

# AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER INEQUALITY TOWARDS THE MAIN CHARACTER REFLECTED IN MARIE BENEDICT'S THE OTHER EINSTEIN NOVEL: FEMINIST APPROACH

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## Abstract

This research aims to analyze gender inequality that can be found in the novel of "The Other Einstein" by Marie Benedict. It focuses to analyze on the female main character, MilevaMaric, and the first wife of the infamous scientist, Albert Einstein. This research is descriptive qualitative research, using the method of library research to collect data and the method of descriptive analysis by Ratna. The theory uses to analyze the gender inequality acquired by Mileva is Longwe's framework of women empowerment, structures into five levels of equality. It means that if all of the five levels are unable to be reached, empowerment is unable to fully be acquired by women. The research's result showed that Mileva was unable to acquire the equality and full empowerment of women in the novel as the equality Mileva had received throughout the novel had only reached the lowest second level, access. While the rest higher three levels, conscientisation, participation, and control were not reached, and those equalities were not received by Mileva. It can be concluded that through this research, the equality level that had been reached by women in the culture and the times when Mileva lived around the end of 1890s and beginning of 1900s is on the level of access, the half of the women's empowerment.

**Keywords: Feminism, Gender Inequality, Women Empowerment.**

## A. INTRODUCTION

The patriarchal system in society is built upon women as the second sex. It had become issues from time to time as female in nature is considered to be the contrast with male. A simple instance is taken from the issue of inequality between both gender, which women's side took the effects more. Historically, it had been stated that women were denied to have the rights equally with men in the past, such as the rights to vote, to have education, to have the rights of parental, and also the right to choose marriage. It was as if women live to not be themselves and have no rights over their own bodies (University of Exeter, 2019). However, as the time passed, the gap of the equality in societies started to get smaller, but it still exists until now in a quite few societies who still hold firmly on the belief.

The image of women has been deeply implanted as the other sex of men that is supposed to remain the eternal feminine, where they acted as a companion, not regarded as total human beings in which their rights are limited. There had been clear differences between how

the way men were raised and taught onto what occupations they should take. While, women were only assigned to focus on works such as taking care of their children and house, and they were not supposed to aim for higher education. Beasley (2005) mentioned that most part of social and political ways is written by men, for men, and about men. It signifies the existence of women is considered below men on how was pictured in life before gender equality occurred.

The movement of feminism has the goal for women to achieve equality as the same with men, and to fight against gender inequality that had occurred in society. Stated by Lorber (2001), gender inequality took a lot of different forms, but for sure that it is usually women who received the disadvantages than similarly situated men. The obvious inequalities that are bound to be happened are when women had lower pay for the same work, blocked for their chance on advancement for top position, imbalance of housework done between women and men who at the same time work outside the house, and the others. Gender

inequality in the other hand can be found in literary works, amongst is novel.

There is a novel that took the researcher's interest to be analyzed by bringing up the topic of gender inequality. The novel with the title of "The Other Einstein" written by Marie Benedict is a historical fiction novel, first published on October 18<sup>th</sup> in 2016. It had become one of the most popular books that are published in 2016, and the author of the novel, Marie Benedict had also been known as the bestselling author in New York Times and USA Today (Goodreads, 2016). The novel span around the main character, MilevaMaric's life when she pursued study on math and physics, rather than the path of marriage. She is a brilliant physicist, who contributed on the theory of relativity that may had been inspired by her own insight. Anyhow, she is known to be the famous Albert Einstein's first wife rather than a clever and impeccable physicist. She was then married to Einstein as he pursued and mesmerized by her brilliance intellectual. Her life turned sideways along the marriage that faced problems, and lost sight on the life she dreamed of.

Discrimination against women has always been a culture of society which is the main point of resistance in the field of the patriarchal system. Women become expected to be below the standards in participating in any leading role, and women become placed in lower positions that are not eventful. It causes lots of gender inequality experienced towards women as men shouldn't treat them that way. Gender inequality makes women feel weak and less able, inferior and paltry, and tends to discourage them from doing the same things as men. Thus, feminism becomes important in overcoming gender inequality towards women, and women can get the same rights as those things obtained by men.

