

## **Reclaiming Power: Hybridity, Mimicry, and Defiance in "Still I Rise": A Postcolonial Perspective**

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**Abstract.** This research studies the link between identity, resistance, and cultural conciliation in Maya Angelou's renowned poem "Still I Rise." Drawing from Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical agenda, mainly his concepts of hybridity and mimicry, the current study scrutinizes how Angelou's poem works as a principal assertion of resilience against colonialism and overbearing constructions. By doing a detailed inspection of the poem, the article argues the ways in which Angelou exercises an impertinent voice that goes beyond the binaries of oppressor and oppressed, forming a space for a hybrid identity that celebrates both African legacy and the present self-assertion. The exploration discusses the mechanisms of mimicry as a system for resistance, where the speaker's self-possessed restoration of power dislocates conformist narratives of dominance. By affirming her right to rise notwithstanding historical and systemic command, Angelou displays the convolutions of postcolonial identity, signifying how insubordination can arise from the very structures that wish to downgrade. Furthermore, this research places "Still I Rise" in the grander outline of postcolonial discourse, stressing the poem's importance in the modern arguments of race, gender, and empowerment. In conclusion, this exploration discloses that Angelou's verse is not only a personal legalization but a collective bonding call for downgraded voices. It features the inference of hybridity and mimicry as tools for reclaiming intervention and identity in a world affected by colonial histories.

**Key words:** Defiance, Hybridity, Mimicry, Reclaiming Agency, Resistance.

### **1. Introduction**

In present-day literature, there are few voices as effective as that of Maya Angelou. Her poem "Still I Rise," a base of African-American literature, represents a spectator of resistance, power, and the unbeatable personality of those overlooked by history. Through its rhythmic poetries and evocative descriptions, the poem portrays the brawl against suppression whereas promptly glorifying the power of identity and self-respect. In this agenda, the usage of postcolonial theory, mostly the concepts of hybridity and mimicry uttered by Homi K. Bhabha, offers a worthy angle through which to review Angelou's work. This research means to inspect the intricate connection amid these hypothetical theories and the themes ingrained in Angelou's poetry.

Hybridity, as Bhabha (2012) states, indicates the incorporation and reconfiguration of cultural features that appear from colonial encounters, leading to novel arrangements of identity that fight unsophisticated classifications (p. 12). Mimicry, on the other hand, serves as a method of resistance, where the colonized person clasps elements of the colonizer's culture while simultaneously weakening and distorting it, hence enlightening the essential discrepancies within colonial authority (Bhabha, 2012, p. 18).

Angelou's "Still I Rise" symbolizes these thoughts, as it rebounds the poet's own navigation through the historical and cultural legacies of racism, sexism, and subjugation. The poem's periodic

authorizations of resilience and self-assertion can be perceived as acts of insolence against the forces that aim to express and detain her identity. By benefitting from Bhabha's theory, this study will debate how Angelou's practice of language, imagery, and rhythm forms a hybrid space that confronts overriding narratives and reclaims power for the marginalized.

Moreover, this inspection is not only a theoretical application; it is also an essential exploration of the ways literature can serve as an instrument for communal variations. In an age where debates of race, identity, and power associations are ever-relevant, Angelou's poetry agrees with the modern clashes for honor and fairness. By inspecting "Still I Rise" through the viewpoint of postcolonial theory, this study is going to describe the poem's determined inference as a basis of motivation and endorsement for human beings dealing with their own identities in a multilayered and often dictatorial world.

## **2. Statement of the Study**

This study is going to examine the intricate correlation among identity, resistance, and empowerment in Angelou's famous poem "Still I Rise" via the theoretical outline offered by Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry. By analyzing how Angelou copes with the complexities of race, gender, and historical subjugation, this inspection seeks to display the ways in which her work serves as a main declaration of self and a reclamation of agency in the face of colonial legacies.

