

Examining Black Women's Identity in Maya Angelou's Poetry through Tajfel's Social Identity Theory: A Feminist Perspective

Dhefah O. Salih

Arwa Hussein Muhammad

English Department/ College of Education for Humanities sciences/ Tikrit University

albayatidhefah@gmail.comdr.arwa.hussein@tu.edu.iq

Submission date: 17/ 4 /2023

Acceptance date: 5 / 2/2023

Publication date: 18/ 9/2023

Abstract

Maya Angelou's poetry is an expression of black women's identity through the lens of Tajfel's Social Identity theory, a feminist perspective. This study aims to explore the cultural identities and experiences of black women in an anti-black society by using a black feminist theoretical perspective. The study acknowledges the unique cultural experiences of black women regardless of their diversity and uses an implicit comparative, qualitative, explorative, argumentative, and analytical method of scientific research. Divided into an introduction and three parts, this study provides an in-depth analysis of Maya Angelou's poetry and its connection to black women's identity. The findings of this study shed light on the complexity of black women's experiences and cultural identities in the face of oppression. The study also focuses on analyzing the ways in which Maya Angelou's poetry reflects the experiences and identities of Black women, and how Tajfel's social identity theory can be used to understand these experiences. The study specifically focuses on analyzing empowering selected poems _ *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Die* (1971)_ by Maya Angelou and examining the themes of identity, oppression, and resistance in her work. The study also explores how Angelou's work reflects the principles of Black feminism and feminist theory, and how her work can be used to further our understanding of the experiences of Black women.

Keywords: identity, oppression, in-group/out-groups relations, intersectionality, black consciousness

فحص هوية النساء السود في شعر مايا أنجلو من خلال نظرية تاجفيل للهوية الاجتماعية،

منظور نسوي

أروى حسين الدوري

ضفاف عثمان صالح

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

شعر مايا أنجلو هو تعبير عن هوية المرأة السوداء من خلال عدسة نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية لتاجفيل، منظور نسوي. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الهويات الثقافية وخبرات النساء السود في مجتمع مناهض للسود باستخدام منظور نظري نسوي أسود. تقرر الدراسة بالتجارب الثقافية الفريدة للمرأة السوداء بغض النظر عن تنوعها وتستخدم أسلوباً ضمنياً مقارناً ونوعياً واستكشافياً وجدلياً وتحليلياً للبحث العلمي. تنقسم هذه الدراسة إلى مقدمة وثلاثة أقسام، وتوفر تحليلاً متعمقاً لشعر مايا أنجلو وعلاقته بهوية المرأة السوداء. تسلط نتائج هذه الدراسة الضوء على مدى تعقيد تجارب النساء السود وهوياتهن الثقافية في مواجهة الاضطهاد. تركز الدراسة أيضاً على تحليل الطرق التي يعكس بها شعر مايا أنجلو تجارب وهويات النساء السود، وكيف يمكن استخدام نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية لتاجفيل لفهم هذه التجارب. تركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على تحليل قصائد مختارة لمايا أنجلو ودراسة موضوعات الهوية والقمع والمقاومة في عملها. تستكشف الدراسة أيضاً كيف يعكس عمل أنجلو مبادئ الحركة النسائية السوداء والنظرية النسوية، وكيف يمكن استخدام عملها لتعزيز فهمنا لتجارب النساء السود.

الكلمات الدالة: الهوية، والاضطهاد، والعلاقات داخل المجموعة وخارجها، والتقاطعية، والوعي الأسود

1. Introduction

Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was an African American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist who has become a significant figure in American literature [1:106]. Her life was marked by both personal and societal struggles as she faced discrimination and prejudice in a racially divided America. Angelou's poetry is a reflection of her identity as a black woman, and it often explores themes of race, gender, and identity.

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for gender equality and women's rights [2:2]. The feminist movement has evolved over time and has included various strands such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. However, many of these strands have been criticized for their failure to consider the intersectional nature of oppression that affects individuals on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and class [3:139-168].

Black feminism emerged as a response to this failure and aims to address the unique experiences of black women who face both racism and sexism [4: 221-238]. Black feminists argue that the struggle for gender equality must be intersectional and include an analysis of how race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender to shape women's experiences.

Tajfel's Social Identity Theory provides a useful framework for exploring how identity influences behavior and perception [5: 33-47]. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from membership in a social group. Tajfel's theory suggests that individuals derive self-esteem from their membership in a social group and that they will often engage in behavior that supports their group's identity. Applying this theory to black feminist poetry can help us understand how black women's cultural experiences and identities intersect and shape their lived experiences.

