

Post Colonialism: Utopian and Dystopian Elements in Maya Angelou's Poetry

أدوب ما بعد الحقبة الاستعمارية: العناصر الطوباوية والخيالية والواقعية

المريرة في شعر مايا أنجلو

إعداد

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Abstract:

This study explores postcolonial themes in Maya Angelou's poetry, emphasizing utopian and dystopian elements shaped by colonial and racial experiences. Postcolonialism is analyzed not only as a literary method but as a broader framework addressing ongoing colonial legacies such as displacement, racial discrimination, alienation, and gender oppression. Angelou's work reflects the complexities of racial identity, hybridity, and hegemony, critiquing white supremacy and its sociopolitical ramifications.

The study highlights Angelou's personal and collective struggles against racism and patriarchy, illustrating how her poetry serves as a narrative of resilience and self-awareness. Utopianism in her poetry presents visions of freedom and justice, while dystopian elements expose harsh realities endured by African-Americans. Through close readings, the research demonstrates how Angelou's poetic voice embodies postcolonial resistance and feminist consciousness. This thesis contributes to understanding the transformative power of literature in negotiating identity and history within the postcolonial context.

Key Words: Postcolonialism, Maya Angelou, Utopianism, Dystopianism, Racism, Hybridity, and Feminism.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الرسالة موضوعات ما بعد الاستعمار في شعر مايا أنجيلو، مع التركيز على العناصر الطوبوية والمظلمة التي تشكلت بفعل التجارب الاستعمارية والعرقية. يُحلل مفهوم ما بعد الاستعمار ليس فقط كمنهج أدبي، بل كإطار أوسع يعالج إرث الاستعمار المستمر مثل التشريد، التمييز العنصري، الاغتراب، واضطهاد النوع الاجتماعي. يعكس شعر أنجيلو تعقيدات الهوية العرقية، والتداخل الثقافي، والهيمنة، منتقدة التفوق الأبيض وتبعاته الاجتماعية والسياسية.

تبرز الدراسة النضالات الشخصية والجماعية لأنجيلو ضد العنصرية والنظام الأبوي، موضحة كيف يمثل شعرها سرًا للصمود والوعي الذاتي. يعرض الجانب الطوبوي في شعرها رؤى للحرية والعدالة، بينما تكشف العناصر المظلمة عن الواقع القاسي الذي يعانيه الأمريكيون من أصول أفريقية. من خلال قراءة متأنية، يبين البحث كيف يجسد صوت أنجيلو شعري مقاومة ما بعد الاستعمار والوعي النسوي. تسهم هذه الرسالة في فهم القوة التحويلية للأدب في التفاوض حول الهوية والتاريخ ضمن إطار ما بعد الاستعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار، مايا أنجيلو، الليوتوبيا، الديستوبيا، العنصرية، التداخل الثقافي، النسوية.

Images of Dystopia and Utopia in Angelou's Life

Through every single page in Angelou's life, she witnessed dystopia but she hung on to utopia. As a child, Angelou faced displacement and separation from her parents – a dystopian matter. She went to live with her grandmother who gave her everything she needed and became the first image of her utopia. She witnessed rape and stuck to silence. But she met Mrs. Flowers who was a page turner for her and helped her to overcome this incident and retain her voice. Thanks to Mrs. Flowers, Angelou became a writer. On her graduation day, a white principle attended the party and gave an ugly speech that put them (Angelou and her black classmates) down, but she retained hope after singing “Lift ev'ry voice and sing” with her classmates. That was the first time for her to feel happy and proud to be a member of the beautiful black race.

Getting enrolled in the world of work made her lose her innocence, but she learned the lesson that not everybody is trustworthy. She worked for the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) that gave her a chance to fight for freedom. She hoped for a better future. As a black woman, she dreamt of equality and overcoming racism.

The importance of the study

Most of the previous researches and studies discussed Angelou's poetry from different perspectives. The most discussed approaches were concerned with her poetry as an African-American feminist poet. But this study attempts to highlight the postcolonial approaches of utopia, dystopia, as well as racial discrimination, oppression, alienation, and utopian and dystopian feminist questions within the poems. The postcolonial contribution of Angelou is the point of the study on the two levels of themes and technical devices.

The focus of this study will be on those poems of Angelou that did not receive the same attention as her famous and iconic poems. Angelou is not only “Still I Rise” or “Phenomenal Woman”; there is more and much to be said about her rich poetry that showed post-colonialism and its utopian and dystopian elements. Postcolonial utopianism and Angelou’s unheard-of poems will make this study significant and different.

Objectives

This study aims to sort out the representation of post-colonialism with its completely different concepts – utopianism and dystopianism – in Angelou’s poetry. The study will analyze themes, imagery, and figurative language to highlight their link to the above mentioned approaches.

Research Questions

- 1- How is post-colonialism with its utopian and dystopian elements represented in Maya Angelou’s poetry?
- 2- How does the poet quest for The Black identity in her poetry?
- 3- How did she use poetry techniques such as colorful, African, rich imagery; hard and unswerving symbols; sharp rhythm, unstructured free verse, and that sturdy satirical tone to deliver her strong message and cry?

Methodology

This qualitative research will analyze and illustrate Maya Angelou’s themes and figurative language according to post-colonialism. The research will quantify the given information and analyze them to deduct information. In order to achieve this aim, the study represents the following chapters:

First Chapter: Images of Racism.

Second Chapter: Images of Utopia and Dystopia.

Third Chapter: The Presence of Maya Angelou’s Poetry in Different Communities.

