INTERSECTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND RESISTANCE IN THE POETRY OF MAYA ANGELOU

TERESIA WANJIRU KABERIA

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or any other award.

Signature_____ Date _____

Teresia Wanjiru Kaberia

C50-2992-2019

Supervisors

We confirm that the work reported in this thesis was carried out by the student under our supervision.

Signature _____ Date _____

Dr. Charles Kebaya

Department of Linguistics and Languages

Machakos University

Signature _____ Date _____

Dr. Larry Ndivo

Department of linguistics and Languages

Machakos University

DEDICATION

To Morris Ntongai

For the love that we share

My daughters

A woman can as well

My sons

Failure is no option

My parents

Ignominy wiped away

My siblings

A challenge debunked.

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ABSTRACT

Guided by hermeneutics, intersectionality and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, the study investigated manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance as motifs in Maya Angelou's poetry. Hermeneutics was used in the analysis and interpretation of manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in various contexts, Bakhtin's concept of dialogism was used to explore how language is used to foreground power relations society, and Intersectionality enabled the analysis of how various socio-historical factors coalesce to bring out Maya's worldview for a just society. The study adopted a descriptive research design with primary data obtained from twenty-nine purposively selected poems from *The Complete Collected Poetry of Maya Angelou*. Thematic content analysis was used in the analysis and interpretation of the poems. Findings from the study revealed that various contexts, such as historical and socio-cultural, and language converge to foreground knowledge, power and resistance in Angelou's poetry. Additionally, the findings showed that intersections of knowledge, power and resistance contribute to the understanding of Angelou's worldview for a just society.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this thesis, the following terms are used as defined below:

Discourse - A conversation or intercourse which controls perceptions, realities, social norms and behaviour across history.

Intersection- Interconnection, convergence, intertwine.

Knowledge – Awareness of ways of conceptualizing realities in certain situation.

Power – Ability to influence people or exercise authority over others causing them to act in a certain desired way.

The Marginalized - Refers to persons considered to be of inferior status in a society. The marginalized, according to Antonio Gramsci, Ashcroft, (Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998:215) are suppressed by hegemonies of the ruling class.

Resistance – Refusal to conform to normalized societal regulations, structures and expectations.

Worldview- An individual's postulations of what an ideal world should be like.

CHAPTER ONE

CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background from which concepts of knowledge, power and resistance are examined, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions and assumptions, justification and significance, and scope and delimitation. It also presents review of related literature, outlines the theoretical framework and research methodology employed in the study.

1.2 Background to the study

Michel Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, posits that "knowledge refers to all procedures and effects of knowledge which are acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain" (51). He adds that sources of knowledge include symbols, objects and items that are held dear by a specific community. Foucault argues that knowledge is generated through controlled processes of production and organization. He focuses on mechanisms by which knowledge comes into being, that is, processes by which certain facts become more known than others, which he calls knowledge production. To Foucault, knowledge production does not happen in a void but through particular technologies and strategies, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutions.

Sara Mills points out that knowledge production relies on history, that is, the reorganization of particular incidents throughout time that lead to particular productions of knowledge. That is to say, history provides fodder for knowledge

production. An examination of knowledge production within any discourse should therefore take into consideration the historical context of the knowledge, as it is from history that the knowledge production draws.

Patricia Collins, in *The Sociology of Knowledge*, argues that knowledge production is dependent on social contexts and that "knowledge creation takes place in specific times and places" (23). She describes 'knowledges' as consisting of ideas, ideologies and mentalities. She argues that knowledges, ideas and mentalities emerge out of, and are dependent on, social contexts in a society's groups and institutions, and the social position of their proponents. This shows that it is possible to infer the interpretation of knowledge from various social contexts in which it emerges.

Collins further observes that in the interpretation of any creative work "we cannot separate the structure and thematic content of thought from the historical and material conditions that shape the lives of its producers" (2000: 42). This means that history enables us to decipher the unknown about the present by critically examining the past, and therefore, becomes vital to the interpretation of knowledge production. Examining various social contexts therefore enables the study to underscore the fact the changing social contexts in which Angelou writes her poetry have a relevance to the knowledges produced in the poetry, and that each of the social contexts that she encounters have a bearing to the knowledges. It is only through an interrogation of various social contexts that that one is able to appreciate forms of knowledges embedded in her poetry.

In *Learning from The Outsider Within*, Patricia Collins examines knowledge production from the perspective of the marginalized. She argues that the process of acquiring knowledge begins when those who are marginalized and relatively invisible from the 'eyes' become conscious of their marginalization and begin to find a voice, challenging points of views advanced by the socially and politically dominant. She calls this voice oppositional knowledge, and argues that it is people's experiences within intersecting power relations of various factors such as race, education, social class, gender, sexuality, age, religion and poverty, that shape their worldviews. She further posits that, it is at this point that, the marginalized begin to disbelieve the oppressors' views of themselves as small and insignificant, and in so doing they claim their voices and begin to empower themselves by naming reality as they see it.

While introducing the concept of power, Foucault states that power is based on knowledge and argues that in producing knowledge, one makes a claim to power. To him, knowledge cannot exist without its relation to power; best discussed using the compound *knowledge/power*. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault describes this knowledge/power as "an abstract force that determines what is to be known, rather than the notion that individuals create ideas and knowledges" (28). He observes that individuals are only vehicles or sites of knowledge production and exercise of power relations.

It is out of understanding the vagaries of power that resistance, a concept that Foucault links with power, comes into the fore. Foucault describes resistance as a reaction and a response that is shaped practices of power. His notion of

resistance is perhaps best explained in the most often quoted passage in *The History of Sexuality,* stating that, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). John Hartman interprets this statement to mean that resistance in itself is actually a form of power; hence resistance becomes equal to power (2). Agreeing with Hartman's assertion that resistance is a form of power, Thomas Nealon describes resistance as reverse power, meaning that resistance, in its entanglement with power, will employ the same mechanisms as power, and, as argued by Mona Lilja and Stella Vinthagen, "harness power otherwise, in the production of other effects" (24). Building on this argument, Lilja and Vinthagen argue that individuals resist and respond to power relations in their own unique way from obedience to subversion. It is evident that resistance and power intertwine, and different forms of power give rise to different forms of resistance.

In engaging discussions on intersections of knowledge, power and resistance, it is critical to understand the universality of power and its interdependence with knowledge. Foucault's ideas about the intimate connection between knowledge and power are well articulated in *Prison Talk*. He asserts that "it is impossible for power to be exercised without knowledge: it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (52). This shows that the relation between knowledge and power is recursive, such that, the acquisition of knowledge is a claim for power and resistance, and imbalances of power relations will always provide opportunities for knowledge production. This study emanated from this

background as it examined manifestations, intersections and ways through which the knowledge, power and resistance are portrayed in the poetry of Maya Angelou.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

It is not in doubt that poetry conveys significant philosophical truths through knowledge. Poetry facilitates an understanding of human nature. It does this by piecing together knowledge on the past, present and the future in societies. Poetry has the capacity to deliver knowledge outcomes by allowing individuals to see new possibilities in their lives, thus, functioning as an important source of knowledge. However, in any domain, knowledge does not come as an isolated phenomenon because its production is a claim to power, and an invitation to resistance. Whenever there is knowledge production, both resistance and power do occur, such that knowledge, power and resistance exist in triad. This study, therefore, examined how knowledge is produced through the unique use of language in the poetry of Maya Angelou. The study also analysed intersections of knowledge, power and resistances showing their recursive relationships in Maya's poetry and how their convergence projects her worldview of a just society.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at investigating intersection of knowledge, power and resistance in selected poems of Maya. The study addressed the following specific objectives, to:

i. Examine manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance as motifs in the poetry of Maya.
ii. Analyse how language has been employed to portray motifs of knowledge, power and resistance in the poetry of Maya.
iii. Investigate how intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in Angelou's poetry project her worldview of a just society.

1.5 Research Questions of the Study

The study sought to answer the following questions:

i. To what extent do knowledge, power and resistance manifest themselves as motifs in the poetry of Maya?
ii. How is language used to portray the motifs of power, knowledge and resistance in the poetry of Maya?
iii. In what ways do intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry project her worldview of a just society?

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

This study was founded on the following assumptions, that:

i. Knowledge, power and resistance are manifested as motifs in the poetry of Maya.

ii. Language is used to portray motifs of knowledge, power and resistance in various ways in the poetry of Maya.

iii. The intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry projects her worldview of a just society.

1.7 Significance and Justification of the Study

This study came at a time when issues of race, gender, and class dominate discourses in the USA epitomized by the unfortunate deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. These two deaths showed the world that the USA is still grappling with issues of marginalization, identity and belonging in the 21st Century. The study shows how experiences of marginalization are at the centre of knowledge production, exercise of power and, consequently resistance.

Using an intersectional perspective, this study examined the interplay of knowledge, power and resistance as embodied in Maya's poetry. By doing so, it showed how socio-cultural and historical contexts inform lived experiences, shape individual behaviour, and spur resistance. Thus, the study contributes to the growing critical repertoire on Maya by showing how knowledge, power and resistance not only shape individual behaviour but also project her image of social justice.

By analysing how experiences of the marginalised functions as sites of knowledge production, literary scholars will greatly benefit from the intersectional perspective that the study took in studying Maya's poetry. Other individuals too will greatly benefit from the realization that knowledge production has the ability to redeem one from subjectivity, through using lived experiences as avenues for knowledge production, self-definition and eventually, self-actualization.

1.8 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study focussed on knowledge, power and resistance in the poetry of Maya Angelou. It delimited itself to how intersections of knowledge, power and resistance projects Maya's view of a justice society using selected poems from *The Complete Collected Poetry of Maya Angelou.* This study delimited itself to the notions of knowledge, power and resistance as theorized by Michel Foucault.

1.9 Review of Related Literature

This section reviewed literature in the following areas: the biography of Maya Angelou, manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance, and their intersections in literature and Maya's creative works. It also reviewed scholarly works on Angelou's poetry and identifies knowledge gaps that the study sought to fill.

1.9.1. A Biography of Maya Angelou

As narrated in her autobiography, Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was born Marguerite Johnson on 4th April 1928 in the United States of America. Her life is documented in seven autobiographical volumes: *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Gather Together in My Name* (1974) *Singin', Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) and *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013).

In *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya reconstructs three events that characterised her troubled childhood and teenage life. First is the divorce of her parents and subsequent relocation of Maya and her brother Bailey to their paternal grandmother's home in Stamps, Arkansas. Her grandmother, Annie Henderson, is a protective woman who attempts to nurture them in a Christian home full of love. The divorce ushers her into her grandmother's life of Christian traditions, and also introduces her to issues of racial segregation.

The second event, rape, which she describes vividly in her autobiographies, completely shatters her trust in a man she had begun to view as a father figure. In *Maya Angelou: The Iconic Self,* Lupton Jane describes the rape as "the ultimate learning experience for Angelou, and that through her pain she becomes aware of being a small girl in a world controlled by men" (88). The subsequent murder of her violator does not ease her pain, but forces her to retreat to silence for five years. Eventually, a woman named Mrs Flowers uses poetry to guide her and release her from speechlessness. The third is her pregnancy at the age of sixteen, which ends

with the good news of the birth of her son and acceptance by her mother. These three events had a profound effect on her personality and highly influenced the events in her life, and to a larger extent, influenced her writing.

In her early adulthood, poverty, illiteracy and the quest for survival transformed her from the innocent girl, raised in church by a pious grandmother to a drug addict, an alcoholic, a prostitute, a dancer and a nightclub singer, who entertains men for money. She neglects her son and exposes herself to numerous risky relationships with men, including fellow dancers, married men, a criminal who deals in stolen clothes and a drug addict. Lupton argues that because Maya becomes too quickly got involved with different men, "she is repeatedly hurt by men, who are more experienced than her, who are far abler to see her neediness and exploit it before she is able to see it in herself" (149). Again, her powerlessness in the face of gender and racial segregation, poverty and ignorance is demonstrated.

The turning point in Maya's life, as described by Cynthia Palmer and Michael Horowitz, comes when a friend demonstrates to her the dangers of heroin addiction. Palmer and Horowitz explore the notion that this was like a re-birth to a new enlightened Maya, and the beginning of an attempt to reclaim her innocence (144). It is at this turning point that she embarks on a journey to rebuild her life by actively seeking knowledge through education. She begins to work in bars at night and study during the day, and succeeds in attaining knowledge that eventually equips her with power to speak out for herself and other marginalised persons in her predicament.

Paralleling the turning point in her private life and her writings, Pierre A. Walker, describes the sequence of Maya's poetry as moving "progressively from helpless rage and indignation to forms of subtle resistance and finally to outright and active protest" (80) as she struggles through divorce, isolation and guilt to emerge as one of the most celebrated women in African American history. He further explains that "poetry in all its forms can be an act of resistance", arguing that "the first instance of Angelou becoming a poet" (83) gave her the first step to seek knowledge, such that the graduation ceremony in her autobiography "makes it clear that the victim of oppression can herself become a poet and use her poetry as a form of resistance," therefore, she now concentrates on "harnessing the power of words to a positive effect" (91). Thus, for Maya Angelou, resistance becomes a form of power that enables self-expression.

1.9.2. Manifestations of Knowledge, Power and Resistance

1.9.2.1. The Knowledge/Power Nexus

Foucault in *Power and Knowledge* observes that facts are produced through knowledge and that scholars are simply sites or avenues of knowledge production. He opines that knowledge is not simply the product of scholarly studies, but the result of different interactions and subsequent disseminations within the society, all realized from varied institutions and their inherent practices. This implies that, to Foucault, knowledge is intimately connected to all social institutions such as the political, economic, and cultural regimes that are involved in its production.

Foucault however, adds that despite the fact that culture is a source of knowledge, sometimes knowledge production results in power relations that work against the same culture. This then, means that, knowledge sometimes challenges the culture in which it is produced by introducing the element of difference.

Foucault argues that the interrelatedness between knowledge and power blurs the differences between elements of power and knowledge. Although power exists everywhere, it is knowledge that reinforces power, while the exercise of power on the other hand shapes knowledge. Knowledge is linked to power because it assumes the authority of truth, and has the ability to make itself true. Thus, Foucault introduces what he calls the power/ knowledge nexus, arguing that it is difficult to draw a line between knowledge and power as neither can exist without the other. In *The Politics of Truth,* Foucault states:

> It is not a matter of describing what knowledge is and what power is, and how one would repress the other or how the other would abuse the one, but rather a nexus of knowledge /power has to be described so that we can grasp what constitutes the acceptability of the system (61).