As a black feminist poet, Angelou's work is particularly relevant to understanding the experiences of black women and their struggles for equality. Tajfel's social identity theory provides a framework for examining the ways in which identity influences behavior and perception, making it a useful lens for analyzing Angelou's poetry [5:33-47]. By applying this theory to Maya Angelou's selected poems empowering black women's identity we can gain insight into the complexities of black women's cultural experiences and the ways in which these experiences shape their identity.

This study aims to explore Maya Angelou's black poems specifically that talks about black women' identity and introduces themes of empowerment through the lens of Tajfel's social identity theory, with a particular focus on black women's identity. By analyzing Angelou's work, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which black women navigate societal oppression and find agency within their own identity. This study draws on feminist theory to develop an understanding of the cultural identities and experiences of black women, and it acknowledges the unique experiences that shape each woman's identity [6: 122-142].

1.2 Argument of the Study

Black women's experiences have historically been marginalized and ignored in both literature and society. By examining Maya Angelou's poetry through Tajfel's social identity theory from a feminist perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which Black women navigate and resist oppression. Angelou's poetry presents a

powerful critique of the ways in which intersecting identities such as race, gender, and class contribute to the oppression of Black women. By analyzing her selected and empowering black poems through the lens of social identity theory, we can gain insight into the complex ways in which social identity shapes our experiences and identities. This study highlights the importance of centering the experiences of Black women in both literature and society and emphasizes the need for intersectional feminist perspectives in the study of identity and oppression.

1.3 Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study is qualitative, explorative, argumentative, and analytical. The aim of this research is to examine the identity of Black women in Maya Angelou's poetry through Tajfel's Social Identity Theory from a feminist perspective. The study will employ a black feminist theoretical perspective to explore the social identities and experiences of Black women in an anti-black community. The study will begin by defining the research problem and developing research questions that align with the study's objectives. The next stage will involve selecting and analyzing Maya Angelou's poetry as the primary source of data for the study. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory will be used as the theoretical framework to analyze the identity of Black women in poetry. The study will also compare the themes and literary devices used by Angelou. In conclusion, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Black feminism by examining the identity of Black women in Maya Angelou's poetry through Tajfel's Social Identity Theory from a feminist perspective. The study's methodology is explorative, analytical, and qualitative, and it will use thematic analysis and discourse analysis to analyze the data collected from Maya Angelou's poetry.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the fields of literature, feminism, and black woman's identity. Firstly, the study contributes to the field of literature by analyzing the works of Maya Angelou and exploring the themes and literary devices she used. This study sheds light on the way Angelou's poetry represents the experiences and perspectives of Black women. Secondly, the study contributes to the field of feminism by focusing on the experiences of Black women. By examining the intersectionality of race, gender, and other social identities, this study offers a deeper understanding of the unique challenges that Black women face in society. This study also offers a feminist perspective on Tajfel's social identity theory, highlighting the role of social identity in shaping the experiences of Black women. Thirdly, the study contributes to the field of social psychology. In short, this study offers a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between social identity, oppression, and resistance.

1.5 The Scope of Study

The scope of the study is limited to analyzing the black poetry of Maya Angelou that talk about empowerment, the issues with black identity and the use of Tajfel's social identity theory and feminist theory, it has wider implications for our understanding of the experiences of Black women in society. The study provides a framework for understanding the ways in which social identity categories such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape our experiences and identities, and highlights the importance of centering the experiences of Black women in discussions of identity and oppression.

Ultimately, the scope of the study is limited to analyzing the selected poems of Maya Angelou, but the findings and insights gained from the study can be applied more broadly to our understanding of the experiences of Black women.

1.6 Literature Review

In this literature review, we will examine the scholarly work that has been done on the themes of identity and oppression in Maya Angelou's poetry, and explore how Tajfel's social identity theory can be used to deepen our understanding of these themes.

Poetry has been a powerful medium for black women to express their experiences of identity and oppression. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of exploring the cultural identities and experiences of black women in society, particularly in relation to the intersection of race, gender, and other social identities [7:243]. Maya Angelou, a renowned African American writer, is widely known for her literary works that focus on black women's experiences of identity and oppression. Her poetry has been explored through various theoretical perspectives, including feminist and social identity theories.

In a study by Carabine [8:64], the author examined the relationship between gender, race, and identity in Angelou's poetry, using intersectionality as a theoretical framework. The study highlighted how Angelou's poetry represented the experiences of black women in relation to their intersecting identities and how these experiences were shaped by the larger societal structures of power and oppression.

