

Black Feminism Reflected through The Narrator's Responses of Women Oppression in Maya Angelou's Memoir: *A Letter To My Daughter*

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Abstract

Any unjust situation where one group denies another group is considered as oppression. This condition is possibly initiated by groups that assume their internal attribute as superior to another group. Therefore, the groups assume they have the right to deny another group's rights. Women oppression is one of kinds of oppression. The differences in physical and biological features of a woman's body benefit men with more privilege and no responsibility to carry children. As a result, a woman is considered as not necessarily need education and career path. A movement has arisen to defense oppressed women, especially women of color, whose experiences are not represented through the mainstream feminist movement. Black feminism's distinctive perspective sees oppression as an intersection of factors. This article aims to elaborate Black feminist perspective toward women oppression in Maya Angelou's memoir entitled *A Letter To My Daughter*. The oppression experienced by Black women is identified in the form of the control of Black women images and the regulation of Black women bodies. The narrator's critical perspective toward the oppression is articulated through her action in promoting self-definition and self-valuation to Black women. Self-empowerment enables Black women to resist and oppose any forms of oppression.

Keywords: Black feminism; Black women; Women oppression; Memoir; Maya Angelou

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Introduction

Humans tend to group themselves with people who share a similar attribute with them. Their dynamics within the group trigger their feeling of belonging to the group. Loyalty and pride over being a group member are some of the feelings (University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2010, para.2). On the other hand, those feelings might also constitute a feeling to compete with other groups and even commit violence.

The superiority of one's group possibly restricts another recessive group in their access or relation to society. Women oppression is one of many kinds of oppression. The distinctive biological and physical features between men and women determine women's role, value and trigger the standard of appropriate expressions for both women and men where men are active and women are passive (Collins, 2000, p. 83).

The lameness of power between men and women, socially and physically, facilitates men to abuse their power over women. This practice remains through time and can be easily found in any domain, such as home, workplace, and school. It is related to the fact that oppression is practiced from a broad scale such as institutions and government until a lesser scale, such as social community and family (Collins, 2000, p. 276).

Women demand to cut off the unequal condition politically, socially, and economically by proposing a feminist movement. In many ways, the feminist movement is expressed through literary work to remove women's stereotype of being subordinate to men. However, the mainstream discussion in feminism refers to White middle-class and Western origins (Collins, 2000, p. 6). Therefore, feminism is criticized for being unable to stand for all women since it lacks colored women representation, especially Black women.

Madsen states that women oppression is experienced by all women within their racial group (2000, pp. 217-218). However, unlike white women, Black women are double oppressed because of their identity as a Black

and a woman. Collins shows Black women's reality through her perspective on Black feminism. According to Collins, Black feminism is a distinctive perspective that views oppression due to intersecting factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality (2000, pp. 137-140). In order to respond the reality of Black women, Black feminists create theories which meet the needs of Black women by helping them to mobilise around issues that they perceive to have a direct impact on the overall quality of life (Humm, 1990, p. 19).

Black feminism perspective values African American women's experiences as the center of knowledge to interpret Black women's reality and define their objectives without comparing to the White Eurocentric ideas (Taylor, 1998, pp.54-55). This means that Black feminism is the most appropriate perspective to examine African women's lives than the Western feminist perspectives.

An author, poet, playwright, and civil rights activist, namely Maya Angelou, is a Black woman writer. Her best-known works are the series of seven autobiographical that focused on her experiences since she was a child until adult highlighting on the Black and women oppression (Respect Women, 2014). Angelou is also considered as the pioneer of autobiographical writing style (Spring, 2017).

One of her works, a memoir entitled *A Letter To My Daughter* (2012), provides essays and poems about her own experiences of growing up as a Black woman. A memoir is a type of autobiography which is written by a person who considers their experiences significant to be conveyed. Furthermore, memoir tends to be more related to external events that significantly bring impact to its readers (Prose: Literary Terms and Concepts, 2012, p. 192).

In delivering the message, a memoirist might employ any kind of point of view, however, the first point of view is more frequently used (Brittingham, 2013). In *A Letter To My Daughter*, Angelou uses the first-person point of view to deliver her stories. The first-person point of view indirectly shows that the readers are expected to be in a similar position as Angelou encounters the stories. She

delivers the stories in a descriptive narrative style. Angelou connects ideas and details to convey the sense of how she perceives every experience. Abrams states "Narrator is the writer of a story who involves events, characters, and what the characters say and do" (1999, p. 173).

