Name

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Subject

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Still I Rise

Literature serves as a medium to give voice to subjective opinions and feelings since objective opinions cannot correlate well in a singular point of view narrative. African literature regained its voice through the major contributions of Black authors in writing their history from their subjective experiences. Earlier, the world was told about their history and culture from a unicentric point of view because the power of the narrative was snubbed by the colonizers. Maya Angelou is a famous African American writer, poet, and feminist. In her work, she has exclusively talked about the issues of African identity and most importantly the subjugated status of African American women. This essay analyzes her poem, *Still I Rise* to trace the idea of double colonization of African American women. Besides, it critically analyzes literary devices such as themes and diction in this poem to establish the notion of double colonization.

Double colonization occurs in a postcolonial sphere and women suffer through these repeated attempts of inequality and injustice. Africans were colonized by Western colonial masters and they suffered the loss of their land and cultural heritage. In the same manner, their sense of identity was taken away by the White masters and they had to bear a fragmented sense of identity and their status was maintained as slaves. In this lieu, Black women faced double pressure and repercussions because their rights were subjugated twice. Firstly, they suffered patriarchy at the hands of their men and secondly, they were treated as slaves by the colonial masters. They were not given any right to their bodies and attempts of physical abuse and rape became a common practice. Similarly, they were treated as exotic beings and pushed into slavery against their will and they could not claim any right on their kith and kin as well (The Image of black woman in there poems of maya angelou).

This poem contains the themes of racism, resilience against patriarchy, and a sexist mindset. Racism is by far the most striking theme in any work penned down by a Black author since it serves as a motivation for them to share their subjective experiences in front of the world. Likewise, due to the narrative control of colonizers, Black identity was long portrayed as either uncivilized or heathen in history. Angelou also points to this practice in the first couplet of her poem, "You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies” (Angelou lines 1-2). In the same manner, it points to the hatred and prejudices that the majority White Americans keep for the minority Black Americans as they cannot get past their racist ideas and injustices done on the latter. By the same token, the above couplet points at patriarchy because in a postcolonial sphere, women have to follow rules made by men and they are treated as submissive beings. In the second stanza, this line “Why are you beset with gloom?” (Angelou line 6), directly questions the patriarchal double standards and additionally, it also points to colonial masters because they are afraid of any insurgency against their hegemonic control. Likewise, another couplet extensively defines the practice of subjugation in a patriarchal household, “Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes?” (Angelou lines 13-14). When women are not given any right to speak against injustice by men, the latter continue to overlook the struggles of women because they took it upon themselves to represent their women. This practice is very much similar to the treatment by White.

This poem is also a call of action for African American women against sexism because Angelou strongly emphasizes the point of breaking patriarchal notions to restore equality and feminist thinking. In the poem, she deliberately questions both the men in her society and the White colonial masters and rebels against their prejudices. For example, this couplet “Does my haughtiness offend you? / Don’t you take it awful hard” (Angelou lines 17-18) is symbolic of women's pride and feminist idealism because this idea is often considered a threat against men. She also draws a parallel between the expected roles of women and her rebellion against those roles to take back control of her voice and female identity. For example, “You may shoot me with your words, / you may cut me with your eyes, / you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I’ll rise.” ( Angelou lines 21-24). These lines are full of an ambitious revolt against the centuries-old practice of silencing the female identity by deciding it for them to act according to a set code of conduct. Similarly, she aims high by standing above these differences and not letting society pull her back.

Angelou has employed diction to amplify the revolt against patriarchy by pinpointing these racial prejudices and patriarchal stereotypes in her poem. In the first stanza, these words “trod”, “dirt” and “dust” (Angelou lines 3-4) refer to the inhumane treatment of Black Americans at the hands of White Americans. Likewise, in the second stanza, “oil wells” (Angelou line 7) points at the wealth and resources of Black African tribes that were looted by the colonizers. It also shows that Black women are not unaware of their past and the horrors of slavery since their identity speaks for it. “Bowed head” and “lowered eyes” (Angelou line 14) strike a significant portrayal of Black female identity as a submissive being. In one of the middle stanzas of the poem, she has used the word “diamonds” (Angelou line 33) to emphasize rape attempts directed at Black women because they are treated both as submissive entities and exotic beings. In the second last stanza, the mention of “black ocean” (Angelou line 39) suggests that Angelou is taking pride in her Black identity and preaching it to her community as well. Moreover, in the last stanza, the words “ancestors” and “slave” (Angelou lines 39-40) restate the narrative of this poem again that by controlling their sense of identity and past, they should rise and fight for their rights.

Angelou, through the vivid use of themes and diction, in her poem, has evoked the challenges of double colonization faced by Black women and at the same time, she amplifies the feminist ideology as a relief from both these racial practices and patriarchal setting.

**Work Cited:**

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