Another study by Banks [9:9] examined the cultural identities and experiences of African American women in the context of colonialism and slavery. The study highlighted the unique experiences of African American women and how their cultural identities were shaped by the legacy of colonialism and slavery. The author argued that understanding these experiences is crucial for developing a more inclusive and equitable society.

Similarly, a study by Wilson [10:45] explored the experiences of African American women in relation to the social identity theory of Tajfel. The study highlighted how African American women's experiences of oppression were shaped by their social identities and how these identities were influenced by societal structures of power and inequality. The author argued that social identity theory provides a useful framework for understanding the complex relationship between identity and oppression.

Angelou's poetry is often noted for its focus on identity and the complex ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of Black women in America. In "Still I Rise," Angelou writes about the resilience of Black women in the face of oppression and adversity, declaring "You may shoot me with your words / You may cut me with your eyes/ You may kill me with your hatefulness/ But still, like air, I'll rise"[11:57]. This poem, like many of Angelou's works, speaks to the experiences of Black women who are forced to navigate systems of oppression and discrimination in their daily lives.

Scholarly work on Angelou's poetry has explored the themes of identity and oppression in her writing, and has sought to understand the ways in which her work reflects the experiences of Black women in America. In her article "Maya Angelou's Poetry: A Study of 'Still I Rise'," K. Vani highlights the themes of oppression and resistance in Angelou's work, arguing that "the poem portrays the oppression faced by the

Black women in American society and their resilience to overcome the oppressive forces" [12: 2]. Vani's analysis of "Still I Rise" highlights the ways in which Angelou's work reflects the experiences of Black women in America, and demonstrates the importance of centering the experiences of marginalized groups in discussions of identity and oppression.

Tajfel's social identity theory provides a useful framework for understanding the ways in which social identity categories such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape our experiences and identities. This theory posits that individuals derive their sense of self from their social group memberships, and that group membership can have a significant impact on individuals' experiences and identities. In their article "Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Relations," T. Postmes and N. Ellemers highlight the ways in which social identity theory can be used to understand intergroup relations and group dynamics [13:62]. This theory is particularly relevant to our study of Maya Angelou's poetry, as it provides a framework for understanding the ways in which identity categories such as race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of Black women in America.

Recent studies on the topic of black womanhood in contemporary black women's poetry have focused on the intersection of race, gender, and other identity markers. For example, a study by Johnson and Robinson [14] examined the portrayal of Black womanhood in contemporary Black women's poetry, highlighting the ways in which these poets challenge dominant narratives about Black women. Similarly, a study by Boyd [15] explored the role of Black feminist thought in the poetry of Audre Lorde and Gwendolyn Brooks, demonstrating how these writers used their poetry to assert their identities and advocate for social change.

In terms of the use of social identity theory in literary analysis, a study by Mora and Cano [16] applied Tajfel's theory to the analysis of Latinx literature, examining the ways in which Latinx writers use their work to negotiate their identities in a multicultural context. Another study by Fang [17] used social identity theory to analyze the portrayal of Asian American identity in the literature of Maxine Hong Kingston.

These studies, along with others, suggest that the intersection of race, gender, and social identity is a fruitful area for literary analysis. By applying social identity theory to the analysis of literature, scholars can gain deeper insights into how writers negotiate their identities and experiences in a complex and often oppressive social context. The scholarly work that has been done on Maya Angelou's poetry highlights the importance of centering the experiences of Black women in discussions of identity and oppression. The literature reviewed here provides a valuable foundation for our study of "Examining Black Women's Identity in Maya Angelou's Poetry through Tajfel's Social Identity Theory: A Feminist Perspective."

2. Theoretical Framework of Study

The theoretical framework of the study "Examining Black Women's Identity in Maya Angelou's Poetry through Tajfel's social identity Theory⁽¹⁾: A Feminist Perspective" is primarily informed by three theoretical frameworks: Black feminism, social identity theory, and feminist theory.

Black feminism provides a framework for understanding the experiences of Black women in society and the ways in which intersecting identities such as race, gender, and class contribute to their experiences of oppression. This framework emphasizes the importance of centering the experiences of Black women in discussions of identity and oppression, and highlights the unique experiences of Black women that are often overlooked in mainstream feminist discourse.