The narrator and characters in a memoir have significant role in delivering the messages. The author attempts to make the characters understandable for the readers. Angelou's memoir employs several methods of presenting the characters. The methods are personal description, character as seen by others, speech, thoughts and reactions (Murphy, 1972, pp. 161-173).

A Letter To My Daughter is not only a narration of Angelou's painful experiences, but it is also an articulation of Angelou's inspiring thoughts on Black women. Birch mentions that the significant feature of Angelou's work is in "her selection and patterning of her life experiences, which she then weaves into an inspirational fabric of survival" (1994, p. 124). Angelou herself states "All my work, my life, everything is about survival. All my work is meant to say 'You may encounter many defeats, but you must never be defeated'..." (as cited in Birch, 1994, p.124). In *A Letter To My Daughter*, Maya Angelou, as the narrator and the main character, articulates her perspective in responding to Black women oppression. Thus, this study is an attempt to investigate Maya Angelou's perceptions and responses to the issue of Black women's oppression.

Methodology

This study is intended to analyze women oppression experienced by Black women, and the narrator's responses which reflect Black feminism. In accordance with the purpose of this study, feminist criticism is employed. Lois Tyson states that "feminism seeks to understand the ways in which women are oppressed" (2011, p.139). Furthermore, according to Wilfred L. Guerin in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, feminist criticism is used to expose patriarchal premises to result prejudices in order to examine the social and cultural context within a literature (1999, p. 197). This approach is

relevant to examine the narrator's point of view in perceiving the experiences and responses of Black women in relation to women oppression. The method used in this study is library research. The primary source used is Maya Angelou's Memoir: *A Letter to My Daughter* (2012), and the secondary sources used are books, journal, and articles. In conducting the study, the researchers gather and select the data from the primary source and the selected data is analysed by employing theories related to literature, women's oppression, and black feminism.

Women Oppression in *A Letter To My Daughter*

Women oppression is defined as "the experience of sexism as a system of domination" (Humm, 1990, p.153). In Angelou's *A Letter to My Daughter*, women oppression is found in two forms. The first is in the form of the control of Black women's image, and the second is in the form of the regulation of Black women's body. The control of Black women's image is the use of stereotypes or myths to justify Black women subordination as truth by society (Collins, 2000, pp. 72-73). The stereotypes and myths come from particular quality of a Black woman used as judgment to generalize all Black women or misled information that is intended to justify Black women's position to remain lower.

The control of Black women's image is an unseen control applied through transmitted idea and beauty image. When Angelou was a child and lived in her paternal grandmother's house in Arkansas, she experienced of being controlled by the idea and image of being a Black woman which was transferred by the elders. Within her paternal grandmother's environment, the children are used to see the world through their elder's view. As Collins has mentioned, motherhood and family are used as environments to teach children, especially Black children, about being inferior and believe the idea of oppression (Collins, 2000, pp. 50-51). In chapter one, entitled *Home*, Angelou tells her experience of being inferior to white people that she rarely sees (Angelou, 2012, p. 4). As a child, Angelou is being told words to memorize. Through

habituation, Angelou believes the memorized words as a fact. As an example, Angelou used to believe that she was inferior to her brother, Bailey.

Without knowing why exactly, I did not believe that I was inferior to anyone except maybe my brother. I knew I was smart, but I also knew that Bailey was smarter, maybe because he reminded me often and even suggested that maybe he was the smartest person in the world. He came to that decision when he was nine years old (Angelou, 2012, p. 4).

Angelou portrays how a repetitive remark from her older brother could affect her perspective on herself. Although Angelou knows that she is smart, however, Bailey's words makes her feel less worth and considers it as truth.

The transmission idea of Black's inferiority can affect the larger scale and spread out the oppression, as Angelou writes,

The South, in general, and Stamps, Arkansas, in particular had had hundreds of years' experience in demoting even large adult blacks to psychological dwarfs. Poor white children had the license to address lauded and older blacks by their first names or by any names they could create (Angelou, 2012, p. 4).

By agreeing on Black inferiority, the older Black people agree to be inferior to the whites, and the white children also agree to be superior to the older Black people. The process of this agreement is through habituation. Everyday experiences enable this agreement that being adapted as a routine and later accepted as a regular occurrence (Collins, 2000, pp. 158-159). Therefore, although they have different ages, both of them routinely see Black oppression in their daily lives.

