

GENDER, RACE AND BELIEFS IN THE WRITINGS OF BLACKNESS

MAYA ANGELOU

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Abstract

Studies of women's fiction have enriched and transformed the literary field, which for many years was dominated by the male canon. These studies have challenged the existing order and proposed the need for a new social order. In the development of feminist studies, important paradigms have emerged that reveal the violence and oppression that women, and in this case, African American women, suffer because of their gender, race, and beliefs. This study is conducted using qualitative and analytical methods. A documentary investigation is carried out in which Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989) and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality (1989) are defined and analyzed. The development of intersectional feminism is addressed, focusing on the historical and political moment experienced by this social group of African American women. Two selected poems by Maya Angelou are then analyzed, demonstrating how intersectionality refers to a complex system of various forms of repression and discrimination based on gender, race, and beliefs that coexist and exclude this social group.

Keywords: gender; beliefs; black feminism; intersectionality; intertextuality.

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RECEIVED: 09-02-2026 / ACCEPTED: 11-05-2026 / PUBLISHED: 30-06-2026

How to quote: Cordero, N (2026). Gender, race and beliefs in the writings of blackness Maya Angelou. *Almanaque*, 48, 81-102. <https://doi.org/10.58479/almanaque.2026.113>



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Gender, race, and beliefs in blackness writing

*Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns,
and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman?*

Sojourner Truth

Studies of women's fiction flourished in the mid-1970s with the second wave of the women's movement. The idea arose to analyze texts written by women, reversing the logic that had prevailed for years in literary criticism, which had viewed women's literature as a subgenre or, even more so, as a sophisticated version of popular romance. Women's fiction followed the political orientation of women's liberation, reclaiming and vindicating the role of writing in social movements. Like the writers of the 1930s who preceded them, African American feminists defined their cultural practices against a literary establishment that had forgotten its responsibility to the political and social functions of art and had taken refuge in interiority and self-reflection.

Women, in the words of Jeanne Willette (2013), are outside all systems; they are stranded in the "eternal," the "natural," or the "essential," outside history and beyond the reach of progress; women exist as the contradiction of the Enlightenment, which, for half the world, has failed to live up to its promises of emancipation. Or perhaps it could be said more accurately: if women of color are others, then the Enlightenment does not consider them worthy of consideration.

The female fiction presented by contemporary African American writers has been important in raising the voice of their literary independence. María Lauret (1994) points out that African American women writers have recognized the importance of Zora Neale Hurston in the writing of contemporary African American women, with a similar emphasis on the voice and literary emancipation of the marginalized subject (p. 13). New theoretical concepts have been emphasized that challenge the referentiality of language and the stability of gender identity, the sexual, the textual, and the role of the unconscious in subjectivity and meaning (Lauret, op. cit. p. 3). The author points out that female fiction of subjectivity is more diverse and complex

than what critics have categorized as confessional, and explains that what these texts have in common is that they are not texts that talk about how I became a person, but rather affirm the need for radical social change (Lauret, op. cit. p. 8).

When analyzing the literary works of Black women writers, it is useful to incorporate the concept of gender intersectionality, as this encompasses the various forms of discrimination that can affect a person or a race and influence their access to rights and opportunities. This type of approach reveals that gender, race, and beliefs are interrelated. Yuval-Davis (2012) confirms that the term “intersectionality” was first introduced by Crenshaw (p. 22) in her article “Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). This concern already existed in the United States and had been addressed by authors such as Angela Davis and Gloria Anzaldúa (Marta Cruells, 2015, 34). Díaz Polegre, L.; Torrado Martín-Palomino, E. (2018) (p. 297).

These are important in the analysis of black female writing because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, in the words of Kimberlé Crenshaw (op. cit. 1989). The ideas of sex and race are based on experiences that represent only part of a more complex phenomenon. (“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex (1989, op.cit. 1989).

Our study will be based on articulating these interrelated concepts, which are oriented toward research and analysis of intersectionality. One of the first investigations carried out in the field of women’s studies was a critique of existing fields that did not include women as subjects of study. Based on the theory of intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Julia Kristeva’s thesis on intertextuality (1989)), we will analyze two selected poems by Maya Angelou, an African-American writer who has witnessed tyranny, oppression, and discrimination.