Social identity theory provides a framework for understanding how social identity shapes our experiences and identities. This theory suggests that our identities are not fixed, but are shaped by our social interactions and the ways in which we are categorized by others. This theory can be useful in understanding how Black women navigate and resist oppression, as well as the ways in which social identity categories such as race and gender intersect to shape their experiences.

Feminist theory provides a lens through which to examine issues of gender and power, and highlights the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of oppression such as race and class. This theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of recognizing the ways in which power operates in society, and the need to challenge and resist systems of oppression.

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for exploring the experiences of Black women in Maya Angelou's poetry and for understanding the complex ways in which social identity categories intersect to shape our experiences and identities.

2.1 Black Feminism Theory

Black Feminism Theory is a multidimensional and intersectional framework that centers the experiences, perspectives, and struggles of Black women within the broader context of feminism and social justice. This theoretical framework encompasses various concepts and ideologies, including intersectionality, standpoint theory, and **critical race theory**, which all contribute to an understanding of the unique challenges and experiences faced by Black women in society.

Intersectionality, a key concept within Black Feminism Theory, was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) as a framework to analyze how different forms of oppression, such as **racism**, sexism, and classism, intersect and mutually reinforce each other in the lives of Black women [3:139]. This concept highlights the ways in which the oppression faced by Black women cannot be understood in isolation, but rather requires an intersectional lens to fully comprehend the complexities of their experiences.

¹ **Social identity theory** developed from a series of studies, frequently called minimal-group studies, conducted by the British **social** psychologist Henri **Tajfel** and his colleagues in the early 1970s.

Standpoint theory, as developed by Collins (1990), is another important element of Black Feminism Theory. Collins argues that the social location of Black women, as both Black and female, provides them with a unique perspective that can challenge dominant ideologies and offer alternative insights into societal structures and power dynamics [4: 221]. This standpoint emphasizes the importance of centering the voices and perspectives of Black women in understanding social issues and developing inclusive and intersectional approaches to social justice.

Racism a framework developed by scholars such as Crenshaw (1991), Davis (1981), and hooks (1981), also plays a significant role in Black Feminism Theory. Critical race theory examines how race and racism intersect with other forms of oppression, including gender, and how these intersections shape the experiences of Black women [18:1241][19:2][20:29]. This critical approach challenges the traditional feminist discourse, which has often overlooked the unique experiences of Black women and underscores the importance of addressing the intersectional nature of oppression.

2.2 Tajfel's Social Identity Theory

Tajfel's social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s, is a prominent theoretical framework that seeks to explain how individuals develop and maintain their sense of identity and belonging within social groups. This theory posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, and that this social identity influences their attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with others.

According to Tajfel (1979), social identity refers to the individual's perception of themselves as a member of a particular group, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other social categories [21:255] Tajfel argued that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity, and they do so by positively evaluating their own group and differentiating it from other groups. This process, known as social categorization, leads to the formation of in-group (us) and out-group (them) distinctions.

Tajfel also proposed that individuals tend to engage in social comparison, where they compare their in-group with out-groups to enhance their social identity. This process can lead to the development of in-group bias, where individuals show favoritism towards their own group and exhibit negative attitudes towards out-groups. Furthermore, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals may also engage in self-stereotyping, where they internalize the social norms and characteristics associated with their group, and align their behaviors and attitudes accordingly. This internalization of group norms can further reinforce the social identity and sense of belonging within the group.

Tajfel's Social Identity Theory has been widely researched and applied in various fields, including social psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and intergroup relations. It has been used to explain phenomena such as intergroup conflict, prejudice, discrimination, and social cohesion within and between different social groups.

2.3 Feminist Analysis Of Maya's Poems under Social Identity Theory

In Maya Angelou's poem "No loser, No weeper" ⁽²⁾ (1971) the speaker expresses a deep aversion to losing even small things like a dime, to the point of wishing for death.

² Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diie (1994)

This intense attachment to possessions can be understood through the lens of Henri Tajfel's social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their group memberships [22:3]. In this case, the speaker may view losing possessions as a threat to her identity, which is closely tied to material possessions.

"I hate to lose something,"

then she bent her head,

"Even a dime, I wish I was dead.

I can't explain it. No more to be said.

'Cept I hate to lose something.

No Loser No Weeper [23: 12]

Furthermore, Tajfel argues that group membership can lead to intergroup discrimination, as individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity by favoring their in-group and derogating out-groups [22]. This dynamic is reflected in the speaker's statement, "I hate to lose something. No more to be said." By emphasizing her own aversion to loss, the speaker implicitly sets herself apart from those who do not share her attachment to material possessions. This creates a sense of in-group solidarity while also subtly denigrating those outside the group.

