

Barakat Akinsiku's views in *The God of The Sea* on Traditional and Modern Beliefs in Marine Ecosystems

Pandangan Barakat Akinsiku dalam The God of The Sea terhadap Kepercayaan Tradisional dan Modern Pada Ekosistem Laut

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Keywords

ecocriticism; marine ecosystems; traditional belief; modern belief.

Abstract

This research aims to describe how African people's traditional and modern beliefs in marine ecosystems as described by the author in *The God of the Sea* by Barakat Akinsiku (2021). This research uses ecocritical theory with descriptive-qualitative methods. The results show that there are two differences in overcoming the marine ecological crisis: in traditional belief, they use rituals to stop flood disasters, and obtaining blessings such as the death of a baby whale is considered to fulfill people's living needs. Furthermore, in modern belief, they use methods that educate the public about waste so that people become aware of the plastic waste that is scattered on the beach and sort out what should be recycled and what should not so that the death of a baby whale on the beach is not a blessing, but instead a disaster, the effects of the marine ecological crisis. Based on these two beliefs, the author wants to provide awareness to African governments, primarily to provide free education to African communities who live on coasts with deficient economic levels so that those who live on coasts understand the dangers of rubbish, which can damage marine ecosystems and can protect marine ecosystems for the common good.

Kata kunci

ekokritik; ekosistem laut; kepercayaan tradisional; kepercayaan modern.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana kepercayaan tradisional dan modern pada ekosistem laut oleh masyarakat Afrika yang digambarkan pengarang dalam cerita pendek *The God of The Sea* karya Barakat Akinsiku (2021). Penelitian ini menggunakan teori ekokritik dengan metode deskriptif-kualitatif. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dalam mengatasi krisis ekologi laut terdapat dua perbedaan, seperti dalam kepercayaan tradisional, mereka menggunakan ritual untuk tujuan menghentikan bencana banjir, dan memperoleh berkah seperti kematian bayi paus dianggap sebagai pemenuhan kebutuhan hidup masyarakat. Selanjutnya, dalam kepercayaan modern, mereka menggunakan cara yang mengedukasi masyarakat mengenai sampah, agar adanya kepedulian masyarakat terhadap sampah plastik yang berceceran dipinggir pantai, serta memilah mana yang seharusnya dapat di daur ulang dan tidak, sehingga kematian bayi paus dipinggir pantai bukan merupakan suatu berkah, melainkan bencana, efek dari krisis ekologi laut. Berdasarkan dua kepercayaan itu, pengarang ingin memberikan kesadaran kepada pemerintah Afrika khususnya untuk memberikan pendidikan gratis kepada masyarakat Afrika yang tinggal di pesisir dengan tingkat ekonomi yang sangat rendah, sehingga mereka yang tinggal di pesisir memahami akan bahaya sampah yang dapat merusak ekosistem laut, dan mampu menjaga ekosistem laut demi kepentingan bersama.

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A. Introduction

The God of The Sea is a short story from a collection of short stories compiled in a book entitled *Everything Change Volume III* in 2021 by Barakat Akinsiku. She is a writer with an interest in global affairs. She comes from the country of Nigeria, Africa. Her short story, entitled *The God of the Sea*, is generally described as a story about the lives of coastal people who experience difficulties when they face the anger of the sea god, Olukun, who is the Orisha leader of the sea. The result of Olukun's anger required coastal communities to look for new settlements further from the coast. Apart from that, look at the illustrations in the short story *The God of the Sea* between two black men with hair characteristic of African people. The author wants to illustrate the lives of African citizens regarding their relationship with the marine ecosystem, which has been contaminated in many literary works. For example, in the case of the proliferation of highly polluted plastic waste along the coast, twenty-three beaches in Tunisia, Africa, were officially closed, relatively new beaches (Bonauli, 2020). North African countries, in particular, are making more vigorous efforts to oppose the enormous amount of waste pollution, which is dangerous for the life of biotic and abiotic sea creatures and for beach visitors who carry out tourist activities such as swimming.

This phenomenon has been analyzed regularly by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) since 1937-2019 take water samples, especially in Tunisia, where the analysis results were that the sea water was polluted by domestic waste, plastic waste, and blooming smelly algae. The waste generated each year reaches approximately one billion plastic bags. Based on data from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), 20% of plastic waste production is thrown into the sea, and 80% of other pollution will automatically return to land, so this causes or harms the health of coastal communities, the balance of nature, or marine ecosystem (Dalberg Advisors, 2019, p. 1). An ecosystem is an ecological system formed by an inseparable reciprocal relationship between living things and their environment (Hutagalung, 2010, pp. 13–15). It is also a complete and comprehensive unitary system between environmental elements that influence each other. Thus, marine ecosystems are ecosystems found in marine waters, and life is found in the sea both biotically and abiotically.