Conclusion

First Chapter

Images of Racism

Abstract

This chapter investigates the racial oppression portrayed in the early poetry of Maya Angelou. The African-Americans experienced different forms of racial oppression and injustice. Angelou used different types of images as well as different symbols to describe racial oppression and the impacts of these conditions on the African-Americans. She used different images to urge the African-Americans to depend on themselves, not on the white liberals or the black bourgeoisie. Shaping the identity deformed by racism was Angelou's concern.

When I Think about Myself

Angelou wrote this poem about a black woman who was a maid in New York City. The woman sat at the back of the bus with her shopping bags. She laughed at whatever the bus driver did: stopped abruptly, stopped slowly, picked up somebody, missed somebody. Angelou watched this woman for about nine months. Angelou declares that if you do not know "the black features you may think this woman is laughing. She wasn't laughing. "She was simply extending her lips and making a sound" (Angelou, "Maya Angelou – The Mask" 2:35-3:12).

The protest poem "When I think about myself" sheds light on identity questions. When the persona thinks of herself, her identity (who she is), her place in the society, she laughs. Actually, she finds only vanity. She finds that she is a person of no importance. She extends her lips and makes the sound of laughter. In other words, she is not laughing — she is not happy.

Paraphrase

In the opening stanza, the first line "When I think about myself" means that the persona intends to reflect on herself and her life. The allegorical meaning intended by the poet in the second line is not real laughing; it is only a gesture of spreading the lips and making a sound. The metaphor in the third line shows inconsiderableness.

The metaphors in the fourth and the fifth lines signify insignificance. The dance is walked (anybody can walk) and the song is spoken (anybody can speak). The auditory images assert that there is nothing special about the persona. The hyperbole that is in the second and sixth lines shows the restrained feelings of sorrow for not having a proper life. The auditory and organic imagery clarifies the intended meaning.

In the second stanza, the first line depicts a sad situation: working as a maid for the white community even after turning sixty. The second line exemplifies depre-ciation. The auditory images in the second and third lines: "calls me girl" and "I say "yes ma'am"" clarify servility. "For the working's sake" suggests endurance and seeking survival. The fourth line reflects self-esteem. In the fifth line, the expression "Too poor to break" clarifies how slavery and poverty ail the soul so it could be easily broken. The deep sorrow felt by the persona is expressed in the hyperbole in the sixth line "I laugh so hard I almost choke". The visual and organic images help the reader see the fields of suffering of the persona.

The allegorical hyperbole, in the first two lines of the last stanza, expresses the depression experienced by the persona who found out about the state of her community. Using a simile, the poet likens the "tales" of the persona's community to "lying" to symbolize unbelievability. The auditory and visual images help the reader hear the cry of the maid and see the pitiful deplorable life of her community.

In this poem, Angelou defends her race by highlighting the reason behind their endurance to humiliation. She clarifies the reason that makes the old black maid endure the insulting white young woman calling her "girl". Simply, the maid wants to keep her job to be able to support her family and to keep her race alive. She accepts slavery to earn a living for the new generation that could find better living conditions. So, Angelou is so grateful for the older generations who endured humiliation and insult to feed, shelter, clothe, and educate the family (Hagen 129).

We Saw Beyond Our Seeming

Declaring the African-Americans as free men by the government gave birth to the white hegemony. The politicians, principals, landowners and employers were white. The white took over the society. They were the rulers and the African-Americans were the ruled. The white were the only voice of the society. So, the African-Americans were forced to accept this situation for which they were the ones to blame. Unfair hybridity was forced in society. The white controlled the political, economic and cultural situation. The African-Americans bent down to the conditions. They did whatever the white ordered. Thus, the slavery chains were still a fact of life. Angelou wrote this poem to clarify how the African-Americans unintentionally participated in their decay.

Paraphrase

The first stanza shows the days of agony under slavery. The first line begins with the new generation of African-Americans looking back at their dark past. "These days of bloodied screaming" manifests the slavery days and agony the black experienced under an unfair government. "Children dying bloated" incarnates children dying of hunger every day. "Lilies floated" stands for the innocence and purity of these children. "Lilies" is a symbol of sadness and sorrow due to the helplessness of the black. "Noosed and dangling" typifies lynching the black men. "The temples strangling" represents the killing of the black men as if it were a part of a religious ritual: a human sacrifice. It reflects the place that the black owned in society.

The fourth and fifth stanzas highlight the reasons for this agony. The poet blames it all on her race. They are the ones responsible for their bad conditions. "Our guilt grey fungus growing" indicates the black admitting their sin. They are the ones to blame for their enemy's strength. "Grey fungus" is a metonymy that shows how bad and harmful this enemy is. "Knew and lied our knowing" betokens the black knowing their mistake and pretending not to know. "Deafened and unwilling" certifies getting deceived. "Aided in the killing" demonstrates black weakness that helped in the

killing of their elites. The last stanza shows the consequences of their deeds. "Souls lie broken" is a metaphor that likens their souls to broken things. It connotes their physically and psychologically broken selves. "Dry tablets without token" is a metaphor that shows their hand-made helplessness and worthlessness.

Miss Scarlett, Mr. Rhett and Other Latter-Day Saints

Before analysing the poem we need to have a close look at *Gone with the Wind*. This novel shows that slavery was not a big deal. It highlights "the creation myth of white victimhood in America". It works as "a kind of skeleton key, unlocking America's illusions about itself". Jim Crow's discrimination laws brought power back to the white (Redemption) and replaced "slavery as a mechanism of subjugation". The novel represents how the Confederacy's Lost Cause alluded to everybody that the South fought the North for the rights of the states but not slavery matters. It brings up the claimed harmony between the white masters and their black slaves in the plantation. Sarah Churchwell says: "it's terrible to watch people cling to their captivity and insist on their own destruction" (Makowsky 991).

