



## Social Stereotypes and Distorted Images of Women in Maya Angelou's *Letter to My Daughter* and *Mom & Me & Mom*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.4.823.51120>

### ABSTRACT:

Men, and not women, have defined, in their own terms, female subjectivity in many societies. The social constructs that emanate from these jaundiced definitions amount to stereotyping, which is a significant concern of most women writings by African Americans. A compelling hypothesis is that there is need for a departure from these male-constructed images to more re-womanised identities. This paper attempts to track this growing shift on the twin levels of content and form which constitute the aesthetic of the gendered space in the African American writings. Within this aesthetic matrix, as now well established, is a content that evinces a counter-patriarchal temper, and a form that subverts palimpsestic traces of traditional African American thinking. African American culture and the corresponding literary aesthetic have undergone untold transformations over the decades. This paper discusses the portrayal of social stereotypes and how they have contributed to the distortion of the woman's image. By using Spivak's (1994) post-colonial theory and Kristeva's (1969) post-modernist feminism, this paper analysis these stereotypes as depicted in Maya Angelou's novels. This study examines, against this matrix, representative texts from the works of female African American women writers, specifically Maya Angelou's *Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom* that prey on personal experiences to narrate the ordeal and the lessons women have learnt in dehumanising patriarchal societies. She has fought for her place and has overcome to emerge the strong and successful woman she eventually becomes. The paper concludes that women have historically suffered various forms of prejudice. Women writers have used the literary platform to confront different strands of segregation. Despite the fact that cultures have evolved significantly, the images of women of women are still distorted. Women have received different treatment from their male counterparts and that has resulted in a distorted image of themselves. This is as a result of the social stereotypes which are deeply rooted over the decades and this has resulted in dismembered female images. The dismembering has taken various forms such as discrimination, violence against women, sexual harassment, inferior gender, formless, beings with minimal rights if any, disadvantaged both physically and intellectually.

(Key words: *Re-membering, distortion, image, subaltern, ambiguity, post-colonialism and post-modernism*)

### 1. Introduction

The African American literary platform has instrumental in the reimagination of contemporary socio-political issues. The role of women in the African American society has provided fodder for development of literary works over the past decades. These literary works reflect the progressive steps in social transformation. Female writers have used these platforms to challenge and open up new vistas for women. From a historical perspective, women in the African American society, and, indeed, the Black diaspora, have encountered various forms of marginalisation and discrimination, being confined to predefined roles and norms; however, as the region experiences social and political changes, women have found opportunities to break away from traditional roles and embrace new perspectives and world-views. This is reflected in contemporary African fiction.

Literary works are beneficial tools for creating awareness about social problems that readers encounter in their immediate environments. Literature has no function, except that which is given it by those who read it (Ezeigbo, 2000). Our society is highly patriarchal; for a woman to survive here, she really has to be hardworking, resilient, tolerant and accommodating. Stereotypes play on our minds so strongly that it becomes tougher to convince people of their talent in fields where they believe their gender is weak (Coffman, 2014). Chimamanda Adichie says in one of her quotes 'Many stories matter' (Adichie, as cited in Rodriguez & Gralki, 2019). Stories have been used to dispossess and malign. Stories can also be used to empower and humanise. Stories can break or repair the human dignity. Maya Angelou having grown in a very stereotyped community as well as an environment against women, made her to get dehumanised and have a very low opinion about herself as a woman until her mother told her a different story about herself which eventually assisted her in becoming a great woman. These two works *Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom* acts as an awakening call to all women to rise up to their full potential which might be hidden behind societal stereotypes and social structures and embrace their true self and leave a mark in this world.

The evolving social and political fabric has created a more inclusive environment, providing women with opportunities to participate in various spheres of life that were erstwhile the preserve of men. As education becomes more accessible and economic opportunities grow, women have entered the work force, pursued higher education and taken on leadership roles in both public and private sectors. This has allowed them to challenge traditional gender

norms and stereotypes, asserting their capabilities beyond the confines of domestic responsibilities. Women's increased participation in politics is a notable aspect of this transformation. In recent years, more women have taken on roles as political leaders, parliamentarians and policymakers. Their presence in decision making positions has led to greater focus on issues such as gender equality, women's rights and social welfare. As women become more involved in governance and policy formulation, the perspective on critical issues has become more inclusive and diverse.

