



Black Female as the “Transient Woman”: Anzalduan and Bhabhaian Construction of Subjectivity in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

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Abstract

*In her Female Subjectivity in African American Women’s Narratives of Enslavement: Beyond Borders (2009), Lynnette D. Myles conceptualizes Black female subjectivity as an intersubjective act that actively challenges and transforms oppositional views and fixed notions of identity and defines it as the “Transient Woman.” The Transient Woman is a fluid consciousness that moves— in and out, back and forth, —in in-between places toward subjectivity rupturing various forms of Otherness. It is not a close-ended paragon, but rather a beginning of a new consciousness with which the Black woman talks back to the stereotypical images—either sexless or wanton, evil, stubborn, hateful, dependent, and living for others—of Black womanhood prevalent in cultural imagination and textual presentation. By drawing on Anzaldua’s concept of the “New Mestiza” consciousness and Bhabha’s theory of the “Third Space,” Myles posits that the Transient Woman embodies a new form of consciousness—one that empowers Black women to transform from unconscious objects to deliberate, and active forces within hegemonic society. This paper argues that in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Maya Angelou presents self-consciousness as a developmental journey toward self-actualization, which begins in a state of unconsciousness and gradually*

“Geçici Kadın” Olarak Siyah Kadın: Maya Angelou’nun Kafesteki Kuşun Neden Şarkı Söylediğini Biliyorum Adlı Eserinin Anzalduan ve Bhabhaian’cı Çerçeve de Öznelklik İnşası

Öz

Lynnette D. Myles, Afro-Amerikan Kadınların Köleleştirme Anlatılarında Kadın Öznelliği (2009) adlı eserinde, siyah kadın öznelliğini karşıt görüş ve kimliklerde değişiklik yaratan öznelerarası bir eylem olarak görüyor ve onu “Geçici Kadın” olarak tanımlıyor. Geçici Kadın, ‘Ötekilik’in çeşitli biçimlerini parçalayan öznelliğe doğru ‘ara’ yerlerde ‘ileri geri’, ‘içeri ve dışarı’ hareket eden akışkan bir bilinçtir. Daha ziyade kapalı uçlu bir örnektir. Siyah kadının, kültürel hayal gücünde ve metinsel sunumda yaygın olan siyah kadınlığa dair cinsiyetsiz ya da ahlaksız, şeytani, inatçı, nefret dolu, bağımlı ve başkaları için yaşayan basmakalıp imgelere karşılık verdiği yeni bir bilincin başlangıcı. Anzaldua’nın “Yeni Mestiza” bilincini ve Bhabha’nın “Üçüncü Mekânı”nı kullanan Myles, Geçici Kadın’ın siyah kadınları “bilinçsiz nesnelere hegemonik toplumdaki kasıtlı güçlere” dönüştürme yeteneğine sahip yeni bir bilinç olduğunu ileri sürüyor. Bu makale, Maya Angelou’nun Kafesteki Kuşun Neden Şarkı Söylediğini Biliyorum (1969) adlı eserinde Angelou’nun benlik bilincini, bilinçdışından başlayıp yeni bir özerklik bilincine ulaşan gelişim aşamaları boyunca kendini gerçekleştirme yolculuğu olarak dile getirdiğini, Üçüncü Uza-y’daki kimliklerin zorluklarını benimseyerek ve dinamik bir öznelklik biçimi ortaya ko-

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evolves into a new, autonomous awareness. Furthermore, it contends that by navigating the challenges of identities within the Third Space and embracing a fluid, dynamic subjectivity, the autobiographical Maya emerges as the "Transient Woman."

arak otobiyografik Maya'nın "Geçici Kadın" olarak ortaya çıktığını savunmaktadır.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Transient Woman, Lynette Myles, Consciousness, Third Space.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öznellik, Geçici Kadın, Lynette Myles, Bilinç, Üçüncü Mekân.