The novel comes to the defense of the racist foundation of the Ku Klux Klan. Mitchell claims that the Ku Klux Klan whose members were noblemen was responsible for protecting the white women against the attacks of the disloyal freed slaves that the government protected (Konecna 11). In *Gone with the Wind*, a beautified image of racism is portrayed. Churchwell asserts that Mitchell beautified racism with clear excuses. Mitchell used dereflection to direct the attention of the reader to a courageous Scarlett. So, the reader does not see the intended white supremacy, but the grief of a white woman who became "another form of property" of patriarchy. In doing so, she directs the attention to the myth of plantation instead of the slavery and brutal war (Makowsky 993).

Paraphrase

The title holds irony in comparing Scarlett, Rhett and other plantation owners to saints. In the first stanza, “novitiates” is an allegory of the Ku Klux Klan. The irony, in this stanza, is intended to mock the claimed cluelessness of the Ku Klux Klan. It was known that the white plantation owners were too cruel to their slaves. So, in the second stanza, “human sacrifice” is the allegory of Scarlett's actions. “Golgotha” is the allegory of the hard time Scarlett had. “Blackface” is a metonymy of the black mockery. “Priest” is an allegory of white plantation owners. The irony lies in comparing Scarlett's playful actions to self-sacrifice of Jesus. It lies in comparing the cruel plantation owners to priests, and referring to the plantation as a holy place.

In the third stanza, irony lies in describing Scarlett as an unforgettable dead. There is irony in saluting Scarlett and praying for her soul. It appears, in the fourth stanza, that the intended character (Scarlett) was bad that the “God-Makers” paint frescoes with blood and gall for her tomb. In the fifth stanza, the irony lies in praising Rhett who is a white cotton plantation owner.

In the sixth stanza, “shadowed couplings of infidels” is an allegory of Rhett's family. “Tempt stigmata from the nipples” is an image of severe torture. “Your true believers” symbolizes the slaves that Rhett befriended. The irony lies in comparing Rhett to his father by describing the father as an infidel and Rhett as a trustworthy person.

The allegory, in the seventh stanza, is intended to complain about the injustice to our mother Eve. In the eighth stanza, the allusion is intended to remind the black of Birmingham church bombing. The irony exists in reporting that “Ministers make novena” using the “charred bones” of four little black girls. The irony, in the ninth stanza, refers to the confederate song made for Dixie Land (the name intended for the states of the south). The poet reminds the black of the old intention of the white to keep slavery.

In the tenth stanza, the “hymen” symbolizes virginity, and “relics” symbolizes feminine purity. The use of this sexual expression “and guard the relics/ of your intact hymen” is meant to move resistance against oppression (Kaberia 73). The poet repeats the word “his seed” to urge on reviving the land where their grandparents died of slavery. In the last stanza, the irony lies in saluting Scarlet as a pure soul and Rhett as a respect-worthy martyr.

Sepia Fashion Show

The black bourgeoisie (the educated black) occupy the middle class. They are ashamed of their black skin and adopt white attitudes. The African-American bourgeoisie accept the culture of the white and want to imitate their lifestyle. This class of African-Americans want to forget about their historical and social background and mix with the white. They want to fabricate a new black ideology and identity. In the poem “Sepia Fashion Show”, Angelou expresses how the black bourgeoisie try to mix with the white community. However, they remain at the bottom. They pay a heavy price for that. They lose their identity and adhere to conformity.

Paraphrase

In the title of the poem “Sepia Fashion Show”, Angelou uses a clever symbol. A fashion show that is colored in sepia symbolizes the fading heritage that they need to keep in mind. The first stanza holds a visual image of the models’ physical look. The next stanza sheds light on the manners of the models. “They’d nasty manners, held like banners”, holds a simile that reveals their publicly shown rude manners. “I’d see ’em in hell, before they’d sell /me one thing they’re wearing, clothes-wise”; in these lines the poet uses a hyperbole to declare that she will not buy or wear any of the clothes of the fashion show.

In the third stanza, the poet sheds light on how “The Black Bourgeoisie” act. “The Black Bourgeoisie, who all say "yah" /when yeah is what they're meaning” hold an allegory that signifies the black bourgeoisie fail to match with white community. “Should look around, both up and down /before they set out preening” demonstrates that they need to look at their historical background and their future before “preening”.

In the last stanza, the poet clarifies what the black bourgeoisie should consider: their past. “Indeed,” they swear, "that's what I'll wear /when I go country-clubbing.” reflect their disregard of the case of race inequality. They care for unnecessary matters. “I'd remind them please, look at those knees, /you got at Miss Ann's scrubbing.” embodies that kneeling down to scrub the house floor left dark marks on their knees.

There is a metonymic allegory in the poem. The poet compares the black bourgeoisie to the designers of the fashion show; the fashion designers sell their own designs to make money and get rich, and the black bourgeoisie sell their heritage out to elevate their standard in society. The poet compares the black bourgeoisie to the models of the fashion show. The models may not like what they wear, but they need to act according to their job. The black bourgeoisie may not like the white, but they need to act according to their (the white) community to gain their respect and easily mix with them.

Angelou used her poetry to encourage the African-Americans to get back their rights. She used different colors to clarify her point of view to the reader. As a feminist, she referred to how white women oppressed black women. She urged the black women not to forget the past, and warned them of getting deceived by the white. So, alienation, racial oppression and marginalization were the main themes addressed by the poet.

Second Chapter

Images of Utopia and Dystopia

This chapter describes the dystopian life experienced by the African-Americans as portrayed in Maya Angelou's poetry. The politicians and the principals were unjust to the African-Americans. They tried to enslave them by making them their servants. They originated racial discrimination in residence by defining regions for the black and regions for the white. However, the African-Americans created the utopia that they wanted for their children and themselves. In her poetry, Angelou describes various dystopian and utopian images.