Therefore, this research uses ecocriticism as a significant intellectual movement that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, referring to the study of biological themes and relationships that appear in literary works, aiming to discover the role of literature in the ecology of the human species (Meeker, 1997). It was William Rueckert who first introduced it as 'ecocriticism' in his 1978 essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, setting the stage for ecological standards and concepts in literary studies (Dobie, 2012, p. 238; Glothfelty & Harold, 1996, p. 20). According to Lawrence Buell, ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study of literature and the physical environment, a tool for environmental analysis and brainstorming to improve contemporary environmental situations (Dobie, 2012, p. 239). Kerridge also defines *ecocriticism* as an idea about the environment represented by texts (Sukmawan, 2016).

Moreover, ecocriticism, as highlighted by Glothfelty, plays a crucial role in raising readers' awareness of the world and their responsibility to defend it. It necessitates a careful examination of human actions on the environment and the impact of these actions on nature itself. Glothfelty defines ecocriticism as studies related to the physical environment and literature (Glothfelty & Harold, 1996, p. 19). Ecocriticism can also select, explore and complete an ecological environment in a broader sense (Garrard, 2004, p. 4). There are several approaches used in ecocriticism, namely the text used to understand the world or the study text itself, the author, and the entire ecosphere (Dobie, 2012, p. 240). When viewed from the perspective of text studies, ecocritical texts reveal the characteristics of pastoral and apocalyptic narratives. Pastoral, a literary work that explains a rural area by displaying its differences with urban areas implicitly and explicitly (Gifford, 1999, p. 2) is a critical element of ecocritical texts. For instance, the literary tradition of Ancient Alexandria contained refugees from cities to villages, becoming a source of poetry during the Renaissance in Europe. This pastoral element adds depth to the ecocritical texts, making them more engaging and thought-provoking.

Meanwhile, apocalypticism is a genre born in a crisis situation to deepen the determination of a marginalized community to provide hope and a vision of freedom from the bonds that bind it. However, apocalyptic literature is nothing new in expressing creativity and advocacy for marginalized people (Thompson, 1997, pp. 13–14). An apocalyptic narrative is a presentation or revelation about the end of history. The central theme of apocalypticism that is often encountered is a form of struggle between good and evil. Furthermore, the model of ecocritical study of literary works is a model of environmental literary study. From this model, it becomes a study of pastoral narratives and apocalyptic narratives. There are bucolic elements, discourses of retreat and return, and arcadia constructions in the study of pastoral narratives. Bucolic is a marker in pastoralism; for example, 'shepherd' means from the village. The retreat is someone who escapes from today's people, current behavior, and the complexities that occur in cities and explores them (Gifford, 1999, pp. 45–46) while the return is a return to the past Arcadia is an ideal place. The apocalyptic narrative study model explores the characters or heroes, the environment, and the apocalyptic vision itself. Exploring the character or hero figures can be done in three ways, namely by looking at the people in the past who influenced the character

or hero figures in the story; the second is a narrative about the journey undertaken by the character or hero figure in the story which people guide, previous people, the third is that the journey undertaken provides something interesting (Morris, 1972).

Regarding environmental elements, four types can be traced, namely; the first is a narrative that tells that the world has changed (Thompson, 1997, pp. 13–14), the second is a narrative that contains an effort to prevent humans from doing damage to the environment in a persuasive or promising way (Garrard, 2004, p. 99), the third is the awareness that humans are part of the organic universe who must do their best in protecting nature, the fourth is a narrative that has awareness in refusing to do damage for the sake of humans (Sessions, 1995, p. 107).

Thus, previous research is needed to analyze the short story *The God of the Sea* by Barakat Akinsiku using ecocritical theory. Among them; Stephen's research entitled *Eco-survival in the poetry of G.' Ebinyo Ogbowei*, he examines how the environmental crisis is depicted in literary works as well as supporting the contents of several of his poetry collections: *Song of a Dying River* (Ogbowei, 2009, p. 17), *Vultures* (Ogbowei, 2009, pp. 41–42), *The Plundered Province* (Ogbowei, 2009, p. 47), *The House Full of Strife* (Ogbowei, 2009, pp. 68–69), *What Tale Trinya* (Ogbowei, 2009, pp. 30–32), and *Dancing Cats* (Ogbowei, 2009, p. 35), describe the transformation that occurred in the biosphere of the Niger Delta, Southern Nigeria as a result of activities carried out by humans both socio-politically, technologically and industrially. Thus, these poems display eco-friendliness showing a tremendous empathy towards the Niger Delta environment to create awareness by highlighting the environmental crisis that could destroy the region and advocating valuable ways to overcome the situation (Stephen, 2013).