He reinforces the above assertion in *Prison Talk* where he states that knowledge and power are entangled with each other, "and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power" (52). This shows that power and knowledge are tied together, one cannot exercise power in the absence of knowledge and in producing knowledge, one exercises power and aspires for power.

1.9.2.2 Power and Resistance

As stated in the background to this study, power and resistance are not only conjoined, such that each exists within the other, but also shape knowledge. Both power and resistance are found in the same place, hence, like power, resistance is multiple, and all social relations are characterised by power and resistance. This means that not only is resistance shaped by power, but resistance also reinforces or creates power relations, such that the two exist in a mutually constitutive relationship.

Stella Vinthagen and Anna Johansson argue that individuals respond to power relations in different ways, from self-reflection, obedience to resisting. From this assertion, it is possible to argue that self-reflection, as a kind of relation to oneself can itself become a response to power relations, exercised through knowledge production. Thus, power also gives an individual the potential to view themselves differently, enabling one to engage in practices such as naming and choice making. Self-reflection then, becomes a form of reaction to power, ideally a form of resistance. Resistance therefore, in its various forms, becomes an important agent for social change, as a result of its entanglements with power.

Wendy Harcourt posits that power and resistance are both multiple and contradictory, and that "what is defined as resistance depends on where one is positioned structurally, experientially and epistemologically" (6). Resistance therefore can be described as an everyday practice that is motivated by people's attempts to re-define their lives and find their own cultural and social standing. In this context, resistance sometimes unconsciously takes the form of words, actions

and various survival strategies. Harcourt further argues that resistance can be achieved by the marginalized women, men and others by challenging and speaking to power, through knowledge production. By producing discourses that reclaim, rename and reposition them, the value of their actions and words as resistance can be understood.

1.9.2.3 Knowledge, Power and Resistance in Literature

Foucault relates knowledge, resistance and power to literature by referring to a concept known as discourse. He adopts the term discourse to denote a historically contingent system that presents us with knowledge and meaning. In his book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes discourse as a "set of practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak" (49). Hence, a discourse consists of a set of practices that are informed by dominant forms of knowledge. Discourses provide spaces in which power relations are exercised enacted and resisted. In *The Order of Discourse,* Foucault cautions against equating discourse to language or reality, but explains that discourse is simply a system that structures the way we perceive reality and translates this perception of reality into language, enabling us to discuss power relations and their resistances (67). Reference to discourse in this thesis therefore, exceeds that of its association with language to include the non-linguistic practices that enable the realization of meaning in society. Foucault recognizes that discourse, just like power is both creative and hegemonic. He presents discourse as a binary force, that, on one hand is constitutive of materiality, while on the other hand becoming a form of

hegemonic mechanism that can be employed to regulate bodies, culture, ideologies and behaviour. Moreover, in the construction of meaning, discourse, knowledge and power exist in an intersectional relationship, whereby power buttresses discourse, while discourse constructs meaning and knowledge to govern the perception of certain realities.

Literature uses language to express perceptions and realities in society. The concepts of knowledge, resistance and power are therefore linked through discourse to literature, which provide the necessary spaces for power/ resistance discussions. The notion of resistance as expressed in *The Order of Discourse* reveals how practically all written texts produce knowledges. In view of the argument that knowledge cannot exist without power, production of knowledge by literary works introduces a concern with power and how it is resisted. By engaging in knowledge production, literature provides mirrors through which it not only provides insights of reality, but also informs possibilities of what might be, (knowledge production), encouraging a re-evaluation of self and a re-strategization where necessary (power, resistance).

There is no doubt from the above that the production of knowledge is a claim to power and, subsequently resistance. This, coupled with the fact that literature and other forms of artistic expression are a form of activism (cf Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*), confirm the conceptualization of literary work as an important arena of struggle (Barbara Harlow). Barbara affirms that the poets and narrators who resist cultural hegemony 'seek to re-define through their writing the possibilities of a new revised social order' (50). It is possible to therefore argue

that one of the powers of literary works lies in its ability to use the imagination to redress the imbalances of social and individual reality.

While discussing the relationship between various literary genres and resistance, Loubna Yousef and Emily Golson explain that an examination of literary works indicates concerns with the agony and anger of the masses, and their resistance. They argue that all literary genres engage political and social issues of the moment, mobilizing public opinion, advocating for the persecuted and the marginalized, thereby, creating spaces for reflection and action by the oppressed.

Literature has, through history, engaged in resistance against oppression through works such as the writings of the reformers in the 15th century, the slave abolitionist writings, the texts that defined the women's assertion of their place in society, and the war protest literature. Later as new forms of subjectivities emerged, the anti-colonialist and post-colonial writers, together with writers on the environmental movement also used creative works to critique certain issues in society. All these literary works have been instrumental in informing and imparting knowledge, power, and influencing resistance movements all over the world. Harriet Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, depicted atrocities committed during slavery, and was important in furthering the early anti-slavery course in America. In the years before the civil war, Stowe's novel brought public attention to the horrors of slavery in a way that had not been done before. By bringing into public awareness the suffering and anguish of the slaves, she created a perception that stirred reflection and action from the masses and authorities. Therefore, historically, through such literature that critiques the society, writers have found

spaces to voice their disapproval of certain issues, making literary works key avenues for the exercise of resistance.

Discussing theatre as a vehicle for resistance, Kim Wiltshire and Billy Cowan begin with the argument that all theatre is a form of resistance in that it presents unique issues to an audience, and "allows the audience to focus on the queerness of these issues. It then invites the audience to re-think the issues, in an attempt to critique the status quo" (1). Further, they posit that the writing and acting of revolutionary works in drama and theatre usually coincide with major cultural and political upheavals in the 'real' world. They present protest works in this literary genre as dynamic in their evolvement through historical events, to include changes in thematic concerns and aesthetic developments that challenge various societal realities. This is illustrated by the South African protest theatre that challenged apartheid through the Althusserian ideology of binary master narratives, such as those of black/white or inferior/superior. Today protest drama in post-apartheid South Africa has evolved to address issues in contemporary South Africa.

Poetry as a literary genre has long been regarded as an important means of social critique of various issues in society, and can be placed at the centre of the sociological analysis of power and resistance. Poetry artistically fuses aesthetics, imagination and social critique. Keith Leonard argues that the best way to understand the power of poetry is through the Biblical creation story. He gives the illustration of Adam, who is given power to name as an illustration of his authority. He describes poetry as an art that gives one the power to name and therefore, claim. With reference to African American women poets, he reiterates that these poets

have utilized their "faith in the power of poetic language", by expressing themselves in poetry. They are able to re-define their lives by claiming the power to name and therefore have been able to produce a body of "a poetry beautiful and empowering in its intricate rewriting of cultural conventions" (169). Poetry, therefore, empowers one with linguistic resources to speak out for themselves and to construct new knowledges. Karen Brodine argues that every poem is both an extension of the personal life of the writer and a force for expressing ideas, oppression and feelings. True to this description, Maya's poetry is not immune to the issues of power struggles and suppression in her life. Maya pours herself out in what appears to be confessional poetry, focusing on her survival, despite her earlier setbacks in life, such as the shame of being a prostitute and the stigma of illiteracy. In so doing she engages in what Robert Lowell describes as, "the recurrent effort of the most ambitious poetry of the century," that is, building a great poem out of "the predicament and horror of the lost self" (113). Lowell describes this as a form of resistance in that by refusing to partake in the society's silence around certain shameful subjects, the poet challenges us to re-examine our own failures and re-evaluate our actions.

1.9.2.4 Voice and Agency

As discussed above, Foucault emphasizes on the binary of power and power, citing its hegemonic and productive forces that are both exercised through discourse. To him, discourse is both a mechanism and an effect of power in that discourse engenders power, and power generates discourse. Through discourse, norms such as beliefs, attitudes, and regulations are (re)produced with the intention of either empowering or conferring subjectivity on certain individuals and groups of people. The continued performance of such norms results into one being positioned at certain places such as those of marginality and being silenced. Dominant discourses that ratify certain socially constructed norms are therefore responsible for the creation of class and gender- based forms of marginalization and for the silencing the marginalized.

Foucault argues that although marginalization is enabled by knowledge produced through hegemonic discourses, marginalized persons can also engage in knowledge production to counter the hegemony of such discourses. He posits that in order to do this, one must regain control of intellectual, political, cultural and moral discourses by re-writing previously hegemonic discourses in their own terms, hence using their voice to articulate their issues. In view of these, it is evident that knowledge production gives the marginalized 'voice' and empowers them to create new discourses that resist marginalization.

In order to understand agency, this thesis approaches the notion agency from the postulations of Judith Butler. Theorizing on discourse, Butler advances the concept of "performativity", which she argues is "the reiterative and citational

practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993:2). To Butler, a discourse creates through performativity, that is, the constant repetition of its ideologies. She illustrates this argument with the fact that the constant repetition of discourses on gender is responsible for the creation of gender as we know it. She therefore concludes that it is only within the context of the hegemonic discourse (for examples discourses of racism or sexism) that the production of new discourses is enabled to counter the hegemonic discourses. From the performativity perspective, she introduces the concept of "agency", which she sees as "a reiterative or re-articulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (1993: 15), thus, agency is a form of re articulatory power exercised inside its discourses of marginalization. Agency therefore enables one to exercise resistance within discourses that marginalize them and like power, is "everywhere". Thus, within hegemonic discourses agency enables resistance.

Patricia Collins argues that knowledge empowers marginalized persons and enables them to take up agency. However, to her, it is the social and historical contexts within which knowledge is produced that are most critical in the domination versus resistance matrix. She therefore contends that a conscious conception of knowledge as a form of empowerment must be cognizant of the discourses of race, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression that inform its production. She too agrees that it is only through the production of knowledge by the marginalized themselves that these subordinated persons can find ways to assess the truth, (that is take up agency and speak truth to power), define their own reality (re articulation through voice) and thereafter reconceptualise the

social relations of domination. Hence, the knowledge/power nexus becomes a key element for the marginalized persons' attainment of agency and voice and as opined by Foucault, if the marginalized speak, they are empowered, take up agency and no longer remain marginalized, as marginality results from lack voice and agency.

1.9.3 A Critical Exploration of Maya Angelou's Creative works

The critical reception of Maya Angelou's poetry has often been overshadowed by that of her autobiographies. Lupton Jane in her essay, *When Great Trees Fall*, argues that despite Maya having her poetry published in more than four individual volumes and a number of separately published ceremonial poems, "literary critics and editors of specialized anthologies have paid scant attention to her poetry" (79). She cites *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* which includes Maya's only two poems while *The Prentice Hall Anthology of African American Women Writers* contains only one of her poems. In her analysis of Maya's works, Lupton engages in a comparison of the metaphor of rising in Maya's poetry and autobiography arguing that the *rise* in Maya's works is employed as a call to the Black Americans to rise and take up their rightful place in America. She further argues that the rise in Angelou's poetry can be read as an echo of the Negro Spiritual rising.

Songkhla addresses the theme of the phenomenal woman in Angelou's later poetry. Basing her study on the presentation of the woman in poems published before *Phenomenal Woman*, Songkhla follows the emergence of the 'caged woman' into the world of work and economic empowerment in later poems, in what

she describes as a journey towards self-discovery: from ignorance to knowledge, from silence to speech, from oppression to liberation. She relates Angelou's poetry to her autobiographies arguing that the autobiographies enable one to comprehend Angelou's poetry.

Saket Guha examines two forms of resistance in the poetry of Angelou: resistance to sexism and resistance to racism. In his analysis of various selected poems, he concludes that in her poetry, Angelou shows "more concern for racist discrimination and injustice than sexist oppression which emanates from her belief that gender equity cannot be achieved before demolition of racial inequality" (54). He therefore posits that Angelou's poetry is a form of activism against racist oppression of her community.

Nagpal Prandial analyses how Angelou portrays horrors of racial oppression, while at the same time advocating for protest by Blacks using symbols such as metaphors and "subtle words filled with powerful images of revolt in her poetry" (586). She argues that Angelou's poetry is a call for the Black man to rise up and reclaim his place in the American society.

Juan Du explores the theme of self-actualization in Maya Angelou's poetry. He argues that by re-defining blackness and eulogizing the self-accepted black identity, Angelou encourages African Americans to own their African heritage and embrace their black identity. He concludes that Angelou's poetry is directed to African Americans, to urge them to preserve their heritage.

Noor Ismael identifies two types of racism that Angelou's poetry highlights, that is, overt and institutional racism. To clarify the meaning of these two types of

racism, he further classifies Angelou's poems into two: those that portray overt racism and those highlighting institutional racism and analyses them in relation to the type of racism each poem addresses. He concludes that Angelou's poetry exposes the two forms of racism, with the aim of reforming the social life of the African Americans.

1.9.4 Summary of Reviewed Literature and Gaps Identified

From the reviews of literature above, it is evident that available scholarship on Maya's poetry predominantly focuses on thematic concerns such as the search for personal identity, black oppression, slavery and articulation of black feminist issues. This study extends this existing scholarship on Maya by focusing, first, on how various contexts such as historical, cultural and social intersect to reveal certain aspects of meaning in her poetry and how their convergence informs knowledge production, exercise of power and consequently resistance in Maya's poetry. Most of the critical studies reviewed above engage a feminist perspective in the analyses of Maya's creative works. This study departs from this by engaging hermeneutics and intersectionality as perspectives in reading Maya's poetry as a site for knowledge production, power and cultural resistance. Finally, this study departs from other studies that have examined the concepts of power and resistance in Maya's poetry by analysing them as intersecting motifs, and how their intersection contributes to Maya's worldview of a just society.

1.10. Theoretical Framework

The study hinged on hermeneutics and intersectionality theories. Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* defines hermeneutics as the theory and philosophy of understanding and interpretation. Hermeneutics theory is classified into five spheres: conservative hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics, phenomenological hermeneutics, radical hermeneutics, and philosophical hermeneutics. Each of these hermeneutic categories has its own guiding tenets. Conservative hermeneutics, for instance, endeavours to reproduce and reconstruct interpretation (Bjørn Ramberg & Kristin Gjesdal, 2013). It emphasizes the importance of language, especially the role of dialogue, as a medium of understanding works of art.

Critical hermeneutics aims to analyse relations of power inherent in works of art, and to uncover established, reproductive exploitations of various individuals, groups and classes (Michael Apple, 1982). Critical hermeneutics encourages a critical reflection in interpretations, thereby neutralizing researchers' experiences through self-reflective practices to that of a non-participative, peripheral observer who emancipates interpretations from authority structures (Anthea Jacobs, 2014). It allows researchers to gain awareness of the impact of traditions, culture, ideology, institutional, and organizational structure and attends to the extra-linguistic forces that can influence the interpretations of meanings. An important concept in critical hermeneutics is the hermeneutic arc, which describes the back and-forth movement between the text as a whole and its constituent parts during the process of interpretation. As analysis continues through the back-and-forth movement

between the interrelated and complimentary processes of explanation and understanding, understanding expands, and initial, naïve understandings are disapproved, re-organized, or accepted and gradually expanded upon, with all these phases of analysis being informed by the interpreter's prior-understanding (Paul Ricoeur, 198).

