

**REBELLION TO OPPRESSION IN MAYA ANGELOU’S POEMS: AFRICA, CAGED  
BIRD, STILL I RISE, A BRAVE AND STARTLING TRUTH: A PHILOSOPHICAL  
AND HISTORICAL APPROACH**



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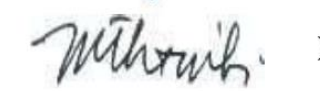
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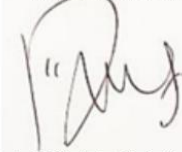
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The researcher



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# REBELLION TO OPPRESSION IN MAYA ANGELOU'S POEMS: AFRICA, CAGED BIRD, STILL I RISE, A BRAVE AND STARTLING TRUTH: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL APPROACH

## Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk (1) Menjelaskan bagaimana kondisi kulit hitam Amerika pada zaman Maya Angelou (2) menjelaskan makna puisi-puisi Maya Angelou terkait dengan teori eksistensialisme Fanon. Penulis menggunakan teori eksistensialisme Frantz Fanon. Menurut Fanon, penjajahan memiliki efek psikologis pada penjajah. Orang kulit putih menganggap orang kulit hitam inferior sejak lahir. Konstruksi ontologis ini secara ekonomi bertujuan untuk menangkap sumber daya alam dan manusia kulit hitam. Fanon menyatakan bahwa revolusi adalah satu-satunya cara untuk mengakhiri penindasan. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan filosofis dan historis. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif analitis yang memanfaatkan studi pustaka dan memusatkan perhatian pada sumber-sumber referensi yang berkaitan dengan topik yang dibahas. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa eksistensialisme Fanon tercermin dalam puisi-puisi Maya Angelou yang berjudul Africa, Caged Bird, Still I rise dan A Brave and Startling Truth. Penindasan berlangsung di era Maya Angelou. Puisinya memberontak putih dan memotivasi hitam untuk mendapatkan kembali hak-hak mereka.

**Kata kunci:** kolonisasi, eksistensialisme, penindasan, revolusi

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to (1) To explain how the condition of American black in Maya Angelou's era is (2) to explain the meaning of Maya Angelou's poems related to Fanon's existentialism theory. The writer used the existentialism theory of Frantz Fanon. According to Fanon, colonization had psychological effects on colonials. The white considered the black inferior from birth. This ontological construction was economically aimed to grasp the natural and human resources of the black. Fanon stated that revolution was the only way to end oppression. The writer used philosophical and historical approaches. The method applied in this study is analytical descriptive that utilized library research and concentrated the attention on the reference sources related to the topic discussed. The results of this study indicate that Fanon's existentialism is reflected in Maya Angelou's poems entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I rise and A Brave and Startling Truth. The oppression lasted in Maya Angelou's era. Her poems rebels the white and motivates the black to get back their rights.

**Keywords:** colonization, existentialism, oppression, revolution

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a result of human thought based on human experience and imagination which is expressed in the form of works. In addition, the means used to convey or express the results of their thoughts are using language. Literature can also be used to describe something through writing or a very beautiful work. According to Terry Eagleton, Literature is a beautiful written work that writes something in the form of language that is condensed, deepened, twisted, shortened and twisted, made odd or other aesthetic composition methods through language tools (Eagleton, 2010, p.4). In addition, according to Ahmad Badrun, Literature is an artistic activity that uses language and other symbols as a tool to create something imaginative (1983,

p.16). There are two types of literature, namely fiction and non-fiction. Where the types of fiction are poetry, prose, and drama but if in non-fiction such as literary criticism, autobiography, biography, and essay. However, the researcher uses poetry as an object for research.

Poetry is a literary work in the form of beautiful writing in which there are thoughts and experiences of the creator of the poem which are packaged in beautiful words. According to Hudson (Aminuddin, 2009:134), poetry is a literary work in which the creator uses words as a medium of delivery to produce illusions and imagination, just like a painting that uses lines and colors to describe the painter's ideas. Moreover, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, poetry is a teaching that deals with fewer words.