The Mothering Blackness

Africa formed the image of utopia that the African-Americans dreamt of. For instance, Ghana gave a utopian space to many African-American intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s. The African-American intellectuals such as Du Bois, Julian Mayfield, St. Claire Drake, and Maya Angelou lived there at some point and made use of the Ghanaian experience as a starting point for establishing "a transnational notion of antiracist citizenship" beyond the civil rights movement in the United States (Zamalin 81).

In three stages, Angelou describes her journey to Ghana in her poem "the mothering blackness". The first stage— "running"— is described in the first stanza. It is a dystopian state of fear. She came to Ghana, running from the shame she had experienced in Egypt. "Back to the mothering blackness" is a metonymy that connotes the poet's return to her original home, Africa. "Deep in the smothering blackness" is a metonymy that implies the inside of the poet. "White tears" form icicles to typify the secret tears that cannot be easily revealed.

In the next stage, Angelou describes her first steps on Ghanaian lands, the lands of utopia. "She came down creeping" is an organic image that epitomizes the poet's fatigue, and her uncertainty about the decision. "The black arms waiting" is a synecdoche of the African-American group that welcomed Angelou and her son in Ghana. "Rime of alien dreams befrosts her rich brown face" is a metonymy that exemplifies the poet's thought that she is not a Ghanaian woman and owns no property in Ghana. This thought "befrosts" her

The "blamelessness" is the last stage and the development of the former stage. The biblical allusion in "black yet as Hagar's daughter" is a simile that connotes the poet being a single mother. It denotes her pride of herself and her skin color. There is another biblical allusion in "tall as was Sheba's daughter" that betokens the poet's pride of her royal tallness. "Threats of northern winds" is a metonymy of the racial issues and the shameful incident the poet experienced in the northern countries. "Die on the desert's face" is a personification. It suggests that the poet does not need to worry about any problems because they will not be able to reach her.

Harlem Hopscotch

The American society reveals many images of dystopia. The white socialites have an illusion that separating the white from the black in everything could achieve comfortable equality. They could not recognize that equality and separation are two different things. They have the government name the black districts and the white districts. The government does not tolerate with any objection feature of the black. The jail is definite for anybody that objects. The poor African-Americans inhabited an urban state named Harlem. Harlem was one form of racial and social discrimination. They were too poor due to unemployment. They could not afford food or pay rent. The crisis was recognized by everybody in Harlem (adults and children). Angelou represented this crisis in her poem "Harlem Hopscotch".

“Harlem Hopscotch” celebrates a high priority for the strength of dereflection as a method of survival. The rhythm of this powerful poem makes the reader hear the feet beat “first hopping, then suspending in air, and finally landing in the appropriate square. People need to harden and be very energetic to be able to live in a world firmly tied with such rigid statements as “food is gone” and “the rent is due”. Racial discrimination compounds “the pressures of hunger, poverty, and unemployment”; these conditions indelibly discriminate against the black. “In the air, now both feet down. / since you black, don't stick around”; the life of the black has turned out to be a brutal hopscotch game. They desperately play; however, they hopefully hop and unhesitatingly land. “Both feet flat, the game is done. / They think I lost. I think I won” put an end to the poem. The analysis of these two lines announces the victory of the poet. This type of poems handles “both love and black identity” and forms the poet’s method of defence against the struggles of the game of life (Bloom 40-1).

Figurative language

“Hopscotch” is an allegory that represents the division of a small yard into smaller boxes that form the children’s game. The small boxes represent the division of the city land into white suburbs and black suburbs. “Curse and cry” is an auditory image that shows the only thing they can do. “Curse and cry, and then jump two” is a kinesthetic image that urges the black to try again. “Hold for three, then twist and jerk” is a kinesthetic image that advises the black to bear hardships and push for better conditions. “Cross the line, they count you out” is a kinesthetic image that exemplifies objection. “That's what hopping's all about” is a kinesthetic image that clarifies the black need to keep working and rebel to fulfill a real change. The kinesthetic image in “both feet flat, the game is done” reflects the black persistence; however, the decision has come about.

The dystopian image lies in that African-Americans are not allowed to “cross the line”. They are not allowed to object or rebel against the rules of society. The white are the rulers who arrange the society according to their own criteria. These rules erased the identity of the black. If the black do or say anything against the way the white treat them, they will face jail and lynch. Angelou asserts “that’s what hoping is all about”. She states that they keep working and try to change these conditions. It becomes a must to object and work hard to obtain their rights.

Prisoner

In lines full of disappointment and frustration, Angelou expresses the state of a prisoner. A dystopian fact of life is that a prisoner cannot go beyond the bars of the cell. All creatures can move freely, but a prisoner cannot. The prisoner experiences different kinds of torture such as a low quality food and bad treatment. The prisoner has the right to talk to himself, think about his history, remember the glory he made (the reason behind his imprisonment), and dream of freedom and a bright future. Dystopia is the spiritual prison in which the black live. The researcher considers that the prisoner is all of the black Americans. The prisoner meant in the poem, according to the reading of the researcher, is Martin Luther King Jr. who was imprisoned in Birmingham.

Paraphrase

The poem begins by reflecting dystopian images of the jail. “Even sunlight dares/ and trembles through/ my bars/ to shimmer/ dances on/ the floor” hold a personification that shows how “sunlight dares”, walks on the floor of the jail and dances, but the prisoner cannot freely move in the solitary confinement cell. The visual image in these lines mirrors unbearable caging. The auditory image in “a clang of/ lock and/ keys and heels” clarifies the only sound the prisoner hears. “And blood-dried/ guns” is a metonymy that reflects the brutality of the policeman. The researcher suggests that “blood-dried/ guns” is a symbol of shooting and killing the black.