Julia Kristeva’s thesis on intertextuality (1989), we will analyze two selected poems by Maya Angelou, an African-American writer who has witnessed the tyranny, submission, and abuse suffered by black people and women in the oppressed society in which she lived. The ideas of VanDik (2003), Ortega y Gasset, J. (1983), Diez Patricio (2017), Octavio Paz (1983), and María Lauret (1989) will support our thesis. The analysis of these two poems will reveal, through the theory of intersectionality and intertextuality, a difficult and tangled system of multiple oppressions, subjugation, and slavery, which will demonstrate how race, gender, and beliefs interact, revealing various forms of exclusion.

With this objective in mind, the study will be constructed from the perspective of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist feminist criticism, broadening the focus to female textuality and subjectivity *per se*. Connections will then be established between female fiction and the writing of other social movements—the movement of African American women writers—to show their common ground with literatures that oppose dominant groups. The themes of female subjectivity and the process towards its knowledge and realization of being will be explored. It will be demonstrated how the texts of black women writers written in the first person can be

theorized as fictions of subjectivity that counter dominant definitions of gender and, at the same time, construct a new female subject. Many of these writers' works, such as biographies and poems, have been used as a resource to express the subjugation, domination, and abuse that this race has suffered over the years.

I.- Justification of the research

The aim is to analyze African American women's writing, in this case, in two poems selected from the work of Maya Angelou, from the perspective of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989) and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality (1989).

Taking into account historical criticism with a psychoanalytic perspective on women's literature, we can analyze both the fiction of female subjectivity and the limitations of double standards imposed by the male canon in literature and in life. Hence, it is important not only to investigate the literary tradition of women's literature through time (), but also to focus on the difference in fiction written by women, in this case, African American women.

This leads to our research question:

What are the characteristics of intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989) and intertextuality (Julia Kristeva, 1989) present in Maya Angelou's poetry that could be analyzed within this realm of political and literary debate about gender, race, and beliefs, with an understanding of female writing?

II. Scope of the research

The aim is to conduct a documentary review of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theories of intersectionality (1989) and Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (1989) in order to analyze two selected poems by Maya Angelou.

III. General objective

To define and articulate Kimberlé Crenshaw's concepts of intersectionality and Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality in order to analyze two selected poems by Maya Angelou.

IV: Specific objectives

- Identify the concepts of intersectionality presented by Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Define Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality.
- Review the ideas on American feminism put forward by María Lauret.

V. Conceptual framework

We agree with Kimberlé Crenshaw (op. cit.) when she says that black women have sometimes been excluded from feminist theory and anti-racist political discourse because both are based on a limited set of experiences that often do not reflect the interaction of race and gender (p. 140). This author coined the term "intersectionality" in the 1980s with the aim of theorizing and highlighting the violence and discrimination suffered by black women on the basis of race, gender, and social class (Guerra, 2013, 49) cited by Díaz Polegre, and Torrado Martin-Palomino, p. 296). The study of intersectionality theory emerged from sociological circles which, together with the black feminist movement, discussed the idea of the oppression suffered by women in the 1960s and 1970s (McCall, 2005), observing that it differed between white middle-class women and poor black women (p. 296). (2005), observing that these were different for middle-class white women than for poor black women (p. 296).

In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, Kimberlé Crenshaw analyzes several cases of discrimination against women in the *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, *Moore v. Hughes Helicopter & Payne v. Travenol* trials, and demonstrates how the plaintiffs present and interpret the stories of black women before the Court. Hence, it is important to examine the intersectional experiences of black women from a feminist critical perspective in order to highlight their genuine and complex situation, as well as the centrality of their experience, which sometimes places their needs and perspectives on the margins of femininity and the idea of black liberation.

Following the thread of poststructuralist thought, it is relevant to mention Julia Kristeva's thinking on the relationship to the symbolic order, and in particular its relationship to language as a necessary condition. In "Women's Time" (cited by Lauret, p. 99), Kristeva observes that feminist women perceive themselves as victims of the symbolic order, which she describes in Lacanian/Saussurean terms as "an essentially sacrificed relationship of separation and articulation of differences that in this way (in the articulation of differences, within which 'woman' is one of them) produces communicable meaning (Kristeva 1981; 203). In other words, if women wish to assume a place in the world, they must subvert what she calls the "socio-symbolic contract" and explore its constitution and functioning, finding a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions that have been repressed in that contract.