By pursuing understanding rather than explanation, hermeneutics addresses philosophical questions on humans and their understanding of issues in society. Because hermeneutics deals with different aspects of human understanding and its mechanisms it is able to aptly deal with complexities of poetic language, particularly in cross cultural studies. Hermeneutics also emphasizes the role of language in interpretation in that language not as just a means of expression of ideas, but the very essence in which human life thrives.

Martin Heidegger argues, "How a time sees its past, is a sign of how it is there in its today, albeit temporarily (28). Hans Robert Jauss too, argues that "a literary text is not an object which stands all by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period" (12). He justifies this by stating that interpretations of literary works will always vary in different eras and social contexts. This means that as a work of art passes from one historical or cultural context to another, new meanings may be interpreted from it, which perhaps neither the author nor his contemporary audience anticipated. Thus, hermeneutics views meaning as socially, culturally and historically shaped by subjective criteria of various discourses and all interpretation as relative.

Hermeneutics seeks to understand experience and possibly reality, through an interpretation that moves beyond a discovery of authorial intention, to the recognition of cultural, social, historical and various other factors that inform a work of art. Hermeneutics broaches the epistemological subject of what constitutes knowledge. In order to understand the concept of knowledge production in the poetry of Maya Angelou, this study engaged conservative hermeneutics in its analysis of language and dialogue while critical hermeneutics enabled the researcher to use the hermeneutic arc for the unification of the various constituent elements that inform the poetry so as to understand meaning.

This study involved the integration of interpretation, histories and critical reflection in hermeneutic inquiry in order to understand how human experiences in the background of traditions, cultures and history constitute knowledge production and contribute to meaning making expressed through languages. Hermeneutics therefore facilitated the reading and interpretation of Angelou's poems with the aim of understanding knowledge production and its attendant manifestations of power and resistance in the poems, written in a different era, time and context from the one at the time of reading.

Anthony Thiselton observes that hermeneutics' uniqueness as a method of literary interpretation lies in the fact that it raises philosophical questions on how a text is understood, based on which understanding is possible, by taking into consideration historical or sociological questions about how issues of race, gender, class or belief may influence reading of a text while at the same time drawing from theories of communication and linguistic analysis (182). Through the critical

reflection in the hermeneutic theory, this study engaged the text with the assumption that its interpretation is shaped by various other factors, including, but not limited to history and culture, and not necessarily authorial intention.

Hermeneutics theory, however, does not adequately address the concept of power relations as portrayed through language. As Eagleton points out, it fails to take into account that "the fact that the unending dialogue of human history is often a monologue of the powerful to the powerless; or if indeed it is a dialogue, then the partners: men and women for example, hardly occupy equal positions" (64). In order to adequately discuss the intersection of language and power in Angelou's poetry, this study engaged Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony. Bakhtin, in *Dialogic Imaginations,* observes that dialogue holds a central position in interpretation of language, but adds that issues of power permeate the dialogical nature of language. He asserts that "within the arena of almost every utterance, an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged" (354). Hence Bakhtin posits that every form of dialogue is loaded with dialogic overtones that inherently manifest power relations between the conversants. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism goes further to describe this dialogic interaction as one that is pervaded by interplays of power, enacted through a multiplicity of perspectives seen through social dialogues (heteroglossia) and multiple voices (polyphony). This study used dialogism complementarily with hermeneutics in examining how voice portrays power and resistance in Angelou's poetry.

In addition to hermeneutics, intersectionality theory was used to analyse the interplay of language and power as situated within the socio-political context that Angelou writes her poetry. Intersectionality theory, argues Bernie Thorton and Ruth Zambrana, recognises the influence and interworking of various socio-political factors in power relations and reveals that "the workings of power, which is understood as both pervasive and oppressive, at all levels of social relations" (11). By analysing power relations within various social contexts, intersectionality is able to show how power is enabled, exercised and resisted in different social structures and situations.

Patricia Collins and Silma Bilge state that intersectionality was first coined by the African American scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s, while working with women of colour, who faced discrimination and denial of equal rights in the legal and socio-political arena. She used the term intersectionality, as an umbrella name, to consolidate the studies of gender, class and race, in a bid to achieve an interconnected analysis of their influence on the individual. Since then, the theory has been used extensively in analytical frameworks of discussions on race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality and their relation to societal issues.

As a theory, intersectionality posits that different social identities overlap and form a system of interlocking oppositions. Explaining intersectionality as a theory, Collins and Bilge argue that all societies contend with different factors such as "race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, nation and religion, that, among others, constitute interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power" (26). By helping us to organise the various factors into a

framework of power analysis, intersectionality theory enables us see how these different factors interconnect and relate to one another, influencing an individual's worldview and creating multiple power relations within various social structures.

The intersectionality theory is highly commended for its simultaneity. Anna Saraswathi's argues that "in a lived experience and political practice, certain identity categories overrule, capture, differentiate and transgress others" (47). She further posits that intersectionality proposes a unified reading of various categories and their workings in the lives of individuals, since, as she points out, "a real-life person is not for example, a woman on Monday, then, a member of a working class on Wednesday" (48). As a theory, intersectionality therefore responds to the theoretical demand to examine the different factors that influence power relations and how they occur in their relational systems simultaneously.

Intersectionality theory has two organizational focus points, critical inquiry and critical practice. This study used the critical inquiry approach, which Collins and Bilge contend has been used to examine the relation between issues of knowledge production and social inequality (31). Collins and Bilge identify six core ideas of the intersectionality framework: social inequality, the notion of power, relationality, social context, social justice and complexity. Guided by the above core ideas, this research engaged in an intersectional analysis of knowledge power and resistance as motifs in the poetry of Maya Angelou.

1.11 Research Methodology

Jean Schensul defines research methodology as "the blueprint or set of decisions and procedures that governs a study and renders it understandable to others" (70). He further describes this set of procedures as an approach that the researcher takes in carrying out the research. This section therefore, describes the approach taken in data collection and analysis in this study. It offers a detailed description of the research design used and outlines the inclusion and selection criteria. It explains the sampling procedures used in the study, identifies the target population and specifies the sample size. Finally, it outlines the ethical considerations of the study and explains how these considerations were addressed.

1.11.1 Research Design

This study was anchored on a descriptive research design which was guided by three main aspects. One was, to identify and describe the knowledge-power-resistance intersection as brought out in the poetry of Maya Angelou. It also sought to analyse how various poetic devices are used by the poet to portray this intersection and to analyse how their realization impacts on Angelou's worldview of a just society. Guided by the objectives outlined above, the study engaged in reading, interpretation and analysis of the poems, through the theoretical framework selected for analysis.

1.11.2 Target Population

The target population is defined by Tony McEnery and Anthony McEnery as “the total number of subjects that the researcher intends to analyse or study” (126). They argue that the target population is identified based on the concerns of the phenomena being investigated. The target population therefore defines units for which the findings of the research will be generalized. The target population for this study was poems in *The Complete Collected poetry of Maya Angelou*.

1.11.3 Sample Size

The sample size indicates the number of units from which data will be gathered, and is obtained from the target population. The sample size for this study comprised poems selected from The *Complete Collected Poetry of Maya Angelou*: an anthology published in 2015. The anthology contains poems from six volumes that were initially published across two decades. In order to arrive at the total number of poems used for this study, Spearman’s formula (Watson 2001) was used. Using the formula, a sample size of twenty-nine poems was arrived at.

1.11.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Alex Edmonds and Thomas Kennedy define inclusion and exclusion criteria as the “boundaries that are set for eligibility of prospective samples into the study” (20). The inclusion criteria define the characteristics required of prospective samples for inclusion into the study, while exclusion criteria refer to those characteristics that disqualify the prospective samples from inclusion in the study.

1.11.4.1 Inclusion Criteria

The study included all the poems in The *Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou.* However, whereas the twenty-nine poems were selected based on their manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance, the following aspects were considered in their selection:

a) Length: a mixture of long and short poems.

b) Stanza type: mono and multi-stanzaic.

c) Historical periods: cutting across various historical periods.

d) Social contexts: cutting across varying contexts upon which Angelou writes.

1.11.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

The study deliberately excluded the following:

a) Ceremonial poems performed by Maya Angelou during occasions such as those performed on birthdays of famous personalities and funerals.

b) Poems in Maya Angelou's spoken word album.

c) Unpublished poems of Maya Angelou, and those written before the beginning of her formal career as a writer.

1.11.5 Sampling Techniques

The poems under study were selected through purposive sampling, also referred to as deliberate sampling. Michael Patton describes purposive sampling as a "form of sampling whereby the researcher deliberately selects the sample which they believe will provide accurate data" (402). The choice of poems in the

anthology was therefore, done based on thematic concerns and stylistic features employed by the author to realize meaning. The selection of poems for analysis in this study was also informed by the researcher's prior knowledge on poetry and vigorous reading on the area under study.

1.11.6 Data Collection

The primary data for this study comprised poems in *The Complete Collected Poetry of Maya Angelou*. The data was collected from a thorough reading and analysis of the selected poems. Guided by the objectives of this study, the data collected was analysed in order to gather adequate data for interpretation. Library research on poetry and philosophical concepts under scrutiny was undertaken. Other sources of secondary data including peer reviewed journals, articles and scholarly papers were consulted as guidelines for comparing arguments and making inferences. In addition to this, internet research was done to compliment data gathered from the above sources.

1.11.7 Data Analysis

The primary data and secondary data collected was analysed in line with the objectives of the study and the guiding theoretical frameworks. Being a qualitative study, data analysis was done by critical examination of the data from the poems. Through critical analysis, a comprehensive synthesis and interpretation of data gathered from primary and secondary sources was undertaken, in order to come up with valid, verifiable, research conclusions.

1.11.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in research anticipated during the study were considered. Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy posit that ethical issues are extensive and must be anticipated in the conceptualization of the study and effectively addressed in the research plans (78). In view of this, the following ethical considerations were made during the study, the researcher obtained official clearance from the following institutions before embarking on the study:

a) Machakos University Graduate School.

b) National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation.

1.12 Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one lays down the critical foundation of the study. It outlines the objectives and specifies the scope and limitation of the study. It also identifies the research gaps that the study seeks to fill through an extensive review of related literature and outlines the theoretical framework and the methodology of the study. Chapter two examines manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in the poetry of Maya Angelou. Chapter three analyses how language is employed in the poetry of Maya Angelou to manifest intersections of knowledge, power and resistance, and chapter four investigates the intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in society. Chapter five outlines the conclusions of the study and gives recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND RESISTANCE IN MAYA'S POETRY

2.1 Introduction

In line with the first objective of this study, this chapter examines the manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry. The chapter is grounded on hermeneutics in examining social, historical and cultural contexts in which the poetry is written. Graham McCaffery & Nancy Moules observes that using hermeneutic theory in analysis permits a researcher to explore complex, dynamic relationships and experiences while acknowledging issues such as asymmetries of power relations, gender (in)equality, or other contextual and historical factors and their role in understanding. This chapter therefore examines experiences within historical, social and cultural contexts and how these experiences inform manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry using the following poems: *They Went Home*, *Poor Girl, Sepia Fashion Show, Still I Rise, To a Zorro Man, The Couple, The Calling of Names, Thank You Lord*. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me* and *One More Round.*

2.2 Knowledge Production in Maya's Poetry

In *the Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault presents knowledge as a distinct social and discursive practice that is produced within specific social, historical, economic and political contexts. He adds that discursive practices constitute four levels: objects, subject positions, concepts and strategies. Foucault argues that these

discursive practices employ certain specific techniques of knowledge that function simultaneously as means for acquiring, transmitting and authenticating knowledge.

In her poetry, Maya writes from a society where intersecting power relations foster social inequalities such as class, race and gender differences. Her autobiographical writings reveal that Maya herself is greatly marginalized in terms of race, gender and social class. In view of this, Joanne Braxton describes Maya's literary works as a marginality discourse that seeks truth assessment, thereby engaging in knowledge production. She argues that the very awareness of Angelou's "enforced marginality becomes an additional catalyst for life writing, for testifying, for telling it like it is" (4), Thus, Maya in truth assessment, using her poetry, engages in knowledge production in order to resist the limits imposed on her individuality based on her gender, social class and race.

Jukka Mikkonen notes that when a work of art persuades through truth, it imparts knowledge, and its acquisition enables individuals to reconceptualise certain situations and act in certain ways. This chapter analyses how Maya's poetry engages in knowledge production informed by different experiences and contexts. It also analyses how her poetry enables a re-conceptualization of situations, through instruments of liberation; that is, resistance and power.

2.2.1 Social Context and Knowledge Production

Social contexts are avenues for knowledge production acquired from interactions in certain social environments, perception and reflection leading to experiential knowledge. This section analyses how various experiences within social contexts inform knowledge production in Angelou's poetry.

The poem *They Went Home* (7) engages a young female persona to reflect on the dangers of illicit love. The persona highlights her encounters with lovers who shower her with praises, but fail to make any form of marital commitment to her. Instead, the lovers go home to recount her good deeds to their wives. Two contrastive actions are presented in this poem which relates experience to knowledge. One is the admission by the men that the girl possesses all the qualities they seek in a woman, and two, the action of leaving her after moments of pleasure. The persona begins the first three lines with a narration of the good qualities that the men see in her. The last line in each stanza begins with the contrastive conjunction *but* and presents knowledge on the reality that the girl finds herself in:

> They went home and told their wives,
>
> that never once in all their lives,
>
> had they known a girl like me,
>
> But . . . They went home
>
> (Maya, 7).

In this stanza, Maya makes language the instrument through which a personal experience is transformed into rational knowledge. In the last line of the last stanza, she highlights experiential knowledge produced through the girl's experiences

within a context of unequal power relations. The unequal power relations are evident in that, despite the girl doing everything to keep the men, including keeping a clean house and having a seductive body, “They went home” (7). The men do not return her generosity by choosing to stay with her as she expects. The girl therefore feels marginalized that as a girl, the men do not reward her efforts with the attention she expects. She is therefore treated as the ‘other’ woman.

