

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Alienation refers to the separation that individuals or groups can feel towards themselves, society, or the surrounding environment. This phenomenon involves the inability to feel connected or integrated with social reality (Munajah, 2023). In line with the broader process of social fragmentation and disintegration, Øversveen (2021) defines alienation as a subjective feeling of estrangement, helplessness, loneliness, and separateness. Some factors trigger alienation, according to Munajah (2023); firstly, the breakdown of communication due to the inability to communicate effectively can lead to isolation and feelings of alienation. Next, the value differences, which are the conflicts between the individuals and their surrounding environment, can cause alienation. Then, social misfit, a person's feeling that he or she does not fit into the social norms or environment, can also lead to alienation. In the United States, historical and social factors have contributed to the experience of alienation. Among African Americans, institutional racism and discrimination have led to alienation. The concept of "double consciousness" described by W.E.B. Du Bois reflected that people might feel a sense of being both "American" and "African American" at the same time, creating a sense of detachment and alienation (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005, pp. 3–26).

A homeland can be defined as a concrete state with defined borders and a product of shared language, land, and culture, as defined by Vamvakidou (2010).

Homeland refers to a person's geographical area or country of origin, including cultural, historical, and national aspects of identity. In the United States, the concept of homeland embraces more than geographic boundaries. It encompasses the national identity, history, and values that define America. The exploration and settlement of various ethnic groups and immigrants have significantly contributed to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States.

Throughout American history, the struggle for independence has been central to understanding the homeland, signifying the determination to build an independent country. The historical experiences of African Americans have contributed to a sense of disconnection and alienation from their homeland, including forced migration and mistreatment of their ancestors. Reflecting the complex relationship between alienation, race, and attitudes toward other marginalized communities, the impact of racism and marginalization on African Americans has also influenced their attitudes toward other marginalized groups, including immigrants (Wilkinson & Bingham, 2016).

Marginal groups are individuals or groups who exist on the fringes or periphery of society, often experiencing social, economic, or political exclusion. In America, marginalization includes individuals or groups who face social, economic, or political exclusion due to factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, among others. It is important to note that this description is objective and does not include subjective assessments. Marginalized groups, such as diaspora and immigrant communities, often remain closely connected to their homelands while in the United States. This connection can affect their sense of identity, their sense of inclusion, and their cultural engagement. For example, the

diaspora may have a unique perception of their homeland or distinct from the host country where they currently reside. It may contribute to a multifaceted sense of belonging and attachment (Addis, 2012).

Historically, marginalized groups in America, including Afro-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and others, have experienced racial discrimination in various aspects of society, including economic disparities, the criminal justice system, business, housing, health, and all levels of government (Estrada, 2022). At the end of the 19th century, African Americans were systematically marginalized through slavery and discriminatory laws, a practice that continued until the middle of the 20th century. Unfortunately, marginalization remains to this day, with racial and ethnic minorities facing disparities in education, employment, criminal justice, and economic inequality.

The experience of racially or ethnically marginalized groups in the United States is characterized by the loss of identity, dignity, property, and cultural communities, as well as assignment to second-class citizenship. Research has shown that marginalized racial and ethnic groups have experienced high odds of hate incidents, including racist violence and discrimination, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Marginalized racial and ethnic groups experienced high odds of hate incidents during pandemic.* 2023. <https://sph.washington.edu/news-events/sph-blog/high-odds-hate-incidents-for-marginalized-groups-during-pandemic>). A significant number of workers from marginalized racial and ethnic groups have reported experiencing racism in the workplace with the majority of these acts being initiated by individuals who identify as white. Racism and discrimination have been shown to prevent

marginalized groups from accessing good health and well-being. This highlights the connection between marginalization and health and underscores the significant impact of racism on racially or ethnically marginalized groups in America. Racism affects their lives, including social, economic, and health-related outcomes.

Structural racism has a significant impact on marginalized groups in America, leading to health inequities, discrimination, and hate incidents. According to Gee and Ford (2011), recent research has shown that structural racism is a fundamental cause of health inequities among racial and ethnic groups. This is due to social segregation, immigration policy, and intergenerational effects during the pandemic. To tackle these issues, it is crucial to encourage a collective examination of how racism is sustained by procedures, standards, and anticipations, as well as individual conduct and attitudes (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/choice/antiraciststrategiestodisruptracialinequitiesdr/workbook>). By understanding the deep cultural roots of racism and promoting mutual appreciation of each other's cultures, it is possible to reduce the impact of alienation and marginalization on individuals and society as a whole (DeVenny, Keecece. July 2023. *The Power of Language American, Redefined How Language is Weaponized to Oppress and Marginalize*. <https://www.naacpldf.org/white-supremacy-what-it-means-to-be-american/>).

