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## **RACISM IN DUNCAN TONATIUH'S *SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL* (2014)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research is an analysis of Duncan Tonatiuh's picture book entitled *Separate is Never Equal* (2014), which focuses on the representation of racism in the picture book. The research analyze the form of racism in the picture book depicted by the characters and the illustrations. This research used descriptive qualitative method and textual analysis that employed the types of racism by Jones (1997). It is found that there are three types of racism: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism, are depicted in the picture book. The representation of racism is shown in the form of white as superior towards non-white as inferior. The non-whites in the picture book are represented as an inferior race and their social status is lower than whites. The findings of this study, therefore, signify the importance of children literature, more specifically picture books, as medium to raise awareness of racism more effectively.

**Keywords:** *cultural racism, individual racism, institutional racism, picture book, racism*

## INTRODUCTION

Racism is one of the big problems in human life because it can impact violence, slavery, and discrimination. This term is closely related to the negative perception of one ethnic group to other ethnic groups, based on physical differences such as skin color and hairstyle. Grosfoguel (2016) argues that racism is “a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that has been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the world system.”(p.2). In brief, racism is dehumanization regarding violence and dispossession in the world system.

According to Jones (1997) racism in general has been conceptualized as an attitude and prejudice scale. He stated there are three types of racism; Individual racism, Institutional racism and Cultural racism. Individual racism, also called as personal racism supported an individual disadvantaging actions by personal belief in stereotypes, pre-judgment, or

bias. According to Dovidio (2000) a stereotypes in individual racism refers to a person or member of a group which their existence is unjustified. Different from stereotypes, pre-judgment or prejudice is an actual experience or an opinion that is not based on reason. People who judge something without knowing the facts becomes an act of discrimination to a negative perception which involves denying individuals or group of people equality of treatment (Allport, 1954, p. 51). Alternatively, it proposed both prejudice and stereotypes as the result of motivation to achieve a sense of superiority, replace a feeling of self-regard and support status in society (Brigham, 1993). Meanwhile, institutional racism refers to the limitation the opportunities for particular groups of people. The institution manipulates toleration of intentional or unintentional institutional policies and make a particular groups of people more difficult to move freely. Therefore, white people looking for benefits from them in term of policies, practices and procedures. Usually, white people make a policies which can cause detriment for

non-white. For example, non-white cannot study in a public school and they must be placed in other school. And in practice, as a minority group, non-white must follow the procedures that have been made in order to avoid more severe disputes that can harm them. Almost the same as institutional racism, cultural racism involves the superiority of dominant groups in cultural heritage. The interplay of policies, practices and programs of institutions leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for non-white that compared to white communities that occurs in cultural conditions.

Not only is it in real life, the issues of racism is also found in children's literature. Children's literature is one type of literature in which most of the works are related to children's daily life. According to Fadiman (2017), children's literature which mostly tell about fairy tales, fables, lullabies and folk is an easy-to-read story written for children. Contemporary children stories are not confined to fairy tales, folk, lullabies, and fables as they also present issues like bullying, discrimination, and

racism. For instance, Sturm (2017) examines a material on school segregation to address the question "is separate ever equal?" on children's picture book *Separate is Never Equal*. This study is a teaching-learning design in the scope of classroom materials. The finding shows students are able to build an understanding of the importance and benefits of school desegregation and the negative impact of segregation. Meanwhile, Edgerton and Jackson (1996), attempt to redesign a thought of black and white in Disney's Film *Pocahontas*. The finding shows Pocahontas should reconstruct a beauty standard and race to make a new stereotype regarding racism, besides the longstanding traditions of the "Hollywood Indian" which is still elicited in the native community. Using Critical Race Theory, Wiseman, Vehabovic, and Jones (2019) analyze a few children's picture books that contain racism in aggression, bullying, and harassment for children. The finding shows a few books address bullying based on racism, realistic portrayals of bullying incidents, and relatable

descriptions of how bullying behavior is addressed.

