

**THE OPPRESSION REFLECTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S
FIVE POEMS**

THESIS

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK
IBRAHIM MALANG**

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THE OPPRESSION REFLECTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S FIVE POEMS

THESIS

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S)

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2026

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I state that the thesis entitled “**The Oppression Reflected in Maya Angelou’s Five Poems**” is my original work. I do not include any material previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am only person who responsible for that.

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MOTTO

“Dan di setiap orang yang berilmu masih ada yang lebih mengetahui”

Q.S. Yusuf; 76

“Perjalanan yang jauh, kau bangun untuk bertaruh”

Evaluasi-Hindia

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis, first and foremost, to my family, especially my parents, who have consistently provided support, advice, motivation, and prayers for the smooth running of my studies, allowing me to reach this point.

To Ms. Siti Masitoh, M.Hum., my thesis advisor, who has guided me with unwavering patience and brought me this far.

And finally, to myself, thank you for persevering and fighting as hard as you have.

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perhaps they also actually had their own problems. You will always have a place in this small heart of mine.

Malang, 7 May 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nafila', with a horizontal line underneath the letters.

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ABSTRACT

Syarif, Nafila Zaha (2026), The Oppression Reflected in Maya Angelou's Five Poems. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor Dr. Siti Masitoh, M.Hum.

Key words: Oppression, decolonial theory, freedom.

The dominant white society in the United State feels that they have the most power in all aspects. This study analyzes various forms of oppression carried out by white society against the Black community and analyzes how the Black Community resists the acts of oppression they experience. Forms of oppression and resistance are found in Maya Angelou's poems *the calling of names*, *my Arkansas*, *momma welfare roll*, *the mothering blackness*, and *a brave and startling truth*. The research method employed in this study is literary criticism, utilizing a decolonial theory approach developed by a group of Latin American scholars, including Quijano, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Lugones, and Walsh. The results of this study indicate that there are four forms of oppression experienced by the Black community: historical and political oppression, economic oppression, cultural and linguistic oppression, and psychological oppression, which continue to persist in the modern era in more subtle forms. This study also identified five forms of resistance practiced by the Black community: epistemic resistance, re-existence, decolonial memory, economic resistance, and pluriversal vision. This study demonstrates that Maya Angelou's poetry is not merely a literary work but also contains numerous memories of the oppression and resistance experienced by the Black community, serving as a warning to society to pay attention to acts of violence that continue to occur to this day.

ABSTRAK

Syarif, Nafila Zaha (2026), Penindasan yang Tercermin dalam Lima Puisi Maya Angelou. Skripsi Sarjana. Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing Dr. Siti Masitoh, M.Hum.

Kata kunci: Penindasan, teori dekolonial, kebebasan.

Masyarakat kulit putih dominan Amerika Serikat merasa diri mereka yang paling mempunyai kuasa dalam segala aspek. Penelitian ini menganalisis macam-macam bentuk penindasan yang dilakukan masyarakat kulit putih kepada komunitas kulit hitam dan menganalisis bagaimana komunitas kulit hitam untuk melakukan perlawanan atas tindakan penindasan yang mereka alami. Bentuk-bentuk penindasan dan perlawanan ditemukan dalam puisi karya Maya Angelou *The Calling of Names*, *My Arkansas*, *Momma Welfare Roll*, *The Mothering Blackness*, dan *A Brave and Startling Truth*. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini kritik sastra dan menggunakan pendekatan teori dekolonial yang dikembangkan oleh sekelompok cendekiawan Amerika Latin di antaranya Quijano, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torees, Lugones, dan Walsh. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan ada empat bentuk penindasan yang di alami oleh komunitas kulit hitam yaitu penindasan histori dan politik, penindasan ekonomi, penindasan budaya dan linguistik, dan penindasan psikologis yang masih berjalan di era modern dengan bentuk yang lebih halus. Penelitian ini juga menemukan lima bentuk perlawanan yang dilakukan oleh komunitas kulit hitam yaitu perlawanan epistemik, re-existence, memori dekolonial, perlawanan ekonomi, dan visi pluriversal. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa puisi karya Maya Angelou bukanlah sekedar karya sastra, tetapi juga mengandung banyak memori pada masa penindasan dan perlawanan yang dialami oleh komunitas kulit hitam, dan memberikan peringatan kepada masyarakat untuk memberikan perhatian kepada tindakan kekerasan yang masih terjadi sampai saat ini.

مستخلص البحث

شريف، نافلة زها (2026)، الاضطهاد المتجلي في خمس قصائد للشاعرة مايا أنجيلو (Maya Angelou). بحث جامعي. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية مالانج. المشرفة: الدكتورة سيتي ماسيتوه، الماجستير.

الكلمات الأساسية: الاضطهاد، النظرية الديكولوجية، الحرية.

يرى المجتمع الأبيض المهيمن في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية أنه الطرف الأكثر امتلاكاً للسلطة في مختلف الجوانب. ويحلل هذا البحث أنواع أشكال الاضطهاد التي يمارسها المجتمع الأبيض ضد المجتمع الأسود، كما يحلل كيفية مقاومة المجتمع الأسود لهذه الممارسات القمعية التي يتعرض لها. وقد اكتشف أشكال الاضطهاد والمقاومة في قصائد مايا أنجيلو *The Calling* و *My Arkansas* و *Momma Welfare Roll* و *The Mothering Blackness* و *A Brave and Startling Truth*. يعتمد هذا البحث على منهج النقد الأدبي، ويستخدم مقاربة النظرية الديكولوجية التي طورها عدد من مفكري أمريكا اللاتينية، من بينهم: كيجانو / Quijano، و مينولو / Mignolo، و مالدونادو-توريس / Maldonado-Torres، و لوغونيس / Lugones، و والش / Walsh. وتُظهر نتائج البحث وجود أربعة أشكال من الاضطهاد التي يتعرض لها المجتمع الأسود، وهي: الاضطهاد التاريخي والسياسي، والاضطهاد الاقتصادي، والاضطهاد الثقافي واللغوي، والاضطهاد النفسي المستمر في العصر الحديث بأبهى حلة. كما توصل البحث إلى خمسة أشكال من المقاومة التي يمارسها المجتمع الأسود، وهي: المقاومة الإستراتيجية، وإعادة الوجود، والذاكرة الديكولوجية، والمقاومة الاقتصادية، ورؤية بلوريفرسالية. ويبين هذا البحث أن قصائد مايا أنجيلو ليست مجرد أعمال أدبية، بل تحمل أيضاً ذاكرة غنية عن فترات الاضطهاد والمقاومة التي عاشها المجتمع الأسود، كما تقدم تحذيراً للمجتمع بضرورة الانتباه إلى ممارسات العنف التي لا تزال مستمرة حتى الوقت الحاضر.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher explains about the background of the study, the problems of the study, the significant of the study, the scope and limitation of the study and the definition of key terms.

A. The Background of the Study

In 2020, a murder case occurred that shocked citizens of the United States. The incident involved a 46-year-old black man named George Perry Floyd. He was a store security guard and was known as a kind and friendly person. The incident began on May 25, 2020, when the cashier at the store where George Floyd worked called the police to report Floyd for stealing money. The cashier made the accusation by presenting a counterfeit \$20 bill. Four police officers arrived at the scene, one of whom was Derek Chauvin. Without hearing Floyd's explanation, he was immediately detained and handcuffed. Floyd appeared to be having difficulty breathing. Chauvin then pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for approximately 9 minutes and 23 seconds, and Floyd repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." Several people who witnessed the incident tried to stop Chauvin, but he continued to press down on Floyd's neck until Floyd stopped moving and died at the scene (Dreyer et al., 2020).

The incident sparked large demonstrations in several cities in the United States and gave rise to the slogan "Black Lives Matter," which defends black people and asserts that black lives are equally valuable (Boudreau et al., 2022). The

frightening act of violence, with Chauvin's knee on Floyd's neck, is reminiscent of the metaphor in Angelou's poem *Caged Bird*, which describes a bird whose wings have been clipped and whose legs have been tied, symbolizing the system of oppression against black people in the United States. Floyd's fate was like that of a bird in a cage that lost its right to fly freely, and Floyd lost his right to breathe and live. The tragic events experienced by Floyd became a symbol of the injustice that has been going on for years in the United States. This story emphasizes the importance of social equality for every citizen (Kalhor et al., 2023).

The oppression of the Black community in the United States is an ongoing conflict that continues to have a serious impact on the social system to this day. The death of George Floyd in 2020 revealed that racial discrimination still dominates a systems that should protect all citizens. Given this phenomenon, literary research using the theme of racial oppression remains crucial, as it can depict authentic social realities often ignored by government policies. Poetry, in the current context is useful as a medium that not only shows real phenomena but also serves as a tool to raise readers awareness of the injustice that occur around them. One of African-American female poet, Maya Angelou experienced discrimination in her life and recounted these experiences through poetry. Angelou's poems possess social values and meanings that are suitable for scientific research.