## **B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The approach used in this analysis is the feminist approach. Feminism represented the

movements done to aim and establish the equality between men and women, in term of political, economic, and social rights. It focused on gaining the equal opportunities for women, as women's rights are known nonexistent in public before the feminist movements were planned. In which feminists assume that the difference social values between men and women are just a culture, so it is possible to be changed and establish it towards the culture they expected and desired.

Hooks (2000) stated that feminism is an action to stop sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. This definition is not literally meant that men is the enemy of this movement. Naming sexism is to present the focused of the problem or matter. It implies that this movement exists for problematic sexist thinking and action, either between gender, age, or social status. It was understood that no matter who someone is, they have the rights to live in their own will. She also mentioned that majority of people do not understand sexism, which they assumed that feminism is only about how feminists are a group of anti-males which they learnt about it from patriarchal media. They thought, this movement of women is focusing on the freedom to have abortions, to be lesbians, to do violence in society. In reality, the feminism they concerned about is the fight of women to gain the gender equality, equal pay for equal work, equal social values, sharing households and parenting. Among the issues, most of the people agreed on the idea of having gender equality in workplace, that is equal pay for equal work.

### **2.1 Framework of Women's Empowerment**

Longwe framework is expanded by a consultant on gender and development, named Sara Hlupekile Longwe, which is based in Lusaka, Zambia. Longwe stated that the framework acted as the base of development that helped to identify how it support and build women's empowerment (March et al, 1999). The system concentrated more on different areas rather than only on achieving equality on the sectors of society and

economy. Development in the framework meant to enable people to live their own lives away from poverty of exploitation and oppression. The development can be seen through the achieving of five levels of equality, which are present in the areas of economic and social life and are used to determine the level to women's empowerment.

1. Welfare

The lowest level of women to achieve empowerment, which is related to material needs such as access to income, supply of food, and medical needs.

2. Access

It indicated to women's access to the practices of administrative and law, included the access of land, credit, labor, facilities of marketing, and public benefits and services.

3. Conscientisation, which is conceived as a conscious insight on the differences between gender and sex, and well-aware on the possibility of change on the cultural gender roles. It also requires belief on the fair division of labor and should be agreed by both sides, without involving political or economic domination.

4. Participation

Fourth level of quality that defined equal participation of women in the practices of decision-making. It is regarded as an important aspect on the development of empowerment, as participation meant the involvement in declaring decision in project planning, evaluation, and implementation that will be affected on wide communities.

5. Control

The last development level that marked the highest level of equality and women's empowerment. It denoted to the control done by women through the process of their decision-making, achieving the equality to control over in terms of production or distribution on

benefits. Equality on control meant that both genders have the equal rights to control, which means that neither side dominated over other.

## 2.2 Previous of The Research

The researcher found studies that are also related to the analysis of gender inequality that was portrayed in novel. The first study is from journal article of gender inequality analysis on "The Breadwinner" novel by Deborah Ellis. Prastiyowati, Andini, Prastiwi(2019) had analyzed on the types of inequality that can be found in the novel as experienced by the main character. The research used the theory of Longwe's framework of women empowerment, which consists of five equality's levels. The analysis result showed that the main character experienced gender inequality as the levels of equality is not fulfilled, and the lack of equality caused negative effects, such as lack of security, poverty, and so on. Compared to the previous study with the analysis in this research, the use of theory is the same, which is the framework of women empowerment by Longwe in (March et al., 1999) with five levels of equality. It would be analyzed in the novel of present research whether all of the equality's levels are fulfilled or vice versa.