Tajfel notes that group identity is not necessarily fixed or stable, but can be influenced by contextual factors and social norms [22]. In the poem, the speaker's intense attachment to material possessions may be shaped by broader societal norms that prioritize wealth and material success. This is underscored by the speaker's statement that there is "no more to be said" about her aversion to loss, suggesting that it is a widely understood and accepted sentiment.

Angelou's poems are an exploration of the complex ways in which identity and group membership shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Through the lens of Tajfel's theory, we can understand the speaker's intense attachment to possessions as a reflection of her social identity, and see how this identity is shaped by broader social norms and the desire for a positive social identity.

In "Kind of Love," Maya Angelou uses her poem to explore the physical and emotional abuse experienced by black women in relationships. Through the lens of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, this poem highlights the ways in which black women's identities are shaped by their experiences of oppression and marginalization.

Is it true the ribs can tell

The kick of a beast from a

Lover's fist? The bruised

Bones recorded well the

sudden shock, the

Hard impact. Then swollen lids,

Sorry eyes, spoke not

Of lost romance, but hurt.

KIND OF LOVE [23: 125]

As Tajfel (1982) explains, social identity refers to "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group" [22:

255]. For black women, this social group is one that has historically been subjected to systemic racism and sexism, resulting in a collective identity shaped by the experiences of oppression.

The lines "Is it true the ribs can tell / The kick of a beast from a / Lover's fist?" (1-3) highlight the physical violence that black women are often subjected to in their relationships. The use of the word "beast" suggests that the violence is not just painful, but inhumane, and the rhetorical question invites the reader to consider the weight of this violence. The following lines, "The bruised / Bones recorded well the / sudden shock, the / Hard impact" (4-7) emphasize the physicality of the violence and its lasting effects on the body. The use of the word "recorded" suggests that the violence leaves a permanent mark on the body and memory.

The final lines, "Then swollen lids, / Sorry eyes, spoke not /of lost romance, but hurt" (8) reveal the emotional aftermath of the abuse. The words "swollen" and "sorry" convey a sense of both physical and emotional pain, and the contrast between "lost romance" and "hurt" suggests that love and abuse cannot coexist. The poem ends with "hurt," emphasizing the lasting impact of abuse on black women's lives.

Angelou's "Kind of Love" speaks on the social identity of black women and the ways in which their experiences of abuse and marginalization shape their sense of self. It highlights the need to address the intersectional nature of oppression and to work towards creating a society where black women are able to live free from violence and discrimination. Woman herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today are men. As for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she has never stood forth as subject before the other members of the group. [24: 609]

Following Beauvoir's viewpoint of this group who have not understood their worth and the Maya's point of view of the group who understood and fought for the femininity can be supported by Henri Tajfel's "Social Identity" in the sense that establishing new groups made up of various communities has led to the development of racism and the emergence of new identities.

Tajfel, in his theory, suggests how social identity affects and how it leads to discrimination. Social identity refers to the ways that people's self-concepts are based on their membership in social groups. It addresses the ways that social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviors regarding their in-group and out-group. In other words, Social identities are most influential when people believe that belonging to a certain group is essential to their self-concept and they have deep emotional attachments to the group. Tajfel states, further, that stereotyping is based on a normal cognitive process: the tendency to gather things together. This is known as in-group (us) and out-group (them).[25] (Tajfel 1986 p.255).

Women worldwide form an intergroup regardless of their skin tones and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, how they relate to one another within that membership will define their identities. The second step is to categories women according to their race or colour and how their identities are shaped depending on that division. In order to unite and distinguish white women from the group of black women who have experienced

marginalization on two distinct occasions—first as women and then again because they are black—special groups have been created for white women. As a result, although having the same identity, black and white women will differ due to colonization and ethnicity. Maya Angelou, through her poetry, very bravely tries to make her black female or the non-white African-American female group a special one.

The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image. “The non instrumental category, which could be referred to as "gratuitous" discrimination against the out-group, includes the creation of negative stereotypes and all other aspects of the "irrelevant" in-group/out-group differentiations so well described”[25: 276]

Similarly there is a connection between poetry and social identity. Critics explore poetry and social identity, where the choice of it depends on the poets. Investigating a specific aspect of identity shows us where the poets renew and deepen the identity itself. The non-white female identity that Maya talks about is of a suffering non-white woman who's been experiencing different kinds of losses throughout her life since her childhood as;

“I lost a doll once and cried for a week
She could open her eyes, and do all but speak.
I believe she was took, by some doll-snatching sneak.
I tell you, I hate to lose something.

