

A WOMAN'S IDENTITY AS DEPICTED IN ANGELOU'S POEM

“WOMAN WORK”

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INTISARI

Skripsi ini menganalisa puisi Maya Angelou, yaitu “Woman Work”. Puisi tersebut menyajikan topik mengenai identitas yang diekspresikan oleh Maya Angelou melalui pikiran dan perasaan. Tujuan skripsi ini adalah untuk mempelajari pencarian identitas Angelou identitas yang digambarkan di dalam puisi tersebut. Skripsi ini menggunakan pendekatan ekspresif, karena pendekatan tersebut merupakan pendekatan yang paling cocok digunakan untuk mempelajari perspektif penyair melalui karyanya. Studi pustaka digunakan untuk mendukung analisis dalam skripsi ini.

Hasil dari analisis menunjukkan bahwa posisi sipembicara ialah sebagai wanita yang memiliki peran dalam masyarakat sebagai seorang ibu, pekerja dan budak. Si pembicara mengerjakan semua pekerjaan baik di dalam rumah tangga maupun diluar. Namun, si pembicara ingin mengungkapkan proses dari perjalanannya untuk menemukan identitas yang tergambar di puisi tersebut. Pembicara mencoba membuktikan bahwa identitas ialah bagian kualitas yang terpenting yang harus dipertahankan.

Di dalam puisi ini, si pembicara menyatakan bahwa dirinya menjadi seorang wanita yang lebih percaya diri dan membanggakan. Hal tersebut merupakan hasil dari proses kedewasaan yang si pembicara ungkapkan yang membuat dirinya menyadari identitas yang ia miliki. Pembicara membuktikan proses kehidupan yang ia hadapi menunjukkan bahwa si pembicara tersebut adalah wanita yang kuat.

Kata Kunci : *Proses pendewasaan, Perempuan, Identita*

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Maya Angelou's poem “Woman Work”. This poem talks about identity which is described by Maya Angelou through her feelings and ideas. The objective of this research is to study Maya Angelou's search of identity which is depicted through the poem. This article uses an expressive approach because this approach is the most suitable for learning the poet's perspective on woman identity through her works. Library research is employed to support the analysis.

The result of the analysis implies that the speaker's position is a woman who has a role in society as a mother, worker and slave. The speaker carries out all jobs in the house and outside. However, the speaker expresses a process of her journey to find her identity which is reflected in the poem. The speaker tries to prove that identity is an important part of her qualities that must be maintained.

In this poem the speaker indicates that she becomes a woman who is more confident and proud. It is the result of her process of maturity that is expressed by her that makes her

realizes the truth of her identity. The speaker reveals the process of her life that is faced by her to display that she is a strong woman

Keywords: Process of maturity, Woman, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Maya Angelou is an African-American poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, actress, producer, filmmaker, historian, dancer, and civil rights activist. She is one of the most famous and influential voices in the United States (Angelou, 2014). Maya Angelou wrote poems about segregation and discrimination toward African-American in the United States and some of her poems talk about identity and the issue of racism.

From some of her poems, the present writer takes one of the interesting poem which talks about identity namely "Woman Work". The poem is interesting, because its content is about the awareness as an African-American woman who has inferiority complex. Angelou's early life was unsettled. She faced the insecurity and her life was full of anxiety because of her identity. Thus, the present writer is interested in conducting a research on Angelou's idea of identity.

In this research, the present writer analyzes Angelou's poem by comparing the background of the author to understand the essential information about a problem or situation which is experienced by her, and the image of an African-American woman depicted in the poem. In her poems, Angelou expresses about women during racial discrimination, segregation, and male domination. According to Wayne Shumaker (1965: 10), poetry is "the idea or mind of the poets that are flowing as a media to express a certain kinds of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts".

In her poems, Angelou depicts the daily work of a black woman in the Southern States of America 1960s-1970s (Kent, 2013). On the other side, Angelou tries to express about either woman can accept the limitation of her quality (personality/characteristic) or not and either woman can define herself and also

others (society) or not. Besides, Angelou describes how woman can accept the treatment from society or not. Therefore, the poem is a product of Angelou's experience regarding identity that is how woman tries to display the quality that she has as a part of her identity.