Maya Angelou is one of the characters who expresses her thoughts based on her life experiences which are poured through the form of poetry. Maya Angelou is a poet as well as an African-American activist. In 1993, Maya Angelou was the first woman ever to be asked to read her work at the inauguration of the President of the United States. Her real name is Marguerite Annie Johnson and was born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA and died on May 28, 2014 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA at the age of 86 years. Maya Angelou has a very bitter life story in her childhood where she got bad treatment from the people around her like she was raped by her mother's boyfriend because of racial and discrimination backgrounds at the age of 7 years. So she told it to her brother and her mother's boyfriend was arrested by the police and after being released, her mother's boyfriend was killed by Maya Angelou's uncle. So that trauma caused Maya Angelou to be silent for about 5 years. From bad experiences that happened to her, so that she was able to create very beautiful works such as her poems entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise, and A Brave and Startling Truth according to the object of the research.

In the poems of Maya Angelou each of the poems has a story. Such as a poem entitled Africa (1975) in which there is an image of a robbery that is very detrimental to blacks, in addition, in Maya Angelou's poem entitled Caged Bird (1983) there is an image of oppression to blacks, Still I Rise (1978) is a picture of blacks who are starting to dare to fight, and in the poem entitled A Brave and Startling Truth is a picture of the victory of blacks. So, according to the four poems, the researcher uses the existentialism theory of Frantz Fanon. Which in Fanon's theory explains the psychological impact experienced by the colonized (blacks), the background to the occurrence of black colonization, and the spirit to fight colonization.

Based on the information above, the writer is interested in analyzing Maya Angelou's poems entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise, and A Brave and Startling Truth which are

related to the existentialism theory of Frantz Fanon. So, the author gave the title in the research "Rebellion to Oppression in Maya Angelou's Poems: Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise, A Brave and Startling Truth: a Philosophical Approach".

## **2. METHOD**

In this research there are several methods, 1) type of study. In this study, the researcher used qualitative descriptive because this research did not require numerical data. According to Koentjaraningrat (1993: 89) qualitative research is a research that has three formats. The three formats include descriptive research, verification and grounded research formats. In addition, according to David Williams (1995) qualitative research is an attempt by researchers to collect data based on natural settings. 2) The object of this research, the researcher uses 4 poems from Maya Angelou, entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise, and A Brave and Startling Truth. Focuses on the existentialism (philosophical). 3) In this study, there are two types of data, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data used by the researcher is Maya Angelou's poems entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise and A Brave and Startling Truth. In the secondary data used by researchers are research journals related to the object used by researchers. 4) The steps used by researchers to collect data are: Search and read for poems by Maya Angelou that are on the same theme, Searching the internet for journals related to the object studied by the researcher, looking for theories that match the poems of Maya Angelou taken by researchers, read about the theory taken by the researcher namely about existentialism (philosophical), write about things that are important to the theory, identify the problem, 5) In qualitative research requires accurate and reliable data by using triangulation. Triangulation according to Moleong (2010: 330) is a technique to check the validity of data that utilizes something other than the data for checking or as a comparison against the data. In this study, researchers used two triangulations, namely triangulation of data sources and triangulation of theory. In triangulation of data sources, researchers compare the information obtained from several sources and in theory triangulation, researchers use various sources to complete theoretical data. 6) In the three-component data analysis technique, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. According to Sugiyono (2018:247-249) Data reduction is containing a summary, selecting the important things, focusing on the main things that must be in accordance with the research topic, looking for themes and patterns. Which in the end can provide a clearer picture and can make it easier to carry out further data collection. After data reduction, there is data display. Data display in qualitative research can be done in the form of tables, graphs, flowcharts, pictograms and others. Through the presentation of data, the data can be organized and easy to understand. In addition, data presentation can be done in the form

