

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN: AN INTERTEXTUAL STUDY OF MAYA ANGELOU'S "EQUALITY" AND LANGSTON HUGHES' "NEGRO"

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out the intertextuality of Langston Hughes' poem "Negro" and Maya Angelou's "Equality" about Racial Discrimination in the past and the life of African-Americans. This study is intended to depicted of Racial Discrimination which as reflected in Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou's poem. This study employs qualitative research. . There are two types of data The primary data are main source which are taken from the poem of Langston Hughes' "Negro" and Maya Angelou's "Equality" .The content such as sentences, stanza, and line as the source can be taken as proof. The secondary data are supporting data which are taken from some data such as international journals, articles, thesis, essays, sites, magazines online related to the theory that used in the topic of the study. The study is going to explain about Racial Discrimination study to draw how the African-American treated unwell, including the social conflict and the descent of the greatest difficulty in Americans culture. This study interested in the intertextual study of the poems and the kind of discrimination experiences by African-American in USA is describes in their poems.

Key Words: *African-Americans, Racial Discrimination, Intertextuality*

1. INTRODUCTION

A poem may begin with a lump in the throat, a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression as an effort to find fulfillment. Some poets may be easily understood, while the others may be not, however it is only the author who can interpret the poem. According to Ollila and Jantas, "Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story, or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. Poetry is used to achieve this artistic expression in several ways "(1)

Langston Hughes' *"Negro"* and Maya Angelou *"Equality"* are poems that shows the same background and tells a similar tragedy. Both poems describe the life of Black African-American and Racial Discrimination in the past, the two poems are intertextually related to each other intends to examine the intertextual relationship between *"Negro"* by Langston Hughes and *"Equality"* by Maya Angelou in terms background of themes, other intrinsic elements, and the writing style of the poem.

Intertextual approach is to understand a text as an insertion from other texts. Intertextuality is also understood as a process to connect texts from the past with the text of the present. According to Zengín:

Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. By so doing an intertext transforms or reproduces the texts preceding it (300).

Regarding poets, there are African-American poets, especially those who revealed their social conditions there were many poems produced. The poets who have expressed the condition especially in poems are Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou, two African-American poets who are popular in that era and this era. African-Americans are also often referred to as Negroes, and explained below:

"Negro" is a very interesting word because, first of all, it comes from a Greek origin meaning something that is dead. Negro comes from the same origin as "necro" and "nekro." In Greek there is no difference between these words. Some wise and devious white scholar knew what he was saying when he decided to call black people Negro (or necro). If the originator of this concept had been using the Latin or Spanish origin, as is often suggested, he would have called himself blanco, which means white. He did not call himself blanco; he called himself "white" and he called black people Negro, likely meaning necro. There is a semantic message hidden in this word and it seems that it might lie in its Greek origin intending to describe the Black person as a "dead substance." The manifestation of the distorted African self found in the characteristics of the "Negro" is something that stands as a barrier to the real expression and real essence of the African person. The "necro" refers to a mentally, socially and culturally dead person. (Akbar 1)

"Blackness is still the main criterion for the origin of the lower races. The meaning of the ancient black environment caused by scattered sunlight together with the meaning of black as negation, death, vices and even disease outbreaks" (Hrabovsky 85). This can be seen in terms of Blackness which is very denigrated, they are not only considered as a low figure, but also discriminated against. The absence of justice for the difference made by whites as

it said, that it is a natural poor African-Americans and even the cause of a disease. Blackness is also treated as a slave. "Black skin was regarded as 'damned' and as one of the reasons of enslavement since the launch of the slave trade in 1441" (Hrabovsky 66). Some theorists explain that race and racism are sufficiently independent for the possibility of having the former without the latter. In addition, the relationship was so strong that the affirmation of the distinction between the two becomes negligible, while both were necessary consequences of each other. "Where there is racism, there is race; where there is race, there is racism" (Lewis, par. 5).

Racism is a hierarchy of superiority or inferiority along human lines. This hierarchy can be constructed and characterized in every ways. "Westernized elites from the Third World (African, Asian or Latin American) reproduce racist practices against ethnic or racial groups which, depending on local or colonial history, which are considered "*inferior*" under human lines can be defined or marked along religious lines, ethnicity, culture or color" (Grosfoguel 10). The emerging racism is the difference between the color of the skin that causes the black race to feel distinguished and perceived by the white race. Moreover this difference leads to discrimination.

