LA BELLING DIFFERENT SKIN COLOR AS CULTURAL DETERMINISM REPRESENTED IN MAYA ANGELOU’S POEM THE CALLING OF NAMES

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to describe representation of labelling different color skin as a construction of American towards color skin people in America reflected on one of Maya Angelou’s poems The Calling of Names (1994). This study will use structural-semiotic approach, especially applying Riffaterre’s semiotics of poetry (1984). This semiotic theory will operate on heuristic and hermeneutic readings for uncovering description of representation of how color skin people is perceived and, of course, labelled as different people by white people. This labelling performance for color skin people results, first, the acts of calling particular name of people which raises racism on different skin colour, second, racism, prejudice, discrimination which leads to bias and disparity creating inequity and inequality towards Black or Coloured people in American society and long continuum of labelling different skin colour as a result of cultural determinism in American Society.

Keywords: representation, labelling, racism, continuum, cultural determinism, Maya Angelou

Introduction
Rothenberg (2001) claimed that race and gender differences have been portrayed as unbridgeable and immutable. Men and women have been portrayed as polar opposites with innately different abilities and capacities. Race difference has been portrayed similarly. African-American writers speak about strategy to fight against the belief in racial hierarchies that relegate them to second class status (Walker in Braxton, 1999). The Calling of Names becomes one poem to be interested to investigate since it speaks about protesting against cultural determinism through labelling towards colored skin people.

Labelling or stereotyping is the process of how people judging others. It becomes a matter of semiotic reading relating its representation of American society. Since the object of this study is a poem, I elaborate theoretical framework about poetry. Poetry is the language of imagination, and imagination is the key to fulfillment. Human’s experience of life is largely determined by the ways in which they imagine their world (Polonsky, 1998). It is a created artifact, a structure that develops from the human imagination, and that is expressed rhythmically in words (Roberts and Jacobs, 2003). Poetry is made for improving human as a person, increasing human’s chances for success in the world, or even making human more literate (Polonsky, 1998).

Poetry seems peculiarly inseparable from the concept of text. A poem is a closed entity; it cannot be differentiate poetic discourse from literary language (Riffaterre, 1978). This
formal and semantic unity, which includes all the indices of indirection, is called significance. From the standpoint of meaning, the text is a string of successive information units. From the standpoint of significance, the text is one semantic unit (Riffaterre, 1978).

Any sign within that text will, therefore, be relevant to its poetic quality, which expresses or reflects a continuing modification of the mimesis. Only unity, thus, can be discerned behind the multiplicity of representations. The relevant sign need not be repeated. It suffices that it is perceived as a variant in a paradigm, a variation on an invariant. In either case, the perception of the sign follows from its ungrammaticality (Riffaterre, 1978). The ungrammaticalities spotted at the mimetic level are eventually integrated into another system. As the reader perceives what they have in common, as s/he becomes aware that this common trait forms them into a paradigm, and that this paradigm alters the meaning of the poem, the new function of the ungrammaticalities changes their nature, and now they signify as components of a different network of relationships. Everything related to this integration of signs from the mimesis level into the higher level of significance is a manifestation of semiosis (Riffaterre, 1978).

The semiotic process really takes place in the reader’s mind, and it results from a second reading. Two levels or stages of reading are (1) heuristic reading and (2) retroactive or hermeneutic reading. Heuristic reading is done by the reader when the reader’s input is his/her linguistic competence, which includes an assumption that language is referential, and at this stage, words do indeed seem to relate first of all to things. Hermeneutic reading is the process when the reader remembers what he has just read and modifies his/her understanding of it in the light of what s/he is now decoding. S/he is in effect performing a structural decoding as s/he moves through the text s/he comes to recognize, by dint of comparison or because s/he is now able to put them together, that successive and differing statements, first noticed as mere ungrammaticalities, are in fact equivalent, for they now appear as variants of the same structural matrix (Riffaterre, 1978).

