

The Future Hope as Reflected on W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Comet* and COVID-19 Pandemic Conditions

Anicleta Yuliasuti*, Rommel Utungga Pasopati

English Literature Program, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya
Jl. Semolowaru 84 Surabaya, Indonesia.

Corresponding author*

anicleta.yuliasuti@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract: W. E. B. Du Bois' *the comet* is story of apocalypse caused by incoming comet. That afro-futurism speaks chances of new life beyond any racial segregation. It may reflect COVID-19 pandemic today of better condition to be realized in new normal. Such aspect is also asserted in concept of futurism that underlines art in former then shapes culture in latter. Then, how may W. E. B. Du Bois' *the comet* inspire future hope in COVID-19 pandemic? Through qualitative method by reading, quoting, and analyzing written sources, the writers would like to propose how a critical event could bring abundant hope than despair for socio-cultural future. The short story of Du Bois indicates equality as discrimination ends post-apocalypse. That may bring in perspective for new normal condition to re-arrange social structures. Optimism is socially brought in by humanity beyond borders through altruism. In conclusion, *the comet* could inspire how human should behave through better humanity. Future hope should always be kept in mind to fight any obstacles that may come and to realize better life afterwards.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Future Hope, Futurism, The Comet, W. E. B. Du Bois.

Introduction

Literature is indeed reflection of everyday life of human beings. In writing, any kind of human expression and attitude are seen in every language that is known. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois or W. E. B. Du Bois is a writer whose short story *the comet* reflects such condition post-apocalypse (Du Bois, 2005). More than merely judgment day, he expresses such hope of individuals beyond any racial segregation indicated in that story (FordhamNews, 2020). Published in 1920, the short story mirrors such afro-futurism that is how future should be shaped as better place for black people. Meanwhile, COVID-19 pandemic condition today is full of anxieties. Existence of the disease and deaths of many people bring in such despair to everyone. But, altruism and togetherness also come to the surface following the hope beyond such despair. Today, hope should always be kept in mind so that better future could be realized from better doings from health and other wider aspects.

Both W. E. B. Du Bois' story and COVID-19 pandemic situation show future hope as direct reflections of them. Then, the question is how may W. E. B. Du Bois' *the comet* inspire future hope in COVID-19 pandemic? The writers would like to propose how a critical event could bring abundant hope than despair for socio-cultural future. The short story of Du Bois indicates equality as discrimination ends post-apocalypse. That may bring in perspective for new normal condition to re-arrange social structures. Optimism is socially brought in by humanity beyond borders through altruism.

Method

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Online and offline scripts are used to explain analysis of W. E. B. Du Bois' *the comet*, futurism, and COVID-19 pandemic situations

including how supports and tensions are drawn in between either. Online and offline scripts are derived from books, journals, and online resources to understand shown matters. The data analyses include attaining sources, reading them carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in reference lists.

Results and Discussions

The apocalypse: the plots of *the comet*

The plots of *the comet* start from a black man named Jim (Du Bois, 2005). He is a messenger in a bank. He is told by the president of the bank to go to basement to take some documents. While he is in the basement, there is a big boom outside that makes such earthquake inside the basement. Jim is so worried and he struggles to find a way to the surface. Outside then, he sees everyone is dead. The people are dead because of poisonous gas from the incoming comet as informed in the news a day before. At first, Jim does not know what to do, but then he starts to walk around to the city seeking for help or even survivor. He enters a restaurant where everyone is dead inside. He remembers how that place rejects him because of his skin color. The society generally used to treat him as citizen number two as it is not just at all (Anders, 2016).

Jim then continues to walk then he hears a woman asking for help. He goes to an apartment and meets a girl that needs his help. Her name is Julia and she is a white and wealthy girl (Fordham News, 2020). Julia is as confused as Jim and she decides to go out to search for her father. Jim accompanies her as he does not want to lose another survivor either. They have a dialogue about how a new world could be done from now on. There is a hope for them to shape new perspectives of society beyond any segregation. Jim says his mind in being underrated while Julia is also aware of how her whiteness may bring in bad effects for the man. Later on, Julia meets his father alongside with her fiancée. Her father takes Julia and she follows him. Her father does not say thanks to Jim but even humiliates him by giving some money (Du Bois, 2005). Julia even would not

turn to see him. Julia and her father then goes away leaving Jim alone standing as he is his entire life.