Maya Angelou was a woman born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri (Kalhor et al., 2023). She was a poet, orator, and screenwriter. Maya was an African-American woman who was asked to read a poem she had written at the inauguration of the President of the United States in 1993. At the inauguration, she

recited her poem titled *On the Pulse of Morning*, which won a Grammy Award in the same year (Arwa A. Khayat & Dawla S. Alamri, 2025). Maya has written many best-selling books, most of which tell the story of her life experiences. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), and *A Son Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) are some of the books written by Maya. In addition to writing books and poetry, Maya was the first black woman to write a screenplay that was made into a film, titled *Georgia, Georgia* (1972). In 1982, Maya was appointed as a professor and continued to produce poetry such as *I Shall Not Be Moved* (1990). In 1996, she became an Honorary Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Maya Angelou, n.d.).

In this study, the researcher used five poems by Maya Angelou entitled *The Calling Of Names* (1971), *My Arkansas* (1978), *Momma Welfare Roll* (1978), *The Mothering Blackness* (1995) and *A Brave and Startling Truth* (1995). Using these five poems, the researcher discusses the violence committed by Americans against black people and how black people can resolve the oppression perpetrated by American society. All five poems share the themes of oppression and the desire for freedom, recounting the injustice and oppression experienced by black people. In addition, black people also experience discrimination and racism perpetrated by white Americans. These poems write and describe the journey of black people who struggle to obtain justice and freedom in their lives. They always voice the rights they should have, but what they get is their voices being ignored and considered nothing more than wind passing through the ears of white people.

Maya Angelou's poem, *The Calling of Names*, stems from her reflections on how white people label black people with offensive and appropriate terms that have evolved over time. Angelou traces the shift in offensive terms used for black people, such as colored, negro, and black. This serves as evidence that language is not just a means of communication but also a tool of power and humiliation. In *My Arkansas*, Angelou uses symbols of nature to depict the wounds of history that have not yet fully healed wounds still burdened by the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow segregation. This poem illustrates that the black community in Arkansas has not yet achieved true equality.

Momma Welfare Roll, it tells the story of black mother living in poverty and dependent on the government due to long standing economic injustice. She is often criticized, yet she continues to accept the assistance provided as a right, not as a form of charity. This poem was written as a critique of the American social system, which continues to oppress black women even after the era of slavery has ended. Then *The Mothering Blackness* tells the story of a black woman who returns to her true identity after experiencing discrimination, racism, and injustice outside her home region. Maya uses the term "Mothering Blackness" to mean a place of embrace and return for black communities. The last one is *A Brave and Startling Truth*, in which Maya hopes that humans can let go of hatred, hostility, and war and continue to pave the way for peace and unity among fellow humans (Oishy et al., 2024).

The five poems used in this research have distinct characteristics. First, each of the five poems addresses a different form of oppression, ranging from historical,

economic, linguistic, and psychological. Overall, the poems provide a broad overview of the experiences of oppression faced by Black Americans. Second, the poems symbolize Maya Angelou's consistent voice in resisting oppression that has persisted for over twenty years. Finally, the five poems were written in different periods and years, but they share a common theme how Black communities struggle to achieve freedom, justice, and recognition as human beings.

Decolonial theory was pioneered by scholars such as Franz Fanon, Walton Mignolo, Maria Lugones, Anibal Quijano, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, which developed in the late 20th century (Menon, 2023). Decolonial theory is known as a critical approach that rejects the legacy of colonialism through knowledge, culture, social systems, and modern ways of thinking. This theory states that colonialism will continue even after colonized countries have gained political independence. This is because colonialism will remain in social structures, ways of thinking, and modern science. The origins of decolonial theory lie in Latin America, among academics who were members of the Modernity/Coloniality Research Group in the late 1990s (Mario et al., 2025). The group opposed the notion that modernity originated solely in Europe and argued that modernity and coloniality are one and the same, meaning that the progress of Western nations was based on the exploitation and colonization of the non-Western world.

There are several previous studies relevant to this research, which the author has categorized into three groups, there are studies examining Maya Angelou's poetry, studies exploring how literary works depict oppression, and studies examining how decolonial theory is applied to literary works. First, the author will

include studies that also examine Maya Angelou's poetry. Many of Maya Angelou's poetry have been analyzed using feminist, postcolonial, sociological, and biographical theories. In Abdolmaleki (2025), the author examines the poem *Still I Rise* using postcolonial theory and genetic structuralism. The author reveals that the use of linguistic elements such as simile, repetition, and parallelism can also illustrate how African women struggle to rebuild their authentic identities after experiencing oppression.

In addition, there is another study that focuses on the stylistic features used in analyzing Maya Angelou's poetry. Fitra et al. (2022), in their research, analyzed stylistic features specifically semantic figures in Maya Angelou's poems *On the Pulse of Morning* and *Still I Rise*. The results showed that the use of stylistic features such as metaphor, simile, and personification can indirectly convey moral messages about oppression, struggle, and freedom. Then Duwiyolana et al. (2024), examined seven poems written by Maya Angelou and found that the use of figurative language in the poems reinforces the themes of oppression, struggle, and freedom experienced by the Black community.

Research conducted by Chandrashekharappa (2024) notes that Maya Angelou's poems contain the poet's critique, which serves as a form of resistance against segregation and systemic injustice, and explain that her poetry serves as a source of inspiration for the Black community to rise up and fight for freedom. Then Qaseem (2023), analyses several of Angelou's poems from perspective of racism and slavery. The researcher found that Angelou uses language to expose the discrimination perpetrated by White people against the Black community,

particularly through her poetry. This study also demonstrates that Angelou's poetry serves as a powerful form of resistance against racial and gender oppression.

In the second section, there are studies focusing on the theme of oppression beyond the works of Maya Angelou. Hussain (2022), analyzed the works of Alice Walker and found that the oppression experienced by African American women is multi layered, including racial, gender, and social class oppression. Then there is Wajiran & Apriyani (2025), conducted research on 3 novels by Toni Morrison, the research revealed that Morrison describes forms of racism ranging from systemic, sexism, and also about the trauma experienced by the next generation of American women. Next Plummer et al. (2024) who write in their study that racial oppression is a legacy of colonialism throughout the world it is not only the United States that has been affected by it.

The final section consists of studies that employed decolonial theory in the analysis of literary works, and the author cites two such studies. In Berkman-james & Andrews (2025), this study analyzes Adichie's novel "*Purple Hibiscus*" using decolonial theory. The study found that the main character in the novel has continuously absorbed colonial perspectives and has unconsciously slowly abandoned local culture and become more imbued with Western culture. Then Manathunga et al. (2022), state that using poetry can be useful for conveying the history of colonialism from the perspective of the oppressed rather than the oppressors. They also state that the knowledge possessed by oppressed communities is just as important as Western knowledge. Both studies utilize decolonial theory from different perspective. The first utilizes the perspectives of

Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, and Fanon, while the second utilizes the concept of epistemologies of the South. Both studies demonstrate that, they are not fixated on the same figure but are instead adapted to their respective research perspective. These findings demonstrate that decolonial theory can be effectively applied in various forms of literary works as a way to reveal how oppression continues to occur, albeit in more subtle forms.

Previous studies have shown that research focusing on Maya Angelou's poetry has been dominated by feminist, postcolonial, and stylistic theories. The researcher found no previous studies that examined these five poems by Maya Angelou using decolonial theory. In this regard, this study offers something new and distinct from previous research.

This study differs from previous studies conducted in recent years in that it provides a new perspective on the object of study. Previous studies using Maya Angelou's poetry as their object of study often employed feminist, postcolonial, and stylistic theories that focused on examining the figurative language in Angelou's poetry. In fact, there are several studies that also discuss oppression, discrimination, and freedom in Angelou's poetry, but the research does not focus on decolonial theory. As explained earlier, the researcher wants to further explore the types of oppression experienced by black people at the hands of American society.

Maya Angelou's poems are an effective way to convey the lived experiences of the Black community regarding racial discrimination and the colonial system that continues even after the colonial era has ended. Her works not only tell the suffering

of the oppressed community, but also how the spirit of the oppressed community to fight and struggle for identity and freedom. Therefore, this study uses decolonial theory to answer the main questions: the types of oppression reflected in Maya Angelou's five poems and how the Black community resists the oppression contained in the poems.

B. Problems of the Study

From the background of the study above, the problems of the study can be stated as follows:

1. What are the kind of oppression reflected in Maya Angelou's poems *The Calling of Names*, *My Arkansas*, *Momma Welfare Roll*, *Mothering Blackness*, *And A Brave And Startling Truth*?
2. How do the minority struggle against the oppression reflected in the poem?

C. Significant of the Study

Theoretically, this study uses decolonial theory to analyze Maya Angelou's poetry, which has been extensively researched and studied through the lens of postcolonialism and feminism. This can enrich our knowledge of oppression, discrimination, and resistance to unjust actions. In practical terms, the author hopes that this research can provide benefits to the wider community in efforts to raise awareness and concern for various forms of injustice that are still ongoing today. Through literary approach, this research invites everyone to better understand that acts of racial oppression are not just past events, but rather these events are

problems that still exist today and require attention and responsibility from all of society.

D. Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study focuses on five selected poems by Maya Angelou that are quite well-known, namely *The Calling of Names* (1971), *My Arkansas* (1978), *Momma Welfare Roll* (1978), *The Mothering Blackness*, and *A Brave and Startling Truth* (1995). This study only looks at the various forms of oppression experienced by black communities and how they resist the oppression they face. Using decolonial theory as the main approach in the analysis, which can be used to understand poetry from the perspective of colonized knowledge, power, and humanity.

Like any research, this research has limitations related to the research object and the method used. The researcher only analyzed the text of the poems without examining the biographical aspects of the poets or the socio-political situation in the United States. In addition, this study only used one theory, namely decolonial theory, without using other theories such as feminism or postcolonialism. Therefore, the findings of this study focus on understanding the meaning of oppression and struggle from a decolonial perspective.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Oppression: oppression is an act carried out by a group with greater power to prevent a smaller group from achieving equality in social, political, and economic systems. This occurs due to customs or

traditions passed down through the generations from their predecessors within the group (Quijano et al., 2000).

2. Decolonial theory: An approach used to analyze the legacy of colonialism, which continues to influence the mindset, culture, and social systems of modern societies. This theory is useful in helping colonized communities regain their identity and rights (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).
3. Freedom: A situation where people can feel and obtain equal justice. A community where people have the opportunity to do things, think, and live their lives without pressure or restrictions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, the researcher explains about the objective approach to analyze the poems and the oppression theory proposed by Quijano, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Lugones, and Walsh.

A. Objective Approach

This study uses an objective approach, specifically one that is commonly used in literary studies, which focuses solely on analyzing literary works without considering external aspects such as the author's biography, the history of the writing, or comments and responses from the readers of the literary works itself. The emergence of this approach was a response to historical criticism that placed too much emphasis on social context such as the biography or life of author rather than the text of the work itself. Ritchane (2021) explains that New Criticism believes that literary criticism should not discuss the origins of literature, social background, history, politics, and social impact. The objective approach is also referred to as formalism or new criticism in the Anglo-American tradition, which views literary works as objects of beauty that deserve to be studied individually.

The objective approach analyses poetry by looking at specific aspects such as metaphors, diction, imagery, language structure, tone, theme, and symbolism. This approach only focuses on intrinsic without focusing on extrinsic elements in literary texts. The intrinsic elements focuses more on the literary work itself, such as its content, structure, and constituent aspects, while the extrinsic elements

focuses on literary work from outside the text, such as the life of the author, the social conditions in the text, the psychological conditions of the author and characters in the text, ideas, and other artistic elements, the element of the intrinsic approach are considered the main focus in the process of analyzing literary works because these elements are important in the analysis.

By carefully analyzing aspects of literary works, readers can understand how poets create meaning through their choice of language and structural patterns. Poetry uses symbols, metaphors, and beauty as important aspects for the formation of meaning and emotional effect, rather than merely decorative elements in literature (Ziadi, 2025). The use of certain types of metaphors rather than literal statements can convey multiple layers of meaning at once, which in turn creates a diversity and richness that may be difficult to achieve it through direct statements. In the same way, forms found in poetry such as imagery can help readers understand themes and feel emotions. Poetry can become more harmonious and emphasize its main meaning if there are images or symbols that appear repeatedly in the literary work. However, if there is equality or conflict between certain images, it can add tension or highlight differences in the poem.

Although this analysis does not stand alone, the use of this objective approach serves as the basis for research to understand deeper socio-political meanings. The use of this approach helps researchers find evidence in poetic texts, word choices, and imagery. Then, the evidence found is used to explain decolonial ideas. This approach makes it possible to see how Angelou creates meaning through her poetry, while decolonial theory explains the meaning of the text, which

describes the experiences of African Americans and their forms of resistance. The combination of the two makes the analysis more social-political, while the clear evidence from the text remains.

B. Quijano's Theory of Oppression

This study employs the theory of oppression from a decolonial perspective, which posits that the effects of colonialism are still felt long after the colonial era has ended and are experienced by contemporary societies. According to those who have experienced oppression, it has become an integral part of everyday life, manifesting in policy, culture, and society. The use of this method facilitates a deeper understanding of Maya Angelou's poetry, which recounts the experiences of the Black community.

1. Decolonial Theory

Decolonial theory began to develop at the end of the 20th century as a means of oppose colonial regulations aimed at modern societies. This theoretical perspective brought about significant changes in postcolonial studies, as decolonial theorists felt that even though countries had gained independence and raised their flags independence, they were not yet fully independent. This is evident in how societies think, view race, and perceive who is most powerful, which shows that the effects of colonialism continue to live on even after the colonial era has ended. While postcolonial theory examines the impact of colonialism on literature and culture, decolonial theory emphasize that the basic colonial structure, commonly referred to as

‘coloniality’, continues to exist and function even after the colonial era has ended (Lemos, 2022).

Decolonial theory was first developed by a group of Latin American historians in the late 1990s, they formed a group to conduct research examining the interaction between colonialism and modernity. The group of historians included Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Maria Lugones, and Catherine E. Walsh. Although this idea originated in the Latin American context, it can be used to understand the colonial legacy worldwide, including the experiences of African-American living in the United States. The group historians argues that coloniality and modernity cannot be completely separated, as Western societies were able to develop through the exploitation of resources and labor from the countries they colonize.

Distinguish between “colonialism” and “coloniality” is a function of decolonial criticism. The term “colonialism” refers to a period in history when European powers had direct control over territories in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. This direct colonization largely ended in the 20th century, as most colonized countries gained political independence. However, the term “coloniality” refers to the old forms of power that remain even though the colonial era has ended and the colonized countries have gained independence. The point is that even though the colonized countries are no longer colonized, the thinking and ways of working occurred during

the colonial era still live on and are embedded in modern life after the end of the colonial era (Udah, 2024).

Franz Fanon, one of the pioneers of decolonial theory, wrote his important works *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) before decolonial theory was officially formulated, making these works the early foundations of decolonial theory. Fanon was a psychiatrist and activist from Martinique who worked in Algeria during the war of independence to monitor people affected by colonialism in terms of their mental and cultural conditions. He asserted that colonialism not only oppressed through economic or military power but also created a “colonized personality” that could change a person’s perspective. Fanon argued that political independence alone was not enough, society must also be freed from the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism (Novey, 2021).

Decolonial theory can be used to explain that modern racism is more than just personal hatred, it has become ingrained in institutions and social systems that stem from the remnants of the colonial system. Although colonialism has ended, African-American still experience discrimination, violence, and educational inequality. The lingering evidence of discrimination demonstrates that even after the official end of colonialism and the enactment of the 1960s Civil Rights Act, discriminatory practices continue occur (Alang et al., 2023).

2. The Concept of Coloniality

In decolonial theory, there are three key concept that are interrelated and serve as the foundation for understanding colonialism as it persist today, the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being.

a. Coloniality of Power

coloniality of power is a concept developed by Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist, which describe how systems of power were formed during the colonial era and continue to this day, even though colonialism has ended. In the past, European colonization was carried out directly through the military or government, but today that colonization still exists but in a more subtle form. Examples include dependence on money, the belief that Western culture is superior, and the manipulation of political systems. Therefore, the coloniality of power demonstrates that the powerful and the colonized continue to form an inseparable dynamic rooted in colonialism (Quijano, n.d.).

b. Coloniality of Knowledge

Walter D. Mignolo developed the concept of coloniality of knowledge from ideas put forward by Quijano. He explains how Western scholarship dominates educational systems and knowledge worldwide. Local knowledge systems which encompass cultures, traditions, beliefs, and values of Asian, African, and Latin American societies are regarded as weak and unscientific within this

framework, whereas European knowledge is considered authentic, universal, and accurate. This concept challenges the notion that there is only one way to understand the world, instead, we must acknowledge and respect the diverse scientific traditions found in various cultures and communities (Mignolo, 2000).

c. Coloniality of Being

Coloniality of being is a concept developed by Maldonado-Torres as an extension of the concept developed by Quijano. This concept addresses the existential and psychological dimension of colonialism, particularly its impact on the self-esteem and humanity of colonized communities. As a results of colonialism, certain groups feel they have lost their self-esteem and cultural identity. The concept of the coloniality of being helps to heal and restore the self-esteem of those who have been damaged and marginalized by colonial power. This concept also highlights the importance of reclaiming humanity as a form of resistance against the colonial system that continue to operate (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

3. Kinds of Oppression

Furthermore, Quijano explained that there are various kinds of oppression, ranging from economic, political and institutional oppression, to psychological and existential oppression, and oppression through culture and knowledge.

a. Economic Oppression

According to Quijano (2000), economic oppression is a system whereby dominant groups control the results of work, resources and employment through exploitative practices justified by racial categorization. The colonial era categorized forms of forced labour, such as slavery, which were assigned to serve the interest of the European economic system. Slavery and various forms of economic discrimination have continued to prevail, ranging from persistent intergenerational poverty, occupational segregation, unequal pay, and a lack of access to property ownership. Black communities living in America have faced the greatest adversity in their history. Beech et al. (2021), state that poverty within Black communities is a direct consequences of structural racism, which has existed since the colonial era and continues to shape systems and policies to this day.

