



Liberal Feminisme in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to find out the liberal feminism depicted in Angelou's selected poems and the role of women in Angelou's Selected poems. This research was a qualitative design. The data was taken from selected poems, namely; Equality (1990), Phenomenal Women (1995), Memories (1978), and Women's Work (1969). The results showed that liberal feminism described in Maya Angelou's poem was, first, the poetry "Equality (1990)" was known as women who represented their race/society group fighting for the right to equality and against racism. Second, the poetry "Phenomenal Woman (1995)" was known women who were themselves because the women in this poem were black women who struggled against the assimilation of white dominant cultural aspects of racism and gender discrimination. Third, the poem "Remembrance (1978)" was known through women who got the loss. Lastly, the poem "Woman Work (1969)" was known through the existence of women who showed superiority over themselves, displayed their skills, and were responsible for their own volition. The role of women in Maya Angelou's selected poems in the poems "Equality (1990)" and "Phenomenal Woman (1995)" was a role for women who worked to make money. Meanwhile, in the poem "Remembrance (1978)" and "Woman Work", it was known that there was the role of women who carried out activities in the house. This research concluded that Maya Angelou's selected poems described liberal feminism, in which the poems showed the existence of women who struggled, defended equality of rights, fought racism, fought discrimination and showed their strengths through the efforts of the attitudes and willingness of those who dare to voice it, especially women, then the role of women in society.

Keywords:

liberal feminism, role women, poem.

1. Introduction

People are witnessing various technological advances, the environment, and various aspects of life. People begin to have an open-minded style when they experience things, and their minds develop due to the developments around them. This causes people to become critical of events that occur in their environment. According to Humm (1990), feminism includes both doctrines of equal rights for women (the organized movement to achieve women's rights) and an ideology of social transformation that aims to create a world for women beyond simple social equality. Davies (1996) added that feminism refers to a collection of movements and philosophies that aim to define, create, and obtain equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights for people. One of the movements and philosophies that influence how people act, think, and live is the feminist movement, and liberal feminism is part of the feminist movement.

Liberal feminism is a feminist movement that focuses on individual freedom. In liberal feminism, freedom for women focuses on equality between men and women. From the perspective of liberal feminism, men and women should have equal opportunities, such as equal opportunities in education, economics, politics, society, and society. Liberal feminism emphasizes the rights of women to get the freedom of life. It is known that before feminism began, women were considered the second gender. Women are pushed back and subjected to male domination due to gender differences in knowledge. The main discriminatory principles control women's movements and activities, mostly benefiting men. Male domination over women is no longer just a matter of physical oppression; it has also become a social problem. This shows that gender inequality exists and does not affect many areas of life, including economic, social, political, and other social fields. For this reason, Mary Wollstonecraft, who was the first liberal feminist to have the most famous work, namely *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), triggered the emergence of the liberal feminism movement in the United States, which was seen as a major step forward for the feminist movement. It has developed in America to include feminism as part of civil rights and sexual liberation (Armando, 2005).

As an example of liberal feminism, look at the Kessler's (2015) opinion, where the average full-time working woman earns only 77 cents for every \$1 an American man earns. Because men with more power work more efficiently, women are paid less than men. Then, in Pakistan, a 20-year-old woman named Farzana was stoned by her family for refusing to marry a man of her family's choice. Instead, Farzana chose to marry Iqbal, a man of her own choice. Farzana is one of the few stories about women abused just for being a woman. According to the publication Pakistan, Houreld & Raja (2014), women in Pakistan are maimed and killed for wearing jeans, peeking in windows, singing, staring out windows, and giving birth to baby girls.

Gender inequality manifests itself in the marginalization of women in various parts of family life, work, and society, as well as various forms of physical and psychological violence against women based on the assumption that women are weak. Women's roles are domesticated in housework because they are diligent, nurturing, and so on. Liberal Feminists use this gender imbalance to determine why women get this treatment.

Based on the above statement, the liberal feminist movement argues that the freedom to choose the life of their own choice and gender equality where men and women do not have the same opportunity to live and they do not have individual autonomy are very minimal in society. The reason is that there is still discrimination and racism within the community. A reflection of equality between men and women (with such conditions) can be reflected in literary works. Literary works are written works that contain imagination and are not based on facts (Abrams, 1981). One of the famous literary works is Maya Angelou's poetry, namely "Equality (1990), Phenomenal Woman (1995), Remembrance (1978), and Woman Work (1969)".

