

WHITE'S RACISM FACED BY AFRO-AMERICANS DEPICTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS*

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Abstrak

Rasisme adalah masalah yang tidak ada solusi untuk menghindari dan menguranginya sampai saat ini. Di era modern ini, rasisme menjadi lebih rumit dalam beberapa aspek dalam kehidupan kita. Ada banyak fenomena sosial di Amerika Serikat terutama di Arkansas pada tahun 1931 yang disebabkan oleh perbedaan ras dan kesenjangan antara kulit putih dan kulit hitam Afro-Amerika. Maya Angelou adalah salah satu penulis yang memilih masalah ini untuk novel berjudul *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Peneliti menggunakan teori strukturalisme genetik dalam melakukan analisis karena dalam analisis ini, peneliti ingin membuktikan apakah novel ini mewakili realitas atau hanya merupakan imajinasi penulis. Goldmann berpendapat, karya sastra sebagai struktur yang bermakna akan mewakili pandangan dunia penulis, bukan sebagai individu tetapi sebagai anggota masyarakat.

Singkatnya, analisis data dapat dirumuskan ke dalam tiga langkah. Pertama, peneliti mencari struktur yang bermakna rasisme oleh kulit putih yang dihadapi suku Afro-Amerika yaitu: prasangka, pemisahan, diskriminasi, pemusnahan, dan pengusiran, sementara suku Afro-Amerika berjuang untuk menentang rasisme oleh kulit putih. Kedua, menganalisa semua data yang ditemukan oleh peneliti berkaitan dengan kelompok-kelompok sosial penulis yang mencerminkan masalah penulis melalui isu-isu sosial budaya, sejarah, dan politik yang terkandung dalam karya karena ia adalah bagian sebuah komunitas tertentu. Kemudian dilanjutkan dengan mengeksplorasi fakta manusia dan subjek kolektif, kemudian menemukan pandangan dunia penulis.

Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa novel ini dan latar belakang (sejarah) memiliki hubungan dekat. Penindasan dan perjuangan dalam novel ini merupakan situasi Arkansas pada tahun 1931. Oleh karena itu, novel ini merupakan pandangan dunia penulis, menyangkut situasi pada waktu itu.

Kata Kunci: Strukturalisme Genetik, Fakta Kemanusiaan, Kolektif Subyek, Pandangan Dunia, Afro-Amerika, dan Rasisme.

Abstract

Racism is a problem with no solution to avoid and reduce it until now. In this modern era becomes more complicated in some aspects in our life. There are many social phenomena in the United States especially in Arkansas in 1931 caused by racial differences and inequality between the Whites and the Afro-Americans. Maya Angelou is one of the authors who chooses this problem for her novel entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

The researcher uses genetic structuralism theory in doing the analysis because in this analysis, the researcher wants to prove whether this novel represents the reality or it is only an imagination of the author. Goldmann argues, the literature as a meaningful structures that will represent the world view of the author, not as individual but as a member of society.

Shortly, analyzing the data can be formulated into three steps. First, the researcher finds the structures of White's racism faced by the Afro-Americans namely: prejudice, segregation, discrimination, extermination, and expulsion while the Afro-American's struggles appear to oppose the White's racism. Second, Analyzing all the data that are found by the researcher related with the author's social groups that reflect her problems through socio-cultural issues, history, and politics contained in the works because she is a part of certain community. Then it is continued at exploring human fact and collective subject, then finding the world view of the author.

The conclusion of this research is that this novel and its historical background have close relation. The repression and struggle in this novel represents the situation of Arkansas in 1931. Therefore, this novel represents the world view of the author, concerning with the situation at the time.

Keywords: Genetic Structuralism, Human Fact, Collective Subject, Worldview, Afro-American, and racism.

INTRODUCTION

This novel is an autobiographical story of the pain that accompanies a young girl's loss of innocence, feeling rejected by the totally segregated society of Arkansas in the 1930s and by her mother who deserted her at age three. Marguerite must also struggle with a troublesome body image and feeling of sexual inadequacy. She even blames herself for the death of the man who rapes her. Until she gives birth to a son, Guy, Marguerite feels that she has little or no control of her own destiny. Once she learns to accept Guy, and the events leading to her pregnancy, she begins to feel less like the "caged bird" of the book's title, less imprisoned by her race and gender. She finds freedom in self-expression and begins to take control of her life.

The main theme of this novel is Maya's struggle to survive and grow in a world that is complex and rough. Maya was very young when she was sent to her grandmother and uncle in Stamps, Arkansas. Her life was not easy. Momma is a rigid person who does not know how to love her. Moreover, racialism is a strong issue in Stamps which makes life harder at the time.