b. Political and Institutional Oppression

According to Quijano's thinking (2000), political and institutional oppression constitutes the control of states systems of authority, law and institutions dominant group, which results in marginalized communities being directly excluded from equal protection. This form of oppression is experienced by the Black community in the United States in various ways, such as the

redrawing of electoral boundaries to weaken their vote, the imposition of harsher criminal penalties, facing violence from the authorities and lacking legal protection, and being hindered in economic progress and development. Prolonged racism has permeated all aspects of public policy in America, including the education system, this is a consequence of colonialism that has never truly been resolved (Li et al., 2022).

c. Psychological Oppression

In Maldonado-Torres (2007), psychological oppression involves controlling the way people perceive them self through the instilling of hierarchical values constructed by the colonizers, so that the colonized come to regard themselves as weak and unworthy of being considered fully human. Maldonado-Torres reveals that this condition is referred to as the Coloniality of Being. Forms of oppression experienced by Black communities, such as the persistent negative portrayal of Black people in education or the media, and the subtle treatment intended to demean Black people, result in intergenerational trauma that persist. Sanders et al. (2024), note that psychological distress can arise when Black people internalize negative views of themselves, and they are aware that this persistent trauma can be passed down to subsequent generations.

d. Cultural and Linguistic Oppression

Cultural and linguistic oppression according to Quijano (2000) refers to the imposition of European cultural and knowledge standards, which are regarded as the only legitimate and universal forms of knowledge, this concept was subsequently developed by Mignolo as the Coloniality of Knowledge. At that time, the language, knowledge, culture, and way of life of colonized communities were directly abolished and destroyed. This oppression was experienced by Black communities in the United States through derogatory labelling, the erasure of African history from school curricula, the rejection of AAVE (African American Vernacular English) as an illegitimate language, and the appropriation of culture without recognition or compensation.

4. Forms of Resistance Against Oppression

While Quijano's thinking identifies kinds of oppression, Mignolo and Walsh's thinking outlines forms of resistance against oppression, such as epistemic resistance, re-existence, decolonial memory, economic resistance, and the pluriversal vision.

a. Epistemic Resistance (Delinking)

According to Mignolo (2009), the concept of delinking is a form of epistemic resistance whereby oppressed communities consciously free themselves from the Western cultural and intellectual standards

imposed by colonialism. They then assert their own understanding of the world and their way of thinking are legitimate and valuable. This resistance is carried out by Black poets, artist, and scholars by creating works from the voices, language, and traditions of their own African-American experiences. They reject imposed racial labelling, write works based on their own experiences, and reveal that the experiences of the Black community are important and worthy of respect, not something that must be equated with European standards (Austin & Anya, 2023).

b. Re-existence (Rebuilding Identity)

The term ‘re-existence’ was coined by Mignolo & Walsh (2018) to describe the efforts of oppressed communities to rebuild their authentic identities after their way of life and identities were destroyed under the colonial system. By persevering and continuing to live, they resist oppression and emphasize that they are human beings who deserve to be valued and recognized as whole. This resistance is shaped by Black communities through the preservation and celebration of their cultural heritage and spirituality, the creation of spaces to appreciate and celebrate one another within the Black community, and the passing on of the community’s values and historical narratives to future generations as a form of resistance against cultural erasure. Jacob et al. (2023), note that art and creativity are effective means of resisting oppression and

transforming the experiences of racism into a driving force and strength for resistance.

c. Decolonial Memory

Decolonial memory is a form of resistance based on Mignolo's (2022) concept of re-telling neglected histories to counter governments seeking to erase the experiences of oppression suffered by the oppressed. Poets, artist, and members of oppressed communities engage in this resistance by writing and telling stories about the wounds of history that refuse to heal-not a past that is already over. They also help to disseminate stories not recorded in official history as a form of identity defense and to demand recognition of the suffering endured by the oppressed. Gilbert et al. (2022), write that stories center on the forced destruction of Black communities, such as the burning Black Well Street, must be told continuously. Shared memory forms of foundation for the community's recovery and the continuation of its struggle.

d. Economic Resistance

According to Walsh (2018), economic resistance is a form of resistance whereby communities living in persistent poverty refuse to feel ashamed or blame themselves for conditions that are in fact dictated by an unjust system. They resolutely assert their rights as a form of resistance against the rhetoric that marginalizes them. This form of resistance is demonstrated in the rejection of the negative

labels consistently applied to Black communities, the acceptance of aid and resources as rights they are entitled to after centuries of oppression, and the creation of spaces for mutual support within the community as a means to swiftly achieve justice. Addressing economic inequality within the Black community must begin with the recognition that their poverty is a legacy of racism dating back to the colonial era, and not a results of personal failings.

e. Pluriversal Vision

According to Mignolo (2009), the pluriversal vision is a form of resistance that imagines a world in which diverse forms of humanity and ways of life can coexist on an equal footing, without any one group being superior. This endeavour is the ultimate goal of the decolonial struggle, referred to as the ‘decolonial horizon’ by Walsh. This resistance is manifested through calls for peace and solidarity that transcend racial and national differences, a rejection of the notion that injustice is inevitable, and an affirmation that long oppressed communities possess a strong and significant voice in the discourse on justice. According to Azad et al. (2022), resistance through poetry can actively envision human solidarity as an achievable decolonial project.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss about research design, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. The accuracy of research results, depends on the research method, which plays a crucial role in the research process.

A. Research Design

The research design used in this study is literary criticism, a method that helps to analyze, interpret, and provide, literary criticism that is useful for understanding the meaning, structure, and significance of the work being analyzed. This study also used decolonial theory as a method of analysis. Decolonial theory examines how the legacy of the decolonial era continues and is still felt by society even though the colonial period has ended. The focus of decolonial theory is not only on colonial history, but also on several things that are still controlled by the colonial system, such as ways viewing the world, ways of thinking in society, social, political, and economic structures, and social knowledge.

B. Data Sources

The poems selected for this study as research objects have gone through a systematic process. First, the researcher searched for poets who wrote works related to the main topics of racial oppression, social discrimination, and resistance to colonial legacies. Then, after Maya Angelou was selected as the subject, a literature review was conducted to determine which poems had been widely studied and which had not. This process was useful to ensure that the five selected poems could provide new analytical results. The five poems ultimately used were *The Calling of*

Names (1971), *My Arkansas* (1978), *Momma Welfare Roll* (1978), *The Mothering Blackness* (1995), And *A Brave and Startling Truth* (1995). These poems were chosen because they are still very limited as research objects on the topic of oppression and resistance.

C. Data Collection

Data collection in this study went through several important stages to produce accurate results. First, the researcher conducted repeated close readings of the selected poems to gain an understanding of their content, intrinsic elements such as metaphor, symbol, diction, imagery, tone and theme, and use of language from the poems. Then the researcher grouped elements related to oppression. The next step is to identify the parts that constitute strategies of resistance in the poems, and the last step is to document all textual evidence that is relevant to answering the research questions.

D. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study uses decolonial theory, which will examine poetry from three core concepts of decolonial theory, namely coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being. Furthermore, textual evidence will be organized according to the types of oppression, which are racial, economic, social, political, or psychological. Then the researcher will identify how the poems display various strategies of resistance, such as identity restoration, demands for justice, and the voicing of desires for freedom. These findings will be linked to the core concepts of decolonialism to determine their meaning. Finally,

the findings will be combined to identify the forms of oppression and resistance in accordance with the five poem.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter, consist the results of an analysis of the five poems by Maya Angelou, The Calling of Names (1971), My Arkansas (1978), Momma Welfare Roll (1978), The Mothering Blackness (1995), Dan A Brave and Starling Truth (1995) which describes the various forms of oppression and resistance within it.

A. The Kinds of Oppression Reflected in Maya Angelou's Poems

The oppression of the Black community in the United States is not merely a historical event of the past, it is a system that continues to operate within the social, linguistic, cultural, and governmental spheres. Maya Angelou vividly and powerfully depicts various forms of oppression in their poetry, including political and historical, economic, linguistic, and psychological oppression.

1. Political and Institutional Oppression

This form of oppression stems from a system of power established during the colonial era and the era of slavery, with continues to persist in modern society even though the colonial era has officially ended.

a. *My Arkansas*

*There is a deep brooding
In Arkansas
Old crimes like moss pend
From poplar trees
The sullen earth is much too
Red for comfort*

In the first stanza, a rather sharp statement is immediately presented, the word “*brooding*”, which implies deep contemplation in a void, conveying an atmosphere in this poem that is heavy, dark, and full of pressure, an atmosphere that seems to have no end in sight. The phrase “*old crimes like moss pend from poplar trees*” is a complex metaphor, moss clinging persistently to poplar trees and glowing ever more firmly illustrates the violence of the past that has never truly ended and has never been cleansed. In the African-American context, the poplar tree carries a unique and ark connotation. The song *Strange Fruit* is famous for depicting the bodies of Black people hanging from trees in American South, and Angelou’s poem also uses the analogy of the tree. The carries referred to in this poem are not individual acts, but an entire organized system, such as slavery, segregation, lynching, and various forms of state sanctioned racial violence. In this stanza, the word “*tree*” does not refer to a tree in the conventional sense, but rather serves as an analogy for the constant terror inflicted by white society upon Black society and a terror carried out in full view of the entire white community. Just like a tree, this terror continues to grow and spread.