According to Riru et al. (2021), poetry is a written art that uses language as the quality of its beauty. Poetry is a literary work rich in imagination that expresses deep perceptions and feelings/emotions (Shumaker in Permatasari, 2016), and Maya Angelou is a memoir writer, American actress, and poet whose autobiography explores themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression was notorious until the

end of her life. Maya Angelou focuses her literary work on women's issues. She reimagined how to write about the lives and identities of women in a male-dominated civilization using autobiography.

Gender inequality manifests itself in women's marginalization in various parts of family life, employment, and society, as well as numerous forms of physical and psychological violence against women based on the notion that women are weak. Women are domesticated in household labour because they are diligent, nurturing, and so on. Feminists use this gender imbalance to determine why women are treated this way.

Maya Angelou focused her literary work on women's issues. She reimagined how to write about the lives and identities of women in a male-dominated civilization using autobiography. Many feminist poets, including Maya Angelou, became interested in spreading their feminist ideas through her poems, such as Maya Angelou's four selected poems that the researcher researched, namely "Equality (1990), Phenomenal Woman (1995), Remembrance (1978), and Woman Work (1969), which are poems that have something in common where in this poem Maya Angelou underlines the importance of understanding the essence of women's struggles in fighting a racist and discriminatory society by criticizing society's injustices against women and children, showing how poetry embodies the idea of freedom while criticizing modern cultural ideas about beauty, and these poems also emphasize sexuality and show the power of women over men. Maya Angelou intends her poetry to inspire female readers and give them pride in who they are. This was the main reason the researcher conducted a research on liberal feminism depicted in Angelou's selected poems, the role of women in Angelou's selected poems, and at the same time, the reasons for the background of this research.

2. Methods

The researcher used a qualitative method appropriate for the research goals. Bogdan & Biklen in Angraini et al. (2022) mentioned that qualitative methods are research that observes the characteristics of the research subject, described in descriptive words, both in written and spoken form. It was used to better understand social life by studying specific populations or locations. The data for this research was gathered from Angelou's selected poems. The researcher chose four poems from Angelou's collection, namely Equality (1990), Phenomenal Woman (1995), Remembrance (1978), and Woman Work (1969). The poem as source data were taken from several books by Maya Angelou, Thesis, Internet, and other reliable data sources. After collecting all the data, the data was ready for analysis. The data analysis was used to determine what the researcher did with the data. In analyzing the data, the descriptive analysis method was used with several procedures, namely, a structural approach and a feminist approach.

3. Results

3.1 The Poem of "Equality (1990)"

Equality is a poem by Maya Angelou, published in 1990. This poem has a theme that indicates finding racism and discrimination so that there is freedom for

all black races (African-Americans), especially women. The poem "Equality" has communication between two races; the Black Race and the White Race. The background of the poem "Equality", written by Maya Angelou, is about the different treatment experienced by black people in society (white people). They experience bad treatment from society because of the colour of their skin.

1) *Liberal Feminism depicted in the poem of "Equality (1990)"*

The poem of Equality (1990) interprets the pain and shame of the history of the black race, especially women, against racism and discrimination in the United States. This poem describes how black women want to be free and equal with white people. Maya also stated, "Equality and I will be Free", to describe how black women want Equality to be free. They want to be the same as white people. They want racism and discrimination to be abolished in the United States. As seen in the poem of "Equality (1990)", it reveals that black people, especially women (African Americans), want society (white people) to treat them equally. Angelou epitomizes the idea of an African-American who is confident and aware of his equality. The poet shows that he, as a representative of the black race, can boldly describe themselves as an individual capable of fighting for the rights of freedom and equality.

Then no matter how hard they try, the rhythm (atmosphere) will remain the same, and people will continue to see it differently for no reason. This line means that no matter how strong the "drums" make loud noises to demand freedom and equality for black people, white people still look at them with one eye; they will always be racist against black people. In data three, four, and five, which have the same meaning, "Equality, and I will be Free", this line is repeated throughout the poem six times. This line demands the rights of black people, especially black women who fight the inequality and racism they have tolerated. The two repeated lines emphasizing equality and freedom mean the need for a revolution against racism and discrimination so that everyone is treated equally without any distinction.

