

A CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM IN LANGSTON HUGHES'S SELECTED POEMS: A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

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1. Introduction

Postcolonialism as Darian-Smith argues is a term which carries several meanings on multiple levels such as “modernity, colonialism, imperialism racism, ethnicity, cultural geography and postmodernism” (1996: 291). Langston Hughes' "Selected Poems" The poems Hughes composed praised the experience of undetectable people: of slaves who "hurried the boots of Washington"; of artists on Lenox Avenue; of poor people and the lovesick; of failures in "the wager of night." They passed on that insight in a voice that mixed the spoken with the sung, that transformed beautiful lines into the expressions of jazz and blues, and that tore through the window ornament isolating high from mainstream society. They traversed the reach from the verse to the questioning, ringing out "miracle and agony and dread—and the marrow of the bone of life." Then the poet in his poem “I, too”



criticizes Walt Whitman's poem, "I hear America Singing" as the poem implies that only White people in America should be proud of being American no matter what his or her job is.

The significant of this study lies in that it gives new knowledge about Hughes's life, his literary works and the way of criticizing the colonialism. Analyzing the poems and showing the substantial aspects of the lives of the Black Americans in Hughes's "Selected poems".

2. Literature Review

Not many studies have been conducted about Langston Hughes's poetry and the critique of colonialism in his poems. Some critics wrote about his biography and his poetry in general but it had never been looked at closely. David Chiniz (1996) wrote "Literacy and Authenticity: The Blue Poems of Langston Hughes" in which he analyses his poems. Faith Berry (1992) tackled the poet's biography before and after the "Harlem Renaissance". On the other hand, Mary Culp (1987) argues the religiosity of the poetry of Hughes.

This study unlike the previous studies conducted about his works, focuses on some of his poems in which the theme of colonialism is obvious. It is clear that it needed courage for black writers to express themselves. But the poet has wisely expressed his burdens and the hardships of the black people and the mixed people from a black parent and a white parent in his poems such as "I, Too", "Cross" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" but indirectly.

3. Research Method

This study is a qualitative research. Data has been collected from the text of the poem and other critical studies and essays conducted on Hughes's literary works. The study will also use the significant quotations, lines, texts, sentences and phrases from his poems, which are relevant to the objective of this study. To show how he wanted to say this is a kind of alteration in the awareness of the black people. For instance in "I, Too" and "The Negro speaks of Rivers" to show how they have been brought from Africa as slaves to America and "Cross" in which the poet describes not only the burdens of the black whose parents are black but also for the mixed race individuals. Moreover, a thorough review of literature has provided to show the body of existing literature on his poetry.

4. Harlem Renaissance on African-American Literature

The Harlem Renaissance was an African-American cultural movement that took place in New York City's Harlem neighborhood in the 1918 and early 1930s. The Harlem Renaissance refers to the period from the end of World War I to the present day, the last century's mid-thirties, known at the time as the "The Negro Movement" it was named after an anthology of influential African-American works titled "The New Negro" which was published in 1925 by philosopher Alain L. Locke¹. During the 1920s the idea of the New Negro became an important symbol of racial progress, and different political groups vied with each other over who more properly represented the new racial consciousness. During the movement of African-Americans from other parts of the country, the Renaissance period included a community of authors and educators affiliated with Harlem, Manhattan. This literary renaissance marked the first time in American history that white people took care of African-American literature. While some argue that the Harlem Renaissance had little impact on African-American literature and culture, the Harlem Renaissance was a time when the community of talented black authors created a variety of literature recognized in the articles three main categories, poetry and art. The Harlem Renaissance was a transformative period in which poetry transformed a nation of African-Americans to a colossal level. Langston Hughes was a well-known black writer of the time who worked in a wide variety of literary genres. He invented a modern literary genre known as jazz poetry. His poem "The Negro speaks of Rivers" provides a strong unity in the history of African-Americans, and his poetry covered the challenges encountered by African-Americans with a combination of music, laughter, and culture. (Aberjhani and I. West, xi-xii, 160)

5. Post-colonial Literature

The post-colonial as a concept has to undergo major semantic expansion soon to include ethnic studies, minority studies, American, African, Caribbean, South American, "third world" studies: writings by people who have been dominated by white, Euro-American cultures, which explore the different modalities of influence, identity and subjectivity as influenced by race, gender, class, ethnicity. Then it finally studies sex and sexual orientation. (Nayar 2008)