The visual and auditory image in “Guard grey men/ serve plates of rattle/ noise and concrete/ death and beans” exemplifies how the inhumane guards treat the black prisoners. They brutally torture them and lead them to death. The visual image in “then pale sun stumbles/ through the poles of/ iron to warm the horror/ of grey guard men” personifies how the light of sunset warms and calms the frightened prisoners. The description of sunset connotes that the inhumane guards leave and the prisoners rest.

The last stanza starts with displaying the time when “black night” comes. The prisoner sinks in the flood of “history of fear”. The lines “The me/ myself of me sleeks/ in the folds and history/ of fear” signify loneliness and remembrance of history and old memories. The secret in the prisoner’s mind makes the prisoner calm down, sleep and dream. “To secret hold/ me deep and close my/ ears of lulls and clangs/ and memory of hate” denotes how the secret of the prisoner puts him at ease, so he can forget about “lulls and clangs and memory of hate”. The poet relates “lulls and clangs/ and memory of hate” to the prisoner’s “ears” to refer to the prisoner being called an extremist. The poet ends the third stanza with two utopian lines, “then night and sleep/ and dreams”. “Then night” stands for the end of torture. “Sleep” reflects ease. “And dreams” embodies hope. The first two lines of the refrain of the poem “it’s jail/ and bail” is an allusion to the imprisonment of Martin Luther King Jr. He went to jail and was released after paying a bail. “Then rails to run” denotes escaping and leaving the case of segregation behind.

Weekend Glory

The “dystopian beauty” is defined by Miguel Sebastian-Martin (a researcher) as a trial to create “aesthetically beautiful worlds” to win the admiration of the intended reader or viewer. The authors try to achieve this knowing that dystopia is related to forms of “social ugliness, horror, or undesirability”. Tom Moylan (Professor Emeritus) states that “dystopian beautification” is another element of “the contemporary “dystopian structure of feeling”— that is, our collective surrendering to the sociopolitical dystopia of neoliberal

capitalism, and ensuing relinquishing of utopian aspiration'. The excessive aesthetic enjoyment created by beautified dystopia involves a disturbing potential in tension with dystopias' "critical-satirical potential" (Martin 277, 278). The poem, "Weekend Glory", exhibits a beautified dystopia.

The first two stanzas hold dystopian lines that embody the ignorant black bourgeoisie. They only pretend to live a luxurious life. They act like royal figures. They take large loans from the "local banks" to buy costly houses and cars. They do that to impress other people and mix with the white. In other words, the poet displays how the black bourgeoisie try to beautify their dystopian lives. They use these methods to be happy. However, the poet does not think that they are truly happy. In the third stanza, the persona of the poem offers them a life lesson "if they want to learn how to live life right". She advises them to "study" her "on Saturday night" and see how she enjoys her weekend with simple things. The lines "if they want to learn how to live life right/ they ought to study me on Saturday night" show how the persona is self-confident and sets herself as a model.

In the fourth stanza, the persona switches from displaying the weekends of the rich to her joyful weekends. She has nothing to worry about (no debts), and goes to beauty salons. The persona takes good care of her appearance because beauty does not consider skin color (Girsang et al. 9). "I get my hair done/ for my own self's sake" reflects independence. The visual image in this stanza shows the simplicity of the persona's life.

The fifth stanza describes some activities the persona does on her weekend. She takes her discretionary income and plans the round with her friend (a black girl). The visual and auditory images make the reader feel their joy and happiness. In the sixth stanza, the persona describes how the journalists write about her simple job and life. Although they do not really know her, they underrate her. "They just can't see/ how I work all week/ at the factory" reveals their ignorance of her hard work. The visual image clarifies how she enjoys herself on weekends.

In the seventh stanza, the persona clarifies how the rich make fun of her lifestyle. She defends herself by explaining that they have the same life just like her; they fight to survive. The persona's clarity makes her feel strong. She does not care about their mockery. She takes pride in being a black woman (Girsang et al. 10). In the last stanza, the persona announces that her life is not flawless, "but it sure ain't hell". The persona uses a metaphor to describe her life in the following lines, "my life ain't heaven/ but it sure ain't hell". The lines, "and have the luck to be Black/ on a Saturday night" show the persona's pride of her race, identity and self-image.

The persona's beautified dystopia lies in her satisfaction. She has a simple job, but she earns money that enables her to survive. She cannot afford luxurious things, but she can enjoy her life. She works hard at the factory and gets paid. She beautifies her weekend with simple affordable methods. She puts on beautiful clothes, gets her hair done in a beauty salon, goes to a club to listen to blues music and dance and laugh. She does not want to change this life. She is not looking forward to being wealthy. She is satisfied enough not to imagine a utopian life.

Ain't That Bad

In American culture, utopia is recognized as a fundamental tune. "Utopian thinking is a cultural trait that emerges from a wide body of cultural texts throughout American history". As a genre of literature, utopia pervaded "the wider realms of popular culture, visual culture, architecture and political discourse" (Verheul 1). The idea that utopia is "a state of being and doing" is supported by works. These works are creative in that they draft "a blueprint for the black utopia". For instance, establishing black wealth, technological development, and education are the real producers of radical changes (Brown 7; Varlack 84). Angelou represents black utopia in her poem "Ain't That Bad?" Instead of representing the racial questions, oppression and injustice, she displays pictures of the black success and advancement. She stages the black elites under the light spot.