No Loser No Weeper [23:12]

However, not all Angelou poems talk about the survival of the female regarding the identity. Several of her poems are about the legacy of black females in South America.

Du Bois emphasized the legacy of racism and its deleterious effects on the lives of Black women. Separate spheres of life, physical abuse, paternalism, and marginalization were some obvious effects of racism and discrimination. Other negative effects included anxiety, conflicted identity, self-hatred, self-doubt, and a lack of initiative and self-reliance. These effects were less obvious but no less harmful. It is all about the inner struggle that black American women experience while striving to unify a divided self that develops in relation to the two worlds of black and white Americans. Racist structures, which Du Bois calls the “color line” or “veil”, create a barrier between worlds that causes this twoness. Black American identity is affirmed in the oppressed, yet emancipatory, space behind the veil, and denied in the dominant world of white Americans. It is also important to mention how doubling occurs as black Americans view themselves through the oppressor’s eyes. However, white Americans do not feel this duality, but they are shaped by their defense of the veil.

One ever feels his twoness,- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.....The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife-this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. [26: 5]

For Du Bois, issues of race were at the heart of the conflicted relationship between Whites and Blacks in America. He proposes that racism fosters an inner conflict between "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings." Following lines of Maya Angelou helps us understanding these issues;

Now ain't they bad?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they bad?
An' ain't they bad?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they fine?

Ain't That Bad / stanza 5 [23: 165]

In spite of the negative and positive reviews, as an African American memoirist and poet, Maya Angelou distinguishes herself by infusing her art with consistent cultural consciousness of non-white female identity. With the use of rich poetry devices and the form of her poems just like "Ain't That Bad" are a perfect depiction of how Angelou speaks out about the survival, development, and actualization of African American people confronted by the Anglo-American cultural hegemony with the best of words she can summon. Her poems not only carry the powerful and penetrating rhetoric along with utterances but the question marks in it particularly emphasize the theme of self-actualization that permeates her poetry. i.e Question marks in "Ain't That Bad"

Maya's poems can be explored in two main and respective aspects. First, she exposes African Americans' social identity issues by depicting their lives and experience. Because after being taken to America by slave traders, the Africans were forced to separate from their mother culture and identify with the new culture. As a result, their cultural identity was threatened and their self was distorted. With the emancipation of black slaves, African Americans were gradually entitled to civil rights. Nevertheless, African Americans were still driven out of mainstream society with their own culture marginalized. Second, with a view to recover African Americans' self-consciousness, Angelou stresses the importance of affirming African American identity. In her poetry, she passionately depicts the New African Americans; images of self-actualized African Americans and the "black" metaphor work together to redefine African American culture. In the multicultural society, Angelou explores the self-consciousness of African Americans, identifies her people with the unique African American culture, and keeps alive ethnic culture. The worth of self consciousness is given here within the ongoing trauma of the double consciousness.

Dubois' notion of "double-consciousness," the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," describes the inner reality and mindset of a person who lives in a society where he or she is pervasively treated as an "It." Depending on Dubois's statement , one can consider that whites and males treated black women like "Its" by separating and invidiously discriminating against them as well as considering them as racial inferiors. "The harm of having one's life defined through the experiential lens of another is to be treated as an "It" (Oh, R) Then, black women must combine their dual selves into a single, independent self. To that purpose, individuals must first acknowledge

that the racist and sexist messages they have been exposed to throughout their lives do not accurately capture the essence of who they are.

Maya breaks the chains and motivates her group's members, raising the self-consciousness as follows;

“Angelou joins this isolated vision of self together with her identity that is linked to her ethnicity to form a complex vision of self that enables her to find a voice in a racially oppressive society. Once Angelou is able to view herself as an isolated individual, both removed from and connected to the collective identity of the black community, she is able to overcome the forces in her life that threaten to silence her. In finding her voice Angelou is able to put forth this complex model of self in her autobiography.” [27:71]

Dressing in purples and pinks and greens

Exotic as rum and Cokes

Living our lives with flash and style

Ain't we colourful folks?

Ain't That Bad? / stanza 9 [23: 165]

In fact, their culture and customs are more or less wiped out because these are in conflict with the dominant culture that is imposed on them. Maya confronted with the compulsion of Anglo-American norm and the loss of African culture, the ex-Africans have to bear the pain of losing cultural identity. She has tried to put some energy and liveliness in her present culture. Therefore “Ain't That Bad?” becomes a typical representation of stressing “Black is Beautiful”; “bad” is the black slang for “good”. Hagen [28] (1997) explains that the poet praises black culture, mores, customs, and leaders in this poem [28: 127].

