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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)<https://doi.org/10.55966/assaj.2025.4.1.068>Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Power, Identity, and Resistance in Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise*: A Critical Discourse Analysis****Tariq Ullah**

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sajid.iqbal@uom.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

Language is not only utilized as a communication tool but also as an effective tool to construct identity, resist oppression, and exert social agency. Similarly, Poetry in literary fiction is an effective medium by which marginalized speech affirms resistance and recuperates narratives of dignity and empowerment. This research performs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the poem Still I Rise by Maya Angelou, drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model to discuss how linguistic, rhetorical, and discursive resources generate themes of power, identity, and resistance. At the level of the text, the poem utilizes repetition, metaphor, lexical oppositions, and an assertive voice to represent a speaker who evinces self-value in opposition to racial and gender oppression. Through repeated words like "I rise," Angelou performs resilience and regains voice and agency for disempowered identities. On a discursive practice level, the poem subverts historical and institutional relations of power through direct address, rhetorical questioning, and intertextual allusion to slavery and institutional injustice, situating the speaker as a specific self and as a representative figure of collective resilience. Lastly, in the social practice sphere, Still I Rise is positioned within Black feminist scholarship and civil rights movements, counter-hegemonic to hegemonic discourse and delivering an alternative reading as one of ancestral pride and resistance. In this analysis, it is evident that Angelou's poetry is not only literary but a discursive intervention which remakes Black womanhood and recovers cultural and political space.

Keywords: CDA, Gender Oppression, Discursive Strategies, Poetry, Intertextuality.

Introduction**Background of the Study**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary school of thought for the study of language that focuses on the relationship between discourse and power in society. Language is viewed as a social practice that both reflects and shapes social structure, in addition to being a tool for communication. CDA is specifically interested in how discourse plays a role in the construction and

reproduction of power relations and ideologies, frequently in a manner that seems natural or common-sense (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). Language, CDA scholars argue, is never neutral. It is a potent tool by which ruling ideologies are imparted, reproduced, and sometimes contested. One of the main objectives of CDA is to bring out these underlying ideologies that are inscribed in texts and oral discourse. For example, Fairclough (2001) stressed how discourse is central in the formation of social identities, relationships, and knowledge systems. Analogously, van Dijk (2008) discussed how discursive structures tend to promote the interests of dominant social groups in ways that affect public opinion and shape perceptions through the control of information and discourse.

Three-dimensional model proposed by Norman Fairclough is among the most influential analytical models in CDA. It entails textual analysis (vocabulary, grammar, and text structure), analysis of discursive practices (production, dissemination, and consumption of texts), and social practice analysis (where discourse is placed in broader social and cultural contexts). This model highlights the dialectical relationship between society and language in that language is being shaped by social structures but can also potentially shape those structures (Fairclough, 1992).

Teun A. van Dijk made important contributions to CDA in his work on socio-cognitive approaches, which analyze the interaction between discourse and social cognition. Van Dijk believed that power is not necessarily exerted by physical force but in many cases by subtle control over discourse and knowledge. His discussion about discourse in texts of media and political rhetoric particularly in the domain of racism and immigration, in general, demonstrates the means through which biased stereotypes and discriminative ideologies are recreated through the language (van Dijk, 1991). Ruth Wodak Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is the other important contribution seen to overlap linguistic analysis and the historical, political, and social issues. It means that DHA is especially skilled at examining the problems of discourse evolution with time and through structural connection across texts and genres (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Intertextuality and interdiscursivity have been used to give DHA a more advanced approach to the existence of language practices within wider social processes.

CDA has found many applications across all realms such as media, education, law, politics among others. Sievers et al (2007) refer to some applications of the model to look at how subordinate groups are constructed in the media (Baker et al., 2008); how gender ideologies are being articulated in schools (Lazar, 2005); and how politicians were negotiating national identity during a time of crisis (Chilton, 2004). Such examples point to the potential of CDA to expose the concealed messages re-appropriating the social strata and power disparities.