Kristeva points out that women have been sidelined in the history of Western philosophy and culture, and that it is necessary to develop approaches from a perspective that takes into account their experiences and subjectivities, that is, a feminist philosophy. Intertextuality, according to Julia Kristeva, is the field of transposition of various signifying systems, and the concept of text is like the space in which multiple statements taken from other texts intersect and intertwine. (Raquel Gutiérrez Estupiñán, *Intertextuality: theory, developments, functioning*, p. 12). (Signa: magazine of the Spanish Association of Semiotics. No. 3, 1994). This is how language is essential for constructing subjectivity, and the subject is constructed through language. This is not a fixed and stable system of signs and meanings but a dynamic process that is constantly transforming.

In other words, intertextuality refers not only to the relationship between texts but also to the relationship between subjects who are, at the same time, written and read. They are subjects who are divided by their listening and by their reading in the writing of the other, the other as interlocutor and as socio-historical context. For Kristeva, following Anne Herrmann (*The Dialogic and the Difference*, 1989), intertextuality occurs in the “between text,” in the “non-linguistic,” the negative, the rupture, what she calls the “unreadable” of modernist writing (p. 17). So first-person writing, autobiographies, and, we would add, poetry, can be seen in women’s fiction as a genre that, in addition to revealing public achievements, offers explorations of the psychic and social construction of female subjectivity, what Kristeva calls “*the subject in process*,” which recounts the story of possible personal failures, separations, frustration, and fragmentation (Herrmann, op. cit., p. 99).

The texts that have been selected are considered highly relevant sources for the study of African American women because they delve deeply into the consciousness of the individual and because they offer a glimpse into the social conditions they have experienced, where, despite the labels imposed on them, they have been able to survive and overcome the limitations they suffer due to race, gender, and beliefs. These factors play a role in their lives, which are burdened by discrimination and alienation from the society that oppresses them. Kristeva attaches importance to the feminist movement and avant-garde artistic groups, and argues that a discourse closer to the unnameable and the abject must be found; that is, it will only be through access to the semiotic dimension of language and the practice of signification that true crises and real changes will occur (Kristeva, 1981, 1984). Hence the importance that the author attaches to the feminist movement and avant-garde artistic groups, two historical subjects that she characterizes as transgressors of the symbolic order that organizes the dominant meanings (Natalia Suniga and Sergio Tonkonoff (2012). *Language, Desire, and Society. The Contributions of Julia Kristeva*. VII Conference on Sociology of the UNLP).

V A. The architecture of an African American woman and cultural heritage in the poetry of Maya Angelou.

María Lauret recounts that during the Depression, the position of African American women was much more precarious than that of their white female co-workers (op. cit. pp. 35-36). They were denied industrial employment and unionization, which explains the scarcity of proletarian fiction in literature written by African American women. The few works that were produced, such as Alice Walker's *Jubilee*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*, were not published until 1966. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a non-mainstream cultural movement, the Harlem Renaissance, which gave rise to some works by women, such as those by Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Zora Neale Hurston. The movement avoided the type of protest writing that would later develop in the work of African Americans affiliated with communism, such as Richard Wright and Ann Petry in the 1940s and then in the Black Arts movement in 1960 (Laret, op. cit. p. 36). Theorists of this movement saw their intellectual production as a way to bridge the gap of ignorance and racist prejudice that separated blacks from whites.

Zora Neale Hurston stands out, despite the many criticisms she suffered, as a standard-bearer for African American women writers, for her contribution to the emancipatory program of the Harlem Renaissance, her controversial ideas on race, her anti-communism in the 1950s, and her cultural practices, rooted in African American folklore.