In the line “*the sullen earth is much too red for comfort*,” the term “*red earth*” reinforce the imagery in a subtle yet unsettling way. The clay soil in Arkansas is indeed soil, but here “*red*” also signifies the colour of blood, the blood of the slaves who toiled on that land and the blood of victims of racial violence that has seeped into the soil. This form of oppression described in this stanza is the forcible seizure of land labour, the victims of the violence

are forced to work hard they are the ones who till the end, but they never get enjoy the fruits of their labour. Then the word “*sullen*” provides an unusual emotional perspective, the earth seems to swallow and bear the sins committed upon it. This is not merely a depiction of nature, but shows how violence is swallowed up and permeates every aspect of life.

*Sunrise seems to hesitate
And in that second
Lose its incandescent aim, and
Dusk no more shadows
Than the noon.
The past is brighter yet.*

The second stanza of this poem highlights the aspects of time in the depiction of historical oppression, the form of oppression here takes the form of a stagnant political system and the failure to uphold civil rights. The sun rises “*hesitantly*” and appears to have “*lose its incandescent aim*”, suggesting hesitant progress and development that never seems to arrive. In fact, at that time civil rights laws were already officially in place and enforced, however, enforcement on the ground was lax, and certain local governments, law enforcement agencies, and public organizations still controlled by white people consistently found ways to ensure that the progress and development sought by the Black community remained obstructed and ultimately failed. Angelou depicts the hesitant sunrise as a sign that the prospects for progress in Arkansas are highly uncertain. The line “*the past is brighter yet*” is startling phrase, which can be interpreted as a contradiction between the pleasant and the ironic. American thought has always held that the present should be brighter than the past, but the Black

community in Arkansas sees no development or progress in their ongoing lives, they feel the past might have been brighter. Even though oppression continues in a more organized form, resulting in a lack of any sustained vision of progress.

*Old hates and
Ante-bellum lace are rent
But not discarded.
Today is yet to come
In Arkansas.
It writhes. It writhes in awful
Waves of brooding.*

By the third stanza, the context of political and historical oppression has reached its peak, this stanza describes the oppression resulting from the spread of a system of values and a culture of racism against Black people, which has been disseminated within white society. “*Ante-bellum lace*” clearly refers to the period before the American Civil War, when slavery was still legally permitted. “*Lace*” depicts the boundless luxury of white life in the American South, much of which was produced by the forced labour of the Black community. Although lace is beautiful, it is thin and fragile, concealing the violence behind its beauty. The truth that the hatred and symbols of the slavery era have been “*rent but not discarded*” serves as metaphor for a society that has officially abandoned the system of segregation but continues to maintain the social strata and values built upon it structurally and culturally. Hatred, racial hierarchies, and injustice still persist within the system, even though its outward appearance has been altered by legal changes.

The phrase “*today is yet to come in Arkansas*” is a rather startling statement. The fact that the Black community has never experienced this “*today*”, a day that should bring equality and justice, serves as a critique of the narrative of progress that underpins American academia. The word “*writhes*” is written twice “*it writhes. It writhes in awful was of brooding*” creating a rhythmic cadence that makes the suffering sound even worse. Arkansas is likened not only to bearing the wight of its history in silence, but to having endured continuous suffering and repeatedly experienced life’s calamities that never truly subside.

From the perspective of the coloniality of power, this poem illustrates how the racial power system established during the colonial era truly disappeared after civil rights were established. It has evolved into a more subtle form, yet remains effective in perpetuating existing social hierarchies, as evidenced by the economic inequalities inherited from our ancestors, as well as official and cultural segregation that continues to reflect deep-seated prejudices, even if they are not openly acknowledged.

b. A brave and startling truth

In the previous poem, *My Arkansas*, depicts historical oppression within a local and specific context, this poem addresses broader and more widespread issues of historical oppression. Written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, its messages about violence, war, and intergenerational oppression are all the more relevant.

*When battlefields and coliseum
No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters
Up with the bruised and bloody grass
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil*

This verse depicts the oppression of war, which claims the lives of so many young people, here the form of oppression described is the coercion of vulnerable and marginalized communities to fight a war that is not their best interest. The phrase “*unique and particular sons and daughters*” stands in stark contrast to colonial thinking, which dehumanizes victims by reducing them to mere statistics. Angelou asserts that the fallen are not faceless stranger, they are individuals with their own histories, humanity, and uniqueness. Their deaths on “*foreign soil*” reveal that war is waged solely for the sake of power, often forcing the weak and marginalized to die for the interests of others rather than their own. The vulnerable were forced to fight in World War I and II under a military system that remained segregated, as a result, even though they won the wars, they still did not receive the full rights they were entitled to.

*When religious ritual is not perfumed
By the incense of burning flesh
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake
By nightmares of abuse*

This verse depicts the oppressive forces targeting religion and childhood, the word “*perfumed*” ironically describes the smell of burning flesh, associated with a religion that should bring goodness and protection, yet is instead linked to the scent of death in sacred rituals. This illustrates just how powerful the system of oppression is no aspect of life is truly

beyond its grasp. Childhood dreams “*kicked awake*” by nightmares of violence this is deeply moving depiction of systemic oppression that destroys the potential and hopes of a young generation before they can be realized.

Within the concept of the colonality of power, this poem illustrates how oppression stemming from colonialism leads to a system of violence that transcends national and racial boundaries. Quijano asserts that the colonality of power is not merely about the oppression of one group by another, but about how the system establishes violence as a universal norm accepted by all parties both the oppressors and the oppressed.

2. Economic Oppression

This oppression occurs when the resources, economic systems, and jobs of oppressed community continue to be controlled by the dominant society, making difficult for the economic system of the oppressed community to advance and develop. This oppression is carried out by the state and its economic system, and the oppressed are Black community trapped in structural poverty.

a. Momma welfare roll

This poem is among the most vivid depictions of economic oppression. Angelou portrays this economic oppression through the real life experiences by Black woman, not through data or abstract arguments, but through the

details of her body and her life, which makes the portrayal of economic oppression feel real, not merely an illustration.

*Her arms semaphore fat triangles,
Pudgy hands bunched on layered hips
Where bones idle under years of fatback
And lima beans.
Her jowls shiver in accusation
Of crimes clichéd by
Repetition. Her children, strangers
To childhood's toys, play
Best the games of darkened doorways,
Rooftop tag, and know the slick feel of
Other people's property.*

Every detail in this verse depicts the persistent poverty that has endured for years even centuries. The form of oppression described in this stanza is the legacy of structural poverty that persists across generations, with no end sight. The phrase “*years of fatback and lima beans*” does not merely refer to a limited diet, it also illustrates a poverty that has existed for a long time, not by choice, and not something that can be overcome through hard work. “*fatback*” is a cut of pork fat that is very affordable and often serves as a daily staple poor families in the American South. Then there are “*lima beans*”, a type of bean that is also very inexpensive. This diet is diet of poverty, lacking in beneficial nutrients and monotonous, which suggests that they consistently lack adequate food for their daily needs. “*Fat triangles*”, “*layered hips*”, and “*pudgy hands*” are depicted on the woman’s body, illustrating the results of a diet that is nutritionally poor, cheap, and high in fat and carbohydrates.

The description of the children in this poem is a startling image in this stanza, in this stanza, oppression takes the form of the deprivation of a child's rights or dreams due to structural poverty. They are referred to as "*strangers to childhood's toys*", and Angelou reveals that persistent poverty has robbed these children of their right to a proper childhood even before they realize it. They are already familiar with "*the slick feel of other people's property*" it depict children who are far from the playgrounds, fairy tales, and toys they should have enjoyed as children, but instead live on the outskirts of the city in poor conditions. Worst of all is the "*slick feel of other's property*", where they dare to touch other people's property, depicting children who dare to steal other people's belongings because of forced conditions to survive. This occurs because of the inherited cycle of structural poverty, not because the system closes the opportunity for them to developed.

Maya Angelou does not portray the woman in this poem as someone weak in character or morality. Her anger "*her jowls shiver in accusation of crimes cliched by repetition*" is not a sign of weakness, rather, it is a natural expression for someone who continues to live in a situation of repeated injustice. "*Cliched by repetition*" indicates that the injustice she experiences have occurred so frequently that they are now considered normal. This situation is far more distressing than the injustices themselves, as it reveals the normalization of oppression.

*Too fat to whore,
 Too mad to work,
 Searches her dreams for the
 Lucky sign and walks bare-handed
 Into a den of bureaucrats for
 Her portion.
 'They don't give me welfare
 I take it.'*

This second verse highlights a more direct aspect of the relationship between the state system and structural poverty. The phrase “*too fat to whore, too mad to work*” indicates that this woman has limited options. And those options stem from an oppressive system rather than her own needs. She lacks the capital to start a business, lacks the connections to secure a job, and lacks access to formal education. For some reason, this woman didn't have a job that paid her the same wages as other workers. She didn't work not because the system at that time exclude her from access to proper education, appropriate job training, and fair employment opportunities.

