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**AN ANALYSIS OF FEMINISM IN MAYA ANGELOU'S POEMS BY USING  
HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES**

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes discrimination toward black woman which appears in Maya Angelou's poems. In this case, the researcher chose three poems of Maya Angelou. Those are "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird". In order to discover them, the study was conducted by using feminism theory and also historical and biographical approaches. It focuses on words, lines, and stanzas of the poems. The research was conducted with the following statement of problems: (1) What is the dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou's poems? (2) What are the reasons of using feminism perspective in Maya Angelou's poems? (3) How are the images of black woman described in Maya Angelou's poems?. The research design of this study is descriptive qualitative method because the researcher does not use statistical numerical but is requires descriptive analysis of the object. The research is conducted by descriptive qualitative because the result of the data is word, sentence, and language. After collecting the data from the poems, the researcher put them into some groups which relates to the problem focuses. The researcher analyzes every datum by using content analysis. Based on the research questions mentioned above, the result of the study are as follows. First, the researcher concludes that the dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou's poem is Radical Feminism because discrimination toward black women are related to the bad history of black people. Second, the reasons of using feminism perspective by the poet is the image of her bad life experiences. The last result is the image of black woman in Maya Angelou's poems which shows the discrimination toward woman in her era. The result of the study can be used as a reference in the research literature itself in educational institution and so on. It also expected to be useful in several ways. This study gives significance for the researcher to understand and provide more knowledge about feminism. The study may be expected to give significance to the future researcher who conduct studies about literature focusing on feminism or on poems or in using biographical and historical approaches.

**Key Words:** Feminism, black woman, historical and biographical approaches.

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## Introduction

Literature is a literary work which there is a beautiful art that comes from human life. Literary work is the result of the expression of feelings and describes imagination of the author's. Jones (1968: 1), states that literature is simply another way we can experience the world around us through our imagination. It means that literary works closely related to life. Life journey is often recorded in literature. However, literature is not only a portrait of life. Literary works are often an expression of a person's feeling which reflect the reality of life. As a literary work, literature has a beauty that encourages a person to read and enjoy. There are some literary works in this world, such as : novel, poem, and drama.

Poetry is one of the literary work which has characteristic. The characteristic which make it different from another literary work. Poetry is written in different ways. Poetry is the result of human creativity that is manifested through the arrangement words which have meaning. Poetry is also composed of diverse elements variety. These elements include a form of words, shapes, patterns of rhyme, rhythm, ideas, or issues gained significance in the life of the poet and life to be conveyed to the reader, listener, through techniques and specific aspects. The language which uses in poetry is also different. The poem reader can not understand the meaning of the poem easily because every person will have different understanding about one poem. According to Wayne Shumaker (1965: 10), poetry is "the idea or mind of the poets are flowing as a media to express a certain kinds of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts".

For poets, a poem is a media to express their feelings based on the situation, condition, and imagination. All poets have their own characteristic in written. Some of them usually use nature as the object of their poem. Some of them also use love, affection, and friendship as the object. On the other hand, there are some poets who use their life experience in their written. Whether it is good or bad experience in their life. The poets sometimes use poem as the social critic in the society in that era. In this study, the researcher chooses poetry to be analyzed because poetry is a

literary work full of imagination which is very entertains.

Nowadays, there are so many poems which is written by using descrimination and segregation as the subject because of the condition which appears in the society. Beside, there are some women poets who write poems by using feminism touches. For example, the image of woman in the society, the position of women amongs the men, and the descriminations which occur in the women's life. Some people try to describe that theme by using feminism perspective. Based on Bhasin and Khan (1995:5), Feminism is an awareness of women who are under man's domination in many aspects and set of action to resist it. Feminism is a theory which explain about woman emancipation in some aspect such as politic, economy, and another social aspect where women are not allowed to take part. In many people prespective, this is because of the stereotype of men and women in the sex site.

Maya Angelou is an African-American poet, novelist, educator, dramatist, actress, producer, filmmaker, historian, dancer, and civil rights activist. She is one of the most famous and influencial voices in the United States. Maya Angelou wrote poems about segregation and discrimination toward African-American in the United States and some of her poems talk about identity and the issue of racism. Maya Angelou is one of woman writers who uses feminism approach in her work. In her poems, Angelou expresses about the woman during racial discrimination, segregation, and male domination. That is why the reseacher chooses Maya Angelou's works to be analyzed.

As the title, In this study the researcher explains the feminism which explain by Maya Angelou by using the historical and biographical approaches related to the history of discrimination in that era, especially for black women and also the poet's life. The reason of the researcher for choosing these Maya Angelou's works because these poems are about women discrimination and those three poems are the phenomenal poems of Maya Angelou. In this thesis, the researcher wants

to analyze them from a woman viewpoint and focus this research on feminism literary criticism.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Definition of Feminism**

Bell Hook (2000 : 8) in *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* give a simple definition of feminism: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression". Feminism is a complex notion that has vast differences in meaning and connotation for people spanning generations, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, social classes, nationality, and myriad identities. Ratna (2005:588) in *Sastra dan Cultural Studies Representasi Fiksi dan Fakta* states that "Feminism is the concept generalization of women. A critical of social theory which have the purpose is to obtain women right". According to Ritzer (2004:448) says that "Feminism is kind of critical social theory which included in social context, political, economic, and history that is facing by injustice people". According to Humm (1990:74) in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* states that feminism incorporates both doctrines of equal rights of women (the organized movement to attain women's right) and an ideology of social transformation which aims to create a world for women beyond simple social equality. She also states that "Certain terms in contemporary theory, such as work, family, patriarchy, and sexuality, are used to sum up the basis experiences of women". Davies (1996:62) in *Gender Theories in Education* states that "Feminism is women's assertion of their equality with men and their demand for access to those roles and positions of public life traditionally regarded as the province of men". In this study, the writer presents feminism as a way to obtain equal rights as a woman.

