



Racism Reflected in Maya Angelou's Poem

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Abstract

The major problem of this research is racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poems. The aim of this research is to find out how racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poems. This research focuses in Maya Angelou's poems especially about racism. The type of the research is qualitative research. The method of data collection is document analysis, and the technique of data collection is note taking, while the technique of data analysis is descriptive analysis in which the researcher interprets the text and the content of the poem. This research uses two data sources, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source of the study is Maya Angelou's poem itself, from the collection of Maya Angelou published in 1994. The secondary data sources are Biography of the author Maya Angelou, websites in the internet about *Maya Angelou*, and other resources which support to analyze. Based on the sociological approach, the researcher concludes that Maya Angelou's poems reflected racism based on the poem text and the expression in the poem. Maya Angelou's poem also indicates types of racism such as slavery and discrimination. The last conclusion is Maya Angelou choose racism as the important issue in her poems because she is an African-American poet and activist.

Keywords: racism, reflected, Maya Angelou's poems, Sociological Approach

A. Introduction

Maya Angelou is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. Hailed as a global renaissance woman, Angelou is a celebrated poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil right activist. Born on April 4th, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps, Angelou experienced the burtality of racial discrimination, but she also absorded the unshakable faith and values of traditional African-American family, Community, and culture. As a teenager, Angelou's love to arts won her a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Fransisco's Labor School. At 14, she dropped out to become San Fransisco's firs African-American Female cable car conductor. This research will investigates the meaning and the way Maya Angelou face her pain and sentimental moment against racism represent from her collection of poem "The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou" (1994) written by Maya Angelou, there will be thirteen poems to analyzed with structural analysis and sociological approach in racism perspective they are: *My Guilt, The Calling of Names, On Working White Liberals, The Thirteens*

(*Black*), *The Thirteens (White)*, *Harlem Hopscotch*, *Africa, America, One More Round*, *Ain't that Bad?*, *Our Grandmother*, *Riot:60s* and *Sepia Fashion Show*.

In this study the researcher explains how Maya Angelou's poems against racism, the criticism against types of racism and find out why racism become an important issue in Maya Angelou's poems using the structural analysis and the sociological approach. The researcher use Rene Wellek perspective to understand the connection of racism in Maya Angelou's poem and Maya Angelou's background.

Wellek explains that there are three classification of sociological approach, First, the writer sociology, it is about the social background of the writer, the ideology of the writer which reflects in his / her other activity besides literatures as the writer is a society, he/she can learn as a social person. Second by the content of their literary works, it is related to the purpose of a literary work and other things reflect from the literary work related to the social problem. The last one is the reader problem and the social impact of the literary work. It is about how far a literary works define of depend on the social background, social change and social development.

B. Research Method

This research belongs to descriptive qualitative research, which refers to the research based on qualitative data taken from Maya Angelou's poems. The object of the research consists of two object, namely formal object and material object. The formal object of this research is optimistic view of life, and the material object of this research is Maya Angelou's poems. The data source of this research is divided into two, namely primary data source and secondary data source. The primary data source of the study the poem itself, from *The Collection Poem of Maya Angelou*. The secondary data sources are Biography of the author namely Maya Angelou, websites in the internet about *Maya Angelou*, and other resources which support to analyze. The method of data collection is document analysis by collecting, note taking, and selecting both of the primary data and the secondary data. Technique of the data analysis used by the writer is Descriptive technique, in which the writer interprets the text and the content relating to the psychological condition of the major character.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

Racism in this research divided into two they are the expression of racism in Maya Angelou's poem which explained in kind of diction and the criticism against types of racism in Maya Angelou's poems. Angelou with her poem reflected the action of racism specifically the action of white people (Caucasian) toward black people (African-American) not only as an idea but an action which recorded in history of America turn into so many unequal judgment as it turn into slavery, discrimination, segregation, hegemony, prejudice and stereotype and class struggle specifically to the class conflict.

1. *The Expression of Racism*

According to the text of Maya Angelou's poem, the researcher finds out that Angelou's poem indicates racism as it is shows in few indicators such as diction, imagery and symbol. Diction or the choice of the words becomes one of the important indicators to decide that Angelou's poems reflected racism. Diction can be dividing into four such as borrowing diction, this diction involving the use of different language words to reach particular meaning and effect of a literary work. Dialect is the second part of diction. It is also meant to make a literary work easy to judge based on the dialect. The special expression is also one of the important parts in Angelou's poem. It will give the particular information to the reader about certain condition. The last one is the special term; it is the chosen of words to make particular meaning as a symbol and image of the literary work meaning. In this part the researcher can be suspicious toward the text based on the words that remain racism because Angelou reflected racism in her poem based on the dialect and the special term she use.