Introduction

The act of writing has historically served as a form of resistance against systems of oppression that have sought to silence Black voices and erase Black experiences. Until the abolition of slavery, and even for decades thereafter, education remained an elusive dream for most Black individuals in the United States. For much of American history, teaching enslaved individuals to read or write was considered a crime. Despite these harsh restrictions, many African Americans secretly pursued education and wrote about their lives. These powerful narratives eventually gave rise to a unique genre in American literature popularly known as the Black autobiography. In *Black Autobiography in America* (1974), Stephen Butterfield argues that autobiographical writing is a way for African Americans to assert their humanity and their right to grow and thrive. He describes these narratives as "a bid for freedom, a beak of hope cracking the shell of slavery and exploitation," and also "an attempt to communicate to the white world what whites have done to them" (Butterfield, 1974: 3). Autobiography, in this sense, is both a personal act of liberation and a public form of protest.

Regina Blackburn expands on Butterfield's point by highlighting the unique role of Black women's autobiographies. She notes that these works not only reveal what the white world has done to Black people, but also expose how Black women have been treated within their own communities. As Blackburn writes, "the black female autobiographies... also communicate to the world what the black world has done to them" (1980: 134). This insight underscores how Black women use autobiography to confront both racial and gender-based oppression, making their life stories a space for self-definition and resistance on multiple fronts.

In white American surroundings, Black womanhood is endowed with multiple marginalities. While a Black woman is initially disempowered due to her racial identity, she remains perpetually marginalized as a gendered subject by both white and black men. Therefore, in their autobiographies, the Black women engage themselves with "issues of identity, of defining and understanding the black self" and female self as a

matter of "double jeopardy" (Blackburn, 1980: 136). In her seminal essay, "The Narrative Self: Race, Politics and Culture in Black American Women's Autobiography," Nellie Y. McKay provides a comprehensive understanding of Black female subjectivity in the autobiographies written by Black women. She notes that while in male narratives, subjectivity is constructed on public and patriarchal authority, in the female narratives, the subject is engaged in a more cautious and private resistance. For McKay, Black womanhood is "not static or a single ideal" (1998:100), rather, it is a continual struggle to reinvent and reconstruct the Black female identity under multiple marginalization.

Lynette D. Myles's *Female Subjectivity in African American Women's Narratives of Enslavement: Beyond Borders* (2009) is a significant recent contribution to the ongoing discourse on Black female subjectivity. According to Myles, Black female subjectivity involves a consciousness of self "in relation to others having made change to opposing views and identity" (2009: 7). Drawing on bell hooks, she further defines this subjectivity as a form of deliberate movement that "enables creative, expansive self-actualization" (1981: 15). This form of consciousness emerges through the act of challenging entrenched stereotypes perpetuated by both the white imagination and Black male chauvinism.

Stereotyping Black women is deeply rooted in the history of American slavery, during which they were objectified and reduced to instruments of labor or sexual commodities. It was within this context that enduring archetypes—"Mammy," "Jezebel," and "Sapphire"—emerged. The Mammy figure was portrayed as an older, overweight, and sexless woman—strong, nurturing, and loyal, yet wholly desexualized (Myles, 2009: 16). In contrast, the Jezebel stereotype cast Black women as hypersexual and perpetually available, a construct used to legitimize their sexual exploitation by both Black and white men. The Sapphire caricature depicted Black women as aggressive, emasculating, loud, and emotionally volatile—"evil, treacherous, bitch, stubborn, and hateful" (hooks, 1981: 85). These dehumanizing tropes excluded Black women from the 19th-century ideal of Victorian femininity—the "Cult of True Womanhood"—which exalted white women as angelic, pure, and morally superior, rendering them, in theory, untouchable even by their husbands. As Paula Giddings observes, "Black women were consigned to the other end of the scale, as mistresses, whores, or breeders" (1985: 43). These reductive portrayals extended into male-authored literary representations, where Black women were seldom autonomous but instead "seemed to live for others, for Black men or White; for children, or for parents; bereft, always it appeared, of an autonomous self" (Cudjoe, 1984: 11). Such enduring stereotypes have not only shaped societal attitudes but

have also deeply influenced the ways in which Black women are represented, resisted, and reimagined in both literature and culture.