### **The History of Feminism**

The history of feminism should be grooved from the history of western feminism because feminism as the reaction of women discrimination comes from there. According to Krollokke and Sorensen (2005 : 24), the history of feminism is divided into three wave. Each wave deal with deifferent aspects of the same feminist issues.

The first wave comprised women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, promoting women's right to vote. First wave feminism was a period of activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In the United Kingdom and United States, it focused on the promotion of equal contract, marriage, parenting, and poperty right for women. By the end of the nineteenth century, the activists focused primarily on gaining political power, particulaly the right of women's suffrage, though some feminists were active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic reight as well.

Rosenstand (2006:575) states that "the first wave generally refers to the feminist movement in Europe and the United States from its early beginning the seventeenth century to the accomplishment of its most urgent goal, the right for women to right". Philcer and Whelehan (2004:53) say that "In Britain, the origins of first wave feminism lay in the widespread social and economic changes of industrialisation, one aspect of which was the extension of constitutional rights to wider sections of the (male) population. He also states that "This early feminism was concerned with the education and employment rights of women and with improving the legal rights of married women (Philcer and Whelehan, 2004:53). There are four genres in this period. They are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism.

The second wave was associated with the ideas and actions of the women's liberation movement beginning in 1960s. The second wave compaigned for legal and social equality for women. The term *second-wave feminism* refers mostly to the radical feminism of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Inspired by the tactics of the more activist parts of liberal feminism, radical second-wave feminists also used performance (e.g., underground or guerilla theater) to shed light on what was now termed "women's oppression."

While the third wave in the early 1990. This wave brings four genre, they are postmodern feminism, multicultural feminism, postcolonial feminism, and ecofeminism. The third wave is a

continuation of and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s. Lipstick feminism, girlie feminism, riot grrl feminism, cybergrrl feminism, transfeminism, or just girl feminism. Born with the privileges that first- and second-wave feminists fought for, thirdwave feminists generally see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents: “The Third Wave is buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 83).

Third-wave feminists are motivated by the need to develop a feminist theory and politics that honor contradictory experiences and deconstruct categorical thinking. Third wave feminism is also inspired by and bound to a generation of the new global world order characterized by the fall of communism, new threats of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, and the dual risks and promises of new info- and biotechnologies. A common American term for third-wave feminism is “grrl feminism,” and in Europe it is known as “new feminism.”

This “new” feminism is characterized by local, national, and transnational activism, in areas such as violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation, and the overall “pornofication” of the media.

### **The Types of Feminism**

There are many perspectives about feminism. Rosemarie Tong on her book *Feminism Thought A More Comprehensive Introduction* third edition, there are some types of feminism, those are Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Care-Focused Feminism, Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism, Ecofeminism, and Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism. In this thesis the researcher presents four types of feminism, they are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, and Marxist and Socialist feminism:

#### **a. Liberal Feminism**

The liberal feminism rose in the seventeenth centuries. Liberalism gives intensity for the equality rights in occupation or education. The feminist believe that democracy is naturally

adaptable to equality for the women and men. Every human being is created with the same rights and every woman must have the same opportunity in developing their future.

Liberal feminism is trying to make women and men equal, corporate, independent and free to decide their own future. Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism and feminist theory, which focuses on women’s ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal feminism looks at the personal interactions between men and women as the starting ground from which to introduce gender-equity into society. According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to come about without altering the structure of society. Issues important to liberal feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, “equal pay for equal work,” affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women.

Liberal feminists argue that women have the same capability an capacity as men for moral reasoning and agency, but that patriarchy, particularly the sexist patterning of the division of labor, has historically denied women the opportunity to express and practice this reasoning. Women have been isolated to the private sphere of the household and, thus, left without a voice in the public sphere.

#### **b. Marxist and Socialist Feminism**

Marxist feminism is growing up in the second wave during late 1960s and 1970s, in Britain especially. Marxist feminist analysis as the identification of the structural elements that determine the quality and nature of our experience. Guerin (1979:202) states that “Marxist feminists attack the prevailing capitalistic system of the West, which they view as sexually as well as economically exploitative. Marxist feminist thus combine study of class with that of gender”.

Marxist feminists argue that the path to gender equality is led by the destruction of our



capitalist society. This perspective speaks out to issues such as unequal pay, obstacles to achieving tenure or excelling in certain fields, and the frequent lack of family-friendly policies at many of the institutions and national organizations of higher education. Gender - Inequality theories recognize that women's location in, and experience of, social situation are not only different but also unequal to men's.

Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminists see *women as being held down* as a result of their unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere. Prostitution, domestic work, childcare, and marriage are all seen as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system which devalues women and the substantial work that they do. Socialist feminists focus their energies on broad change that affects society as a whole, and not just on an individual basis. They see the need to work alongside not just men, but all other groups, as they see the oppression of women as a part of a larger pattern that affects everyone involved in the capitalist system.

c. Radical feminism

This type of feminism spreads out in the United States since 1960s-1970s. They consider that both women and men must be educated to see the tradition as one of oppression and be encouraged to create a new one based on a female perspective.

Radical Feminism is a branch of feminism that views women's oppression (which radical feminists refer to as "patriarchy") as a *basic system of power* upon which human relationships in society are arranged. It seeks to challenge this arrangement by rejecting standard gender roles and male oppression.

Radical feminists argue that being a woman is a positive thing in and of itself, but that is not acknowledged in patriarchal societies where women are oppressed. They identify physical violence as being at the base of patriarchy, but they think that patriarchy can be defeated if women recognize their own value and strength, establish a sisterhood of trust with other women, confront

oppression critically, and form female separatist networks in the private and public spheres.

Radical feminism is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, and no longer serves to solely define the term, "feminism". This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change rather revolutionary proportions.

Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behavior and culturally-determined behavior in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

**Maya Angelou as American Feminist Poet (Autobiography of Maya Angelou on *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou)**

Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928 as Marguerite Ann Johnson. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri to Bailey Johnson, Sr., a doorman and Vivian Baxter Johnson, a card dealer in a local gambling parlor. Marguerite's brother Bailey was a year older. He gave Marguerite her nickname when he couldn't say her name and called her 'my sister' or 'my-a-sister'. The nickname was shortened to Maya. Although Bailey called Marguerite 'Maya', she went by the name Marguerite Johnson or Rita until adulthood. In 1949 she changed her name to Maya Angelou for professional and stage recognition.

When Marguerite was three years old, and her brother Bailey four, their parents divorced. The children were sent alone on a train to Stamps, Arkansas to live with their paternal grandmother. The grandmother, Annie Henderson, owned a general store and did well financially during the depression. Ms. Henderson had the nurture and means to care for the children but the small Arkansas town also exposed them to the

segregated south and related injustices. Marguerite lived with her brother, grandmother, and a disabled uncle in the back of the general store and often helped Ms. Henderson in the store. The children lived in Arkansas for four years before their father returned them to the care of their mother in St. Louis. They returned to the care of their grandmother later in their childhood, only to return to their mother once again when Marguerite had finished grammar school. By then, Ms. Johnson lived in San Francisco. Marguerite and Bailey enjoyed the presence of a generous stepfather when they moved to San Francisco. Bailey was a consistent presence in her childhood and Marguerite has remained close to her brother throughout her life.

During the time that Marguerite and Bailey lived with their mother in St. Louis, Marguerite was raped by her mother's boyfriend. She told Bailey, who then told their maternal grandmother about the incident. The man acknowledged his guilt but he was murdered by maternal uncles after he spent only one day in jail. At the time of the murder, Marguerite became mute and she did not speak for about five years. Soon after the murder is when she and Bailey returned to the care of their grandmother for a period of additional time.

Marguerite was impacted by Mrs. Flowers, a woman of means and influence in the black community of Stamps. Mrs. Flowers knew that Marguerite was bright and a voracious reader. She encouraged Marguerite to read every book in the library and convinced her that words were not nearly as meaningful if they were not spoken. Mrs. Flowers helped Marguerite overcome her muteness and once again be able to use her voice.

Marguerite attended a predominantly white high school in San Francisco. She was a troubled teen and experienced several crises related to her own identity. She convinced a local boy to have sex with her and she became pregnant. Her son, Clyde, was born just days after she graduated from high school. Marguerite worked as the first African American streetcar conductor in San Francisco during her high school years.

As a young mother she experienced life in poverty and a world of illicit activity. She experienced multiple traumas during her early years as a poor, single mother, including the kidnapping of her son by a babysitter.

As a young adult, Angelou worked as a dancer, singer and actress, and she began to write songs and poetry. She traveled a European tour with the opera *Porgy and Bess*. Angelou learned new languages as she traveled and she became fluent in English, Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic, and West African Fanti. In the 1950's Angelou joined the Harlem Writer's Guild and began to work on her writing with earnest. She wrote prose, poetry, screenplays, songs, short stories and more. She also became involved in the civil rights movement during that time and wrote and produced a show to benefit the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She later became the Northern Coordinator of that organization for several years. Angelou and her son spent a number of years living in Cairo, Egypt and Ghana. During that time she worked as a newspaper editor and teacher of dance and drama. During her time overseas Angelou became familiar with the home and culture of her African heritage. She met Malcolm X and became even more closely aligned to the civil rights activities. She returned to the United States and had hoped to work closely with Malcolm X but he was assassinated as she was to begin her work with him. She was also involved with the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. It was not until after his death, and at the urging of friends, that she wrote her first autobiography at the age of 42.

Angelou has written six autobiographical volumes. They have alternated with books of poetry and essays. She has also written several children's books. All of the autobiographical works have been produced as adult looking through the eyes of the child and young woman who was evolving. The work is a glimpse into the experiences of a black, female individual who has had to find an identity through the experiences lived.

From the explanation of Maya Angelou biography, we can conclude in short that Maya

Angelou is black American actresses, director, playwright, autobiographer, and poet. She is the first woman poet who describes her feeling and thought by writing the poems. She writes her poems by using the feminism approach according to her experience.