Significance is the reader’s praxis of the transformation, a realization that it is akin to playing, to acting out the liturgy of a ritual, the experience of a circuitous sequence, a way of speaking that keeps revolving around a key word or matrix reduced to a marker. It is a hierarchy of representations imposed upon the reader, despite his personal preferences, by the greater or lesser expansion of the matrix’s components, an orientation imposed upon the reader despite his linguistic habits, a bouncing from reference to reference the keeps on pushing the meaning over to a text not present in the linearity, to a paragram or hypogram, a dead landscape that refers to a live character, a desert traveled through that represents the traveler rather than itself, an oasis that is the monument of a negated or non-existent future. The significance is shaped like a doughnut, the hole being either the matrix of the hypogram or the hypogram as matrix (Riffaterre, 1978).

Based on the theoretical framework above, the problem proposed is how Angelou spoke about labelling different color skin as cultural determinism represented in her poem The Calling of Names. The aim of this study is to describe labelling different color skin as cultural determinism represented in Maya Angelou’s poem The Calling of Names.

Methodology
This study was designed as qualitative-descriptive research applying Semiotic approach. The material object of this study is the study of Maya Angelou’s poem entitled The Calling of Names. Its formal object is
the study of this poem concerning on the heuristic reading and hermeneutic reading of this poem. The data analysis was taken by some procedures: (1) data was signified by dictionary meaning; (2) data was interpreted by hermeneutic reading with finding out the matrix, model, and hypogram of this poem (See Riffaterre, 1978; Bressler, 1999).

Finding and Discussion
This part elaborates heuristic and hermeneutic reading of Maya Angelou’s poem The Calling of Names. The poem of Maya is as follows:

**The Calling of Names**
He went to being called a colored man after answering to “hey, nigger.”
Now that’s a big jump, anyway you figger.
Hey, Baby, watch my smoke.
From colored man to Negro,
With the N in caps,
was like saying Japanese instead of saying Japs.
I mean, during the war.
The next big step
was a change for true,
From Negro in caps
to being a Jew.
Now, Sing, Yiddish Mama.
Light, Yellow, Brown
and Dark-brown skin,
were okay colors to describe him then.
He was a Bouquet of Roses.
He changed his seasons
like an almanac.
Now you’ll get hurt
if you don’t call him “Black.”
Nigguh, I ain’t playin’ this time.

**Heuristic Reading of the Calling of Names**
This reading will focus on the literal meaning of word by word and line by line in every stanza. First stanza describes A man which has been mentioned to be expressed to give or address him a particular name that is an adult male human being which has the natural color of a person’s skin which shows which race they belong to at time that is later than an event being called colored man as reaction of a very polite way as attracting someone’s attention using extremely offensive word for a black person. At present time, it refers to something which has very sudden moment without considering other things the man expects attracting to call somebody special to look at the act of smoking cigarette moving (see Hornby, 1995).

Second stanza speaks about Showing difference between an adult male human being which has the natural color of a person’s skin which shows which race they belong to and a black man including letter N in a limited amount similar to express a thought, opinion, fact of a person from (with offensive word) that subject of speaking intends from beginning to the end of armed fighting between two or more groups (see Hornby, 1995).

Third Stanza delivers meaning about After a large stage in progress, the act of becoming different intended to be given to something exists showing difference between a black man in a limited amount to become member of people whose religion is Judaism, so at present to make musical sounds with the voice of a Jewish mother song (see Hornby, 1995).

Fourth stanza shows The natural outer layer that covers a person lit the natural light, which a color like a lemon, a color like chocolate or soil, and a color like chocolate with no light is a way of agreeing of the natural color of a person’s skin which shows which race they belong to for saying someone like a man. Thus, he is like a group of a garden plant with thorns on its stems and pleasant flowers fastened together attractively arranged for formal occasion (see Hornby, 1995).
Fifth stanza tells about A man exchanges one thing to another thing the period of the year when annually happens similar to a book published every year that contains fact or information about particular subject or activity which at present time people will be in pain if they do not consider the man to be a black person. Thus, it is an extremely offensive word for black person that the poet is not performing a particular character in particular period of time for which something has been happening (see Hornby, 1995).