of brief descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flowcharts, and others, but what is often used is narrative text. According to Sugiyono, 2018: 249, by presenting data, the data is organized and structured so that it will be easier to understand. In analyzing qualitative research is the final conclusion. According to Sugiyono (2018: 252-253) the conclusions in a qualitative research can answer the problem formulation that was formulated from the start, but not necessarily, because as has been stated that the problem and problem formulation in qualitative research is still temporary and will develop.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Here the researcher will explain based on problem statements, namely the condition of American Black in Maya Angelou's era and the meaning of Maya Angelou's poems seen of existentialism theory of Fanon. Researchers found the conditions of American Black in the Maya Angelou era which can be grouped into 3, namely: political, social, and economic conditions. In addition, the researcher also found the meaning of Maya Angelou's poems seen of existentialism theory of Fanon, there are oppression, rebellion, and freedom.

#### **3.1 The conditions of American Black in the Maya Angelou Era**

##### **3.1.1 Economic**

African-American slavery is the highest in South America. South America had a lot of fertile land and slaves were employed as cotton pickers and millers. The size of the plantation area and the amount of work to be done will require more workers. Unlike in the South, people in North America want slavery and freedom abolished so that African Americans can have the same rights as white Americans. This opinion about slavery has since become controversial not only for the government but also for society as a whole. The majority of people consider slavery very important for their lives, especially for the economy of the people in the South. The dispute culminated in a civil war between the people of the North and the South. As a minority in 19th-century America, African Americans were denied the right to decent, well-paid work. Limited job opportunities mean that African Americans don't do well in the economy here. It also includes two categories: Smart and Stupid. If she's a smart African-American she'll work in prostitution, if she's stupid she'll work as a waitress.

##### **3.1.2 Politic**

The politics of the North and the South also developed differently. The North needed the central government to build infrastructure (roads and railroads), protect trade and finance, and control the flow of state finances. The South is in many ways more dependent on the



federal government than any other region. The southern patriots feared that if the central government was too powerful it would interfere with slavery. In addition, the existence of discrimination also causes the deprivation of rights. When the white Democrats returned to power, they passed laws that made it difficult to register black voters. Black voters were removed from the electoral roll. African-American voter turnout has dropped dramatically and they can no longer elect representatives.

### 3.1.3 Social

Although the abolition of slavery was eventually abolished from American soil, racism was not really abolished, they continued to commit racist acts in the form of discrimination. The discrimination that occurs is driven by racial stereotypes based on physical characteristics such as body type and skin color compared to black people. Racial stereotypes are another way of racism by white Americans through acts of prejudice and hatred towards racial differences and physical characteristics. They believe that African Americans are savage, cruel, and often criminals or simply troublemakers. A clearly identifiable act of racism is due to discrimination. This makes it difficult to get along with society in general, often even within his own group. The matches carried out by the majority of the community were driven by several factors. One of them is the difference in skin color, race, and culture. It's a disgrace when a white American applies for a job and pays him a small salary with a pretty strict work order, racially stereotyped. Black people stopped getting an education because they decided not to because of discrimination from white Americans when they were in school.

## **3.2 The Meaning of Maya Angelou's Poems Seen of Existentialism Theory of Fanon**

### 3.2.1 Rebellion

3.2.1.1 In Maya Angelou's poem, Africa (1975), Maya Angelou described the history of Africa, in which natural and human resources in Africa were taken by white colonists.

3.2.1.2 Maya Angelou's second poem taken by the researcher is "Still I Rise" (1978). This poem contains a picture of black people who have started to fight against the invaders or white people.

### 3.2.2 Oppression on Blacks

Maya Angelou's second poem taken by researchers entitled Caged Bird (1983) tells about the picture of colonialism in which the people there could not feel free to live, constrained by oppression that affected the psychology of black people.

### 3.2.3 Freedom

In the last poem taken by the researcher, namely *A Brave and Startling Truth* (1995). This poem describes the independence of the black people who have been colonized and oppressed after a long time.

