Conflicts and Resiliency in Maya Angelou's *I know why the Caged Bird Sings*

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Abstract

Maia Angelou claims how she overcame her uncertainties and established her identity when she became an adult. As a young girl, she had to fight against the obstacles imposed by a rather sexist and racist society. It was not easy then to face institutionalized racism and survive in segregated America. When she was a child, she felt abandoned by her parents who sent her to Stamps to be raised by her paternal grandmother. While growing up in segregated South, she suffered from inferiority complex because of the color of her skin and her awkward body. She pictured herself waking up from a nightmare in which a beautiful white girl had been cursed by an evil fairy, jealous of her beauty, and transformed into a big black and awkward girl, with nappy hair and misaligned teeth. Angelou speaks of her alienation and displacement, not only in connection with the places where she lived but also with her own family. She testified the resentment of African Americans who were forced to live at the margin as they became an easy target of institutionalized racism and social inequalities. However, she also denounced the atmosphere of uncertainty she had to live with when the traumatic impact of a sexual assault left her with the most profound distrust of her own patriarchal community. All in all, Angelou's biography explored her life experiences as a response to the unequal treatment of the black community within the American society

Keywords

Conflicts. Resistance. Prejudice.

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Born in Saint Louis, Missouri, on the fourth of April 1928, Marguerite Annie Johnson experienced the trauma of displacement at a very early age. When she was three and her brother, Bailey, four, they were tagged and sent on a train to their paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. Marguerite's broken family structure took its toll on her moral and spiritual development. She was still a child, but her heart was full of pain and sorrow since she believed that her parents wanted to get rid of her because they disliked her. As Maia puts it in the opening passage of the book:

> I don't remember much of the trip, but after we reached the segregated southern part of the journey, things must have looked up. Negro passengers, who also travel with loading lunch boxes, felt sorry for 'the poor little motherless darlings' and plied us with cold fried chicken and potato salad. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 5).

Angelou makes explicit in the lines above the tenets of displacement, not restricted to the disruption of the family structure, but a rampant phenomenon within the African American community. She affirmed retrospectively that the United States "had been crossed thousands of times by frightened Black children to their newly affluent parents in Northern cities, or back to grandmothers in Southern towns…" (BETHEL, 1981, p. 239). At that point she came to realize a common identity with the community around her, an unbreakable bond between her inner self and the outer self.

Through her autobiographical work, Angelou also ascertains the existence of geographical displacement as an African American tradition. Displacement means first and foremost that the black broken body was forcibly uprooted through the experience of slavery. That was the primal cataclysmic event which destroyed family bond in the community, one which could only be abated by spirituality. Angelou underlines such suffocating experience by ascertaining how painful it is to grow up for a "Southern Black girl", and that "being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 16). Conversely, she shows the importance of spirituality to soothe the pain by believing that "the peace of a day's ending was an assurance that the covenant God made with children, Negroes and the crippled was still in effect". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 16)

Harold Bloom (2009) identifies in Angelou's biographical work a complex relation to the African American memoirs. Such memoirs are primarily formed by the slave narrative and the church sermon. For Bloom, Angelou invigorates her hope and strength through African spirituality. Her sense of self, Bloom added, goes back to the

African American paradigm of what he calls 'the American Religion'. The essence of West African spirituality, according to Bloom, was retained even after the ordeal of the "Middle Passage from Africa to America". As he puts it, it is the gnosis of African spirituality, "the little me within the big me". Although not overtly reacted against, European faith was indeed transfigured by African American spirituality. As Broom cunningly puts it:

> Though converted to the slaveowners' ostensible Christianity, they transformed that European faith by a radical "knowing" that the "little me" or most inward self did not stem from the harsh space and time of the white world, but emanated ultimately from their unfallen cosmos that preceded the Creation-Fall of the whites. Angelou's pervasive sense that what is oldest and best in her own spirit derives from a lost, black fullness of being is one of the strongest manifestations in African American literature of this ancient gnosis. (BLOOM, 2009, p. 1).