The story is about afro-futurism in how future is drawn as better place for black people. It states so many hopes that may come post-apocalypse. There is a total new life beyond any segregation. As people are dead, then Jim and Julia may start a new life with thoughts of being equal to each other (Shawl, 2017). Separations and segregations are needed to be abolished to bring out new understanding between black and white people. New life for Jim and Julia as man and woman could shape a new generation that could reset former thoughts. Indications of mocking others could be eradicated to show how new life is always possible. Hope is always ready to be realized (Anders, 2016; Bellot, 2021). Besides, the wish also reflects such new hope for humanity. This view is so general but crucial for every living human being. Justice and equality could be brought in altogether with understandings among persons. Universal idea of seeing others as humans could be regained again to realize such hope from one to others.

However, those hopes must also face realities as stated in the story. Jim wants to go beyond to post-racial world and it seems that Julia agrees to that (Repino, 2016). Actually, Julia hesitates at the end when she sees her father and fiancée. Her agreement is conditional if only there is no other choice. As there is another choice, she chooses to go to her former life. She wants to stay while Jim needs to go. Jim could not do anything more when Julia leaves him alone. He is left with only hope beyond any realization anymore; a hope not hopeless, even if unhelpful (Hartman, 2020). Julia's father and fiancée are symbols of comfort zones of culture. They are reflections of civilization at that time. Her father only sees Jim as a servant, not as equal as himself. He still thinks that there is a big gap between black and white people. That aspect actually is also agreed by Julia as she returns to her the one and only zone. She refuses to make new one as it may be too difficult for her. She thinks that it is better to go back rather than go forward. That is how Du Bois states his critiques for liberal paradigm (Douglas, 2015).

Futurism and COVID-19 Pandemic Conditions

The term of futurism firstly comes as an art movement then speaks to wider cultural aspects in the latter. Futurism specifically underlines dynamism of change in the frame of modern life. Stated by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909, this idea reflects such innovation to culture and society (TATE, 2020). More perspectives are explored such as cubism, automotive, syntax-based poetry, and even glorified architecture. It is such movement that hates idea of museum-based by indicating admiration of progress. Traditional notions should be changed with more energetic sides that focus on being unique rather than merely following the old paths (TheArtStory, 2020; Artland, 2020). It is always better to celebrate differences rather than to obey to old rules of life. Society then is changed to be so urban that may include further work of advancement and enhancement as well. Somehow, this futurism, especially in Italy, becomes involved in fascism as many artists accept Mussolini's dictatorship (TheArtStory, 2020). This condition then makes such backlash for futurism. However, the energy of futurism is so widely used today.

In this case, futurism also spreads to modern condition today. The main idea is to look after future as the best place and time to change and to advance. It has become so cultural that involves language as wider knowledge of everyday life (FordhamNews, 2020; Qvortrup, 2021). There are three main aspects that follow the effects of futurism on language. First, totally whole different points of perspectives. This side is so utopic that may revolutionize all things through certain place and time. There should be total difference from one period of time to another as people must change things in society enormously (TATE, 2020; Douglas, 2015). Second, there is hope in future change and advancement of society but it involves slow evolution or even only half revolution. People and society as well think that change is inevitable but to totally bring new ideas to every kind of side is out of sense (Artland, 2020). There must be change, indeed, but the change should always be considered through better measurements. Advancement should be predicted by including many aspects as well so that one change may bring better whole shift in the future (TheArtStory, 2020).

The third one is believing there is hope in the future but do not really rely on total progress of it. Here, people seem to follow condition of everyday life easily. They live between condition of being traditional and modern, being old and new, and being insignificant and total (Artland, 2020; Tuason *et al.*, 2021). The third aspect may be so naïve, but that is what the most people think today. Future condition may include hope but people should also follow the flow of life. They may also try to make a change but the most important is they embrace their aspects of everyday life tightly (Tuason *et al.*, 2021).

From futurism, it could be seen how future holds faith in how things are going to change in next time and place (Artland, 2020; Qvortrup, 2021). In addition, futurism implicitly indicates a matter of hope. Hope is nowhere but situated in the present wished for the future. As simply defined, hope is how future is seen as important wishes got fulfilled. Holding to hope is not out of mind but it is so rational that as a desired outcome (Milona and Stockdale, 2018). It also indicates perceptual experience as how humans perceps life at the next time by exploring own approach to understand reality. There is belief at stake in hope, in both positive and negative hope. If people believe in having better condition so the belief is fulfilled, but it will become worse if the reverse happens. Hope is also practical since rationality in this case is not conceptual (Milona and Stockdale, 2018; Tuason *et al.*, 2021). It brings in idea of being wishful to further opportunities while lying on fundamental part of identities.