The second study that researchers found is from the article on gender inequality analysis entitled Women's Economic Empowerment Through Entrepreneurial Opportunities In Zimbabwe's Informal Furniture Industry written by Tonderai & Kufakunesu, (2019). The journal article analyzes gender inequality in women's participation in the furniture manufacturing trade and their involvement in informal sector activities. Women have almost no rights in furniture-making commerce, given the tendency of the patriarchal system towards gender in terms of power and ownership relations and decision-making. The purpose of the analysis is to ensure gender equality at any level by supporting women's entrepreneurial competence and supporting women in making decisions.

### C. METHOD RESEARCH

This research used descriptive qualitative research to analyze the novel entitled "The Other Einstein" written by Marie Benedict. The researcher applied the theory of Longwe's framework of women's empowerment which is divided into five levels of equality. The theory is used to find out gender inequality that occurred in the novel, identify the unfulfillment of the five equality's levels by the female main character, MilevaMaric.

The data is collected by using the method of library research by Ratna (2004), which the primary data source is the novel "The Other Einstein" and the secondary data sources are the references in forms of e-books, articles, and web articles. The procedure of collecting data is by reading the novel, then noted the statements as related to the theory used. The data is analyzed by using the method of descriptive analysis by Ratna (2004), started by identifying and classifying the data into parts accord to the theory. Lastly, the analysis is resulted the unfulfillment of gender equality as reflected in "The Other Einstein" novel.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. Welfare

Welfare is the lowest level of equality, where if this level is not fulfilled, means that inequality of gender still exists in the society. However, in the novel, the female main character, Mileva, received the equality of welfare which are an appropriate boarding house for her to live near the college and her source of income after becoming the head of her small family. They can be seen from the quotations below.

"Over tea and cakes and pleasantries and under Papa's persistent questioning, the Engelbrechts explained the workings of their boardinghouse: the fixed schedule for meals, visitors, laundry, and room cleaning. Papa, the former military man, inquired about the security of the lodgers, and his shoulders softened with every favorable response and each assessment of the tufted blue fabric on the walls and the ornately carved

chairs gathered around the wide marble fireplace."(Benedict, 2016, p. 22)

The quotation above occurred when Mileva and her father arrived for the first time at Zurich, and went to their first destination, which is the boardinghouse of Engelbrechts Pension. There Mileva's father, Miloš questioned and made sure to the owner that it has to be a safe place for Mileva to live, so she could focus in attending her long-awaited education path at the college in Switzerland, one of many universities in Europe who grant women for admission. From her father's actions of worrying his daughter's living and safety, it showed that Miloš had compassion for his female child, and that proved that Mileva had required the equality of having assuring and safe place for her to live far away from her hometown and family.

"Even when I had the Nobel Prize money Albert had promised me in our divorce to assist in the raising of my beautiful sons—my brilliant Hans Albert, who went on to become an engineer, and my poor Tete, who succumbed to mental illness—I have reclaimed my intellect and my scientific passion by tutoring promising young female scientists."(Benedict, 2016, p. 321)

From the quotation, it showed that after divorcing her husband, Albert Einstein, Mileva had received money from the Nobel Prize on one of their four papers they worked on in 1905, as stated in their divorce's terms. Even though the hatred of her after knowing Albert removed her name from the authority, she thought that at least she deserved the money of the honor. From the money that she had received, she treated it as sums to raise her sons, which became the sources of their food supply and care. In the otherhand, Mileva who had become a widow and the head of the family, also obtained the source of her income, in which she reclaimed her passion and intellect in science to do a job of teaching young female scientists, who she once was. This aspect also proved that Mileva

indeed had fulfilled the lowest level of equality, welfare.

## 2. Access

The second level after welfare, access meant that the accesses allowed for women to public facilities or places that was allowed for men for decades. Mileva had also passed this level of equality where she was allowed to attend one of Swiss' universities, and the places she visited along with her boarding house's female friends.