As we can see above, the issue of displacement is deeply interwoven with that of spirituality, and as such both are fundamental to understand the African American identity. Transformational changes in society are known to be dynamic, but key characteristics of the African American community have not been superseded, nor perceived as a new African American persona. They have been suppressed by the allegiance to the white ruling class; albeit compressed and repressed, they morph and revamp in the deep inner self, a place not accessible to external forces. Such constant frictions are strenuous, though, to the extent of generating multiple individual and collective conflicts.

Individual conflicts are spiral in that they are forced towards the inner self alienating it by breaking a bond of affection in a process of detachment. Conversely, they may act to reconcile the inner self to its immediate environment in a process of attachment. The capacity of the inner self to react intentionally, one way or another, against those compelling forces is seen as resiliency. Remus Bejan (2009) uses the term 'Nigrescence' in his article on Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:

> For African Americans, racial identity is bound up in both the historically specific politics of representation and experience and the effects of repression that occur upon entry into the symbolic structures of language and culture, the social and political relations of everyday life, and active involvement with the racial projects of American society. The system of racial stratification characteristic of the American society has deep roots in eighteenth century European classification schemes, in the eugenics movement and the racialized history of imperialism. Slavery exaggerated existing ideas of racial difference and the inferiority of color people, serving as a rationalization of the exploitation of Africans in America. That same racist ideology continued, in metamorphosed form, after the emancipation of slaves, guaranteeing their subordinate status for

> generations. This particular experience has produced in time a number of competing representations of the Nigrescence. (BEJAN, 2009, p. 148).

In *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou discloses to the readers how she engaged in the herculean task to deal with her personal conflicts since her early childhood through her formative years. The title of the book constitutes information essential to the meaning of her oeuvre. Like a bird in the cage, she felt entrapped growing up in the segregated America of the thirties. Such experience is analogous to or rather inspired by that expressed in Dunbar's poem 'Sympathy'. Dunbar (2006) starts the poem by telling us that he knows what the "caged bird" feels. Like Dunbar, Angelou cries out to the world because she knows that there is no way of coping with what that exceeds the bonds of reasons. For Angelou, it goes beyond acceptability that the suffering bird, trapped in a cage, cannot fly off and avail herself of the equal opportunity of the 'American dream'. Similarly, in Dunbar´s poem the bird is deprived of lighthearted gaiety, not able to fly to the bright upland slopes outside.

In Dunbar's poem, time in the outside world elapses like a rapidly flowing river but for the imprisoned body in the cage, time drags. Like Dunbar's caged bird that strives for freedom, Marguerite wants to break the shackles of oppression which were meant to render dormant the seeds of emancipation in her. She rises to the challenge of facing her conflicts as they emerge from her own entourage and from the society as a whole. As McMurry (1976, p. 1) points out, "the cage is a metaphor for roles which, because they have become institutionalized and static, do not facilitate inter- relationship, but impose patterns of behavior which deny true identity". It is made manifest in her autobiographical book that Angelou, as much as young Marguerite, had to struggle against the institutionalized roles imposed by the white ruling class and further reinforced by an African American patriarchal community.

By the same token, Pierre A. Walker (1995) brings special attention to the formal strategies Angelou uses in her book to face those institutionalized roles. For Walker, Angelou's autobiography is didactically narrated as "a sequence of lessons about resisting oppression, a sequence that leads Maya progressively from helpless rage and indignation to forms of subtle resistance, and finally to outright and active protest". (WALKER, 1995, p. 93). In this sense, Angelou's didactic lessons also endorse that racial segregation has been relentless in America for centuries, and as such it came to atrophy her black body since its inception. Self-hatred is then an inevitable corollary, leading to destructive feelings of low esteem to such an extent that she fancies herself a white girl.

She desperately needs to wake out of her "black ugly dream" and see that her hair is no longer kinky, but rather long and blond. She thinks of the hypnotizing effects of her light-blue eyes and the dazzling whiteness of her skin. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 2-3).

As Mary Jane Lupton (1998, p. 56) puts it, Maia lives in a world which is based on rejection of her own race. Suzette A. Henke (2009, p. 108) also stresses out that Maia was prematurely oppressed by the overwhelming representation of white female beauty in 1930's America. The truth is that black women have always been subjected to endless subliminal or clearly perceptible ideals of white beauty through the media, the very black community itself, and the society. To be young and black in Arkansas, she said, "meant, quite simply, to be lonely and to be doubly marginal—twice removed from the dominant power group and handicapped by a burden of racial and gender stereotypes".