Imagery also helps the researcher to figure that Angelou's poem reflected racism. As it is known that it is explain the mental picture that is picturing, portraying or painting of imagination as a reaction when the readers understand the poem. One of the most influence parts in Angelou's poem is visual imagery.

Symbol becomes the last language style the researcher use to decide that Angelou's poem reflected racism. It is also become one of the most important indicators since symbol define the other meaning then the literally meaning of a words. One of them is the use of *black* and *white* words. These words not literally meaning as colors but the different race which later become

the long history of racism from slavery, discrimination, hegemony, stereotype and prejudice, and class struggle. We find the words in *Harlem Hopscotch* poem below:

In the air, now both feet down.
Since you are black, don't stick around.
Food is gone, the rent is due,
Curse and cry then jump two.

From the verse above the speaker of the poem straightly put *black* words as the determiner of the verse. It is the center of all verse. It is not only refers to the color of black. Black means African-American. The words deliver the meaning that since you are an African-American you cannot socialize as free as you want it. It is related to segregation, discrimination, stereotype and all those racism idea.

2. Criticism against type of Racism

Angelou's poem becomes one of the most useful literature works to track the trace of racism in America which happened in sixteenth until nineteenth century. The poem also reflected the sentimental feeling as she is an African-American she seriously describe the ignorance of white people toward her race. In her poem Angelou try to describe racism and kind of it is institution toward Black African-American as slavery, discrimination, segregation, hegemony and prejudice and stereotype.

a. Slavery

Slavery becomes the most painful part for Angelou in her poem about racism. She repeatedly mention the condition about slavery in her poem with different tone of emotion such as anger, sad, guilty, even hopeless because slavery seems too difficult to stop while at the same time it is sacrificed so many live of black African-American as she describe in the first verse of *My Guilt* poem Below:

My Guilt
My guilt is "slavery's chains" too long
The clang of iron falls down the years.
This brother's sold, this sister's gone,
Is bitter wax, lining my ears.
My guilt made music with tears.

Angelou mentions in the previous chapter that this poem describe her sad feeling by entitled it as "*my guilt*" which deliver the reader to throw back the history of slavery in America, as she mention that *my guilt* "*slavery's chains*" *too long* to describe the memory of slavery era. Slavery in the early thirteenth century is known famously in Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, Sicilia, Catalonia and other Mediterranean market (Davis, 1999:61) but long before it arrives in America it is already known among the Muslim that slavery is almost have no different as a servant not as a plantation farm as in America, slavery among Muslim used to show the measurement of richness and quite different because it is treat with no roughness and no dangerousness. It is simply just to show and manage the wealthy of the master (Franklin, 1988:28). Unfortunately this slavery still becomes the beginning of the slavery later with cruelty including in America. George M. Fredrickson explain that the very first time slavery introduced as a servant from Africa which later turn to called as a slave was in Virginia. They are not mention as a slave because it is not commonly known, the black people only doing the life servitude instead of called them as a slave because on that time Virginia also not have been a center of plantation yet. In the seventeenth century especially in 1619 by a Dutch vessel in Jamestown sells about 20 black African to the Virginian (Pinkney, 1975:2). On that time the black African-American is in a complex situation because there is no clear legal law action to protect their right even thought by the time black slave introduced in Virginia the white also in particular situation being a servant but they still can pursued their right if they convert into Christian. The same chances are not given to the black slaves. They are considered no longer as human but as property which there is no particular institution can protect them except the slave holder (Pinkney, 1969:2), Including the edging of marriage relationship. Parents, husbands, wives and child in a slave marriage can be separated depends on the slave holder decisions in particular situation.

The next line she wrote that *this brother's sold, this sister's gone* to prove that the slavery still exist as an inconvenience truth. In a history of American, Slaves really traded as a property.

AlphonsoPinkney has written that slave “could be sold, traded, or given as gifts and slave families were frequently dissolved for economic reasons” even in a history slave can be a change of payment than money, to pay debt, or when one win the gambling they can be awarded slaves. The female slave face the different problem, they always or suggest to make a relationship to another slave which end with the intention of reproduction to born another and more slave and give more profit to the slave holder. Slavery become the important property to increase the income of the landlord because the more they are the more the result of the harvest and wealth of a person (Franklin & moss, 1988:28). It is being a developed into a big business in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Slavery trades mainly run by Dutch, French, and English companies (Franklin & Moss, 1988:33). It was Bishop Bartolomeo De Las Casas as the one who propose the permit of immigration of Black African slaves into the new world. Being the most dominated the slave trade in the seventeenth century and Portugal was the first country occupied with the slave market. The need of clearance the forest and farming of tobacco fields, Virginians realize the existence of black servant can be use. They then decide so called “perpetual servitude” of Negroes. The Virginians manage the other island of Negroes might usually use to escape. They start to do the correction toward Negroes and punish them with the legal support of law. Since 1640 the difference of white and black are quite reputable. At the same year, there are three servant runaway, one was the white servant and the other were black and unfortunately get caught. The court sentences them not with the same charge. The white servant is sentence “to serve his master in one additional year” and the Negroes sentence “to serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life here or elsewhere.” That is the beginning of *African servitude* which later known as African Slavery (Franklin, 1988:54).