Angelou through this poem, literally, describes signs, first, calling of colored and black people offensively by stating name’s calling which illuminates and emphasizes on original skin color. Second, she makes analogy of calling names by making abbreviation with capital letter. Third, she uses another analogy of calling Jewish people. However, the poem ends with re-using offensive words for calling particular person of particular skin color. In another word, this Angelou explains the acts of calling particular name of people which raises racism on different skin color.

Hermeneutic Reading of the Calling of Names

After Angelou’s poem is read heuristically, it indicates oppositional signs. First opposition is about colored man and black man. This poem gives illumination of calling of certain ethnic groups with offensive words to subordinate words. This leads to stereotyping of different skin color. Differentiation starts when people are called through their skin color. An example of this differentiation is when African people are called as nigger, nigguh, and negro. This opposition indicates subordination by calling people from their different skin color.

Second opposition is opposition of calling names from particular countries in complete ways and in abbreviation. This opposition places different position from particular skin color. It happened since there was World War II that American calls Japanese people as Japs as their underestimate ridicules.

Third opposition is opposition between various skin color and similar color combination. It signifies various colors which are not as beautiful as similar colors, intentionally being tied, being put together to appear harmonization.

Those opposition leads to process of subordination towards different skin color. This subordination is a foundation to construct stereotyping for making label to particular skin color people. It intentionally leads to form inequality. Dominant groups impede the development of subordinates and block their freedom of expression and action (see Miller in Rothenberg, 2001). Existence of dominant groups, in this case White people, appears to make calling of different skin color people by using underestimate and offensive words. It automatically becomes the process of making label to those people. As a result, it is the matrix of this Angelou’s poem. Angelou wants to open people, particularly White people, that they have made label to different skin color people. Gans (Rothenberg, 2001) wrote that the label by calling names of different skin color becomes a racial codeword to subtly hide anti-black or anti-colored people which submerges and represses racial and class antagonism to exist.

Those labelling process also becomes the way Angelou sees the imposition of White people towards different skin colored people. Anglou’s awareness and subsequent sense of displacement experienced by her is Angelou’s point to departure (Manora, 2005). It will become Angelou’s poem hypogram when her poem has similar idea with Tizard and Phoenix (2002) which wrote ‘Yellow belly’, ‘half-breed’, ‘breed’ and ‘redskin’ were the commonest taunts thrown at the
mixed-parentage young people. Like those with two black parents, they were also called ‘nigger’, ‘jungle bunny’, ‘Zulu’, ‘blacky’, ‘wog’ and ‘gollywog’. They were told that they had been in the oven or toaster too long, or that they were an overdone chicken. The influence of her poem signifies behavioral and psychological problem in Angelou’s idea and life. She feels that the calling names for different skin color as a manifestation of underestimating Black or mixed parentage as a continuous labelling and stereotyping of them.

Besides Angelou’s psychological problem in her idea, the labelling leads to bias and disparities in her idea had by White people. Bias and disparities still exist and result in inequity of services, opportunities, and practices in American society. It is a result of prejudice and discrimination toward differences in race, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, and disability (see Chin, 2004).

In another word, Angelou’s idea of writing this poem is a manifestation of racism, prejudice, discrimination which leads to bias and disparity. They create inequity and inequality towards Black or Colored people in American society. Those are, thus, also long continuum of labelling different skin color as a result of cultural determinism in American Society.

**Conclusion**
This analysis above crystalizes on two subject matters: first, The Calling of Names speaks, literally, the acts of calling particular name of people which raises racism on different skin color, second, Angelou’s idea of writing this poem is a manifestation of racism, prejudice, discrimination which leads to bias and disparity. They create inequity and inequality towards Black or Colored people in American society. Those are, thus, also long continuum of labelling different skin color as a result of cultural determinism in American Society.

**References**