Malcom X (1990, p. 169), a major exponent of the Civil Rights movement, draws attention to the fact that the whites deliberately make African American hate their own identity, that is their African characteristics. As Malcom X sees it, the idea of blackness being ugly has a devastating effect on the formation of black identity, which is further accompanied by internalized racism. Referring to self-hatred within the black community, Malcom X underlines that:

> We hated our heads, we hated the shape of our nose, we wanted one of those long dog-like noses, you know; we hated the color of our skin, hated the blood of Africa that was in our veins. And in hating our features and our skin and our blood, why, we ended up hating ourselves. And we hated ourselves. (1990, p. 169).

The lack of self-esteem found within the African American community, as shown above, helps to explain Maia's initial helpless rage. First and foremost, it is worth reasserting that Maia's story is narrated in retrospect. This alludes to the preponderant position held by the narrating "I" over the narrated "I". As Marguerite became an adult, her lenses would magnify her understanding of the conflicts she grew with, and as such the segregating South would come out more realistic and her response to it hypothetically more incisive. Being distinctly a child then, however, she lacks the strength and resourcefulness of an older adult to fight back.

Marguerite's uneasiness with her racist surrounding is subtly manifest in her initial protest. She described the unfair relation between the local authority and her oppressed community. It was when a "used-to-be sheriff" came to warn her grandma that

Willie had to lay low at night to avoid being lynched by some boys searching the community for a "crazy nigger" who had messed with a white woman. Marguerite never forgot how humiliating it was for her uncle to bend down and hide in chicken droppings even not having committed any crime. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 17).

On another occasion, Marguerite senses a feeling of growing restlessness when she and Bailey were heading to town. They felt terrified as they reached the white part of town, like "explorers walking without weapons into man-eating animals' territory". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 25). Segregating South was soon made visible to the eyes of young Black children. They feared crossing the path of white folks as if they could fall prey to ruthless slaves catchers. As Marguerite puts it:

> In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites look like. Other than that they were different, to be dreaded, and in that dread was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 25).

Angelou also attests her strategy of subtle resistance in an attempt to reverse the superiority values of white folks even though such values still persist in their white mentality. She depicted the situation of some families of 'powhitetrash' who lived on her grandma's farmland. She speaks of the lack of hygiene of the poor white people who came into the store filling the air with their strong body scents. Marguerite complained of the improper behavior of the white children crawling over the shelves and jangling around incessantly. She also disapproved of the liberty those young children took in the store and the fact that they treated her uncle and grandma by their first names. Young Marguerite narrates the most painful and confusing experience she had when some white children aped her grandmother:

> Then one of them wrapped her right arm in the crook of her left, pushed out her mouth and started to hum. I realized that she was aping my grandmother. Another said, "Naw, Helen, you ain't standing like her. This here's it." Then she lifted her chest, folded her arms and mocked that strange carriage that was Annie Henderson. Another laughed. "Naw, you can't do it. Your mouth ain't pooched out enough. It's like this." (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 30).

Unable to respond with violence to that insolent attitude, Marguerite remained in a state of utter bewilderment. She felt as if her wrists were cuffed by a racial hierarchy which left no room for confrontation. She thought of a way to lash out at those children, grabbing the rifle and aiming at those who had unfairly triggered her frustration, but she remained numb with disbelief. So did her grandmother who avoided reacting

against those unscrupulous white children. As grandma had grown in age and experience, she knew how to deal with white folks. She taught Marguerite and Bailey that the less they said to white folks the better. So, to respond to that childish impertinence, Marguerite's grandmother started singing "Then she began to moan a hymn. Maybe not to moan, but the tune was so slow and the meter so strange that she could have been moaning". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 30). As the white children continued their disrespectful behavior, grandma "sang on. No louder than before, but no softer either. No slower or faster." (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 31). When the girls got tired of mocking her, grandmother "hummed on and the apron strings trembled". Then she changed her song to "Bread of Heaven, bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more" and some minutes later resumed singing "Glory, glory. Hallelujah, when I lay my burden down".