It is difficult to prove whether this novel represents the reality or it is only an imagination of the author. Therefore, Lucien Goldman offers us the theory to answer this problem. His theory is called "Genetic Structuralism theory". It is used to analyze the literary work by using internal and external aspects of literary work. By this theory a researcher is helped in finding the world view. A term Genetic Structuralism adopted by Goldmann is to describe his method of cultural analysis. Goldmann concerns not only with immediate appearances or content, but also with significant mental structures. Such structures are totalities in which the component parts are dependent on the whole.

"Just as the psychologist must conceive the psychic life of the individual as a complex effort towards a unitary and difficult to establish equilibrium [un effort complexe vers un équilibre unitaire et difficile à établir] between the subject and his milieu, the sociologist must study every group as an effort to find a unitary and coherent response to the common problems of all the members of the group in relation to their [common] social and natural milieu. It goes without saying that for each of these individuals, these problems are only a—more or less important—sector of his consciousness, the totality of which is tied to all the other groups to which he belongs." (Cohen, 1994:145)

Goldmann stresses that such structures must be understood in terms of their origin in the historical process. Any given totality can be inserted into a larger totality; thus a literary text can be seen as a totality with its own structure, or as a component of a whole epoch of social history. Goldmann develops the concept of a "world view" the set of aspirations, ideas, and feelings elaborated by a whole social

class at a stage in its history (Goldman, 1975:160). It is a world view produced by a collective Subject, but may find its most coherent expression in a major literary or philosophical text. The genetic structuralism is usually to analyze the great work, because it is usually created on a great event such a novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Concerning with the problem, this study has three goals. The first is to find out how White's racism faced by Afro-Americans in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* reflects the real society of Arkansas in 1931. The second is to find out how racial discrimination is naturalized as the common view in Arkansas society, and the third is to find out what Angelou's world view related to her creative process.

Method of Analysis

This research uses qualitative research to support the study. Best and Kahn (1989: 89-90) state that "research can also be qualitative, that is, it can describe events persons, and so forth scientifically without the use of numerical data". In qualitative data, the aim is to provide our perspective and study in words and other actions, such as making interpretation, description or observation. The qualitative may be in a form of text, photograph or image, videos, sound recording, and so on.

The primary data of this study are all the data from the novel "*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*" written by Maya Angelou, which was published in 1970. The data might present in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogs throughout the novel that are related to racism in order to find out the impact of Afro American toward racist, the struggles of Afro-Americans to fight White's racism in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and the real society of Arkansas in the 1930s that is revealed by the novel. The researcher also uses secondary data are like books, encyclopedias, articles from the Internet, and journal which are related to the Whites' racism faced by the Afro-Americans, the Afro-Americans' struggles against the Whites' racism and the real social condition of Arkansas in the 1930s.

This research uses descriptive method for the research shows the description of White's Racism Faced by Afro-Americans Depicted in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Genetic structuralism theory is applied to describe the collected data.

Result

Based on the data that have been collected and analyzed, it is found that genetics structuralism depicts racism in the form of the hidden structure. The continuity of the racism, the people in collective subjects approve the norms and the world views agree to take this dominant ideology. The human facts become usual and the history will always repeat itself. By all means, this study has given a supportive contribution to the world of literary studies. Every great literary works is quite the representation of the spirit of the era. The structure within the novel permeates through the story by repeating the human facts, and the collective

subjects. The plot and scene are the world view of the author that can be traced back as the initiative tool to study the real facts within the age of novel making. The urges become clear to link the world view of the author and the facts outside of the novel by taking a high consideration of the history. Hence there is more a plausible interpretation to say that the novel is the representation of its era. By all means, this study has given a supportive contribution to the world of literary studies. Every great literary works is quite the representation of the spirit of the era.

Discussion

The story begins by highlighting personal suffering of an innocent little girl and her older siblings, whose parents eventually divorced and leave them. When their parents' marriage ended, Maya and Bailey sent by train from Long Beach, California to Stamps, Arkansas, where they lived with their paternal grandmother, who they call "Momma." Maya was very young when she was sent to her grandmother and uncle in Stamps, Arkansas. Her life was not easy. Momma is a rigid person who does not know how to love her. Moreover, racialism is a strong issue in Stamps which makes life harder at the time. Five years later, she has to live in unknown city where she looked for comfort in Mr. Freeman, who molests and rapes her. At the age of ten years, Maya began to experience racism directly. Cullinan mother tried to change her name and white dentist Dr. Lincoln said he prefers to stick his hand in the dog's mouth rather than treating Maya, because he concerns her black skin as disease.