In this statement, the study is going to explain about Racial Discrimination to draw how the African-American treated unwell, including the social conflict and the descent of the greatest difficulty in Americans culture. "Of the nonwhite ethnic groups, Americans of Africans descent have had the greatest difficulty in becoming assimilated into the larger culture" (Edward 168). This study is intended to examine Black African-Americans voices as reflected in Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou's poems, this study is entitled Racial Discrimination in African-American: An Intertextual Study of Maya Angelou's "*Equality*" (1990) and Langston Hughes' "*Negro*" (1922).

2. RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative research. In analyzing the data, the study uses descriptive qualitative technique. The technique is used to describe the element of the poetry and make some understanding towards the poetry through sentences, stanza, and lines. There are two types of data The primary data are main source which are taken from the poem of Langston Hughes' "*Negro*" and Maya Angelou's "*Equality*". The content such as sentences, stanza, and line as the source can be taken as proof. The secondary data are supporting data which are taken from some data such as international journals, articles, thesis, essays, sites, magazines online related to the theory that used in the topic of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN LANGSTON HUGHES' "*NEGRO*"

The title "*Negro*" tells about two meanings; first, who is the subject and second, what is the poem talk about. The speaker begins with telling his identity in first stanza line 1. "*I am a Negro:*" He says that he is a Negro. This reflects that the speaker wants to declare himself and his people community. He describes that the skin color of African-American people is black and their origin is from Africa. It proves that the difference between Black and White is very strong, from which they come also disputed in a very significant difference. From

the name 'Negro', they will say that 'Negro' is a lower society class and deserves to be a slave.

In the first stanza, the speaker rephrases line 1. This means that he emphasizes what has happened to black people's history. Even though their hardship is lighter from year to year because of modernization, sometimes they still get unfair treatment in their community until this era. The speaker emphasize that he is a Negro, he is Black, and he is an Africa. "Racial discrimination concerns the unequal treatment of races, while racial inequality concerns unequal outcomes (in income, education, health, etc.)." (Clair & Denis 857)

Hughes describes himself and his race as having been a *slave, worker, singer* and *victim* in line 4,7,10 and 14 who suffered from discrimination in several different ways from several different people in several different places. By doing this the speaker shows himself, one Black man, as the entire Black race throughout history. "Racist slavery, thus the enslavement of African citizens, was responsible for emerging ideologies of white supremacy (the so-called "white man's mission"). The slave system not only enslaved on the "coloured" principle, but black skin was also referred to as something "deeper" and more fatal" (Hrabovsky 66). The speaker describes the history of African American people who have been a slave, and their job was not a noble one, because many of them at that time worked as boots cleaners.

This poem reflects African-American history and the trials and tribulations they experienced in the past and continue to survive in the present. Hughes uses many figures of speech in this poem, alluding to Julius Caesar, George Washington, and Woolworth Building to show the great role played by black people throughout history, from Africa to the United States. Hughes describes himself and his race as slaves, workers, singers and victims who suffer discrimination in different ways from different people in different places. By doing this Hughes showed himself, a black man, as the entire black race throughout history.

On lines 8 and 9, these two lines show the contributions made by African-Americans in the past. In this poem, Hughes portrays African-Americans building the Pyramid in Egypt and the Woolworth building in New York. Hughes also tried to show the achievements of African-Americans through their works. Even though they were slaves, they were proud to be able to build a pyramid in Egypt. And they are also proud of their skills and strength to build the Woolworth Building.

African-Americans also face a type of discrimination in their society especially in employment. African-American work is not the same as the Americans. American men refuse to work with African-American because White American considers slaves to be inferior. "Discrimination is defined as a differential treatment of people depending on their group affiliation" (Fershtman et al. 371).

In stanza 4 line 11,12 and 13, this poem describes the expression of African-American laughing and singing songs. As we know the misery of black Americans for a very long time, and this poem shows us that they shouldn't be moody all day long. But African-Americans have the soul to resolve their grief over racial discrimination in their society. Singing the songs makes their lives alive and turn away from the depression, anxiety and suffering at that time. Kareff and Ogden, "racial discrimination has been

associated with negative psychological consequences like depression and anxiety in several research studies” (qtd in Grieg 2003).

