



The Romanticization of Culture as a Force for Good: Maya Angelou's Vision for a Better World

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Abstract

This article decodes the diacritics of the map of culture clash or what the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie termed the “The danger of a single story” (2009) by introducing a line of thought whereby American blacks and whites can rethink the sense of disorientation associated with the black and white cultures to avoid cultural discrimination, dissolve cultural boundaries, and build up patterns for a cultural compromise. Through delving into the legacy of Maya Angelou (1928-2014), one can formulate the tenets of a manifesto for romanticizing culture. Romanticizing culture is a critical endeavor for a possibility of bridging cultural gaps to fulfill cultural harmony through the dissemination of liberal aesthetics, secularism, and a cultural newness to eradicate cultural fetishism and cast aside projections of otherness. It is a process of self-recovery which involves a jump over the deformed reality through the spread of mystic aesthetics to escape from the hostility images that prevents American blacks and whites from a spiritual self-consciousness. It can, above all, provide a possibility of a new mind-set towards fullness and perfection. Angelou's manifesto of romanticizing culture comprises these tenets: the poetics of mysticism, the hybrid aesthetic of “rasquachismo”, a notion coined by Tomas Ybarra-Frausto calling for breaking the magnifying glass that doubles the scale of cultural tensions, and the accentuation of the positive and elimination of the negative, a mode of thought that can mitigate projections of otherness.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, Romanticizing culture, The poetics of mysticism, The hybrid aesthetic of rasquachismo, The accentuation of the positive and elimination of the negative

Introduction

Through delving into the legacy of Maya Angelou, one can formulate the tenets of a manifesto for romanticizing culture in terms of what the British sociologist Ruth Levitas labels “the desire for a better way of being” (Levitas 1990, 198). Romanticizing culture is a critical endeavor for a possibility of cultural juxtaposition through the dissemination of a cultural newness that can put an end to cultural fetishism and cast aside projections of otherness so that the dream of perfectibility can come true and flourish. In actuality, the prolific African American poet Maya Angelou rejects the politics of absolute difference between the white and black cultures. She is against the claim that cultures should regard themselves as alien to one another. Rather, she supports cross-fertilization. In other words, she wants to make a model in which the other flows into the self, but with no transgression against culture. Her notion of cultural juxtaposition is in conformity with Homi Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity”: the emergence of new cross-cultural forms between two diverse cultures. In addition, she is against surrender to the gaze of the white man, since it echoes what Frantz Fanon calls a “betrayal” because the white man misleadingly tries to chide the black man that “it is not enough to try to be white, but that a white totality must be achieved” (Fanon 1967, 193). Angelou’s portrayal of Black personas in her poetry challenges the alienation of Black people from their own identities and their inability to escape the white gaze. So, Angelou’s rebuttal to be at all times under the white gaze touches upon Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “collectivity” (Spivak 2003, 56), which means that when the oppressor or even the oppressed moves to the other place, he/she does as the other place, a mode of sameness she strongly resists.

By extension, Angelou wants to frame up an incentive to encourage all black and white Americans to adopt a more liberal, secular, humanistic, humane, hopeful and democratic view of present realities and future possibilities. For her, it is not convincing enough that injustice, oppression and discrimination might be the gateway to a better future. She realizes that the American arena is a chaotic one where dreams and aspirations of the black race remain unrealized. She has seen with shock and unbelief the endemic oppression and discrimination that have become part

and parcel of the racial-based American society. Therefore, her main aim in writing poetry is to provide cultural alternatives to the social and cultural ills in such society. According to Fanon, “each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it” (Fanon 1963, 166). Angelou has actually fulfilled this mission by her disenchantment with the socio-cultural and political happenings around her. Her principal objective is not only to inform, educate and entertain, but to equally change the society towards perfection through art. In this context, the Kenyan novelist and critic James Ngugi wa Thiong’o asserts that “art . . . is revolutionary by its very nature as art . . . Art strives towards perfection” (Ngugi 1998, 13). Angelou’s ideology in her verse is to overlap the dominant aesthetics of whiteness in the American cultural scene because, according to Edward Said, “being a White Man, in short, was a very concrete manner of being-in-the-world, a way of taking hold of reality, language, and thought” (Said 2003, 227). This racist ideology raised many eyebrows in black American literary output, including Maya Angelou’s. Thus, Angelou warns black Americans against falling into the abyss of the Manichean allegory and discrimination imposed by the racist white culture.