My crime is “heroes, dead and gone,”
 Dead Vesey, Turner, Gabriel,
 Dead Malcolm, Marcus, Martin King.
 They fought too hard, they loved too well.
 My crime is I’m to tell.

In the Eighteenth century, slavery becomes the important role to growing the economic condition in the United States (Franklin, 1988:64). Angelou mention one of the name such Denmark Vesey, Gabriel and Nat Turner these men represent the rebel of slave who fight for their right and try to erase the slavery in their era. In 1822 there is **Denmark Vesey**, he is an ex-slave who won the lottery and uses the money to free himself. At that time he also planned the rebellion and soon become a member of African Methodist Episcopal Church and also become a preacher. In his religion mission she prepared the recruitment of other black slave confidence to become a rebel vision to kill the slave holder and spent four years to select those who dare to fight. Unfortunately, the mission is failed because someone divulged the information of his mission. The end of his planned the mission resulting 35 slaves were executed and 34 others were deported. **Gabriel** is actually the pioneer of the slave rebellion in 1800 before Vesey. He works in a plantation around Richmond, Virginia. He stated that he has a heavenly mission. He then chooses slaves to follow his mission plan to kill the slave holder with his family around the plantation. In short, Gabriel and his army killed all the whites. In this mission even he is not doubt to recruit the landless white which is later becomes the fatal cause of his mission. While after that in 1831, **Nat Turner** also known as one of the rebel slave who run away and revisit for religion faith. He also known as “mystic and frequently buried himself in prayer”. AlphonsoPinkney explains that he has a bravery to lead the mission based on his vision. According to his mysticism, Turner not recruits much rebels as previous rebellion. But it is become the most the biggest slave rebellion because it is need army to stop them. Turner and his participants killed 60 whites but get down because army and other white already surround them (1988:12-13). This is the reason of Angelou sadness and her guilty feeling. All of them died to fight for their right and never be judged equal as human whether it is in religion and also law.

In the other poem the imagination of slavery era describe in *One more Round* in this poem Angelou expresses her spirit to not give up. That happiness can come toward the hardest life of a slave just because they can finish their work in the plantation.

There ain’tno job beneath the sun
 As sweet as rest when a job’s well done.
 I was born to work up my grave
 But I was not born to be slave.

One more round
 And let's heave it down,
 One more round
 And let's heave it down.

Papa drove steel and momma stood guard,
 I never heard them holler' because the work was hard.
 They were not born
 To be worked-out slaves.

In this poem Angelou try to dig the imagination of the reader by add the diction which somehow related with the slave daily grin as the servant in the plantation area which is one of the truth in the past in North America that commonly the slave work at the cotton plantation and have to deal with the heat of sun. She describes that Negro basically get used to their condition as a slave but there will be no people deserve to be called and treat as slave. As the researcher already explain above that slavery found no advantage to what they do as a servant. Because they are not treat as human but property that possibly sends to anywhere depend on their slave holder, master, or land owner.

The other sentimental poem describe the woman as a slave have to deal with the fact that they cannot protect their children but give up to the condition where the master holder ask them to do including sell their child far from her as in the *Our Grandmother* poem.

No angel I stretched protecting wings
 Above the heads of her children,
 Fluttering and urging the winds of reason
 Into the confusion of their lives.
 They sprouted like young weeds,
 But she could not shields their growth
 From the grinding blades of ignorance, nor
 Shape them into symbolic topiaries.
 She sent them away,
 Underground, overland, in coaches and
 Shoeless.
 When you learn, teach
 When you get, give
 As for me,

I shall not be moved.

The situation above is probably one of the most powerlessness situation can be guess and prepared to face for every single slave. Angelou describe the mother as the speaker surrender the fate of her children. The mother already realize for she and other black women born as a slave let go the children with their unfortunate fate, work hard, hiding and disappeared or survive and again become slaves is the undeniable fact.

b. Discrimination

Discrimination being one of the complex issues toward African-American in America. The segregation laws for example makes black lose their right as human and also as a citizen. Discrimination can be transform in kind of forms as nationality, racial or ethnic, regional, religious, sex and gender. United Nation states that the term discrimination refers to "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."(Dyke, 1985:5).