Finally, it is explained that Angelou kept calling his 'drums' as a sign that he was 'beating the message' of equality for all. This shows that he has an unshakable spirit of conviction against racism; she continues spreading equality and freedom to all people.

2) *The Role of Woman in the Poem of "Equality (1990)".*

The role of the woman in the poem "Equality (1990)" is the role of the public, the role of all human events/activities that are usually carried out outside the home and aim to generate income. From the data in the poem of "Equality (1990)", Maya wants to explain that black women at that time were like women who could be called sex workers, where these women worked as enslaved people who served several different men. Angelou tries to convey that she represents black women feeling discrimination and getting bad attitudes, whereas African-Americans are not treated the same in this poem.

Then, many black people, especially black women, are persecuted, hated, and received injustice from a painful history and a shameful past, so black people,

especially black women, including Maya Angelou, crave equality and be free from history and bitter and embarrassing past (Gerbe, 2004).

3.2 The Poetry of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)"

"Phenomenal Woman" was published in 1995 and describes a woman who has self-confidence despite being from the black race. She doesn't care what people think about the image of black women in society. Maya Angelou's words represent black women talking about her beauty and strong personality that is attractive to men, even though she lacks "certain qualities associated with traditional notions of beauty" (Constantakis & Kelly, 2012). The background of this poem is to tell about In the era of slavery, African-American women could not think of themselves as beautiful women because of their physical appearance, such as "dark skin, wide nose, full lips, and curly hair" (Collins, 2000).

1) Liberal Feminism depicted in the poem of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)"

In the poem "Women Phenomenal (1995)", Angelou reveals the struggle of women to show that they have advantages as phenomenal women. The "women" in this poem want other women to believe they can do better. They have inner beauty, good attitude, self-confidence, and other abilities that might make them superior and more extraordinary than men. In this poem, there is feminism, namely liberal feminism. The poem explains the ability of women to face the harshness of life and simple lifestyle conditions to avoid assimilation of aspects of the dominant white culture, which considers them ugly and dirty, to end oppression and discrimination.

From data in the poem of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)", Maya Angelou explained that, even though her appearance is not like ordinary women who want to look extraordinary, she is still confident and does not feel ashamed of her body. Because it shows her confidence in appearing as a black woman. Data 8, 9, 10 & 11 have the same meaning, which is similar and tells about her burning self-confidence, strong feelings of independence, and the ability to choose what she wants to achieve as a woman. In this poem, Maya Angelou believes in herself by identifying herself as a woman with an image of a real woman that other women cannot imitate. She believes in attractiveness beyond physical appearance. Something innate in her makes her appreciate the gift of sensual style so that she can show how proud she is of herself for having a beautiful attraction to the opposite sex (men).

2) The Role of woman in the poem of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)"

From the analysis of the poem of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)", the background of this poem explains that Maya Angelou, the poet of this poem, was a sex worker at that time. This is proven. In data 19 in this poem, Maya Angelou Explains that black women who work as prostitutes to earn a living become phenomenal women among other women. In addition, data 20 shows that the woman in this poem works as a sex worker, not in her home. Based on the data and discussion, the woman in this poem has a confident, even arrogant character. She walked in front of all the men with her figure, which she had carefully crafted, and

she walked eagerly to be recognized by everyone, especially the men around her. This poem includes the role of women in the public sector because the women in the poem work outside the home even though they work as sex workers.

3.3 The Poem of "Remembrance (1978)"

The poem "Remembrance" was created by Maya Angelou and published in 1978 in the collection of poetry "And I Still a Rise". The theme of this poem is memory, love, trust, and bad treatment. The background of this poem is based on a real experience that is bad but subtly (manipulative), which is not only directly felt by other women, but she also feels it. Where it starts with experiencing bad treatment by his mother's boyfriend when he was a teenager, she didn't want anyone to know about his embarrassing past linked to her bad memories. However, this poem explains that the bad memories (subtle sexual harassment) she experienced are things she will never forget. Maya Angelou's poem Remembrance (1978) aims to remind all women to be careful when dealing with men. Angelou believes that men use various techniques to lure women into fulfilling their worldly needs.