The objective of this research is to study Maya Angelou's search of identity which is expressed through her feelings, thoughts, desires, and perspective depicted in the poem "Woman Work". In this research, the writer uses the expressive approach which is proposed by M.H. Abrams in his book, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams claims that:

A work of art is basically the internal made external. It uses skill and imagination to produce something through operating process under the impulse of feeling. In another word, it also expresses the product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, feelings (1979: 22).

In addition to that, in *Glossary of Literary Terms* (1981), Abrams defines the expressive approach as follow:

Expressive approach defines poetry as an expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet's imagination operating in his/her perception, thoughts, and feeling, and tends to criticize the work with sincerity, or seriousness, geniuses to the poet's individual vision/mind, and it is often seen in the work for evidences of the particular temperament/experience of the author who consciously or unconsciously, has revealed herself/himself in it (Abrams, 1981:42).

The expressive approach requires the present writer to take into account the biography of the author. Biography is a reflection of its author's life and times of the characters in the work. The expressive approach is used to understand the expression of the author (Maya Angelou)

about identity. Therefore, in this research the writer also discusses about the definition and concept of identity to ease the writer in studying and looking further on Maya Angelou's identity in her poem "Woman Work".

The data sources of this research are taken from the written materials in the library. The primary data is the literary work itself. The secondary data are used to support and give clear picture of the work. This research uses analytical descriptive method to discuss Angelou's identity through her feelings, thoughts, desires, and perspective when she faced the terms of racism. Moreover some relevant books are taken into account because they contain the secondary data which support the analysis.

The focus of examination is the identity of Maya Angelou as expressed in her poem "Woman Work" and the time event that is faced by Maya Angelou, namely how Maya Angelou sees the identity as the process of maturity at the time of racism and how the identity affects her feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. In the analysis the speaker in the "Woman Work" poem is Maya Angelou.

Since this paper examines the identity aspects in Angelou's poem, the scope of the study covers Angelou's perspective in identity, how the concept of identity is formed, and Angelou's biography includes her experiences when she faced in terms of racism.

MAYA ANGELOU'S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maya Angelou is a poet whose works contain the placement and displacement as an African-American. When her parents divorced, she and her brother were sent to their grandmother in Stamp, Arkansas (Angelou, 1969: 3-4). That is the time when her feeling of suffering began as a child.

Angelou suffers humiliation because she assumes herself as an African-American woman who has inferiority complex. Furthermore, she was always sad

and felt angry. In Stamp, Arkansas, she met various social groups who dislike her because of her black skin and that was why they treated her unfairly and also disturbed her with their cruel act of violent because of the discrimination. Nevertheless, her experiences during racial discrimination, segregation, rape, and numerous other hardships changed her attitude (Angelou, 1969: 20-22).

Maya Angelou was born as Marguerite Annie Johnson on April, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was given the name Maya by her elder brother who called her "My" or "Mine" (Angelou, 1969:50). In the first volume of her autobiography, Angelou wrote about her embarrassed feeling because of her black skin, especially when the children of the colored Methodist Episcopal Church was wiggling and giggling to her. At that time, she wore the dress which the color was lavender taffeta and she knew that the dress was made of rough silk material that made her uncomfortable. Angelou saw her grandmother made pleats in the dress and made the little tuck around the waist which made Angelou has an imagination that she was like a movie star if she wore that dress. She also expressed that she wanted to be one of the girls whose skin was white and she thought that to be the white people will be accepted in the world.

However, Angelou's imagination to be white people disappeared because Angelou saw an old white lady's dress and appearance was prettier than hers so she thought she cannot be like her. Angelou had been greased with blue seal Vaseline and powdered with the Arkansas red clay. However, the age-faded color made her skin look dirty like mud, and everyone in Church was looking at her skinny legs (Angelou, 1969: 1-2). That is the things why Angelou realized that she felt displaced by people around her.