The current paper submits that Angelou's verse symbolizes the techniques of hybridity and mimicry as tools of insubordination, and also permits the disregarded voices to subvert predominant narratives and announce their identities. Through a thorough examination of the poem, this paper will investigate how Angelou employs poetic language and imageries with the intention of defying systemic domination, reclaiming power, and expressing a robust identity that goes beyond the binaries enforced by colonialism.

Eventually, this study is going to lead to the larger field of postcolonial literature by validating how Angelou's poetry not only mirrors the brawls of her time but also agrees with contemporary matters of identity and resistance. By placing "Still I Rise" within Bhabha's theoretical context, the research wishes to encourage a profounder understanding of the importance of literature in the continuing pursuit of empowerment, cultural reclamation, and societal impartiality.

## **3. Significance of the Study**

The present study is substantially significant in a couple of fields, such as literary criticism, postcolonial studies, and cultural theory. By scrutinizing "Still I Rise" through the standpoint of Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry, this article results in a profounder understanding of how downgraded voices reclaim power and declare identity in the face of colonial legacies. In fact, this paper establishes how Angelou's poem characterizes the impediments of identity development in a postcolonial context. By using Bhabha's theories, the investigation underscores the collaboration amid cultural identity and resistance, underlining that postcolonial literature is not only a duplication of colonial subjugation but also a spot of endorsement and modification.

Furthermore, the integration of Bhabha's theoretical structure with Angelou's poetic expression offers a detailed investigation that links literary studies and cultural theory. This interdisciplinary approach brings about a more all-encompassing contemplation of such themes as resilience, insolence, and the reclamation of power. The current study also emphasizes the importance of resistance as a process of emancipation. By referring to the themes of hybridity and mimicry in "Still I Rise," it displays how Angelou's verse functions as a dominant assertion of identity against historical and systemic suppression. This insight can arouse the existing readers and writers to handle their own identities and narratives in a way that challenges principal cultural models. In conclusion, by exploring how Angelou deals with the sophistications of race, gender, and history, the study describes the practice of cultural reclamation, and displays how overlooked people can defy colonial narratives and confirm their identities via groundbreaking manifestation.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1. On the Theory

*Homi K. Bhabha* (2006) by Huddart is observed as a critical examination of the work and philosophies of Homi K. Bhabha, an imperative Indian-English investigator recognized for his contributions to postcolonial studies. Huddart's book inspects Bhabha's crucial concepts, like hybridity, mimicry, and the third space, which address the multi-layered borders amid cultures and identities in a postcolonial agenda. The book also studies Bhabha's impact on literary theory, cultural studies, and the existing arguments around identity, power, and colonialism. It correspondingly covers discussions on Bhabha's illustrious works, such as *The Location of Culture*, and their prominence for understanding cultural exchange and difference. By and large, the book works as both an outline of Bhabha's thought and an inspection of its inference in the fields of literature and cultural studies (pp. 6-16).

*The Location of Culture* (2012) by Bhabha is one of the most important texts of postcolonialism. According to what is argued in this book, colonization was not only a financial, military, or political occurrence, but one that primarily affected culture and identity universally. This is why this research benefits from Bhabha's theories. In fact, the issue of identity is one of the most substantial subjects in the poem which is discussed here. Bhabha has been mostly obsessed with such problems as identity, social agency, and national association. He has also presented an effective theory of cultural hybridity. He has used notions such as mimicry and hybridity to say that cultural production is always most productive where it is most indecisive (pp. 3-13).

"Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review" (2022) by Bhandari starts by the explanation of Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space," which alludes to a metaphorical space where different cultures interrelate and transfer their identities. This space allows for hybrid identities to arise, defying binary concepts of culture and identity (pp. 171-178).

The discussion probes how Bhabha's theory is linked to contemporary debates of cultural identity, predominantly in a globalized world where migration, diaspora, and multiculturalism are widespread. The article then examines how individuals deal with their identities in this "Third Space." Bhandari also offers a critical review of Bhabha's theory, evaluating its relevance and use in today's context, which encompasses discussing the powers and restrictions of the theory, in addition to the way in which it has been received in academic and cultural discourse (pp. 179-181).

