

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Black art movement is a period in which the artistic and literary development among Black Americans in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is the most important influence in the African American literature which there were many African American writings appeared after that. The Black Arts Movement also embraced the artistic articulation of the Black Power Movement, give a means for authors to show their experience in political and social discrimination that African Americans continued to experience (Beaulieu 788). Those experiences are considered as the inspiration of Black to create a work. The Black Arts Movement engaged in cultural nation building by sponsoring poetry readings, founding community theatres, creating literary magazines, and setting up small presses (Wallenfeldt 60).

During the Black Arts Movement period, there is Black women movement or also known as Black Feminist Movement which the community of Black women writers expanded and solidified at that time (Beaulieu 350). It was developed in response to the experience of Black women in Black liberation movements, Black women often found themselves facing sexual oppression within Black liberation movements and racial oppression within the women's movement (66). It means the cause of Black feminist emergence as effort to meet the need of Black women who felt they were being racially and sexually oppressed. One of their efforts is addressing the Black women experiences through their work. Beaulieu was stated in his *Writing African American Women: An Encyclopedia of Literature by and about Women of Color*:

In The 1970s saw an increase in the number of Black women writers whose works were being published. This was a significant step for the Black feminist movement, as it provided a place for their concerns to be addressed. Black women used their poetry, stories, and novels to address the issues that had historically been impacting upon them (69).

One of the well known Black feminist at that time is Maya Angelou. Marguerite Annie Johnson or known as Maya Angelou (1928-2014) is an African American writer, singer, actress and civil rights activist. She is known for her several volumes of autobiography that tell about her life as Black woman including economic, racial and sexual oppression experience. The most famous of her autobiography is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) about Maya's story life from childhood to adulthood (Cox 10). The book covers her life from childhood in Stamps, Arkansas and describes the way she was raised in segregated rural Arkansas, until the birth of her son at the age of 17 (Bloom 10). According to Beaulieu *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* established a new genre of expression as autobiographical fiction became a medium for women of color to bring attention to how their personal lives have been impacted by larger social and political systems (70). Therefore, this work being the first autobiography was created by an African American woman.

Maya Angelou was a Black woman who lived in America where White people were the majority group. At the time, the Blacks have experienced of discrimination, insulting and oppression because of their race (Rahmawati 2). From her experiences, she expresses her thought and feeling through her works such as in her poems. She started to write when she was at nine years old after she experienced a raping, murder,

and a trial. Because of those experiences, she decided to live in silent for several years and starts to write poem (Cox 18).

Most of Maya's poems are about her experiences in life (Bloom 127), including about her experience in discrimination, segregation of her environment as well as about her love. *Still I Rise*, *Equality*, *Woman Work* and *Touched by An Angel* are some of her famous poems. In *Woman Work*, the poem tells about being a mother and doing all of her chores, while in her *Equality*, it is about her wish to have equality with White people. Then, in her *Still I Rise*, it is about the discrimination and oppression experiences and in her *Touched by An Angel* is Maya's thought about love in her life. Based on the content of those poems, all of the events on those poems also have experienced by Maya Angelou.

As mentioned before about the autobiography of Maya *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) which is about her early years as African American woman, it means that her autobiography explains her experiences life in her childhood until she has a child. Some of her experiences have been written there, such as she has experienced being a mother and has a child in her sixteen years old without any husband, experienced of discrimination in her environment such as when her graduation ceremony in her elementary school, she did not call by her teacher forward as one of the best students but the teacher only called the White students (Cox 19). She also ever experienced about love which she had fallen in love for many times, one of her boyfriends is Curly, 31 years old man (25).

Based on the explanation above can be concluded that there is relationship between Maya's *Woman Work*, *Equality*, *Still I Rise* and *Touched by An Angel* with her life. In order to find the connection of Maya Angelou's poems and her life, this research

will use biographical criticism as an approach to find it and how her life was reflected in her poem through understanding in Maya Angelou's biography.

According to Wellek and Warren, the most obvious cause of a work of art is its creator, the author and hence an explanation in terms of the personality and the life of the writer has been one of the oldest and best established methods of literary study (67). It means this theory is one of the oldest theories to analyze a literary work and it stresses on the creativity of the author in creating his or her work based on the creating history which the work has relationship with the author's life. In this case, biography of the author will sometimes be reflected in his or her work. The biography itself presents the subject's life story (in this case, the subject here means the author of a work), various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of experience, and may include an analysis of the subject's personality (Kopong 1). In short, biographical approach is an approach used to understand and comprehend a literary work by studying deeper about the life of the author. In using this theory, we must understand the biography of the author first and then seek the connection between the contents of the work and the author.

Regarding with those issues above, there is an interesting thing of Maya's creativity in her works; that is how she shows her experiences through her works so that her personal life reflected in her works. In this reason, this study will focus to analyze on the some selected poems of Maya Angelou, they are *Still I Rise*, *Equality*, *Woman Work* and *Touched by An Angel* using biographical criticism. This study only chooses the four poems of Maya Angelou because those poems including of the most famous of Maya's poem and all of them are about being a Black woman.

1.2 Statement of Problem

1.5 Scope and Limitation

In order to make the discussion in this study more focus on the problem, the writer decides the scope and limitation. The scope of this study is to analyze the relationship between Maya Angelou's experience life and her poems. While the limitation of this study is using the four selected poems of Maya Angelou, those are *Still I Rise, Equality, Woman Work* and *Touched by An Angel*.

1.6 Method of Study

This study is library research which this study gathering the data and information from some books, journal, theses and websites with enclosed the quotation as the evidence to support the analysis. This study uses qualitative analysis which the result of this research will be presented in writing form and give interpretation to the result descriptively. The aim of using this method is to identify and describe how Maya's life reflected in her poem. There are some steps in analyzing the data:

1. Reading Maya Angelou's poems and her biography repeatedly to get more understand about the contents of them.
2. The next step, analyzing the poems and classifying the theme of each poem.
3. After determine the theme, then seeking the connection with the events of the author's life that have relation with the theme using biographical approach.
4. The last step is finding out and interpreting the correlation between the author's life and her poems.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

In this research, there are some key terms which significant to the reader to make easy in understanding this research. Those are:

- a. **Biography** : a relatively full account of a particular person's life, involving The attempt to set forth character, temperament and milieu (society), as well as the subject's activities and experiences (Abrams 22). In other word, biography presents about human life story which include of the various aspects of their life, including intimate details of experience, and may include an analysis of the subject's personality.
- b. **African American** : one of the largest of the many ethnic groups in the United States, they are mainly of African ancestry (www.britannica.com). They also known as Afro-American, colored and Black American.
- c. **Racial Segregation**: the practice of restricting people to certain circumscribed areas of residence or to separate insititutions (www.britannica.com).
- d. **Discrimination** : unfair treatment of one particular person or group of people because of the person's sex, religion, nationality, race (racism), etc (www.britannica.com).