The second way used to maintain the control of Black women's image is through beauty image. Control through beauty image is a form of image control that considers Black women physical appearance out of the women beauty standard. Angelou experienced this control when she was a teenager.

When Angelou was a teenager, Angelou felt dissatisfied with her body. Angelou tells it in chapter three, *Revelations* (Angelou, 2012, pp. 15-17). Angelou is asked by a boy who lived up the street to be intimate with him. Angelou refuses the invitation for months. She expects to do that with her boyfriend, not a stranger. However, within months of refusal, Angelou starts to realize her body's desire for an intimate look.

It was during that time that I noticed my body's betrayal. My voice became deep and husky, and my naked image in the mirror gave no intimations that it would ever become feminine and curvy. I was already six feet tall and had no breasts. I thought maybe if I had sex my recalcitrant body would grow up and behave as it was supposed to behave (Angelou, 2012, p. 16).

Using several unconvincing words such as 'maybe' and 'supposed,' Angelou refers to particular criteria she associates as a standard to her body. Angelou assumes that sixteen-year-old girls usually have curvy and feminine body shapes, meanwhile, Angelou does not have that, therefore, Angelou considers herself abnormal. Therefore, to fulfill the standard she claims about how her body is supposed to be, she accepts the boy's invitation to be intimate with him.

The standard Angelou refers to is constructed by intersecting oppressions. It controls Black women's image by emphasizing woman beauty as it depends on physical attractiveness, includes skin color, hair texture, and body features (Collins, 2000, pp. 88-92). The body ideals for black women are "light skin tone, long and straight or loosely curled hair, and a curvy body shape" (Oney et al. as cited in Avery, 2017, p. 7). As a result, by the existence of this beauty standard, which refers to whites' physical characteristics, women must fulfill the particular standard to gain their self-worth and remain inferior if they cannot fulfill the standard.

The second form of women oppression experienced by Angelou is the regulation of Black women's body. The regulation of Black women's body is a regulation that enables

Black women's body to be objects and profitable to the oppressor. This regulation also restricts Black women's authority over their own body. Collins states that Black women's body's regulation is a useful tool to maintain the elite class's existence to remain in the upper position (Collins, 2000, p. 132). Black women's body regulation objectifies and makes Black women's bodies a commodity. This regulation of Black women's body has different forms from employment discrimination related to their dark skin color, the maintenance of Black women's body image as an object of pleasure, and intervention to Black women's reproduction (Collins, 2000, p. 132). Angelou experiences the regulation of Black women's body through three experiences she tells within *A Letter To My Daughter*: 1) Domestic abuse, 2) Sexual harassment, and 3) Rape.

Domestic abuse is any behavior used to gain power or control over an intimate partner, a married couple, living together, or dating. Angelou experiences domestic abuse by her boyfriend, namely Mark. In chapter five, entitled *Accident, Coincident, or Answered Prayer*, Angelou tells her experience of being in a relationship with a Black man when she was a single parent (Angelou, 2012, pp. 27-33). To Angelou, Mark is a soft and tender man.

However, after months of his tender treat, Mark picks Angelou up from her work one night. After driving a little while, Mark stops his car on a cliff. Unexpectedly, Mark accuses Angelou of cheating with another man. Mark's accusation of Angelou leads to an assault and kidnapping.

Mark hits Angelou several times until Angelou passed out. After Angelou passed out, she wakes up in a condition where most of her clothes are already taken off. Mark treats Angelou as if Angelou is the property that he can treat as he wants. Mark's objectification to Angelou also includes his act to embarrass Angelou in front of the crowd. Mark uses derogating words to assault Angelou, such as: 'lousy cheating,' 'low-down woman,' and 'lying cheating broad.' During the time Mark kidnaps Angelou, Mark wants to murder himself and Angelou with a razor blade.

He started to cry, saying he loved me. He brought a double-edged razor blade and put it to his throat.

'I'm not worth living, I should kill myself.'

I had no voice to discourage him. He quickly put the razor blade on my throat.

'I can't leave you here for some other Negro to have you.'

Speaking was impossible and breathing was painful (Angelou, 2012, pp. 29-30).