### 4.2. On the Poetry

Palupi (2014) reviews the distinctive linguistic and thematic features present in Angelou's poetry that mirror African-American culture, identity, and experience. The article examines how Angelou's exercise of language, rhythm, and sound echoes African-American oral conventions, including elements of jazz, blues, and spirituals. It also investigates how these sounds result in the expressive intricacy and cultural validity of her verses (p. 2).

Each poem, "Alone," "Still I Rise," "Caged Bird," and "Equality" debates issues of suppression, resilience, and the hunt for freedom. The article correspondingly debates how Angelou articulates the African-American experience of demotion and the power found in community and self-assertion. Additionally, the scrutiny analyzes the imageries and signs applied in these poems, inspecting how they prompt the historical and shared conditions of African-American life. For instance, "Caged Bird" can be observed as an important metaphor for the limitations obligatory by racism and discrimination (pp. 3-4).

Palupi has also concentrated on how Angelou's poetic voice serves as an instrument for uttering African-American identity. The article consequently stresses the ways in which Angelou's work challenges stereotypes and declares the confidence and impediment of black experiences. Similarly, the musicality of her language is explored as a means of cultivating the poems' messages. The debate also comprises links with other works in African-American literature, putting Angelou in a bigger literary context that states analogous themes of race, identity, and liberation (p. 5).

In another study, Igwedibia and coworkers (2019) examine "Still I Rise" in light of relevance theory, a sketch in pragmatics and cognitive science that focuses on how human beings take to mean communicative messages based on their exploration of relevance in context. The article starts with an explanation of relevance theory, which proposes that human communication is impacted by the yearning to make the most of the relevance of information while diminishing cognitive effort (p. 65).

The article then investigates how the context, including historical, cultural, and personal, impacts the clarification of "Still I Rise" by scrutinizing how readers with diverse experiences stem meaning from the poem based on their own experiences and communal conditions. It is revealed that "Still I Rise" is an effective declaration of resilience in the face of subjugation. The article examines how the poem's themes agree with the principles of relevance theory, predominantly in how Angelou transfers her insolence against racial and gender-based discrimination (p. 67).

The exploration stresses the informative approaches employed by readers as they engage with the poem, and debates how Angelou's practice of repetition, imagery, and metaphor generates layers of meaning that invite the readers to determine profounder expressive and intellectual replies. The article then examines the cognitive procedures included in understanding the poem by realizing how readers cope with the interface between the literal and figurative language of the poem, looking for relevance in Angelou's assertions of power and self-confidence (pp. 68-69).

Furthermore, Fitra and coworkers (2022) have inspected the usage of such semantic techniques as metaphors, similes, imagery, and symbolism in Angelou's verses "On the Pulse of Morning" and "Still I Rise." The article argues how these techniques bring about the general significance of the poems and the moral ideologies they carry. It starts with an explanation of what semantic figures are and their inference in poetry by delineating how these figures extend the expressive and intellectual engagement of readers with the text (pp. 77-80).

This research initially delivers an inclusive consideration of the semantic figures employed in "On the Pulse of Morning." This poem, delivered at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993, is about subjects of optimism, harmony, and the shared journey of the American people. The article then draws associations amid the two poems, scrutinizing how both use semantic figures to address questions of race, identity, and shared veracity. It maintains how Angelou's poetic approaches produce constancy in her themes while also emphasizing the different circumstances of each poem. The article probes the meanings resultant from these semantic figures, debating how they lead to the whole messages of the poems (p. 84).

## 5. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, literary analysis approach, concentrating on a meticulous reading and thematic investigation of "Still I Rise" through Bhabha's postcolonial outline. Homi K. Bhabha is a fundamental academic in postcolonial studies, identified for his essential viewpoints that confront conformist understandings of culture, identity, and power links in colonial and postcolonial conditions. His theories of hybridity and mimicry are mostly pertinent when reviewing literary works like Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," as they deliver thoughtful discernments regarding the snags of identity progress and confrontation while undergoing colonial intimidation.