In Stamp, Arkansas the segregation was so complete that most black children did not really know what whites looked like. She only knew that they (the white supremacy) were different, their most

feared, and the most dreaded thing was including the hostility of the powerless (the black people) against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ugly against the well dressed. Thus, Angelou felt annoyed and frustrated that made her did not like the white people. She described them as the strange pale creatures and they were not considered folk (Angelou, 1969: 20-22).

In addition to that, Angelou expressed and described how the whites in Stamps were so prejudiced that an African-American could not buy vanilla ice cream excerpt on July Fourth. She admired and contempered for the white things, namely the white folks' cars and white glistening houses that made Angelou envy with all their wealth. In her autobiography, Angelou expressed that she knew God was white too, but no one could make her believe that He was prejudiced (Angelou, 1969: 40).

In addition to having black skin, Angelou realized that she did not have a high intellectual. That is why she was treated unfairly, and felt stupid. Therefore, she must be able to work so that her position is appreciated. At the age of fifteen, Angelou went to Mexico and decided to find a job in an office. However, she got a job only as a conductor on the streetcars. Yet, the community there did not accept black people on the streetcars. She actually felt disappointed, and she really wanted to break the restricting tradition.

In her autobiography, Angelou dreamed of herself dressed in a neat blue serge suit and her friendly smile for the passenger would make their own work day brighter. At the age of nineteen, she was interviewed by the Railway office and she accepted to work as a driver for Mrs. Annie Henderson (a white lady) in Stamp, Arkansas and she was hired by Railway office as the first African-American for the San Fransisco streetcars. During her work at that company, her work shifts were split so haphazardly. This is the depiction of

how society treats Angelou unfairly. That is why Angelou feels sad and disappointed because the people in that company treated her maliciously (Angelou, 1969: 224-229).

Angelou as a child is a displaced person. Her memories in Arkansas changes her attitude because the way of white people's treating her, Angelou feels humiliated. Besides that, there were times when physically she could not deny to herself that something very important was taken from her body. That is why she suffered a traumatic period which made her did not like the white people. Furthermore, because of her long pain from childhood till she became an adult, she almost forgot her identity.

MAYA ANGELOU'S PERCEPTION OF IDENTITY

Angelou considers identity as an important thing that she must hold on to. As Maya Angelou said, "I believe identity as an integral part of human existence. It creates societies and distinguishes culture. It gives individuals a sense of community and self-worth. I have an identity that no one else can own. It is a reflection of my past and the foundation of my future" ("Identity in Maya Angelou's Graduation" 1).

Besides, Angelou realizes her identity as a part of her existence. Maya Angelou also described in her essay "Graduation", an abrupt shifts in her identity which is experienced by her, that was "during her 8th grade commencement ceremony, namely, the proud of graduating class of 1940 made her painfully aware of the prejudices and stereotypes that haunted her race. She also realized the history of her behavior changed and the obstacles that was faced by her when she heard the words to the Negro National Anthem for the first time("Identity in Maya Angelou's Graduation" 1).

When Angelou at her grade-school graduation ceremony, singing was heard in Angelou's memories of her segregated Arkansas school. She sings a song of James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every

Voice and Sing" openly. For Angelou, this song became a celebration of the resistance of African-American, namely as a key to her identity that she was on top again and survived as an African-American. Angelou expressed this in her autobiography that she was proud to be a member of the beautiful African-American race (Angelou, 1969: 155-156). In order to prove her identity, Angelou thought that it was necessary to keep her self-respect which was the most important part that must be maintained. She knew that she had "dark-skinned and six feet tall". However, she would still kept the identity which she had, namely, her dignity as an African-American woman without having to hurt people surrounding her.

ANGELOU'S FEELING, THOUGHT, DESIRE, AND PERSPECTIVE IN "WOMAN WORK"

A. Woman's Position (Existence)

Woman's position was one of the aspects of identity which determined her social roles. The definition of position itself means "a location in some social structures and a role has a set expected behaviors corresponding to the location" (Faust and Wasserman in Ferligoj et al (1992: 2-3)). Woman's position is related to a location in some social structures which a woman interacts and lives together either in family or society. Social structures related to social systems which organize characteristics pattern of relationship. Thus, it is important how a woman behaves properly depending on the roles that is played by her, for example, she can play the role of son, daughter, sister, brothers, students, worker, friends, etc. Therefore, each role which is carried out by a woman must be appropriate with the expected norm of society or family. Each role is going to change a woman's behavior because she wants her behaviors to fit with the others according to the values and norm around her.

