

HISTORY OF COLONIALISM IN AMERICA IN MAYA ANGELOU'S POEM "ON THE PULSE OF MORNING"

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Abstract

This study uses a postcolonialism approach, where concepts such as colonialism, postcolonialism, and hybridity are used to identify the problems contained in the poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' by Maya Angelou. The purpose of this study is to understand the background of the creation of the poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' and compare it with social events at that time. The main questions asked in this study are: 1) What social events occurred at that time that were the background to the creation of On the Pulse of Morning, 2) What social impacts emerged after the event, which prompted Maya Angelou to write the poem. This study used descriptive qualitative research in which data collection techniques used are observational method and literature study through literature and historical books, journal, and weblogs. The results of the study show that America has undergone many changes since it was free from European colonialism. Colonialism brought a habit like the frequently exploitation between ethnic. This desire was voiced through one of Maya Angelou's literary works of poetry entitled 'On the Pulse of Morning'. The conclusion of this study shows that this poem voices unity and togetherness as well as changes in American citizens against discrimination and injustice felt by black citizens in America. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for further research on postcolonialism with deeper analysis techniques and clearer explanations.

Keywords *On the Pulse of Morning, colonialism, postcolonialism approach*

INTRODUCTION

The poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' is a poem by Maya Angelou published in 1993. This poem has a very deep meaning especially in American history and the social life of the American people at that time.

Maya Angelou is an African-American poet who successfully brings humanitarian values, the spirit of change towards the better, and openness to the importance of respecting differences in her work with her strong metaphors. The creation of this poem includes three symbols consisting of trees, rocks and rivers. These elements are a metaphor that represents a meaning that Maya Angelou wants to convey about unity, responsibility and hope for the future. This poem tries to convey a message about the need for healing from the trauma of colonialism and encourages listeners to recognize their common humanity despite having diverse backgrounds.

Postcolonialism can be interpreted as colonial power in which a thought was created discussing the legacy and impact of colonialism in the modern era (Quijano, 2000). The impact of colonialism has a major effect on social life, such as human rights issues or racial tensions (Ross, 2019). Because of the impact caused by this colonial power, literary works emerged as a medium to voice the hopes of society (Waisuddin, 2023). This literary work can reflect and respond to the social, political, and historical dynamics that form a bond between the author and his readers (Hastric et al., 2023; Nandyhalli, 2023). In postcolonial studies, the approach of literary criticism theory focuses on the impact of colonialism which not only affects the political and economic order, but also penetrates various aspects of life such as culture, identity, and society (Drozdíková, 2001).

In World War II, the United States entered a period of great political and economic change (Tessava, 2008). Domestically, the country was recovering while facing the threat of communism from

the Soviet Union (Todd, 2003). In 1993, the civil rights and racial struggles in the United States reflected a complex social situation (Mujiyati et al., 2016). Despite some progress, major challenges remained. Systemic discrimination and social injustice remained major issues affecting the lives of many people, especially minority groups, the Los Angeles riots highlighted deep racial tensions and demonstrated the need for law enforcement reform and improved race relations in the country (Subagja, 2023)

The condition of America as it is cannot be separated from the influence of European colonialism. Colonialism not only exploits natural resources, economy, politics, and language, but culture is also affected, one of which is in literary works. Postcolonialism in literature was a response to European colonialism which lasted from the end of the 15th century to the mid-20th century (n.n, 2003).

European countries such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal succeeded in controlling all of Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and America, they imposed culture, language, and government systems on the countries they colonized and also often erase and change the original traditions and identities of colonized countries. (Blakemore, 2024). On the other hand, colonized countries began to enter the era of decolonization. Decolonization began to develop after World War II when many former colonies gained independence from colonial rule (Nowell et al., 2024). In this period, postcolonial literature began to exist and often explored colonial themes, experiences, and perspectives formed due to colonialism, cultural domination, and identity (n.n, n.d). This shows that one of the biggest influences of colonialism is its influence on literary works (Hassan, 2020).

The complex dynamics that occur between colonizers and colonized influence the depiction of symbolism in America (Fanon, 2023). National symbols such as flags and currencies play an important role in the formation of identity, unity and assertion of control over a region, national symbols such as flags are usually symbols introduced in new regions (Kolstø, 2006). These symbols are not only depicted as a form of hope or pressure, used to foster a sense of loyalty and show power (Akiboh, 2023).