The studies of racism shows that children's literature is not just simple stories for children. Brown and Tomlinson (1999) state that children's literature is a good quality of book written for children through poetry, prose, fiction and non-fiction. Since children's literature is read for children, the content of the story must contain positive value to build critical thinking on children's minds. However, some obstacles such as getting bored while children reading a monotone story in children's literature can be found in reading the stories. One strategy to solve this problem is putting an illustration on children's literature, and it is called a picture book. Picture book is a book containing illustration for children which combines verbal texts and visual images to deliver a message (Sipe, 2011). Besides eliminating boredom, the illustration can help children to develop their imagination very well because when children do not understand the verbal text, they will interpret the images.

Since picture book provides visual elements which can represent racism, the present study uses children's picture book entitled *Separate is Never Equal* (2014) by Duncan Tonatiuh. There are reasons this study is important to be conducted: In terms of theoretical benefit, the result of this study hopefully can give a current information in Literature field about racism in the picture book by using Jones (1997) theory. While, in terms of practical benefit, the study hopefully can give an enlightenment and knowledge about picture book seen from literature perspective. Besides, the study hopefully make people more aware that even in a children's picture book, people are often take for granted, there is an important issue implied. In this case, Tonatiuh's picture book brings out the issue of racism very well through verbal and visual styles.

These research is similar to the previous study by Sturm (2017) who uses the same data but she attempts to find how racism is represented for the benefit of teaching-learning. Other studies by Wiseman, Vehabovic, and

Jones (2019) who use children's picture book but they attempt to find racism in aggression, bullying, and harassment for children. This research emphasizes the representation of racism through the types of racism. Therefore, this research is expected to fill the gap in the forms of racism. In this research, the writer attempts to reveal how is racism represented in the picture book using Jones theory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is a textual analysis within a qualitative design. The purpose was to reveal racism issues in *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonotuh. The story is about Sylvia Mendez and her family's fight for desegregation when they had moved from the crowded city of California to a farm nearby Westminster. When the first day of school neared, Sylvia and her brother came to the local public school to enroll, but they were banned because they are Mexican descent, and the institution principle told them to go to Mexican school. Sylvia's father did not accept if their children should go to the Mexican school because

he knew that his children are not Mexican and they spoke English very well. When no one could not help, he tried to collect signatures for a petition to integrate schools so that all children, regardless of their skin color or background, could have the same opportunities. From that, he went to a courthouse in Los Angeles for days and finally he got equality for his children to study in a public school. This picture book was chosen as the main data source since it took salient issues of racism in children's literature. In finding the answer, the three types of racism as proposed by Jones (1997) were applied in order to find which part(s) in the picture book described each type.

There were several steps in doing the research. First, the writer read the picture book several times. Second, the writer collected the data in the form of narrations or dialogues, which indicated the types of racism. After analyzed the narration or dialogues that show the types of racism, the writer categorized he types based on Individual racism, Institutional racism, and Cultural racism.

Lastly, the writer analyzed the types of racism and concluded what meaning had derived from the idea of racism in the picture book.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of *Separate is Never Equal* (2014) by Duncan Tonatiuh reveals the representation of racism which focuses on the types of racism. According to Jones (1997), there are three types of racism: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism. Individual racism in the picture book is depicted through personal racism supported an individual disadvantaging actions by personal belief in stereotypes, pre-judgment, or bias. While, institutional racism in the picture book is depicted through institutional policies that unfairly limit the opportunities of particular groups of people and looking for the benefits for them in terms of policies, practice and procedures. On the other hand, cultural racism in the picture book is depicted through the superiority of dominant groups in cultural heritage.

To get more detailed explanation, the findings are divided into two modes: verbal and visual, and each type of racism shows textual evidence by matching the appropriate category.

### **Individual racism**

From the very beginning of the story, the reader is presented with a conversation and illustration that show the action of racism. In this picture book, individual racism is taken place by a white boy towards the protagonist, Sylvia Mendez, at a public school in California. It can be seen in one incident which happens when Sylvia is passing through the school corridor. There is a young white boy pointed at Sylvia and yelled discriminating words:

**“Go back to the Mexican school! You don’t belong here!” (p.1)**

The excerpt above shows prejudice action because the white boy expresses an opinion that is not based on reason. While the boy does not get acquainted with Sylvia Mendez, he judges her not to study at public school,

and he tells Sylvia to go to a Mexican school. It is told that Westminster public school is one of the prestigious schools in California, and children who study there are usually white children in the middle class and above. Meanwhile, Mexican school is a school in Mexican, which has a corrupt system. People who move to Mexican have to think carefully about their children's school because Mexican may not have an excellent public school. There are significant differences between Westminster public school and Mexican schools such as the building construction, the teachers, school equipment, and school curriculum. Westminster public school has sturdy, clean buildings, while Mexican schools are typically house in run-down buildings. Mexican school employs less-experienced teachers than the Westminster public school. The students in Mexican schools bring shabby books while children in Westminster public school bring a luxury bag with pieces of expensive school equipment. Another striking difference is in the school's curriculum in which Mexican school focuses on

economics in everyday life, while Westminster public school focuses on science. That is why he says discriminating words such as "Mexican school," which refers to racism because the white boy feels more superior to the other, and those who are not white do not belong at that public school.

This action of prejudice is strongly depicted in figure 1



Figure 1. Individual racism

This illustration is present on the first and second pages of the picture book. If we look generally at the picture, there are many features that show the action of racism. Firstly, the color displayed on the first page of a picture book is brightening and striking. It can be inferred that white children are always seen as more distinct and brighter than non-white child. The second, all-white children dominate these two pages. There are five white children and one

non-white child walking in the school corridor. Indirectly, the bigger number of white children shows an act of discrimination because it privileges the whites more than non-whites. The third, the position of white children and the non-white child in the picture illustrates the assumed hierarchy. It represents how white children are higher than non-white when all white children in this picture are placed higher than Sylvia Mendes, the only non-white child who is placed on the right side and at the bottom. It implies the whites think themselves higher than the others. The fourth, the white children in this page have arrogant expressions such as head up and cynical expression shown from sharp eyes and lips. It is also confirmed by the white boy at the corridor seen pointing at Sylvia with insulting face, while the other white children seem to ignore what is happening around them. Furthermore, the appearances of the characters show significant differences. Sylvia's appearance in the illustration looks shabby by wearing a red shabby shirt, loose socks, and she braids her hair down. She also brings her books by

hugging them tightly without wearing any bag. Different from white children, all of them using neat clothes, clean shoes, and all of them bring their own bags. It is shown that white children are more prosperous by having all the luxury school equipment.

This visual evidence is a prejudice action in individual racism. From the text, it is shown by verbal and visual evidence which distinguishes the skin color differences between a white boy and Sylvia Mendez as people of color. Individual racism is carried out by one individual who thinks himself as more superior than the others.

### **Institutional racism**

Institutional racism also occurs verbally and visually. Verbally, racism is represented in repeating downgrading expression about being Mexican. Visually, the illustration shows the differences between the Westminster public school and the Mexican School.

The first evidence of policy at institutional racism that is found in the picture book is represented through the



secretary on the local public school who rejects Sylvia and her brother's enrolment to study at public school. She says that Sylvia and her brother should go to the Mexican school:

**“They cannot attend this school,” said the secretary. They must go to the Mexican school.” (p.8)**

The excerpt above shows the institutional policies in institutional racism because there is an unfair opportunity for particular groups of people. The secretary only gives two enrolments for Sylvia's cousins because the school's policies refer to them who have light skin, long auburn hair, and their last name is Vidaurri. Their father is Mexican but of French descent. Sylvia and her brother are wondering why they have brown skin, thick black hair, and their last name is Mendez, but they are American, not Mexican. Sylvia speaks perfect English. Even her father was from Mexico, but he becomes a U.S citizen and marry her mother from Puerto Rico, which is a U.S territory. The secretary, as part of an educational

institution, applies the school policies to confirm the enrolment only for white children only.

The other evidence that shows institutional racism is when the secretary emphasizes or repeating the same words towards Sylvia and her brother:

**“Rules are rules, The Mendez children have to go to the Mexican school” (p.11)**

In this part, Sylvia's aunty tries to persuade and convince the secretary to accept all of them to study at the same public school. She says that they are living in that part of town, why there must be differences between non-white and white. However, the excerpt above shows that the rules are rules, Sylvia and her brother cannot study at a public school.