Furthermore, the result of African-American creativity is ragtime or jazz music now. Jazz is a musical origin from Africa, which was popular in the Harlem Renaissance era. The Harlem Renaissance was the development of the Harlem neighborhood in New York City as a black cultural mecca in the early 20th Century and the subsequent social and artistic explosion that resulted. Lasting roughly from the 1910s through the mid-1930s, the period is considered a golden age in African American culture, manifesting in literature, music, stage performance and art. That is all explained by Hughes in this poem especially in the four stanzas.

In the stanza 5 line 15 and 16, the poem illustrates that African-Americans are sometimes unlucky, because they often become victims in their communities, and they are treated unfairly. This might be caused by racism, Americans consider their own race to be superior and African-Americans to be inferior. Racism is a hierarchy of superiority/inferiority along the line of the human. This hierarchy can be constructed and marked in diverse ways.

“Westernized elites from the Third World (African, Asian or Latin American) reproduce racist practices against ethnic or racial groups which, depending on local or colonial history, which are considered “inferior” under human lines can be defined or marked along religious lines, ethnicity, culture or color” (Grosfoguel 10).

This poem also says that African-American in that era were tortured and victimized by cutting off hands, for no apparent reason. Unsubstantiated punishment for any wrongdoing that involves them and makes them victims and the lynching is still in Mississippi. Furthermore, the poem also show that the law at the time made African-Americans been a victims. They face discrimination in their society black and white remain separate in all aspects.

Last stanza (stanza 6) is the rephrase of first stanza, for making sure of the poem is by the real and the experience in the past. The prominent theme in the poem is the status of black people then, written from the point of view of enslaved Black African-Americans, the poem is full of comparisons with the experience of slaves from history.

Racial Discrimination in Maya Angelou’s *“Equality”*

This title gives the first message about equality, perhaps not only equality for African Americans, but also for all types of equality, such as gender, race, height, weight, and age. Equality also replaces the repetition of the line *“equality and I will be free”*. The word “You” means of White people. We can see from the first stanza that shows that when the White people saw the speaker, they did not consider the existence of the speaker.

In stanza 1, the word “I” or we represents African-Americans and “you” strongly agree as a white ruler. Meaningful lines once African-Americans become equal to other people in the world, they will eventually be free from conversation and conversion. The difference of race makes them unequal with the Black. Race is the world classification of humans based on physical characteristics. Base on those classifications, those humans join

with the humans who have the same characteristic, they make group base on those characteristics.

In the second line in this first stanza, the author discusses the idea of being seen. The idea of being seen "*through a glass that will not shine*" reminds us of a pair of glasses, or another lens through which one can see something else - except the glass does not shine. This metaphor shows that when the speaker is seen, they do not need to be fully seen, or understood because they have been seen. "*though*" in the third line makes it seem as if the following description of "*standing up boldly*" is something that is overlooked by the observer. Writers are seen, but their form, their movements, their attitudes, their intentions are not seen.

Because the character "*I*" here means of Black Woman. The speaker or the character here is Maya Angelou itself since the poem is about the Black American who lives with the White America which the White is the majority of group there. "Blackness is still the main 'criterion' of a 'lower' racial origin. The ancient environmental meaning of black skin as being caused by sunlight is diffused together with the meaning of black as a negation, death, bad nature and even illness" (Hrabovsky, 85). It is still correlated with the previous analysis, the Black which discrimination refers to differential treatment of otherwise equally qualified person, and how the African-Americans weren't treated equally and that when everyone is treated equally the world will be a better, happier place and they will be free. As Michael Yudell claims: "Racial differences were fast becoming part of the scientific vernacular, prejudice and discrimination based on skin color both preceded and complemented scientists' providing a vocabulary to racial ideology" (qtd in Hrabovsky, 84)

In the second stanza of the first line begins with the phrase "*You do own to hear me faintly*" the word *own* tells. Ownership over the other person, and *owning* the ability to listen to them, is an indication that the topic of the poem tends to center on slavery and eliminate the freedom of other individuals. In this light, the "*I*" of the poem probably represents those who have been oppressed and sold as slaves, while "*you*" represent their forced masters. While the themes expressed so far can be applied to many elements of injustice, the choice of words here indicates something specific and very frightening.