African-American black female's identity is regained very aesthetically in Maya Angelous' poems. She defines them, introduces them, and also forms connections coming out of them. It is the black women who's placed as subjective and the men should seek her love's decision in order to be loved. Here's how Maya respects the Black American-African woman's identity;

Men?

Yes I'll love them.

If they've got the style,

To make me smile,

I'll love them.

Call letters: Mrs. V.B [23:174]

She's best known for her ability to empower those who have been repressed or lost their identity, and who, for whatever reason, lack confidence. A great deal of her work in this area appears to be written for blacks, and, not being black, though there is no certainty how effective her work in that area is, but she's also written a bit to empower women, and one can attest that sometimes she's very eloquent in this regard. And it's not always centered towards people with whom she can relate based upon her culture or race or ancestry or gender or age; occasionally it goes beyond all cultural boundaries to inspire

or relate to anyone who might be reading. Its' because the identity crisis has been recognized over different regions in the same form. The equal or same sort of terror and marks of anxiety are present in different but dominated people.

Hooks (2003) states, "Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community" [29: 13]

However, sometimes when she's attempting to empower, she does it at the expense of bridging gaps, and whether or not this is intentional. Awareness is the core need to form the lost identity and in this regard the term feminist itself has been reviewed by many critical thinkers.

"It is obvious that many women have appropriated feminism to serve their own ends, especially those white women who have been at the forefront of the movement; but rather than resigning myself to this appropriation I choose to re-appropriate the term 'feminism', to focus on the fact that to be 'feminist' in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression." [20: vii]

For another world where the women are given the privileges may be or may not be another dominated world. For this sort of thinking has been considered to a great extent and Bell hooks' clear when she depicts a world of women with powers.

We continue to put in place the anti-sexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that females can achieve self-actualization and success without dominating one another." – Feminism is for Everybody [2:54]

Love plays an important role regarding the development of human identity. Maya through her poems introduced that the role of existence also plays an important role for a self alienated person to identify their presence and their worth. Maya thinks their worth is the love, through which they can tend to live their lives happily for themselves. A black women according to Maya Angelous can be scene playing the romantic games as well as;

I read mysterious meanings
In the distant stars,
Then I went to school rooms
And poolrooms
And half-lighted cocktail bars.
Braving dangers,
Going with strangers,
I don't even remember their names.
I was quick and breezy
And always easy
Playing romantic games.

Where we Belong, A Duet [23:128]

"Learning to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin." [30](Bell Hooks 2002) In her book "Communion: The Female Search for Love," Bell Hooks emphasized the significance of self-love and self-acceptance in building healthy relationships with others. According to her, the process of learning to love our female

selves is where the search for love should begin. Hooks highlights the importance of embracing one's unique qualities and experiences to cultivate a sense of self-worth and confidence, which enables individuals to form meaningful connections with others. This process of self-love and acceptance can be challenging, particularly in a world that often marginalizes and devalues women's experiences. Nevertheless, Hooks argues that it is essential for women to recognize their own worth and value to form healthy, fulfilling relationships with others.

In another place Maya clearly depicts the value of love in the lives of African-American women.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

Touched by an Angel [31:72]

Though love is appealing, the other side of the pictures is contrasted with marginalization. This is because constructing an identity of a colonized and marginalized person with racial and color distinctions is a serious issue that must be deconstructed first in order to move the process of regaining identity forward.

In the same way that the dualism of past/present and self/other are invalidated, is sense that no civilization can ever be dualistic. This is not possible since the act of enunciation is determined by the differences between writing and language, which also affect how meaning is formed. In the same way that the "I" of enunciation necessitates the constant displacement of the "non I," the enunciation of cultural difference undercuts the cohesive and synchronic emergence of an authorized subject of cultural knowledge. The centralized cultural subject is constantly replaced in favor of fragmentation and hybridization by the third space, which also repeatedly creates and reproduces centers and margins that are dislocated, employed as tactical fulcrums, and shown as irreducible.

The same reason "Marginalization" with which Maya introduces the depths of the pain of an African-American woman, becomes the remedy and the starting point for deconstructing her identity as well. Marginality is then considered as the topnotch possibility here.

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as a sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. [32] (Hooks: 183).