1) Liberal Feminism depicted in the poem of "Remembrance (1978)"

Feminism will always deal with the bad treatment of women that often occurs in society. In this case, ill-treatment is usually related to the oppression of women and rape or other forms of sexual harassment. James (2000) argues, "Feminism is based on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged compared to men and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustifiable". Finally, women have been unjustly held back from achieving full equality for most of human history in many societies worldwide. They even have to feel the bad treatment done by men to them. And that's what Maya Angelou has ever experienced in her life.

This poem describes liberal feminism, where women or Maya Angelou herself, suffer losses and do not get justice for the treatment of men. According to Tong (2008), liberal philosophy emphasizes that women and men are created equal, have the same rights, and should have the same opportunities. Kindness has to take a backseat to rights. Everyone can do what they want if it doesn't harm anyone else. This poem also describes dangerous behaviour in the form of sexuality that leads to rape where when a man (in the poem) does not waste the opportunity to execute his "deed" that has manipulated the attention of an innocent woman (in the poem) that the woman believes that the man this has started to show her fake love and care, while a man's only goal is to have sex with her. He wants to get her virginity. And data 12 shows how a woman is exposed to immoral acts by men who only play with the woman. In lines 12, "Love lingers between", and 13, "My breasts, then, only," describe a woman fascinated by the affection and attention she receives from a man. The woman then repays the man's actions by offering and enjoying her body freely. However, she did not realize she had been raped and imprisoned by that man's trickery.

2) *The role of woman in the poem of "Remembrance (1978)"*

The data in the poem "Remembrance (1978)" describes how the man in the poem takes advantage of the opportunity to abuse women or do subtle things secretly. Then data 22 shows how women in this poem are made helpless in the name of love and men's care, where she gives her body to men (in poetry) as a way to return her love and attention according to lines 11-13 "only the scent of your love lingers." between my breasts, then, just". I am greedy to consume your presence,' these lines 14-15 imply that women like the treatment they receive from men. However, she doesn't understand that she has been exploited and trapped by the man's trickery until she realizes what happened to her.

3.4 The Poems of "Woman Work (1969)"

In 1969, the poem *Woman Work*, one of Angelou's Maya poetry works, was published. This poem raises the theme of feminism and self-identity. The female voice in this poem is the voice of Maya Angelou, who tells her daily life like other black women whose life is dedicated only to caring for others (Constantakis & Kelly, 2012). Thus, this poem conveys Angelou's personal feelings towards a period that witnessed many important events, such as "the end of Vietnam" and the exciting momentum of the feminist movement" (Constantakis & Kelly, 2012). The background of this poem is that there are women, especially black women, who are having a hard time living in South America, where women, especially black women, are only made enslaved people, even in their own homes.

1) *Liberal Feminism depicted in the poem of "Woman Work (1969)"*

In data in the poem of "*Woman Work (1969)*", Maya Angelou brilliantly reveals the workload that must be faced by women. She had to work like an ox, from dawn to dusk, on a set schedule with no time to relax. "Being a mother means being there even when it hurts," she wrote in an online article entitled *The Role of Mothers in Children's Lives*. Because, surprisingly, you can never stop being a mother." As a result, as mothers and housewives, the woman in this poem works like a machine all day long, both inside and outside the home. according to the poem lines 1-7 "*I've got the children to tend, The clothes to mend, The floor to mop, The food to shop, Then the chicken to fry, The baby to dry, I got company to feed*". which means that She has to take care of the children, go shopping, cook, clean the house, iron clothes, work outside the home to increase income, and so on.

The woman in the poem looks at the "storm" and hopes it will take her away from her house, which is full of work to be done. She also hopes "the wind takes her to the sky". Her previous statement showed that she was planning to take a short break before returning to her routine. Then, the woman in this poem has done her job at night. Before going to bed, she saw snowflakes slowly falling outside the house. She thought the icy white color would give her energy back. She then rested and slept, knowing the following days would be full of work. As a result, she must be brave to face all the obstacles and responsibilities of life. She's not the type to give up easily.