About the Author

Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was an acclaimed African American poet, memoirist, singer and civil rights activist, whose works address the subject of identity, race, womanhood, and resiliency. Born Marguerite Ann Johnson on the 4th of April 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Maya Angelou leads an excellent life. She experienced trauma, racism and displacement as she was growing up; her life had a tremendous effect on her writing (Angelou, 1969). One of her best-known autobiographies is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), which provides an honest account of her upbringing in the racially segregated American South. The book describes her experiences with sexual abuse, alienation, and her quest for identity and voice. Its candid portrayal of Black womanhood made it revolutionary, and it is recognised for having paved the way for African American women authors to enter the mainstream of writing (Walker, 1995). Angelou's lyrical prose style, which deftly

blends personal narrative with more general cultural commentary, was also introduced to readers through this work.

Her autobiographical writing occasionally overshadows her poetry, but it still has an impact. A strong commitment to social justice, musicality, and affirmations of strength are characteristics of Angelou's poetic voice. In feminist and civil rights contexts, poems like *Still I Rise* and *Phenomenal Woman* are frequently cited as cultural mantras. Angelou's statement in *Still I Rise*, "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave" (Angelou, 1978, p. 41), reflects both personal empowerment and historical continuity. Her poetry continuously promotes women's empowerment and the Black community's tenacity, making her a significant literary and cultural figure (Neubauer, 1999). Angelou's impact went beyond her writing; she collaborated with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and was active abroad, especially in Africa, advancing Black identity and culture globally (Gillespie, 1999). She became the second poet after Robert Frost to perform at an inauguration when she was asked to recite *On the Pulse of Morning* at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. The poem echoed themes found throughout her body of work, with a focus on unity and renewal (Angelou, 1993). President Barack Obama recognised Angelou in 2011 with more than 50 honorary degrees and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (Obama, 2011). Her impact on Black American life, particularly Black womanhood, is celebrated in classrooms and cultural discourse (Braxton, 1999).

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the wide recognition of Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* as a powerful literary expression of African American identity and resilience, there remains a need for a deeper examination of how linguistic and discursive features within the poem construct and convey themes of power, identity, and resistance. While previous studies have celebrated the poem's inspirational tone and historical significance, few have applied a systematic Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to explore the underlying power dynamics and ideological structures embedded in the text. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of how Angelou's poetic discourse challenges dominant social narratives and asserts marginalized voices, particularly those of Black women. Thus, this study aims to examine *Still I Rise* via the perspective of CDA in order to reveal how Angelou uses language to empower herself, create her identity, and fight against oppression based on race and gender.

Objectives of the study

- To analyse the discourse strategies employed in *Still I Rise* to construct themes of power and identity
- To examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used *Still I Rise* to resist and challenge the dominant narratives of racial and gender oppression

Research Questions

- In what ways does Maya Angelou use linguistic and rhetorical devices in *Still I Rise* to construct and assert themes of power and identity?
- How does the poem *Still I Rise* employ discourse strategies to resist and challenge dominant narratives of racial and gender oppression?

Significance of the study

There are a number of reasons why this research is significant. In the first instance, it develops the discipline of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by subjecting its principles to a poetic text, generalizing CDA beyond media and political discourse to literary discourse. By tracing the

linguistic and discursive features of *Still I Rise* in great detail, this research illustrates how poetry, particularly for marginalized communities, can be an effective tool of identity creation, ideological challenge, and empowerment.

Secondly, the work offers incisive analysis of African American literary and feminist discourse, with particular attention to how Black woman poet Maya Angelou resists patriarchal expectations and institutionalized racism through her linguistic practice. It refers to the way poetic language aids in social consciousness creation and in resisting hegemonic historical narratives. Furthermore, by demonstrating how race, gender, and power intersect in Angelou's writing, the study advances discussion on intersectionality. As *Still I Rise* is still relevant to current social justice movements, deconstructing its discursive strategy advances literature as activism and channels of change on both an intellectual and popular level.

Literature Review

Such scholars as Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (1993) describe language as a social practice under the wider Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a formation affected by the structure of ideology and power. CDA has predominantly been used to study political discourse, media discourse, and institutional discourse, but recent research has increasingly used it to study literary discourse as well. The use of CDA in poetry enables us to have a better insight into the ideology operating in poetic language, and how power relations and resistances are hidden within. Lazar (2005) contends that FCDA is particularly suited to uncover how language reflects and resists gendered power relations.

Discourse, identity, and resistance are arguably the strongest motifs that have gained very wide appeal in inter-disciplinary scholarship with the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as CDA is based on the assumption that language is a social practice that recycles and constructs power relations in society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Critics contend that literature, especially poetry, are productive discursive spaces where social ideologies are reproduced or over-turned. On the basis of this argument, literature is not only entertainment or source of knowledge but an instrument through which power is accessed and identity is built (Toolan, 1997). This has proved to be extremely important while reading texts by historically marginalized societies.