Maya Angelou, originally named Marguerite Annie Johnson, was born on April 4, 1928, and died on May 28, 2014, at the age of 86. The landscape of beliefs surrounding Maya Angelou's life is one of disruption, segregation, and racial separation found in a violent and hostile environment. In the Arkansas of her childhood, Maya confronts episodes that undoubtedly reflect an important vision of what group relations were like in the southern United States in 1930. In her five autobiographies, Maya Angelou has secured an important place as the narrator of a story that spans from 1941 to 1965, from the beginning of World War II to the days leading up to the assassination of Malcolm X. In this way, Angelou transcends the autobiographical tradition, capturing her experience in historical narratives that link the small town of Arkansas with Africa, and where the range expands from the innocent gaze of a little girl to the maturity of a strong, sensitive, and kind woman.

Although Angelou has been recognized primarily for her autobiographies, and many readers have identified her mainly as a poet, her work received two major nominations: one for her first autobiography and another for her first book of poetry. According to Lupton (1998), in 1970, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* received a National Book Award nomination, and in 1971, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Maya Angelou published many poems that have received significant recognition, such as *On the Pulse of Morning*, which was selected by President Clinton to be read at his presidential inauguration in 1993. Many of her poems have been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, including

Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die, Shaker, Why Don't You Sing, and Still I Rise. Several of her poems highlight the role of femininity, strength, and temperance as a model to follow.

The periods she spent in St. Louis and San Francisco offer a perspective on her urban life. Maya's description of race relations in Stamps during the 1930s clearly presents the Jim Crow era, with laws legalizing segregation and unwritten rules about behavior between the races. Maya experiences firsthand the attitude of white superiority over blacks and the impact of racism on her unconscious when she dreams that she wakes up transformed into a beautiful blonde girl (Megan-Wallace, 1954).

The influence of her mother, Vivian Baxter, is evident when the author presents us with a prose work in "Mother and Freedom" from her book *Even the Stars Look Lonesome*. In that work, Maya describes her mother: "She stood before me, a dolled up-pretty yellow woman, seven inches shorter than my six-foot bony frame" (Lupton, 1998, p.12). This work develops backwards and forwards, from mother to daughter, from daughter to mother, ending in a chilling account of her mother's death, where she refers to her as "*this once vibrant woman*" who now lies connected by pale blue tubes to an oxygen tank, fighting cancer in her final hours (Lupton, 1998).

During Maya Angelou's childhood, segregation deeply permeated the culture of the southern United States and governed all aspects of social relations. The two races, black and white, occupied different places in society, attended different schools and churches, went to different restaurants and stores, and sat in different seats on public transportation. Jim Crow laws prevailed in the southern states and were very effective in propagating the separation of blacks and whites (in *Caged Bird*, 20. Megan-Wallace, 1998).

This was the landscape that Angelou saw every day, where she grew up and lived. In the words of van Dijk (op. cit. 2003), "members of a group who share ideologies, such as racism or anti-racism, are in favor of very general ideas, ideas that form the basis of more specific beliefs about the world and guide their interpretation of events, while also conditioning social practices" (p. 14).

According to Ortega y Gasset (1983), whether we like it or not, we all have beliefs about the things that surround our existence, and these convictions are an integral part of our lives, constituting the interpretation we give to things and the possibilities they open up or close off to us. We have not formed these convictions ourselves; they are beliefs that we have received from others, which we hold and share with others. He adds: the deepest layer of our mental life is formed by them; they are our solid ground (Conrad Herraiz Sousa in Ortega y Gasset, J. (1983).

In contrast to the theory of truth as a reality independent of the subject, Diez Patricio (2017) says that there is the subjective, doxastic theory of truth; that is, truth as belief, adding

that “belief is a subjective truth, a conviction, something that the subject considers to be true, and should not be confused with objective reality, whose correspondence in the theory of knowledge is the concept of *knowledge*” (p. 2). Hence, understanding this consideration, we will then ask ourselves: “not what reality is, but what reality is” (op. cit., p.129), and this is where the sociocultural context must be taken into account.

V B. Beliefs and cultural heritage

Angelou’s cultural heritage forms the basis of her understanding of reality. What she learns provides the support that will underpin her beliefs in the future. From her ideas, the ideas already accepted in the society around her, her beliefs emerge, which she accepts and interprets as her reality. Her sensitivity to the racism that permeates the environment, the helplessness and futility she has perceived since childhood, is the feeling of this little girl who realizes the cage that traps and diminishes her and from which she will one day escape. These are beliefs that Maya holds, even if she does not think about them; in the words of Diez Patricio (2017), “They are not ideas we have, they are ideas we are” (op. cit., p.130).