Afro-American culture is distinct from descendants in the United States who survived the Middle Passage, also known as the Atlantic slave trade, in which millions of enslaved Africans transmitted to America as part of the

triangular slave trade. Thus, Afro-American culture is a blend of African and Sahelean cultures, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The literary tradition discussed here originated in the late eighteenth century. Before the peak of the slave narrative, autobiographical spiritual narratives dominated African-American literature. The nineteenth-century slave narrative marked an early high point in Afro-American literature. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s saw the development of literature and art. Among the themes and issues addressed in the literature are the role of Afro-Americans in American society, African American culture, racism, slavery, and equality (Brown et al., 2013).

Before the American Civil War, literature mainly consisted of memoirs written by people who had escaped slavery; the slave story genre includes stories of life under slavery and the paths of justice and redemption to freedom. African-American literature is now widely recognized as an essential component of American literature. The oral traditions of enslaved Africans in America are the foundation of African American literature.

Enslaved people used stories and fables similarly to how they used to in music, which influenced African-American poets and writers such as Langston Hughes. He was chosen due to his significant role as a social activist and a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, he had a major contribution in voicing Afro-American opinions through *The Chicago Defender* newspaper as the civil rights movement gained momentum. He was also a prolific writer at an early age and became best known in the creative community in Harlem.

Langston Hughes is an African-American novelist who was born David Herbert Richards Lawrence on February 1, 1902. Widely regarded as the father of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes was also a poet, social activist, columnist, American playwright, and songwriter. Two of his early works were *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927).

Hughes faced numerous social issues as a black man living in the United States. Afro-Americans accept much racism directed at them. As a result, in his novels "Pictorial History of the Negro in America," "Negro Speaks of Rivers," and "Famous Negro Heroes of America," Hughes frequently depicts the lives of Afro America in America. Hughes became a crucial writer for African Americans because he commonly pictured the lives of African Americans in his work. The racism that Afro-Americans faced at the time was terrifying. Hughes, on the other hand, discovered the best solution for him. Langston Hughes frequently based his writing on his turmoil, which is included in the poem 'Dreams' (cited <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>).

There have been many researches exploring Black Identity in Langston Hughes poems, such as Ghosh (2018), Mohammad (2016), Ekpo (2017), Nunes (2021), Limna (2022), Pattu (2022), Saientisna (2021).

Ghosh (2018) explores how Langston Hughes explores the importance of racial consciousness and cultural nationalism devoid of self-hate, which united people of African descent and Africa across the globe in some of his poetry. In line with Ghosh, Nunes (2021) highlighted the poetic language of American author Langston Hughes, with particular attention paid to the issues of race and African American identity, and explores the Black self-emancipation, which has

produced a remarkable legacy of cultural and identity resistance. Like Ghosh, Expo (2017) outlined the socio-political undercurrents in Langston Hughes' poetry and how they support the affirmation of the black American individual self in American society by using psychoanalytical and feminist viewpoints as its theoretical frameworks when evaluating a few of the poetry. Besides that, there is also Limna (2022), who investigates the poetic language of American novelist Langston Hughes, focusing on race and African American identity, which underlines a Black self-emancipation that has produced an incredible legacy of cultural and identity struggle. Following the researchers that have mentioned before, Saientisna (2021) discovers the gap between Langston Hughes's "I, too, Sing America" (1926) and Amy Saunders "You're not Black" (2019) about how racism developed based on various formations of sociocultural and historical characteristics.

However, Mohammad (2016) views Langston Hughes's poems differently. He recalled how slavery and segregation are expressed in some of Hughes' poetry. African Americans have had to portray an upbeat outlook throughout history to achieve everlasting independence. Pattu (2022) highlighted the racial discrimination from white people against Afro-Americans who were formerly enslaved people, seen from the acts of prejudice, insult, words used, and the act of suppression in some of Hughes' poems.

Previous studies have explored culture in one of Langston Hughes' poems, but none have examined how Afro-American cultural values regarding obstacles or challenges are taught and how the next generation handles these problems in contemporary life. Therefore, the researcher aims to analyze the representation of

Afro-American culture in Langston Hughes' poems and how poets portray this issue by selecting six of the poet's poems using cultural materialism by Raymond Williams.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the explanation above, two research questions have been formulated:

1. How are Afro-Americans represented in six Langston Hughes poems using cultural materialism?
2. What language device did Langston Hughes use in his poems to portray Afro-Americans?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

Based on the research questions above, the purpose of the study is presented below:

1. to examine how Afro-Americans are portrayed in six of Langston Hughes' poems using cultural materialism.
2. to determine the language device used by Langston Hughes to portray Afro-Americans in his poems.

1.4 Significances of The Study

The study's results may be helpful for readers and parties interested in literary research. It aims to enhance readers' understanding of the representation of Afro-American culture in poetry, shedding light on the struggles, history, feelings,

perceptions, and culture of Afro-Americans. In addition, readers can gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the historical context by comprehending the meaning of the poems.