This engagement between resistance and language in poetry has remained the focal issue of postcolonial and critical literary theories. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) contend that resistance literature seeks to reclaim linguistic as well as cultural power from colonial and oppressive powers by rewriting dominant discourses. Through code-switching, metaphor, rhythm, and symbolic language, poets have been able to resist hegemonic discourses and establish alternative perceptions. This perspective is in line with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), who insisted on decolonizing language and literature and promoted linguistic practices that subvert imperialistic structures.

Discourse-based identity construction is another emphasis of CDA based on literature. According to Weedon (1997), identity is not essentialist but is constructed by language in the context of an ideological structure. Literature, and poetry specifically, is made a location through which identities, particularly those of race, gender, and class are contested and reimagined. Feminist literary critics like Cixous (1976) have promoted *écriture féminine* (women's writing) as a strategy for subverting patriarchal language. Such discursive disruptions enable women authors to retake control over their bodies, histories, and voices, contesting gendered forms of representation.

In black and minority literature, several scholars have noted how poetic discourse functions as a means of cultural memory and resistance. Paul Gilroy's (1993) "Black Atlantic," for example, identifies transnational Black identity and culture as resistant acts against Eurocentric modernity. Black diasporic poetry utilizes oral forms, rhythm, and spiritual symbolism to build alternative knowledge and history, resisting erasure and marginality. In the same vein, Claudia Tate (1983) points out the way in which African American women's literature remakes mainstream narratives of womanhood based on lived experiences of racism, sexism, and survival.

Discourse and ideology in literary works have also been examined from the perspective of structuralism and poststructuralism. Roland Barthes (1977) and Michel Foucault (1980) insisted that discourse is not only a reflection but constitutive of reality, implying that writing or speech is inextricably linked to knowledge and power structures. In poetry texts, this proves particularly relevant, as poetic language tends to disrupt the normal forms and meanings, opening up room for subversive or resistant readings. Literature is therefore a type of counter-discourse that allows for the marginalized voices to challenge dominant ideologies from within.

Recent sociolinguistic and literary linguistics scholarship has further helped explain how power and resistance are played out within poetry. Simpson (2004) argues that stylistic devices in poetry, including point of view, modality, and deixis, are key to determining the ideological position of a speaker. The cross-over between form and social meaning enables richer explanations of how authority and resistance are textually constructed. Besides, critics such as Eagleton (1996) and Attridge (2004) have highlighted the political and ethical nature of literary reading, contending that literature calls the reader into a critical conversation with power systems.

The use of poetry as social resistance and identity construction has been a topic of longstanding investigation in literary and linguistic environments. In non-Western societies, postcolonial, indigenous, and diasporic writers have employed poetic language to challenge mechanisms of domination, gain power back, and determine cultural identity. Anzaldúa (1987), for instance, speaks about how Chicana women's border identities are negotiated through the use of multilingual, hybrid poem styles that cross linguistic and national boundaries. Her own research illustrates how poetry language is deeply connected with sociocultural positioning and political resistance. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) argues cultural representation within postcolonial contexts happens within a "third space" of enunciation, where meaning is neither fixed nor binary but negotiable and unstable, an argument highly relevant to poetry language as an area of cultural negotiation.

Resistance poetry is particularly prevalent in apartheid, exile, and occupation discourses. Among South African literature, poets Dennis Brutus and Oswald Mtshali used symbolic and politically loaded discourses to denounce racial oppression and colonial legacy (Chapman, 2004). Through their abundant metaphoric imagery and cultural references, the authors capture what Lazar (2007) refers to as "discursive activism", a deliberate use of language to challenge dominant ideologies and catalyze political awareness. In Palestinian poetry, Darwish (2002) used poetry not only as personal displacement but also as political and nationalist discourse appealing to collective memory and identity. These examples provide evidence for the argument that poetry is not merely aesthetic expression; it is a discursive war zone in which power is contested and identities are reclaimed.