The philosophy of hope is so wide that it may touch matter of individual, science, social, and even politics. There is no human that never speaks and thinks of hope since it is always there (Qvortrup, 2021). Hope could be positive or negative in its content. Being positive means to have certain realized conditions in the future while being negative is to wish that never happens at all. There is no wrong in those two since hope is so individuals yet particular (Bloeser and Stahl, 2017). That could only be approached deeper not by universal perspective but by experiential approach. Hope is specific, not general, yet it could not be predicted whether such hope is the same for

everyone (Repino, 2016; Tuason, Guss, and Boyd, 2021; Tuason *et al.*, 2021). Somehow, one and another hope is contested each other, even people could fight each other in having different hopes. People could kill each other for things that have not come yet. Therefore, hope is not only rational, but also emotional as it brings in context than concept as well (Bloeser and Stahl, 2017).

Generally, hope does not stand alone but has background that would like to be realized in the future. It does not only relate to former ordinary life but also despair and pain (Hartman, 2020; Bloeser and Stahl, 2017). Hope is also wish for better destiny or fate. Bad conditions in the past are wanted to be amended in the future through hope. Somehow, it includes individual feelings of his or her surroundings but at the same time it involves wider and more general states of society. Therefore, every hope is valuable since there is a close combination between nature and nurture of life through contradiction of being optimistic and pessimistic (Bloeser and Stahl, 2017; Pimlott, 2020). Hope is both psychological and mental states of mind in which its intention is to remove fear and anxiety. Here, hope could be meant also as matters of defense mechanism to cope with anxiety. While defense mechanism moves backwards, hope goes forward by stating that better parts of life would be realized in the future (Tuason *et al.*, 2021).

Both futurism and hope are well enough reflected in COVID-pandemic condition today. Reality of condition today is seen in matter of despair and hope. The aspect of desire is so much awful. There are many people died because of the virus. Hospitals are fully occupied, oxygen is difficult to be found, and fear of being infected is everywhere (Nu'man, 2021). This severe condition is worsened by activated virus in the body that could infect other vital organs. It is like a flu but with more danger inside. Those who died could not be taken by the families. Ambulances bring them to their last places by medical assistants who wear hazmat suits. Those who mourn must stay at home and they could not pray together with others. The disease also brings in fear as people should always being aware of health protocols (Du Bose, 2020). Wearing face masks, washing hands,

and keeping the distance are the most important thing that should accompany all activities.

No one really knows the standing truth behind this virus. It keeps evolving from time to time and the next phase is more dangerous and infectious than before (Gross, 2021). Delta variant is a proof of widened infections in Indonesia and people have not got away from it until today as Omicron variant is emerging today. Moreover, death and disease come up with denial of many people including official governments (Du Bose, 2020). At first, the existence of this virus is denied by saying that this could heal by itself and similar to normal influenza. Many people still hold events that involve many people that could infect those who come inside. People also disobey health protocols by saying that they have better immune than others. Some of them also think that vaccine is the ultimate medicine so that any following to the protocols is unneeded anymore. As consequences of this pandemic, many people are fired from work and most of them must work at home. Movements are limited and economic is stagnant while political aspects are bound to the limitations and restrictions of the pandemic situations (Nu'man, 2021; Du Bose, 2020).

Besides all of those despairs, there is still hope in pandemic condition today (Gross, 2021). More chances are realized as incoming opportunities of different realm, especially online. People start to explore online realm that still contains various possibilities. Trading could be done online and more educations are held without borders by using internet (Susanti and Widajatun, 2021). Home industries are flourished as people stay at home longer than before. Small and medium companies are keeping their productions by selling them through social media that may enhance their income. In social points, altruism is widely seen today (Gross, 2021; Susanti and Widajatun, 2021). People may suffer difficulties but those burdens do not stop them to share to others. If there are people who have to stay at home because of being infected, neighbors are coming to help them with everyday needs (Nu'man, 2021). More shops are giving discounts and cashbacks so that people could buy things that they require. Having profit is

not the main purpose today but it come with ideas to help others as well.

No matter how rich and poor people are, sharing to others is the reflections of humanity that actually still lives despite many difficulties felt today. It is interesting how pandemic condition today increases awareness of otherness as well (Gross, 2021; Tuason *et al.*, 2021). Togetherness is the main idea here that binds people. People are not being selfish but they understand that this pandemic is bad for everyone. Therefore, they help with anything they could. Some people base their doings through social and religious perspectives that enhance feeling of abilities to strengthen societies (Du Bose, 2020). Own needs are important but others' are either as well. This shows hope among people. Until now, humans being could survive to this pandemic despite of despair that is still going on.

