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## THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK WOMEN STRUGGLE IN MAYA ANGELOU'S POEMS "EQUALITY"

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the representation of Black women struggle in Maya Angelou's poem. In this study, the researcher chose a poems of Maya Angelou. The poem entitles "Equality". In order to discover the representation of black women struggle in those poems, the study was conducted by using intrinsic elements of poetry, feminist literary critic, gynocriticism and biography of Maya Angelou. This study was conducted into two research problem; 1. How Maya Angelou represent black women struggle in her poem? 2. What kinds of struggle does Angelou describe in her poem? The result of this study shows that Maya Angelou represent the struggle of black women through the intrinsic elements. She represent that there is a clash between black women and white people. White people treat black women in a bad way because they are consider black women as slave. The poems shows that black women struggle against racism.

**Keywords:** *Representation, black women, struggle, gynocriticism*

### Introduction

The nineteenth century was the time when black women speak up against slavery and support to black women's right. They speak against the race and gender oppression black women have experienced at home, work, moreover the dominant culture as a whole. Along the history of black women movement in United States, black women were put on the last rank of social class, on the fourth after African American men since slavery time. Black women being discriminated against every aspect of life. Not only struggling by the discrimination of the men, black women also struggled for racism (Myrdal, 1944, p. 60).

Black women in that era suffers double discrimination. It was also experienced by Maya Angelou who was born as black woman. Black American woman poet would have her literary identity formed by the dominant (white male) tradition, by muted women's culture and muted black culture (Showalter, 2010, p. 202). It means that black American woman poet would represent their literary identity because the formed of male tradition and make them muted their own culture as women.

Representation is reconstruction and displays the facts of an object so as to discover meanings related to the fields of literature. According to Hall representation is the production of meaning through language (Hall, 1997, p. 16). Representation here means that black American women poet would represent their own experience through the discrimination in that era. Black American women poet would represent their suffering to against black women oppression and discrimination in all aspect of life. It also represented by Maya Angelou which is one of the black American woman poet.

Maya Angelou who has been called as America's most visible black female writer, is a famous novelist and also a great poet. It can be seen when she was called by the president of America that year for reciting her poem at the inauguration of Bill Clinton in 1993. The poem that she recited is a poem titled "On the Pulse of Morning" which tells about desire for unity between peoples of United State. In 1971, her volume of poems "Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiiie" was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Based on the background of study stated above, the researcher will discuss about how the representation of black women struggle in Angelou's poems. It can be formulated into two research question as follow:

1. How Maya Angelou represent black women struggle in her poems?
2. What kinds of struggle does Angelou describe in her poems?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Intrinsic elements of poetry can be used to understand the story behind the poem. Intrinsic elements are important rules in analyzing poetry. The writer can will understand the meaning of the poetry and what message that the poets want to deliver to the reader by analyzing the intrinsic elements. Robert states that the intrinsic elements are the analysis of the literature itself. There are several intrinsic element which will used in this research to find the representation of black woman struggle in Angelou's poems. There are: metaphor, simile, symbol, imagery, and repetition. Metaphor is one of figure of speech that compare something with the other thing to make a new meaning. Furthermore, Abrams (1999, p. 97) states that metaphor is a word or expression that usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing without asserting a comparison. It means that metaphor is a word which compared to the other word. Metaphor used in literary work to make the word or the meaning of the word has a big impact to the story.

Simile is the opposite of metaphor. If metaphor is compares the two thing which has similarity, simile is figure of speech which compare two thing which does not have similarity or relation. Simile is one thing likened other things in some way to clarify the image. According to Abrams (1999, p. 97) simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or "as". It means that simile is explicit comparison which can be seen or easy to recognize because the use of the words like and as. Symbol is an image that have meaning beyond themselves. Symbol is a detail, a character, an incident which have meaning to interpreting in literary work. Symbol often used by the poets to sent an idea. Meanwhile (Abrams, 1999, p. 195) define symbol as a word or phrase that signifies an object or even, that word signified something beyond itself. In literary work, symbol used to describes something with the other word or phrase to make the literary work more interested.

