content analysis, which emphasizes a descriptive approach. The researcher decodes and understands the textual material using content analysis, concentrating on instances of racial prejudice. Using this approach, the story can be examined methodically in order to identify themes, patterns, and incidents that add to our understanding of racial prejudice as a whole.

This study employs racism theory to find examples of racial prejudice in the novel using descriptive and content analysis. The researcher used the postcolonial theory by Pieterse and Powell (2016) as a significant framework to assess the data gathered.

In addition, there are various unique processes in the data collection process. To become acquainted with the complexities of the narrative, the researcher first reads the short story more than once. Data is then methodically gathered and arranged, with a particular emphasis on situations in

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which characters are subjected to racial discrimination. The remaining analytical steps are built upon this well-organized data.

Furthermore, a critical component of the methodology is the discovery of data pertaining to racial discrimination in relation to postcolonial theory. This entails a careful analysis of the gathered information via the prism of postcolonial viewpoints, which makes it possible to spot underlying power dynamics, colonial legacies, and cultural prejudices in the story.

Nobody cannot emphasize the importance of Pieterse and Powell's (2016) postcolonial theory as a framework. It provides a theoretical framework for evaluating the facts and allows for an investigation of the larger historical and sociocultural background that informs and shapes the racial discrimination incidents in the short tale "Clara" (2014). Postcolonial theory is incorporated into the analysis to enhance it and give a more thorough and sophisticated grasp of the dynamics at work.

## Result and Discussion

Through analyzing the experiences of the main character, Clara Atawa, Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short novel "Clara" provides significant insights into the intricate problem of racial prejudice. This chapter aims to examine the ways in which racial discrimination has influenced Clara's character development and to peel back the many layers of prejudice present in the story.

Due to her Chinese heritage, Clara Atawa becomes a moving symbol of the widespread racial hostilities that existed in Indonesia during the time period that the short story is set in. The story deftly interweaves Clara's experiences with bigotry, abuse, and even sexual assault to expose the terrible reality that people from underrepresented ethnic origins must face.

The author uses Clara Atawa as a canvas to vividly depict the prejudices that are pervasive in Indonesian society. The story of Clara's journey, set against the backdrop of racial prejudice, is one of perseverance and strength. Her complex character development acts as a powerful plot element, giving readers a perspective through which they can consider the wider implications of racial discrimination. The conversation also touches on the larger sociopolitical background of Indonesia in the era that the short tale is set in. The author's decision to center this story around Clara Atawa enables a nuanced examination of the ways in which gender-based violence and other types of oppression, such as racial prejudice, interact. The narrative compels readers to engage more deeply with the widespread societal concerns the story addresses by forcing them to face difficult facts about the intersections of discrimination and identity.

Clara's experiences function as the novella's main theme, provoking readers to consider the severe and long-lasting effects of racial prejudice. By using Clara as a lens, the author not only highlights the injustices experienced by the Chinese population in Indonesia at the time, but she also starts a larger discussion about how prejudice is a universal problem and how people deal with hostile situations.

### 1. Ferocity to Chinese Ethnicity

In line with Rousseau's perspective, natural law doesn't establish individual inherent rights; instead, it establishes the rights of citizenship as a collective entity. Any right derived from natural law manifests within the citizenry as a unified concept discernible through the general will. Consequently, this theory suggests that every person should be entitled to equal treatment, irrespective of their social standing and origins. Nevertheless, the protagonist in the story does not experience equitable treatment and may even encounter violence solely due to racial distinctions, It can be seen through the following quotation.

*" I just kept quiet. SMACK! I was slapped. My lip stung. Perhaps it had split. "Answer me! You did, didn't you? You Chinks have no religion!" I didn't have to answer. CRACK! I was slapped till I collapsed. Someone else came up to look at the photo. "My God! Her boyfriend's Javanese!" I thought of my boyfriend. I never cared whether he was Javanese or Chinese, I only knew that I loved him "*

Based on the quote mentioned earlier, it is clear that the Chinese community faced unfair treatment, violence, and oppression during that historical era due to baseless accusations. The main individual suffered physical harm, leading to injuries like split lips and localized numbness, as clearly stated in the quotation. The quote also highlights that the indigenous population harbored biased opinions about the Chinese ethnic group during that time, arguing against them forming relationships with the indigenous people. Similarly, Clara Atawa was also subjected to unwarranted allegations and

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violence from the indigenous community, who falsely asserted that the Chinese community had no religious faith or belief in God.