Maya uses ellipsis at the last line of each stanza in this poem to portray the unsaid words in the girl’s thoughts. Discussing the effects of such experiences by marginalized persons, Patricia Collins has argued that, marginalized persons will always design a social thought to counter unequal power relations, which in turn provides a “stimulus for the crafting and passing on” (8) of oppositional knowledge, designed to resist oppression. This form of knowledge, because of the powerful, processes of its production contribute strongly to the mobilization of the marginalized to express and act upon their grievances. Hence, through her experience with men, the persona acquires knowledge that enables her re-examine the position she holds in the men’s life. Her articulation of the actions of the men and a presentation of the contrast of their actions shown by the use of “But… they went home” (7) in the last line of the first two stanzas can be read as part of the processes of the production of experiential knowledge.

The persona has gained enough experience to realize that even after “they’d spend one night, or two, or three” (7), the men cannot make any formal commitments to her. Hence the poem ends with the last line stating that “But …” (7), the use of ellipsis shows that the girl has attained experiential knowledge,

knows what to expect after the three nights, so that the actions of the men no longer come as a surprise to her.

Experiential knowledge is replicated in the poem *Poor Girl* (70), where the persona, a girl, highlights the unfair treatment that she, together with another girl, experience at the hands of a certain man:

> You've got another girl
> and I know it
> Someone who adores you
> just like me
> Hanging on your words
> like they were gold
> Thinking that she
> understands
> your soul
> Poor Girl
> Just like me
>
> (Maya,70).

In both poems, personae are girls who feel they are unfairly treated by the men they entrust their emotions with. In *Poor Girl* (70), the use of words "poor girl, just like me" (70), shows feelings of marginalization from the girl. In both poems, the girls have grown to recognize marginalization in their lived experiences. They relive these experiences from a vantage point, where they examine their relations with the

said men. The girls negotiate hegemonic discourses and speak out their experiences through their own interpretation of their life narratives, so that, by rethinking the past and retelling it, they attempt to consciously resist objectification. By detailing their embodied experiences, in the two poems, the girls also engage the reader in an exploration of their feelings towards the men's actions, feelings, that have largely been shaped by their being gendered and excluded from having a say in these relationships.

Bianca Williams identified the expression of one's feelings in literary works as a way of engaging in knowledge production, "Feeling, emotion, and affect are forms of knowledge" (37). She argues that these forms of knowledge enable the exercise of power and resistance by providing an individual with multiple "ways of knowing the world and figuring out how to navigate it" (37). Thus, in the poems, *Poor Girl*, and *They Went Home* the female personae, by detailing to the public space their private feelings of disappointment with the men, engage in knowledge production with the aim of arousing a common resistance with other females in the same predicament. Through the production of this knowledge, females such as the girl referred to in *Poor Girl* are indirectly urged to exercise power by finding a way to navigate the affective dimensions of power and re-configure the world of men (read as the exercise of power).

2.2.2 Historical Context and Knowledge Production

As discussed in chapter one, Knowledge production is understood by examining historical contexts that shape it. Within different historical eras,

knowledge production has been shaped by institutionalized centres of power and their involvement with issues of dominance such as exploitation and the reproduction of inequalities among people. In *Sepia Fashion Show* (48), Angelou speaks to the "The Black bourgeois" who struggle to fit in the dominating white culture at the expense of their black identity. Throughout the poem, she details ways in which the black bourgeois imitate the whites in dressing, speech and character. Angelou urges them to rethink their social and historical background within the American society:

The Black Bourgeois, who all say "yah"
When yeah is what they're meaning
Should look around, both up and down
Before they set out preening

(Maya, 48)

The last stanza presents historically shaped knowledge through the symbol of the black woman's knees.

"Indeed" they swear, "that's what I'll wear
When I go country clubbing."
I'd remind them please, look at those knees,
You got a Miss Ann's scrubbing

(Maya, 48).

The *Routledge dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English* defines Miss Ann as the prototype of the White Southern woman, for whom most Black American women worked as cleaners and housemaids. Knees with Miss

Ann's scrubbing are extremely rough and darkened knees that most African American women got as a result of kneeling for long hours scrubbing kitchens belonging to the Miss Anns of the society. Maya uses Miss Ann's imagery to foreground the knowledge of oppression which characterises the history of Black Americans.

In the poem *Still I Rise* (163), Maya uses imagery drawn from the physical environment to emphasises that the rise of the oppressed is inevitable and that it is only a matter of time before they rise. The lines "Like moons and like suns" (163) equate the persona to natural phenomena to portray the knowledge that though the body is natural, the oppression meted on it through abuse, racism, sexism is not. Knowledge and power exist in an intersectional way, such that, by equating the persona's unstoppable rise to that of the moon, sun and tides, Angelou portrays the persona as part of the uncontrollable force of nature and its power.

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.

(Maya, 163).

She uses the air, the sun, the moon and the tides as knowledge symbols that represent the natural, interminable power of rising which the persona in the poem will eventually attain.

2.3 Manifestations of Power in Maya's Poetry

Power, as theorized by Foucault, is inherent in knowledge. This section therefore analyses how power shapes various forms of knowledge in Maya's poetry, and how its exercise enables individuals to challenge oppressions and influence decisions.

2.3.1 Erotic Power

Maya uses erotic features of the female body as strategy for disrupting patriarchal domination that exists between men and women. For instance, in the poem *To a Zorro Man* (9), Maya gives an erotic account of foreplay, sexual intimacy and arousal from a woman's point of view. The erotic acts are depicted through memory and recollection of a woman's intimate moments with her lover, where the woman's sexuality is described through images such as "silk purple drapes" and "a clean mirror" (9).

Here
In the wombed room
Silk purple drapes
Flash a light as subtle
As your hands before
Lovemaking

(Maya, 9).

In this stanza, the colour purple is used as a semiotic marker, paired with the symbolic ‘silk drapes’, to describe the ambience of the feminine body organ in which the sexual activity takes place. The use of colour in literary works evokes cognitive responses that relate to real-life situations. In his analysis of colour in literary texts, Lukiannets Hernz observes that as a source of knowledge about the surrounding world, visual imagery is greatly enhanced by the use of colour terms. He gives an illustration of the use of the colour purple in poetry, arguing that “purple denotes royalty, enlightenment, power and fantasy” (21). Silk is a fabric that is associated with royalty, luxury and riches. Its usage in the poem is confers the female body to status, wealth and prestige. The conferment of wealth and prestige to the female body enable us it to link it to power, hence situate it as a site of power. Maya further elevates female sexuality by placing it on images such as a ‘clean mirror’ to free it from derogatory connotations and allow a new perspective that associates it with purity.

Maya confers another form of power on woman’s sexuality: the power to flash and photograph, even with a covered lens. The covering of the lens can be read as an attempt to silence the female on sexuality, but through the exercise of power, this silencing is resisted when the covered lens “catches” the image:

> Here
> In the covered lensed
> I catch a
> Clitoral image of your general inhabitation
>
> (Maya, 9).

The description of the sexual act as a 'clitoral image' serves to enhance the fact that its account is given from the feminine perspective. The room where intimacy takes place is personified as a feminine space and the action is centred on the woman as the source of power. By placing women at the centre of sexual pleasure, Maya portrays her as a site of power because she possesses erotic pleasure. In the final stanza, the image of the trembling male is viewed as weakening of traditional patriarchal power structures that place the male as solely in control of the sexual act. Through this, Maya re-inscribes normalized associations of masculinity with power and through descriptive accounts of foreplay and sexual pleasure, exposing the dynamics of gender and power in society.

2.3.2 Identity as Power

The control of knowledge acts as a form of oppression occasioned by those positions of power. However, the marginalized can exercise power by engaging in counter knowledge production to re-define not just what is known, but how their subjectivities and identities are constructed (Foucault 1977). In the poem *The Couple* (93), societal perceptions on gender, race and class as aspects of identity formation are portrayed:

> Discard the fear and what
> Was she? Of rags and bones
> A mimicry of a woman's
> Fairy-ness
> Archaic at its birth
>
> (Maya, 93)

In this first stanza, the speaker presents a woman, who mimics ancient notions such as those found in fairy tales, notions that have become obsolete. The ambiguity of the last two lines in this first stanza allows the two lines to act as, both a declarative statement and as part of an answer to the question raised in the first part of the stanza. These lines serve as a statement of power, (that is, a command to rid the society of such degrading perceptions of womanhood) and question the validity of society's perspectives on gender and power.

In the first stanza, the poem begins by manifesting counter knowledge production as power to draw attention to the falsity of previously established knowledge on womanhood. The poem focuses on women's identity as a form of mimicry. The identification of the woman as nothing more than mimicry of archaic notions of fairy-ness highlights her subjectivity as she tries to copy the lifestyle of fairy tale characters, in the process, losing her identity, power and culture. Robert Young has argued that "mimicry at once enables power and produces the loss of agency" (147). Hence, Angelou's description of the woman's identity as a form of mimicry is not only a questioning of power, but a revelation of the loss of agency that has been brought about by archaic gender norms, which reduce women to rags and bones.

In the second stanza, an assessment of masculinity, similar to the one done on womanhood in stanza one is offered:

Discharge the hate and when
Was he? Dishevelled moans
A mimesis of a man's
Estate
Decieted for its worth

(Maya, 93).

The above stanza depicts the power of class-based constructions of identity and their relation to gender and social positioning. The stanza appears to parallel the first stanza in terms of meaning. In the fourth line, the lone word, *estate*, with its multiple connotations such as, fortune, landed property, social status, social or political class, is used to link masculinity to notions of economic stability and power. The falsity in the linkage is expressed by describing it as mimetic and deceit. In these two stanzas, the use of words *what* and *when* portrays subjectivity, powerlessness and the absence of individuality. In the final stanza, Maya urges for a discarding of these biased constructions of identity, mirroring Franz Fanon's call to "Set man free" (9) from the "uniform" (114) of race, and in this poem, expanded to gender and class. This call is amplified in the last stanza in which the identity resulting from societal perceptions of being discussed in the first two stanzas is referred to as enfeebled thrones.

2.3.3 The Power in Naming

One of the functions of a name is to identify its referent. However, there are cases where names are used to discriminate, privilege or assign a certain identity. The poem *The Calling of Names* (46) portrays the power in names used to define dark skinned persons throughout history and the impact of these names on the African American's psyche. In the poem, historical events that affect lives of African Americans are chronicled and related to the nature of naming. The first stanza details various names given to Africans: 'nigger' and 'coloured man'. History shows that the name nigger was initially used to refer to dark skinned persons, albeit with pejorative undertones. Randall Kennedy explains that nigger is a derogatory word derived from the Latin word *nigger* which means black, and was also the name of a slave ship that docked in Virginia in 1619, carrying African slaves. Based on its historical connotations, *nigger* reflects powerlessness and servitude. In this poem, the entire exercise of proposing, enforcing, and answering to the name nigger is seen as "a political exercise" (Martin Ben: 83) in which the power of naming is exercised.

The second name given to the African in this poem is 'coloured man', a name that identities him as belonging to persons with a certain skin colour and subsequently, his race. Judith Butler argues that naming is an illocutionary act which in some instances confers upon a subject the position of insubordination (1997: 29). Naming one on the basis of race is considered as 'othering' and conferring upon him the category of othered. In this case, naming becomes part of social operation strategies that are embedded in discourses of race and enabled by

power relations that classify and discriminate people. By virtue of its 'othering', the name 'coloured man' signifies the power that naming occupies over the named. The change of name from nigger to coloured man is described as a 'big jump' in the poem not worth of celebration because it still marginalizes. There is also change of name "From coloured man to Negro'/ with 'the 'N' in caps" (46). Paradoxically, Negro with N in caps was used to name the black man during World War II, implying that the capitalization of 'N' in Negro is part of political propaganda to entice him to render his services during the World War.

From the second stanza, the poem chronicles the participation of the Africans in World War II and Voter and Civil Rights legislation that outlawed discrimination based on skin colour in America during the fifties. It relates these events to the names used to describe dark skinned persons during each era. As the names evolve through the historical and political events narrated in the poem, old demeaning names are dissolved to create new positive identities like nigger becomes 'a Bouquet of Roses' (46). The emphasis of this line is on the exercise of the power of self-definition that has enabled a substantive movement from derogatory black history to an assertive statement about a more positive future.

The last stanza finally celebrates the Black Power Movement that arose in the sixties. Through a description of the events during this time, the power of naming among African Americans in America is highlighted. In the poem, emphasis is placed on the need for African Americans to accept their skin colour and work towards a positive identity. In the last stanza, the man has not only accepted his blackness but is proud of it: "Now you'll get hurt / If you don't call

him Black" (46). King argues that "taking possession of one's own name and thus claiming sovereignty over one's self is an act of power" (684). Thus, by replacing the bitterness of answering to 'hey nigger' in the first stanza with an acceptable name at the end of the poem, a sense of power is achieved through self-naming.

2.4 Portrayal of Resistance in Maya's Poetry

The importance of poetry in voicing resistance has been noted by Barbara Harlow who asserts that "the role of poetry in the liberation struggle itself has been a crucial one, both as a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness" (34). This means that historically, the poetic voice has been used as a vehicle through which awareness is created and resistance against domination is actualized. This section therefore, examines how Angelou's poetry raises the consciousness of the marginalized in taking up agency and working towards the reinvention of a non-discriminative society that espouses racial, social, sexual and economic equality**.** It examines various forms of resistance manifested with certain contexts in her poetry.

2.4.1 Cultural Resistance

Stephen Duncombe views culture "as a set of norms, behaviours and ways to make sense of the world" (5). Culture dictates our understanding of issues and expected conduct of members in society. In this way, culture serves as a means of social control. Duncombe, however, shows that culture can be used as a form of resistance by utilizing words, meanings and symbols "consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political,

economic and/or social structure" (5). This section analyses how cultural resistance is manifested through the conscious use of certain symbols, words and meanings in Maya's poetry.

Maya's poetry stems from two cultures in an environment of unequal power relations. Both the dominant and dominated culture is manifested in her poetry. In such a situation, cultural resistance is bound to occur in an attempt to counter the hegemony of the dominant culture. For example, through the dominant white culture, images that associate God, godliness and purity with the white race have been implanted in America, such that God is conceptualized as white while (d)evil is black. In the poem *Thank You, Lord* (175), this notion of God that has been deeply ingrained in white culture is dismantled through a re construction of God as "brown skinned" with a "neat afro" and "full lips" (175). Further, the Messianic role of the white Jesus is equalled to that of African American activists such as Malcom, Martin (allusion to Martin Luther) and Du Bois. In elevating and eulogizing these African American heroes of black liberation movement to the same pedestal as Jesus, Maya equates their deaths to martyrdom and effectively compares their deaths to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ that paid for the freedom of mankind. Angelou uses them as symbols for resisting the cultural glorification of the divine salvation of man as white. She further emphasizes the joy that African Americans feel at having their own cultural construction of God, such that "Sunday services become sweeter when you're Black" (175).