### **Historical and Biographical Approaches**

According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995 : 1790-1818), Historical Approach “seeks to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural, and intellectual context that produced it—a context that necessarily includes the artist’s biography and milieu.” A key goal for historical critics is to understand the effect of a literary work upon its original readers.

Historical Approach is one of the most basic approach used in the analysis of poetry is referred to as the historical method of literary criticism. This means that the critic interprets the poem within the history, or contemporary frame of reference, behind the poem. The historical approach insists that a poem’s meaning can only be understood within a historical setting. That is, those who use this approach do not allow for the possibility of making a completely interpretative reading a poem.

In other words, if one takes the historical approach one must be willing to do so to the basic exclusion of all other approaches. This approach assigns cardinal importance to what the contemporary readers would have thought, the response becomes the basic clue to what the poet must have meant. While those using the historical approach admit that a poem can mean something different to the readers in the different era, they still maintain that the original meaning is the only true one, and that it can be discovered only through historical analysis.

Kennedy and Gioia (1995 : 1790-1818), also state about the biographical approach that :

Biographical approach “begins with the simple but central insight that literature is written by actual people and that understanding an author’s life can help readers more thoroughly comprehend the work.”

Hence, it often affords a practical method by which readers can

better understand a text. However, a biographical critic must be careful not to take the biographical facts of a writer’s life too far in criticizing the works of that writer: the biographical critic “focuses on explicating the literary work by using the insight provided by knowledge of the author’s life.

The biographical approach as the method of analyze the poem by examining the poem in relation to what is known about the poet’s life. If we want to use this approach we have to know the poet’s life or the poet’s biography. There are two major advantages in using the biography approach of the author in the analysis, namely to illuminate the elements within a work, words, allusions to particular place (local) and historical events, conflicts, themes, characters, setting. Furthermore, biography gives ease to see the expressions of author’s deep concern and conflict. Therefore, Angelou’s personal life, her times and works are taken into consideration (Guerin et al, 1999 : 22).

### **Methodology**

#### **The Form and Strategy of the Study**

The strategy of used in this study was descriptive qualitative. The research is conducted by descriptive qualitative because the result of the data analyzed is in descriptive phenomenon such as words, sentence and language. In this research, the researcher will describe the feminism which appears and the image of black woman in poems “Still I Rise”, “Caged Bird”, and “Phenomenal Woman”. The researcher on this study uses historical and biographical approaches. They are used to compare between Maya Angelou’s poems which consist of feminism with the biography of Maya Angelou and what happen in her era. By using this approaches, the researcher will know the reason of the poet used the feminism aspect in her works.

#### **The Data Sources**

The data of this study are collected from the three poems of Maya Angelou which reflect of feminism and the image of black women in those poems. Those poems are “Still I Rise”, “Caged Bird”, and “Phenomenal Woman”. Source of data of this study is Maya Angelou selected poems. The researcher takes three selected poems of Maya Angelou, they are: “Still I Rise” (1978), “Caged Bird” (1983), and “Phenomenal Woman” (1978).

### **The Technique of Collecting the Data**

The data of this study are taken from Maya Angelou’s poems. In collecting data, the researcher took the following steps: (1) Reading and understanding Maya Angelou’s poems : “Still I Rise”, “Caged Bird”, and “Phenomenal Woman”; (2) Giving marks in every part of the poems which relate to problem of the study; (3) The data, in this case is the types of feminism which has been marked by the researcher are written in the corpuse; (4) Categorizing the data based on problem of the study.

### **Data Validity**

In qualitative research, data are usually verified using triangulation technique. A triangulation was done to verify the trustworthiness of data or information by looking at the source of data repeatedly to arrive at the same conclusion on the phenomena observed. In this study, the reseacher will use investigator triangulation. The researcher wants to compare what people say about the situation of research that is feminism aspect in poetms relate with the biography and historical life of the poet. In this study, the researcher chooses Uun Muhaji ,S.Pd., M.Pd to investigate the data. He is one of the literature expert especially poetry in Kanjuruhan University of Malang.

### **Findings**

In this point show the type of feminims which appear in three poems by Maya Angelou

The finding of dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou’s three poem is showed on chart above. The dominant type is Radical Feminism because it closed to the tradition of oppression and segregation toward woman. In those three poems talked about history and tradition which tied black people especially woman. The researcher found 8 data of Radical Feminism which portrayed in Maya Angelou’s poems entitle “Still I Rise” and “Caged Bird”. 5 samples from “Still I Rise” and 3 samples from “Caged Bird”. The example from poem Still I Rise showed in the the stanza below.

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.*  
(Still I Rise, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza)

Maya Angelou declares that nothing and no one could oppress her or keep her down. She does not care what the history books saw, for she knows they are full of “twisted lies”. She will not let it bother her that others “trod” her “in the very dirt”. She proclaims that if she is trodden in the dirt, that she will rise like dust. This stanza included to radical feminism because from this stanza in poem Still I rise, Angelou write “You may write me down in history” meant that the oppression toward woman did not only happen on Angelou’s era but also since ancient woman have gotten oppression.

Meanwhile, in the whole of poem Caged Bird, the type which is used by Maya Angelou is Radical feminism. The example of Radical Feminism in poem Caged Bird showed in stanza below.