These experiences and the observation of the racial discrimination that prevailed in the southern United States fueled her passion to transcend and do something for the failed society that surrounded her. Black people were associated with incompetence and submission. Every historical situation offers possibilities, gives rise to ideas and thoughts, feelings and projects. In Angelou’s case, the language, customs, and institutions that surrounded her are the catalysts that push her to portray the social world of African Americans at that time. As suggested by the first scene of “Song of a Caged Bird” quoted by Megna-Wallace (1954), the image of the African Methodist Episcopal Church highlights the importance of the church as a social institution in her life and in the lives of African Americans in her community. For them, the church was a source of comfort and inspiration that strengthened them and helped them live in that hostile, adverse, unfavorable society.

The family is also an important support in their struggle for life. It is the heritage that came from Africa and remained from generation to generation, surviving the oppression that black people had to endure in the United States of America. Angelou reiterates in her conversations the importance of celebrating her heroes and heroines.

She is certainly referring to the permanence of their beliefs. As Ortega y Gasset (n.d.) points out, “Ideas are held; beliefs are lived” (p. 1). In other words, beliefs... do not arise on a particular day and time in our lives, we do not arrive at them through a particular act of thinking; they are not, in short, thoughts we have, they are not occurrences, not even of the highest kind due to their logical perfection, which we call reasoning. Quite the contrary: those ideas that are truly “beliefs” constitute the continent of our lives (p.1). For Maya Angelou, her continent of life was her heritage, the heritage that gave her the strength to rise from the dust and honor her heroes and heroines.

The episodes at the home of Momma, her grandmother, with whom she and her brother Bailey go to live after their parents' divorce, show how Momma takes this creative girl by the hand and how she influences her childhood. E. Franklin Frazier, quoted by Megna-Wallace (1954, p. 118), analyzes the importance of grandmothers as the backbone of the African American family. They were highly valued in the plantation economy by both slaves and masters. It was they who maintained and supported the unity of the African American family with their strength. When independence came, it was generally the grandmothers who kept the generations together.

V C. Poetry, historical expression of gender, race, class, and transcendence.

At the beginning of "The Bow and the Lyre," Paz (1983) states that poetry is "sublimation, compensation, condensation of the unconscious. Historical expression of races, nations, classes...//...in its bosom all objective conflicts are resolved and man finally acquires the awareness of being something more than a passing phase" (p. 13). When we attempt to delve into the analysis of Maya Angelou's poetry, it is necessary to examine her experiences, feelings, and emotions, because these are what shape this great human work that is poetry. What is expressed in a poem is the result of experiences suffered and dreamed, where the poet's authenticity in embodying them values and transcends them. These are expressions that manifest the beliefs of the black race, expressed by an African-American woman in selected poems.

"Our Grandmothers"

"Our Grandmothers" presents the dignity and determination of African-American women. The phrase "*I shall not be moved*" becomes the *leitmotif* of several stanzas, reaffirming the persistence and courage of these grandmothers who shape the social memory of the group. The grandmothers Angelou presents in this poem are women of enormous courage and resilience, navigating turbulent waters where they must respond to the violence of the master who wants to take her away to sell her and separate her from her children, to the modern woman who stands in line at social services.

"Our Grandmothers" is a poem of courage in which the character "*she*" becomes increasingly blurred as we read on. At first, we do not clearly understand who the speakers are referring to, whether an animal or a person. As we read on, "*she*" is revealed to be a courageous, strong, and bold person who affirms that she will not be moved, "I shall not be moved," that she will always remain steadfast and determined. *Momma, Is Master going to sell you From us tomorrow?* The grandmother then answers her children's questions and sincerely repeats "yes" three times to emphasize that their fate is in their hands, "*Yes, he will, if we don't escape him.*" She refers to her children's fate, lamenting how that course is not in her hands, but warning that perhaps her suffering could be redeemed by the idea of seeing them grow up free outside the corrupt culture that subsumes them. She conveys the idea of freedom that she desires for them; they will be able to move but will not be oppressed by that system, "They shall

not be moved.” Momma lives through her children and encourages them to be independent, to emancipate themselves, otherwise they will be lost in that debased system that overwhelms them.