Reflections of Future Hope Between *the Comet* and COVID-19 Situations

W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Comet* and COVID-19 pandemic have similarities derived from the core and periphery of the cases. The similarities are following; a critical event may shape such new condition in the future (Shawl, 2017). In the short story, incoming comet is the main cause of the destruction that also results to new hope to degrade racial segregation. Jim as the main character takes big role to shape a new understanding in that new situation (Du Bois, 2005). In pandemic today, the existence of the virus changes every single aspect of life including economic, politic, social, and health as the most important one. The existing health protocols are clues how a big event is also a crucial one in shaping future surroundings.

Next, that big event makes humanity at corresponding future stake. Humanity is like a collateral here; increasing death must happen to grow better condition in the future. Death is indeed loss, but that sacrifice is like seed that should be cultivated for better lessons of next generation. Lessons learned from health condition should be reflected either to wider perspectives such as social and political matters (Tuason *et al.*, 2021). Humanity is getting lesser because of decreasing

population of human beings, but it also becomes restored as continuous survival that may seem going on and on every day and every time as well.

Last, both matters of big event and humanity show how tensions between good and bad sides are always seen in the following. The apocalypse of the comet and pandemic of the virus are not such total conditions that wipe everything and shape a new one. The old one still exists followed by the new side that grows (Milona and Stockdale, 2018; Douglas, 2015). This is the most important analysis between those two aspects as understandings between two sides are always on demand to process what happens on each issue.

The future hope in the short story and the pandemic is indicated in tensions between two contradictive sides. Even a big event may never totally support a side and annihilate another. Both parties of aspects will still go on. In another word, hope never stands alone but accompanying with despair. Future hope will never exist if there is no despair on the background (Shawl, 2017; Pimlott, 2020). It also shapes matter of optimism that walks together with pessimism. As one thing is wished to come true, it must understand how reality corresponds to that dream (Hartman, 2020). Therefore, hope as located in the future are not monolithic at all. Hope is in the future must face reality in present condition that results from despair from the past. Past, present, and future are never separated since any indication is such cause, proof, and effect of various issues. The short story involves racial segregation as the cause in the past, incoming comet as the proof in the present, and better humanity as the effect in the future. The pandemic shows COVID-19 virus as the cause in the past followed by the pandemic in the present and also renewal of normal condition in the future as the effect (Tuason *et al.*, 2021). The three parts are also direct reflections of an ending of the past, a present in today, and the beginning of the future.

Besides, it could be understood how those three parts above put more emphasis in the present. The past is wished to be better in the future. Both past and future did not and do not happen anymore. The present does take place and time as the most ultimate sense (Milona and Stockdale, 2018). The present as represented by realities are burdens of

the future to come since the affection of the past seems still going on. Philosophy of hope then must also face philosophy of time which relates more to the present. The present is such presence of being negated, supported, and also known. This is the widest horizon of condition today. The past must be remembered while the future must be imagined, but the present walks altogether with people in place and time happening now. The present is what people are now and this condition may shapes burdens from the past that hinders the future (Milona and Stockdale, 2018).

The Comet by W. E. B. Du Bois justifies equality as discrimination ends post-apocalypse. As many people died, equality beyond any racial segregation is such hope that ready to be realized. Humanity then is restored beyond any border of color lines especially cultural borders between the colored and the white (Bellot, 2021). Dualism is needed to be eradicated and be changed with duality as differences are more appreciated. Nature of different skin colors should be apprehended better by nurture of social conditions. The stigma that follows could be simply gone by valuating otherness of the victims either (Douglas, 2015). However, those hopes are hindered by very realities in Jim and Julia's situations. As Jim hopes that better condition beyond racial segregation must be realized, Julia hesitates. She even turns back to her father and fiancée once she knows that they survive. It is such indication that Jim's hope will never die out, but Julia's cultural comfort zone is also adaptive either.

As hope goes through, reality may pull it back to show present condition. Jim needs to shape a new life and he thinks Julia does too, but then Julia returns to her new life. Somehow, future is so undecidable and Julia thinks it is better to stay with reality although she knows that condition brings such burdens to others from stigma of the past (Bellot, 2021). Besides, the incoming comet actually only affects people of New York. Julia's father who is outside the town is not affected at all by the poisonous gas. Here, it can be seen how hope actually is so specific but could be so problematic if being seen from other perspectives. Jim's hope is only at that city while other cities may still hold to old culture of segregation. Then, the apocalypse

actually is not the end of the day and total beginning of a new day. It is only partial to Jim's city and the effect is limited either. The outer space thing is truly symbol of hope, but reality also comes up with various perspectives of present.