The third evidence that shows institutional racism is when Sylvia's father, Mr. Mendez, meet the superintendent of the Westminster school. Mr. Mendez explains that his family just moved to a nearby farm, and the public school on 17th Street is the closest school to their house, and he

decides to send their children to that school. Unfortunately, Mr. Harris said that they cannot go to the public school:

**“Your children have to go to the Mexican school” (p.12)**

In this situation, Mr. Mendez does not get a definite answer to the problem. He does not know why public school rejects his daughter and sons to study in public school even though he already talks to the superintendent of Westminster school. However, he never stops to fight for the desegregation. In the following days, Mr. Mendez meet Mr. Atkinson, the county superintendent, who is Mr. Harris's superior. Mr. Atkinson says the same thing, to send his children to the Mexican school:

**“Your children have to go to the Mexican school” (p.13)**

If we look at all of the evidence, the institutional staff said the same thing about the do and the don't in terms of institutional policies. The rule that must be followed is sending Sylvia Mendez

and her brother to Mexican school, and rejecting them to study at the public school. Repeating the words Mexican in prohibiting manners shows that being Mexican is inferior. Necessarily, Sylvia as an American citizen has the right to study in any school in America.

These policies are strongly depicted in figure two, three, and four.

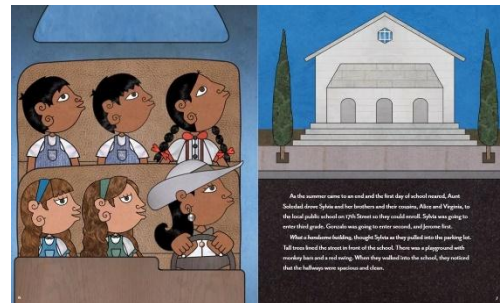


Figure 2. Institutional racism at school

The illustration is present on the sixth and seventh pages. If we look generally at the picture, it shows the expression of the characters and the description of Westminster building. On the sixth page, it presents an illustration of five children who sit in the car and a woman who drives the car while looking out the window. Aunt Soledad who drives the car is Sylvia's aunt, and two children who sit next to her are her children. Meanwhile, the children who sit in the

back seat are Sylvia and her brothers. Even though they are cousins, the skin color of Sylvia and her brothers are different from her cousins. Sylvia and her brothers have brown skin tone and thick black hair, while her cousins have light skin and long auburn hair. They are different because Sylvia's uncle is of French descent. The position of white cousins and the protagonist in the picture illustrates the assumed hierarchy. It represents how white cousins are sitting in the front seat while Sylvia and her brothers are sitting in the back seat. It implies the whites think themselves more advanced than the others. On the seventh page, the narrator explains about Westminster building. It is describes that Westminster public school building is *a handsome building*. It can be seen obviously that the building stands very sturdy in a large area. It has three large doors and stairs along the building. The building also uses a very good and strong tile. There are trees lined the street in front of the school. There is a playground with monkey bars and a red swing. When they walk into school, they notice that the hallways are spacious and

clean. If we look at the color displayed, the picture illustrates the Westminster public school as a bright school because the building's color is white, the sky over the building is blue, and the trees around the building are green and big enough. All the color combination is very beautiful and gives the impression of happiness. Furthermore, the superiority is shown by the placement of building in the picture book when the building stands firm in the center.

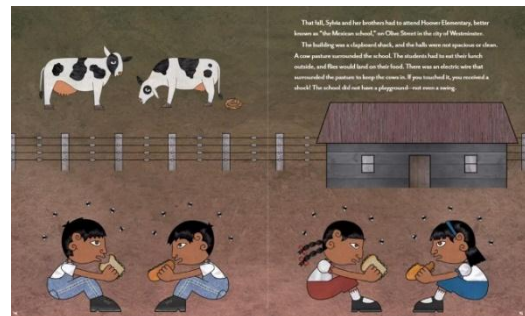


Figure 3. Institutional racism at school

Different from Westminster public school, Mexican school looks plain. The illustration is present on the fourteenth and fifteenth pages. The narrator tells that the picture illustrates the setting and place in a school during lunch hour. There are several elements that support Mexican school has inadequate facilities for teaching and learning. Firstly, in the