In recent times, many researchers have focused on researching a literary work with a postcolonial approach. For example, Mahliatussikah studied resistance as a response to colonialism in a poem and found an event of resistance described in an object of poetry (Mahliatussikah, 2020). Meanwhile, Ikhwan focused on all forms of postcolonialism, concluding that postcolonialism provides a picture of practices related to and challenging social hierarchies, power structures, and colonial discourse (Ikhwan, 2018). Nugraha focuses on the expression of the ideology of resistance in a poem (Nugraha, 2020). The article explains the meaning of poetry during the colonial period contained in the poem *Menghadapi Maut* which aims to provide an overview of the form of poetry that faces death postcolonialism (Nensilanti, 2024). This study aims to fill the unexplored research gap, namely by examining the social events that underlie the creation of 'On the Pulse of Morning' and the impacts that occurred afterwards.

METHOD

In this qualitative research design, this study utilizes documentary research methods to collect relevant data for the analysis. Through this approach, researchers can explore more deeply History of American, the History of Colonialism in America, the perception of American citizens towards colonization, the meaning of a poem, and its influence on the lives of American citizens. This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design with a case study. According to Creswell (2017), this method involves some processes such as collecting, analysing, interpreting, and writing the result, descriptive qualitative approach is also an efficient approach to find and describe existing data clearly and in depth from the research object. Case study defined as a study that investigates a phenomenon in real life, (Yin, 2018). In this study, the case study approach can explore the poem written by Maya Angelou entitled 'On the Pulse of Morning' from postcolonial perspective which aims to provide an understanding of historical events and social impacts that occurred at that time. The research object for this study was a poem by Maya Angelou with the title 'On the Pulse of Morning'. Researchers are interested to study the poem because this poem received so much attention from Americans and won the Grammy Awards in the same year this poem was published.

Data collection techniques that researchers used are observational method and literature study through literature and historical books, journal, and weblogs. With observational method, researchers can find out what is going on in surrounding environment (Kabir, 2016). Literature study defined as the process of obtaining information from existing resources including academic articles, archived scripts and books which related to the research topic (Nazir, 2011). The data analysis method used in this research is content analysis, which is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context that aims to provide knowledge (Krippendorff, 2004). Through this analysis, the study focuses to investigate the content taken from existed resources which is related to historical turning points of America in 1993 that involves the materials and inspiration behind the creation of the poem 'On the Pulse of Morning'. Researchers read and analyse the book, journal, and weblogs about history of America, history of colonialism in America, and read the weblogs about poem 'On the Pulse of Morning'. After that, researcher take a note the data that relevant with the research questions and write down the interpretations of researcher's perspective clearly in this paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research results from two research question, researchers divided it into two discussions, namely finding and discussion.

Findings

In this section, researchers explain the historical and social contexts that influenced the writing of 'On the Pulse of Morning'. This poem was published in 1993. Maya took advantage of the moment when America was in a period of social transition. There was a lot of racial tension and inequality to voice the hope of unity and renewal for American citizens through the use of her personification language style which is depicted with natural symbols.

Important History in America

1. Important Events in America

This poem was read after President-elect Bill Clinton was inaugurated. In the post-Cold War years, the United States experienced an economic crisis where unemployment rates soared and social inequality occurred among the people (Wals, 1993). Conflicts related to civil rights and race were increasingly widespread. Racism in the United States has existed since the colonial era and lasted until 1993. White people, especially those from Europe, began to dominate various aspects of life, including immigration, voting rights, and education. This dominance had a negative impact on minority groups, such as African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans, who experienced discrimination in various areas of life (Library of Congress, n.d)

2. Social Movement and Racial Tensions

The largest social movement at that time involved Africans and this conflict began with their arrival in America as slaves traded in the 17th to 19th centuries, the forced labor experienced by Africans resulted in ten percent of them not being able to survive (Elliot & Hughes., 2019). Although slavery was abolished in 1865, the impact of slavery was still felt as seen from the many forms of discrimination experienced by African-Americans (Schermerhorn, 2018).