Mark's impulse to kill Angelou before committing suicide is derived from his possession of Angelou. His feeling to possess Angelou shows how Mark sees her as his property. Mark has done domestic abuse to Angelou, which occurs between intimate partners who are Black men and Black women. Black men who abuse Black women aim to prove their measure of manliness. It is related to Collins' statement: "violence against Black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured" (2000, pp. 159). In other words, although, as partners, both Black men and women share the same experience of racial discrimination, on the other side, Black men also accept Black women's negative image. Black men adapt masculinity as a form of domination to Black women.

Black men and women share similar struggles against racial discrimination; Black men are expected to protect Black women from the whites' oppression. Otherwise, Black women are assailed both by Black men and white men (Collins, 2000, p. 54). As a result, it contributes to the sexual harassment experienced by Black women. The state of Black women double-oppressed by their one-race brother and white men construct Black women images as a game for all men to play (Collins, 2000, pp. 54-55). Therefore, Black women's sexual harassment is justified in society. Nevertheless, the justification of Black women as a general object for sexual harassment is followed by a threat to make them remain silent. The fact that Black women always become object is also identified by Febriyanto in his research entitled *The Idea of Black Feminism in Maya Angelou's Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman*. He found that in Angelou's poem entitled *Still I Rise*, Black

women are oppressed by White people and Black men (2010, pp. 55-56).

Another Angelou's experience of being harassed in a public space also supported the fact. In chapter ten, *Morocco*, Angelou tells her experience of sexual harassment when she was in Morocco (Angelou, 2012, pp. 59-62). It was her first morning in Morocco, and she was walking in the street by herself. Angelou was shouted and beckoned by a group of men.

When I reached the men, they sat down suddenly. There were no stools beneath them so they did not really sit, they simply squatted on their haunches. I was raised by a southern grandmother who taught me it was rude for a young person to stand or even sit taller than an older person (Angelou, 2012, p. 60).

When Angelou reaches them, they insult Angelou by squatting in front of Angelou-in-a-miniskirt. The different number of the men and Angelou, who was alone, shows an unequal power between them. As Andersen states, sexual harassment is defined as an unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in a relationship of unequal power (1997, p.134). Besides unequal power, sexual harassment cannot be separated from social myths that believe women actually ask for it. The group of men may perceive this myth by seeing the miniskirt that Angelou used. Although there are some people there, they do not notice what happen to Angelou. When she was being insulted, Angelou tries to be neutral as she follows the group of men to squat. Both Angelou and the men do not speak the same language. They are unable to understand each other language. One of the older men says something loud to a group of women behind them. Angelou does not know what the older man said, but then no longer after that, one of the women comes to Angelou and offers the cup in her hand.

Just as I prepared to stand and bow, a woman appeared with a miniature coffee cup in her hand. She offered it to me. As I took it, I noticed two things, bugs crawling on the ground, and the men approving of me by snapping their fingers. I bowed and took a sip of the coffee and almost fainted. I

had a cockroach on my tongue (Angelou, 2012, p. 61).

When Angelou knows that her cup is filled with cockroaches, she keeps on drinking the coffee. She swallows four cockroaches in total. After drinking the coffee, Angelou bows to them and walks out from there. As shared by Collins, sexual harassment is followed by a threat to make the victim remain silent and unable to give a counter-attack (Collins, 2000, pp. 52-56). In this case, the cockroaches-coffee given to Angelou is a form of threat as it is used as a tool to break Angelou's resistance down. Kellie et al., found that an individual or a group that sexualized or objectified is seen as someone with less mental and moral status capacity (2019, p. 2). Thus, Angelou's experiences of being objectified and harassed in public reflect how a Black woman is viewed as a less competent individual.

Collins suggests that rape is a form of sexual violence used to regulate Black women's bodies (Collins, 2000, p. 146). The act of rape forces the victim to be passive and submissive. To Black women, the act of rape given to them is justified with the myth of the Black prostitute. In other words, the rapist might be triggered sexually; additionally, the label of *jezebel* toward Black women justifies it. Therefore, the rapist moves further to force his domination on the victim. Rape cannot be separated from the Black women's images since Black women are already marked as people with animal-like sexual appetites (Collins, 2000, p. 140).

In chapter eight, *Violence*, Angelou finds many sociologists and social scientists declare a misleading statement about rape. They explain that rape is not considered a sexual act but a need to feel powerful. Therefore, in order to support the statement, they further explain that most of the rapists are those who were victims. In other words, the act of rape becomes a tool for them, the rapists, to gain the power used to absent in them (Angelou, 2012, pp. 47-49). However, Angelou does not fully agree with the statement.