In one of her poem, Angelou mention the situation of the discrimination in one of a town in America. The poem entitled "Harlem Hopscotch" as below:

One foot down, hop! It's hot.
 Good things for ones that's got
 Another jump, now to the left.

Everybody for hisself

In the air, now both feet down.
 Since you are black, don't stick around.
 Food is gone, the rent is due,
 Curse and cry then jump two.

All the people out of work,
 Hold for three, then twist and jerk.
 Cross the line, they count you out.
 That's what hopping's all about.

Both feet flat, the game is done.
 They think I lost. I think I won.

The speaker of this poem talks as she is playing the hopscotch. But Angelou choose Harlem as the subject of black life in her poem, it is one of the urban state in America which majorly known as the most black civilian live in there. Harlem is also known as the biggest area for black transmigration. She describes the condition of daily life in Harlem. As we know that segregation is the separation toward different races or subordinate race. African-American gets used to receive the lower treatment than the white people. In America, black African-American cannot socialize everywhere they want but deal with the poor economic improvement they still have to fill them all as the requirement of American citizen as the victim of this law treated injustice to their right as a citizen, where they cannot have the same public service with the white people (Anglo-Saxon and Caucasian). As she describes above that since *you are black, don't stick around*, means for African-American their presence in public area tend to invite the suspicious even their not doing something bad. The African-American is not socially welcome by their environment just because the different of their skin color and the stereotype toward their bad attitude. The result of this discrimination is the exclusion of the African-American itself and the poorness because they only allowed doing the rough work while the need to afford the normal life is not appropriate with the treatment from the government. Such situation also resulting from the black migrants who run away from plantation area and escape to New York as powerless human because they are not get used to the modern life and new skill. Even though they have socialized with the new environment they still remain in a slum area because the situation is not really different with their old place. At the end, they remain depressed because economic life and different place not give them different chance.

White supremacy is one of discrimination of racism idea and put white as the superior to the non-white. The terrible part of this idea that it is applied in politic, economic and social dominates in America. Angelou mention one of the social domination as the Calling of Names in her poem. In this poem she describes how the white people start to change the calling of African-American as black as they represent their skin. Later, the calling of names labeled not only happen toward African-American but it is also happened toward Jews.

From colored man to Negro,
 With the N in Caps,
 Was like saying Japanese instead of saying Japs.
 I mean during the war.

The next big step
 Was a change for true,
 From Negro in caps
 To being a Jew.

The speaker of this poem describes the different color which turns called as Negro while the fact is they are the citizen of America there suppose to be no need to mention about race. Later the arrival of the Jewish from Europe also become a new racism even though in Europe the Jews already face the different treatment just because what they belief. Angelou try to describe that religion hatred is not the reason to differentiate others. After long history of slavery in America, the religion hatred toward the Jewish also becomes the long dark history to remember.

History recorded that in Europe before spread in west, Judaism is a scary fact of a person has since it is the opposite of the Christian beliefs. This later, known as Anti-Judaism which the

Christians beliefs that a Jew is a sin as French Historian, Leon Poliakov explain the bible in Matthew 27:25 that the Jew is a criminally guilty. They called for the death of Christ cry out after the deed has done that "his blood be upon us and our children."(Fredrickson, 2002: 18) the traditional belief also describes the Jews as not human but devil. Cecil Roth, the anti-Semitism historian explain that the Jews planned unbelief and made them not like any other human, it is make them different and be able to do the worse crime where people cannot imagine. This idea then make Jews have to deal with the condition also their inherited receive the human crime. Including the different call of name and treatment even have to deal with convert they belief into Christian. The effect is multiple such as the forbidden of inter marriage, the convert of belief and the great massacre of Jews in Europe especially in German.

D. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion, this study comes to the conclusion as follows. Firstly, the researcher find out how racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poem by gathered the indication of racism come from the expression in the text of Maya Angelou's poem such as the diction, imagery and symbol. In diction it is analyzed specifically from the dialect, special term, special expression, and borrowing that Angelou choose to put in her poem are appropriate with the indication that her poem reflected racism. In this part Angelou choose the certain words and accent as her own style or even represent her race as she is an African-American. Not only diction, the expression also come from imagery and symbol. These two expressions build the certain imagination in visual or auditory to the researcher. In symbol also, Angelou put certain word to describe one poem entirely to prove that Angelou's poem reflected racism.

Secondly, the researchers identified further to the types of racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poem by understand the meaning of the poems. It is concluded that the thirteen of Maya Angelou's poem against types of racism. The types of racism here are: slavery, discrimination, segregation, Hegemony, prejudice and stereotype and class struggle especially in class conflict. These types of racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poem specifically describe in the personal, sentimental feeling and emotional way to remind the reader about racism.

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