Moreover, women's empowerment has been driven by grassroots movements and activism. Women's rights organisations and feminist movements have mobilised to demand gender equality, social justice and end of discrimination. These movements have been instrumental in raising awareness about women's rights, advocating for legal reforms and pushing for more gender inclusive policies. Despite these positive changes, challenges persist not all segments of society have embraced the evolving roles of women with equal enthusiasm. Women writers have responded to these challenges in equal measure. They have utilised their fictional platforms to demonstrate that traditional beliefs, patriarchal norms and resistance to change have hindered progress in African American societies. In some communities, resistance to women's empowerment stems from fear of losing traditional power dynamics or lack of awareness about benefits of gender equality. Furthermore, while progress has been made in urban areas and certain sectors, women in African American societies still encounter additional barriers. Access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities may remain limited, perpetuating gender disparities and reinforcing traditional gender roles. In this paper, we rely on illustrations from the two literary works, Angelou's *Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom*, to demonstrate how social stereotypes have distorted the images of women in African American societies and, by extension, the Black diaspora.

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## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study benefits from two theories: postcolonialism (Spivak's subalternity) and Kristeva's feminist discourse. The critical intervention in this paper encompasses Spivak and her concern for 'subaltern' people who were and are often marginalised by the by dominant western culture. The 'Subaltern' is a military term which means 'of lower rank.' She borrowed this term from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. The subaltern has become the major issue of discussion in postcolonial studies. It tries to explore the unjust representation of the third world women and men, working class or black people in literature. Postcolonialism is the recent development in the field of contemporary critical theories. It examines the impact of colonialism, imperialism and other such postcolonial issues on developing nations and other once colonised countries. Spivak's concept of 'subaltern' has made her one of the influential critics. Her idea of subalternity is often associated with feminism, deconstruction and Marxism. Spivak has explored the representation of the third world women, tribal people and the orient. Her primary focus is on the struggle of the silenced groups. She strives to give them a voice in a society hardly recognises their existence. By championing these marginalised voices, Spivak challenges some dominant idea that the western world is more civilised and developed than the non-western world. She criticises western critics such as Karl Marx, Derrida, Foucault and British or French feminists. For the purposes of this study, we have appropriated the 'subaltern' to refer to silenced voices of women in African leadership. Using illustrations from the two literary texts, we argue men have marginalised women in contemporary societies and these forms of marginalisation have distorted their image.

Kristeva is one of the most referenced theorists by contemporary feminist thinkers. She proposes a postmodernist strand of feminism. Spivak, on the other hand, has advocated for the understanding of black African women in the context of socio-economic hierarchies, indigenous social culture, gender, race, religion, class, and national development, in ways that are both individual and collective even when contradictory. The development of social and political institutions is hinged on the inclusion and rediscovery of the role of women. Her ideas have revolutionised conceptualisations of gender and politics, particularly in the context of the African society. literature in its comparative depth becomes a cross-cultural armament for outlining diverse cultural tropes that combine history and culture within a literary matrix for unravelling gender and its terrible assumptions. Thus, the many literary studies, poetry and stories of Spivak become the instrument by which women could be allowed to 'recreate themselves' away from cultural, social and even theological strictures that limit the possibility of what a female can ever hope to become in a male-dominated world.

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## 3. Methodology

This qualitative study has adopted an analytical research design. We recognise that this study calls for a critical appreciation of literary works to determine its correspondence to emerging social discourse on women and politics. Literature, African American fiction to be specific, is regarded as a platform for representation of emerging socio-political realities. Two texts, *Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom*, which are drawn from African literary space, have been purposively sampled for this paper. We critically read the two texts and assigned codes to textual components that seemed relevant for interrogation of the writer's representation of social stereotypes and distorted images of women. Our critical analysis was guided by Kristeva's brand of post-modernist feminism and Spivak's subalternity. To reinforce our arguments in this paper, we have also made references to similar studies that we found particularly intriguing.