In addition, there are two main indications of future hope in that short story. The first is Jim's hope that really wants to go beyond any segregation at all. He thinks that the apocalypse truly happens and new life could be shaped by his and Julia's roles. He believes his hope could be realized by considering the reality where people are already died leaving only Jim and Julia themselves. The second one is Julia's role. She actually believes in Jim's hope and she also agrees that discrimination should not matter anymore because of new understanding that they will realize later. Her return to his father actually does not omit that hope but only hindered by reality. She chooses reality than hope. The lesson that could be taken is that hope may always face reality and how persons choose one to another does really matter as it may shape future condition. Julia's decision here is the main key. If she believes Jim at all then new perspective could be attained to change future reality. However, she chooses reality in the present that binds to the past as in deep she may still does not want to move from her own comfort zones.

COVID-19 pandemic condition shows how the virus does not end everything but surely affects all aspects of life. The hopes among pandemic condition do exist as there are abundant chances, rising altruism, and prolonging togetherness that are reflected from individual actions toward wider society (Gross, 2021). However, those hopes may still be followed with bad realities out there. Many violence still come to surface in the midst of everyone's difficulties today. Terrorism is still out there shadowing people with terror out of dignity of tolerance. Murders are still in the news as results of ordinary conditions and affected by the bad thoughts came from the pandemic. Armed conflicts are going on either when people try to reach better health through health protocols and vaccinations. The reality is so contradictive from the hope. Despite its very danger, the virus does not annihilate much violence as it becomes cause of the

death of many good people (Du Bose, 2020). The annihilation is not to the whole. Bad things still come to relate to burdens of future hope.

Moreover, former culture is not totally shifted in all aspects. Many people are still stubborn in responding to the existence of the virus (Du Bose, 2020). There are still denials from many persons regarding being of the virus. Many people are also still ignorant about realizing better health protocols in public realm. They know the cause of the pandemic and they know what to do to eradicate the wider effect of the virus, but they refuse to do what are good to themselves, their families, and societies as well. The virus and reality of the pandemic should be such revolutions to old culture, but then those do not move in an instant (Isley *et al.*, 2020). Like what happens in Julia's doing, people still live in comfort zones by abandoning others. They know that the future should be better but they still hold to reality today. Ironically, it seems that they find a happy place during difficult matters of pandemic situation today.

Indeed, COVID-19 is not an apocalypse that wipes everything out. As the short story of Du Bois tells, the pandemic still leaves human with old culture but fulfilled with better attitude to be realized afterwards. The pandemic gives new spirit to the future hope especially in the matter of altruism and togetherness (Isley, *et al.*, 2020). People should not be like Julia that chooses to turn back to the past. Persons should suspend their own needs and share to the others more often. As the pandemic touches everyone, so all people should move together from the lesson learned about this pandemic. Humanity should be restored once again by paying more attention to single details of our movements and how those may affect other's lives (Pimlott, 2020). The virus is adaptive as well that is similar to Julia's comfort zone, but being like Jim is the most important deed today. Hope must still goes on to be realized although hindered by realities (Isley, *et al.*, 2020). People should not depend on realities but they have to change realities.

The future hope indicates that humans could survive not because of total tendencies to a side but due to tensions among their deeds. The tensions

are about being good and bad, going selfish and altruism, living old and new culture, and so on. Having hope means that any destruction will always be followed with constructive values (Pimlott, 2020). People should not gaze only to the destruction as it may destruct them as well like what Nietzsche said about gazing to the abyss. People should listen to other aspects of merely destruction as those are hopes of having good fortune in the future (Isley, *et al.*, 2020). It is quite the same with despair that never comes alone but flows altogether with hope. Despair is felt by our heart painfully but hope is also there waiting to be known, understood, and then realized later. This is the point of duality that matters. It may open up to possibility of despair but also it shows indications of hope. We could never abandon despair as it is natural in life but the same treatment should be done to hope either. Having hope and realizing it is not such purpose to omit despair. It is to treat despair with hope that future condition should be much better than the past and the present as well.

Conclusion

W. E. B. Du Bois' *the comet* inspire future hope in COVID-19 pandemic through understanding tensions that happen in life. A critical event could bring abundant hope than despair for socio-cultural future. The short story of Du Bois indicates equality as discrimination ends post-apocalypse. That may bring in perspective for new normal condition to re-arrange social structures today. Optimism is socially brought in by humanity beyond borders through altruism. *The comet* could inspire how human should behave through better humanity. Future hope should always be kept in mind to fight any obstacles that may come and to realize better life afterwards.

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