The first stanza contains a visual image. It asserts that the life of the African-Americans is normal. They dance, eat food, listen to loud music and drink gin. The visual images in the second stanza clarify the black culture of which they are proud. They wear do-rag, style their hair into an afro and are proud of their blackness. "Don't I shine and glow?" is a rhetorical question that shows their neatness. Angelou wonders whether the white racists are ignorant enough to deny the great talents of the men that the poem mentions. She stages the oppressed (talented black men) to their oppressors (white racists). She represents these black famous figures not only to honor them but also to urge her race "to recognize their [own] individual value" (Ahmed 26). Angelou mentions Stevie Wonder (singer and songwriter), Leontyne Price (soprano), Jesse Jackson (former shadow US senator), Alvin Ailey (dancer), Miss Barbara Jordan (the first African-American woman to be a governor) and Pearlle Bailey (author, actress, and singer).

The similes in the sixth stanza are very clear: "black like the hour of the night" and "black as the earth". There is a personification in "earth which has given birth"; it likens the "earth" to a woman that gives birth. "And when all else is gone will abide" represents strength and solidity. The similes in the seventh stanza betoken the strength and welfare of the black race. "Bad as the storm that leaps raging from the heavens" contains a simile that refers to the black strength with "bad" meaning "good" in black West African English. "Bringing the welcome rain" indicates benefit and generosity. "Bad as the sun" is a simile that asserts the importance of the black. "Lifting the waters again" refers to the sun drying the water in the streets and declares the constant benefit of the black. Angelou continues her report of the black elites: Arthur Ashe (tennis player), Muhammad Ali (boxer), André Watts (classical pianist) and Andrew Young (former United States ambassador to the United Nations). She wants to show the reader that the black are not only professional athletes but also successful politicians, musicians, actors, singers and dancers.

The dystopian fiction can be seriously taken by employing the dystopian motive as a central point for the various encounters “among literature, popular culture, and social criticism”. The readers can take part in this challenge, “which is ultimately a positive one”. Indeed, a dystopian alert from “impeding nightmares” is needed to reserve any possible futuristic dreams (Booker 177). Angelou employs this point of view in her poetry. She mentions the achievement of the African-Americans and at the same time reminds them of their dark history. So, the past can be the engine of the African-Americans’ hard work.

Chapter Three

The Presence of Maya Angelou’s Poetry in Different Communities

Angelou receives several invitations to causes every week; however, she attends by her name or herself the ones that are worth it. “She sings, she lectures, she recites poetry, and she flirts with the audience”, and they like it. She is interested in the issues of women. In Texas, she narrates “a 10-movement choral symphony about breast cancer. Her interest in and support to “low-income health care” crystalized in her visit to a Philadelphia hospital. She is under the light pen when it comes to racial tolerance, issues of women and diversity (Cox 97).

Angelou takes the side of the oppressed in the whole world. She is aware of their issues, and her voice is heard by the oppressed everywhere. Through her poetry, she encourages them to tell their stories, and they find that her poetry is the best representative of their experiences. They use her poetry to express their feelings. Her poetry becomes the most suitable voiced method through which they go over the boundaries. In this chapter, the study represents how different societies employ Angelou's poetry.

A Black Woman Speaks to Black Manhood

In 1995, division and hostility was the meaning of the relation between the white and the black in America. The question was discussed in a fiery manner (Bartness 1). The Million Man March inspired the black men and raised the spirit of the African-American community. This march was considered one of the most encouraging events of post-civil rights (Mickelson 4, 26). Angelou was one of the few women who took part in the Million Man March in Washington, D. C. She recited a poem in this event (Cox 91, 92).

Paraphrase

This unique poem begins with a dystopian remembrance of slaves and their suffering. The synecdoche in “our souls look back/ in wondrous surprise” refers to the remembrance of slavery in astonishment. “At how we have made it” denotes the deep feeling of amazement. “So far from where we started” symbolizes the changes that have happened to their lives. In the next stanza, she calls the black men and urges them to look back at their history—“look over your shoulders/ and at our history”. “The night was long/ the wounds were deep” is a metaphor for the long period of slavery and its consequent deep scar. “The pit has been dark” is a metaphor for their dilemma and its unbearable hardship. “Its walls were steep” symbolizes the impossibility of changing the life of slaves.

In a dystopian manner, Angelou portrays the exploitation and helplessness of her race. She describes how the black women were abused. “I was dragged by braids/ on a sandy beach” symbolizes ill-treatment. The black men were helpless and could not help their wives—“I was pulled near you/ but beyond your reach”. “You were bound and gagged” signifies that the black men were chained with slavery. “When you heard me cry /your spirit was wounded /with each wrenching try” typifies the failure of the men to help and protect their wives.

The sixth stanza refers to the black man's trial to break the chains of oppression, protect his wife and put an end to slavery. The seventh stanza represents the black man holding himself together and considering his manhood. The symbol of "the rope and the chain" shows that the black man did not consider the strength of his master; he only saw his spilled manhood. The eighth stanza suggests that the black man did not forget that he could not help himself or his wife. He held that shame in his heart.

Black utopianism glows in the next lines. In the ninth stanza, the poet celebrates surviving those terrible days. However, the resultant bruise still hurts. "And we do not deny/ their bruising weight" is a metaphor that refers to the effect of hatred as a hurting bruise. In the tenth stanza, Angelou asks the black men to put aside this image and look at their current image. They obtain the pride and strength that they deserve.

The eleventh stanza comes as a celebration. Angelou repeats, "stand up, clap hands" to invite happiness to the march. She uses personifications in "let us welcome kind words back into our vocabulary/ let us welcome courtesies back into our bedrooms/ let us invite generosity back into our kitchens/ let faith find a place in our souls/ let hope live in our hearts" to give advice to the black men to live a happy, peaceful life.