In this poem, the speaker asserts her position as a mother as well as a maid who

is responsible for household chores. In the first line of the stanza, I've got the children to tend. The speaker expressed her positions as a mother. She had a responsibility to take care of her children. The speaker said that she had children to take care of. This can also be understood that she was not only taking care of her children, but she also had a duty to take care of other's children. It can be understood that the speaker was a mother and also a maid who has to take care of her employer's children. It can be concluded that as a mother, she has to pay attention for her children and the children of her employer.

In the line thirteen of the first stanza, "Then see about the sick" The meaning of 'see about' means "to give attention or care; to turn's one attention to; take care of" (dictionary.reference.com/browse/see about). It can be understood that the speaker had the responsibility for taking care of the sick person in the hut. In the last line, "And the cotton to pick", the speaker wanted to say that she had to pick the cotton as part of her job as an African American. It can be concluded that the speaker as a maid and slave must work very hard. She was not only doing the domestic job but she also had to work on the plantation.

B. Woman's Feeling

Feeling is "power and capacity to feel and the idea or belief which is not based wholly on reason because feeling is expressed as a general opinion on her/his perception as a result of stimulus on them both external and internal" (Hornby et al, 1962: 364). This feeling can be pictured and expressed in form of happiness, worry, contentment, bitterness, love, depression, and etc. Therefore, feeling appears as a natural process of the individual (Voris, 2009).

This happens because each individual generally expresses their feelings which are related to their perceptions and thoughts about things around them. In the following excerpt, the

speaker used some connotative words to express her feelings of happiness. In the first line of the second stanza, "Shine on me, sunshine", the speaker expressed that 'sunshine' gave her happiness. The speaker also expressed that 'sunshine' was the source of shine/brightness which gave the speaker spiritual force. Furthermore, the 'sunshine' gave light in her life or in other words, 'shine and sunshine' gave cheerfulness for the speaker minds.

In line three of the second stanza, "Fall softly, dewdrops", speaker expresses that she felt the condition of being peaceful and fresh. The speaker wanted to picture that the 'dewdrops' which fell softly gave the calmness and freshness for her. This condition made her feels comfortable and pleasant. However, in this line the speaker also wanted to describe her feeling of sadness. The speaker used the word 'dewdrops' to represent her tears. It can be said that the speaker expressed her tears which fall quietly. Therefore, it can be understood that the speaker was a fragile and sensitive individual.

C. Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is a process of human being to accept all of their condition and character as their asset or quality. According to Sugiarti (2008: 11), self-acceptance has the meaning that is "they have succeeded to accept their assets and limitation as it is without feeling smugness or defensive". They accept it positively either their excess or weakness. It means that they have found the character which forms the basis of self and integrity and humility.

In the third stanza, the speaker showed her disability to accept herself and her condition. In the first line "Storm, blow me from here", the speaker used the word 'storm' to represent her uncontrolled anger. The word 'storm' can be defined as "a situation in which many people are angry, upset, etc" (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/storm). Thus, speaker expressed that she was angry and upset about her bad and sad condition.

Besides that, the word 'storm' can be defined as "violent human emotions" ([www.scribd.com/doc/Symbolism in Literature](http://www.scribd.com/doc/Symbolism%20in%20Literature)). 'Storm' supports the bad feeling which is felt by the speaker. It can be understood that the speaker could not bear that feeling.

Furthermore, the speaker cannot completely understand and accept the limitation of her own characteristics (namely her anger and sadness). Moreover, she wanted to leave the bad condition around her. Because her condition was so bad, it took "a storm" or powerful force to lift her from such misfortune.