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## 4. Analysis and Discussion

Men, and not women, have defined, in their own terms, female subjectivity in many societies. African American women have been victims of society's propensity to – in Sofona's words – 'de-womanise black womanhood' (1992, as cited in Ukadike, 1994, p. 1). Thus, literary writings by African American women reimagine various forms of 'de-womanisation' and attempt to 're-womanise,' 'rehumanise' images of women and propagate women's assertion of their 're-womanised' and 're-humanised' identities. In depicting the old and new images, these female writers 'member' or 're-member' images of women in African societies. The title for this paper is extracted from a thesis titled '(Re-)membering the distorted images of women in Maya Angelou's

*Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom*.’ By ‘membering,’ we mean putting together positive images that have erstwhile been overshadowed by social constructs, machinated by men. ‘Remembering’ suggests shedding off male constructs and putting together re-womanised images in bid to dignify or re-humanise women. In their literary works, they portray the challenges women face as they strive to reclaim the power of self-definition and self-representation. Toward the accomplishment of such goals, new social and political currents in African American society and, generally, the black diaspora require new levels of critical awareness and new challenges to Western intellectual hierarchies. In this paper, we have concentrated on the stereotypes that historically have distorted the images of women.

Angelou’s *Letter to my daughter* provides a rich platform for exploring manifestations of de-womanisation in African American fiction. To demonstrate that she is making a trans-racial and trans-cultural appeal, Angelou addresses this letter to a daughter she never had. By virtue of this salutation, this autobiographical acquires a near-universal appeal; it is an exhortation to women across the world. She creates the impression that the issues tackled in this work are not limited to the African American society. Her appeal for re-womanisation at the beginning of the letter evinces hope for young women all over the world: ‘[Daughter], you may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them’ (Angelou, 2012, p. x). Over the course of this insightful letter, Angelou demonstrates how various life events have shaped her image(s) and are likely to shape the images of women around the world. To clarify that this message is meant for all women, she says: ‘I gave birth to one child, a son, but I have thousands of daughters. You are Black and White, Jewish and Muslim, Asian, Spanish-speaking, Native American and Aleut. You are fat and thin and pretty and plain, gay and straight, educated and unlettered, and I am speaking to you all’ (Angelou, 2012, pp. x-xi).

This letter was inspired by the notes Angelou wrote to her friend Oprah Winfrey for more than two decades. This was a third book in a series of essays she had written. What is particularly striking about this letter is that it won the hearts of many American readers and became one of the best-selling titles in the United States for its intimate account of the writer’s upbringing in an American society where women identities are defined by men. It is an autobiographical work that comprises short essays and poems depicting the life adventures of the writer herself. Dedicating the work to the thousands of women – as earlier indicated – who see her as a [mother](#) and a role model, Angelou’s work is as inspiring as it is thought-provoking. Angelou reveals her target audience in the prologue when she says, ‘You will find in this book accounts of growing up, unexpected emergencies, a few poems, some light stories to make you laugh and some to make you meditate’ (2012, p. x).

The first decade of the twentieth century was not a great time to be born black and poor in St. Louis, Missouri (Angelou, 2014, p. 1). In the prologue to *Mom & me & mom*, Angelou marvels at herself and poses what appears to be a rhetorical question that highlights the social stereotyping of women in a traditional American society that peripheralises women: ‘How did I, born black in a white country, poor in a society where wealth is adored and sought after at all costs, female in an environment where only large ships and some engines are described favorably using the female pronoun – how did I get to be Maya Angelou? (2014, n.p.). Angelou portrays this period as one in which men ‘made violence part of their inheritance as her grandfather would often tell Vivian: ‘If you get in jail for theft or burglary, I will let you rot. But if you are charged with fighting, I will sell your mother to get your bail’ (2014, p. 2). Perhaps nothing captures the social realities in the American society during this period than what Spivak says:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernisation. These considerations would revise every of judgments that seem valid for a history of sexuality in the West: ‘Such would be the property of repression, that which distinguishes it from the prohibitions maintained by simple penal law: repression functions well as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, affirmation of non-existence; and, consequently, states that of all this there is nothing to say, to see, to know.’ The case of suttee as exemplum of the woman-in-imperialism would challenge and reconstruct this opposition between subject (law) and object-of knowledge (repression) and mark the place of ‘disappearance’ with something other than silence and nonexistence, a violent aporia between subject and object status. (Spivak, p. 103)