According to Angelou, however, cultural belatedness is the main spring of cultural oppositions between blacks and whites and therefore each group must do without such a consciousness-contaminating mode of thought in order to open up new horizons for cultural harmoniousness. This idea holds that blacks and whites can eliminate the temporal space that confines each human ethnicity’s awareness and deceives its members into thinking that their culture deserves to be highly regarded by transcending the conflicting cultural and historical constructions. Herein comes the need for tolerance towards historical instances of racial tension, such as the American Civil War, the effects of the Great Depression, and employment discrimination, which disproportionately affected black Americans. This way, romanticizing culture is to advance the “*rasquachismo*” aesthetic, a notion developed by Tomas Ybarra-Frausto that calls for breaking the magnifying glass that doubles the scale of cultural tensions by deconstructing the domains of difference. Put another way, the “*rasquachismo*” aesthetic does not mean the nullification of one’s cultural identity for the sake of the magnification of the other’s cultural

identity, but rather it ensures cross-fertilization without nullification, erasure or negation.

Moreover, romanticizing culture is a sort of self-recovery that entails escaping from a reality that has been distorted via the spread of mystic aesthetics. With her poetry, Angelou offers blacks and whites a mystic escape from the hostile images that serve as a burden in the face of spiritual self-consciousness. Thus, her poetry can aid these communities in mystically heightening their awareness of who they are. To Angelou, however, mystic self-knowledge can help minority groups better assimilate themselves as well as the other. It is an emancipatory option to free black Americans from the merciless rejection of the white other. The poetics of mysticism is thus a critical endeavor to overlap the dominant ethics and aesthetics that define beauty and superiority only in relation to the white culture. As a result, the ideology of otherness becomes obsolete. In a similar vein, George P. Fletcher rightly notes that if people adopt a mystic ideology, they begin to adopt a romantic identity and view national or cultural identification as a fashion of self-expression: “The Romantic views national identification as a mode of self-expression rather than in terms of the rights and obligations of citizenship” (Fletcher 2002, 251).

Above all, Maya Angelou’s manifesto of romanticizing culture aspires to help the culturally diverse groups, particularly black and white Americans, to build up a sanctuary where fraternity, brotherhood, peace, juxtaposition, and tolerance can exist, or as the British singer John Lennon points it out in his prominent lyric “Imagine”: “Imagine all the people/ Living life in peace/. . . . A brotherhood of man/ Imagine all the people/ Sharing all the world/ I hope someday you’ll join us/ And the world will live as one” (Lennon 1971, 1). In an interview with *The Black Scholar*, Angelou asserts that “the life of art one wants to lead is a worthwhile one and can hopefully improve life, the quality of life for all people, that’s already a chore” (Angelou 1977, 45). In a sense, she emphasizes that all human beings must fight against evil in order to widen the space of good: “Like most things it’s the person who perpetuates the evil who is usually more crippled by it than the person upon whom the evil is perpetrated. There is something very healthy about struggling against evil. It’s very positive, puts a little spring in your step” (Angelou 1977, 53). She also declares: “I am for every person, or groups of people who intend to make

it a better country for everybody, a better world for everybody. I mean I would be a liar if I said I thought I could enjoy my freedom without this white woman across the street enjoying hers. I cannot” (Angelou 1977, 52). Accordingly, Ruth Sheffey maintains that the rhetoric of black poetry, including the poetry of Maya Angelou, is “allied to the primitive idea of goodness, to the force of utterance” (Sheffey 1980, 97), thereby building up a romantic reconfiguration in which cultural antagonisms can coexist. By analogy, Jaime Fuller argues that in April 1978, Angelou told *The Washington Post*: “My equipment tends to be that of a social humanitarian and a poet, which I suppose is the same thing, and I tend to watch how people are. I have three very close friends in Washington, two black and one white and they lie about fifteen blocks apart” (qtd in Fuller 2014, 1).

A case in point here is Angelou’s autobiography *The Heart of a Woman* (1981) which reflects upon Hegel’s law of “Negation of the Negation” as she adverts to the birth of a new utopian survival mechanism between blacks and whites through the portrayal of a chain of interconnected transitions as she and her son Guy are portrayed living with whites in an attempt to participate in the new openness between blacks and whites. Likewise, in her poem “A Plagued Journey”, Angelou’s dream of perfectibility and social betterment unfolds itself most clearly as the black persona portrayed in the poem has a burning desire to climb up the mountain of light with a hope of utopian existence: “Happy prints of/ an invisible time are illuminated . . ./ I am forced/ outside myself to/ mount the light and ride joined with Hope” (Angelou 1994, 198).