The advent of feminist discourse analysis even further illuminates the convergence of gender, language, and resistance in poetry. Mills (1995) clarifies that discourse, if examined from a feminist

perspective, highlights the insidious manner in which language enforces patriarchal dominance or facilitates resistance against it. Feminist poets around the world, like Adrienne Rich and Kamala Das, have employed poetry form to deconstruct conventional gender ideologies. Rich's (1979) "language of the oppressor" analysis highlights the tension that women must engage in self-expression using linguistic forms created by and for male power. In comparable settings, Indian poet Kamala Das's confessional form and erotic language circumvent cultural prohibitions and patriarchal norms, reasserting female identity within a rhetoric of self-determination and emotional reality (Tharu & Lalita, 1991).

In critical discourse studies, researchers continue to underline the value of socio-political context for understanding discourse. Pennycook (2001) suggests a "critical applied linguistics" approach that complements the objectives of CDA by locating it in real-world battles for equity and voice. This approach reaffirms the significance of studying poetic texts as part of larger cultural practice. Poetry, as a form, thus is a site of resistance not just in its content but also in its form, its abstention from ordinary grammar, its irregularity, and its defamiliarization strategies all serve to interrupt the dominant ways of making meaning.

Emotion and affect in discourse is also increasingly recognized in current discourse studies. Wetherell (2012) examines how emotion is discursively constructed and deployed as a rhetorical device in texts, particularly those that involve trauma, resistance, and social justice. Discourse analytic work is especially pertinent to poetry, where affective language is paramount in triggering common experiences and motivating readers. Emotional appeals within resistance poetry are not coincidental but are discursively fashioned to prompt empathy, invoke outrage, and induce solidarity.

In addition, digital humanities and multimodal discourse analysis are increasingly broadening the boundaries of CDA to cover poetry delivered on social media, in spoken word performances, and across visual domains. Meaning is no longer transported by text alone but through multitudes of image, gesture, sound, and layout, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue.

Methodology

Based on Norman Fairclough's (1992) Three-Dimensional Model, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the main methodological approach employed in this qualitative study. Critically analysing the language and rhetorical devices used in Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* will enable us to comprehend how the poem creates themes of power, identity, and resistance while subverting dominant racial and gender narratives.

Theoretical Framework

A systemic and systematic approach to analyzing texts across the three interrelated dimensions of language, discourse, and society is provided by Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (Fairclough, 1992). His three-dimensional approach includes social practice, discursive practice, and textual analysis. Posing as its primary objective is the scrutiny of linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, coherence, rhetorical devices, and stylistic options contributing to the meaning of the text (description). Examining how the text is produced, circulated, and received is the second dimension, discursive practice (interpretation), which explores how meaning is constructed from interactions between the text, writer, and readers. By positioning the text within its broader sociocultural, historical, and ideological context, the third dimension that is social practice, or explanation, explains how the text reflects, reinforces, or resists the dominant power arrangements. The discourse analysis of *Still I Rise* is particularly appropriate for this model

because the poem not only serves as a socio-political commentary embedded in feminist discourse and African American identity but also as a powerful literary expression. Due to the poetic diction, symbolic imagery, and strong voice of Angelou, this model of Fairclough is particularly appropriate for multi-layered discourse analysis that unveils deeper meanings in terms of identity, empowerment, and resistance.

Data Source

The primary source of information is the poem "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou, which was part of her 1978 poetry collection *And Still I Rise*. The poem serves as a stand-alone analytical unit due to its rich linguistic structure and thematic relevance to issues of oppression, resistance, and empowerment.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeds through the following stages:

Textual Analysis

On the textual level, the research finds and deconstructs certain rhetorical and linguistic components in Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* to reveal how meaning is made from language. This involves looking at lexical options that connote strength, oppression, and resistance, like the repetitive employment of words such as "rise," "shoot," "slave," and "hope," which cumulatively reinforce the speaker's defiance and empowerment. The poem also uses rich imagery, metaphors, similes, and symbolism; e.g., equating the speaker's ascension to dust, air, and ocean, to show strength and overcoming of agony. Repetition and parallelism, particularly in the use of the repetition "I rise," are used both structurally and thematically, to reaffirm resolve and continuity. The pronoun usage, especially the tension between "I" and "you," makes the poem personal while at the same time touching on systemic oppression. Angelou's tone of assertiveness, confidence, and sometimes irony, and her modality usage also add to the strength and unwavering of the voice of the poem. Such micro-level analysis shows how Angelou constructs a voice of poetry that is strong, unbreakable, and thoroughly entwined in the shared historic memory of Blackness and resistance.