According to Walder (1998) the post-colonial theory is a field of literature cultural research, which has come into being as a part of the decentering tendency of post-1960s thought in. It is commonly characterized as that which critically or

¹ Alain Leroy Locke is heralded as the "father of the Harlem Renaissance" for his publication in 1925 of *The New Negro*, and he was a prominent leader of the New Negro Movement in the mid-1920s.

subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship in the west. Post-colonial literature forms part of the phase of overhaul. To give voice to colonized experience, post-colonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization the myths of dominance, the race classifications, also discusses the challenges and effects of decolonization of a nation, in particular issues related to the political and cultural freedom of previously subjugated citizens, and issues such as racialism and colonialism. (Boehmer 2005) In describing colonialism and imperialism, (Hasan, Ahmad and Muhammad 2021; Hasan, Hassan and Ahmad 2020) argued, “they exploited people and their wealth in the name of colonization, as they stated that their goal is to civilize and educate native Africans, but on the contrary, they practiced so many cruel activities towards the native”, to make them slaves and make them feel inferior as they are not white.

6. Postcolonial Poetry

Post-colonial poetry means poetry written by non-European peoples under colonialism, either after independence or in the immediate preceding period, especially works that deal, albeit indirectly, with life issues in the gaps between Western colonialism and non-European cultures. Decolonization has become a key framework for conceptualizing post-colonial poetry. (Ramazani 2012). Post-colonial poetry deals with form and vocabulary as a tool for transcending the legacy of colonialism and forging new social and cultural horizons. As a result of colonialism and the colonial education system, the English language itself and also constitutes an important, but paradoxical tool for self-expression after colonialism. (Kneeper 169)

The following are some examples of those poems that were written in post-colonialism era, as a weapon against the tyranny of the rulers of those times.

Song of Lawino is an epic poem written by UN Ugandan poet Okot p' Bitek.

Omeros is an epic poem by Derek Walcott.

Politics is a poem by Irish poet William Butler Yeats.

Piano and drums is a post-colonial poem written by Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara.

7. Postcolonial Criticism in Literature

Post-colonial criticism as a literary and cultural phenomenon, which is the result of the twenty-first century, acts as an important move from colonial criticism of nineteenth century in its perceptions and worldviews. Edward Said and Bhabha are two of the famous writers of this field.

As it is internationally acknowledged and admitted, post-colonial critique indicates and initiates a reversal of the binary opposition the colonized marginality/ the colonizer centrality “during the colonizing period in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the European imperial culture” was dominant. (Moore-Gilbert, Santason, Maley 1997)

8. Langston Hughes’s Biography

James Mercer Langston Hughes “was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, which is located at southern Missouri. His parents were divorced when he was a young child, he started to live and raised by his grandmother (Marry Patterson Langston) until he become thirteen, after the death of his grandmother Hughes went to live with family friends for two years. Later Hughes moved to Lincoln city to live with his mother (Carrie Langston Hughes) there he started to write poetry.”²

(The Weary Blues) was Hughes’s first book of poetry that was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1926. In 1929 he finished college education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania; Hughes’s first novel won the Harmon gold medal for literature in 1930. Langston Hughes was the most influential African-American poet of the twentieth century, a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance (1918-mid 1930s), and an out spoken critic of colonialism and secessionism.

In his poetry, he endeavored to appeal to, as well as to, the black masses while also making a living from his work, which meant attracting white audiences. One of his significant developments was the incorporation of African-American vernacular and cultural practice, including the rhythms of black music, into his writing. While he was tired of the lecture circuit, he was quickly linked to live audiences and frequently read his works to accompany black musicians and singers.

He may be well known as a poet, but he has published in almost every literary genre and has written five novels, two autobiographies, more than thirty stage plays, many opera librettos, and three collections of short stories, as well as five collections of stories and newspaper columns featuring the character of Jesse B. Semple. In addition to writing the columns “Simple” He was also a translator, an anthologist, and a writer of several children book, for instance “*The Black*” and “*The Sweet and Sour Animal Book*” are posthumously published collections of Hughes’s poetry for children that position his word against a backdrop of visual art.