In this brief narrative, Clara Atawa assumes the role of the target, enduring incidents of sexual harassment and intimate violence at the hands of the indigenous community. As stated by Collier in 1992, sexual harassment comprises various instances of unwelcome sexual actions directed towards the recipient and may affect women from all walks of life. In this instance, Clara Atawa encounters such ordeals, as evident in the subsequent quotation.

“I tried to move my hands to hold down the tight mini-skirt I was wearing, but they couldn't move. It turned out there were already two men holding down my left and right arms. I felt my skirt being pulled down. I kicked wildly. Then two more pairs of hands caught hold of my legs. I wanted to get up, but there was a sharp pain in my groin. It was like a spear had been thrust deeply between my thighs.”

The passage suggests that Clara is facing unwelcome sexual advances from several men who are using physical force. Despite her attempts to break free, she is overpowered by the strength of these men, who are part of the indigenous community. Against her wishes, they forcibly remove her clothing and swiftly engage in inappropriate behavior, displaying behavior akin to that of animals.

## 2. Profound and entrenched emotional wounds

The cruelty of racism targeting the Chinese ethnic group results in numerous consequences, including the mental health challenges and trauma endured by its victims. This is evident in the following quote.

*“I don't know if the Comprehensive Indonesian Dictionary contains the words to express the pain, the humiliation, the bitterness, and the insult felt by a woman who's been gang raped by many men—because she is a Chinese woman. My boyfriend, on the other hand, is so shy even about kissing me on the lips. My groin hurt, but I knew it would heal quickly. But the wounds in my heart, must I carry those with me to the grave? Just who do you suppose would defend us? Can it really be that we were born just to be hated?”*

The reader is immediately drawn into a world of profound suffering and injustice. This powerful opening sentence sets the stage for a thought-provoking exploration of the complex themes of identity, societal discrimination, and the enduring effects of trauma.

The story takes an unexpected twist as the narrator contrasts the intense and horrifying experience of a woman's gang rape with a seemingly unrelated and mundane observation about her boyfriend's shyness in expressing physical affection. This stark contrast serves to highlight the stark disparities between the intimate, personal world of relationships and the broader, deeply troubling societal issues that the narrator is grappling with.

The emotional depth of the narrative reaches a climax with the narrator's desperate plea, “Just who do you suppose would defend us? Can it really be that we were born just to be hated?” These questions lay bare the profound sense of helplessness and isolation that the narrator and others like her may feel in the face of discrimination and violence. The implication is that there is a broader societal indifference or even complicity in the suffering of those who are marginalized.

In essence, every person has an inherent right to make decisions and resist, but during that particular era, the Chinese ethnic group didn't have the capacity to contest the bias enforced by the native population. Discrimination not only causes emotional harm but also nurtures sentiments of regret, occasionally resulting in thoughts of taking one's own life.

It is proof that the victim in the short story can be shown through the following quotation.

*“I picked up my handphone and heard my father's message: “If you're hearing this message, I hope you're already in Hong Kong, Sydney, or at least Singapore. Brace yourself, Clara, and your two sisters, Monica and Sinta, were thrown into the fire after being raped. Mama was raped too, then killed herself, jumping from the fourth floor. Maybe I'll follow her. I don't know whether it's worth living any longer. I feel I just want to die.”*

The theory of Psychological Distress is a range of unwanted responses to emotions, including despair, worry, rage, and feelings of unworthiness, that can be driven by discrimination. Over time, this psychological anguish may compound, making the person's mental health issues worse. According to the theory of psychological distress, the provided passage is linked to this concept. The excerpt from the brief narrative demonstrates the father's despair upon witnessing the tragic demise of his

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entire family. The phrase "Maybe I'll follow her" conveys a deep sense of disappointment and frustration arising from the mistreatment by the native population.

In the mentioned narrative snippet, we also observe cruelty, which reflects the father's mental breakdown as he witnesses his family's demise before his eyes. It also highlights the mental anguish experienced by the daughter, who loses her whole family due to the discrimination they face. When the father says, "If you're hearing this message, I hope you're already in Hong Kong, Sydney, or at least Singapore," he is communicating with Clara in the expectation that she has already left the city, indicating an intensification of racism and discrimination during that time.