In *Life Doesn't Frighten Me* (167), various facets of culturally constructed stereotypes are dismantled. The persona, a young girl, voices her resistance to

different things that would naturally be expected to frighten her including life itself. The first stanza lists real and imaginary things that are naturally feared by children, such as shadows, barking dogs, noise and ghosts. In the second stanza, the concept of resistance against foreign ideology is brought in as the persona states that even "Mean old Mother Goose" and "the dragon" do not frighten her. Mother goose is an imaginary figure in French fairy tales and English nursery rhymes, while the dragon is a mythical figure associated with evil. By alluding to the inability of the non-African imaginary mother goose and the dragon to frighten her, the persona voices her resistance to domination by foreign ideologies. In the third stanza, she explains how she uses her voice (boo) to resist them and force them away from her:

I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So, they fly
(Maya, 167).

In last two lines of the above stanza, the persona refuses to 'cry'. This means that she has resisted the intentions of the power exercised on her, and eventually her detractors fly away

In the fourth stanza the persona voices her resistance to racial discrimination evidenced through bullying in "That new classroom where / Boys pull my hair" (167). In the classroom, the persona resists sexism and racism by owning the

weaknesses that have been culturally ascribed to her as a black female and declaring herself above their terror. She owns her title of "kissy little girls / with curls in their hair" and declares that she is beyond the culturally stereotyped girl who screams at the sight of frogs and snakes:

> Don't show me frogs and snakes
> And listen for my scream
> I am not afraid at all
> It's only in my dreams
> (May, 167).

In the fifth stanza, resistance is also realized through the voicing of the stereotypical association of Blacks with black magic, voodoo and charms. The persona too, seems to own this stereotype of blackness and identifies with it, stating:

> I've got a magic charm
> That I keep up my sleeve
> I can walk the ocean floor
> And never have to breath
> (Maya, 167).

2.4.2 Self- definition as Resistance

Du Bois describes the history of African Americans as a history of the self "longing to attain a self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (191). This longing for a truer and better self is geared towards self-definition, that is, the production of truthful knowledge about oneself. The re-

appropriation of self-definition enables “a kind of awakening, the emergence of a repressed truth from the recesses of oppressive cultural systems” (Du Bois:192). In the poem *Still I Rise* (163), there is a re-writing of historical knowledge that redefines the persona by negating previous knowledge produced by others. This is evident in the first stanza, where, the assertion that “You may write me down in history / with your bitter twisted lies” (163) questions the validity of biased historical knowledge produced by those in power by referring to it as ‘bitter twisted lies’. By creating doubts on the truthfulness of this knowledge, the persona automatically invites us to a denial of its power, which is a form of resistance. The third line, “But still, like dust, I’ll rise” (163) is a form of self-definition and a disavowal of the intended effect of this power created by the falsified knowledge: that the persona would be “trod in the dirt” (163). By invalidating this historical knowledge, the persona denies power over the trajectory of their life thereby resisting the intended effect of twisted lies through self-definition.

Self-definition encourages remodelling the individual through denial of stereotypical knowledge created by hegemony and the creation of truthful knowledge about oneself, resulting in self-representation. Foucault argues that self-definition uses strategies such as self-fashioned ‘narratives of the self’ (Foucault in Nixon Sean 1997: 322). The persona in *Still I Rise* shows how the marginalised are seeking to re-define the version of reality presented by the oppressor and constructs their own reality. Patricia Collins refers to this kind of self- fashioned reality as oppositional knowledge gained through experiences in intersecting forces of oppression such as race, class and gender. She vouches for the significance of

oppositional knowledge, arguing that it is through this knowledge that the marginalized appropriate the power to redefine themselves, such that they, can question what has been said about them and its credibility, re construct reality, assert themselves, and validate their power as human subjects (125). Hence, in this poem, the persona reconstructs her reality by renaming herself the black ocean, leaping wide, and the dream and hope of the slave.

In *One More Round* (155) the persona throughout the poem employs a self-narrative to declare who they are, but immediately uses the same narrative to resist the class constructed subjectivity that has been bestowed on them by multiple power relations. “I was born to work up to my grave/ But I was not born /To be a slave” (155). Through self-narration, the persona contrasts who the marginalised what they are and what they have been made as a manifestation of their resistance to domination. By asserting that “I was not born to be a slave” (155), the poem employs what Jose Medina refers to as a ‘return to the origin’ which involves a retreat to the foundations or ‘the primary points of reference’ in order to invalidate a dominant ideology (16). The invalidation of this ideology gives rise the resistance call in the refrain of this poem:

> One more round
> And let’s heave it down
> One more round
> And let’s heave it down
>
> (Maya, 155).

Structured in the form of a work song, the ambiguity in the refrain, the repeated phrase, 'let's heave it down' (155) is not just part of the motivation to work, but a call to resist marginality and bring it down.

In the second and third stanzas, resistance is portrayed through the use of memory as a tool for self-narrative. Memory as a manifestation of resistance has been singled out by Medina who argues that it is a Foucauldian resistance form that 'puts practices of remembering and forgetting in the context of power relations, focusing not only on what is remembered and forgotten, but how, by whom, and with what effects' (9). In the poem, the persona remembers the hard work and resilience of their parents, but cautions against this being used to objectify them.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter has examined manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry. Analyses of poems in the chapter showed that Maya navigates convolutions of history and memory to foreground knowledge production, exercises of power resulting into poetry that resists dominant narratives of oppression in society. Knowledges of various contexts, such as historical and social contexts, facilitate the understanding of manifestations of the various forms power. Exercises of power, in turn, ignite resistance to cultural hegemony and other forms of oppression. In her poetry, Maya highlights the plight of the marginalized based on class, gender and race-based discrimination. The next chapter analyses how language is employed in Maya's poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE USE IN MAYA'S POETRY

3.1 Introduction

Guided by tenets of hermeneutics as pointed out in the theoretical framework, this chapter examines how language is used in Maya's poetry showing how language facilitates the understanding of power relations and resistance in society. The chapter also engages Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to analyse the use of intertextuality, hidden dialogue as well as internal dialogue in Maya's poetry. Analyses in this chapter is based on the following poems: *No, No, No, No, Harlem Hopscotch, Lord in My Heart, Africa, When Great Trees Fall, Willie, When I Think about Myself, Remembrance, Savior* and *Miss Scarlet, Mr Rhett and Other Latter-Day Saints.*

3.2 Power in Language Use

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that language is a form of dialogue that is modulated by power relations, such that by examining language use, we can decipher relations of power among the language users. Bakhtin argues for 'the role of the other" (70) in language use and contends that in order to comprehensively account for meaning in language, otherness must be taken into account. He gives an illustration of the phrase "the sea" as an everyday utterance by an individual and "The Sea! The Sea!" (85), exclaimed by 10000 Greeks in Xenophon, arguing that these two words, though lexically and semantically similar are interpreted differently when the circumstances concerning the speakers are taken into consideration. Thus, this

section analyses the use of heteroglossic and polyphonic discourses in relation to power relations. Examining language use by speakers in the poems, to whom they speak and various contexts from which they speak enables us to read certain power relations in words and phrases that would otherwise appear “innocent”.

3.3 Heteroglossia and Polyphony

Heteroglossia refers to the presence of two or more distinct viewpoints expressed in an artistic work and facilitates the inclusion of various socio-ideological codes and voices within the same text (Lian Malai Madsen: 45). Polyphony on the other hand involves the use of varying, clearly separable voices within a discourse (Bakhtin 1984:193). The concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony can be read as discursive linguistic resources that can be utilized within certain social interactions to accomplish certain goals. Bakhtin postulates that heteroglossia is important in that, through language, it gives us “specific points of view on the world” (1981:291) from various positions, thereby, highlighting various ways of experiencing and evaluating the world by both marginalized and those in power. A key characteristic of multi voiced and multi perspective discourses is their inextricable entanglement with issues of power, such that they are always inflected by and with power relations (Bakhtin 1984: 108). Also, as argued by Fairclough in any language, dialogue, whether involving others or taking place internally within an individual, through thought, utterance or the written text, provides communicative power (112). Hence, every individual voice or perspective realized within a dialogue can be read as a negotiation of power or a manifestation of lack of it.

In the poem *No, No, No, No*, (42) Angelou employs polyphony and heteroglossia to voice her resistance to America's involvement in the Vietnam war and also show the vanity of the American dream to immigrants and African Americans living in or aspiring to go to America. The poem has four speakers who present distinct voices and perspectives; the anonymous third person narrator who appears to have a broad nationalistic and liberal perspective, dying babies, a female black speaker and a female white. In the first stanza the narrator's voice employs dysphemistic diction, through phrases such as "stinky finger in their crusty asses" (42) to express disgust at the inhumanity of the Vietnam War, that only benefitted a few people referred to as "two-legg'd beasts that walk like men" (42). The dysphemistic words highlight how elite persons engage in dirty war games, while:

crackling babies
in napalm coats
stretch mouths receive
burning tears
on splitting tongues.
JUST GIVE ME A COOL DRINK OF WATER 'FORE I DIIIE

(Maya, 42)

Heteroglossia is realized in this poem through the narrator's juxtaposition of actions of grown-up men playing an offensive game such as stinky fingers (read as their trivialization of the Vietnam war) with the suffering of innocent babies affected by the war. This juxtaposition can be read as a multi-perspective representation of power relations and their role in the capitalist war. It highlights

the exercise of power by the political elite over the suffering of the innocent, through a manifestation of the callousness with which the propagators of the war treat the masses. Further, a state of powerlessness is manifested through the images of dying babies burned by napalm and begging for water in their deathbeds. Napalm, used as a symbol of suffering, was a gelled form of gasoline that was used as a weapon by US forces in the Vietnam War. In this context it becomes a source of knowledge through dialogic echoes that relate it to the suffering of the masses during the Vietnam war.

There is use of polyphony in the second stanza. A black female picks the conversation from the first stanza responding satirically with a "No" to the voices of dying babies requesting for a drink of water. The satirical response shows how cry for help for the marginalized is trivialized as emphasis is placed on abstract things such as the statue of liberty. The speaker then questions the relevance of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom, referring to it as a "gap-legg'd whore' (42) who selectively welcomes people of a certain race and continent to America while rejecting others. Through this perspective, the speaker resists the notion that the Statue of Liberty is symbol of inclusivity, unity and freedom, and instead, singles it out as a symbol of systemic oppression and discrimination against members of certain groups. The ideals of the statue of Liberty such as freedom and inclusivity are contrasted with the reality of America's immigration practices that discriminate against Black immigrants while welcoming Whites from Europe:

No, the gap-legg'd whore
of the eastern shore
enticing Europe to COME
in her and turns her pigeon-shit back to me
to me who stoked the coal that drove the ships
which brought her over the sinuous cemetery
of my many brothers

(Maya, 42).

In the second stanza, the speaker laments that Africans greatly contributed to building the American economy and have the right to live there and pursue the American dream, yet their descendants are unrecognized and unwelcome in America. The speaker chronicles the struggles of immigrants and the working class and their resistance to the way they are treated in America.

In the third stanza, a new voice, the voice of a white female speaker responds to the black speaker's allegations of marginalization. The white persona attempts to exonerate her race from the allegations of the speaker in the previous two stanzas. She resists claims of racism by showing that the historical mistreatment of African Americans is inevitable, and was warranted because of their misdemeanours:

I've let your men cram my world
With their black throbbing hate
And I swallowed after
I've let your mammies

Steal from my kitchens

(Maya, 42)

The White female speaker's accusations against African Americans appear trivial compared to issues raised by the Black speaker. She is callous towards the Blacks showing that indeed Whites have tolerated Blacks. She resists the image of innocence portrayed through the babies presented in the first stanza and calls them "pickaninnies" a derogatory term used to refer to children born to slaves and persons of inferior social class. Maya, through the white speaker, reveals the insincerity of the ruling elites:

What more can I do?

I'll never be black like you.

(HALLELUJAH)

(Maya, 42)

In another poem, *Harlem Hopscotch* (51) dialogic echoes are employed in what is structured as a children's hopscotch game to reveal power play between those in power and the marginalized. The first dialogic echo is evident in the title of the poem. The use of the term *Harlem* as an adjective to qualify a children's game is a dialogic echo that relates the game to issues of racism and points out that the game is not just the ordinary hopscotch. Andrew M. Fearnley and Daniel Matlin contend that the name Harlem is loaded with symbolic meanings that make it "a spatial signifier of blackness" (1). They argue that Harlem is synonymous with Black power and resistance, such that, Harlem is symbolically a vector that charts

the historical and cultural trajectory of African Americans and their position in America. Hopscotch on the other hand, is a popular children's game where players throw an object into patterned spaces on the ground, then hop in turns through the spaces to pick it up, without stepping on the boundary lines. By using both the symbol of Black power and a children's game as the title of the poem, Maya engages in a form of hidden dialogue with the reader of the poem to show how power games control relations between the dominant class and marginalized persons. The use of the game is a way of contrasting the assumed innocence of the marginalized with the harshness of the situation that imposes restrictions on them. In the first line of the poem, the dialogue begins as a simple instruction to children playing hopscotch. However, from the second line, it explores issues of poverty and power relations between the haves and the have nots:

> One foot down, then hop! It's hot.
> Good things for the one's that's got
> Another jump, now to the left
> Everybody for hisself
>
> (Maya, 51)

In the second stanza, the poem highlights issues of racial and class discrimination: "Since you black, don't stick around / Food is gone, the rent is due" (51). With the display of the hopelessness of racial discrimination, poverty and hunger in these two lines, the speaker advices the player to "curse and cry and then jump two" (51). In this seemingly innocent and childish advice is indeed a call to take note of the happenings in Harlem and ready oneself for resistance. The poem's use of words

one, two, three in the consecutive stanzas can be read as a form of countdown and a rallying call for resistance.

After detailing instances of suffering in each stanza, the first stanza calls for one foot down and a hop, the second stanza for two jumps, while the third stanza categorically states:

All the people out of work
Hold for three, then twist and jerk
Cross the line they count you out
That's what hopping's all about

(Maya, 51)

Maya use of violent diction in the choice of words such as twist and jerk in a poem as a dialogic echo to rally the marginalized to resist oppression. The call to resistance is further manifested through hidden dialogue as the player is encouraged to flout the rules of the game by crossing the line. This narrator is adamant that the whole idea behind the game is to flout the rules, which can be interpreted to mean resisting hegemonic norms, rewrite one's own subjugation and refuse to be part of marginalization. At the end of the poem, the speaker exclaims, "Both feet flat, the game done / They think I lost: I think I won" (51). Thus, through this hidden dialogue, instructions given to players in a children's game translate to a manifestation of the interplays of power and resistance in spaces that symbolize marginalization in America.