This study reads Black female subjectivity against prevailing stereotypes, arguing instead—via Myles’s integration of Anzaldúa’s *New Mestiza* consciousness and Bhabha’s Third Space—that Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* stages a profound transformation. Rather than being erased by intersecting forces of racial, gendered, and cultural oppression, Angelou’s protagonist reconstructs her selfhood as a “Transient Woman,” a figure Myles defines as one capable of shifting Black women “from unconscious objects to deliberate forces in hegemonic society” (2009: 5). In this reimagined subjectivity, the Black woman is no longer silenced or marginalized but emerges as a conscious, mobile, and empowered agent of change—demonstrating how literature itself can become a Third Space that fosters hybridity, resistance, and new possibilities for identity formation.

“Transient Woman” challenges the prevalent images and stereotypes of Black femininity as a paradigm, which encompasses Black women’s “psychological, spiritual and political” (Myles, 2009: 33) movements towards a new consciousness. In this move, while the psychological dimension of Black women’s struggle refers to the process how they view themselves, spirituality lies in their discovery of resources in an intersubjective connection with other Black women, and the political aspect comprises their contestation against hegemonic forces. According to Myles, the “Transient Woman” is understood in “five stages: Innocence, Consciousness, Rebelliousness, Flight (Digression), and Reentry (Materialization)” (2009: 34). Although Myles provides the model on her reading of enslavement narratives, Maya’s Black female subjectivity in *Caged Bird*¹, definitely fits Myles’ definition of Black woman’s subjectivity as “Transient Woman.” A closer analysis of the stages of development, that the “Transient Woman” undertakes, divulges that while some phases of her growth on the one hand resonate with Gloria Anzaldúa’s the *New Mestiza Consciousness*, her location of transformation resembles Homi K. Bhabha’s Third Space on the other. Therefore, the essay reads Maya’s subjectivity as “Transient Woman” an Anzaldúan and Bhabhaian construction.

The “Transient Woman” as Anzaldúan and Bhabhaian Construction:

In Latin American discourse, the term *mestizaje* has become a central concept in discussions around race, nationhood, and cultural identity. As

¹ From this point onward, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* will be referred to in its abbreviated form, *Caged Bird*.

Peter Wade notes, *mestizaje* denotes "essentially the notion of racial and cultural mixture" and functions as "a key concept in the complex of ideas around race, nation and multiculturalism" (2005: 10). This concept of hybridity underpins Gloria Anzaldúa's landmark text *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), which reflects on the sociopolitical consequences of the U.S.-Mexico War and the annexation of Texas—events that marked Mexican Americans as a new racial and cultural minority within U.S. national borders.

From this history of aggression and dominance, along with strict racial and gendered boundaries, Anzaldúa articulates the concept of the *New Mestiza Consciousness*. The *mestiza*, for Anzaldúa, exists in a state of duality—living as an Indian within Mexican culture and as a Mexican within white patriarchal America. Her internal divisions echo W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of *double consciousness*, which captures the African American experience of being both Black and American in a hostile, racist society. Both paradigms express "significant forms of oppositional culture and consciousness" (Martínez, 2002: 159) that arise from the tensions of being caught between systems of power. This shared experience of living in between worlds and negotiating multiple identities provides a crucial framework for understanding how marginalized subjects forge new and transformative modes of consciousness.