“And yet the Swiss were the most tolerant people in other ways; they had the most lenient university admissions for women, for example. It was a confusing contradiction. ..., The Polytechnic was a new sort of college dedicated to producing teachers and professors for various math or scientific disciplines, and it was one of the few universities in Europe to grant women degrees.”(Benedict, 2016, p. 19-20)

The quotation declared that Swiss has become a country in Europe that is tolerant towards women by giving the equality of education, which they had universities that allowed admissions for women to attend the college. Through the opportunity, Mileva and her brilliance abled to pass the admission to Swiss Federal Polytechnic, became the fifth women to be admitted, and the only female among all male students in the class. Although she had to face the professor's indifference towards her, it did not sway her and she still diligently follow his courses and lessons.

“They constantly entreated me to join them in walks, lectures, café-house visits, theater, and concerts.”(Benedict, 2016, p. 26)

“That's the spirit, Mileva. What fun we'll have! By day, we will work as historians or physicists or teachers, and by night and weekends, we will play our concerts and go for hikes.” (Benedict, 2016, p. 57)

It is shown from the quotations that showed how Mileva's friends would invite her to hang out outside the boarding house at public places, such as

café, park, concert, and theater which allowed access for women. The starting compassion and equality given towards women also able for them to reflect on what they really want to do for their lives. Helene had the dream to path way towards being a teacher, while Mileva becomes scientist. Because of tolerance environment of Swiss and the rare chance given for them to acquire education there, it was believed that even by themselves they are able to acquire the future they want. From this aspect, it is believed that the equality for women of access had been reached for the female characters in the novel to receive.

## 3. Conscientisation

The third and middle level of equality, conscientisation is the level of equality in which the awareness and understanding of differences between gender and sex is occurred, and also the belief on the possibilities to change the cultural gender roles. Unfortunately, the equality received by Mileva had stopped in this level, as found in the novel conscientisation did not exist around her even in the culture of the known-tolerant country of Europe, Switzerland.

““You are?” he asked as if he weren't expecting me, as if he'd never heard of me. “Miss MilevaMari , sir.” I prayed my voice didn't quaver. Very slowly, Weber consulted his class list. Of course, he knew precisely who I was..., I had to petition him directly to enter the first year of the four-year program, known as Section Six. He had approved my entrance himself! ..., “As if being the only woman in Section Six—only the fifth to ever be admitted into the physics and mathematics program—wasn't enough. ..., Perspiring from the effort, I realized the classroom was completely silent. They were waiting for me to settle, and perhaps embarrassed by my limp or my sex or both, they kept their eyes averted.”(Benedict, 2016, p. 13-14)

The quotations found in the novel above had proved that conscientisation is not found on the male character around Mileva in her education life, who is her class's professor. It is being explained by Mileva herself in the quotation that the professor indeed was the one who admitted her into the first year after she had to directly request to him for it. As if he did not know the attendance of Mileva, through the actions he had emphasized on his trivial view on her, both for her gender which she was one of the five women ever admitted in the university, and the fact that she came from the East European. He treated her like non-existence in the class, but not after Mileva succeeded to prove herself by answering professor Weber's question which all of her classmates unable to answer.

““So will you go to Ka ?” I looked up, startled at his question. How could I stay away? “Of course.” “For how long?” “Until Lieserl recovers.” “Can't your mother handle this? You could be away for an awfully long time. A proper wife shouldn't leave her husband alone for too long. How will I manage?” I stared at him. Had he really just asked me those questions? For all his selfish inquiries, he hadn't asked a single question about the scarlet fever or Lieserl's condition. Where was his compassion and concern for his daughter? All that seemed to matter was his inconvenience at my absence.” (Benedict, 2016, p. 212-213)

The situation in the quotation is where conscientisation did not exist in Mileva's household, by Albert. It situated when they were still newlyweds, but their daughter before marriage was having a severe illness back in Mileva's hometown, which is the scarlet fever. Mileva had been waiting to bring Lieserl to their home at Bern, however it did not go as what she planned as Lieserl's sudden disease occurred. When she tried to hurry to catch on the last train to her family were, Albert stopped her and asked her to stay because he would not be able to manage the housework. He had cultured mindset that all of the housework should be

done by women in house, not men. As the level of conscientisation, it should be agreed by both that labor should be divided fairly. In this term, it did not matter for Mileva to continue doing the housework herself, however in Albert's statement showed his thought of a housewife should prioritize the house and husband, and refusing to do the housework while she would be away for long.