Imagery can be defined as the representation through language of sense experience (Perinne & Arp, 1992). Imagery are used the figurative language to make the reader feel the physical senses. Imagery used particular word that create visual representation of ideas in the readers mind. It means that by using imagery, the poets want the reader feel the poem as like he/she is the character in that poems. By using imagery the reader can feel the physical sense. According to (Perinne & Arp, 1992) imagery may be visual (something seen), auditory (something heard),

tactile (something felt), olfactory (something smelled), gustatory (something tasted), organic (something in the inside of feeling), and kinesthetic (something which can move).

Furthermore (Rosmaidar & Wijayani, 2012) states that visual imagery is a kind of imagery that usually appears in a poem because poem was used the visible representation. Auditory imagery uses the word which represent sounds, it means that auditory imagery use a word which can representative the sound which can heard. Tactile imagery uses a word which can express the touch sense of human. It means that tactile imagery use the word which can represent the sense of something which can be touch and felt. Olfactory imagery uses the word which can express the smell of something. Gustatory imagery uses the word which represent the flavor of something which can be tasted. Organic imagery uses a word which can express the inside feeling, such as hunger, thirst, love. Kinesthetic imagery is the word which represent the static movement of something.

Repetition is a recurrence of element which create a unity. According to (Cuddon, 2013, p. 601) “Repetition is an essential unifying element in nearly all poetry and much prose. It may consist of sound, particular syllables and word, phrases, stanzas, metrical patterns, ideas, allusions and shapes”. It means that repetition is the essential element in poetry that consist of the repeating particular word or syllable, sounds, phrases which used by the poet to emphasizing the meaning of the word or syllables. In other word repetition is a part of figure of speech where give influence to the sound of poem such as harmony when that poem is heard by the reader because there are some of words, phrases or sentences in poem is repeated.

Feminist criticism is the literary study which focused on women analysis. Showalter in (Adams, 1991) states that feminist criticism has shown the desire of women writer and bring the differences toward the interpretation of women writing and different perception toward their literary experience. (Humm, 2004) states that feminist literary criticism is a particular interest in the cultural construction of gender, difference, race, and cultural life of women. Feminist literary criticism is a critics that desire for position of women is equal with men. It is about regard the existence of women both as a writer and object of literary work. Wiyatami states that feminist literary criticism is an analysis which focused to a women as writer, how woman describes in literary work, relations with a man and the environment (Wiyatami D. , 2012, p. 11).

The study of women’s writing concentrates on to examine the women’s struggle, how were their worlds shaped, how they have turned figures, plots, narratives, lyrical and fictional projects set up for different purposes to their use, with what cunning did they press into service objects coded into cultural significations indifferent or hostile to them. According to (Showalter, 2010, p. 186) “American feminist criticism essentially textual, all however become gynocentric and all are struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical association with inferiority”. To find the representation of women from women writing, writer used theory from Elaine Showalter (2010, p. 187):

“Theories of women’s writing presently make use of four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural. Each is an effort to define and differentiate the qualities of the women writer and the women’s text; each model also represent a school of gynocentric feminism criticism with its own favorite texts, style, and methods.”

Maya Angelou is one of great black American women poet. According to Showalter “A black American woman poet would have her literary identity formed by the dominant (white male) tradition, by a muted women's culture, and by a muted black culture” (Showalter, 2010, p. 202). It means that black women poet manifest common approach to the specific political, social, economic they have been experienced. Showalter also states that “A gynocentric criticism would also situate women writer, gynocentric criticism would analyze women text with the social culture of women writer” (Showalter, 2010, p. 202).

Gynocriticism concerns the history of woman literature, the style of writing, theme, genre, structure, of woman writing, creativity of woman writing and a profession of women. Gynocriticism is a criticism that comes from Elaine. According to Showalter gynocriticism is a criticism which concerns with increasing, especially female structure for dealing with works written by women in all subjects, the subjects are history, style, themes, genres, and the structure of writing by woman (Showalter, 2010, p. 184) .