The next form of oppression contained in this stanza is the dominant community's system of government which humiliates and intimidates recipients of social assistance. The act of “*walks bare-handed into a den bureaucrats*” is a very accurate description of the relationship between the poor community and the state's bureaucratic system. The word “*den*”, typically used to describe the lair of a wild animal, illustrates how the bureaucratic system which is supposed to serve the people, actually function as an intimidating and dangerous space for those in dire need. These women come “*bare-handed*”, they have no legal representation, no connections, and no understanding of bureaucratic procedures, yet they still come and

confront the system. This is a courage born not of strength, but of the conviction that they are entitled to what they demand.

Within the framework of the colonality of power, the conditions described in this poem are a direct legacy of the colonial system, which for centuries excluded Black communities from access to property ownership, quality education, meaningful employment, and intergenerational wealth accumulation.

3. Culture and Knowledge Oppression

This oppression occurs when the culture, language, and knowledge of the oppressed community are seen as illegitimate and valuable, and also illegitimate in that area, then the culture of the dominant group is made the standard and worthy of obedience. In this oppression, the oppressor is the white American society with this government institutions, while the oppressed is the Black community.

a. The calling of names (1971)

*He went to being called a colored man
after answering to 'hey, nigger'.
Now that's a big jump,
anyway you figger,*

The first stanza of the poem opens directly with a contrast that highlights two stark forms of naming. Throughout history, the word “*nigger*” has been used to belittle, humiliate, and dehumanize the Black community, constituting one of the most brutal forms of linguistic violence

ever witnessed in the United States. The shift from “*nigger*” to “*coloured man*” is seen as a major leap, yet it also carries an ironic implication no matter how significant or far reaching the change, a person’s identities remains defined by others rather than origination from within themselves. This first stanza contains a form of oppression that can be classified as linguistic oppression, wherein the community that controls the naming of an individual also holds control over their very existence.

The word “*answering to*” describes a subtle and lengthy process of formation. When a person or community is subjected to derogatory terms too frequently, there’s a potential danger that they may begin to accept those terms of describing themselves. This is a deliberate psychological process designed to make the oppressed recognize that these derogatory terms are indeed their identity.

*Hey, Baby, watch my smoke.
From colored man to Negro,
With the N caps,
was like saying Japanese
instead of saying Japs*

In the second stanza, the analysis is deepened by comparing two instances of name change in two different contexts. The capital letter used in the word “*Negro*” is an attempt to confer a more subtle sense of self worth through spelling, which is nearly identical to the shift from “*Japs*” to “*Japanese*” during World War II. However, in Maya Angelou’s poetry, she implies that renaming cannot truly change the circumstances of the oppressed. The community that freely bestows a name upon another

community will still hold power, and those who are named will remain in the same position. The comparison of the word “Japs” to “Japanese” in this poem illustrates that this form of violence isn’t unique to the Black community. It’s a common tactic used by dominant groups to maintain their power system over subordinate groups. The name change is not a morality or recognition of equality, but rather a political gain for the more powerful group.

*Light, Yellow, Brown
and Dark-brown skin,
were okay colors to
describe him then.
He was a Bouquet of Roses,*

In fourth stanza, a person’s identity is reduced identity to the various shades of their skin. The use of the phrase “*Bouquet of Roses*” feels contradictory, because although the phrase itself beautiful, people are treated as objects grouped based on their appearance rather than viewed as whole human beings. A bouquet of flowers is an object that looks beautiful, and beautiful flowers chosen according to one’s aesthetic preferences. In this stanza a bouquet of flowers is analogized as language that is used beautifully, but the underlying thought of the action still places humans as objects that can be classified with other parties, not as someone who can name themselves. This constitutes one of the most subtle forms of oppression, dehumanization, expressed in language that is, in theory the most refined and polite. During the slavery era, skin colour could determine

whether someone was allowed to work in the house or in the fields, and whether they could get an education or not.

*He changed his seasons
Like an almanac.
Now you'll get hurt
If you don't call him 'Black'.
Niggah, I ain't playin' this time*

The fifth stanza brings a sharp rise in intensity, this stanza demonstrates oppression in the form of instability in the assignment of identity that is continuously imposed by external systems. The comparison to an almanac that changes with the seasons suggests that this shift in identity is not a free choice, but rather an adaptation to ever changing conditions a survival strategy within the system that constantly redefines who is allowed to hold greater power.

The use of AAVE “*Niggah, I aint't playin' this time*” in a widely published poem signifies that the dialect of the Black community is a legitimate and powerful form of expression, not something that needs to be standardized or hidden. One form of the coloniality of knowledge is the dismissal of the languages and dialects of oppressed communities as invalid, unscientific, or unfit for use in public spaces. By using AAVE openly and without apology, Angelou directly challenges this linguistic hierarchy.

4. Psychological and Existential oppression

This oppression attacks the identity and self-esteem of the oppressed group who are constantly told to they are weak, which makes the oppressed community begin to believe the negative stigma given to them. The oppressors in this form are the cultural system, media, educational institutions, and social norms by the white community and the oppressed are Black individuals who are forced to live in this system.

a. The Mothering blackness

The poem is the deepest and most intimate exploration of psychological oppression among all the poems analysed. Angelou depicts the psychological condition of a Black woman who has experienced alienation from her own identity as a results of living in a world dominated by white cultural values and standards, a condition that Franz Fanon referred to as the “colonized self”.

*She came home running
Back to the mothering blackness
Deep in the smothering blackness
White tears icicle gold plains of her face*

The first stanza immediately present an image full of paradox and internal tension, this form of oppression results in Black individuals doubting their own identity. The most striking paradox is the use of two opposing terms to describe the same thing: “*mothering blackness*” a nurturing darkness, warm like a mother’s embrace and “*smothering blackness*” a suffocating, oppressing darkness. These two description appear

in consecutive lines, creating an unresolved tension, and it is precisely this unresolved tension that most accurately reflects the woman's true psychological state. For her, Black identity is a place of return that offers warmth, but at the same time feels burdensome, a tangible ambiguity experienced by many who live caught between two worlds pulling in opposite directions.

The phrase "*white tears, icicles, and golden plains of her face*" is one of the most complex and richly symbolic images in this poem. The phrase describes psychological oppression that takes the form of freezing the identity and expression of oppressed communities. White tears frozen like icicles on the surface of golden face vividly depict how the experience of living in a world dominated by white values and standards, discrimination, rejection, pressure to assimilate, beauty standards that exclude her existence, has left a frozen, cold mark on the surface of her identity. The "*golden*" face Angelou refers to is a marker of the intrinsic value within that woman, but that value has been obscured by a layer of freezing caused by the outside world. This is not merely a depiction of sadness, it is a depiction of how psychological oppression works concretely, it freezes, paralyzes, and obscures the richness within a person. The "*white tears*" in this stanza interpret the woman's attempts to conform the white standards, from her beauty to her speech, her dress, and her way of thinking. But despite her best efforts, her identity remains frozen and obscures her true identity.

*She came down creeping
Here to the black arms waiting
Now to the warm heart waiting
Rime of alien dreams befrosts her rich brown face*

This second stanza deepens the portrayal of psychological alienation in a more subtle but still powerful way, in this stanza, oppression takes the form of the dreams and hopes of an oppressed community alienated by the system. The word “*creeping*” refers to the woman returning to her hometown with a tired, wounded face and feeling unworthy due to frequent violence from the outside world. This can be described as someone who has struggled outside her hometown with a system that never recognizes her worth, which causes her to begin to doubt her own worth. The phrase “*rime of alien dreams*”, is highly appropriate image of how the values, beauty standards, and ways of life imposed by the dominant culture have seeped into her and chilled her true identity. These dreams are called “*alien*” because they are not her own, they are dreamed implanted from outside, dreams that define success and worth based on standards never designed to include her.

The word “*befrost*” - to freeze with frost – used to describe the effect of those strange dreams on her rich brown face reaffirms the theme of the freezing of identity that has already emerged in the first stanza. The “*rich*” brown face is a sign that Black identity is something of value that has sealed off and cooled that richness. From the perspective of the colonality of being, the psychological wounds described in these two verses are a direct result

of the colonial system, which for centuries has systemically instilled the belief that everything related to Black culture, identity, language, and aesthetic is inferior, worthless, or unworthy.

B. The Minority Struggle Against the Oppression Reflected in The Poem

Resistance in a decolonial context does not always take the form of physical confrontation or open demonstrations. Mignolo and Walsh identify several forms of resistance that operate at various levels, from the most personal and internal to the most collective and universal. These forms of resistance include epistemic resistance, re-existence, decolonial memory, economic resistance, and a pluriversal vision.

1. Epistemic Resistance (Delinking)

The resistance takes the form of consciously breaking with cultural standards established by colonialism and asserting that their perspective on identity are as valid as those of other cultures. This resistance is carried out by Black American community, depicted through the character “he” in the poem.

a. The Calling of Names

This poem is the most direct manifestation of this epistemic resistance in the entire corpus analysed. The poem’s journey, from passive acceptance of a demeaning name to the active assertion of a self-chosen name reflects the psychological and epistemological journey

of the African-American community in reclaiming control over their identity.