3. Social Reconciliation After Riots and Racial Injustice

The riots involving acts of injustice and racism experienced by Rodney G. King sparked a major conflict in America. At that time Rodney experienced violence by law enforcement officers, but the decision given by the court stated that the law enforcement officers were not guilty. This decision triggered a major incident where riots occurred, there were 50 fatalities and 560 businesses that were not running due to damage. The losses incurred from the incident reached one billion dollars.

4. Environmental Awareness

The United States experienced an economic downturn and increased unemployment in the early 1990s. With this condition, a proposal emerged regarding the relaxation of industrial regulations to increase productivity. President George H.W. Bush, after this proposal was implemented, there were very detrimental impacts such as increased pollution and contaminated water. With that, America passed a new law, the Pollution Prevention Act in 1990, where this law aims to prevent pollution.

The Major Impact After the Social Events in 1993

In this section, researchers describe the social impacts that emerged after the important events in America occurred. The author also describes how Maya responded to the social events that prompted her to create a poem that meant hope, change, and unity toward a better direction.

1. Cultural Reconciliation and the Role of Inaugural Poetry

'On the Pulse of Morning' is not the first poem to be read at a presidential inauguration in American history, after John F. Kennedy's 1961 inauguration by Robert Frost, which was also described as a bridge between the worlds of politics and literature (Frost., 1961). Angelou's poem aims to bridge issues of race, ethnicity, and politics, this poem is also a call for the American government to reconcile. Therefore, Angelou was appointed to read the poem at Clinton's inauguration, who is an African-American female poet who is a representative of the importance of diversity of voices (Resnick., n.d). This poem is a reflection of the symbol of hope of the Clinton presidency for American society.

2. Response to Recent Social Unrest

The peak of racial tensions in 1991 in LA involved a man named Rodney King, this issue was a new topic so it was used as a background in Angelou's poem where the contents of the poem contain themes of survival, struggle, and healing. Where this can also be seen as a response to the country's need for reconciliation after the great division of race or minority groups occurred.

3. Inspiration from Environmental Concern

*A Rock, A River, A Tree
Hosts to species long since departed,*

*But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,*

This poem personifies nature as a symbol of conveying history, hope, and responsibility and also, as a form of concern for the relationship between the planet and humans. The theme of this issue is also in line with the many practices of sustainability and awareness of climate change in the early 1990s.

Discussion

Events such as the post-war era, social movements, social reconciliation, and environmental awareness prompted Maya Angelou to raise this issue at Clinton's inauguration. The post-war period was marked by the emergence of social issues, racism, and politics that created a major movement in America such as the environmental and civil rights movements. Especially for African Americans. With this background, Angelou describes the voice of the American people and expresses hope, pain, sadness, and dreams for the next generation.

The impact of the events that prompted the creation of this poem emerged from social events that occurred in 1990, which culminated in the incident of racism experienced by a man named Rodney King, who was killed by law enforcement officers, resulting in widespread outrage. This sparked anger among African Americans when they learned that the perpetrators were not tried fairly, and because it triggered a series of other conflicts such as demonstrations carried out by American citizens. With this, the poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' is a depiction of the social response that occurred at that time,

which called for unity and healing with the hope that this message is conveyed in a poem and the hope for a new beginning for America, represented by President Clinton. This explanation is in line with J. Drozdíková's theory (2001) which explains that the influence brought by colonialism in America caused changes in social life in the modern era such as human rights or racial tensions and also influenced literary works.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is Maya Angelou's rich poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' voices unity and togetherness as well as changes in American citizens against discrimination and injustice felt by black citizens in America. Maya Angelou explicitly explains the picture of the state of America at that time through natural symbols. From a postcolonial perspective, this poem contains a deep meaning about American history. Therefore, this poem is so popular that it won the Grammy Awards in the same year as the year this poem was published. This study contributes to the study of postcolonialism in literary works of poetry by showing the relationship between American history and the poem which is explicitly explained by the author who inspired her in creating a poem. Through this finding, it indicates that every citizen has the same rights. Discrimination and racism are bad habits. And poetry can be a place to voice aspirations. In addition, this study has limitations in the search for historical sources. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be carried out better and with deeper analysis techniques so that the results are clear.

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