Sima Kamali (2018) reiterates Walker's categorization of Angelou's response to oppression. According to Kamali, Angelou's protest is expressed through her interaction with the older generation within the community. As shown above, Angelou also assumed her grandmother's nonviolent attitude, although she felt obliged to do so. Kamali emphasizes that Angelou's feeling is infused with her grandmother's ideology, one inherited from prior generation and supposed to be passed on to the younger one. It is then worth mentioning that that set of beliefs and values attributed to the black community is a tradition that goes back to the first African American slaves' mode of resistance.

In that regard, Angelou was sharp to reproduce the same nonviolent attitude adopted by the early proponents of the Civil Rights movement. In no way shall that be considered an inability of the African American community to aptly address the issue of racism and its limiting effects. Rigorous controls were exercised upon enslaved African Americans and death threat was always imminent. Disobedience was lethal, as slaves however a dear and necessary commodity were, to some extent, replaceable. Resistance was then built, not in terms of a direct conflict against the white ruling class, but as much secretive and subtle as possible. Although enslaved African Americans were erroneously thought to owe docility to their white masters, the strategy of nonviolent protest was meant to endure the excruciating and ignoble conditions of slavery. It may, as such, be considered a way to empower the seemingly black muted body through spirituality. In that respect, Kamali (2018, p. 64) is vehement in expounding her views on Angelou's subtle resistance, as she puts it:

> Although she explains it through the perspective of her paternal grandmother, Angelou builds the basis of subtle resistance on being non-confrontational but still to a certain extent effective. While she addresses the criticism of nonviolent protest for not being aggressive and bold in confronting racist white people, Angelou credits the resistant strategy of this older generation in being the foundation for future models of protest, as will be demonstrated in the next stages. In addition, the lexical choices made to describe her grandmother's ideology about white people is rooted in the master and slave hierarchy of the antebellum era, which implies that Angelou is paying tribute to her ancestors for their culture of resistance. The final rhetorical question emphasizes the importance of this tradition of resilience and resistance as an integral part of black American culture since the days of slavery, as discussed in the slave narrative tradition section. (KAMALI, 2018, p. 64).

As Marguerite grew older, she was no longer under the umbrella of age which, in theory, should protect her from such an oppressive racial prejudice. That all kind of interpersonal relationships within the community were interspersed with social and racial abrasions would soon be interpreted by young Marguerite as a shameful experience meant to bruise her self-esteem. Her indignation was intensified when she became witness to cases of overt collective discrimination within the community. But at times, Marguerite would find ground to believe that there might be hope beyond those thorny hills she had to climb. As symbolized by Dunbar's caged bird, Marguerite does not want to give in to social injustice, but to beat her bars and break free.

In her quest for identity, Marguerite found resonance for herself in a woman with distinctive qualities. But even when she found admiration for a Black woman, Mrs. Berta Flowers, she still used white folks' beauty as a parameter. Speaking of her, Marguerite claimed that "She was thin without the taut look of wiry people, and her printed voile dresses and flowered hats were as right for her as denim overalls for a farmer. She was our side's answer to the richest white woman in town". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 93). In this sense, she found Mrs. Flowers a distinguished-looking woman. Mrs. Flowers was a laudable role model within the community, one that would even match an illegitimate standard of white beauty impinged upon the African American community. Furthermore, she sowed a fertile field with seeds of hope and knowledge that would help forge an unbreakable ego, as quoted below:

> She appealed to me because she was like people I had never met personally. Like women in English novels who walked the moors (whatever they were) with their loyal dogs racing at a respectful distance. Like the women who sat in front of roaring fireplaces, drinking tea incessantly from silver trays full of scones and crumpets. Women who walked over the 'heath' and read morocco-bound books and had two last names divided by a hyphen. It would be safe to say that she made me proud to be Negro, just by being herself… She acted just as refined as whitefolks in the movies and books and she was more beautiful, for none of them

> could have come near that warm color without looking gray by comparison. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 95).