The last two lines in this stanza use a metaphor for the hope to mark the important thing of the work. The drum may not be a literal reference, but another way to express personal and intimate aspects of themselves that endure even through the worst difficulties. When the writer states that the rhythm never changes, it shows that this beat or rhythm has been with them for a long time, and their own terrible experiences cannot change the things that are part of them. In the context of slavery, this is reminiscent of a musical culture originating from various African nations. If this is the intended purpose, it shows that their music that grows freely is still part of them, and the desire to follow it cannot be broken, no matter what is done to them.

The first line of stanza 4 gives the poem accuses, and gives the writer a kind of high morale. The author is accused of being immoral or indecent, and told that their lives consist of being with one person and another as often as they deem necessary. The use of the word "*wanton*", along with the general expression of moving "*from man to man*," indicates that the writer is a prostitute, or can be compared to those in their personal lives.

Interestingly, the accusation was not rejected, but was greeted with another accusation that someone who judges them for the things they do is someone who cannot understand if in a position to do so. Writers portray themselves as shadows in the eyes of their accusers, showing that they are beneath them in their social hierarchy. On the other hand, the speaker is placed on the accused not by denying their words, but by defending their actions.

In the next 5th stanza, "I" becomes "We," and this reinforces the impression the reader has of the group being discriminated against. "*painful history*," and "*shameful past*," shows that the writer is one of the newest generation in the midst of a long line of people who are persecuted or hated, all of whom long for equality. The notion of slavery and the long period of racial discrimination that followed it continued in accordance with the words of the poem. Racial discrimination can be said as a division, rejection, restraint, or favorite based on race, skin color, ancestry, nation, or ethnic background. "It has purpose to damage the other groups, declining pleasure, refuse equality or human rights and freedom covered in the political, economic, social, cultural, and any other public life" (National Action Plan to combat Racism, Racial discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance 6).

The last line, which portrays speakers as people who are in an unfavorable personal situation or unwanted industry for work makes it reasonable that even if the speaker may not be a slave in their society, they may experience racial discrimination after such a time, unfortunately it is commonplace.

The 7th Stanza next refuses the role of accuser for speakers, who speak in a manner that talk about the people here, demanding what they "accept" their blindness to the injustice they create. Overview blinkers and the coating is an effective metaphor for those who would rather not admit the bad truth, and this is used to great effect here because communicating recognizes the moments of weakness of their own in the form of pain and tears that have heard other people and visible, but choose to be silent and discarded.

Maya Angelou explores the dilemmas of this world in her poem, Equality. With a shadow and drum metaphor, Angelou displays everyday frustration oppressed in a closed eye society. He painted the world from both sides creating conflicting scenarios, and expressing his thoughts in mere three-part poetry. Strongly, couplets combined together by anaphora, "*Equality, and I will be Free*".

Equality by Maya Angelou is not intended as a call for revolution. It only describes the message waiting. The Black African-Americans are already here. The Black African-Americans have said the same thing repeatedly. The Black African-Americans have been wanted this one human right for years, decades, and century. The Black African-Americans have protested our rights, waged war, and writing. Environment shadow of our struggle into history, we have been here, and we will continue.

The difference between the Black and the White such us have been explained before, is unfair. The setting in the poem is also in a place where Maya lived, it is in America which the majority is White people and the minority is Black people at the time. She lived in Arkansas the place that race where divided between Black and White and discrimination and segregation still appeared. In this poem, Angelou wants to show that the Blackness wants to get equality like everyone else, because they got different treatment and bad stereotypes from White people. Even though the Black feel they are different and

would feel frightened at the time, whether they were right or wrong. Racial discrimination refers to unfair treatment people or groups based on their race or ethnicity. "Racial discrimination concerns the unequal treatment of races, while racial inequality concerns unequal outcomes" (in income, education, health, etc.). (Clair & Denis 857). In "Equality" Maya Angelou is trying to discuss the importance of equality and freedom without segregation, discrimination and racism.

INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "NEGRO" AND "EQUALITY"

The poetry of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou were thrown back from racial discrimination and slavery in the 19th century. They mentioned some of the same points and the same mission of exposing the problems of the treatment of whites to blacks, which were inhumane. In this poem the African-Americans people want the same equality and freedom as white American, in fact this lasted from around the 15th century to the 19th century. The struggle of the African-Americans people for equality is one of the great dynamic forces of the labor struggle itself. The purpose is to analyze the struggle and show how it will find its completion in the socialist society of the future.