Ethnic Chinese individuals in Indonesia experienced violence during the 1998 incident, which left them with distressing memories of what happened. Due to the bigotry they encountered during the horrifying event, many people found it difficult to talk about their experiences and were unwilling to remember the catastrophe. It is proof that the victim in the short story can be shown through the following quotation:

*"She told her tale in language that was impossible to understand. Not because her Indonesian isn't good enough, since she has complete command of the language, but because it seems as if what she'd experienced and felt couldn't be put into sentences. Her pretty face was full of unimaginable emotional pain. I was almost moved even before she began to tell her tale. I could never have imagined that a human being should have to endure so great a burden of suffering merely because she was born a human being. Her story came falteringly. The sentences didn't follow one another. Her words were scattered about without being linked together so that I had to make sense out of.*

She communicated in a language that seemed unintelligible when telling her narrative, but this wasn't because she didn't know how to speak Indonesian; on the contrary, she was fluent in it. Rather, it appeared that the sensations and feelings she had gone through were too intense to put into words. Her face, beautiful as it was, was almost palpably heavy with an inexplicable emotional pain as she started to speak. *Before she even began to tell me about her life, I was almost to cry because of the obvious suffering on her face. I was unable to anticipate the tremendous amount of pain she had had to bear just for being a person.* Her story did not develop in the anticipated linear fashion as she carefully untangled it; her sentences did not flow naturally from one to the next. Rather, her statements were fractured and dispersed, making it extremely difficult to piece together the cohesive story that was hidden beneath her fragmented story.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, Seno Gumira Ajidarma's 2014 short stories "Clara" presents an emotional and thought-provoking investigation into racial prejudice and its disastrous effects on modern society. The story illustrates the persistent and widespread nature of racial prejudice by means of Clara's realistic representation, demonstrating how it may seep into even the most private and intimate facets of a person's life. The story reveals the prejudice, preconceptions, and microaggressions that Clara, a lady of mixed ethnicity, encounters on a daily basis, illuminating the subtle yet profound effects of racism on people.

"Clara" questions the arbitrary divisions that society frequently places on people based only on their ethnicity or outward appearance, exposing the unfairness and logic of racial prejudice. Clara's moving battle to fit in with a culture that continuously challenges her sense of self and place is a potent metaphor for the larger problems marginalized people in society face.

Seno Gumira Ajidarma's "Clara" is a brilliant piece of writing that challenges readers to consider the subtle ways that racism still permeates our society. It challenges us to face our own biases and prejudices and to work toward a more inclusive and fair society. It is a call to reflection and change. In the end, "Clara" is a reminder that stories have the ability to illuminate the darkest aspects of human nature and inspire us to take a more proactive, understanding, and empathic approach to combating racial discrimination. It is a call to action, imploring us to embrace the richness and beauty of our diverse planet and to tear down the walls dividing us.

"Clara" comes to light as a potent indictment of the arbitrary distinctions established by society on the basis of a person's race or physical appearance alone. The story undermines the irrational underpinnings of racial prejudice and asks readers to reevaluate the justice and justification of such discriminatory actions. Clara's moving effort to find her place in a world that continuously

challenges her identity is a powerful allegory for the larger struggles encountered by marginalized people, highlighting the structural problems that support discrimination.

Seno Gumira Ajidarma's mastery of narrative is evident in "Clara," which prompts readers to consider the subtle ways that racism persists in our society. The story encourages people to examine their own biases and prejudices by acting as a trigger. It inspires readers to actively participate in the development of a more just and inclusive society by acting as a call to action.

Essentially, "Clara" is a powerful invitation to reconsider our viewpoints and tear down the walls that divide us more than merely a piece of literature. The narrative forces us to confront the most sinister sides of human nature, encouraging a proactive, perceptive, and compassionate strategy to end racial discrimination. It is an appeal for change that begs us to tear down the barriers dividing us and to appreciate the richness and beauty of our unique world. "Clara" is a monument to the transforming power of stories, highlighting how they may shed light on social challenges and inspire us to work toward a more peaceful and cohesive world.

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