Anzaldúa outlines four transformative stages through which the *New Mestiza* emerges. The first stage is marked by rebellion against systems of male and white dominance that constrain Chicana women. In the second stage, known as the *Coatlicue State*, the *Mestiza* begins to internalize her liminal identity, disrupting the subject-object dualism that defined her subordinate role in patriarchal and colonial cultures. Anzaldúa writes, "Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. Knowing is painful because after it happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before" (1987: 70). This pain of awareness propels the *Mestiza* toward a radical transformation of identity and being—a stage Anzaldúa calls a "spiritual and political crossing" (1987: 7). The third stage, *The New Mestiza Way*, entails a rupture from the religious and cultural constraints of the past—a rejection of tradition in favor of syncretic selfhood. Finally, the stage of *El Retorno* (The Return) marks the *mestiza's* re-entry into society, now armed with a consciousness of "multiple positionalities, contradictions, and ambiguities" that enable her to resist marginalization and avoid returning to the passive identity of the "old mestiza" (Myles, 2009: 45).

While Anzaldúa's *New Mestiza* arises from the specific history of Chicana women, Lynnette Myles draws compelling parallels between this

trajectory and the experiences of African American women in the post-colonial U.S. context. Myles employs Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the Third Space to theorize the *Transient Woman*, an identity that resists fixed categories and moves through different stages of self-realization within socially and culturally marginal spaces. For Myles, African American women construct their identities "in the now—the present—beginning in the space of social or 'cultural difference'" (2009: 46). This ongoing process allows them to continuously redefine themselves beyond imposed boundaries and limitations.

Bhabha's Third Space is a conceptual site where cultures overlap, where identity is negotiated rather than given. Drawing on Victor Turner's theory of liminality, Bhabha defines Third Space not as a fixed location but as an enunciative moment—a point of cultural articulation arising from social flux. In this interstitial passage, identities are decentered and opened to redefinition. As Bhabha explains, "difference is articulated in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures—through that displacement or liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities" (1990: 210–11). In this way, culture itself is not a monolithic or holistic entity but emerges through confrontation, negotiation, and hybridity. The Third Space becomes especially significant in postcolonial feminist discourse. It provides a site where marginalized subjects—particularly women of color—can articulate identities that transcend binary constructions such as colonizer/colonized, male/female, white/black. In Myles' framework, Black women's Third Space becomes a metaphorical territory of transformation: an "unexplored territory" that they must "travel to in order to become new subjects after they have moved from the space of difference or the boundaries of Other" (2009: 49). For Black women, entering this Third Space is not merely a spatial shift but a profound journey of self-articulation, where hybridity, resistance, and reinvention converge.

Despite the differing cultural and historical contexts that shape the experiences of Chicana women, postcolonial subjects, and African American women, Myles emphasizes their shared struggle to transcend imposed boundaries and redefine themselves in opposition to oppressive hegemonies. Their respective journeys reflect a dual commitment to survival and transformation—an insistence on forging new subjectivities from the conditions of marginalization, hybridity, and resistance. In this light, the *Mestiza's* evolving consciousness and the postcolonial subject's negotiation of the Third Space parallel the African American woman's movement toward becoming the "Transient Woman." These

figures emerge as kindred spirits within a broader feminist and postcolonial project—one that reimagines identity through cultural rupture, resistance, and the continual process of renewal.

Black Female Subjectivity as the Transient Woman in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

According to Myles, the Transient Woman's initial "Innocence" relates to female existence within an idyllic environment. Her immediate surroundings center in or near family or a community support system. At this very early stage, the "the disenfranchised female is not cognizant of herself and her enslaved state" (Myles, 2009: 33). Angelou's narrator, Maya, although was cast aside by the parents at age four, was living with the grandmother innocently failing to feel the horror of abandonment since she found the grandmother selflessly loving and unconditionally protective. The grandmother's love and protection kept her in such a dream-like world that she thought to be one of the loveliest "little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (1984: 4)² in her lavender taffeta in the Easter morning. When she saw her grandmother putting "ruffles on the hem and cute little tucks around the waist" (1984: 4), she expected that the extraordinary beauty of the dress would make her look like a movie star. Ensuring her perfect look with the "angel's dust sprinkled face" (1984: 4) and ruffled taffeta, she prepared herself for the performance in the Easter morning.