Discursive Practice

Through examining the way that the poem *Still I Rise* positions the speaker and the reader in a larger world of cultural and ideological meaning, the research here centers on the process of interpretation. It discusses the relationship of the poem with the rest of cultural discourse and, particularly, those discussing gender, race, and social justice, and how historical and social context can affect interpretations. This includes reviewing the inter-textuality and allusions the poem draws upon to base the speaker in an essay voice of universal hardship. These also involve allusion to slavery, strength of ancestors and injustice of history. Considering the way the poem was perceived and understood in a diverse set of literary contexts including, feminist, African American and mainstream context, the analysis helps to highlight the diverse effects and meaning of the poem. Also emphasized is the sense of strength, dignity and self-worth used by the speaker to push and break cultural norms and stereotypes, in particular- definitions of Black womanhood. Through this critical lens, the poem is interpreted not as a personal assertion but rather as a sharp intervention into and critique of prevailing cultural narratives.

Social Practice

When considered within the context of its overall social and historical progression, the interactions and responses to exploitative systemic forces in the poem have become noticeable. The reading

situates *Still I Rise* in a historic continuum of Black resiliency and resistance by linking it to the enduring legacy of slavery and racial discrimination in America. It also analyzes how Black feminist thought and the civil rights movement influenced Angelou's voice, rendering it political and personal. The poem establishes the dignity and autonomy of oppressed subjects based on lived experience and collective memory, which ties into the broader struggle for racial justice and gender justice. Through challenging dominant ideologies, reclaiming the past, and putting forward a bold counter-narrative of pride, hope, and defiance, Angelou's poem is an effective discursive intervention, as this level of analysis illustrates.

Analysis and Discussion

Textual Analysis of Linguistic and Rhetorical Devices in Constructing Power and Identity

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the subsequent analysis presents the following about the objective: To analyze the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used by Maya Angelou in the poem *Still I Rise* for constructing themes of power and identity.

At the textual level, Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise* employs a wide array of rhetorical and linguistic devices that collectively act in concert to develop an empowered and assertive speaker who proactively responds to historical and social oppression and asserts her voice as a powerful Black woman. Of the devices, one of the most compelling is repetition, which is both a structure and a theme. The recurring word "I rise," which comes not just at the conclusion of many stanzas but also ends in the intense final, triple repetition; "I rise / I rise / I rise", serves as the poem's rhetorical and emotional anchor. What begins as a poetic refrain develops into a defiant statement of resilience, a mantra of strength, and a rhythmic manifestation of resistance.

The repetition of "I rise" throughout the poem echoes the action of rising itself, imitating the physical and psychological action of rising from oppression, suffering, or defeat. The constant repetition asserts the speaker's unrelenting will in the midst of myriad adversities, whether individual, historical, or systemic. Not only does this stylistic convention make the poem musical and rhetorically rhythmic, but it also adds to its symbolic potency. It is a constant replenishment of power, with the implication that however frequently the speaker is trodden upon, through lies, through violence, through mockery, through hatred, she will be standing again, unbroken and unabashed.

This refrain has rich metaphorical import, especially within the context of African American history. The act of rising has profound resonance within the shared memory of slavery, segregation, and racial injustice and therefore represents a steadfast upward movement from centuries of oppression. The plain style of the sentence "I rise," devoid of modifiers, conveys an eternally and universally true thing about human resilience, and redundancy underscores it. By using this stylistic device, Angelou constructs a rhetoric of unbeatableness, one where the speaker refuses to be defined by victimhood. Instead, she takes control over her name and history, stating a powerful voice that cannot be muted and will not be noticed. This redundancy thus turns not only into a poetics technique but into a revolutionary proclamation of being, dignity, and survival. The lexis in *Still I Rise* are selected with purpose to evoke the very essence of resistance, dignity, and empowerment, as they mirror the emotional strength and resolve of the speaker against oppression. Lexical words such as "shoot," "cut," "kill," and "trod" are evocative verbs that activate connotations towards violence, aggression, and dehumanization. These terms metaphorically describe the historical and current realities of racial and gendered violence faced by Black people

and Black women in particular. They represent the physical, word, and philosophical instruments of institutional persecution and are exercised to exclusion, silence, and degrade individuals. But there are words such as "dust," "air," "moons," "suns," and "Gold mines" and Angelou provides a vocabulary of the transcendence and resiliency that is the diametric opposite to these spoilage words. These words have natural, heavenly, and material meanings, both spiritual ascension and intrinsic worth. So, for example, "air" and "dust" suggest an elemental quality to the speaker's resilience, unmanageable and indissoluble, and "moons" and "suns" a persistence and heavenly force. "Gold mines" and "diamonds" also suggest a value and richness that cannot be stolen, again reinforcing the idea of the speaker's self-proclaimed value against attempts on the part of society to devalue her.