Hybridity, as conveyed by Bhabha, indicates the course by which cultures interdepend and touch one another, bringing about the growth of new, diverse identities. It challenges the twofold obstructions often found in colonial discourse such as colonizer/colonized, self/other, and dominant/subordinate, by representing that identities are not stagnant but rather fluid and dynamic. In this sense, hybridity becomes a spot of appeasement and contestation, where the colonized person can create an extraordinary identity that assimilates features from both the colonizer and their own culture (McEwan, 2018, p. 79).

In "Still I Rise," Angelou's verse demonstrates hybridity through its incorporation of African-American cultural elements with more comprehensive questions of resilience and deliverance. The poem draws on rich cultural customs, oral histories, and the collective experiences of black females, whereas concomitantly engaging with universal issues of brawl and subjugation. This hybrid identity

enables Angelou to express her voice and intervention, and also to confront the limitations obligatory by both historical and existing oppressors.

Mimicry is another pivotal idea in Bhabha's theoretical sketch. It denotes the procedure by which colonized subjects imitate the cultural customs and behaviors of their colonizers. Although this imitation may initially sound to reinforce the colonial authority, Bhabha asserts that it can also serve as a technique of revolt. Mimicry engenders a space where the colonized subject can doom and challenge the supremacy of the colonizer, enlightening the incompatibilities and limitations of colonial command (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 139).

In "Still I Rise," Angelou employs a system of mimicry that both distinguishes and deplores the historical pressure undergone by African Americans. The strong tenor and recurring refrains in the poem can be supposed as a deliberate mimicry of the condescending methods historically focused on demoted groups. Nonetheless, instead of supporting these viewpoints, Angelou changes them into a significant declaration of resilience and self-assertion. Furthermore, the interface of hybridity and mimicry in Angelou's verse accordingly results in a deep inspection of identity and confrontation. Through the perspective of Bhabha's theory, "Still I Rise" becomes a place where the intricacies of cultural identity are uttered, illuminating how relegated voices can deal with and exchange their place in a dominant culture.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Hybridity

In "Still I Rise," the themes of hybridity and resilience are openly merged with the text, and this issue reflects a postcolonial standpoint that is in accordance with Homi K. Bhabha's theories. The poem acts as an influential assertion of defiance against historical domination, altering pain into a basis of power and identity. Hybridity, an essential perception in Bhabha's postcolonial theory, denotes the amalgamation of diverse cultural identities and experiences, bringing about a novel, multifaceted identity that goes beyond binary oppositions.

In "Still I Rise," Angelou exemplifies this hybridity by putting next to each other the historical agony of African Americans and a vision of future liberation. The introductory lines, "You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46) show the domineering narratives that have tried to define black identity through a lens of pessimism and suppression. Here, Angelou challenges the historical prejudices suffered by black people, and acknowledges the burden of this hurting heritage.

Nevertheless, instead of being limited by this history, Angelou proclaims her resilience and agency. The phrase "But still, like dust, I'll rise" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46) works as a potent metaphor for endurance and restoration. Dust, often perceived as unimportant, becomes a sign of power and determination. This conversion of an adverse historical experience into a foundation of authorization demonstrates the hybrid identity that arises from the interaction of past and future, agony and resilience.

Angelou's poem also captures a spirit of defiance that defies the tyrannical structures of society. The rhetorical question, "Does my sassiness upset you?" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46) serves as a proclamation of self-assurance and superiority. This defiance is not only a response to repression; it is a dynamic repossession of identity. By acceptance of her "sassiness," Angelou redefines what it implies to be a black woman in a society that often attempts to reduce her value. This act of defiance represents the hybrid identity that Bhabha refers to, as it combines features of resistance with a celebration of self.