However, living in the state of innocence for a Black girl is a very transient phenomenon. Soon she awakens with "Consciousness"—the second stage of development as the Transient Woman—as early as in the Easter morning resembling Myles' vision that "[i]n some situations, the process begins immediately when the Black female realizes that her racial difference lies in her assigned position, which is notably different from that of her white counterpart" (2009: 35). Despite being well prepared, she failed to hide her "greased" and "powdered" (1984: 4) skinny legs everyone, in the church, gazed at. Being treated as an object of laughter in a smothering white American society, she felt suffocated in the popular concept of beauty compared to her apparent inadequacy. Realizing that her entire childhood is imprisoned in the ugly black body, her brain suffers from forgetfulness and out of shame and angst, "the bladder can do nothing but explode in a parody of release" (Smith, 1974:125). Moreover, the consciousness of her racial difference is acute and hitting when the doctor refused to treat her excruciating pain, boastfully declaring that "I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in

² From this point onward, quotations from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* will be cited using page numbers only.

a [racial slur's]" (1984: 203). Such a statement not only expresses an overt abhorrence towards Black people but also animalizes them. However, for Maya, merely recognizing her Black identity in white America was not sufficient; her vulnerability as a woman within a heteropatriarchal society was a lived reality, most tragically embodied in her violent sexual assault by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, in St. Louis. These intersecting experiences of racial and gendered trauma crystallize Maya's understanding of herself as the other of the others—a doubly marginalized subject who must navigate and resist multiple forms of oppression. The loss of her subjectivity through racial and gendered objectification aligns her with Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the *Mestiza*, as she begins to traverse and transform the dualities of subject and object, insider and outsider, oppression and agency.

As a matter of fact, Maya's consciousness of her gendered and racial otherness is crucial for her journey towards "Rebelliousness" — the stage when the woman is "no longer content with complacency and being satisfied with social negation and marginality, the female acts against her oppression" (Myles, 2009: 37). At this point, she positions herself within mainstream discourse and actively confronts structures of oppression. Maya responds towards objectification and humiliation from a new subject position that again reflects the journey of the *Mestiza*. For Anzaldúa, "the topography of the borderland is simultaneously the suturing space of multiple oppressions and the potentially liberatory space through which to migrate toward a new subject position" (Smith, 1991: 200). Maya's body functions as such a space where her different identities contest, conflict and reconstitute one another. At the crossroads of identities of her racial, gendered and poverty-stricken bodies, she officiates rebellion through reclaiming her name from her master, when Mrs. Cullinan shortened her name to Marry. Maya interpreted the name as both an insult and a reflection of white aversion toward Black people, drawing from her understanding of how African Americans had been stripped of their names under the institution of slavery.

Significantly, the first and primary marker of the identity of a person is his/her name. For Maya, the distortion of her name is similar to the denial of the identity of a Black girl in the master's house. She noticed that Mrs. Cullinan had another maid, a descendant of slaves working for the Cullinans for more than twenty years, whom Mrs. Cullinan renamed Glory from her original name Hallelujah. Keeping maids and changing their names according to the master's choice evoked the horror of slavery in Maya. As a mode of revolt, Maya spoilt Mrs. Cullinan's favorite China crockeries, which, as the sign of her aristocracy, she was extremely obsessed with. In her anguish Mrs. Cullinan cried louder,

That clumsy [racial slur]. Clumsy little black [racial slur].’ Old speckled-face leaned down and asked, ‘Who did it, Viola? Was it Mary? Who did it? ...Mrs. Cullinan said, ‘Her name’s Margaret, goddamn it, her name’s Margaret.’ ... I left the front door wide open so all the neighbors could hear. Mrs. Cullinan was right about one thing. My name wasn’t Mary. (1984: 120)

Through this action, in the Cullinan-house, Maya’s state of “Rebelliousness” kicks off against her degradation since she was no longer tolerant of social renunciation and marginality. Indeed, it was not her name that Viola Cullinan was snatching away, rather it was her identity that Mrs. Cullinan was denying. Maya enacts the rebellion like Anzaldua’s *New Mestiza*. For the *New Mestiza*, knowledge of subject-object duality erupts an uneasiness from where she thrives to come out with new ways of seeing and knowing. Like her “political crossing,” Maya employs “interventionist strategies” (Wolf, 2000:10) to compel Mrs. Cullinan to call her by her name Marguerite, and let others hear and acknowledge her identity.