If one reads between the lines, it then becomes apparent that Angelou praises here the kind of Western culture that brought knowledge into her life. Even though she turned to her racial background as the backstage of her literary work, it remains true that she was culturally imbued with and made a certain representation of an enriched westernized formation. In clear opposition to those knowledge sharing sessions, she recalls the low quality of Black school education when she was enrolled in Toussaint L'Ouverture School. There she was astounded by the ignorance of her classmates and the discourtesy or the teachers. (2015, p. 64). At Stamps, although a much smaller town, education was of a higher standard and teachers were much friendlier. In St. Louis, teachers' engagement with student was rather limited.

All in all, African American students were educated in segregated schools poorly funded and ill-equipped. It is then understandable that educational outcomes for African American students are a direct consequence of unequal access to teaching resources, teachers' academic background and school infrastructure in general. It is also arguable that such a deplorable state of affairs constitutes an active part of the institutionalized racism impregnated in all sociopolitical relations in the American society. In this respect, the entire community was victimized by an inequitable political structure that would hold the purse strings and government ensuring maximum utilization of resources in favor of the ruling class. That gross disparity was criticized by Angelou in her biographical book when she compared Lafayette County Training school with the white school. She claimed that "Lafayette County Training school distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 170) The sparsity of educational resources kept black students uneducated and untrained, left to perform menial work for low wages.

Another case of institutionalized racism which provoked indignation among black students was their graduation ceremony. It was a much expected occurrence, one meant to crown all their achievements and fill them with joy and pride. To their surprise, however, a white guest speaker, Mr. Edward Donleavy, went on stage to deliver a speech verging on institutionalized racism, referring in particular to the shameful distinction between white and black educational institutions in relation to their infrastructure and academic training. That was a poignant perturbation in Marguerite's life to see her prospects of a dignified career being darkened by a white politician. Of the black children

then the authorities had a preconceive view which tarnished their most innocent dreams. On that matter Angelou commented that:

> It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. We should all be dead. I thought I should like to see us all dead, one on top of the other. A pyramid of flesh with the whitefolks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths. The Dutch children should all stumble in their wooden shoes and break their necks. The French should choke to death on the Louisiana Purchase (1803) while silkworms ate all the Chinese with their stupid pigtails. As a species, we were an abomination. All of us. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 180, 181).

To the entire school dismay, the grim reaper had come onto stage to threaten their future with its bloody scythe. However, as cited above, spirituality was a powerful weapon African American had to fight back and assure their survival. And such response came out from the juvenile voice of Henry Reed who sang out the communal song "Lift every voice and sing" written by James Weldon Johnson. [75] Angelou stressed how that sound lifted their spirits. As she exclaimed, "We were on top again. As always, again. We survived. The depths had been icy and dark, but now a bright sun spoke to our souls. I was no longer simply a member of the proud graduating class of the 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race". (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 184)

On another occasion, though, the African spirituality, the memory of the poets and the songs of old slaves did not come to rescue Marguerite from her physical suffering and psychological distress. She laid bare her deepest frustration the day she had to see a white dentist for the unbearable pain of her decaying teeth. And to add insult to injury, first Marguerite and her grandmother had to follow the lane to go to the backstairs of the dentist's office. And as soon as they reached the back door, a young white girl disdained to come across them as they are colored people. Angelou found herself in a rather indignant situation when it "seemed terribly unfair to have a toothache and a headache and have to bear at the same time the heavy burden of Blackness". (2015, p. 187). No matter how sick she was, they had to wait outside in the blazing sun, and when the dentist eventually opened the door one hour later, he blatantly declared "Annie, you know I don't treat nigra, colored people". (2015, p. 188) As Marguerite's grandma tried to persuade

[75] Johnson was an African American writer who wrote poems and spirituals of Black culture. Johnson's poem "Lift every voice and sing" was dubbed "The Negro national anthem" because it represented the quest for freedom and emancipation of the African American community. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lift_Every_Voice_and_Sing

him otherwise, he incisively proclaimed “Annie, my policy is I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a nigger’s”. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 189).