Possibly some small percentage of the motivation which impels a rapist on his savage rampage stems from the hunger for

domination, but I am certain that the violator's stimulus is (devastatingly) sexual (Angelou, 2012, p. 48).

Angelou is sure that sexual attraction is the trigger of rape. Although Angelou also agrees that rape is a manifestation of hunger for domination, the primary trigger is sexual. Angelou believes that the rapist's mind already reduces the victim's into her sexual part before.

The stalking becomes, in the rapist's mind, a private courtship, where the courted is unaware of her suitor, but the suitor is obsessed with the object of his desire. He follows, observes, and is the excited protagonist in his sexual drama (Angelou, 2012, p. 48).

Angelou considers two forms of rape: intended and impulsive (Angelou, 2012, p. 48). The intended rape includes the victim's objectification, which is already set far before the physical act is done. What is imagined and desired in the rapist's mind strips down the victim, and it is already considered as rape by making the victim a passive and submissive object. On the other hand, impulsive rape does not mean less violate or sexual.

The violator who stumbles upon his unprotected victim is sexually agitated by surprise. He experiences the same vulgar rush as the flasher, save that his pleasure is not satisfied with brief shock, he has a surge and moves on to the deeper, more terrifying, invasion (Angelou, 2012, p. 48).

The impulsive rape is similar to the intended rape, where sexual attraction becomes the trigger of the rapist.

What moves the rapist further is the victim's state, which is considered unprotected, marginalized, and powerless. Therefore, the rapist is able to satisfy his pleasure to the victim he considers as weak and insignificant. Moreover, the impulsive rapist can unhesitatingly do a terrifying act if he feels threatened by circumstances he cannot control.

Angelou observes that rape is definitely related to powerlessness. It is reflected in the interaction of her two male friends.

I remember a reaction by a male friend, when a macho fellow told him that miniskirts were driving him to thoughts of rape.

My friend asked, if a woman wore a micro mini and no underpants would the would-be rapist be able to control himself? He added, 'What if her big brothers were standing by holding baseball bats?' (Angelou, 2012, p. 49).

The quotation above implies that a victim's unprotected state which is identical with powerless state triggers a man to the thought of rape. Miniskirt that is often pointed as the cause of a man to be driven to the thought of rape would not be relevant to the case.

The following table is the summary of the narrator's responses to the control of image set for Black women which reflect the characteristics of Black feminism.

Table 1. List of The Narrator's Responses to Black Image Control

Black feminism characteristics	The Responses to Black women's image control	
	To the Control Through transmitted idea	To the Control Through Beauty Image
Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning	She compares what is told to her with her own daily experiences.	Angelou finds the importance of motherhood that makes her able to redefine herself.
Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims	Angelou makes a connection by observing and analysing the pattern.	Angelou makes dialogue and tries to connect with herself.

Ethic of Caring	Angelou connects her experiences with the social condition of the South in general.	Angelou is aware of her voice changing that denotes her emotion.
Ethic of Personal Accountability	Angelou refuses the idea, but she is aware of the control.	Angelou tries to redefine herself

The Narrator's Responses Reflect Black Feminism

The second part of the discussion focuses on analyzing the narrator's responses of the identified women oppression discussed in the previous part. The narrator's responses reflect the idea and characteristics of Black feminism.

Black feminism is an alternative way to build self-definition and self-valuation of Black women (Collins, 2000, pp. 251-252). Black feminism emphasizes empowerment which enables Black women to resist the negative labels and opposing any forms of oppression. Angelou strongly emphasizes Black women empowerment in her works. In her research, Yuli identified that Black women empowerment is also found in Angelou's poems entitled *Phenomenal Woman*, *Woman Me*, and *Seven Women's Blessed Assurance*. The imagery and figurative language used in those works reflect Black women's confidence, non-blaming behavior, and other positive values of attitude (2015, pp 13-15).

Black feminism suggests four characteristics used in their Black women community to validate knowledge. They are live experience as a criterion of meaning, use dialogue in assessing knowledge, use ethic of caring, and personal accountability (Collins, 2000, pp. 257-260).

Responses to Black Women's Image Ccontrol

Angelou's environment does the control to her image. Angelou is unable to prevent and control the idea transmission to fit with her. Therefore, in responding to Black women's image's control, Angelou focuses on shifting her view to define and empower herself.