Born in St. Louis, Missouri but raised in Stamps, Arkansas, Angelou moves around often, traversing such places as San Francisco, New York City, Paris, Cairo, West Africa and all over the United States. This introduction foregrounds the diversity of her experiences and justifies declaration that this letter addresses the concerns of women all over the world. Despite constant movement, Angelou believes that one never truly leaves home; ‘one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one’s skin’ (2012, p. 4). This inner sense of home stems from the innate child in all of us yearning for security and safety from the unpredictable outside world. ‘Her real growing up world, in Stamps, was a continual struggle against a condition of surrender ... first to the grown-up human beings who [she] saw every day, all black and all very, very large ... [and secondly] submission to the idea that black people were inferior to white people, who [she] saw rarely’ (2012, p. 4). She presents the image of dual marginalisation; as an African American woman, one has to contend with both racial and gender-based prejudice. To depict the inferior position occupied by African American women, she says:

Without knowing why exactly, I did not believe that I was inferior to anyone except maybe my brother. I knew I was smart, but I also knew Bailey was smarter, maybe because he reminded me often and even suggested that maybe he was the smartest person in the world. He came to that decision when he was nine years old. (Angelou, 2012, p. 4).

The image of a grown-up woman is defined by the social environment; whether or not one is mature is determined by extraneous factors. The yardsticks for determining maturity are as ridiculous as marriage, having children, sophistication, worldliness, growing old and, generally, accumulation of years in one’s body and face, ‘but generally our real selves, the children inside, are still innocent and shy as magnolias’ (Angelou, 2012, p. 5). The image of adulthood is one that is hinged on superficial characteristics; this definition is devoid of introspection, ‘going inside ourselves.’ Spending the bulk of the work unraveling her maternal relationships, Angelou speaks about her grandmother, [Annie Henderson](#), who raised her in Arkansas until she turned thirteen and her unconventional relationship with her mother with whom she lived in San Francisco. Her grandmother’s modest and seemingly antiquated mannerisms shape her image and identity as a young woman. She attests to this when says:

My paternal grandmother, who raised me, had a remarkable influence on how I saw the world and how I reckoned my place in it. She was the picture of dignity. She spoke softly and walked slowly, with her hands behind her back, fingers laced together. I imitated her so successfully that neighbours called me her shadow. (Angelou, 2012, p. 11).

Angelou finds it difficult to change this image and adjust to a new lifestyle when she reunites with her mother in California. Breaking away from a retrained, almost reticent, and humble demeanor of a Christian, punctuated by 'religious music, *Gang Busters*, and *The Lone Ranger*, to the gregariousness and permissiveness around her mother's 'worldly atmosphere' makes her even more withdrawn. This transition from Christian hymns to her mother's loud blues and jazz music dismember her image as a modest and young, God-fearing woman, but 'a sit-down talk-to' with her mother redefines her identity. For the first time in her life, she feels appreciated and someone, in this case, her mother, acknowledges her beauty: 'I had never been called beautiful and no one in my memory had ever called me daughter' (Angelou, 2012, p. 12). This comment sharply contrasts what she had thought of herself when she first met her mother: 'I wanted to sink into the ground. I wasn't pretty or even cute. That woman who looked like a movie star deserved a better-looking daughter than me. I knew it and sure she would know it as soon as she saw me' (Angelou, 2014, p. 12). She would later admit to 'not used to being called beautiful' (Angelou, 2014, p. 14). Her initial impression of herself, it appears, must have been that of an unworthy child, undeserving of a beautiful mother. She eventually forms a cordial relationship with her mother, who reinforces her confidence as she grows up. Her mother told Angelou, 'Baby, I've been thinking and now, I am sure. You are the greatest woman I've ever met' (2012, p. 21). Her mother's kind words inspire her and trigger her curiosity about her world and her society.

Angelou's unplanned pregnancy is also a consequence of social stereotyping. She is made to believe that femininity can be achieved through intimacy; a woman who exhibits masculine qualities needs to have sex with a man to regain her full femininity so that when her 'deep' and 'husky' voice gives no intimations that her image would become 'feminine and curvy,' as she 'already was six feet tall and had no breasts'; she sleeps with a stranger – 'no endearments spoken, no warm caresses shared – and in a fumbling engagement that lasts fifteen minutes, she becomes pregnant (2012, p.16). In her defenseless and childhood ignorance, one would expect her to play victim, but her society has made her believe that this is unacceptable of her and she needs to apologise for it. Ironically, men easily get away with this. It is unfortunate that she has to apologise to her father: 'Dad, I am sorry to bring disgrace to the family, but I have to tell that I am pregnant' (Angelou, 2012, p. 22). She does not sleep this night, not because of the responsibilities that await her as a young and clueless mother, but because she feels her action has brought disrepute to her father.