*In Virginia Tobacco fields,
Leaning into the curve
Of Steinway
Pianos, along Arkansas roads,
In the red hills of Georgia into the palms of her chained hands, she
Cried against calamity,
You have tried to destroy me
And though I perish daily,
I shall not be moved*

This verse presents the life of a slave. We know that the slave lived in Virginia on a large tobacco plantation, in a luxurious environment where, despite the hardships she endured, which suffocated her day after day, she never stopped asserting herself. She refers to the “iniquity,” the wickedness and vileness of those who insulted her. Here we see the insults suffered by black women, slaves crushed by a ruthless master. Kristeva notes in the text the suffocation that afflicts the subjectivity of this woman who dies slowly, day by day, but who has the courage to express that she “will not be moved.”

*She heard the names,
Swirling ribbons in the wind of history:
Nigger, nigger, bitch, heifer
Mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon,
Whore, hot tail, thing, it.
She said, But my description cannot
Fit your tongue, for
I have a certain way of being in this world,
And I shall not, I shall not be moved.*

Although she suffered the lashes that whipped her, she stands up to proclaim her dignity, to dignify her being. The brave face the anguish that is, as Heidegger (Salinas, 2012) explained, the presence of nothingness and maintain their value of being in the face of it, because the essence of bravery is to overcome difficulty. Only those who look at danger and move forward are brave, in the words of Nietzsche (n.d.): “Only those who know fear but overcome it can be

fearless; those who look at the abyss with pride. Those who look at the abyss with eagle eyes; those who cling to the abyss with the claws of Ávila; those have courage."

https://akifrases.com/frase/123775#google_vignette

This poem highlights the importance of staying true to your principles with a clear mind and strong will, so as not to believe what the oppressor tells your race throughout your life. Only the courage that Angelou expresses when she says, *"I have a certain way of being in this world,"* will make other generations know the value of their race.

In the next stanza, she refers to the impossibility of protecting her children in the confusion that was their lives. They sprouted like *weeds*, which she encouraged to escape, *underground, overland in coaches and shoeless*, referring to how difficult the journey would be for those barefoot children.

Angelou strengthens the character of the mother who speaks in the poem "Our Grandmothers." In this verse, she presents the image of a brave woman who rises like an ocean invoking her faith. Several religious images are shown, revealing images of fire, altars, and spirituals. *The Divine upon my right / Impels me to pull forever / At the latch on Freedom's gate.*

Her faith accompanies her like a passion that affirms her and gives her the courage necessary to survive and achieve "freedom," which in this case appears in capital letters, perhaps referring to the spiritual liberation she will one day achieve. Her faith will always accompany her on that journey. She will not lose hope, so she will remain there, "she shall not be moved."

*These mamma faces,
lemon-yellow, plum-purple,
honey-brown, have grimaced and twisted
down a pyramid of years.*

She names Sheba and Sojourner, Harriet and Zora, Mary Bethune and Angela, her predecessors, noble and courageous people. In the penultimate stanza, Angelou shows compassion for other members of society, the most dispossessed. These verses speak of despair, of a society that eats away at people, that leads to prostitution, of the education denied to slaves. The poet represents the shared beliefs of her social group, what is right and wrong, what is permitted and forbidden. However, she courageously asserts herself in the world when she says:

*Centered on the world's stage
She sings to her loves and beloveds,
To her foes and detractors:*

And declares:

*However I am perceived and deceived,
However my ignorance and conceits,
Lay aside your fears that I will be undone,
For, I shall not be moved.*

Expressing her subjectivity fully, she says that despite how she is perceived, despite their ignorance and arrogance, she will not be destroyed, she will remain in history. It is how the person in the poem expresses her feelings. The poem is a tribute to her ancestors, those generations of brave women who preceded her and those grandmothers who sowed the path with seeds of dreams and hopes. These people, although they could not control the circumstances around them, knew how to balance their emotional world, without trying to eliminate their feelings, but rather, on the contrary, resisting with dignity without allowing themselves to be reduced, in the words of Angelou: “*You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them*” (USAToday, 2014).