Nevertheless, Hughes, more than any other black poet or writer, recorded faithfully the nuances of black life and its frustrations. Langston Hughes died of complications from prostate cancer on May 22, 1967 in New York City. Although Langston has

² <https://makingwings.net/blank/blank-6/>
| www.ejsr.org

been dead for a long time but he has done a job that will keep his generation alive in the heart of his country and community. (Flench xvi_xvii-xviii)

9. Hughes's Literary Works

After building up his profession as an extraordinary American writer, Langston Hughes added enough into the universe of writing. Notwithstanding confronting innumerable difficulties and turmoil throughout everyday life, he effectively instituted a conspicuous spot in the scholarly world with his clear and innovative thoughts. Likewise, his dull youth and division from guardians molded his composition and made him experience the hopeless death toll.

Consequently, he archived these thoughts well in his poems, for instance, "Negro discusses a Waterway", "I As well", and "Harlem", Hughes, who guaranteed that Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandberg, and Walt Whitman are his essential impacts, is especially known for his quick depiction of dark life in America from the 1920s through the 1960s. He composed books, short stories, plays, and verse, and is likewise known for his collaboration with the universe of jazz and his effect on his composition, as in his long poem "*Montague of a Dream Deferred*", his life and work were vital in forming the creative commitments to the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s. Not at all like other unmistakable dark writers of the time frame, for example, Claude McKay, Jean Tomer, and Conte Coleen, would not Hughes separate between his own insight and his basic experience of dark America.

He needed recount the tales of his kin in manners that mirrored their actual culture, including their affection of music, chuckling, and language itself just as their anguish. As well as leaving us a huge assortment of graceful work, Hughes composed eleven plays, including the well-known "Simple" "books: *Simple Speaks His Mind* (Simon & Schuster, 1950); *Simple Stakes a claim* (Rinehart, 1957); *Simple Takes a Wife* (Simon & Schuster, 1953); and *Simple's Uncle Sam*" (Hill and Wang, 1965).

Langston Hughes worked as editors for some anthologies: "*The poetry of the Negro*" and "*The Book of Negro Folklore wrote*" an acclaimed autobiography, *The Big Sea* (Knopf, 1940) and co-wrote the play *Mule Bone* (Harper Collins, 1991) with Zora Neale Hurston. (Herring 581)

10. Analysis of Langston Hughes's Poems

Langston Hughes may be a respected and esteemed African-American Icon. His poetry and writing created a platform for black writers during the age, yet today he is one amongst the few underestimated names in modern American poetry.

Despite his pivotal role within the historic period, his poetry never receives the respect it deserves among other poets because many believed it dwells too deeply within the specifics of black culture additionally to race and racism playing a key role on why he is not read as often as he should. Famous critics and students often show little interest in black Americans and as a result, his work is not celebrated in the way it should be. His less political and more obscure blue poetry explores his hidden personal life, a side of Hughes that is often overlooked. These works are excellent samples of how Hughes helped shape the modernist poetry movement. Also Hughes may be a relatively unknown figure in poetry, with little mention of him in modern fiction and poetry.

He is generally lumped in with other black authors and associated primarily with the era in which he lived. One of the reasons for this is that scholars assume the figure is basic and unlearned. Hughes's own poetry technique has been characterized as "simple," according to him. It should be the epitome of simplicity, and a part of this could be interpreted as Hughes wishing for his work to be understood by a particular audience, namely black America at the time. It wouldn't make sense for him to create work about African Americans' hardships if they couldn't connect with or relate to it. Despite his work being straightforward, his content is deep and layered. He used everyday vocabulary and drew inspiration from the everyday lives of black Americans, as well as the struggles they faced in their daily lives and Hughes tried to use his poetry to effect change by demonstrating that African-Americans are not that different from other ethnic groups. Hughes' poem exemplified this perfectly "I Too Sing America"... In this poem, he expresses the insignificance of black people at the time when he says "I am the darker brother / they send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes" (Hughes 2-4) Hughes begins by painting a picture of how black people are viewed. And he goes on to say "Tomorrow, / I'll be at the table / when company comes." (Hughes 8-10) Hughes then concludes the poem with the phrase "I, too, am America" (Hughes 18) It also demonstrates that Blacks are not that different from other Americans, since they are also Americans who sing the same national anthem. Through his poetry, Hughes expresses his profound concern for the misery that his society has endured, and he seeks to bring about improvement. (Satheeshkumar 2012)

11. Results and discussion

In 1920, Langston Hughes was made a beeline for see his dad in Mexico via train. As he was riding in along the Mississippi River, "the expression came to him, at that point a sentence. Drawing an envelope from his pocket, he started to write. Shortly Langston had completed a poet, the title "The Negro Speaks of the Rivers" tells us right off the bat that the accompanying story is told from the viewpoint of an individual from the dark community.