In a racially discriminating environment such as the United States, the views of whites shape images and identities of African American women. Racism not only impacts negatively on Angelou's burgeoning career, but it also affects her emotional well-being. Angelou's recollection of the details of an evening at the American Film Institute is a perfect example of how racial prejudice had deeply influenced her behaviour. She is invited to give an introductory speech, but as she sits, surrounded by the people who shape her views on romance and dignity; memories of the segregated movie house in Arkansas fills her mind. When she finally takes the stage, Angelou forgets her speech entirely and is, instead, fraught with anger. Afraid of what she might say, Angelou mutters a few words and hurries off the stage. Racial segregation instigates fear, lowers the dignity of African Americans as well as their sense of worth. When she facilitates a discussion between white and Black students at a recently desegregated Wake Forest University, Angelou ushers in a new generation of students, equipping them with the vocabulary and awareness to communicate effectively, in what is seen as journey towards healing the racial divide that had distorted the images of Black Americans. The wretched of the earth, the other, are unable to define themselves; the dominant class, the hegemonic culture, controls all facets of American life so that 'in this way [African Americans] learn to give and receive social lies' and to 'swallow the untruth to keep the peace' and they conveniently avoid the 'wonderfully liberating' quality of honesty (Angelou, 2012, pp. 37-38).

Over the course of *Letter to my daughter*, Angelou also unveils her intimate thoughts on such vices as violence and vulgarity – which is ironically celebrated in public forums – her failed relationships that expose depict the objectification of women by men, and her struggles with mental health. She ends the book with her return to Christianity, sharing her ever-evolving relationship with God. For Angelou, being a Christian — or belonging to any religious tradition — is a lifelong endeavour. In a society where extreme forms of violence, such as rape, are condoned; women are an endangered species. Rape, heinous as it is, is justified by men and all manner of excuses, including what is perceived to be women's indecent dressing, are used to sanitise this grotesque injustice. Angelou says:

I am concerned that the pundits, who wish to shape our thinking and, subsequently, our laws, too often make rape an acceptable and even explainable social occurrence. If rape is merely about the possession of power, the search for and the exercising of power, we must simply understand and even forgive the natural human action of sex in the extreme. (Angelou, 2012, p. 48)

Men make decisions on moral standards or codes of conduct. Spivak argues that a core problem for the poorest and most marginalised in society (the subalterns) is that they have no platform to express their concerns and no voice to affect policy debates or demand a fairer share of society's goods. Spivak's theory is grounded on agency: the ability of the individual to make their own decisions. While Spivak's main aim is to consider ways in which 'subalterns'— her term for the indigenous dispossessed in colonial societies – were able to achieve agency. Angelou's work depicts these hegemonic structures. For instance, men make up such classifications as impulsive rape to defend male self-righteousness. Men claim that miniskirts are driving them into thoughts of rape. They rely on this twisted logic to sanitise their conscience. Unfortunately, the American is no exception; men define what is and what is not rape. Violence against is tolerated in such patriarchal societies. Women in African societies are also victims of these distortions and Angelou's trip to Morocco illustrates this; dressing code is determined by men:

The men were shouting and beckoning to me. I saw they were all very old. My upbringing told me that I had to go to them. At that moment I became aware that I was wearing a short skirt and high-heel shoes, appropriate for twenty-five-year-old American woman, totally unacceptable for a female in the company of old African men. (Angelou, 2012, p. 60)