Angelou's response to transmitted ideas and beauty image is in the form of rejection. Angelou cannot directly stop the idea

transmission and the social occurrences that existed. However, Angelou suggests a shifting view from focusing on how people define her to how she defines herself. The memory remains, but it does nothing to redefine someone's self if that someone believes in who she is. Angelou is aware of these unseen controls around her, but she refuses to be controlled by them. Angelou shifts her view to empower herself.

In responding the transmitted ideas, Angelou decides to view and accept her childhood reality as a part of her life that contributes to making her as herself. Although she calls the condition at that time "a continual struggle against a condition of surrender" (Angelou, 2012, p. 4), it makes her aware of the oppression and to strive against it.

The shifting view Angelou took to respond to the oppression through beauty image is not only seen from her attempt to define herself, but also seen from the motherhood of her mother, herself, and her expected baby. The development of motherhood aims to transmit power to other members to attain self-reliance as the strength of resistance (Collins, 2000, pp. 192-193). Angelou's mother's belief and confidence aim to uplift Angelou's self-reliance in accepting her previous action's consequences.

Angelou can uplift her confidence as her alternative way of responding to the oppression. Angelou's mother's confidence is successfully transmitted to Angelou and able to make her redefine herself. Therefore, she finds her self-definition regardless of the oppression. In her research on Maya Angelou's poems, Permatasari found that Angelou was aware of the social control to determine the standard of beauty (2016, p.167). However, although Black women are not fulfilling the standard, Angelou shows the positive and proud image of being a Black woman. Instead of internalizing the control, Angelou chooses to empower herself and all Black women to be proud of their own way.

The following table shows the summary of the narrator's responses to the regulation of the body which reflect Black feminism.

Table 2. List of The Narrator's Responses to the Regulation of Black Women's Body

Black feminism characteristics	The Responses to the regulation of Black women's body		
	Domestic abuse	Sexual harassment	Rape
Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning	Angelou refuses to be victimized and shifts her view to empower her self-definition.	Angelou refuses to be victimized by empowers her self-definition and also fosters her Black women's traditional value.	Angelou argues the sociologists' misled statement of rape by comparing it to the victim's point of view.
Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims	Angelou observes Mark in order to know what he seeks.	Angelou approaches the group of men and tries to have dialogue.	Angelou analyses rape's triggers, scheme, and effects on both the predator and the victim.
Ethic of Caring	Angelou tries to have a dialogue with Mark.	Angelou tries to talk in several languages to the old men.	Angelou writes the chapter eight, <i>Violence</i> (Angelou, 2012, pp. 47-49).
Ethic of Personal Accountability	Angelou intends to discourage Mark's impulse to suicide.	Angelou fosters her traditional teaching.	Angelou feels accountable to revise the claim.

Responses to The Regulation of Black Women's Body

In responding to regulation of Black women's body, there are no direct acts taken when Angelou encounters the regulation. Every response to the oppression is firstly expressed through Angelou's thought. It can be seen through the description of her situation. Her critical situation only allows her to take a thorough observation.

In relation to kidnapping case, Angelou's intention to have a dialogue may be failed, but she still observes within her silence. As a result, Angelou comprehends what Mark seeks from her. With no proof of cheating and chances given to talk, Angelou realizes that there is a part of Mark where he internalizes the image control to Black women.

I knew where he had put the razor blade. If I could get it, at least I could take my own life and he would be prevented from gloating that he killed me. I began to pray. (Angelou, 2012, p. 30)

In the passage above, Angelou has a thought to kill herself. Instead of being killed, she chooses to kill herself. Angelou draws a line from the sequence of events such as the undressing part, the assault, and humiliation in the public space. All of the events indicate Mark's satisfaction to be superior to Angelou. By making Angelou looks like an object without equal rights and feelings, Mark wants to show off his power and manliness. Therefore, Angelou refuses to be killed and become a victim, and let Mark successfully oppresses her.

Pauli Murray states, "A system of oppression draws much of its strength from the acquiescence of its victims, who have accepted the dominant image of themselves and are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness" (Murray as cited in Collins, 2000, p. 99). It can be concluded that a victim can only be a victim when she is accepted her status. Therefore, Angelou refuses to accept herself as a victim and justifies herself being oppressed.