*He changed his seasons
Like an almanac.
Now you'll get hurt
If you don't call him 'Black'.
Nigguh, I ain't playin' this time*

The change taking place here is not merely a shift in terminology, it is a fundamental shift in power dynamics. The form of oppression in this stanza is the rejection of naming as regulated by the dominant system and the demand to give a name to one's own community. Black communities no longer accept names imposed from the outside, they demand the right to name themselves using terms of their own choosing, terms that reflect the identity and dignity they define for themselves. The threat “*you'll get hurt*” is not merely an expression of personal anger but a statement that the violation of a self-chosen name is a form of violence that will no longer be tolerated.

Another form of oppression is seen in the use of AAVE in poetry, where it is considered a legitimate and appropriate language in public space. The phrase “*Nigguh, I ain't playin' this time*” uses AAVE and is widely publicized, including strong epistemic resistance. For centuries, AAVE a language developed by the Black American community, created from a blend of African-American linguistic traditions and English, was considered and illegitimate, non-standard, and educated language by the educational system and institutions controlled by the dominant group

system. Eventually, it was used again by Maya Angelou in her poetry to fight the oppression she and the Black community had experienced.

From the perspective of the colonality of knowledge, the epistemic resistance in this poem operates on two levels simultaneously, at the level of content demanding a self-chosen name and at the level of form using AAVE as a medium expression. Together, these form a comprehensive argument that the naming system controlled by the dominant group is a form of colonial power that can and must be resisted.

2. Re-Existence

This resistance takes the form of rebuilding the identity of an oppressed society after their way of life and self-esteem were destroyed by the colonial system. The subject of resistance in this poem is a Black woman who returns to her native land after being subjected to violence from the outside world.

a. The Mothering Blackness

The poem depicts this process of re-existence through the journey of a woman returning to her original community an identity after experiencing painful alienation in the world outside her homeland. This journey is neither linear nor easy, it is fraught with paradoxes, ambiguities, and tensions. But it is precisely in this complexity that the poem's power lies.

*she came home running
back to the mothering blackness*

The first stanza depicts the beginning of the process of re-existence, in this stanza resistance takes the form of the black individual's resistance to forced conformity. The act of running home is an active and urgent expression of choice. This woman does not walk home with slow, hesitant steps, she runs, indicating that returning to her original identity is something she desperately needs, something that cannot be postponed. Although the darkness also feels "*smothering*", the act of choosing to return there is a rejection of forced assimilation into a world that hurts her but never truly accepts her. This action is not done through words or imagination alone, but she does it. Returning to her original area is command from his body and soul that determines where a person can choose her existence.

*Here to the black arms waiting
Now the warm heart waiting*

In the second stanza, it shows resistance in the form of community acceptance as a place for resistance and recovery. The stanza describes the community not as a burden or a source of problems, but rather the community is a space of return that waits, receives return, and restores. "*Black arms*" with a "*warm heart*" that is always ready to accept becomes a picture of solidarity in the community that can always be a comfortable place to return and take refuge in recovery for its members. This is a form of collective resistance that is very important to heal the

wounds received from the outside world and the cruelty of the oppressive system, the community creates a special space that is useful for healing and empowering their original identity.

*She came home blameless
Black yet as Hagar's daughter
Tall as was Sheba's daughter
Threats of northern winds die on the desert's face*

The third stanza marks the culmination of this process of identity reconstruction and contains some of the most powerful layers of resistance in the entire poem. The first key words is “*blameless*”, this is a highly significant statement in the context of psychological oppression. One of the most damaging effects of the coloniality of being is the guilt, shame, and sense of unworthiness internalized by the oppressed, the feeling that their suffering is the result of their own shortcomings or mistakes. By asserting that this woman returns home and enters the outside world without carrying guilt, Angelou unequivocally rejects this psychological legacy of colonialism.

References to Hagar and the Queen of Sheba are effective strategies for reclaiming identity. Hagar is a female figure in the Abrahamic tradition who experienced exile and suffering but persevered with strength and dignity. Queen Sheba is a female ruler from Africa renowned for her intelligence, wealth, and power across various cultural traditions. By placing the female protagonist of her poem within the lineage of these two great figures, Angelou achieves two things

simultaneously, first, she grounds Black women's identity in a rich and noble tradition and heritage, far removed from the narrative of inferiority imposed by the colonial system. Second, she affirms that strength, dignity, and majesty are inherent parts of Black identity, not something to be attained by meeting others' standards, but something that already exists and merely needs to be reclaimed.

The closing line "*threats of northern winds die on the desert's face*" symbolizes that the pressure and threats from the outside world, the "*northern winds*" serving as a metaphor for the discrimination, rejection, and pressure to assimilate experienced in a world dominated by white culture, vanished the moment this woman returns to her homeland. Her identity as a Black woman, once threatened and frozen by the outside world, now stands firm and unshakable. The desert, commonly associated with Africa, becomes a symbol of extraordinary resilience, even the strongest winds cannot alter the face of a desert that has been shaped over thousands of years.

3. Decolonial Memory

This resistance took the form of a rejection of the forced erasure of the history of a community that had been oppressed by the ruling community in that area. Maya Angelou herself carried out this resistance, helping to represent the Black community in its experiences of oppression.

a. My Arkansas

In this poem, every stanza is an act of decolonial memory. Angelou refuses to portray Arkansas as a place that has successfully moved beyond its past. Instead, she meticulously reveals how that past remains ever, present in every aspect of life, in the soil, in the air, in the way the sun rises, in the way the community “writhes” in constant pain.

*Old hates and
Ante-bellum lace are rent
But not discarded.
Today is yet to come
In Arkansas*

The third stanza explicitly expresses the dimension of resistance through memory. By stating that “*today is not yet come*”, Angelou firmly rejects the official narrative of racial progress often used by those in power to claim that the issue of discrimination has been resolved and no longer needs to be discussed. This rejection is a powerful form of epistemic resistance, it challenges the way the dominant system defines “progress” and “justice”.

Angelou’s decision to write and publish these poems herself was an act of resistance. She chose to serve as the custodian of the collective memory of the Black community in Arkansas, to ensure that their experiences were not only acknowledged by the community itself, but also known to the wider world. From the perspective of the colonality of power, decolonial memory is a weapon that undermined the

legitimacy of the dominant system, as it reveals that the system's claims of progress and justice do not align with the reality experienced by oppressed communities.

4. Economic Resistance

This form of resistance is an act of rejection of shame and self-blame for the poverty that occurs in their community which is caused by an unjust system. The subject of resistance in this poem is a Black woman who is seen as a social burden.

a. Momma Welfare Roll

*They don't give me welfare
I take it*

In momma welfare roll, economic resistance takes a firm and direct form through the poem's closing declaration. These two short sentences contain a profound semantic and ideological shift. The word "give" in the first sentence places woman in the position of a recipient of charity, passive, dependent, and powerless. But the word "take" in the second sentence drastically reverse that position, she is not a recipient of charity, she is someone who actively and consciously takes what is rightfully hers.

The phrase "take it" changes the perspective of the woman's situation. She is not someone who is begging and asking for mercy from the state, she is simply someone who is consciously taking the rights

that are rightfully hers. For centuries, the Black community was forced to work without being given a decent wage, then after the slavery period ended, they were still excluded from government assistance that should have changed their economic situation. So the social assistance they received at that time was not actually a free gift from the state government, but rather, this assistance was a small portion of what they should have received long ago, as a form of compensation for what they had been robbed for hundreds of years.

*Walks bare-handed into
A den of bureaucrats*

This stanza shows a form of resistance, namely the courage of an oppressed community in facing an intimidating bureaucratic system without formal capital. The economic resistance in this poem is also evident in the way Angelou depicts the woman's actions in the face of the bureaucratic system. Her actions in the poem, though seemingly simple, are acts of genuine courage. Without social capital, without legal representation, and without formal knowledge of bureaucratic procedures, this woman still enters an intimidating space to claim her rights. This is economic resistance in its most fundamental form that the assertion of rights in the face of a system structurally designed to intimidate and diminish people like her.

From the perspective of the colonality of power, the resistance depicted here is significant because it rejects one of the most effective

tools used by the dominant system to maintain the hierarchy. The narrative that claims the poverty of Black communities is the results of laziness, irresponsibility, or moral inferiority. By declaring “I take it”, the woman in this poem directly rejects that narrative and replaces it with narrative of rights, justice, and dignity that requires permission from no one.

5. A Pluriversal Vision

This form of resistance is a self-motivation to see a more just world, where all communities have equal rights to life without any one community dominating. The subject of resistance in this poem is all humanity, whom Angelou invites to imagine and fight for a just world.

a. A Brave and Startling Truth

This poem offers a comprehensive and powerful depiction of the pluriversal vision found throughout the analysed poems. Angelou constructs this poem as a grand conditional , a series of “when” clauses that must be fulfilled before true justice can be realized. This structure itself is a statement of resistance, it rejects the current state of affairs as adequate or acceptable, while simultaneously affirming that a different and more just state is possible and attainable.