In fact, Maya’s challenge lies in confronting the epistemological and ontological imperialism of the “sovereign self”—a construct upheld by Western rationalism that excludes difference and reinforces racist, sexist, and patriarchal identity formations. At this point, Anzaldua is obviously relatable to quote that

To the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and female, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle. (1987: 80)

Maya fights the dualistic practices of the master-slave relation black/white dichotomy by engaging in a project that Smith calls “anamnesis: a recollection or remembrance of a past efficiently occluded by the forces of oppression and acculturation” (1991: 201). Confrontation with Mrs. Cullinan is Maya’s exordium to the developing subjectivity resisting the rebuttal of Black identity. Over time, Maya cultivated a heightened critical awareness of the structural mechanisms of oppression and exploitation, ultimately developing the capacity for conscious resistance and transformative action. By challenging her White employer’s sense of superiority, Maya asserts a rebellious stance that paves the way for a *New Mestiza* consciousness.

Maya’s such emerging sense of rebelliousness is fused with a developed sense of collective consciousness in the stage identified as “Flight” by Myles, which resembles Homi K. Bhabha’s “Third Space.” In this phase, the protagonist’s act of rebellion becomes a pivotal moment of identity transformation. Maya’s sense of emerging selfhood and collective

consciousness outside the familiar space reflects the “Third Space” — a theoretical construct that describes the liminal arena where cultural identities are negotiated and hybridized. According to Bhabha, it is an “in-between” space that provides “the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (1994:1–2). In *Caged Bird*, the junkyard where Maya seeks refuge after being abandoned by her father functions as such a space, enabling her to momentarily escape the structures of race, gender, and familial constraint and to reconstitute her identity through community, labor, and difference.

Maya’s journey into this interstitial space is prompted by a traumatic episode—an altercation with her father’s girlfriend—that leaves her alone and disoriented. Rather than returning to a familiar environment, Maya chooses autonomy, seeking shelter in a junkyard and joining a group of homeless, racially diverse youth. This departure signifies what Myles terms a necessary “Flight”—an act through which African American women resist the roles imposed upon them and move toward healing. In her rebellious act of breaking away from her oppressor, Myles writes, “she claims her right to move freely toward a fuller understanding of herself while casting off the identity imposed on her” (2009: 38). The junkyard, far from being a space of degradation, becomes a site of affirmation and personal discovery. Isolated from dominant social norms, Maya finds herself among a collective of youth that includes a girl from Missouri, a Mexican girl from Los Angeles, and a Black girl from Oklahoma. These heterogeneous youths whom Angelou describes as “the homeless children, the silt of war frenzy” (1984: 272) exposes her to a community bound not by sameness, but by shared dislocation and mutual support. The experience of being accepted without judgment allows Maya to “dislodge the familiar insecurity” (1984: 272) that had long defined her. In this Third Space, Angelou stages the possibility of a new identity forged through interaction, solidarity, and the revaluation of one’s worth.

To elucidate how such interstitial spaces function in identity formation, Bhabha invokes the work of African American artist Renée Green. Her architectural installation, which utilizes elements such as the attic, boiler room, and stairwell, illustrates “the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed—Black/White, Self/Other” (Bhabha, 1994: 3) and male/female. Green explains that the stairwell “as a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness” (1991: 4). The stairwell, situated between dichotomous extremes, functions as a literal and symbolic liminal space through which identities are not only

traversed but reimagined. For Bhabha, this stairwell becomes "the connective tissue that constructs the difference between the upper and lower, black and white" (Myles, 2009: 45), illustrating how hybridity emerges in these in-between spaces.