Perhaps it is the final book in this series of autobiographies, *Mom & me & mom* (Angelou, 2014), which revolves around the life of Angelou's mother, Vivian Baxter, that reveals distorted images of women more vividly, especially the first decade of the twentieth century that we mentioned earlier in this paper. This autobiography gives a historical context to marginalisation of women in the wider American society. Angelou takes a gloves-off approach to her seemingly surgical recollection of her mother's childhood. It, in this regard, provides a better context to de-womanisation than *Letter to my daughter* (Angelou, 2012). In this text, Angelou builds the image of a strong-willed, supportive and affectionate woman who wades through single motherhood, a failed marriage, and career struggles – rare combinations for women in a historically chauvinistic American society. Angelou's intention here is to give context to her current personality. She appears to be trying to answer the question in the first paragraph of *Mom & me & mom*. For the purposes of discussions in this paper, we focus on forms of de-womanisation and de-humanisation in Vivian Baxter's story. The perpetrator of de-womanisation, as indicated elsewhere in this paper, is Vivian's father: Vivian is warned against 'playing little girls' games with big boys' as they may grow 'up to be women,' her brother cannot use endearing words like 'sissy' to call 'just a girl,' a black man learns early that he has to up to threats, or else 'he wasn't a man,' women show men into their rooms and help them 'hang their clothes' (Angelou, 2014, pp. 4-21).

The hegemony of colonialist ideologies of cultural domination cannot be excluded from a historical investigation that seeks to provide a nuanced portrait of complex questions relating to the experiences of African American women. For a long time, racial questions have dominated African American writings and significant issues around de-womanisation have been neglected, thereby discouraging the articulation of an accurate and wholesome black identity. Given the heritage of distorted images, some critics understandably regard the docile ancillary African American woman seen in much of the earlier literary works as figments of writers' imaginations. Partly for this reason, the calling into question of the 'native informant,' in this case, Maya Angelou, in Gayatri Spivak's term, is the *sine qua non* of the black woman's distorted image. As Blackwood and Attile (1986) have noted, black women 'must be the ones who define the areas of importance in [their] lives: work toward the breakdown of 'mainstream' conventions and popular assumptions perpetuated by existing forms of cinema and television' (p. 203).

Portraits of black subjectivity in literary writings have been biased and stereotypical; a new sensitivity to black women's concerns, as one is likely to witness in Angelou's *Mom & me & mom*, indicates a concerted effort to move questions of the 'other' toward the centre. This stance also represents a movement towards decolonisation of African American writings on women; to wit, there is need for a 'theory that takes into account the economic history of [black] (mis)representation and ensuing stereotyping, as well as the interaction between social realities (whole lives) and fictions (fragmentation and... black women need to give that theory [and practice] its direction.' (Blackwood & Attile, 1986, p. 204). Hence, black women must take the lead in a revisionist dialogue, an alternative discourse that requires culture-based interpretation around questions of ethnic identity and representation. It is in support of such efforts that Angelou gives an alternative voice in *Mom & me & mom*.

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## 5. Conclusion

Spivak, acutely aware of the difficulty and dangers of presuming to 'speak' for the subalterns, is undoubtedly a significant resource for interrogating gendered discourse. As such, her work can be seen as predominantly a delicate exercise in the critical thinking skill of interpretation; she looks in detail at issues of meaning, specifically at the real meaning of the available evidence, and attempts not only to highlight problems of definition, but to clarify them, which is important for this kind of discussion. What makes this one of the key works of interpretation is, of course, the underlying significance of 'Can the Subalterns Speak?' Interpretation, in this case, is a matter of the difference between allowing subalterns to speak for themselves, and of imposing a mode of 'speaking' on them that – however well-intentioned – can be as damaging in the postcolonial world as the agency-stifling political structures of the colonial world itself. By clearing away the detritus of scholarly attempts at interpretation, Spivak takes a stand against a specifically intellectual form of oppression and marginalisation. Angelou's have significantly contributed to the reimagining of the cultural stereotypes that perpetuate shallow imaging. Although it is evident that a lot still need to be done, her works privilege women's issues. She is the voice of marginalised African American women who have to contend with social constructs that have continued to gain currency in spite of the persistent calls for cultural rethinking. Her works confront the hegemonic trends inherent in racially diverse communities such as the United States of America. In *Letter to my daughter* and *Mom & me & mom*, and indeed, many other works written by Maya Angelou; it is evident that the images of women are determined by specific socio-cultural goals as opposed to contemporary social realities. In summary, the distorted identities of marginalised people, particularly women, and the pressures of imperialism mark the point of convergence for new literary creation.

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