*When we release our fingers
From fists if hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms*

The resistance in this verse takes the form of imaging a peaceful condition as a human choice, not a gift from above. The stanza depicts peace not as something that comes from above or is bestowed by those in power, but as something that is actively chosen and fought for by human beings themselves. The image of an unclenched fist, tensed muscles slowly relaxing, hot palms cooled by fresh air is a very concrete and sensory depiction of the process of letting go of hostility. It positions humans as active agents of change, not passive objects of a predetermined historical force.

*When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce
When land mines of death have been removed
And the aged can walk into evenings of peace*

The poems depicts a pluriversal vision through images that are deeply concrete moving. Children decorating their dolls with peace flags, rather than toy soldiers or weapons is a portrait of a generation growing up in a world different from the one they inherited. Parents who can walk in the evening without fear are a simple but deeply meaningful image of what it means to live in true peace. These images are deliberately made very concrete and domestic, this is not abstract peace in a political manifesto, this is peace that can be felt in everyday life.

“We are neither devils nor divines” That statement is one of the most significant moments in this poem from a decolonial perspective. In a single short sentence, Angelou rejects two narratives that are equally dangerous and equally perpetuate an unjust system. First, the colonial narrative that views oppressed communities as savage, uncivilized, or underdeveloped a narrative used to legitimate oppression as a civilizing mission. Second, the romantic narrative that views oppressed as pure, helpless victims devoid of complexity a narrative that denies the full humanity of the oppressed in a different but equally demeaning way. By declaring that we are neither demons or angels, Angelou affirms the complexity of humanity as a more honest and stronger foundation for struggle toward justice.

*We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this word
That is when, and only when
We come to it*

This stanza shows the resistance of the pluriversal vision in the form of an affirmation to oneself that humans are the ones who can possibly change the world’s justice system. The statement *“we are possible”* rejects historical determinism, which asserts that injustice is a permanent, unchangeable condition. It is a powerful and bold affirmation that humans have the capacity to create a different world, one that is more just and dignified for all. However, Angelou does not allow this affirmation to become naïve, she adds a crucial condition

“that is when, and only when / we come to it”. That possibility will only become to pursue it, fight for it, and not stop until it is achieved.

From the perspective of the coloniality of power and coloniality of being, this resistance rejects the colonial idea that only one group can dominate and determine the cultural standards and way of life for all societies. Instead, Angelou’s poem imagines that the diversity of human kind in the world, with its various contradictions and complexities, becomes a force that can make life more peaceful, meaningful, and valuable.

BAB V

CONCUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this chapter, the researcher present the conclusion from her that have been discussed in the previous chapter and also present suggestion for further research on the oppression experienced by the Black community and how the Black community fights against it.

A. Conclusion

An analysis of Maya Angelou's five poems reveals four distinct forms of oppression, examined through the lens of decolonial theory. First, political and institutional oppression depicted in the poems *My Arkansas* and *A Brave and Startling Truth* demonstrate that modern social systems and policies still inherit the legacy of slavery and colonialism, even though the colonial era has officially ended. Second, economic oppression is contained in *The Momma Welfare Roll*, showing the Black community trapped in structural poverty, a legacy a system that has never given them the opportunity to progress and develop. Then cultural and linguistic oppression in the poem *The Calling of Names*, in this poem language is used as a tool of oppression by imposing negative stigmas on the Black community, and those in higher positions hold the power to define the oppressed. Finally, psychological and existential oppression is depicted in the poems *The Mothering Blackness* and *The Calling of Names*, where self-deprecating statements about the oppressed community are constantly conveyed, causing the oppressed community to feel a loss of identity. These forms of oppression are linked to the central concepts of decolonial theory, which demonstrate that such acts of oppression are not merely events of the past but a system that persist even after the colonial era has ended.

In further findings, five forms of resistance were found that the Black community carried out to fight the forms of oppression directed at them. Epistemic resistance is depicted in the poem *The Calling Of Names*, where the oppressed community rejects the negative definition for them and they start using AAVE which was previously not authorized for use. Re-existence is depicted in the poem *The Mothering Blackness*, where the Black community rebuilds their identity that has been destroyed through the celebration of their native culture and the rejection of standards determined by outsiders. Then decolonial memory in the poem *My Arkansas*, Angelou rejects the narrative of false progress and maintains a shared memory of the history of oppression as a form of demand for justice. Economic resistance in the poem *Momma Welfare Roll*, where Black woman rejects the shame of receiving assistance from the government because she feels that the assistance is indeed her right. And finally the pluriversal vision in the poem *A Brave and Startling Truth*, Angelou invites all humans living in the world to live in peace and equality. From all of Maya Angelou's poems, it shows that with every oppression given to the Black community, they will definitely find a way to maintain their identity and self-esteem.

B. Suggestion

This study only focus on examining five poems by Maya Angelou and only use decolonial theory in analyzing them. Therefore, for researcher who also want to examine the works of maya Angelou, it is recommended to research it more broadly and in more detail by using other works of maya Angelou, in order to obtain more comprehensive results about oppression and resistance in maya Angelou's

poetry. Further research can combine decolonial theory with other theories such as black feminism or postcolonial which can obtain richer and broader analytical results. Considering that oppression in maya Angelou's works is not only racial oppression but also gender and social class oppression which have not been fully discussed in this study.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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APPENDIX

In this section, describes the poems studied in this research, including poems by

Maya Angelou:

The Calling of Names

He went to being called a colored man
after answering to “hey, nigger.”
Now that's a big jump,
anyway you figger.
Hey, Baby, watch my smoke.
From colored man to Negro,
With the N in caps,
was like saying Japanese
instead of saying Japs.
I mean, during the war.

The next big step was a change for true,
From Negro in caps to being a Jew.
Now, Sing, Yiddish Mama.
Light, Yellow, Brown
and Dark-brown skin,
were okay colors to
describe him then.
He was a Bouquet of Roses.
He changed his seasons
like an almanac.
Now you'll get hurt
if you don't call him “Black.”
Nigguh, I ain't playin' this time.

My Arkansas

There is a deep brooding
in Arkansas.
Old crimes like moss pend
from poplar trees.
The sullen earth is much too
red for comfort.

Sunrise seems to hesitate
and in that second
lose its
incandescent aim, and
dusk no more shadows

than the noon.
The past is brighter yet.

Old hates and
ante-bellum lace are rent
but not discarded.
Today is yet to come
in Arkansas.
It writhes. It writhes in awful
waves of brooding.

Momma Welfare Roll

Her arms semaphore fat triangles,
Pudgy hands bunched on layered hips
Where bones idle under years of fatback
And lima beans.
Her jowls shiver in accusation
Of crimes clichéd by
Repetition. Her children, strangers
To childhood's toys, play
Best the games of darkened doorways,
Rooftop tag, and know the slick feel of
Other people's property.

Too fat to whore,
Too mad to work,
Searches her dreams for the
Lucky sign and walks bare-handed
Into a den of bureaucrats for
Her portion.
'They don't give me welfare.
I take it.'

The Mothering Blackness

She came home running
back to the mothering blackness
deep in the smothering blackness
white tears icicle gold plains of her face
She came home running

She came down creeping
here to the black arms waiting
now to the warm heart waiting
rime of alien dreams befrosts her rich brown face

She came down creeping

She came home blameless
 black yet as Hagar's daughter
 tall as was Sheba's daughter
 threats of northern winds die on the desert's face
 She came home blameless

A Brave and Startling Truth

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet
 Traveling through casual space
 Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns
 To a destination where all signs tell us
 It is possible and imperative that we learn
 A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it
 To the day of peace making
 When we release our fingers
 From fists of hostility
 And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it
 When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate
 And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed clean
 When battlefields and coliseum
 No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters
 Up with the bruised and bloody grass
 To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches
 The screaming racket in the temples have ceased
 When the pennants are waving gaily
 When the banners of the world tremble
 Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it
 When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders
 And children dress their dolls in flags of truce
 When land mines of death have been removed
 And the aged can walk into evenings of peace
 When religious ritual is not perfumed
 By the incense of burning flesh
 And childhood dreams are not kicked awake
 By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it
 Then we will confess that not the Pyramids
 With their stones set in mysterious perfection
 Nor the Gardens of Babylon
 Hanging as eternal beauty
 In our collective memory
 Not the Grand Canyon
 Kindled into delicious colour
 By Western sunsets

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into Europe
 Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji
 Stretching to the Rising Sun
 Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Mississippi who, without favour,
 Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the shores
 These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it
 We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
 Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
 Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace
 We, this people on this mote of matter
 In whose mouths abide cankerous words
 Which challenge our very existence
 Yet out of those same mouths
 Come songs of such exquisite sweetness
 That the heart falters in its labour
 And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet
 Whose hands can strike with such abandon
 That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living
 Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible tenderness
 That the haughty neck is happy to bow
 And the proud back is glad to bend
 Out of such chaos, of such contradiction
 We learn that we are neither devils nor divines

When we come to it
 We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
 Created on this earth, of this earth
 Have the power to fashion for this earth
 A climate where every man and every woman
 Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
 Without crippling fear

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.