Marguerite Annie Johnson also known as Maya Angelou was born in 4 April 1928 in Saint Louis, Missouri United States. She is American poet, speaker, and also actress. Her work raise about the spirit of African-American especially in women movement. She talks about the economic, racial, and sexual oppression towards women. Her father is Bailey Johnson and her mother is Vivian Baxter Johnson. Her father work as a doorman at hotel in Saint Louse, and her mother work as a card dealer. She has a brother who was a year older than her, his name is Bailey Johnson Jr. Although born in Saint Louis, Angelou spent much time (when she was child) with her paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas.

In her seventeen years old, she gave a birth which make she think she have to work. Maya has getting marriage for three times. In 1950, she married with Tosh Angelos which mad her must stay in home. Her husband not allow her to work, she became a good housekeeping. After two and a half years, they are decided to divorce. Then she looked for a job and changed her name became Maya Angelou (because of her married name). Beside Tosh, she also ever married with Vasunzi and Paul Du Feu but none of her relationship survived.

After American Civil War (1861-65), slavery was ended and many changes were made by the states governments to give black people more rights. Black and white people was differences in many ways. Black and white cannot have married or even close relationship. Black were prevented from voting for the election, have to par more expensive tax, and not allowed to work in a better place. Maya Angelou survive the racism and event worst because she was black people. She struggled to graduate from college and be a part of the most famous and important women. She is a black girl who survive the racism and win’s over the racism and also became

an important women in the world. Even she is black people but she can survive and arise to be like she now.

### Data Analysis

*You declare you see me **dimly**  
Through a **glass which will not shine**,  
Though I stand before you **boldly**,  
Trim in rank and marking time.*

“Equality” is a poem which talks about how Maya want to be equal with the other. “*You declare you see me **dimly***” Maya begins this stanza used word “**dimly**” which has meaning not very brightly or clearly. Maya used word “**dimly**” as metaphor to compare about how the other see or the opinion of white people towards black people. Maya wants to depict that the existence of black people was dimly. The existence of black people is something which there but also not there by white people. Also in the second line “*Through a **glass which will not shine***”, Maya used phrase “**glass which will not shine**” which has meaning a transparent substance which not have a bright or light.

Maya used sentence “**glass which will not shine**” as a metaphor which explain that black people actually is something which has bright as like a glass. But the glass cannot shine because the slavery time. It means that, black people is something who has a characteristic to be shine but cannot because of the condition back then. Also in the third line “*Though I stand before you **boldly***”, Maya used sentence “**stand before you boldly**” which has meaning to be on your feet before you having a strong appearance. Maya used phrase “**stand before you boldly**” as a metaphor which compare about Maya or black people condition between white people. Maya wants to explain that even black people can be shine but white people was stand before them. It means that there is no way to make black people more shining than white people in that time.

*You do own to hear me **faintly**  
As a **whisper out of range**,  
While my drums beat out the message  
And the rhythms never change.  
**Equality, and I will be free.**  
**Equality, and I will be free.***

Second stanza begins with “*You do own to hear me **faintly***”. Sentence “**to hear me faintly**” which has meaning to be aware of sound which came from me that cannot be clearly heard. Maya used phrase “**to hear me faintly**” as an auditory imagery which depict that black people in that time was not has a strong sound. Maya wants the reader also hear what she hear when the slavery make black people cannot do anything. Also in the second line “*As a **whisper out of range***” Maya used phrase “**whisper out of range**” which has meaning to speak very quietly so the other cannot hear what she say. Maya also used phrase “**whisper out of range**” as an auditory imagery which has meaning that black people in that time has to say something very quietly because of white people. And Maya wants the readers also hear what she hear back then.