The imagery of wealth in the line "Cause I walk like I've got oil wells / Pumping in my living room" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46) similarly underlines this authorization. Here, Angelou contrasts the historical narrative of deficiency and repression with a vision of wealth and self-esteem. This amalgamation of past brawls with a self-assured present indicates a retrieval of power, demonstrating how hybrid identities can appear from the intricacies of history.

The final lines, "Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high, / Still I'll rise" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46) underpin the theme of resilience. The natural imagery induces a feeling of irrevocability and endurance, signifying that the growth of black identity is as confident as the cycles of nature. This cyclical standpoint on identity echoes the hybrid nature of Angelou's work, as it recognizes the past while instantaneously looking toward the future. Thus, "Still I Rise" functions as a potent witness to the resilience of black identity in the face of historical subjugation.

## 6.2. Mimicry

In "Still I Rise," Angelou uses the notion of mimicry in order to destabilize colonial language and outlooks, forming an effective renovation of identity and agency. Through the planned usage of repetition, irony, and vivid imagery, Angelou defies the stereotypes and unjust narratives enforced upon black people, altering them into emblems of power and resilience.

Mimicry, as uttered by Bhabha, symbolizes the way colonized subjects embrace and become accustomed to the language and behaviors of their authoritarians, often leading to a multifaceted interaction that can overthrow the original intent of those expressions. In "Still I Rise," Angelou uses the language of oppression to emphasize the ludicrousness of colonial beliefs. The poem includes the rhetorical question, "Did you want to see me broken? / Bowed head and lowered eyes?" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46). Here, Angelou openly refers to the colonial gaze that pursues to define black existence through obedience and misery. By invoking this language of dilapidation, she reveals its restrictions and inconsistencies.

The practice of irony is essential to Angelou's approach. When she asks, "Does my haughtiness offend you?" she flips the script on the colonial narrative that links pride and confidence with haughtiness. As an alternative, Angelou's haughtiness becomes a sort of authorization, a refusal of the enforced identity that means to weaken her. This irony is also accentuated in the lines, "'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines / Diggin' in my own backyard" (Angelou, 2011, p. 46). Here, Angelou contrasts the image of affluence and richness with the historical circumstance of shortage and repression, retrieving the narrative by declaring her value and abundance of spirit.

The repetition of "I rise" all over the poem functions as a significant refrain due to strengthening the theme of resilience and defiance. Each instance of "I rise" builds upon the preceding one, building a rhythm that repeats the inexorableness of her ascension. This repetition not only underscores her willpower but also destabilizes the colonial hope that black folks should stay submissive or overpowered. By asserting her rise from "the huts of history's shame" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) and a "past that's rooted in pain" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47), Angelou confesses the heaviness of historical trauma while concurrently emphasizing her intervention and authority.

Furthermore, Angelou's usage of vivid imagery augments her destabilization of colonial language. The line "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) arouses a feeling of limitlessness and power that confronts the constrictions of colonial narratives. The ocean is an emblem of profundity and resilience, signifying that her identity is not only extensive but also proficient to defeat the hindrances. This imagery contrasts severely with the restricted and reductive images often enforced by colonialism.

Regarding mimicry, it must be stated that Angelou's poem is regarded as a type of confrontation against the colonial language that attempts to restrain her identity. By taking on and altering the very language that has been employed to repress her, she reclaims power and declares her right to live completely and unashamedly. The repetition of questions during the poem, such as "Does my sassiness upset you?" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) and "Does my sexiness upset you?" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) dares the reader to challenge their own distress with black identity and self-assertion.

## 6.3. Defiance and Ambivalence

In "Still I Rise," Angelou's consideration of defiance and ambivalence plays a significant role in understanding the poem's influence as a postcolonial statement. The poem's flowing tone from openly addressing despots to celebrating self-liberation mirrors Bhabha's indication of resistance in the

colonial space. Angelou's poem exemplifies a multifaceted interaction of power and susceptibility, as she struggles with the heritages of repression while declaring her identity and agency.