As we move through this poem, we observe gender intersectionality and see how blackness hides other wounds within it, such as the alienation of women in the face of a master who enslaves them, the different ways in which oppression can affect black women and influence their fragmentation and cultural alienation. In addition, we perceive the subjectivity of that human being who manifests himself in the text – “*the subject in process*” – in the words of Kristeva, who narrates the story of the adversities, difficulties, and possible personal defects of that subject and the transformation he experiences in the construction of his being (op. cit. p. 99).

Still I Rise

In this poem, “Still I Rise,” which Angelou addresses to the oppressor, she raises her voice to express a history steeped in shame and pain. She stands tall like a strong and wide black ocean that, enveloped in the tide, vigorously penetrates the wave and overcomes it. She refers to her race as a great sea that leaps over obstacles, traveling the difficult path to ascend. It is a constant struggle for this group. Angelou is not expressing her opinions but “shared social beliefs,” in the words of van Dijk (op. cit., p. 20). These are the ideologies of the group she represents. It is sociocultural knowledge that forms social memory. “Sociocultural knowledge is a central system of mental representations in social memory,” in the words of Van Dijk (op. cit., p. 22).

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still like dust, I'll rise.*

This first verse refers to the fallacies in history that present a distorted image of his race. Although the poem was written with the idea of reflecting the oppression of black slavery and social rights, its theme is universal and can refer to any nation that is subject to oppression and abuse. Courageously, the person in the poem addresses the oppressive tyrant and reaffirms that, despite the abuses, torture, and humiliation, she will remain standing.

*Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.*

The tone changes as the poem unfolds. The person challenges by asking: *Does my sassiness upset you?* The message is forceful, arrogant, and confident. Words such as “sassiness” in the second verse, “haughtiness” in the fifth verse, and “sexiness” in the seventh verse are directed at the oppressor, reminding them of their past offenses and present realities. Maya uses laughter or ridicule instead of suffering to express the sadness and suffering of her oppressed race. The phrase “I rise” is repeated like a mantra throughout the poem. The use of the pronoun “you” three times in the seventh verse is particularly emphatic in referring to and confronting the oppressor. No matter what they do with their words, their looks, and their hatred, she, like the air, will rise.

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

The person in the poem evokes the shame of their history, the sense of powerlessness and inferiority, the threat of violence experienced in a society continually threatened by the white tyrant. Like an immensity, their voice rises powerfully, overcoming difficulties, above the tide.

The use of metaphors and litotes in Angelou's poetry serves to convey meanings that are understood not only by African Americans but by everyone, because her language is universal

and applies to all races. Her poems embrace many forms and rhetorical techniques, including variations of language, the language of Black people, language that is sometimes shocking, profane, and themes that some question. Her style is musical, sometimes featuring traces of *blues* and *blues* singers. Maya does not speak only for herself; her voice rises to protest for her gender and her race. Through language, in this case poetic language, Maya constructs her subjectivity and transforms herself in a dynamic process that only her verse can achieve. The person in the poem subverts the “socio-symbolic contract” (the “socio-symbolic contract,” Kristeva, op. cit., cited by Lauret, p.99) by finding in her lyrics a more intimate discourse, closer to her being and to the emotions that have been contained for so long.

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.*

The last stanza recalls the nights of terror and fear that his culture experienced, and appreciates and values the contribution of his ancestors.

The poetic experience is nothing more than a revelation of the human condition; that is, of that ceaseless transcendence in which its essential freedom resides, in the words of Paz (op. cit., p. 191). Hence, what Angelou is showing is not only an experience that reveals her condition, but freedom itself spreading its wings to be free for a moment and transcend.

Hence, she writes about the vicissitudes her people have to face, racism, freedom, separation, and she explores and captures this in her poems, where she expresses suffering, loss, love, and the struggle to endure the path they have had to walk. Certainly, Angelou presents a realistic picture of black life, sometimes sprinkled with laughter and humor, poems that inspire with their energy reiterated in images that reflect the universal and authentic world we all want to achieve. They are poems of protest and survival that we also see in her autobiographies, and where humor also stands out as a response to tragedy.