This ambiguity in use of word, oppression and transcendence, builds a dynamic tension that radiates hard-to-defeat intonation of the speaker. Her value and identity are not destroyed in spite of which form of attack. Besides, the pronouns in the poem (personal pronouns, in particular, binary opposition of the words "you" and "I") create the tone of sharpness, aggressiveness in the poem. The you addressed is to an undetermined oppressor, but this oppressor can be considered metaphorically a racist, sexist, or colonial order and the I refers to a monolithic agent of action who speaks not only on the part of poet but also of a broader collective subject. The fact that the direct address in this form is personalized renders the abstraction of social statement a dialogic form of resistance. The speaker does not back down in confronting her enemies, thereby finding her power through challenging historical injustice that is real. These well-written words and pronouns build a speaker who is not only alive but claims her voice back actively when her story should be retold, not stifled by those who want to silence Angelou.

Figurative speech that Angelou has employed in *Still I Rise* is a powerful tool of adding power to the thematic unveiling of identity, power, and strength. Her similes, such as the ones presented by the lines, like dust, I will rise and like air, I will rise, are crucial to convey resistance and spiritual power of the speaker. Wind and dust are things that cannot be killed and destroyed completely; they represent the spirit of survival, everywhere, and sweet but uncompromising power. Through these similes the struggle and recovery by the speaker is boosted to a basic level- implying that struggle with the odds is a part of nature and it is inevitable. Similarly, metaphors of "diamonds," "gold mines," and "oil wells" are freighted with meaning, implying not just monetary value but value in itself, inner strength, and self-worth. Such imagery shifts the comprehension of Black identity, Black womanhood especially from once devalued and objectified places to a place of radiance, economic metaphor, and religious thickness. The "black ocean, leaping and wide" metaphor still emphasizes an expansive, energetic, and powerful racial identity that conveys the emotional richness and collective energy of the Black experience.

Angelou strategically employs tone and modality to support the speaker's confrontational and assertive stance. The tone across the poem is confident, bold, and defiant, refusing to yield to the demands of the powerful. Angelou applies interrogative lines, including "Does my sassiness upset you?" and "Did you want to see me broken?" not for the purpose of demanding answers, but to challenge societal unease with empowered Black women. These are rhetorical questions, and they're intentionally provocative, compelling the oppressor to consider their own biases while at the same time foregrounding the speaker's refusal to be reduced. The modality in such a line is one of certainty and mastery; the speaker recognizes who she is and what she stands for, and she invites the reader to accept her on her own terms.

Angelou is very successful at reversing the stories of the victim and goes to great lengths to bring together the powerful metaphors with a voice of rage and resistance to re-render them; however, the voice of victory and victory is not merely survival but growth. By virtue of this, the poem is reclaiming identity and agency that systems have always tried to suppress and shows a vision of freedom and love. The combination of metaphor and rich imagery with repetition, use of personal pronouns and aggressive tone helps Maya Angelou to create an authoritative discursive voice. These rhetoric and language could be understood as the embodiment of a collective identity that is based on resistance, cultural memory, and resiliency, as opposed to just asserting the realization of the personal empowerment. As a result, voice of Angelou becomes individual and shared statement in *Still I Rise* which is not only poetry but also language statement of identification and empowerment.