In the twelfth stanza, the poet describes how her race survived, and states the methods they used. They survived and thrived through methods of "passion/ compassion/ humor/ and style". The thirteenth stanza is a refrain that indicates that the black will never forget the dilemma of the past. However, the poet tells the black to "clap hands, celebrate" and be happy because they "deserve it/ jubilate!"

The Poem Recited by Tiffany Mayo in the Million Man March

Angelou wastes no chance to put the problems of the black children on the table. This poem asks for and defends the rights of the black little girls. It was written by Maya Angelou with words added by the Honorable Louis Farrakhan. The poem was recited by ten-year-old student Tiffany Mayo at the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., on October 16th, 1995.

Thank you for this power march;

I know it's all for me.

I represent the black woman of the 21st century.

I am Aisha and Keisha, Tamara and Jane

Kenya, Mattima, and Rosa, Patrice.

I am everyone's daughter and everyone's sister
and everyone's friend and everyone's niece.

I must count on your clean devotion to me.

I am not yet a woman, even if I pretend to be.

I am tender enough to crawl into the palm of your hand.

I need the protection of every black man.

I am not yet a woman.

I need years to grow.

I am learning fast, but there is a lot I don't know.

One day I will be a doctor in outer space.

I will be a teacher, a lawyer, and full of grace.

I have the answers to questions which I alone face.

And of course, I will be the mother of my beautiful race.

But right now, I am a girl; won't you look after me?

I am not yet a woman, even if I pretend to be.

Save me from abusers, from the murderous crowd,

And when I grow up, I will make you proud.

I am not the cause of the pain in your life.

I am not a stand-in for your girlfriend or your wife.

Build me a sanctuary. Don't hunt me like wild gang.

Treat me like Zachariah did Mary.

Protect me from shame.

When I grow up and find the man of my choice,

I will produce, like Mary, a man of God's divine race (Mayo 54:15-56:41).

Paraphrase

The poem opens with giving thanks to all of the Million Man March participants. Mayo, a representative of “the black woman of the 21st century”, appreciates the effort made for her. She mentions names of different women that have different origins to represent the black women's different national and religious origins. She declares her relationship to the black men and counts on their “clean devotion” to her because she is not old enough to take care of herself, even if she pretends to be. She describes her future in four utopian lines: “I will be a doctor in outer space /I will be a teacher, a lawyer, and full of grace /I have the answers to questions which I alone face /and of course, I will be the mother of my beautiful race”.

The black men should save her from the dystopian fate that the abusers, murderers and “wild gang” could cause. The girl envisions a utopian future and the pride she will bring her race when she grows up. She declares that she has nothing to do with any of these men's dystopian experiences. She is not the obstacle that their girlfriends or wives encounter. Therefore, the black men should support and respect her. The biblical allusion “treat me like Zachariah did Mary” clarifies how the black men should treat the girls of their race; they should protect them from “shame”. The black girls promise to grow up well, find suitable men to marry, and “produce, like Mary”, men “of God's divine race”.

Caged Bird

“Caged Bird” is a cross-border poem in which Palestinians find their self-image. However, Angelou did not make it to Palestine herself. Ageel, a Palestinian woman, reports that she learns from Angelou “the virtues of standing still and tall”. Like Angelou, she experiences “different shades of the same tyranny”. Ageel finds her role models in her grandmother and mother who endured bombing. She says: “I remember them waiting—pleading—for a chance to leave, to sing outside our cage, and in the liberated village of our families”. Like “the caged bird” that “sings of freedom”, two million souls imprisoned in a twenty-five-mile strip struggle for freedom (Ageel).

In his article “From Palestine to Turtle Island, The Caged Bird Sings of Freedom”, Yazan Al-Saadi makes use of the theme of Angelou's “Caged Bird”. He finds it the suitable image to describe the caged Palestinians in administrative detentions, prisons, labor camps and even 9644 km away from Palestine (Al-Saadi). Angelou inspired Muhammad Sabaaneh, an author, to use the image of the caged bird in his new book. In the book, the caged bird tells an imprisoned artist, Sabaaneh himself, stories about the Palestinians. The bird tells the writer, “you bring the pencil, and I will bring the stories”. Sabaaneh writes, “This bird collected the stories of Palestinians to show that they are imprisoned, some of them [prisons] small and called jails; others larger and called towns and villages, which are surrounded by military check points, walls and settlements” (Weber).

Paraphrase

The poem opens with a description of “the lyrical visionary” of a free bird that flies in the sky. Freedom gives the bird the power to “claim the sky”. This power discriminates one bird from the other. The caged bird moves angrily in his cage with his clipped wings and tied feet. The refrain in the third and sixth stanzas embodies the dreadful life of the caged bird that it sings “with a fearful trill”. The caged bird does not know freedom; however, it longs for it. It wants its voice to be heard everywhere and beyond its cage because it

sings of freedom. The song, which is referred to as being sung “with a fearful trill” about “things unknown /but longed for still”, is an illusion to “African-American spirituals”, which were sung by the slaves in the United States before the Civil War (Jayanti 28).

The dystopian images are displayed in the ignorance of the free white race—“a free bird leaps /on the back of the wind /and floats downstream /till the current ends /the free bird thinks of another breeze /and the fat worms waiting on the dawn-bright lawn”. The imprisonment and misery of the caged black race represent other dystopian images—“But a bird that stalks /down his narrow cage /his wings are clipped and /his feet are tied /but a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams”. The personification “his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream” clarifies that the bird is proud enough not to shout or show weakness. His fear is caged in his inner self.