The author starts recounting the narrative of the origination of each human progress by taking us to the Euphrates, however finishes all at once and place connected to the historical backdrop of servitude and bigotry in America: When Abe Lincoln rode a boat down the Mississippi, you observe interestingly the detestations of bondage. Our speaker watches the "muddy" Mississippi River turn "Golden" in the light of the dusk, demonstrating the shift from subjugation to the opportunity that numerous Americans lived after the Civil War. The African American population is commended thusly, In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," as our speaker outlines the legacy of dark Americans, starting with the support of development in the Middle East and finishing with references to subjugation as seen from the Mississippi River, he follows more than 4,000 years of history. He discloses to us that because of all that he has seen, heard, done, and saw, his spirit has developed "profound as streams." Rivers have stood the trial of time and convey a mind boggling insight accordingly. Hughes draws an association between the waterways and the African American population, which has persevered through a lot and conveys a similarly significant and incredible wisdom, on our excursion through time in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "our speaker starts with the support of progress on the banks of the Euphrates River. Next he stops by the Congo River bowl where we are calmed by the lapping waters (and are helped to remember the speculation that people started in Africa), and heads toward Egypt where we join different laborers (maybe constrained into working) in building the pyramids. Ultimately, he closes the visit at the Mississippi River, the core of subjection in America. The excursion takes us from snapshots of opportunity (the Euphrates and the Congo) toward constrained (the Nile and the Mississippi). Eventually, we watch the finish of subjection and see opportunity reestablished. The "I" of the poem which is utilized figuratively and not personally; the "I" is connected to every one of the individuals of color across the globe and furthermore every one of the dark people groups ever. Not with standing, the inquiry that remains is the reason should Hughes utilize this general "I"? One answer is a maybe critical one. It might mean exactly the same thing as interminable repeat. Truth be told, Hughes might need to demonstrate that subjugation and difficulty is the thing that is consistently associated with blacks and as blacks are conceived and brought back to life, this bondage is constantly associated with their character and it is something that never disappears. Subsequently, it very well may be an analysis of the norm as well. Another reaction is a positive and hopeful one. Hughes might need to say that since every one of the blacks share a similar encounter, they ought to get joined together." ³ So there is no distinction between Africans in North America, South America, in Asia and Africa. They have a rationale to become joined together and that is the way that they have "known waterways" and their spirit "has developed profound like the streams". This positive reaction bodes well considering the representation of stream and ocean that peruses him clarifies. To put it plainly, as well as being a poem about the personality of blacks, "The Negro

³ [Themes and important quotes of "the negro speaks of rivers" by Langston hughes for waec/neco literature exams \(110\) | lagosbooksclub.wordpress.com](#)

"Speaks of Rivers" is a verse of the relative multitude of stifled gatherings on earth. It not just furnishes us with another measurement toward history and human advancement, yet it additionally makes an expectation for any individual who is in search of his/her character and in urgent need of showing his/her selfhood to others so they will offer authenticity to his/her being there in any case. Thinking about topics of personality and contrast as the most uncontrolled issue of our age in the midst of high requests of majority rule government and common liberties, this sonnet will be as yet alive and have a wide range of individuals understanding it, preferring it and in any event, ending up appended to it. Truth be told, the speaker has "known rivers... more established than the progression of human blood in human veins"—proposing that black history existed even before human life. This associates the speaker to the regular world. On one hand, such an association could be considered hazardous, since bigoted talks regularly go against "civilized" white populaces to "natural" or "uncivilized" black people groups. In light of these bigoted thoughts, Hughes himself veered away from such portrayals in his later work. Then again, this association can be viewed as stating a feeling of intelligence and harmony not withstanding subjugation and persecution, which the sonnet suggests later on and he focuses on that they are not disengaged occasions. They structure one continuous experience, similar to a river. rivers address progression: they can't be slashed up into discrete pieces. Besides, the speaker's experience is "profound" like a river, recommending changeableness, persistence, and internal strength. Individuals of color have endured through the most troublesome occasions. Like a river, black history continues to stream. For two reasons, this point is particularly relevant to the African-American community in the United States. To begin with, the slave trade separated black people from their homes, traditions, identities, and, eventually, their heritage. Despite the cut-off, the speaker insists on a continuous history. Second, American historical myths have traditionally focused on white people. Erasing the black experience effectively As a result, the poem presents a different narrative—one that respects black history—by portraying the speaker's knowledge as spanning continents and historical times. The speaker claims that black identity and achievement are so powerful that they can bridge the gaps left by slavery, allowing people to reconnect with lost ancestors and traditions. The poem boldly depicts the breadth of black historical experience in this way. (Jahangiri 1-4) In, "I, too" the poet shows how the white people in America disrespects him by sending him away to the kitchen when they suppose to have guests. However, this makes him sad, yet he tolerates it as he says he will eat well in the kitchen so as to be strong and then no ones dares, next time to send him away because he will be strong and can do anything to protect himself from being teated severely.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, Langston Hughes was a brilliant Negro poet. His poems are always eaten about full value of life. Primarily it described his humanity and his care of his social condition, as a Negro or Black American. Most of his own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from his race and community experience, especially in his poem "Negro". In this poem, the writer knows the destiny of Black American condition at the time. They received bad treatment of White American who regard Black race as inferior status. Hughes expresses his emotional experiences and makes the reader think about what exactly it was like to live his life during that time. Hughes is a Black poet proud to be a Negro. One can know it when one reads these poems. Hughes identified himself by saying "I am a Negro", and then he describes himself and his race as having been a slave, worker, singer and victim who suffered discrimination. Hughes's poems are an investigation of black personality, not just the distresses and afflictions looked by black Americans yet the warm satisfaction and humor of Hughes's people, author's goal is by all accounts to furnish blacks ways of life as Americans, living in a majority rule government that guarantees existence without prejudice. He offers readers representations of the black experience and, thus, brings his peruses into a closer comprehension of black character. The poet is ambitious in "I, too" to be strong to confront any maltreatment of him who represents the black Americans.