2) *The role of woman in the poem of "Woman Work (1969)"*

The data in the poem of "Woman Work (1969)" shows that a woman has a position that requires her to do all household chores, including cleaning, cooking, washing, taking care of children, and others. The value of housework for caring for the house, raising children, and guiding children cannot be measured in money. She has a lot of work to do as a housewife. The woman in this poem has to look after her children, fix their clothes, sweep the floor, and go shopping. Then she has to fry the chickens, take care of the babies, feed the animals, weed the garden, tidy the clothes, dress the children, cut the sticks, and clean the whole house to make it clean, beautiful, and attractive, that's all they do, where women's activities are only at home.

4. Discussion

Liberal Feminism is depicted in the poem of "Equality (1990)." It is explained that there is opposition to racism and discrimination, wants everyone to be treated equally, and continues to spread the message until it is resolved. Equality in this poem, perhaps not only for African Americans but also for all types of equality, such as gender, race, height, weight, and age. The repetition of the line "Equality, and I will be free" also shows equality. The role of women in the poem "Equality (1990)" can be concluded that Maya Angelou explained that the black community, especially black women, experienced events in the form of painful and embarrassing history in which they experienced injustice and even were sexually harassed. They work as enslaved people and are forced to work as sex workers. This statement proves the public's role in women's role in the poem "Equality (1990)". From the analysis above, the woman's role in the poem "Equality (1990)" is the role of the public, the role of all human events/activities that are usually carried out outside the home and aim to generate income.

Liberal feminism depicted in the poem of "Phenomenal Woman (1995)" has a conclusion that this poem shows that the African-American woman in the poem "Phenomenal Woman" does not consider herself a beautiful woman, but she is proud to be herself, and she is proud to be black ancestry. She tries to show that beauty is not just about the physical. Confidence in being yourself and accepting what you are is more important. Angelou has repeatedly said she is a special being and is proud of it. From this statement, liberal feminism is depicted through Maya Angelou's actions and decisions on her belief that she is proud of herself as a black woman who avoids assimilating aspects of white dominant culture over racism and discrimination. The woman in this poem has a confident, even arrogant character. She walked in front of all the men with her figure, which she had carefully crafted, and she walked eagerly to be recognized by everyone, especially the men around her. This poem includes the role of women in the public sector because the women in the poem work outside the home even though they work as sex workers.

Liberal feminism depicted in the poem "Remembrance (1978)" is the injustice that has been received by women in this poem. Women in this poem are mentally or spiritually harmed. Soetjipto & Trimayuni (2013) argue that gender equality and justice must be achieved without any conditions that differentiate between men and women. In this poem, it is clear that Maya Angelou gives a message so that readers,

especially women, should not be too fascinated by feelings and be more careful about what men do. Because men, both past and present, almost always prioritize their profit and selfishness. The role of women in the poem "Remembrance (1978)" is a domestic role where events or activities carried out by women and men in this poem are in a room. Where the proof is in data 21, lines 5-6, "On occasion, you press on top of me, shine, spout."

Liberal feminism depicted in the poem of "Woman Work (1969)" is that the woman in this poem is a woman who has the ability for her courage to face all obstacles and is responsible for her own life, which is driven by action and her own decisions. The role of women in the poem "Woman Work (1969)" is a domestic role, where the events and activities of women in this poem are carried out at home, namely carrying out household activities. According to Cerrato & Cifre (2018), the domestic role is a gender task related to the domestic area of the house. Some people compare the household area to a good kitchen and a mattress. This is related to cooking, preparing food, washing clothes, and raising children.

5. Conclusion

Maya Angelou's selected poems are related to feminism. After analyzing her four poems, this study can be concluded that liberal feminism depicted in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems is seen from the ability of women to act and decisions made by women themselves, where women in this poem have self-confidence and are aware of the spirit of wanting to demand justice, wanting equality, longing for freedom, fighting racism and discrimination based on certain racial/community groups and gender differences. The role of women in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems is a public role and a domestic role, where the role of women in these four poems chosen by Maya Angelou is to carry out outdoor events or activities aimed at earning income, such as the role of women who work as sex workers in the poems "Equality (1990)", and "Phenomenal Woman (1995)" and the room is not intended to generate income but to carry out household activities. Domestic roles are gendered tasks related to the domestic area of the home. Some people compare the household area to a well-kitchen and mattresses, such as the role of women in the poems "Remembrance (1978)" and "Woman Work (1969)".

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