3.4 Contrastive Opposition

Contrastive opposition involves the creation of a rhetoric that evokes conflicting images, situations and words within a text. It is a form of implied comparison in that there is no outright mention of a contrast by the writer, but certain ideas are placed side by side in the text, such that reader is able to discern differences between the paired entities. In the poem *Lord in My Heart* (88), Maya employs contrastive opposition to present the double standards of Christian religious teachings that contribute to marginalization. The speaker engages the memory of early Sunday school Bible lessons that emphasize on humility, but remain silent on the position of the oppressed. The speaker questions the scriptures on its views concerning actions of self defence against wrongs committed by one's foes. The teachings offered by those who want to use religion as a tool of oppression are then, contrasted with other teachings in the same Bible that advocate for resistance against oppression:

Marvelling with
afterthought
Let the blow fall
saying naught
Of my true Christ-
like control
And the nature
of my soul

Would I strike with

Rage divine

Till my foes are

Fallen dead

(Maya, 88).

The stanza alludes to the Biblical King David, who, consumed with divine rage, pursued his foes and defeated them. The speaker then uses this allusion to highlight the strong contrast between Biblical teachings and contemporary biased Christian teachings. By alluding to instances in the Bible where revenge against foes is espoused, the speaker stresses the idea that vengeance against foes is ordained by God and justified. Hence, resistance in the face of oppression is necessary and even ethical:

Teachers of my

Early youth

Taught forgiveness

Stressed the truth

Here then is my

Christian lack

If I'm struck then

I'll strike back

(Maya, 88).

In this stanza, contrastive opposition is realized through the juxtaposition of the early teachings of the Bible and the reality as viewed by the speaker through a re-reading of the scriptures in such a way that the authority of religious hegemony is subverted.

In the poem *Africa* (84), Maya contrasts images of pre-colonial Africa with those of economically and environmentally wrecked post-colonial Africa. Harlow argues that colonization disrupted traditional griots who were custodians of historical and cultural data in precolonial Africa. She further postulates that in Africa and other previously colonized territories, poetry has been employed as a tool to re-write pre-colonial history such that "the poets, like the guerrilla leaders of the resistance movements, consider it necessary to wrest that expropriated historicity back, appropriate it for themselves in order to reconstruct a new world-historical order" (33). For Harlow, resistance poetry is important as it serves "both as a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness" (34). Thus, Maya, in *Africa* (84) hopes to raise this consciousness and respond to this domination by re-historicizing Africa through resistance poetry. The first stanza details the calmness and self-sufficiency of pre-colonial Africa:

Thus she had lain
sugarcane sweet
deserts her hair
golden her feet
(Maya, 84)

In the second stanza, the image of tranquillity and self-sustenance that characterises pre-colonial image of Africa is contrasted with the post-slavery and post-colonial Africa amidst atrocities committed against it:

> Over the white seas
> rime white and cold
> brigands ungentled
> took her young daughters
> sold her strong sons
> churched her with Jesus
> bled her with guns
>
> (Maya, 84).

Through the use of contrastive opposition in the first and second stanzas, Maya intentionally employs a rhetoric of resistance that portrays the colonized as peaceful and self-sustaining, while the colonizers in their behaviour and cruelty towards Africa, are cast as violent plunderers. Through this contrast, the poem voices resistance to long-standing colonial histories and cultural stereotypes that portray indigenous inhabitants of Africa as having been poor and uncivilized, and effectively "writes back," in Said's argument, to hegemonic cultural beliefs with a "new narrative" (216). Through this juxtaposition, she expresses resistance to the dominant colonial narratives about Africa and highlights alternative perspectives of its history.

The poem further contrasts the image of ravaged Africa with that of the future post resistance Africa, reinforcing a resistance message evident in the last stanza with the proclamation that "Now she is rising". The penultimate lines of the first and last stanzas are also contrasted: "Thus she had lain" (stanza one) and "Now she is striding" (last stanza). Contrastive opposition is also evident in the last lines of the second and third stanzas. "Thus, she has lain /Although she had lain" (84). The contrastive opposition employed in these four lines shows advancements that Africa has made: from a passive endurance of injustices committed against her people (thus she had lain) to exercising power (rising) and eventually resistance (now she is striding). Through the oppositional knowledge created through re-writing of historical facts, Maya seeks to move her audience's view of Africa from a continent of passive observation and oppression to one of resistance. Further, the pains of the subversion and colonization are paralleled with a vision of the new Africa as the Promised Land. For a continent that for long time experienced marginalisation and powerlessness, the idea of rising and striding is meant to imbue a sense of power and self-identity among its people.

In No, *No, No, No,* (41*)* Maya contrasts images of red-shoed priests who have the pleasure of being "palanquined" (43) with those of barefoot children in the country. She then describes the priests' double privilege of wearing shoes and being carried on palanquins in a land referred to as "barefoot children country" as a sign of extravagance and power exercised by religious authorities:

No

The red-shoed priests riding

Palanquined

In barefoot children country.

(Maya, 41).

The stanza goes on to contrast knowledge on the behaviour of present-day saints with what is traditionally known of saints:

The plastered saints gazing down

Beneficently

On kneeling mothers

Picking undigested beans

From yesterday's shit

(Maya, 41).

The saints in the stanza are described as "plastered saints", a colloquial term used to describe a person who makes a show of being without moral faults or human weakness, especially in a hypocritical way, implying that these priests are duplicitous saints. Further, the saints gaze at the mothers "beneficently" as they kneel to pick undigested beans from shit. The religiously held notion of saints, as those that watch over mortals and assist them is contrasted with that of the saints in the poem, whose beneficence is merely gazing at starving mothers. The gazing in the poem is a contrast to the watching of believers alluded to by saints in Christian beliefs. This contrast, on one hand, portrays knowledge on the hypocrisy of religion,

while on the other hand, highlights the oppression meted on ordinary persons by those who hold religious power. By contrasting the illusionary Christian saints to those in the poem, whose benevolence to the mothers is "undigested beans from yesterday's shit", the poet shows hypocritical piety.

3.5 Persuasive Imagery

Persuasive imagery refers to descriptive images used in a work of art with the aim of persuading readers on certain issues. It is achieved through the descriptive presentation of certain images and symbols that are interpreted in shared knowledges and contexts. Barbara Dancygier posits that the major point of persuasive imagery in poetry is that readers can preserve and reproduce these images based on the mental representation of such descriptions. She argues that with this reproduction, such imagery enables the reader to re-simulate the described scenes and through imagination the reader is inspired and persuaded to act in a similar way to that described through the imagery (215). Thus, Maya makes use of sexual imagery, representation metaphors, and also employs images as symbols of knowledge, power and resistance as analysed below.

3.5.1 Sexual Imagery

In the poem *Remembrance* (127) Maya employs sexual imagery to describe an intimate encounter between a woman and her lover:

> Your hands easy weight,
> teasing the bees hived in my hair,
> your smile

at the slope of my cheek.
On the occasion, you press above
me, glowing, spouting readiness,
mystery rapes my reason.
When you have withdrawn
yourself and the magic,
when only the spell of
yourlove lingers
between my breasts,
then, only then,
can I greedily consume
your presence
(Maya, 127).

In the poem, the persona engages images of eroticism, thereby, putting her in charge of the act. This then, serves to identify the woman's body as a source of power and site of resistance. The pleasure of sex in this poem is only felt through a feminine reconstruction of the act in the absence of the man, and not within the physical act. Hence, through this reconstruction the poem creates a parallel power structure that challenges the traditionally gendered models of power that have traditionally placed the man in charge of the sexual act.

In another poem, *Miss Scarlett, Mr Rhett and Other Latter -Day Saints* the speaker admonishes the audience to:

Guard the relics

Of your intact hymen

Daily

putting to death

into eternity,

the stud, his seed

His seed

His seed

(Maya, 33).

Two contrasting images are presented in the stanza above; relics which implies remnants or ruins and intact hymen. The hymen is a symbol of virginity while feminine purity is seen as a relic. These lines can be read as a resistance call to guard whatever little dignity that the marginalized persons still possess. Sexual imagery is also employed in the above stanza as a call to resist forced inhabitation, either through colonization or the silencing of marginalized persons. The use of such explicit sexual imagery with dysphemistic words such as hymen, places Angelou's poetry within the canons of resistance poetry, which, as argued by Harlow, is effective in voicing resistance to oppression and domination. She postulates that resistance poetry rarely conforms to literary or poetic conventions, especially on linguistic correctness and use of taboo language. It therefore employs vulgar language such that "the very bareness of the language is part of the offensive, [and] represents a critical dimension of the poems' attack on certain forms of cultural imperialism" (50). Maya avoids euphemistic references in her use of sexual

imagery as an offensive assault to spur resistance to cultural beliefs that place masculinity as the sovereign controller of sexuality.

3.5.2 Temporal Images

In the poem *Passing Time* (67), the poet uses temporal images to present knowledge on the complimentary roles played by men of all races in harmonious living. Through this knowledge, she trashes the stereotype of Whiteness as being superior to Blackness. By contrasting the two images Angelou attempts to portray in the poem that just like dawn and dusk, each race is able to exercise a certain form of power just as the power of dawn compliments that of dusk. Angelou therefore, through this knowledge, advocates for the resistance of discriminative practices that encourage unequal power relations and urges for a peaceful co-existence among fair- skinned and dark-skinned persons:

Your skin like dawn
Mine like dusk

One paints the beginning
Of a certain end.

The other, the end of a
sure beginning

(Maya, 67).

In this couplet, the last two words in each line describe the complementary roles played by two different temporal images in the natural world. However

inherent in the imagery is the manifestation of power and overt resistance, attained by describing dawn (Whiteness) as the "beginning of a certain end" and dusk (Blackness) as the "end of a sure beginning". The description of complementary roles played by both races in this poem is portrayed as resistance against knowledge produced by discourses of race that elevate one race and present it as superior to other races.

In *A Plagued Journey* (198), the speaker uses temporal images to describe an 'invasion' by sunrise and his reaction to it:

> It is at my chamber, entering
> the keyhole, pushing
> through the padding of the door
> I cannot scream. A bone
> of fear clogs my throat
> it is upon me. It is
> sunrise with Hope
> its arrogant rider
>
> (Maya, 198).

The speaker is forced to join with sunrise and hope, the implication here is that hope is a form of power that allows certain actions that force one into an engagement with the world. Through interpolation we can deduce that without such activism, there is no hope, and when one loses hope, marginality, described in the poem as darkness is bound to be experienced.

3.5.3 Mixed Metaphors

Karen Sullivan observes that mixed metaphors involve incongruous comparison of two elements in a way that conflicts what we know about them in the real world (n.p). Maya in her poetry employs mixed metaphors to blur experiences under focus in order to foreground issues of racial, class and gender-based marginalization. One example of mixed metaphors in Angelou's poetry is the way the metaphor of death is used. In real life, death signifies an end to all things. However, in her poetry, Angelou uses the image of death as metaphor through which transcendence is achieved. In the poem *When Great Trees Fall* (266) death is employed as a metaphor of transcendental power, such that the ability of individuals to achieve great things beyond their existence is manifested. To Angelou, the death of a great soul is therefore not the end of life, but the beginning of new opportunities for manifestation of power:

When great trees fall,
Rocks on distant lands shudder
Lions hanker down
In tall grasses
And even elephants
Lumber after safety

(Maya, 266).

The above stanza begins with a description of the emotional turmoil that accompanies death. However, within the same stanza, Angelou shows that the death of an individual whose life has had a positive impact in the society is loaded with transcendence as a form of power. To Angelou, this power continues to inspire resistance in the living. Her poetry of resistance therefore, draws inspiration from poets such as Langston Hughes and celebrates Black activists such as Martin Luther, such that as the poem ends: “They existed. They existed/ We can be. Be and be/ better. For they existed” (266).

This metaphor of death as a form of transcendental power is also present in the poem *Willie* (150) through the voice of the persona, who though marginalized for his physical disability, resist marginalization and proclaims:

> I may cry and I will die
> But my spirit is the soul of every spring
> Watch for me and you will see
> That I’m present in the songs that children sing
>
> (Maya, 150).

To Willie, death does not signify an end, but a form of transcendental power, such that, even after death, his lived experiences translate into posthumous expressions of resistance to the way society treated him when he was alive.

3.6 Irony

As a rhetorical tool, irony enables the creation of multiple meanings in a text and has been described as "rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition" (Linda Hutcheon:12). Hutcheon further posits that when used as a

strategy for resistance, the power of irony lies in its "ability to subvert from within, to speak the language of the dominant order and at the same time suggest another meaning and another evaluation" (16). Hence, irony as tool for power and resistance facilitates simultaneous deconstruction of hegemonic discourse and construction of another one that resists it within the same text.

In the poem *Savior* (250), the speaker addresses the saviour, a title associated with Christianity. In the first stanza, paradox is used in the description of savior's priests as being petulant and comparable to greedy centurions. The speaker lists hindrances of her experiencing the saviour's love, which include priests, greedy centurions and one million incensed gestures. The word incensed here is used ambiguously. Angelika Braun and Astrid Schmiel opine that irony may be realized where "there are two interpretations of identical wording which are mutually incompatible" (112). One interpretation of 'incensed gestures' could be gestures that have been camouflaged with perfume (another meaning for incense) so as to hoodwink the faithful. Using this interpretation allows us to read them as disguised oppressive gestures that appear good but are in fact repressive to the faithful. This is a manifestation of knowledge on religious hypocrisy that aims to oppress those that seek solace from religion. Through this ambiguity, the knowledge on the double-faced conduct of religious rulers is presented as a form of veiled warning to their subjects to be wary of covert oppression from their expected saviours.

In the second stanza, it is ironical that the agape sacrifice which was supposed to liberate man, amounts to nothing and is reduced to coloured glass (a

metaphor for church buildings that stems from the use of stained glass in the building of cathedrals). The third stanza recognizes the miracles of the saviour, but laments that the ordained priests serving in the church today have become stumbling blocks to the realization of such miracles:

> Your footprints yet
> mark the crest of
> billowing seas but
> your joy
> fades upon the tablets
> of ordained prophets
> (Maya 250).

The last stanza consists of ironical depictions of present-day Christianity that is based on false ideals, showing manifest resistance against pretentious religiosity.