In the conditions of the American black there are political, economic and social conditions. In the political situation is divided into two parts, namely north and south. The north is more focused on infrastructure development, protecting trade, and controlling the flow of state finances. Besides that in the south there is a deprivation of rights and makes it difficult to register in the general election so that they cannot elect representatives. In social conditions there is discrimination based on physical characteristics such as body type and skin color. Black people also do not get their rights in the world of education. There are two parts in the economic condition, namely in the south there is high slavery because it has fertile land, therefore it requires a lot of human resources. While in the north wanted freedom from slavery. This is explained, in Maya Angelou's poems entitled "Africa" describes the abundant natural and human resources, "Still I Rise" describes the picture of black rebellion, "Caged Bird" describes the picture of oppression and "A Brave and Startling Truth" describes a picture of the freedom that blacks get after being oppressed for so long.

There is a relationship between the findings and the theory. In the philosophical approach (existentialism from Frantz Fanon) explains colonialism (the existence of black people). As in Maya Angelou's poem entitled Africa explaining natural resources and human resources and this is in accordance with Frantz Fanon's statement that the construction of the ontology of colonialism is motivated by economic interests by taking African natural resources and human resources for freely in greedily. Maya Angelou's poem Still I Rise This poem contains a picture of black people who have started to fight against the invaders or white people and in accordance with Frantz Fanon's statement, Fanon suggested that all people in the black countries unite to facilitate the revolution because to end the oppression of colonialism could only be done through revolution. Besides that in the poem entitled Caged bird there is a description of oppression where blacks cannot live freely and when someone cannot live freely because the oppressed will get a psychological effect, According to Fanon, the verdicts carried out by the white colonizers were as if black people were retarded since birth so that it had an impact on the psychology of black people where they felt inferior. The last one is Maya Angelou's poem entitled *A Brave and Startling Truth* which is a picture of freedom. While for the historical approach because in this study it discusses the history of American Black.

There are findings from researchers that complement the previous research from Rizky Maulidta Fahmi (2019) entitled "The Way Black Women Face Racial Problems in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems" where this study discusses Maya Angelou's poems which are depicted about women who experience racism. In this study, the researcher uses the theory of feminism and new criticism. But supplemented by research from researchers whose overall research is black, both male and female, not specific to only women. In addition, the researcher also uses a philosophical and historical approach.

#### **4. CLOSING**

With the colonization of the whites, resulting in the lives of blacks being not free, depressed and they lost their rights. Because as a human being, if you get a life that is not free, you will feel something painful for him, especially if at the beginning you can still feel a free life to get his rights. There is definitely something behind the oppression. The background of the oppression of black people is due to the struggle for rich natural resources and human resources in the Black Country. So that they rebel more and more because as humans they certainly don't want what they have to be taken by others for granted and in the end after they rebel, they can get a victory in the form of independence. Which is what the black people hope for from this independence so that they can get a decent life and can get their rights back. So, with the colonization of black people, Maya Angelou made poems entitled Africa, Caged Bird, Still I Rise, and A brave and Startling Truth to provide an overview of what happened that was in accordance with the facts faced by black people and the making of this poem as well. Based on Maya Angelou's personal experience as a black person. In addition, the existence of this poem can provide motivation to continue to fight against oppression and injustice.

Therefore, Maya Angelou's poem with the theme of white oppression is related to Frantz Fanon's theory, in which Frantz Fanon is anti-colonial. Frantz Fanon seeks to help blacks to fight white invaders so that whites do not oppress blacks. Because for Fanon, oppression of black people will have a big impact in terms of their psychology. And blacks from an economic point of view will also suffer huge losses. Fanon was very anti-colonial because Frantz Fanon's parents were French African slaves. Fanon's parents became French slaves because French troops had forcibly occupied the city of Fort-de-France, the Martini Islands. This caused Fanon's life to change, which originally came from a rich family to become a poor family. In addition, while in France, Fanon witnessed the phenomenon of anti-black racism in his daily life.

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