#### 4. Participation

After the unfulfilled level of conscientisation, the next level of equality, participation, also not fulfilled through Mileva's life. In this section, the participation that is not obtained by Mileva is after her marriage with Albert. She was indirectly and directly got refused by Albert to obtain the honor of her scientist papers or works. It can be seen in the quotations.

““Won't he ask who this other author is? This Miss Mari ?” Albert was quiet. “Would you mind if I listed only my name as the author? I'm hoping that if Professor Weber reads it and becomes as impressed as I think he will, he will offer me a permanent job.” I didn't answer. The thought of being expunged from the paper's authorship bothered me; we had worked on it as equals.”(Benedict, 2016, p. 169)

““How could you have let this happen? And not tell me? You know where that idea came from. You know how important it was to me to memorialize Lieserl by publicly authoring that article.” ..., “Did he ask you to remove my name?” “No,” he said slowly. “You asked him to remove my name?” I was incredulous. But only in part. I suddenly remembered another time he'd removed my name from an article we'd coauthored. The one on capillaries, for the other Professor Weber.”(Benedict, 2016, p. 245)

““Why isn't Mileva's name on the patent filing?” Paul asked Albert, a quizzical expression on his face. I stared at the papers again. Surely, Paul was wrong; Albert would

not commit such a grievous sin twice. Not after the months of silence he had endured. My name must be on the filing somewhere. Scanning the page containing the applicants' information, I saw that Paul was right. Nowhere was the name "Mileva Einstein" listed. How dare Albert?" (Benedict, 2016, p. 252)

The three quotations above are listed by the time when Mileva realized that her works or papers were claimed by Albert that honored himself to the society and only put his name on the authority. The first incident occurred when Albert wanted to submit their paper to his superior in the high school he worked for, however in this point, he did request to Mileva that he was going to submit it and list himself as the only author, even it is a work along with her. At the time, Mileva felt bothered but let it be and hoped that it would secure his job permanently. Next, Albert had submit Mileva's work with the title "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies", which was inspired from her condolences over her daughter, Lieserl. However, the article was submitted without Mileva's name as the author, while again Albert give the honor to himself to become the author alone. Lastly, their work on a machine that was named Maschinchen, again was claimed by Albert, putting his name alone in the patent filling without Mileva's. From these selfishness and thoughtlessness of Albert, Mileva did not acquire the equality for the honor of her work, even thought she did participate in creating the works or papers, which showed that Albert had refused her participation towards society.

"Was it so wrong that I wanted scientific work for myself? That work was the core of my being, the link to my longneglected spirituality and intellect. Without it for so long, I felt hollow. Perhaps if I had work of my own, science could become less of a battlefield between Albert and me, a symbol of my sacrifice and neglect, and science could again return to its original sacred place in my world.

..., So this was to be Albert's new collaborator. He gave the work long earmarked for me away—to Marcel. I'd told myself that the hope of collaboration was long past, but to actually witness the passing of the baton was unbearable. How could Albert make me stand by and watch as he utterly robbed me of the bohemian partnership he'd promised? On the theory I created."(Benedict, 2016, p. 279-280)

Apart from the previous incidents of Albert claimed Mileva's works, the quotations above put out the situation that she faced after being married to Albert, which she was prevented to work on science alone without her husband. She was not allowed to have a work published for herself as an author and a scientist, and she was not invited by Albert again to work on science together. Not much different with previous incidents, Albert's actions in preventing her to take part in science, indirectly emphasized that she should be only staying at home as housewife, not as a female scientist who overpowered her husband among the scientists in society.