Also in the next line, Maya write that while she has a drum which beat out the message but the rhythms will never changes. Also Maya used a repetition with a phrase “**Equality, and I will be free**” which repeated twice in this stanza. Maya wants to emphasize about how Maya and black people want the equality. They want to be same with white people. Has the same rights, has the same work place and also the other things. They want to be free.

*You announce my ways are **wanton**,  
That I fly from man to man,  
But if I'm just a **shadow** to you,  
Could you ever understand?*

Third stanza begins with “*You announce my ways are **wanton***” word “**wanton**” which has meaning causing harm or damage deliberately and for no acceptable reason. Maya used word “**wanton**” as a metaphor which compare about the ways of black people or Maya. The way which Maya or black people walk on is a harm way or something which can make them damage. Also in the second line “*That I fly from man to man*”, Maya used phrase “**fly from man to man**” which has meaning come to every man in that area. Maya used phrase “**fly from man to man**” as a metaphor which compare the condition of black women in that time which has to come to every man. In slavery time, black women is someone who used as a breeding women. Also someone who can fulfill the desire of white people.

Maya wants to explain that black women in that time is like a women which can to be calling as a whore. But, in the next line “*But if I'm just a **shadow** to you*” Maya used a word “**shadows**” which has meaning the dark shape that something form makes on a surface. Maya used word “**shadows**” as a metaphor which compare about the condition of black women in that time. Black women in that time was like something bad, something black, something which has not value for white people.

*We have lived a **painful history**,  
We know the **shameful past**,  
But I keep on **marching forward**,  
And you keep on coming last.  
**Equality, and I will be free.**  
**Equality, and I will be free.***

Fourth stanza begins with “*We have lived a **painful history***” phrase “**painful history**” which has meaning an event in the past or something which hurt. Maya used word “**painful**” as an organic imagery which used to makes the reader also feels what Maya feels when slavery time. Everything in slavery time make them feels hurt and it is something painful. Also Maya used phrase “**painful history**” as a metaphor which compare about the condition of black people which it is a painful event in the past. Maya wants to depict that their live when slavery time is a painful event in the past.

“*We know the **shameful past***” Also Maya used phrase “**shameful past**” which has meaning something that make you feel ashamed which happen in the past. Maya used word “**shameful**” as an organic imagery, which invite the reader to feels what Maya feels in the past. That Maya was very ashamed because of the past of their history. But, in the next line “*But I keep on **marching forward***” Maya states that she was keep on “**marching forward**” which has meaning to walk stiff

regular steps like soldier toward a place or position that is in front. Maya used phrase “**marching forward**” as a metaphor which compare about the steps of black people to get a freedom was like a marching which come forward. They always steps forward to get their freedom. Also in this stanza, Maya used a repetition with phrase “**Equality, and I will be free**” which repeated twice in the end of the stanza.

Take the **blinders from your vision**,  
Take the **padding from your ears**  
And confess you've **heard me crying**,  
And admit you've **seen my tears**.

Sixth stanza begins with “*Take the **blinders from your vision***” phrase “**blinders from your vision**” which has meaning something which is excellent from the ability to see. Maya used phrase “**blinders from your vision**” as a metaphor which compare the condition of black people and white people. When black people want to be free they are take the great or excellent vision of white people so they can have equality with white people. Also in the next line “*Take the **padding from your ears***” Maya used phrase “**padding from your ears**” which has meaning something or material that placed inside your ears. Maya used phrase “**padding from your ears**” as metaphor which compare about the condition of black people which take something from white people to make them equal.

Also in the next line “*And confess you've **heard me crying***” Maya used phrase “**heard me crying**” which has meaning a sound which hear by the ear. Maya used word “**heard**” as auditory imagery which invite the reader to hear Maya’s crying because of slavery time. Maya also wants the reader to feels and hear what she want they to hear. In the next line “*And admit you've **seen my tears***”, Maya used a phrase “**seen my tears**” as a visual imagery. Maya invites the reader to see the tears of black people in slavery time.