*But a caged bird stands on the grave  
of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare  
scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are  
tied  
so he opens his throat to sing*  
(Caged Bird, 5<sup>th</sup> stanza)

This stanza illustrated the attitudes black people experiences during segregation. Angelou used the word “caged bird” to represent black



people who always got discrimination. She also wrote “his wings are clipped and his feet are tied”, it showed that during this discriminatory era, blacks were in a state of oppression due to the stolen opportunities and the hatred they regularly encountered. The last line showed that the black people race knew it was necessary to have a voice and finally sing for their freedom. It also included on radical feminism because it related to the history of black people.

The second type of feminism is Liberal Feminism. Liberal feminism is trying to make women and men equal, corporate, independent and free to decide their own future. Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. The researcher found 6 data of Liberal Feminism on poem Phenomenal Woman. Liberal feminisms were only found in poem “Phenomenal Woman”, because in this poem Angelou gave deeper meaning of the beauty of woman. She showed the women power were as same as men. Although they were not as strong as men but they had another positive side that can make them looked special.

The example of Liberal Feminism showed in this stanza below.

*Pretty women wonder where my secret  
lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion  
model's size  
(Phenomenal Woman, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza)*

In those lines, Maya Angelou explains that even though her appearance is not of what is considered typically ideal, she is still confident in herself and not ashamed of her body. It includes on liberal feminism because those line show the confidence toward her appearance as black woman.

*It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
(Phenomenal Woman, 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)*

That is the second examples of liberal feminism in poem “Phenomenal Woman”. In the

stanza above, Angelou describes the image of a confident woman. She is showing herself off, and how woman can portray themselves as true individuals. It also shows how they should have the ability to choose what they want to do because they are powerful, confident, and independent.

To show her power and confident, Angelou used metaphor and personification in those lines. The example of metaphor such as “It's the fire in my eyes”. In this line, she compared her passion to fire. The example of personification such as “An the joy in my feet”. In the line “And the joy in my feet” she made an image that a human emotion (joy) is applied to a non-human object (the feet) and shows that Maya is always happy and simply bliss.

The last type is Marxist and Socialist Feminism. Marxist feminists argue that the path to gender equality is led by the destruction of our capitalist society. This perspective speaks out to issues such as unequal pay, obstacles to achieving tenure or excelling in certain fields, and the frequent lack of family-friendly policies at many of the institutions and national organizations of higher education. Gender-Inequality theories recognize that women's location in, and experience of, social situation are not only different but also unequal to men's. Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminists see *women as being held down* as a result of their unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism was only portrayed in Maya Angelou's poems entitled “Phenomenal Woman”. The researcher found 3 data of Marxist and Socialist Feminism. That can be seen from the stanza below.

*But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
(Phenomenal Woman, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza)*

Those lines showed that people around Maya Angelou always had bad thinking about her. Whatever she did and told no one can believe it because of the bad thinking about black people

image in the society. This line had same meaning with the 6th and 7th line in the third stanza.

*When I try to show them,  
They say they still can't see.*

Angelou tries to show that men could never understand women who had the confidence to do anything, and also showed how women can be strong and self-reliant. That couple lines included of marxist and socialist feminism because in this type, woman got oppression in the society.

Then in the third stanza, she wrote :

*Men themselves have wondered  
What the flash see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.*  
(Phenomenal Woman, 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza)

Those lines showed that when men tried to understand why some women were so confident to take such drastic action, they never really understood why. Men believed that since majority of women didn't take action to try and change their inequality that it was crazy to believe only one woman would take such actions. It is included in marxist and socialist feminism because in this type of feminism focused on the oppression toward women. It can be like women as being held down in the society. In the last line, Angelou used the words "inner mystery". She wants to show that the beauty of a woman is not only from her appearance. The "inner mystery" meant her inner beauty that can be seen by men who thought the beauty of woman was only from her appearance. This inner beauty can be represented as the power, confidence, and the strength of woman.

From all samples which include of feminism types, the dominant type which appears in those three poems is Radical feminism because it closed to the tradition of oppression and segregation toward woman. In those three poems talked about history and tradition which tied black people especially woman.

### **The Struggle of Maya Angelou**

This part consists of the reasons of Maya Angelou used feminism perspective. To analyze it, the researcher used biographical approach. Biographical approach means that in analyzing the poems the researcher has to examine the poems in relation to what is known about the poet's life. The researcher uses Maya Angelou's autobiography entitled "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (1969) to get the reasons why she wrote her poems by using feminism perspective.

The researcher found three reasons of Maya Angelou uses feminism perspective on her poems "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird".

### **Maya Angelou was born as a black race**

Maya Angelou was born on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1928 in St. Louis Missouri. Her parents are Bailey Johnson and Vivian Baxter Johnson. They are from black race. Maya Angelou was not also from rich family. It was showed in her autobiography :

"The dress I wore was light purple. As I'd watched Momma make it, putting fancy stitching on the waist, I knew that when I put it on I'd look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everyone's dream of what was right with the world. Hanging softly over the black Singer sewing machine, it looked like magic. When people saw me wearing it, they were going to run up to me and say, "Marguerite [sometimes it was 'dear Marguerite'], forgive us, please, we didn't know who you were," and I would answer generously, "No, you couldn't have known. Of course I forgive you." (Angelou, 1969 : 1)

In paragraph above clearly showed us that people will respect to her if she look beautiful like a sweet little white girl. She imagine that when she wears her dress, people around her will respect to her. But, that paragraph was followed by :

But Easter's early morning sun had shown the dress to be a plain ugly one

made from a white woman's faded purple throwaway. It was long like an old lady's dress, but it didn't hide my legs. The faded color made my skin look dirty like mud, and everyone in church was looking at my thin legs.