Actually Hughes and Angelou's background in making this poetry was the same, which is about their dark and sad childhood experiences. The author concludes that all poetry is sometimes written on the experience or reality that occurred by the writer himself; who they saw, felt, and listened to. Sometimes even the poem itself is about what they do, facts and not just imaginary. According to Ollila and Jantas, "Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story, or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. Poetry is used to achieve this artistic expression in several ways "(1)

As mentioned in Maya Angelou's poem "Equality" "Equality, and I will be free." (Stanza 3,6,9) In this poem Maya as a representative of African-Americans at that time who also saw and felt racial discrimination expressed their desire to be equal and free. "Discrimination on the basis of race involves harassment, denial of access to employment opportunities, underestimation and other unfair treatments. There are no biological or genetic differences among races. It leads to inequalities," (Fernandes and Alsaed 57). Maya continued the wishes of the other African-Americans, one of them from *Negro* by Langston Hughes. In the "Negro" poem, Hughes devotes all his feeling and experience to the poem. There is a correlation between the poetry, first in "Negro" by Langston Hughes with "Equality" by Maya Angelou that she is continued the wishes of other black people, one of whom was from the "Negro" by Langston Hughes.

In "Negro" poem, Langston tells about some of the experiences of blacks in his time who were slaves, forced laborers, and people who were exiled and often tortured. Blackness is also treated as a slave. Black skin was regarded as 'damned' and as one of the reasons of enslavement since the launch of the slave trade in 1441 (Hrabovsky 66). As in his poem that says *I've been a slave: (Line 4) I've been a worker: (Line 7) I've been a singer: (Line 10) I've been a victim: (Line 14)* all work that they don't normally do has to be done. Throughout "Equality", there are clear themes of discrimination, which line up with Maya's public contributions towards the fight for civil rights. Her own experiences make it very likely that she is the narrator of the poem.

In this poem there are the same words that same meanings, they are *"I'm a Negro"* and *"though I stand before you boldly"*. *"I am"* and *"I"* here, means that they are Blacks, Negroes, African-Americans they use the same word which shows that the writer of the poem is really a black person, in which both also write about how they are in the past. "Blackness is still the main 'criterion' of a 'lower' racial origin. The ancient environmental meaning of black skin as being caused by sunlight is diffused together with the meaning of black as a negation, death, bad nature and even illness" (Hrabovsky 85). This reflects that the speaker or the poetry wants to declare about themselves and their people community, that they are Negro, Blacks, African-Americans.

In Hughes and Angelou's poetry there is an equation of a poetry stanza repeated several times; as in the Langston Hughes poem *"I am a Negro: Black as the night is Black. Black like the depths of my Africa "* written on the first stanza and repeated at the end of the poetry stanza. Then in Maya Angelou's poem *"Equality, and I will free. Equality, and I will free."* It is written in stanzas 3, 6 and 9 or at the end of the poem. This proves that poems have a strong emphasis on wanting to tell the reader the basis of the making of the poem.

In other words, Hughes and Angelou's poems are intertextually related to each other in a form of emphasis. Emphasize means that special importance, value, or prominence is given to an important issue. In this case, racial discrimination in America.

"Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected." (Zengin 300)

The poem of Maya Angelou's *"Equality"* is emphasizing the poem written by Langston Hughes *"Negro"*. Maya continues the desires of the Black African-Americans people to voice the issue of racial discrimination persisted in America as later seen in Hughes' poem.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, this research includes several conclusions. First, this research reveals the depiction of racial discrimination that occurs in both poems. This was faced by Africans-Americans or known as Black people. Diversity is something normal in social life, we can find it everywhere. White people hate black people who don't make sense and judge them based on their visual appearance. Secondly, the portrait of racial discrimination as a result of unfair treatment. In these poems, discrimination was felt by Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou in their past who represented as Black African-Americans people. Discriminating others does not change anything. People have the same rights and obligations in judges, not only white people and not only black people can get judges, but everyone in another country.

In short, Angelou and Hughes poems are intertextually related to some points; first is the content of the poems, second is the background of the poems that was same about their dark and sad childhood experience, third the same point of view "I" in both of the poems there are same words that same meanings, and last repetition in Hughes and Angelou's poems there is an equation of a poem stanza repeated several times.

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