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XÜLASƏ

Langston Hughes-un Seçilmiş Şeirlərində Kolonializmin Tənqidi: Postkolonial yanaşma

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Bu məqalə dünyanın bir çox bölgələrində Avropa müstəmləkəçiliyini, onun müstəmləkə xalqlarının həyatının müxtəlif aspektlərinə olan təsirlərini, Qərb ədəbi və ədəbiyyatında təzahürlərini izləyən Lenqston Hughes-un seçilmiş şeirləri vasitəsilə müstəmləkəçiliyin tənqidini araşdırmağa çalışır. Müstəmləkəçi öz dilini və mədəniyyətini tətbiq etdi, lakin Şərq xalqlarının dilinə etinasızlıq göstərildi. Hughes-un bəzi şeirlərini təhlil edən məqalə, şairin yerli mədəniyyətinə və dilinə malik olmamağa məcbur edən, hətta yerlilərin bir millət olaraq qüdrətinə inanmamasına səbəb olan müstəmləkəçilik tənqidinə nəzər salır.

Daha sonra məqalə post-müstəmləkəçilik yanaşmasının ədəbi təhlilinə işıq salır: onun tərifi və tarixi, ədəbiyyat və bu yanaşma ilə bağlı tənqidi ədəbiyyatını araşdırır. Bu araşdırma, həmçinin Lenqston Hughes-un tərcümeyi-halı, ədəbi əsərləri və poeməsindəki tənqidi nöqteyi-nəzəri ilə yanaşı, şeirlərin təhlili üçün postkolonial yanaşmanı da vurğulayır.

Açar sözlər: Müstəmləkəçilik, Başqalıq, İmperializm, İrqçilik, Langston Hughes

РЕЗЮМЕ

Критика колониализма в избранных стихах Лэнгстона Хьюза: Постколониальный подход

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В этой статье делается попытка исследовать критику колониализма через избранные стихи Лэнгстона Хьюза, следуя европейскому колониализму во многих частях мира, его влиянию на различные аспекты жизни колонизированных народов и его проявлениям в западной литературе и литературе. Колонизатор навязывал свой язык и культуру, но языком восточных народов пренебрегали. Анализируя некоторые стихотворения Хьюза, в статье рассматривается критика колониализма, заставившего поэта отречься от культуры и языка коренных народов и даже разуверившегося в силе коренных народов как нации.

Затем статья проливает свет на литературный анализ постколониального подхода: рассматриваются его определение и история, литература и критическая литература, связанные с этим подходом. В этом исследовании также подчеркивается постколониальный подход к анализу стихов Лэнгстона Хьюза, а также критический взгляд на биографию, литературные произведения и поэзию Лэнгстона Хьюза.

***Ключевые слова:** Колониализм, инаковость, империализм, расизм, Лэнгстон Хьюз*