Discursive and Social Analysis of Resistance Strategies

In this part, the second purpose is met by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model by Fairclough: to navigate the discourse strategies employed in a poem *Still I Rise* in order to counter and refute the prevailing narrative of the gender and racial oppression. The analysis attends to both the discursive practice (interpretation) and social practice (explanation) aspects of Fairclough's model, while demonstrating how the poem interacts with and overturns overarching power structures and ideologies. At the discursive practice level, Maya Angelou places the speaker of *Still I Rise* in intentional and explicit opposition to systemic and historical forces of oppression. This resistance is expressed through the rhetorical deployment of the second-person pronoun "you," which serves to address an unnamed, generic oppressor, one that represents the institutionalized racism, generational violence, and patriarchal systems that have traditionally silenced Black voices, specifically those of Black women. Through addressing this foe directly, Angelou turns the poem from a personal meditation into a public declaration of resistance and challenge. The incessant repetition of "you" generates a dialogic tension that compels the oppressor to engage in a symbolic exchange, where they must account for the speaker's tenacity and resistiveness.

Angelou's application of rhetorical questions, including "Does my sassiness upset you?" and "Did you want to see me broken?" plays a critical role in the speaker's discursive strategy. They are not questions but challenges, blunt provocations that lay bare the discomfort and tenuous authority of those who have a stake in the subordination of others. The questions invert the power relationship by placing the oppressor under scrutiny, hence turning the gaze. By taking advantage of the unfairness and ridiculousness of the presumptions made about her, the speaker becomes an interrogator rather than a passive recipient of criticism. This role reversal not only subverts conventional patterns of discourse but also undermines the ideological supports underpinning systemic inequality. By this discursive intervention, Angelou subverts the very discourses that seek to name, contain, or reduce the speaker's identity. Her words push the reader to reevaluate cultural norms of race, gender, and power.

The combative yet confident voice enables Angelou to create a discourse that is at once resistant and transformatory, one that reveals the fault lines of dominant ideologies when confronted by unapologetic self-revelation. Thus, the speaker is more than a poetic persona; she is a discursive presence that refuses to be erased and insists upon a new paradigm of empowered Black women. The poem *Still I Rise* relies heavily upon intertextual allusions that connect the speaker's individual declaration of strength and dignity to a larger community history of suffering and endurance in

the African American experience. Phrases like "You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies" explicitly appeal to the historical falsification and manipulation of Black accounts, particularly by dominant historiographies that have distorted or omitted the voices of the subordinated. By alluding to the falsification of history, Angelou emphasizes the control power inherent in narrative control and the silencing of marginalized identities.

By contrast, "I am the dream and the hope of the slave" is a recovery of voice and heritage, placing the speaker in a tradition of resistance and survival. It taps into the shared cultural memory of slavery and the struggle for freedom historically, thereby making the speaker a symbol for the people who preceded her.

These intertextual references function not as poetic embellishments but as diplomatic discursive mechanisms that locate the poem within the lived histories and collective consciousness of the African diaspora. The speaker is not just speaking on behalf of herself but dwells in the suffering, survival, and aspirations of generations whose histories were erased or silenced. Her voice is given a symbolic expression of historical continuity, speaking that which was muted by racisms and colonialisms. In doing so, Angelou gives *Still I Rise* a discursive intervention against historical erasure and for a counter-narrative of Black identity founded in ancestral pride and irreducible hope. The poem then moves beyond personal testimony, it becomes a tool for public empowerment, whereby historical fact is recovered and re-echoed in poetic form.

Within the social practice world, *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou is based on more profound socio-political formations of Black feminist thought, civil rights, and anti-racisms that underpin the ideological undertows of the poem. Angelou's poetry specifically resists dominant ideologies of racial and gender inferiority that have traditionally been advanced and supported by dominant cultural discourses. Her radical insistence, "I rise", is not only an individual claim of defiance but a powerful counter-narrative that challenges the social norms and system structures attempting to marginalize, stereotype, or silence Black women. Rising is not only literal, it is also figurative, a reclamation of agency, dignity, and existence in a world that tries to make black identities underground or subaltern.

Discursively, from the standpoint of Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically through Fairclough's lenses, Angelou's poem is a discursive intervention that resists dominant ideologies. The repetition of "I rise" is not merely stylistic; it is performative and political, enacting the very empowerment it declares. It is a practice of claiming space when world is constantly defined by institutional and historical racism, sexism, and classism. By featuring the speaker as an authoritative, unapologetic and assertive figure, Angelou not only subjects the active though inactive representations of Black womanhood to active representation, but also returns such subjectivity to the discourse that is built on self-determination, strength and pride.