The following research is conducted by Ifeyinwa Okolo, discussing landscaping as a plot and character development medium in *Ngugi wa Thiong'o's* *Wizard of the Crow*. It can be seen that the characters are categorized into two: those who support and those who oppose ecological progress. All the characters who have some positivity in them and, in one way or another, contribute to the survival of their environment are on one side, while those whose activities drain the environment either by commission or negligence are on the other side. On the positive side, Kamiti, her ancestors, Nyawira, and her People's Voice Movement members take the lead, with Vinjinia finding a little space between them through her act of redemption for not being part of Tajirika's husband's evil schemes. Finally, Ngugi brought home the argument about environmental and mental issues by strategically honing character and charting the direction of the development of the novel's plot (Okolo, 2013). Therefore, the novelty of this research is to explain how traditional and modern beliefs affect African people's behavior to achieve a disaster-free environment and knowledge to overcome disasters in the future.

B. Method

The method used is a qualitative descriptive method. This research uses material objects and formal objects. The material object used in this research is a short story by Barakat Akinsiku entitled *The God of The Sea* (2021), and formal object used in this research is Gotfelty's ecocritical theory. Several approaches are used in ecocriticism: texts are used to understand the world or study the texts themselves, the authors, and the entire ecosphere (Dobie, 2012, p. 240). This research analyzes literary works and the author's view of the world based on her literary works. Thus, based on this study, the researcher focuses on analyzing the characteristics of apocalyptic narratives and the author's views. Data was collected by quoting conversations, narratives, and fragments in the short story.

C. Results and Discussion

In the short story *The God of the Sea*, the character, I, is in two belief situations: traditional and modern beliefs. Traditional belief was obtained when that character lived in coastal areas. Not only the character 'I', but also all the society living in coastal areas have long-held traditional belief. Meanwhile, modern belief begins to be gained when the character 'I' gets permission to go to school. The character is described as a small child who has limited knowledge, as do all the people on the coast. However, the character 'I' has a dream of being like other children who can go to school in an urban area that the character 'I' never visits except for treatment when the character 'I' is sick and does not get better. The traditional belief in the plot presented by the author regarding coastal communities still believes in disasters and blessings from the sea because the god of the sea, Oluskun, is angry. In addition, they receive protection from Yemoja, the mother of the sea, who gives blessings from sea products, as in the conversation in this short story.

"My father said if we don't pacify the god of the sea often, one day he will sweep us all away. And it seems that the god has been angry for a while, because he sent his water to us recently. His messenger visited us two weeks before I enrolled in the Community Model School" (Akinsiku, 2021, p. 19).

In the snippet of the conversation above, it is said that coastal communities need to appease the sea god if they do not want something wrong or a disaster to happen and drown them. This is a traditional belief that is still held by coastal communities. As is the case in managing marine ecosystems, people are required to do traditional things so as not to cause disaster. In other words, to protect the marine ecosystem and prevent a marine ecological crisis, it must be done through traditional belief, namely the steps taken by coastal communities, namely by carrying out rituals, as stated in the following narrative.

“Perhaps the ritual to appease the water god has not yet been carried out and the result is the chaos we have just witnessed” (Akinsiku, 2021, p. 22).

As the quote above suggests, the coastal communities’ beliefs and practices are deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. They attribute the disaster to their perceived oversight in performing rituals, leading to their village’s submersion and the subsequent search for a new settlement. In their traditional belief, the coastal communities hold the death of a baby whale as a sacred event, a blessing bestowed by Yemoja, the mother of the sea. Coastal communities are described by the author as marginalized communities and as people who do not have rational knowledge, like the whale’s death in the following short story.

“I later found out that it was a baby whale. The peeled flesh was black, shiny, and reflected back the afternoon sun. The giant fin lay on its side and large chunks of its flesh were cut up by the hungry villagers. Someone moves behind me, pushes me forward, and my toe gets caught in something” (Akinsiku, 2021, p. 30).

Based on the quote presented above, coastal communities consider that the death of a baby whale as a gift from the mother of the sea is inevitable. However, this traditional belief began to shift when children wanted to attend school. They did not get permission from their parents because their parents were only able to meet their food needs, and that was not enough. However, as time went by, their parents were also afraid that if they went to work to fish, their children would play freely on the beach, and the sea god might get angry and devour their children, as has happened.

Finally, the children went to the school they wanted to go to when passing through town for treatment, namely the Community Model School. When they go to school there, they go to the city more often, unlike when they only go to the city for treatment or when they are in a bad situation. Since they went to school there, traditional belief slowly blurred their ideology. They were instilled with new knowledge that they previously did not know but often encountered in their living environment.

Thus, the author wants to convey and provide an understanding that traditional beliefs are irrational. Initially, coastal communities needed more education regarding the marine ecosystem crisis resulting from very high poverty, which required them to live without knowing how to protect marine ecosystems. Thus, the author brings out a new understanding in his narrative: modern belief through education. Modern belief entered the lives of coastal communities, starting with the characters ‘I’ and Shanty. This raises doubts about the traditional belief that they have believed in the sea god or the god of the sea, as in the following quote.