back, there is a small seedy building. It may be that the building is never repainted so it seems dark and gives an impression of unhappiness. Second, there must be a convenient facility that facilitate students for eating such as canteen, garden, etc. In fact, the illustration shows there are four children sitting in a large field while eating lunch. They sit anywhere and ignoring cleanliness around them. It cause, there are many flies over the children's head. Instead of a playground or park, on the outside of the school fence, there are two cows and one of them is pooping. The symbolism of cows represent if non-white children are equal to the animal. It is said to be equal because the place they eat and the place they sit are in the same place which are dirty and smelly. Lastly, if we look at the color displayed, the picture illustrates that Mexican school as a gloomy school because all the equipment such as the ground and the sky are brown and there is no other view apart from dirty buildings and cows.



Figure 4. Institutional racism in court

Besides the institutional racism in school, the picture book also shows institutional racism in court. The illustration is present on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth pages. The picture book illustrates when Sylvia's father go to the courthouse in Los Angeles to plea for equality. In the courtroom, there is a brown long fence that stands between non-whites and whites. Behind the long fence there is an American flag in the center. Beside the long fence there is a high prosecutor's table and sits a prosecutor on it. Next to the prosecutor, there is a superintendent with lower table. In the front of the picture, non-whites are sitting and watching the white negotiates with a black man. From the picture, it clearly implied that the long fence shows a distance between non-whites and

whites. The position of white judges and the non-whites in the picture illustrates the assumed hierarchy. It shows two white judges are positioned higher than the non-white characters. It implies the whites think themselves higher than the others.

### Cultural racism

In this picture book, cultural racism occurs verbally and visually. Both verbal and visual evidence are shown when the policy and practice in school presented through the narrator and the picture. Verbally, the narrator mentions the school has a basic principle if dogs and Mexicans are not allowed to swim in the school. Visually, the illustration shows that only white children are allowed to swim in public school, and Mexicans seem sadly through the bars:

**“At that time, not only were schools segregated but also other public places as well, such as pools, parks, and movie theatres. Some businesses even had signs that read, NO DOGS OR MEXICANS ALLOWED.”**

The excerpt above shows the policy on cultural racism. The institution leads to adverse outcomes and

conditions for colored communities compared to white communities that occur within the context of radicalized historical and cultural conditions. Not only is in school policy, but people of color are also not allowed to use public facilities such as pools, parks, and movie theatres. Different from today where people can swim together without considering their race, at the time of the story, people of different race cannot swim in the same swimming pool. On an opening day, tens of non-white people come to use the pool facilities but white people mocking them and it leads to a conflict. The conflict is getting worse when hundreds of white attack non-white people because they disagree with the policy segregation of permitting non-white communities to swim in public places.

The practice of cultural racism is strongly depicted in figure five.



### Figure 5. Cultural Racism

This illustration is present on the eighteenth and nineteenth pages of the picture book. If we look in general, the picture shows activity in a swimming pool. There are five white children swimming with a happy expression. On the other side, there are three non-white children standing behind the bars with a sad expression. It looks like they want to swim too, but the sign around the pool forbids them for swimming in that pool. Besides the obvious one, there are some features that show the action of racism. It shows through the color displayed of the picture book which looks bright only in the image of white children, but it looks dark at the top right where the Mexican are standing behind the bars. It can be inferred that white children are seen more colorful and happy rather than non-white who look gloomy and sad. Furthermore, the sign that is written with a red bold tint emphasize something that is really forbidden. Dogs cannot swim in the public pool because they can contaminate the water and potentially aiding water illness. If the sign says that

dogs and Mexicans cannot swim in a public pool, so it clearly shows that Mexicans are likened to a dog in which they can contaminate the water and spread the illness.

### Discussion

From the analysis that has been conducted, it is found that the picture book portrays the representation of racism through three types of racism: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism. The individual racism in the picture book contains two evidence: one from verbal evidence and another one from visual evidence. The most dominant type that appears in this study is institutional racism with six evidence: three evidence from verbal and three evidence from visual. The cultural racism appeared with two evidence: one from verbal evidence and another one from visual evidence. In this picture book, the race differences separate two groups into superior and inferior. Mexican or non-white considered as an inferior race because their social status is lower than the

whites. This is contributed by the white people who considered themselves as a superior race and put themselves in a higher position. It is shown from the picture book that Mexican cannot study in the public school, they must be studying in a Mexican school with inadequate equipment. There are some perceptions that non-white and white cannot live together in a place with peace and harmony.