In *Miss Scarlet, Mr Rhett and Other Latter-Day Saints* (32), Maya utilizes irony to bring out religious hypocrisy. The title of the poem is ironical as the names Scarlett and Rhett alludes to two persons of unbecoming character in a nineteenth Century novel, *Gone with the Wind.* Giving the titles 'miss' and 'saint' to Scarlet is ironical as from the plot of the novel, she is a greedy, sexually depraved woman who engages in multiple love affairs, and is married to three different men throughout her life, her last marriage being to Rhett. In the novel, Scarlett and Rhett are both wealthy landowners with slaves of their own. Rhett, a cruel man who sometimes sexually molests one of his female slaves, whom he derogatively calls

mammy, is included among saints in the title of the poem. By equating persons of such character to saints, Angelou is actually satirising the "latter-day" saints and portraying knowledge that the conduct of today's so-called saints is not different from that of the Scarletts and Rhetts (sinners) of the yester world. Just like the cruel land owners, it is also ironical that the priests take advantage of the landless and poor in the plantations instead of offering them hope:

Animated by the human sacrifice
(Golgotha in the blackface)
Priests glow purely White on the
bas-relief of a plantation shrine
(Maya, 32).

The human sacrifice referred to in the above are the deaths of numerous slaves whose lives were prematurely ended due to hardships in the plantation farms. The contrasting image of the black human sacrifice and the pure white glow is a manifestation of the unequal power relations between the blacks and the priests as their expected deliverers, who instead:

Smear brushes in
blood/gall
to etch frescoes on your
ceilinged tomb
(Maya, 32).

Angelou further engages irony as a discourse of subversion:

(O Sing)

You are gone but not forgotten

Hail, Scarlett. Requiescat in pace

(O Sing)

King Kotton

(Maya, 32).

The irony in this stanza lies in the fact that Scarlett, a sinner by Christian moral standards, is offered prayers to rest in eternal peace, in the exact Latin terms used to celebrate the deaths of priests and saints. The two, Scarlet and Rhett, are also satirized as being king and queen, seen in the use of the phrase 'Hail Scarlett' and 'King Kotton'. This ironical description is a manifestation of resistance against historical cruelty meted by the wealthy landowners in the cotton plantations. Through this irony, Angelou resists class-based oppression, capitalism and slavery. At the end of the poem, she satirically proclaims, "(O sing/ Hallelujah pure Scarlett/ Blessed Rhett, the Martyr" (32). Angelou's proclamation of Scarlett as pure, in the face of her sexual scandals and the conferment of martyrdom on Rhett irrespective of his cruelty as a slave owner is ironical. The ironical descriptions that mock Scarlett and Rhett and the subsequent revelation of their exploitation of the ordinary folk can be read as a subversive strategy of rhetoric that resists economic exploitation.

3.7 Satire

In the poem *When I think about Myself* (29), the persona satirises her life as a domestic worker, describing it as "one great big joke". She presents her life as completely opposite of what it should ideally be, "A dance that's walked /A song that's spoke" (29). The persona resorts to laughing at the joke that is her life. The first two lines, she says that she almost laughs herself to death. In real life, death is often viewed as the ultimate other, wielding all power, sitting in opposition to life, and at the periphery of what is knowable. The expression of laughing herself to death in this poem is therefore indicative of the persona using laughter and death to satirise the life that she lives, indicating that death would be better. In the second stanza, the persona, who is over sixty years old, calls a young girl 'ma'am', but immediately follows it with a rejoinder that she does this for working's sake. Therefore, because she is "too proud to bend" but "too poor to break", she resorts to laughter, which has been described as an expression of power by the socially repressed. The act of refusing to bend in this poem signals resistance, which the speaker concedes is impeded by her poverty. Satire, through laughter, then becomes a way to confront her poverty and helplessness which have hindered her resistance to bending. Sigmund Freud opines that laughter, when used this way, it is not a resigned form of laughter, but a rebellion, in that it "signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also the pleasure principle, which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstance" (163). The persona's laughter here can be read as an exercise of power, a contemptuous way of satirising not only the

circumstances she finds herself in, but also the 'folks' she works for, who take her humility as a sign of weakness.

Discussing the revolutionary power of women's laughter Jo Anna Isaak argues that for women who face oppression because of class and racial differences, satire and laughter act as a "Metaphor for transformation, for thinking about cultural, social and political change" (5). She argues that laughter provides an analytic frame from which the marginalized not only examine power relations in the society but also by satirizing their oppressors, re-imagine these relationships, reversing power roles. By virtue of her struggles with repressive power, the persona's laughter therefore becomes an exercise of power, where the oppressed ridicule themselves to demonstrate their own subjugation.

The third stanza portrays a different form of laughter as she laughs at her own folks and the tales they tell. Here, looking at the lives that her folks live, who "grow the fruit, but eat the rind". Again, her laughter is a ridicule of capitalism and its oppression on her people, she laughs until she begins to cry. Her laughter can be read within the knowledge/power nexus as both a creation of awareness to her people about their oppression and an expression of power by satirising the oppressors.

In *Song for the Old Ones* (108), the persona celebrates the resilience of slaves in the African American society and their use of laughter as a form of power to overcome slavery:

They've laughed to shield their crying

Then shuffled through their dreams

And stepped n fetched a country

To wrote the blues with screams

(Maya, 108).

In the above stanza, laughter gives the slaves the power to look beyond their suffering, overcome self-pity (crying), focus on their dreams and work towards self-actualization. This action can be analysed as an exercise of power in line with Jacqueline Bussie's assertion that laughter in the face of trauma serves the purpose of interrupting oppressive and dominant structures. She notes that laughter produces a transformative effect that helps destabilise the status quo in regimes of oppression. At the end of the poem, therefore, the persona acknowledges that through laughter, the race is kept alive.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter focussed on ways in which language is used to portray knowledge, power and resistance in Maya's poetry. Through the poems analysed, the study established that Maya employs various linguistic features such as heteroglossia, polyphony and contrastive opposition to foreground the intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in her poetry. The use of imagery was also analysed and it was found that Angelou employs sexual imagery and metaphors to portray these motifs. Finally, the chapter analysed the use of irony and satire as strategies of subversive rhetoric in her poetry. The next chapter analyses Maya's worldview of a just society.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAYA'S WORLDVIEW OF A JUST SOCIETY

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to analyse how intersections of knowledge, power and resistance foreground Maya's worldview of a just society. In order to conduct this analysis, this study draws on the intersectionality theory that highlights how different stratifying discourses such as those of gender, race, and class intersect to act as "major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time" (Collins and Bilge:4). Collins and Bilge argue that an intersectional framework enables the analysis of ways in which the interconnecting aspects bring about social justice. This core idea of social justice in intersectionality is therefore used in this chapter to analyse how Angelou, in her envisioning of a just society and explores attributes that she considers central to the realization of social justice. To do this, the chapter analyses the following poems: *Artful Pose, Awakening in New York, On the Pulse of the Morning, These Yet to be United States, America, Take Time Out Martial Choreograph, Men* and *Our Grandmothers.*

4.2 Knowledge-Power nexus as a Precursor to Empowerment

As discussed in chapter one, the knowledge enables the exercise of power and is, itself shaped by power relations. The poem, *Men*, (132) reveals how the intersection of knowledge and power enables the persona, a young girl aged fifteen and full of teenage desire, to resist what she feels is unfair treatment. In the first stanza, the Persona is awed by men as she watches them from her window. In the

first stanza, the young girl uses the first pronoun *I* to place herself at the centre of admiration of men, expressing joy at the fact that they notice her and shower her with attention.

In the second stanza, she narrates how her experiences at the hands of men. In expressing this universality, her narration at this point, shifts to the second person pronoun, *you*. This effectively detaches her from the description of her delicateness at the hands of the men, presenting it as a universal occurrence in all heterogenous love affairs. The detachment is a form of awareness (knowledge) on the unequal power relations that pervade romantic relationships between men and women is created. She cautions the reader that at first, men hold *you*: "In the palms of their hands, gentle, as if you /Were the last raw egg in the world" (132). In these three lines, it is evident that this experience has informed her knowledge on certain ways that women are treated by men. The gentle touch is quickly replaced with depictions of hurt and betrayal. She gives a detailed account of how a gentle gesture of affection offered by the man progresses from a hug, to a squeeze and finally to a strangling that leaves her breathless and shattered.

In this poem, negotiations of power between the persona and men in private spaces result in the production of knowledge that enables a reconstruction of gender relations. Her realization of her defencelessness becomes the point of intersection between knowledge and power. The power struggles between her and these men result in the production of new knowledge, constructed by the experience of abuse she goes through in the hands of men. David Sibley argues that the production of new knowledge threatens established knowledge and has the power to destabilize

or overrun existing social hierarchies (116), and thereafter empowers the marginalized. In view of this, as a result of the new knowledge that she acquires, the girl empowers her to reconfigure her place and greatly impacts on the trajectory of her future relations with the opposite gender, such that:

> When the window draws full upon
> Your mind. There just beyond
> The sway of curtains, men walk.
> Knowing something
> Going someplace.
> But this time you will simply
> Stand and watch.
>
> (Maya, 133)

In this final stanza, armed with new knowledge that has been shaped by her previous experiences with men, she becomes "the subject who knows" (Foucault 1996: 27) and refuses to allow herself to naively fall into the hands of false illusions of love. In this poem, Maya portrays an encounter of the knowledge/power transformation by depicting the empowered and enlightened young girl as a product of the intersections of the knowledge/power systems of her society. It is at the intersection of the knowledge/ power that the young girl is empowered as she makes decisions on her future reactions to the men's advances.

Foucault elaborates how disciplinary power is exercised on bodies, arguing that the imposition of certain norms on bodies results in othering of bodies

that do not conform to these specified norms. For disciplinary power, the established system of knowledge aspires to know the body as an object to be analysed in relation to those that adhere to the set norms. Subsequently, deviations from norms are defined as abnormal, creating the notion that non-conformity and difference translate to inferiority and otherness (1991: 177–184). One of the ways in which this disciplinary power can be resisted is by reiterating and rearticulating dominant discourses to enable the creation of a reverse discourse (Butler 1995: 236). As is demonstrated in the analysis of the poem, *Phenomenal Woman*, the poet engages in the creation of reverse discourses to resist disciplinary power that has for a long time been exercised on the black female body.

The first stanza of *Phenomenal Woman* begins with an assertion that perimeters of beauty such as cuteness and fashion model size specifications cannot be used to measure the beauty of the black woman. “Pretty women wonder where my secret lies / I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size” (130). These two lines also present the knowledge that the persona is aware of her non conformity to the socially normalized canons of beauty. The re-articulation of repressive discourses that define beauty serves as a ground for the creation of reverse discourse which is an exercise of power aimed at destabilizing institutional control of knowledge about the disciplined female black body. Redefining parameters of beauty to normalize the black female body manifests an intersection of the knowledge/power nexus, where the exercise of power shapes oppositional knowledge that is produced as a resistance to disciplinary power. The production of this knowledge empowers the black female, hence re situating beauty “In the

span of my hips /In the stride of my step/ The curl of my lips" (130). In another poem *Seven Women's Blessed Assurance* (261), the persona takes pride in her big body that would otherwise be considered as obese, unhealthy and ugly within contemporary American standards of beauty:

> I'm fat as butter
> And sweet as cake
> Men start to tremble
> Each time I shake
>
> (Maya, 261).

Maya engages the intersection of knowledge and power to reposition beauty on the width of the hips, the lips, the eyes, the arched back and the breasts. It is important to note that each of these parts of the black female body mentioned in the poem has historically been delineated as imperfect in White hegemonic culture. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders notes that the Black female body in American culture always has had some imperfection: kinky hair, hips too wide, a back that was overburdened through years of slavery, evil eyes, or breasts so ugly and gigantic, that it was rumoured that some slave women carrying babies on their backs "could suckle over their shoulder" (37). Wallace-Sanders further argues that black women can only exercise power over this cultural hegemony by rewriting the canons of beauty in their own terms (3). Hence in these two poems, parts of the black female body that have historically borne the brunt of disciplinary power are celebrated as the new paradigms of aesthetics. Hence, the reverse discourse rides on the power of the

'dominant discourse' and resistance is achieved as the effect of power and as a part of power itself (Butler 1995: 237). Through its redefinition of beauty achieved using the same parameters that have been culturally used to trash African beauty, *Phenomenal Woman* creates a reverse discourse as an exercise of power, whereby using the words "I am a woman. Phenomenally", it reaffirms the womanhood of the black female. The act of re articulating the canons of beauty based on one's own standard empowers the female narrator in *Phenomenal Woman* and enables her exercise agency.

4.3 Equity and Inclusivity for Social Justice

Maya's poetry advocates for tolerance in a multi-cultural America and therefore portrays the concept of inclusivity as a form implied knowledge. In her inauguration poem, *On the Pulse of Morning* (270), she views this implied knowledge as the ultimate transformative tool that must be obtained from history, interactions with other humans, from situations one finds themselves in, and from nature itself. *On the Pulse of Morning* is a free verse poem that opens with the images of "A Rock, A River, A Tree" (270) playing host to other species. Having survived extinction, a tree a rock and a river all speak to the reader, assuming consciousness and agency. Her personification of the tree, the rock and the river and thereafter their portrayal as sources of truth and knowledge casts them as teachers and wellsprings of knowledge.

In the poem, the attribute of the three personae hosting other species, being tolerant to each other and speaking with one voice ensures their survival and is

contrasted with the plight of the selfish dinosaurs and mastodons whose evidence of existence is referred to as a sojourn that leaves dried tokens on the planet floor. Zofia Burr describes the poem as one that encourages the realization that America and the world at large is one of cultural diversity, and that co-existence can only be attained through tolerance and inclusivity. She argues that in the voices of the tree, rock and river can be read as voices of "the land" (126) speaking back to all its inhabitants to embrace each other unconditionally.

The rock's voice views intolerance as lack of knowledge (ignorance), wondering how human beings, who are endowed with Knowledge that range higher than all others on the intellectual scale do not possess knowledge on the dangers of intolerance:

> You, created only a little lower than
> The angels, have crouched too long in
> The bruising darkness
> Have lain too long
> Facedown in ignorance,
> Your mouths spilling words
> Armed for slaughter.
>
> (Maya, 270)

The rock chastises humanity for lack of knowledge that causes them to live in animosity with each other. The contrast between the description of man as only a little lower than angels (who are imagined to be all knowing beings, flying in dazzling light), and the reality that despite their intellectual likeness to angels,

humans crouch face down in bruising darkness, highlights the ignorance of human beings. Also, the concept of angels, alluded to be bearers of good news is employed to question man's claim to being second to angelic nature, but their mouths spill words of slaughter. Lack of inclusivity in society is equated with lack of knowledge, hence, inclusivity becomes an implied form of knowledge that enlightens and enables an exercise of power.