Angelou also shows a similar rejection of being victimized when she is harassed in a public space in Morocco. Angelou chooses to act according to her traditional value instead of taking account the harassment done by a group of old men. Angelou shows her resistance by approaching those old men. When Angelou is shouted and beckoned by the old men, Angelou is aware that it has something to do with her dress. Instead of being afraid or avoiding them, Angelou chooses to approach them politely.

Angelou's action is meant to show her refusal to be treated disrespectfully, however, the old men still try to insult her by asking her to drink a cup of coffee with cockroaches in it. Instead of giving in, she drinks the coffee and swallows all of the cockroaches. Her action by showing respect and politeness—showing the quality of a Southern person—even to the disrespectful older men becomes a strategy to resist. Angelou focuses on fostering her self-definition as a granddaughter of a Southern grandmother who values traditional Black values to respect the older.

Angelou's responses reflect the spirit of Black feminism. Angelou firmly emphasizes dialogue and empathy to keep herself being accountable in encountering her experiences of oppression. Instead of being stuck in the oppressed situation, Angelou made use of it to optimize her observation. Furthermore, Angelou's responses also reflect Black feminism as she engages the sociological imagination by connecting her experiences with the social condition of the South in general. Therefore, she can read the clue of what tends to happen and how to respond to it.

Chapter eight which is entitled *Violence*, (Angelou, 2012, pp. 47-49), is a form of Angelou's responses resisting rape as an explainable social occurrence. As a victim and a woman, Angelou comprehends the victims' point of view. This chapter is also written as a form of Angelou's concern for the overlooked rape victim's perspective.

To oppose the academicians' misleading claims of rape, Angelou describes rape critically through its triggers, scheme, and effects on both the predator and the victim.

Angelou's capability to discuss the topic is also related to her own experience as she was raped by her mother's boyfriend when she was eight years old ("Maya Angelou: Academy of Achievement," 2019).

Related to Angelou's experience, Angelou's resistance to the academicians' claim becomes explainable. Angelou believes that rape is a sexual act, as to how she believes profanity, as part of rape, is directed to the victim in order to fulfill the rapist's sexual pleasure and have less to do with power (Angelou, 2012, pp. 48-49). Angelou's belief is plausible related to her own experience of being raped when she was a child. An adult male does not need to validate his power to an eight-year-old-girl. Therefore, Angelou firmly argues that the act of rape is triggered sexually.

Angelou shares the same perspective as Black feminist's in viewing rape. Collins states that rape is a form of sexual violence used to strip the victims' resistance. Therefore, they become passive and submissive to give what the rapist seeks (Collins, 2000, p. 135). In Angelou's argument, it is sexual pleasure. Either it is primarily triggered by sexual attraction or hunger for power, rape is considered violence where the victim's rights and freedom are seized and dwarfed.

The academicians' claim that most rapists are those who used to be the victims (Angelou, 2012, pp. 47-48) makes the act of rape seem explainable. Rape seems tolerable, therefore, Maya Angelou tries to eliminate the possibility that rape is tolerable. Angelou refuses any thoughts that consider rape as an ordinary occurrence, and she refuses any justifications to tolerate rape culture.

Conclusion

There are two main points discussed in this study. The first is women oppression in the narrator's experiences in *A Letter To My Daughter*. The second problem is about the narrator's responses to women oppression which reflect Black feminism.

The first women oppression found in the narrator's experiences is the control of Black women's image. The control of Black women's

images is maintained through transmitted ideas and beauty images. The control through transmitted idea is practiced and preserved by Black society. Angelou experienced control through transmitted ideas when she was living with her paternal family in Arkansas. The second women oppression found in the narrator's experiences is the regulation of Black women's bodies. Angelou experienced Black women's body being regulated through her own experiences on domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and rape.

The second point discussed is the narrator's responses to women oppression. The responses are in the forms of thought, act, and manner that reflect Black feminism.

The use of Black feminism characteristics enables the narrator to perceive her experiences critically. Besides analyzing her own experiences of being oppressed, Angelou also relates her own experience with the actual social occurrence; therefore, she can figure out the cause and impact of a taken act.

Moreover, in all responses, Black feminism is reflected through the narrator's shifting view to focus on empowering self-definition. The self-definition that Angelou chose portrays her as a proud Southern daughter, a proud mother, and a proud Southern granddaughter. Through her empowered self-definition, Angelou indirectly preserves the Black women community and Black domestic tradition by holding on to its value and being proud to be a part of them.

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