In this light, the junkyard in Angelou's narrative mirrors Green's stairwell: both represent the "in-between" place where fixed identifications become fluid, where boundaries blur, and where a new sense of self can be negotiated. Bhabha affirms the radical potential of such spaces, arguing that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994: 4). Maya's time in the junkyard is emblematic of this hybridity. According to Liliane Arensberg "Maya rises in her own estimation... and becomes her own guardian" (1999: 125) in the junkyard. In fact, the unquestioned acceptance from her peers unsettled the deeply rooted sense of insecurity she had been familiar with since her childhood. The uncritical atmosphere of her community significantly influenced her perspective, fostering a lifelong disposition toward tolerance. It is here where she learns to drive, curse, and dance; traits she associates with her mother and previously struggled to embody. Through these experiences, Maya reconciles the fragments of her identity with newly acquired self-agency.

Ultimately, the junkyard as Third Space enables Maya to reposition herself within a broader matrix of identity and meaning. It is not merely a site of refuge, but one of emergence—where a culturally and emotionally hybrid identity is made possible. By situating Maya's journey within Bhabha's framework of liminality and hybridity, we understand "Flight" not as abandonment, but as transformation. It becomes a conscious movement toward a fuller, more integrated self—one that resists imposed hierarchies and celebrates difference as the foundation of selfhood.

With her intersubjective and collective experiences in the Third Space, Maya entered into "Materialization" to assert her "agency and independence" (Myles, 2009: 39). In seeking employment on her own terms, the Black teenage girl renegotiated and reasserted her racial identity, challenging societal limitations imposed upon her. While her mother offered financial backing, it was Maya's growing sense of self-value that motivated her pursuit of economic autonomy as a form of self-assertion. Even though she had been well aware of her age limitation, she pursued to become a "conductorette" on the San Francisco streetcars. Her mother's denial to the "proposal with: they don't accept colored people on the streetcars" (1984: 284) worked as a booster as she got determined to break San Francisco's race-ridden social bars. By being employed to

her desired post, Maya not only learned the value of independence but also broke the color barrier imposed against her race. Once, the Black female subject coerced into Mrs. Cullinan to restore her identity, the identity that defines her being; by getting the job, now Maya has challenged the restrictive codes that impeded the opportunities in the way of her becoming. Thus, step by step, in a similar vein with the *New Mestiza*, Maya decoded her sense of self within the larger context of family, society, and community.

In fact, the stage of "Materialization" or reentry is like the *el Retorno* of the *New Mestiza*, where "[h]er constant quest to destabilize ethnic, gender, sexual, and other clear-cut standpoints as foundations of identities actually contradicts the possibility of fixed epistemological or political standpoints" (Koegeler-Abdi, 2013: 74). While Maya initially resists racial difference through self-assertion, she subsequently reclaims her body and reenters materiality, thereby challenging the disembodiment enforced by racist, sexist, and colonial structures. To test her Black female sexuality, she seduces "the best of the lot" (1984: 301) as her partner. Importantly, having sexual intercourse with a stranger, as an act of her will, she not only exhibits her control over her body and soul but also clarifies her standing in the world. When her act of inquisition left her pregnant, she started celebrating the Black female body and motherhood as her political strategy to redefine her difference from the white literary positions of somatophobia and white femininity. The black body that she once described as "dirty like mud," (1984: 4) and on another occasion, her playmates described as fecal matter, appeared to her as a heavenly embodiment of beautiful spirits.

Indeed, becoming pregnant is an occasion for Maya to rejoice her body, "the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 35). Although, initially she left the baby to her mother's care, very soon she discovered without being trained at nursing a baby she was doing the same, perfectly proving her mother's saying right that "you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking" (1984: 309). She herself became the mother protector, restaging womanhood as a developed consciousness of love, freedom, responsibility and will to power.