The result of present study supporting the previous study by Sturm (2017) who explains that racism can cause the negative impact of segregation. The negative impact of segregation can be seen in terms of the institutional racism offered by a secretary in public school. Non-whites who cannot study in public school tend to get less knowledge than whites. This is due to school environmental factors (facilities) that do not support children to develop. For example, a dirty and smelly of the classroom can reduce children's concentration.

The result of present study is related to the previous study by Wiseman, Vehabovic, and Jones (2019) who analyze a few children's picture books that contain racism in aggression, bullying, and harassment for children. The finding shows a few books address bullying based on racism, realistic portrayals of bullying incidents, and relatable descriptions of how bullying behavior is addressed. They are similar in terms of bullying. In the present study, individual racism presents Sylvia Mendez as an inferior race bullied by the whites in school's corridor. On verbal evidence, the white children says inappropriate words toward Sylvia Mendez. It is strongly depicted through visual evidence when Sylvia Mendez is crying while leaving the child who shouts at her

The findings contradict to the previous study by Edgerton and Jackson (1996) who attempt to redesign a thought of black and white in Disney's Film *Pocahontas*. The finding shows that *Pocahontas* should reconstruct a beauty standard and race to make a new

stereotype regarding racism besides the longstanding traditions of the “Hollywood Indian” which is still elicited in the native community. The findings are contradicted because the stereotype in previous study presents non-white so well, it opposes the representation of non-white as inferior. While in present study, non-white are presented in an unfavorable situation. Where non-white become oppressed.

### **Conclusion**

*Separate is Never Equal* (2014) by Duncan Tonituh is a picture book that brings racism issues as the major theme of the story. The story contains three types of racism: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism. The types of racism that are found in the story are represented through verbal and visual evidence. Verbal evidence involves the character’s conversations and narrator’s state of mind, while visual evidence involves the illustrations of the picture book which indicate the types of racism. There are two races involve in the picture book: non-white and white They

are constructed because they have different races and cultures but they live in the same place. The representation of racism is shown in the form of white as superior towards non-white as inferior. Mexicans in the picture book are represented as an inferior race and their social status is lower than whites. They are considered as people with lower status and they cannot study in a public school. This is contributed by the whites who considered themselves as a superior race and have an advance position in society.



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Mode	Individual racism		Institutional racism		Cultural racism	
	Textual evidence	Categories	Textual evidence	Categories	Textual evidence	Categories
Verbal	<p>“Go back to the Mexican school! You don’t belong here!” (p.1)</p>	<p><b><u>Prejudice</u></b> Because it is said by the white children towards black (Sylvia Mendez), which contains judgment from someone’s actions.</p>	<p>“They cannot attend this school, they must go to the Mexican school” (p.8) “Rules are rules, The Mendez children have to go to the Mexican school” (p.11) “Your children have to go to the Mexican school” (p.12&amp;13)</p>	<p><b><u>Policy</u></b> The situation is when Aunt Soledad (Sylvia’s aunty) meets the principal’s office to give an enroll form. It is policy because the school has a basic principle not to accept Mexican in public school.</p>	<p>“Some business even had signs that read, NO DOGS OR MEXICANS ALLOWED.” (p.18)</p>	<p><b><u>Policy</u></b> Because it is said by the narrator, the school has a basic principle if dogs and Mexicans are not allowed to swim in the school.</p>
Visual	<p>Insert picture p.1</p>	<p><b><u>Prejudice</u></b> The white boy at the corridor seen pointing with insulting face to the main character while saying discriminating words.</p>	<p>Insert picture p.7, p.15, p.25</p>	<p>Public school has a clean and big building while Mexican school has a small and dirty building.</p>	<p>Insert picture p.18-19</p>	<p><b><u>Practice</u></b> No Mexicans are swimming in a public pool, only white people are allowed. They seem sadly through the bars.</p>