D. A Quest For Love

A quest for love is a wish or desire of a human being to get love not only from themselves but also from others. Thus, it means a long search that is undertaken by human being to get love and affection around them (Hornby et al, 1962: 796). The speaker used the word of 'gently' and 'snowflakes' in the line "Fall gently, snowflakes to picture the peaceful/quiet condition she desires. The word 'snowflake' means "the snow fall in the form of small piece or small thin layer that is not accompanied by storm". Besides that, 'snowflake' is "a symbol of the individuality of each human being and the symbol of serenity, peace, tranquility" (www.soulspeelunker.com). The speaker pictured, 'snowflakes' to go down gently/softly from the heavens and clouds. Thus, the weather condition made the speaker feel safe and comfortable.

In line "Cover me with white", the speaker pictured 'white' to symbolize a soft color, something that was wanted by the speaker as African-American. According to J.C.Cooper (1979: 41), 'white' is associated with "both life and love and kindness". It is used as a symbol of wealth and strength of the white supremacy. Therefore, the speaker dreamt to get the affection and wanted her position equal to the white people. It also meant that the speaker wanted to get love and kindness from others. Besides, the

speaker wanted the people around her also to care about her. However, all her desires were just going to be a dream which was naturally pictured in the poem. In the following "Cold icy kisses" excerpts, the speaker described how she was not treated well by the white.

Cold icy kisses

In this line, the speaker used the image of 'kiss' to represent an affection and as a greeting. Nevertheless, in the poem, the speaker portrayed the condition of being in the contrary. In the line "Cold icy kiss", the speaker expressed that she was welcomed unfriendly by the others. She described that she cannot get an affection, love, and kindness from others.

E. Woman's Physical Appearance and Her Thoughts

According to Hornby et al (1962: 728), physical means "something which is related to the body, that is, how human being uses their whole body as their quality." This physical is affected by weight, motion, and resistance. Physical is also affected through five senses which influence human being to react to do something. There is a connection between physical and spiritual, that is, how each individual use their spiritual to express love etc. It causes the human body to react to do the action which is shaped by them (the spiritual forces). It can be understood that the existence of mind and spirit is a part of the activities of the body (physical). Therefore, each individual has a physical mind which is processed through the brain, central nervous system, and a physical body which responds to the desire of the physical mind (Cromwell, 1994).

There are several parts of "Woman Work" poem that portray the qualities of physical appearance. The first one is Sun, rain, curving sky

In this line the speaker described that she looked like "Sun, rain, curving sky". The word 'sun' represented "the conscious ego, self and its expression, personal power, pride, leadership qualities, the life force" (<http://fsymbols.com/signs/sun/>).

The speaker was paying attention about the fact that she had a capacity to think, feel, and act. It can be understood that the speaker had the quality to hold her personal power that was her feelings and self-esteem.

According to J.C.Cooper (1979: 162), 'sun' defined as "the centre of being and of intuitive knowledge". The speaker implied that it was easy for her to understand something without conscious reasoning or studying. It can be said that 'sun' could represent of the mind or intellectuality. Thus, the speaker had a good personal development. Furthermore, Hornby et al (1962: 1011) defined 'sun' as "the heavenly body from which the earth gets warmth and light". The speaker expressed that she gave warmth to the people around her. It means that the speaker was a kind person, friendly and made the others feel comfortable.

In the last stanza, the speaker expresses herself as a 'mountain'. The speaker used the word 'Mountain' to highlight big size of it. The speaker wanted to describe that like other African-American women, she was a big woman. The word 'Mountain' also could represent "someone or something representing a deity"

(symbolism.wikia.com/wiki/mountain) and "often symbolize of human pride" (www.scribd.com/doc/6472314/Symbolism-In-Literature). The speaker pictured herself as a woman of extraordinary beauty and charm. This was a typical feature of African-American woman. Furthermore, the speaker implied that she felt proud as an African-American woman.

F. Maturity

Maturity is the process of human being to develop their individuality. This process comprises the categories of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. It can be understood that each individual is going to pass through various processes by passing some of this category (Steinberg and Schwartz in Prior et al (2011: 3-4)). This

process is going to influence the life around those who undergo it. Each individual is not only taking care of themselves, but they also interact with others (society). It is important to understand how each individual has a responsibility to fulfill their social task and their role in society.