The tree recognizes America's situation as a rainbow nation, thereby, urging for cultural inclusivity:

> You, the Turk, the Arab, the Scott
> The Italian, the Hungarian, the Pole,
> You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought
> Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare
> Praying for a dream.
>
> (Maya, 270)

By placing geographically distant communities of people such as Hungarians, Arabs, Italians and Nigerians side by side in the above stanza, Maya calls attention to the fact that interactions of nationalities, cultures and languages have taken place in New York throughout history. By doing this, she is calling for the demolishing of inter-racial, cultural, and class boundaries within America, and urging for recognition of the diversity of immigrant communities that make up the USA. The poem is also conscious of the various ways in which various people became citizens of America in the above stanza; that while some migrated willingly in pursuit of

their dream, others were victims of historical injustices. It therefore recognises that inclusivity cannot be attained when people continue to seek revenge for historical injustices and urges for a courageous resolution to historical, racial and class-based systems of oppressions.

The poem underscores the importance of cultural and religious tolerance as precursors to inclusivity, urging "The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek/The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh" (270) to be tolerant to each other's beliefs. In these lines, through unexpected images, such as those of the Christians and the Muslim living harmoniously, rather than engaging in violent religious wars, the poem urges a resistance to existing knowledges that present binary divisions between East and West that have permeated America's politics. In the poem, Angelou also urges for gender inclusivity and condemns discrimination based on one's sexuality. Hence the ninth stanza urges "The Gay, The Straight and the preacher" to reconcile their differences and embrace each person's diversity. Whereas the poem begins with a manifestation of the Tree, Rock and River's superior knowledge, established by virtue of their omniscience, it ends with the same trinity bestowing knowledge on mankind; that a new morning dawns only if they embrace inclusivity.

In the poem *Human Family* (224) inclusivity is urged by engaging and appreciating individual differences among all people. The poem emphasizes on the uniqueness of every individual in the universe, but reiterates that despite our differences, "we are more alike than unalike". The speaker urges us to accommodate each other's differences, such as those based on character, philosophical views and

skin colour. The speaker highlights the universality of concepts such as love, laughter and death, acknowledging the diverse ways in which various cultures express these emotions:

We love and lose in China
we weep on England's moon
and laugh and moan in Guinea
and thrive on Spanish shore

(Maya, 224)

The speaker admits that, despite the different ways that they are expressed in various cultures, these emotions are universal to all human beings:

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type
but we are more alike my friends
than we are unalike.

(Maya, 224)

In *These yet to be United States* (221) Maya lauds the military and economic supremacy of America, but laments the lack equity in the distribution of economic gains within her borders. The title of the poem presents knowledge of the fragmental state of the "united states" brought about by the inequitable distribution of resources among citizens of America. She chastises the leadership of America,

who control the world “from Rome to Timbuktu”, yet they cannot hear the cries of American children:

You dwell in whitened castles
With deep poisoned moats
And cannot hear the curses
Which fill your children’s throats.

(Maya, 221)

The poem *America* (85) compares America’s promise of equality among all its citizens to gold that has never been mined. The poem shows that the America dream that places it as the land of equal opportunities to all is a mirage, unattainable because its resources are shared selectively, leaving out those in dire need:

Her crops of abundance
The fruit and the grain
Have not fed the hungry
Nor eased that pain.

(Maya, 85)

In this stanza, the use of words *abundance* and *pain* show the contrast between overflowing resources available and the lack of equity in opportunities and distribution. Maya is especially concerned with the south, and urges for intervention through government policies that ensure equity is achieved in distribution of resources and opportunities.

Social responsibility encompasses accountability over one's actions and the desire to align their actions to the well-being of other members of society as a whole. In *Take Time Out* (74) the speaker urges for tolerance and understanding of persons such as soldiers, prostitutes and drug users. The speaker is against blanket condemnation of such individuals with no consideration of the circumstances that force them to act the way they do. Intolerance and unfair judgement are described as blindness and those that lack social responsibility as persons afflicted by a form of blindness.

The poem *Martial Choreograph* (203) speaks to a young sailor on the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions. In the poem, Angelou laments the destruction caused by war:

> You will be surprised that
> Trees grunt when torn from
> Their root sockets to fandango into dust
> And exploding bombs force a lively Lindy
> On grasses and frail bodies
>
> (Maya, 203).

In the above stanza, Maya foregrounds effects of wars, not only on human beings, but on nature itself. This poem speaks to both the governments and individuals on the futility of war. She therefore urges for social responsibility by the individual, in ensuring that they are not perpetrators of social evils and crimes of war.

4.4 Voice and Agency as strategies for Power and Resistance

The notion of representation through voice is reflected in Maya's poetry in two ways. One is that she uses poetry as tool of resistance, and, two, as a form of articulatory power through which the marginalized engage in self-representation and negotiation of identity. In *Artful Pose* (90), she resists what she considers vain poetry that only writes: "of falling leaves, melting/ snows, of birds/ in their delights" (90). To this effect, she wishes to use her poetry (pen) as a voice that speaks against the pretentious 'silence' in society, and urgently highlight the plight of those swindled by false love and those affected by the evils of hatred in her society:

My pencil halts
and will not go
along that quietly
I need to write
of false lovers
and hate
and hateful wrath
quickly

(Maya, 90)

Thus, Maya roots for artistic voices that reveal real life situations and represent the plight of the marginalized. Maya sees poetry as the society's alarm that warns her society of evils such as wars. By articulating societal issues, poetry functions as emancipatory 'voices': that is, a symbols of empowerment in society.

The use of voice as a strategy is centred on the notion that meaning is realized through a multiplicity of voices whose utterances are situated within past, present and future. In the poem *Our Grandmothers* (253) Maya uses the grandmother's voice to reconstruct the history of slavery and marginalization. The grandmother recounts events during slavery and relates them to her present predicament. The first stanza begins with the factual description of the grandmother living in animal like conditions where she is besieged by "hounds" and "hunters". The second stanza utilizes internal monologue to state her resolve as she states "I shall not, I shall not be moved" (253). In the third stanza, the intersection between agentic voice and one's power are deployed as a resistance strategy when the grandmother asks her children to speak out and engage in collective resistance to oppression, "Unless you match my heart and words/ saying with me/ I shall not be moved (253). She uses her voice to resist the power of naming exercised over her in the tenth stanza, through names such "Nigger, nigger bitch, heifer/ Mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon (253). Through the strategic use of words such as nigger, bitch, ape and baboon, a powerful image of inferiority is created, whereby, the negative connotations of these names which include non-human, dirty, deficient, and undesirable become intertwined with her identity and complete the 'othering' process. The word mammy for example is a derogative term used to refer to black slaves caring for white children, hence referring to her as mammy and property relegates her to an object to be owned and used. The agentic act of using one's voice as a tool for defiance and self-naming is evident in this poem, which

embraces self-identification and defies the otherness imposed by the oppressor. In doing so, she demands for social justice.

The grandmother's use of her voice to offer her own definition is viewed as a resistance strategy against the power of naming practised by the oppressors to keep their subjects in check. The grandmother's resistance presents us with an intersection between voice and agency, where she voices her refusal to turn up to the oppressor's summons made through demeaning names and takes up agency by denying its power over her. By refusing to turn towards the hail of the oppressor, and using her own voice for self-definition, she rejects the summons of subjectivity and fashions for herself a new agentic position, where she is able to re-assert her right to existence in the world.

In the poem *Our Grandmothers* Maya uses enjambment to portray the power of voice and agency in resistance. For example, she says "my description cannot" she uses the grandmother's voice to emphasize the idea of identity as founded on lived experience and conscious awareness rather than tied to physical appearance, gender or social class. The poem also signals the importance of voice in intersections of knowledge, power and resistance, evidenced in the three lines quoted above. In these lines, through the grandmother's voice, Angelou shifts from demonstrating the power of the voice to subjugate, to emphasizing its role as a resistance tool. It, therefore, becomes an intersection between agency and resistance as it articulates both defiance and affirmation, enacted through voice. Through the use of the capitalized conjunction "But", the speaker voices her resistance and effectively negates her designation as the "other". This on the other hand, enables

her to exercise power by asserting her identity and staking her claim as a rightful inhabitant in of the world, hence advocating for social equality.

In the last two stanzas, the grandmother's voice moves from historical times to the present to portray knowledge on the contemporary plight of the marginalized such as abortion and life issues, gender and class-based discrimination and prostitution. The last stanza is a universal voice of all the marginalized which speaks from "the centre of the world's stage". The grandmother engages the agentic power of voice to resist all forms of unfair representation and deception by categorically stating that:

> However I am perceived and deceived
> However my ignorance and conceits be
> Lay aside your fear that I will be undone
> For I shall not be moved
>
> (Maya, 253).

The grandmother in this poem represents women who have historically taken up agency to speak against social inequalities in society. Maya, therefore, equates the grandmother to other women authors such as "Harriet and Zora, / Mary Bethune and Angela, /Annie to Zenobia" (256). The allusion to Harriet, for example, is in reference to Harriet Stowe whose novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicted the atrocities of slavery, and was important in furthering the early anti-slavery cause in America. In the years before the civil war, Stowe's novel brought public attention to the

horrors of slavery in a way that hadn't been done before. By using her voice to articulate the plight of slaves, Harriet Stowe took up agency and successfully created an awareness that stirred reflection and action from the masses and authorities. In the same token, by taking up agency and speak out against the ills of slavery, the grandmother is in the same league with the great women who have successfully spoken up and greatly impacted on the history of the marginalized in America and the world, such as Harriet, Zora Noel and Mary Bethune.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter interrogated the portrayal of Maya's worldview of a just society. It established that Maya's poetry urges for self-representation of the marginalized. Further, Maya's poetry advocates for inclusivity and equitable distribution of economic resources among all citizens and urges both the government and citizens to embrace social responsibility. Maya's poetry advocates for the actualization of a just society and serves as a cultural medium for knowledge production that espouses the maintenance of social unity and justice in society.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a recap of major findings of this study, highlights key conclusions drawn from the findings and gives recommendations for further research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in the poetry of Maya Angelou. Chapter two (2) examined the manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance in Angelou's poetry in line with the first objective of the study. It analysed the different forms of knowledge, power and resistance manifested in Angelou's poetry and showed how their intersections shape social relations between persons of various social groups. The detailed analyses showed how knowledge production in Maya's poetry enables them exercise power and resist hegemony. The study also found out that erotic power, the power of naming and power of identity as key forms of power that pervade Maya's poetry. The study also found manifestations of various forms of resistance in Angelou's poetry, such as cultural resistance, self-definition as resistance and mimicry.

Focussing on the relationship between language and power, chapter three analysed how Maya uses language creatively to portray knowledge power and resistance. It used Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to analyse aspects of

heteroglossia and polyphony. The study found that Maya employs dialogic overtones and echoes to bring to the fore various social ills in society. It established that Maya also employs metaphors and persuasive imagery to portray the intersections of knowledge power and resistance. The use of irony and satire as subversive strategies were also analysed.

Chapter four (4) of the study analysed how the intersections of knowledge, power and resistance inform Maya's worldview of a just society. It found that Angelou's poetry advocates for the fair representation of all persons in America and for a form of art that is representative of the everyday realities that the ordinary person can relate with. From the study it is evident that Angelou's poetry employs knowledge production as key in the reconciliation between the descendants of the perpetrators of historical injustices such as slavery and the victim's descendants. She sees this as one way to foster national unity and inclusivity, emphasizing on the multicultural inheritance of America. She also sees equity and social justice as ways through which the American dream can be realized for all.

5.3 Conclusions

This study set out to investigate manifestations of knowledge, power and resistance as motifs in the poetry of Maya Angelou showing how they contribute to her worldview of a just society. The study established that Angelou's poetry shows a distinctive manifestation of experiential and oppositional knowledge. In its manifestation of experiential knowledge, Angelou deploys language as the instrument through which personal experiences are transformed into rational knowledge. Written from a background of race, gender and class discriminations,

her poetry engages knowledge production as a form of empowerment for the marginalized.

Knowledge in Maya's poetry is revealed as a shaping force in the exercise of power. This enables resistance as a reaction to power relations that create racial, class and patriarchal hegemony. Her poetry urges the marginalized to look beyond anger and rage and use their voice to articulate their historical injustices. Through her poetry, Maya shows how language can enable marginalized person to harness the liberating power of self-definition to rewrite cultural conventions and re name their own reality. She, therefore, uses poetry to articulate that equity should not be pegged only on the distribution of resources, but should also focus on their access by all, regardless of gender, race social class.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Study

Though this study extensively analysed the intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in Angelou's poetry, it is conscious of the fact that her poetry contains numerous other aspects that can be analysed. It also established from the review of related literature that her poetry has not received as much critical attention as her biographies. Though her autobiographies refer to these poems and events in her autobiographical writings are reflected in her poetry, this study did not dwell on the intertextuality between her autobiographies and her poetry as it was beyond the scope of this study. This study therefore recommends that further research can be conducted in this area.

Maya Angelou was the second poet to perform at the United States of America's presidential inauguration, after Robert Frost. Her inaugural poem *In The*

Pulse of Morning performed for a global audience speaks not only to America, but to the world as a whole. This study therefore recommends a comparative study between her inaugural poem and the other inaugural poems performed in America.

There are other unpublished poems by Maya Angelou that were performed in public gatherings in America but were beyond the scope of this study. These include poems such as the one performed for Michelle Obama on her birthday and are available on YouTube. This study therefore recommends a study of her spoken poetry and a comparison between this poetry and the published poems. Finally, the findings of this study can influence future research on marginalization, inform works of civil rights organizations and help in the development of text books on knowledge production as a tool of empowerment for marginalized persons.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: CLEARANCE LETTER FROM MACHAKOS UNIVERSITY

MACHAKOS UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE DEAN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Telephone:254-(0)735247939, (0)723805929
Email: graduateschool@mksu.ac.ke
Website: www.machakosuniversity.ac.ke

P.O Box 136-90100
Machakos
KENYA

REF. MksU/GS/SS/011/VOL.1

9th September, 2020

The Director,
National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
P.O Box 30623,
NAIROBI

Dear Sir

RE: TERESIA WANJIRU KABERIA (C50-2992-2019)

The above named is a Master's student in the second year of study and has cleared course work. The University has cleared her to conduct a research entitled: "**Investigating intersections of knowledge, power and resistance in the poetry of Maya Angelou**"

Kindly assist her with a Research Permit in order to undertake the research.

Thank you

DR. RICHARD PETER, PhD
DEAN GRADUATE SCHOOL
KRP/anm

APPENDIX II: NACOSTI PERMIT

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: 586002

Date of Issue: 22/September/2020

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. Teresia Wanjiru Kaberia of Machakos University, has been licensed to conduct research in Meru on the topic: Investigating Intersections of Knowledge, Power and Resistance in the Poetry of Maya Angelou for the period ending : 22/September/2021.

License No: NACOSTI/P/20/6805

586002

Applicant Identification Number

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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