Because I was really white and a cruel magician had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with kinky black hair, broad feet, and a space between her teeth that would hold a pencil. (Angelou, 1969 : 1-2)

Maya Angelou says that what she thinks just her imagination. In fact, her dress was not as good as what little white girl wore. Angelou told how her appearance as a negro girl. She was not beautiful, her skin look dirty like mud, and people around her will not be respect to her. During her childhood there were discrimination and segregation toward black people. Black people always got bad treatment. Maya Angelou said in her poem that black people had a bad history around Whites. It was also shown in stanza of her poem below.

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise*  
(Still I Rise, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza)

In those lines, Maya Angelou used the word "You" to Whites and "Me" to herself as black race. She writes that Whites may keep her down with the word torture like the history. From the word "history" we knew that black people had gotten bad treatment from white people not only in Angelou era but also in ancient. Angelou declared that nothing and no one could oppress her or keep her down. She did not care what the history book saw her race, for she knew they were full of "twisted lies". She would not let it bother her that others "trod" her "in the very dirt". She proclaimed that if she was troddes in the dirt, that she would rise like dust.

### **Maya Angelou's parents divorced when she was 3 years old**

When Angelou was three years old, her parents got divorced. Her father sent her and her

brother to live with her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas like she stated in her autobiography :

Our parents had decided to put an end to their disastrous marriage, and Father shipped us home to his mother. We lived with our grandmother and uncle in the back o f the Store (it was always spoken o f w ith a capital S), which she had owned for around twenty-five years. (Angelou, 1969 : 3)

Angelou was very closed to her brother. They got affectionate grandmother and their uncle. But, lived far from biological parents was not easy, especially for children. For children like Angelou, she thought why her parents divorced if they can live happily together. It affected Angelou's thinking about marriage and relationships between men and women.

Then, during lived in Stamp, Angelou still found the descrimination and segregation toward black people. She wrote on her autobiography :

In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like. We knew only that they were different, to be feared, and in that fear was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the employer, and the poorly dressed against the well dressed. (Angelou, 1969 : 12)

From that paragraph we knew that the descrimination was in all of United States. She wrote the Whites were different and to be feared. It meant that in that era, whites and black people were not in peace. They were separated by skin color and wealth.

### **Maya Angelou was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend when she was 8 years old**

Four years later, Angelou's father showed up in Stamps unexpectedly and took her and her brother back to St. Louis, where they lived with their mother. When Angelou was eight years old,

she was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. As she wrote:

He said, "Just stay right here, Ritie, I ain't gonna hurt you." I wasn't afraid—a little uncertain, maybe, but not afraid. Of course I knew that lots of people did "it" and that they used their "things" to do this deed, but no one I knew had ever done it to anybody. Mr. Freeman pulled me to him, and put his hand between my legs." (Angelou, 1969 : 72)

The quotation above showed an event when Angelou was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. In this case, she was confuse what Mr. Freeman did to her. After the incident, Angelou did not understand what she had just experienced. Mr. Freeman forbade her to tell anyone, otherwise he would kill Bailey. As a child who was 8 years old, Angelou obeyed the mother's boyfriend because she did not want his brother was killed. However, the incident was repeated again. As she wrote below.

His legs were squeezing my waist. "Pull down your underpants." I hesitated for two reasons: he was holding me too tight to move, and I was sure that any minute my mother or Bailey would run in the door and save me. "We were just playing before." He released me enough to pull down my underpants, and then dragged me closer to him. Turning the radio up loud, too loud, he said, "If you scream, I'm gonna kill you. And if you tell, I'm gonna kill Bailey." (Angelou, 1969 : 78)

The quotation above showed how Angelou one more was raped by her mother's boyfriend. After the incident, Angelou really felt miserable and in pain. Her behavior changed and made his mother was worried and asked Bailey spoke to Angelou. She told her brother about the abuse, and he eventually shared the information with the rest of the family. Angelou hospitalized and her mother's boyfriend was arrested and put in jail for

a day, and four days later, he was found dead after being severely beaten. Shortly after the incident, Angelou stopped speaking completely because she believed that if she spoke, her mouth would produce "something that would kill people randomly". Believing that it was better not to talk, she maintained her silence for nearly five years.

Angelou and her brother returned to their grandmother's house in Stamps. She made a close friend in town, a teacher named Bertha Flowers, who helped her start speaking again. Flowers also inspired her to start reading classical literature. Angelou started to read many books and write some poems. A few years later, Angelou and her brother went to San Francisco to live with their mother. In that time, she was convince by a local boy to have a sex with her and she became pregnant as she wrote in her autobhiography below.

"Three weeks later, having thought very little about the strange night, I realized that I was pregnant." (Angelou, 1969 : 284)

Once more, Angelou got bad experience with a man. Angelou take care of herself because her Mother was busy with her own life. Her son, Clyde (known as Guy Johnson) was born just days after she graduate from high school. Maya Angelou as a single mother experienced life in poverty and the kidnapping of her son by a babysister. In some sources tell that Maya Angelou has been married several times but none of the relationships survived. Angelou married a Greek man, Tosh Angelos, whom she took the name Angelou. The relationship ended three years later. Then, Angelou married South African freedom fighter Vusumi Make. Same as her previous experience, the relationship ended several years later.