The poet recalls her story with embarrassment, the vassalage imposed by the threatening boss, her feelings, her deprivation, her mediocrity. These are aspects to consider when analyzing the gender, race, and beliefs of this African-American author, what Kimberlé Crenshaw (op. cit.) calls “intersectionality,” the analysis that theorizes and highlights the abuse and segregation experienced by black women. In the words of Julia Kristeva: “It is the object of repression

that allows the constitution of language as code, of symbolic order and even of identities, but which, at the same time, is persistent in its occurrence, placing those who are prisoners of their experience 'in process'." (Kristeva, 2000; 1977). The poet affirms the need for radical social change, and her voice has become the support that will guide them toward that path of compassion, dignity, and freedom.

VI. Analysis

The analysis of the two poems selected in this study answers our research question insofar as the gender, race, and beliefs of a social group

are expressed in the voice of an African American woman who poetically expresses the feelings of an oppressed people and their cultural heritage.

We have applied the theory of intersectionality in the analysis of these selected poems from the work of Maya Angelou. Major difficulties and stumbling blocks have been encountered in the writing of African American women, slavery, dependence, oppression, and, in addition, the temperance, courage, and bravery of women to subvert, through poetic language, the constricting and oppressive established order.

In "Our Grandmothers," Angelou's voice rises to exalt the generation of courageous women, those heroic grandmothers who paved the way for that group eager for life and hope. These were people who bravely resisted the horrors of a vile and repressive system, and although they could not control the circumstances surrounding them, they had the determination to accept their situation and courageously affirm: "*I shall not be moved.*" The poem highlights the beliefs of this group, their conviction of what they see as true in their reality and which constitutes the social memory of their race.

"Still I Rise" expresses the shared social beliefs of the group that the person represents, which is why she utters that defiant cry describing how that oppressive hand can distort social history to discriminate against her race, but even so, like dust, they will always rise. It is an outburst of dignity shared by a dignified, vigorous, and tenacious group. Beliefs are essential parts of our lives, arising from the interpretations we give to the events around us and the possibilities presented to us. These are certainties we have received from our ancestors, which we preserve and share with others, and which constitute our mental terrain, our cultural heritage. The poet affirms the need for radical social change, and her voice has become the support that will guide us toward that path of compassion, dignity, and freedom.

VII. Methodology

A documentary review has been carried out, using qualitative and analytical methods, searching for secondary bibliographic sources on the theories of intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Intertextuality (1989) by Julia Kristeva (1989) that precede and underpin feminist criticism, in order to analyze the writing of African-American women, in this case, two selected poems by the writer Maya Angelou, who has experienced the history of her cultural heritage, representing not only the feelings of a group, its hardships and beliefs, but also the concerns of a repressed collective that undoubtedly express her personal experiences. The writing of African American women has been a valuable feminine instrument of empowerment to denounce the oppression they have been subjected to throughout their existence. The theoretical review that has been developed from the theory of intersectionality reveals how race, beliefs, and the mere fact of being women, especially African American women, affects the discrimination these women have experienced.

VIII. Conclusions

A theoretical analysis of intersectionality has been carried out with the aim of attempting an approach to the writings of African American women, which constitute a valuable contribution to the study of women in blackness because they arise from the most intimate and profound soul of the person, and because it allows us to appreciate how these women have been classified historically and how, despite all the labels placed on them, they have been able to survive all the abuses and rejections inflicted on their race. The segregation that these women suffer because of their race, gender, and beliefs profoundly influences their lives, accentuated by the sexism and racism that has existed in American society. It is important to pause and observe how the main source of this discrimination arises from the existence of a system of domination such as patriarchy.

The theoretical approach of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and intertextuality (Kristeva, 1989) have underpinned this analysis, which will serve to challenge American feminist thought and shed light on those situations that engender social inequalities and are so harmful and pernicious to humankind. The recognition of non-dominant groups in the analysis of social discourse present in Angelou's work shows the path she traces, from the margins to the center, from absence to presence, and from subjugation to autonomy in this social group.

The study of works written by women must continue to expand toward a horizon of immeasurable possibilities, such as constructing an aesthetic that seeks to rediscover the realms of politics, art, and everyday history.

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