## 5. Control

It is the highest level of equality, which means that women had received full equal rights alongside men if it is reached. Certainly, this level is also not reached as what Mileva had gone through. Let alone in the society, Mileva had failed to acquire control over her household and husband. They are shown in the quotations below.

"“Albert, do you think that there's any way we could leave Prague? Return to Zürich or move to any other healthier European city?” He paused, a deep furrow appearing between his brows. “That sounds awfully bourgeois of you. I know Prague doesn't have the comforts or sophistication of Zürich or even Bern, but it's been quite the opportunity for me. It's quite a selfish ask, Mileva.” ..., His face expressed no sympathy or concern, only disgust. “I've been prolific in Prague, Mileva. You are asking me to

give that up.” Albert stood up suddenly, causing my balance to waver, and I fell back on my heels. Without offering a hand of help, he stepped over me, and as he walked toward the kitchen, he said, “You only ever think of yourself.””(Benedict, 2016, p. 272-274)

The quotation above situated when Mileva suggested and requested to Albert to move away back to Zurich, where they once lived together or anywhere else. From the statements, they currently lived in the city of Prague, where Albert gained the opportunity to the position of full physics professor and companion of Institute of Theoretical Physics’ director. Mileva was not unpleased with his secured job, however the unpleasant living in Prague with its unclean water and atmosphere caused their younger son, Tete, to catch on illnesses more often. Albert’s unawareness of the situation that befell his wife and children was because of his neglect towards them. His presence was not visible in the house, leaving them alone for weeks and only saw them in a few family dinners. Mileva’s plead was regarded by him as excuses and selfishness, without thinking about his well-earned job at the Plague, while he himself was selfish enough to not consider his younger son’s health. This not only proved that Albert has the control of the family and the decision maker, he also controlled over Mileva for the things she had not done and turned over the facts.

““It is a list of the conditions upon which I will stay in this apartment with you and the boys. This is only so I can maintain a relationship with the boys. As for you and me, I want our relationship to become a business one, with the personal aspects reduced to almost nothing. .... “Absolutely. If you cannot agree to these conditions, then I will have no choice but to ask you for a separation.””(Benedict, 2016, p. 313)

It was finally shown by Albert of his true self while handling his family matters, in which he had considered Mileva as no other than housewife and the servant in the house. Throughout the novel, Mileva had

been enduring Albert’s acts of thoughtfulness in order to keep the complete image of family. Mileva’s decision let Albert to control them, especially Mileva as she continued refusing to leave him even though he had done many things bad to her. He had threatened to leave his wife and sons if Mileva refused to agree on the conditions he had made, which he literally asked her to continue being like the servant in the house. This showed Mileva had failed to acquire the control over family, even her purpose was to keep her family completed as it should be. She had no choice other than finally divorced with Albert, rather than had to be trampled over her self-esteem.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The novel “The Other Einstein” is a story about the infamous scientist Albert Einstein’s first wife, who is also a scientist herself. Both of them had attended the same university and were in the same class, which they gradually grew fond to each other. However, Mileva’s fate was no different from that of girls in general, as she was pushed by the situation to become full housewife after marriage, despite Albert’s promise of having their bohemian couple life which meant equal in work and love. She was indirectly prevented by Albert to invent science on her own. In this research, it focused to analyze on MilevaMaric, the main character in the novel if she had received the equality rights. This research used the theory of Longwe’s framework about women empowerment, which is divided into five levels of equality. From the research’s result, it had discovered that the equality Mileva had received throughout the novel had reached the lowest second level, access. While the rest higher three levels were not reached, and those equalities were not received by Mileva. They are conscientisation, participation, and control. It can be concluded that through this research, the equality level that had been reached by women in the culture and the times when Mileva lived around the end of 1890s and beginning of 1900s is on the level of



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access, the half of the women's empowerment, and it was when gender inequality still occurred.

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