From her autobigraphy , we found the reasons of Maya Angelou used feminism perspective in almost of her work. It was influenced by her life experience as a black race, woman, and mother.

### **The Image of Black Woman**



### Image of Black Women in poem “Still I Rise”

“Still I Rise” is one of Maya Angelou’s best known poem. This poem was published in 1978. “Still I Rise” is about a Blacks living among Whites. Reading the history of feminism, this poem was written on second waves because the second waves was begun on 1960. In this era more black people opened their voice, especially black women. The term *second-wave feminism* refers mostly to the radical feminism of the women’s liberation movement. In this poem tells how Maya Angelou as one of black woman got oppression and discrimination. The type of feminism which found is Radical Feminism because Angelou wrote how her struggle to live around Whites who have bad thinking about black people. Angelou wrote in her poem below.

*Does my sassiness upset you?*  
*Why are you beset with gloom?*  
*‘Cause I wals like I’ve got oil wells*  
*Pumping in my living room.*  
(Still I Rise, 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)

Angelou refers to her own tone as “sassiness and asksthe hearer if her sassy tone is upsetting. She notices that the people around her in her society ar “beset with gloom” when she success. She questions this. She knows that she succeeded in life, in her writing, and as a woman. The “oil wells pumping in her living room” symbolized her success.

But it continued in the next stanza.

*Just like suns,*  
*With the certainty of tides,*  
*Just like hopes springing high,*  
*Still I’ll rise.* (Still I Rise, 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza)

Angelou compares herself to the moon and the sun as they are affected by the tides. This gave the reader the understanding that she has no other choice but to rise up out of her affliction. Trying as society might to keep her oppressed, it is in her nature to rise up and stand againts oppression just as it is the nature of the tides to respond to the moon.

In second wave closed to the women’s liberation era where some organisations of black

women equality appear. In this poem Maya Angelou tried to describe how the bad history of black people especially women. But she as the leader of woman said that she never give up. She tried to show it in this stanza :

*Out of the huts of history’s shame*  
*Up from a past that’s rooted in pain*  
*I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide,*  
*Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*  
*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear*  
*I rise*  
*Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear*  
*I rise*  
*Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,*  
*I am the dream and the hope of the slave.*  
*I rise*  
*I rise*  
*I rise.*

(Still I Rise, 8<sup>th</sup> stanza)

In those lines Angelou gave the readers an introduction to her identity. She made a metaphor of black ocean as herself, holding in all the “shame” and “pain” of her race and her gender within her tide. In this stanza, Angelou finally refered to the past what the reason that she was oppressed and resented to this day. She called slavery “history’s shame” and she proclaimed that she would not be held down by the past, even if it was “rooted in pain”.

Continuing, Angelou revealed that she intended to leave behind all the effects of slavery and the history of oppression with intent to rise above it. She claimed that she would leave behind the “terror and fear” and that she would rise above the pain and the oppression “into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear”. She did not intend to allow the hatefulness of society or the pain of the past to stop her from becoming all that she ever dreamed of being. For this reason, she repeated three times, “I rise”.

Besides, Angelou also described her feeling in enduring her life and showed her high motivation in facing all problem. The Whites consider Blacks as minority. They underestimated Angelou as a black woman. She was trated unfairly

and was often hurt by Whites, like the lines below :

*You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, loike air, I'll rise  
(Still I Rise, 6th stanza)*

It showed the oppression toward Maya Angelou. But in the next line she wrote "But still, like air, I'll rise". It showed her strength and power to survive. No matter what has done and said to her, she still rise and be brave.

In this poem, Angelou challenged the existing society arrangement about black people. She represented herself as the leader of a movement intent on social change. She confronted oppression and rejected standard gender roles by being the leader of the movement which tried to free both women and men (black people). She recognized her own value and strength and wanted people to recognize it too.

### **Image of Black Women in poem "Phenomenal Woman"**

Maya Angelou published "Phenomenal Woman" in 1978. As we know, in that time she also published "Still I Rise". The content of those poem is about the black women who lives among Whites. But in this poem, Angelou tried to send a message to the readers to appraise themselves although their physical appearance is not perfect. Similar to the poem "Still I Rise", this poem was also written on second waves because the second waves is begun on 1960. That was why in this poem found some liberal feminism which shows the woman capability and power.

In this poem the researcher also found marxist and socialist feminism because according to the time this poem published, Women's liberation grew out and provided alliances with Marxist and Socialist feminisms in areas such as the criticism of the dual workload for women working outside as well as inside the home, the demand of equal pay for equal work, and a breakdown of the gendered division of the educational system and the labor market.

Maya Angelou as the poet and the speaker in this poem described a woman as a great woman and has high confident. The reader could see in every line of this poem showed that Maya was so proud of herself because she always said that she was a phenomenal woman.

*I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.  
(Phenomenal Woman, 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza)*

One most often defines the word as meaning extraordinary and impressive, and Angelou was certainly reveling in being an extraordinary and impressive woman. In every stanza, she showed that she was always proud of her part of the body. Angelou addressed this poem to those women and men who believed that being beautiful meant having slim body, thin lips, and small hips.

*Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's  
(Phenomenal Woman, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza)*

In those lines, Maya Angelou tries to explain the readers that she is not beautiful like a model. Although she does not have perfect body, she can be confident, strong, and brave. Her power and confidence become the inner beauty that makes her phenomenal. Her knowledge and expression shows that she is confident.

Maya Angelou also tells how the society see her, how the men see her, and how the history see her as the black race. It is showed by the third stanza :

*Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
(Phenomenal Woman, 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza)*

Those lines showed that when men try to understand why some black women are so confident to take such drastic action, they never really understand why. Men believed that since

majority of black women did not take action to try and change their inequality that it was crazy to believe only one woman would take such action.

Maya Angelou also tries to show her inner beauty by caring to each other as a woman and mother below.

*It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need for my care.*  
(Phenomenal Woman, 4<sup>th</sup> stanza)

Angelou tries to show that as a woman she has positive side. In line "It's in the click of my heels", Maya Angelou wanted to show her confidence as a woman. Meanwhile in line "The palm of my hand" showed her caring to others.

From the whole stanza the researcher concluded that being a phenomenal woman was not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it was about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself.

### **Image of Black Women in poem "Caged Bird"**

Maya Angelou published "Caged Bird" in 1983. In 1969, Angelou published her autobiography entitled "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings". Poem "Caged Bird" was in that autobiography but was not published at that time. It was published in 1983 in the era of woman liberation movement. This poem was about the black race being held back from freedom by their skin color. Actually, the poem "Caged Bird" did not focused on the black woman only but this poem could interpret the oppression and segregation toward black people in that time. This poem talked about history and tradition which tied black people, that was why the type of radical feminism be dominant. As the literature review in the previous, Radical Feminism was closed to the tradition of oppression and segregation.

Throughout history, barriers have been put up between races. Divisions and inequities between blacks and whites have existed since ancient times. For more than three hundred years,

a wrongful tradition of slavery and discrimination has existed.

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of  
dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing*  
(Caged Bird, 5<sup>th</sup> stanza)

This stanza illustrated the attitudes black people experiences during segregation. During this discriminatory era, blacks were in a state of oppression due to the stolen opportunities and the hatred they regularly encountered. The last line showed that the black people race knew it was necessary to have a voice and finally sing for their freedom.

This was ongoing black inferiority and white supremacy was bound in tradition and hard to sever. Through tradition and history, whites have been given hopes and spirit, meanwhile blacks are servile and bound by tradition. This controversy was condoned and accepted. Tradition has caused the death of black dreams and hope. The poem infers that the probable answer would be a white person, because blacks are "caged" by their color. Opportunities infinitely existed for whites, whereas the same was false for blacks.

*The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird sings of freedom.*  
(Caged Bird, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanza)

The quotation above was the third and last stanzas of the poem "Caged Bird". The stanza explicitly displayed the true meaning of the poem and defined actions of a "caged bird." Blackness of skin acted as a barrier for the black race; it prevented freedom for a person. The freedom and feelings of a white person's existence were unknown to one who was black. In this poem, Angelou as one of black woman showed her voice that black people would be free. Here, Angelou's

belief for freedom and equality was beginning to spread among the black race. She "sings" for freedom.

## **Conclusion**

Maya Angelou is one of the black writer who could support herself by her writing. She is praised for her ability to say what important was to millions of black people especially black woman. She is famous for her description of Black people life. She uses her works to praise voice concern about race and woman. She often writes poems and books about racial issues and feminism perspective.

In this thesis, the researcher analyzed the types of feminism which appear in her poems "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird". The researcher also analyzed the reasons of using feminism perspective by Maya Angelou and the image of woman that is written in Maya Angelou's poems. In analyzing those three poems, the researcher used historical and biographical approach. Historical approach was used to find out the image of black woman because it relates to the history of feminism itself. Meanwhile, the biographical approach was used to find out the reason of the poet used feminism perspective in her poems because it must be related to the poet's life.

From the analysis of the every line in stanzas, the researcher found the answers of the research problems. Firstly, the researcher found three types of feminism such as Liberal Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, and Radical Feminism. For the poems "Still I Rise" and "Caged Bird", the dominant type was Radical feminism because Angelou the theme of those poem are same that was the bad history of black people who got discrimination . Meanwhile, in poem "Phenomenal Woman" the dominant type was Liberal Feminism because the theme of the poem was about the capability, beauty, and power of black woman.

Second, the researcher found the reason of using feminism perspective by the poet. To find out the reasons, the researcher used biographical approach. After reading the autobiography of Maya Angelou the researcher found that her poems theme were influenced by three reasons. The reasons were Maya Angelou was born as a black race, her parents divorced when she was 3 years old, and she was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend when she was 8 years old.

The last finding of this thesis was the image of black woman in Maya Angelou's poems. To find out the image of black woman in every poem, the researcher had to know the history of feminism when the poems are made. In poem "Still I Rise" Angelou challenged the existing society arrangement about black people and she represent her self as the leader of movement who confronts oppression and tries to free both black women and men. Then, in poem "Phenomenal Woman", Angelou showed that being a woman is not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it is about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself. The last, in poem "Caged Bird", Angelou showed that black women especially are under development because of the tradition. She was as the black woman showed her voice that black people will be free.



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