*Hear the tempo so compelling,*  
*Hear the blood throb in my veins.*  
*Yes, my drums are **beating** nightly,*  
*And the rhythms never change.*  
***Equality, and I will be free.***  
***Equality, and I will be free.***

Seventh stanza begins with “*Hear the tempo so compelling*” phrase “**hear the tempo**” which is an auditory imagery. “*Hear the blood throb in my veins*” The next line also there is an auditory imagery with the phrase “**hear the blood**”. In the next line there is line “*Yes, my drums are **beating** nightly*” word “**beating**” which is an auditory imagery. The first line to the third line used an auditory imagery which has meaning or function to make the reader also hear what Maya hear back then. Maya invites the reader to know the condition in the slavery time by hearing. Also in the last stanza, Maya used a repetition of phrase “**Equality, and I will be free**” which repeated twice. The phrase “**Equality, and I will be free**” was repeated in every stanza in this poem. Which Maya used as an emphasizing about how black women want the equality for free. The theme of poem “Equality” is hopes of black women to be equal with white women.

Maya uses the repetition to emphasize that Maya Angelou wants to be free from racism and wants to be equal with everyone. Maya uses pronoun “I” to describe black women as herself. And she uses pronoun “You” to represent white

women. This poem has theme about struggle to get the equality. Maya wants to explain to the readers that black women wants to be equal with white women. Maya also creates a sense of equality to make a strong message for equal rights between everyone.

“Equality” is a poem which describe how black women want to be free and equal with white people. Maya used phrase “**painful history**”, “**shameful past**” which explain about how pain the history of black women against racism in United States. Maya wants to depict how hard the struggle of black women against racism in United States. According to Humm (1986, p. 22) through literary feminist criticism will be described an oppression toward woman in literary work. It means that we can see the oppression toward woman when we used literary feminist criticism when analyze the literary work. Maya also states that “**equality, and I will be free**” to describe how black women wants equality to be free. They wants to be same with white people. They wants the racism deleted in United States and they will be free.

Equality is about the different treatment which experienced by black people in their society. They experienced bad treatments from the society because of their color skin. It is also experienced by Maya as black people. She experienced inequality since when she lived with her grandmother in Stamp, Arkansas. As (Stewart, 2009) states:

“These early years in Stamps were largely happy ones. But as loved as Maya felt by Momma and Uncle Willie, she was learning that there was ugliness about the town, too. Like the rest of south in the 1930s, racial inequality was normal. Although slavery had been abolished since President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, little had changed for African-Americans in the following seventy some years”.

Maya had experienced inequality since she was child. The different treatment of the society also happened when she and Bailey go to a theater to watching a movie. They cannot enter the theater because they are black people but the ticket seller took their money. In that time there are white girls who also bought a ticket, the ticket seller gave the girl the ticket and ask them politely to watch the movie. In graduation day, White politician said that if white people school in Arkansas they will get many opportunities for their work place. The politician said that white people can be an artist, scientist, and other great work. Different with black people the opportunities of their careers is as a maids, handymen, and if they are very lucky they could be athletes (Stewart, 2009) .

Those are some unequal treatment of the society towards black people. Because of those experienced Maya wants to get the same treatment as like white people. She represent the feeling through this poems. She wants to be equal with white people, she wants black people have same right with other people. Through this poems, Maya wants to explain that black people struggling against racism because of their color skin.



## Conclusion

Maya Angelou as black women poet depict about the struggle of black women in United States through her poems. Maya Angelou employs the intrinsic elements of poetry in her poem entitles “Equality” to show black women struggle. In “Equality”, Maya depict about how black women want to be equal with white people. Maya uses auditory imagery to explain their voice which want to be equal with white people. Maya also uses metaphor to explain the condition of black women, and the reason why they want to be equal. Maya wants to represent that black women in that era has a clash with white people. White people treats black women in a bad way because they are consider black women as slave. White people treats black women in a bad way because their color skin. Maya wants to explain through her poem “Equality” that black women struggling against racism.

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