The idea of defiance in "Still I Rise" is intensely uttered in some of the poem's lines, which conjure a sturdy feeling of resilience against historical discriminations. When Angelou asserts, "Out of the huts of history's shame / I rise" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47), she responsively challenges the agonizing heritage of colonialism and oppression. The imagery of "huts" represents the domineering circumstances and the desensitizing experiences of her dynasties, yet the act of rising indicates an important uprising against that history. This defiance is not simply an act of endurance; it is a brave proclamation of identity and agency that confronts the accounts enforced by colonial authorities.

As the poem develops, Angelou changes her emphasis from the authoritarians to the celebration of self-liberation. The repetition of "I rise" is both a chant of resilience and an announcement of enablement. Each repetition underscores the power that comes from admitting one's origins while instantaneously moving forward. This dichotomy echoes Bhabha's concept of resistance, where the colonized subject deals with the intricacies of identity in a colonial agenda. Angelou's defiance is not a denial of her past; rather, it is an acknowledgement of it, positioning her history as a foundation of power rather than disgrace.

Angelou's tone all over the poem exemplifies a feeling of ambivalence, seizing the difficulties of coping with a postcolonial identity. The lines "Leaving behind nights of terror and fear / I rise / Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) demonstrate this ambivalence. Whereas the narrator recognizes the dimness of the past, she also clasps the capacity for a happier future. This evolution from misery to optimism shows the twofold nature of the postcolonial experience, where the blemishes of history cohabit with goals for freedom.

The phrase "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47) similarly accentuates this ambivalence. It echoes a profound association with the past due to distinguishing the sacrifices and brawls of those who came before her. Yet, it also emphasizes the transformative power of that legacy, as Angelou places herself as "the dream and the hope of the slave" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47). This proclamation is both an acknowledgement of her descendants and an assertion of her own identity, explaining how the past affects the present while also influencing the future.

The dominant attitude that arises in the concluding part of the poem underscores the theme of self-liberation. The images of the "black ocean, leaping and wide" carry a sense of infinite power and energy. This metaphor not only shows the profundity of her identity but also offers an irresistible force that confronts the boundaries encountered by colonial narratives. The ocean, with its immensity and power, becomes a symbol of the shared power of the black community, denoting both the bulk of historical trauma and the capability of resilience.

The poem finishes with the repetitive statement of "I rise" (Angelou, 2011, p. 47), which serves as an influential closing announcement. This replication supports the idea that autonomy is a stable process, one that is engrained in both disobedience and celebration. By announcing her acceleration in the face of difficulty, Angelou seizes the spirit of resistance in the colonial space, as enlightened by Bhabha. The act of rising is not just an individual accomplishment; it is a collective announcement of identity, self-confidence, and power.

## 7. Conclusion

To sum up, the exploration of hybridity and mimicry in the chosen poem specifies how Angelou handles the themes of identity, resistance, and emancipation in a historical context characterized by subjugation and devaluation. Her authoritative verses serve not only as an individual announcement of resilience but also as a communal appeal for those who have been muted and subjugated all the way through history. By using Bhabha's theoretical background, I have debated the ways in which "Still I Rise" demoralizes predominant narratives and reclaims intervention. Angelou's exercise of language, rhythm, and imagery produces a hybrid space where the intersections of race, gender, and culture come together.

The poem illustrates the course of mimicry, where the act of applying elements of the oppressor's culture becomes a sort of conflict, presenting the inconsistencies and liabilities in colonial power structures. As follows, Angelou changes her battle into a significant proclamation of self-possession and assurance. Moreover, this study features the long-standing implication of Angelou's poetry in present-day arguments about race, identity, and societal fairness. As we continue to grapple with the heritages of colonialism and systemic suppression, "Still I Rise" stays a vibrant text that echoes the people who are searching for authorization and assertion. The poem's message of resilience acts as a prompt of the transformative capacity of literature as a device for societal transformations, inspiring relegated voices to reclaim their narratives and emphasize their identities in a world that often means to silence them.

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