Angelou employs this image of Maya, the mother, as a "shifting signifier" (Manora, 2005: 373). She portrays mothering as a "collaborative process" in which many women (grandmother, mother, and teacher) in Maya's life played "the role of 'MOTHER' in [their] own way[s,] bringing [their] own inimitable colors and contours to the space, revealing mothering both as a potential form of resistance and a manner of artistry"

(Manora, 2005: 373). For Angelou, motherhood is a symbol of will power as grandmother Henderson, grandmother Braxton, mother Baxter and her mother-like teacher Mrs. Flowers all create remolding perceptions of Black women in the narrative. Examining the significance of images of Black women that take shape in Angelou's work, O'Neale says, "No Black women in the world of Angelou's books are losers. She is the third generation of brilliantly resourceful females, who conquered oppression's stereotypical maladies without conforming to its expectations of behavior" (1984: 26). Therefore, developing her subjectivity as a Black mother, Maya internalizes the courage of her grandmother; sense of freedom, femininity, and sensuality of her mother; and the voice of her teacher.

Maya overturns the concept of Western unique self by developing herself as a transformative hybrid. Beginning her journey from a stage of innocence, Maya progresses through various phases of development to ultimately embrace Black womanhood as a form of materialization. In doing so, she completes the journey of the "Transient Woman"—a figure who cultivates an intersubjective subjectivity through relational experience, asserts control over her body and mind, and emerges as a deliberate, transformative force against the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and sexuality. However, this is not a close-ended paragon, but rather the beginning of a new consciousness with which the Black woman talks back to the stereotypical images—either sexless or wanton, evil, stubborn, hateful, dependent, and living for others—of Black womanhood prevalent in white Western discourses and Black masculinity. With the image of the Black woman of such a consciousness, Angelou argues for dynamism as the marker of identity and destabilizes the fixed prospects of Black female development.

Conclusion

Black female subjectivity occupies a critical space in the discourse of identity, power, and representation. Situated at the intersection of class, gender, and race, Black women's experiences of selfhood have historically been silenced or misrepresented in dominant Western epistemologies. As a result, articulating Black female subjectivity becomes a politically charged act that resists erasure and reclaims agency. The preceding discussion asserts this reclamation by tracing a transformative journey that culminates in Maya's emergence as a "Transient Woman," a subjectivity marked by growth, resistance, and the continuous reconfiguration of identity. This figure resists static definitions and embraces transformation through entry and reentry into materialization. Beginning as a timid and disoriented girl, she develops through displacement,

trauma, and systemic oppression. Silenced and erased repeatedly by her family and society, she gradually reconstructs her identity by confronting the forces that seek to diminish her. Through these experiences, Maya continuously defines and redefines her personal, racial, and social identities.

Mirroring Anzaldúa's concept of the *New Mestiza*, young Maya's awakening to the subject-object duality—particularly her positioning within a white, patriarchal American context—sparks a rebellion against every form of racial and gendered othering. Her transformation is catalyzed by her time in the junkyard, which functions as a “Third Space” where cultural differences are negotiated, and hybrid identities are forged. Within this space, Maya attains the courage to redefine herself, ultimately discovering a stable sense of self that defies essentialist and monolithic constructions of Black womanhood. By asserting her right to exist with her Black identity intact and by transgressing racial and gender boundaries, Maya asserts deliberate agency in a society structured by oppression. In this process, she reclaims the Black female body as a site of psychological, spiritual, and political independence, enacting a revisionist understanding of Black female subjectivity. She unites the verbal and the physical—language and body—to express a newfound sense of self rooted in confidence, resilience, and resistance to marginalization based on race, gender, and class. Her journey affirms a version of Black female subjectivity that is fluid, resistant, and perpetually in motion—a counter-narrative to historical and cultural forces of objectification.

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