“During our second week, we had several guests greeting us during the morning meeting. The principal, Ms. Olayiwola, introduced them as Mr. Patrick and Ms. Chidera from the Oceanographic Institute. It was World Oceans Day and the two of them traveled to different schools to enlighten and teach about the importance of keeping waterways and sewers free of garbage and plastic waste. Miss Chidera holds up a PET bottle, the kind used for soft drinks, which many tourists buy from the Mama Chi Chi shop on the beach” (Akinsiku, 2021, p. 28)

Based on the quote above, it is told how going to school, the character ‘I’ and Shanty were taught not to throw away rubbish carelessly, especially things that cannot be recycled, such as plastic waste, and also dangerous things such as waste in water. Education about the dangers of rubbish and how to protect marine ecosystems began to be planted in the minds of Shanty and the character ‘I’. Thus, from here, the belief initially held by the characters Shanty and the character ‘I’ were traditional, and they then experienced a transition period to become more modern with science, as shown in the following narrative.

“I looked down to see I had stepped on a PET plastic bottle embedded in the sand. Then I saw a few more, scattered in all directions on the shore, and some near the whale carcass. Some bottles are half buried, while others are clearly visible. Some are stepped on and flattened, while others retain their cylindrical shape. They all have different colors and sizes. Miss Chidera's words returned to my ears, and I became

confused. I don't know what to believe. Was this baby whale really sent by the sea god as an act of benevolence, or did this plastic waste find its way into the ocean and contribute to its demise? Could it be that my father was right, or did he and the other villagers know nothing? Do sea gods really exist?" (Akinsiku, 2021, pp. 30–31).

Based on the story above, when the character 'I' saw plastic, the character realized that all this time, what he had not seen or perhaps ignored was something that could endanger his life and also the marine ecosystem. Thus, his belief in the sea god began to waver; he saw much plastic waste of various kinds and colors, which was visible—after the character 'I' went to school, then realized that what the character had seen all this time was rubbish that could harm the marine and coastal ecosystem.

The school has changed the way of thinking of the character 'I,' who initially had a traditional belief in disasters and blessings that came from the goddess and sea god, then experienced a transition to a modern belief by seeing more rationally that the dead baby whale and the flood that occurred were not the results of the anger of the sea god. However, it comes from human actions, such as throwing away rubbish carelessly, even in vast quantities. At the end of the story, the character 'I' continues to wonder which one the character 'I' should believe, whether it is traditional belief or modern belief that the character 'I' believes more, or whether and the coastal communities do not have any knowledge in protecting marine ecosystems, resulting in a marine ecological crisis.

Therefore, based on the narrative in the short story *The God of The Sea*, the aim is to raise awareness and change the ideology that is currently prevailing in coastal communities through the main character towards traditional belief through education towards modern belief. Where it will be hazardous if humans throw rubbish carelessly, which can cause the death of baby whales and flooding from overflowing sea water that devours residential areas on the coast. Apart from that, the author also wants to raise awareness among readers, mainly the author's target, namely African governments, to pay more attention to coastal communities in the fields of education and economics. Not by closing the beach so that tourists do not visit it due to the tons of rubbish on the beach, but the author wants coastal communities also to be given knowledge so that when some visitors or tourists want to play on the African beach, they do not just throw rubbish carelessly because the residents around it guard it.

D. Conclusion

In the analysis of traditional belief about marine ecosystems in the short story *The God of the Sea*, not only is there a marine ecological crisis, but also a crisis of food and knowledge of marine ecosystems by coastal communities. Meanwhile, the modern belief in marine ecosystems is starting to enter the character 'I,' having doubts about the traditional belief that has always believed in the sea god. 'School' has changed the way of thinking of the character 'I,' who initially had a traditional belief in disasters and blessings that came from the goddess and sea god, then experienced a transition to a modern belief by seeing more rationally that the dead baby whale and the flood that occurred were not the result of the anger of the sea god. However, it comes from human actions, such as throwing away rubbish carelessly, even in enormous quantities. Modern belief in the short story *The God of the Sea* provides awareness to the main character through education about the dangers of littering.

Thus, the author's aim in creating the short story *The God of The Sea* is to raise awareness among readers, mainly the author's target, namely the African government, to pay more attention to coastal communities in education and economics. Not by closing the beach so that tourists do not visit it due to the tons of rubbish on the beach, but the author wants coastal communities to be educated so that when tourists arrive who want to play on the African beach, they do not throw rubbish carelessly because the residents guard them. Likewise, residents take extra care of domestic waste, so it is not thrown away carelessly.

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