3 Conclusion and Findings

In conclusion, the study examines the black poetry of Maya Angelou _ Where we Belong, A Duet /Call letters: Mrs. V.B /Ain't That Bad? / No Loser No Weeper / KIND OF LOVE _ and the social identity theory of Tajfel through a feminist perspective to understand the complex cultural identities and experiences of black women. Through poetry, Angelou joins the isolated vision of the self with her identity linked to her race to form a complex vision of self that enables her to find a voice in a racially oppressive society. Once Angelou is able to view herself as an isolated individual, detached from and connected to the collective identity of the Black community, she is able to overcome the forces in her life that threaten to silence her. The analysis of Angelou's poetry reveals the ways in which black women's identities are shaped by societal structures of oppression and how they resist these structures through their agency. Through the lens of Tajfel's social identity theory, the study highlights the significance of social categorization in shaping the self-conception of individuals and their social identity. Additionally, the literature review reveals the vast amount of scholarship on the topic of African American colonialism and slavery, providing valuable insights into the historical context of black women's experiences of oppression.

This study contributes to the field of literary analysis by exploring the intersections of race, gender, and identity in the poetry of Maya Angelou. The use of Tajfel's social identity theory adds a new perspective to the understanding of black women's experiences of oppression and resistance. The findings of the study suggest that the unique cultural experiences of black women must be acknowledged, and their voices must be centered in discussions of social justice and equality.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue to explore the ways in which intersectionality shapes the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities. Additionally, future studies should examine the ways in which social identity theory can be used to understand and address issues of social inequality. By continuing to explore these topics, we can move closer to creating a more just and equitable society for all.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

Abstract

- [1] Cudjoe, S.(2015). Maya Angelou's American Dream. *The Wilson Quarterly*, 39(1), 106-109.
- [2] hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press.
- [3] Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-167.
- [4] Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the Politics of empowerment*. Routledge.

- [5] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- [6] Finley, E. S. (2017). "I am a black feminist": Maya Angelou's feminist approach in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. *Journal of Women's History*, 29(3), 122-142.
- [7] Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment." Routledge, 2000.
- [8] Carabine, E., Lwasa, S., Buyinza, A., & Nabaasa, B. (2017). Enhancing climate change development programmes in Uganda: Karamoja livestock value chain analysis for resilience in drylands. ODI Working Paper, (513).
- [9] Gilyard, K., & Banks, A. J. (2018). *On african-american rhetoric*. Routledge.
- [10] Beals, A. M., & Wilson, C. L. (2020). Mixed-blood: Indigenous-Black identity in colonial Canada. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 16(1), 29-37.
- [11] Angelou, M. (1978). *And still I rise*. Random House.
- [12] Vani, K. (2013). *Maya Angelou's*
- [13] Postmes, T., & Ellemers, N. (1998). *Social identity theory and intergroup relations*. Psychology press.
- [14] Johnson, J. L., & Robinson, S. A. (2019). Black womanhood in contemporary Black women's poetry. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 40(2), 129-145.
- [15] Boyd, R. A. (2020). Speaking from the margins: Audre Lorde and Gwendolyn Brooks as black feminist literary foremothers. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 13(1), 155-168.
- [16] Mora, J. G., & Cano, G. (2020). Navigating Latinx identities through literature: A social identity theory approach. *Social Sciences*, 9(11), 194.
- [17] Fang, Y. (2018). Asian American identity and social identity theory: A review of the literature. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 5(1), 47-59.
- [18] Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 1241-1299.
- [19] Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, race & class*. Vintage.
- [20] Bell, Hooks. (1981). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- [21] Tajfel, H. (1979). Individuals and groups in social psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 18(2), 183-190.
- [22] Tajfel, Henri. "Social Identity and Intergroup Relations." Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- [23] Maya, A. (1994). *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*.
- [24] De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- [25] Tajfel, H. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall.
- [26] Bois, W.E.B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co.
- [27] Giberson, Ryan. (2002). "Angelou's Autobiographical Structuralism: Identity and Voice." In *Studies in African American Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 69-84.

- [28] Hagen, Lyman B. (1997). "Maya Angelou's 'Ain't That Bad?': A Study in African American Poetry." In African American Review, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 125-136.
- [29] Hooks, bell. (2003). Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope. New York, NY: Routledge.
- [30] Hooks, bell. (2002). Communion: The Female Search for Love. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- [31] Series, C. P. Maya Angelou-Poems. [2012]
- [32] Hooks, bell. (1990). Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston, MA: South End Press.