Such subversion is compatible with black feminist tradition, which focuses on the gender, racial and class intersections in the production of oppression as well as in the recovery of agency through cultural representation. The Angelou speaker looks through the same criteria because she states her value and beauty and defiance despite being acceptable to the regimes that desire to treat her as an object. This way, this poem questions not only the social structures and discourses that cause inequality in the first place, but the concept goes even further, that language can be a source of strife and transformation as well. Viewing the poem through the lens of social practice, however, cannot reduce *Still I Rise* to some piece of writing; rather, it is an insurrectionary

statement of self and a scientific action of defiance that questions those notions of identity that have long governed the same voice and the same memory.

Angelou constructs a new discursive space in *Still I Rise* where the speaker is not only combating oppression, but affirmatively locating her identity in positive, powerful terms. The references to "oil wells," "gold mines," and "diamonds" are not coincidental; they are conscious metaphors that redirect traditionally withheld notions of wealth, beauty, and intrinsic worth to a Black female subjectivity. These images disrupt the hegemonic cultural narratives that historically denied such value to Black women. In contrast to asserting self-worth in terms of external, whiteness and patriarchy-informed criteria, Angelou's narrator embraces and re-signifies such signs of power and wealth for herself. This re-signification serves as a discursive strategy whereby earlier shame, invisibility, and marginality are transformed into pride, visibility, and centrality. The speaker is not striving for assimilation into hegemonic norms but redescribing the terms of her existence, insisting that her presence is valuable and uncontainable. The poem *Still I Rise* utilizes a broad range of discourse strategies; ranging from direct address and rhetorical questioning to intertextual allusion, repetition, metaphor, and cultural re-signification to counter, subvert, and deconstruct hegemonic racial and gender ideologies. These tactics cumulatively build an unyielding poetic voice that resists subordination and demands visibility and respect. By a refusal to address oppression in the past and the creation of a radically different concept of self-based on ancestral pride, personal dignity, and forward-looking rebelliousness, Angelou's poem is translated into something more than an aesthetic object. It is an interventionary discourse into the same power relations that have tried to give voice such as hers over long time. The CDA perspective expounded by Fairclough gives us an insight that Angelou is not simply writing a poem, she is reclaiming language and self and history in a political way that compels the reader to ask how it is that some voices are heard and that some stories are told.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

Still I Rise by Maya Angelou is an informed, stratified poem, which imposes themes of power, name and struggle to its linguistic, discursive and social levels of analysis in accordance to the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough. Angelou is a poetry master who uses lexical contrasts, metaphor, vivid imagery, repetition, and personal pronouns to develop an unapologetic, resistant, and defiant voice of poetry at the textual level. The repetition of the statement of self-worth, I rise, transforms it to a rhythmic statement of personal value and symbolic act of dismantling structural oppression, turning individual misery into communal strength. Although such metaphorical features as references to the meaning of the phrase Black Ocean and gold mines redeem beauty and virtue of the Black womanhood, the alternative vocabulary opposes transcendence to the violence. By involving direct address and rhetorical questions, the poem confronts dominant power relations at the level of discursive practice, positioning the speaker in a dialogic struggle with institutional and historical forces of sexism and racism. By re-positioning the speaker as both self and representative of a historically silenced group, such discursive maneuvers subvert oppressive narratives. Socially, Angelou's poem is allied with Black feminist and civil rights rhetoric against the ideologies that have sought to devalue or erase Black identities. Her "rising" becomes a political and performative statement of agency that asks who ought to be able to speak and be heard and reconfigures cultural meanings. In consequence, *Still I Rise* transcends its poetic function to emerge as a powerful discursive intervention reclaiming

language, identity, and history, and challenging readers to rethink the social architecture of voice and power.

Suggestions

The critical discourse analysis of *Still I Rise* can be further developed by examining how Maya Angelou applies the same or varying linguistic and rhetorical tools to convey themes of empowerment, resistance, and identity in some of her other poems, like Phenomenal Woman, Equality, and Caged Bird. To explore how different voices in the Black literary tradition subvert dominant discourses and produce counter-narratives of Black womanhood, potential future studies might also contrast the work of Angelou with other Black feminist writers, like Audre Lorde or Nikki Giovanni. To gain an understanding of how Angelou's language of empowerment functions across different interpretive communities, scholars can also explore the reception of her poetry across different cultural and educational contexts. A multimodal approach that includes performance studies or digital humanities methods can also offer new insights into how Angelou's public performance and oral delivery enhance the rhetorical effect of the poetry.

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