When Great Trees Fall (A Poem Turned Into an Animated Video)

Frequently, the idea of death visits Angelou's mind in an “alarming” manner. Angelou accepts the idea of her own death. She believes that “a day will dawn when I will no longer be among those living in this valley of strange humors”. However, she cannot accept the idea of death when it comes to her loved ones. (Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing* 31). In three minutes and twenty eight seconds, “Rukmini Poddar”, a YouTube channel, turns Angelou's “When Great Trees Fall” into an animated video.

Paraphrase

In the first stanza, “Angelou presented a romanticized vision of Africa, where lions and elephants sought safety amid the thunder caused by falling trees. How much greater, then, is the sound of falling souls?” (Lupton 231). “Lions” is a metaphor for powerful persons. “Elephants” is a metaphor for wise persons. The three elements (rocks, lions and elephants) are overwhelmed with sorrow. Small things “could also mean that those who are unknown, without fame or political significance, feel the effect of the loss just as the great minds of their day feel it” (Uac 152; Syed et al. 63).

The visual and the kinesthetic images in the first two stanzas as well as the organic image in the third stanza refer to the impact of a dystopian fact of life—losing precious souls. These souls walk away with their “promised walks /never taken”. The kinesthetic image—“gnaws on kind words /unsaid”—refers to the deep feeling of regret. People regret the “unsaid” necessary “kind words”, such as thank you. In the fourth stanza, the metonymies—“our souls, /dependent upon their /nurture /now shrink, wizened /our minds, formed /and informed by their /radiance”—refer to the role of these great souls in the persons’ lives. The persons’ minds and souls are shattered by the loss. However, they have the will to pull themselves together.

The metaphor—“peace blooms, /slowly and always /irregularly”—refers to the period of peace that comes “after a period” of sorrow. That peace and hope emerged to change the scene and ease the pain of the sad persons. Hope is brought back to their minds to assert that “those great figures, though now dead, have “existed” to beautify the world and make it a good place for living” (H. Hashim 17-8).

Poetic Justice: A Movie That Used Angelou’s Poems

Poetic Justice is a movie that was released on July 23, 1993. It was produced by Columbia Pictures. Angelou's poetry is the poetry that's used in the movie. Through the movie, Justice read in voice over her poetry (Angelou's poetry in real life) in different situations. Justice was all alone after her boyfriend was murdered, so she wrote and read the poem “Alone” (“Poetic Justice” 07:27-9:01). She read the poem “In a Time” when Lucky had to take his daughter away from her drug-addicted mother (25:06-25:52). Iesha, Justice's friend, had a fight with her boyfriend. Justice recited “Kind of Love, Some Say” after this situation (1:18:52-1:19:22). She voiced “A Conceit” to describe her feelings towards Lucky (1:24:46-1:25:02). After attending a fashion show as a part of her job, she started to think about herself and her appearance. She vocalized “Phenomenal Woman” to delineate how she thought about herself (1:37:27-1:39:48).

The poetry of Angelou is employed in various ways such as videos, animated videos and movies. Angelou's poetry represents and defends rights of her race. Her poetry represents the oppressed African-American community, specially the women and the children. The African-Americans' identity is disfigured by racism. Therefore, Angelou tries to define and preserve the true identity of her race in her poetry.

Conclusion

In her poetry, Angelou portrays dystopia through the description of the living conditions of the black. She reminds the black of their slave ancestors. The black under slavery had no identity. The white controlled them. The black struggled to protect their families. Racial oppression cornered the black in paltriness. The consequent black self-depreciation was reflected on the black self-image. The segregative government thought that equality could be achieved through separation. Therefore, the government ghettoized the black in named districts. The white employers did not give the black chances to apply for jobs. The black employment was too limited; most of them were unemployed and obliged to take odd jobs to survive.

Angelou asserts identity that the black should know who they are. They should not let the white decide what they can or can't do. The black women portrayed in Angelou's poetry are not losers. They work hard to earn a living for their families. They endure humiliation and oppression to be able to feed, dress and educate their children. They are the real heroes that raised the leaders of the black. She represents how the black children should be treated: they should be loved and educated to grow aware of their identity. They should learn how to peacefully defend themselves against any type of abuse.

The educated black (black bourgeoisie) wore white masks to integrate with the white. They took large loans from the banks to buy expensive houses and cars to show the white that they are rich. However, it was way too much that they forgot about the black of Harlem who lived in tough conditions. They forgot about the black

identity question. The black of Harlem were different from the black bourgeoisie in that they maintained their identity and self-acceptance. The black of Harlem were proud of themselves, their race and skin color. They derived their self-actualization from their inner strength and independence. They stressed their self-respect. They asked for the civil rights of the black and real equality with the white, not fake integration.

Utopia is portrayed in Angelou's poetry. She describes her own picture of utopia as well as the different pictures of utopia of the black. Angelou puts her own utopia in the frame of the original land where tallness and blackness are good features. Angelou represents Ghana as her utopia. She declares that decolonization is post-colonial Africa's effective method to create a utopia. Moving back to America, Angelou describes utopia as breaking the strict rules of the white society by maintaining the good self-image and self-respect of the black.

The black freedom fighters went through many obstacles: prison, assassination and lynching. They fought against the racist code of white government. They wanted to put an end to the terrorist Ku Klux Klan. They sought fairness and equality for the black. Thus, Angelou regarded utopia as a place that the black freedom fighters can only dream of. Furthermore, she represents utopia in new chances and new beginnings. She exemplifies black utopia in the different images of the black success and advancement.

In her poetry, Angelou typifies utopia created by the ancestors for their children and grandchildren. She illustrates the utopian natural features that consoled domestic workers. In general, utopia is in the endurance of the black ancestors. They survived slavery days and rose above hatred. Angelou believes that the black children learn from their ancestors how to be proud of their race, be brave and self-confident, and be hopeful. Angelou epitomizes beautification as a method of coping with different dystopian living conditions.

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