In line eight of the first stanza, "The garden to weed", the speaker expressed how she wants to throw away the bad part of human nature in her soul. The word 'garden' symbolizes "the abode of souls and the symbol of the soul and the qualities cultivated in it and of tamed and ordered nature" (J.C.Cooper, 1979: 72). In the following word, 'to weed', the speaker described that she wanted to remove (useless or troublesome plants) from the garden. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this context the speaker wanted to remove and get rid of the bad part of her soul.

In the next line, "I gotta clean up this hut", it is clear that the speaker wanted to point out her real actions. The speaker used this line to picture that she lived in this hut without a sense of comfort. The word 'clean up' means "to rid something of dirt, filth, or other impurities; to rid (a place) of undesirable people or condition" (dictionary.reverso.net/English-definition/clean up). The speaker used the word 'clean up' to picture that there is something which made her not comfortable such as filth that was something which were disgusted, rude, and offensive words. Therefore, the speaker wanted to get rid of the undesirable condition.

In the following word, 'leaf', the speaker pictured that she began to do things better. The word 'leaf' can symbolize "apparent in common metaphors such as the tree of life" (www.frostedleaves.net/leaf-symbolism-and-meanings). In other words, 'leaf' can represent of a life. The word 'leaf' according to Hornby and Parnwell (1952: 235) can be defined as "make a new and better start". It can be said that 'leaf' was

the beginning of new life for the speaker as the result of the process in her life.

G. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is one of the personal values which are valuable because it is a foundation of identity that is, how each individual can appreciate and respect to themselves. It is important how each individual approve their value and quality to the others. Self-respect/self-esteem influence human's trust to other people, their relationship, and their works as a part of their life (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/hr/hrdepts/asap/Documents/Self_esteem.pdf).

The word 'shine' in the first line, "Shine on me, sunshine", the speaker uses the word 'shine' to picture herself like shine. The word shine means "show lot of skill"

(www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/shine). Hornby et. al. (1962:919), defined 'shine' as "excel in some way". The speaker used 'sunshine' as the source of brightness. Brightness can be interpreted as "likely to succeed; intelligent"

(www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary). It can be understood that the speaker pictures 'sunshine' to indicate that she has the ability to learn things quickly. It also means that the speaker was an excellent woman because she was easy to understand and study the things around her.

In the second line of the fifth stanza, the speaker described 'stone' as her capacity to defend her position. According to J.C. Cooper (1979: 160), 'stone' symbolizes "durability, stability". The speaker pictured that she is like 'stone' which is able to stay strong. The speaker had the ability to restrain pressure. Furthermore, the speaker used this word to indicate her pride as an African-American woman who has the quality which is not easily moved and changed. It can be said that she accepted all her qualities. In addition to that, the word 'stone' according to J.C.Cooper (1979: 160) is "impossible

to destroy; seeming never to stop". The speaker identified herself with the 'stone' that could not be easily defeated or destroyed by others.

CONCLUSION

"Woman Work" is a poem which talks about Angelou's journey to look for her identity which can be seen through the speaker's position (existence), feeling, self-acceptance, quest for love, maturity, self-esteem, physical appearance and thoughts. These are some aspects of particular human quality which are expressed by Angelou in her poem. This poem is the voice of a woman's idea of identity which can be seen in every part of the stanza.

Through this poem, the speaker's position is revealed. The speaker, Maya Angelou, is a woman who has a role as a mother, domestic worker and slave. The poem displays some processes of her life which are important to find the speaker's identity. The poem shows the difficult process to find the speaker's identity. In the beginning of her journey, the speaker is not able to accept herself. That is why the speaker tries to express her anger and sadness to indicate that she cannot bear the condition which she has to face. The poem also depicts white people's wealth, position, and status that make the speaker envy them. In other words, at this point the speaker is not happy with her identity.

However, the speaker's journey brought her toward maturity. Through the poem, the speaker expressed that finally she realized her identity and she becomes confident and happy. The speaker defined herself as an African-American woman who was strong and proud of herself. Besides that, the speaker indicated that she wanted to throw away her bad quality. Thus, the speaker succeeded to find, realize and held her identity through the process. It could be said that "Woman Work" is the depiction of Maya Angelou's life, how she tried to understand and define her identity.

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