Living as a girl who is delusional, Maya has in mind that white women are always nice. Thus Maya does not want to be black because she wants to be white. Racism has provoked her mind and she has chosen to make her body more like white girl. Maya is a young girl who suffers not only from the typical trauma associated with being black female, but also from the trauma of adjustment in new environment. She imagined that she was a blonde blue-eyed girl trapped in a Negro clothing. Maya explains familial and social displacement as negativity such as prejudice, powerlessness, and the subordination of women.

According to the Goldmann's theory there are three important points of genetic structuralism such as human fact, collective subject, and world view. These points have a relation each other. In here the writer is going to discuss these three points and their relation with this novel and it's background.

The first, human fact is the result of human activity or behavior either verbal or physical, which seeks to understand science. The fact of humanity in genetic structuralism is divided into two parts, namely, the individual facts and social facts. However those facts and values are made up, they are never originals, there is always process to make facts and values with certain interest (Cohen, 1994:140). Thus Maya in the story should find a breakthrough for herself. These facts have meaning because human contact needs collective individual subject. In other

words, human fact is the result of human effort to achieve a better balance in relation to the surrounding world. In fact, in the novel, Maya is assured as not a pretty girl, then she needs to compensate her ugliness with other. A substitution that she needs is beautiful mind.

The second, Collective subject is part of human fact and individual subject. Human facts arise because the author works as the subject. The author is the subject of life in the midst of society. Therefore there are human facts in society. Collective subject is a collection of individuals who form a single unit and its activities. Goldmann specifies them as a social class in the Marxist sense, because her group is proven in history as the group has created a complete and comprehensive view of the life and it has influenced the development of human history. Here is the supportive data,

Maybe the policeman was coming to put me in jail because I had sworn on the Bible that everything I said would be the truth, the whole truth, so help me, God. The man in our living room was taller than the sky and whiter than my image of God. (Angelou, 1970 Chap13 page 20).

From the above quotation, it means that the image of God is closely related to the White. Hence, the word white has positive meaning and so does the white people. The young Maya does not know about anything, but she has already filled that her existence is lower than the white men. Eventually she imagines that God must be white as well because God is good. All ideas can be regarded as a representation of the author social group. The novel is an autobiography, thus it represents the author's society at that time. The text of white men has higher level rather than the black that is accepted by the black people and becomes the collective subject.

The third, World view is the main discussion in genetic structuralism. Goldmann argues the literary work as a meaningful structure that will represent the world view of the writer, not as an individual but as a member of society. Thus, it can be stated that the genetic structuralism is a literature research that links between the literary structure to the structure of society through the world view or ideology being expressed. Therefore, the literature will not be fully understood if the totality of a society that has given rise to literary texts ignored. Abandonment means the research literature community elements become limp. Thus, it turns the author consciousness in the piece of writing to reimage the reality based on her experience (Cohen, 1994:73). Maya is black. Racism is the cage and she is the bird, and it means not getting jobs, not getting medical treatment, and even the risk of lynching. The incidents of racism in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* lead to expulsion and extermination. However Maya states her oppression in terms of satire expression like the data below:

To me, a thirteen-year-old Black girl, stalled by the South and Southern Black life style, the city was a state of beauty and a state of freedom. (Angelou, 1970 Chap27 page 10)

Maya expresses her satirical statement by saying freedom. Though she knows that the black community in Stamps engages in feelings of expulsion and extermination due to their inferiority, Maya declares her true feeling of freedom by using metaphor, like what happened in the title of the novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Conclusion

Maya is a gender displacement of slavery, racism, and patriarchy system that is brought by the whites. Genetic structuralism addresses parts of the network of relationships that exist each chapter of the novel. The oppression happened in Maya's life is not seen and heard on the surface but what lies behind that. The motive of oppression is seen as a dominating ideology which is taken for granted by the black. Thus Maya approves her existence to be the bad person in early story, though eventually she realizes that she has to take revenge using her intelligence. Hence, the study reveals the structure of the parts in the novel. The oppressions happened in Maya resulting in overall coherent and holistic relations. The connection with the social condemnation such as admiration to the whites, subordination, rape, insult, displacement and mockery falls to premises which emerge as the genetic structure. Those genetic structures in terms of prejudice, segregation and discrimination as the human facts. These genetic structures are the result of the acceptance by the collective subject and lead to the world view that is expulsion and extermination.

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