The moment the caged bird would eventually beat the bars and make a break for freedom was when Marguerite thought of becoming a streetcar conductor. When her mother reacted negatively to her idea by reminding her that colored people were not accepted on the streetcars, Marguerite wanted to claim an immediate fury “which was followed by the noblest determination to break the restricting tradition”. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 265) As she said, she first felt disappointed but soon “gradually ascended the emotional ladder to haughty indignation, and finally to that state of stubbornness where the mind is locked like the jaws of an enraged bulldog”. (2015, p. 265) Of that final conflict Marguerite came out a victor. She did not give in to the institutionalized racism, she confronted the silly clerk instead. She thought the incident was a recurring stupid nightmare, an illegitimate conspiracy against African Americans. As she clearly puts it out:

> The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power.
>
> The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors, and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance. (ANGELOU, 2015, p. 272).

Maia Angelou was one of the most expressive literary voices of America. At an early age, she was sent to Stamps, Arkansas to her grandmother’s house after the divorce of her parents. Although she was carefully raised by her grandmother, she felt abandoned and displaced. A feeling she realized that was rooted in slavery and economic migration from the Southern to Northern part of America. She was still a child when she witnessed the unbearable social injustice that African Americans had to endure, and in response her biographical oeuvre became an unremitting lifelong struggle against institutionalized racism.

Angelou’s reaction to institutionalized racism gradually changed during her life. She knew it would not be easy to grow up in segregating South where no one got exempted from the burden of racial awareness. People of all age, indeed, suffer the social, political, and economical consequences of being part of a racially marginalized group, a burden which has never been lightened, not even for an innocent child. Nevertheless, the submissive responses from the marginalized group do not mean that they cowardly

accepted the position of dominance of the ruling class. In fact, it was the only way they found to assure the survival of the race through silent resistance.

As shown above, Dunbar's caged bird is a metaphor which represents the struggle of the African American people to break the social and physical constraints which keep them at the margin. As Angelou puts it, though, confronting the whites was not considered a wise thing for African American. The author herself was filled with indignation when she saw the poor white children deliberately aping her grandmother, calling her by her first name and showing no respect. Her indignation grew in acridity when she was rejected by the white dentist refusing to heal her teeth while she was agonizing in pain. She then witnessed the collective resentment of her school when a white authority delivered a racialized speech on graduation day. Nevertheless, her most incisive reaction was when she wanted to become a streetcar conductor. She did not accept the discriminating attitude of the white clerk. She wanted to put an end to all that injustice and that was when she had the noblest determination to break the restricting tradition. Through her biographical oeuvre and her contributions to the Civil Rights movement, Maia Angelou held a torch of freedom to light the obscurantism of segregated America.

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CONFLITOS E RESILIÊNCIA EM *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS*, DE MAIA ANGELOU

Resumo

Maia Angelou fala como conseguiu superar suas incertezas e estabelecer sua identidade ao tornar-se uma mulher adulta. Quando jovem, teve que lutar contra as barreiras impostas por uma sociedade sexista e racista. Para Angelou, não foi nada fácil confrontar o racismo institucional e sobreviver com a segregação racial dos Estados Unidos. Logo na infância, sentiu-se abandonada quando seus pais se separaram e teve que ser criada pela avó em Stamps. Enquanto crescia com a segregação no Sul, tinha complexo de inferioridade por se achar feia e desajeitada. Ela se imaginou acordar de um pesadelo em que uma linda garota branca tinha sido amaldiçoada por uma fada má, invejosa de sua beleza, e transformada em uma garota negra desproporcionada, com cabelo crespo e dentes desalinhados. Maia Angelou fala de seu sentimento de não pertencimento em relação aos lugares onde cresceu e à sua família. Ela testemunhou o desapontamento dos negros americanos marginalizados e alvo fácil do racismo institucionalizado e das desigualdades sociais. Entretanto, ela não deixou de denunciar o clima de insegurança em que vivia quando o impacto traumático de uma violência sexual gerou muita desconfiança da comunidade machista. Em geral, a bibliografia de Maia Angelou explorou suas vivências levando em conta o tratamento desigual da comunidade negra na sociedade americana.

Palavras-chave:

Conflitos. Resistência. Preconceito