The Poetics of Mysticism

The poetics of mysticism help Maya Angelou to provide a spiritual jump over the deformed material reality of American culture and the hegemonic influence of the white culture. In one of her telling comments on the positive impact of the mystic, Caroline Myss argues that adopting mystic insights is essential for a better human identity which is the hallmark of the realization of truth:

From poets like Maya Angelou to scientists like Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking to astronauts like Edgar Mitchell, people with the Mystic archetype

have broken through the barriers of ordinary fear-based thinking and awakened their intuitive intellect. For these individuals, as for so many mystics, fulfilling work dedicated to the betterment of humankind is a stepping-stone to truth. (Myss 2013, 191)

In an article entitled “Saint Maya”, John McWhorter recalls Angelou’s declaration which demonstrates that spirituality is an integral part of the black identity. Having lost the dream of self-realization through their black-skinned body, black Americans strongly believed in the colorless spirit which is hard to be under any mode of discrimination. Angelou once declared: “Black people could never be like whites. We were different. More respectful, more merciful, more spiritual” (qtd in McWhorter 2014, 1). Critically, Angelou’s infatuation with mystical scriptures reflects upon her rejection of the material American culture, which robs man of his crystal and unique individuality. In her interview with Audrey T. McCluskey, Angelou emphasizes her long-dated connection with spiritual hymns: “I read James Weldon Johnson’s poem *Preachment*, and that was the melody closest to the blood in my veins” (McCluskey 2001, 3). Being a light in the darkness of the material culture, Angelou maintains that spirituality can salvage the black fragmented individual from the failures he/she confronts. She describes these failures as an instrument to wipe out the rust of a diamond, namely the black spirit: “It is important to encounter defeat—in order to best be oneself. It demands precision in order to develop the brilliance of a diamond” (Randall-Tsuruta 1980, 105).

Angelou also affirms that to have the sensation of the mystic is at the heart of a romantic culture as the unseen beauty can only be perceived through the spirit, being the silent observer and the fullness of our inner being where authentic life emerges. Therefore, after the death of Maya Angelou in 2014, Charles M. Blow obituarizes her in a way illustrating her endless quest for truth, a burden taken up by mystics: “While in search of the truth, she became the truth” (Blow 2014, 1). By the same token, in her interview with Audrey T. McCluskey, Angelou asserts that she is mystically haunted by the search for truth: “What I have tried to do in all of my work over the past 30 years is to tell the truth and to tell it eloquently” (McCluskey 2001, 3).

Besides, Jana Riess rightly notes that one of the most remarkable characteristics of Maya Angelou's poetry is that it "has always been its full-on, all-in commitment to living life in the kingdom. That's God's kingdom in the here and now. Angelou wasn't waiting for some pie-in-the-sky release to an ethereal realm" (Riess 2014, 1). Put differently, Angelou sees that the human body is not a burden, but a container of the spirit, even if it is not a perfect form. She looks upon her black body as a gift, a wonder, not a cage. In this context, in her influential poem "Phenomenal Woman", for instance, she blames the white other for not recognizing the spiritual part of her being: "They try so much/ But they can't touch/ My inner mystery" (Angelou 1994, 131). In mystic terms, realizing the spiritual part in someone else's being would allow the individual to realize the spiritual part within himself. So, this mystical practice is a win-win situation for blacks and whites meanwhile. For Angelou, however, to be black is not a disgrace, but rather, a beauty. Accordingly, her harmony with her blackness undermines the inferiority of blackness. According to Sarah Halprin, Angelou uses ugliness to spiritualize the black identity: "Ugliness is understood to be a phase of identity, a temporary disguise to be dropped when the spirit is able to manifest itself" (Halprin 1996, 157).

Moreover, Priscilla R. Ramsey holds that Angelou's poetry has succeeded in building up a mystic sanctuary to hold a collective transcendental self which would help blacks to escape being overwhelmed by the oppressive and mystifying structures associated with the political injustice espoused by a white-dominated society: "Self-image becomes a new and assertive one as she transcends the singular self through a wide and compassionate direct assertion of her statements against political injustice" (Ramsey 1984-85, 152). Angelou's poetry thus deconstructs the negative feelings which mostly outline the existence of the black community as a minority, thus creating a mystic parallel world and opening up a gateway towards a mystical jump over the upside-down reality. Angelou's love and political poetry are both replete with loneliness and human alienation, but they are balanced out by an exaltation of life and sensuality that results in a transcendence over everything that would otherwise ruin and cause her sorrow. This sensuous world serves as a fortification against things that could be alienating, such as men, war, and oppression of any kind, in the outside world (Ramsey 1984-85).

From this perspective, in Angelou's influential poem "Still I Rise", the speaker is portrayed as a black ocean, a source of endless spiritual energy to achieve a positive self-identity: "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,/ Welling and swelling I bear in the tide" (Angelou 1994, 164). Angelou's eternal optimism is clear enough in the last line of the poem: "I am a dream and the hope of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise" (Angelou 1994, 164). In addition, in the poem "Just Like Job", she couples her life with rivers and mountains as her spiritual home: "My life . . ./ Deep rivers ahead/ High mountains above" (Angelou 1994, 172). Likewise, in her poem "Where We Belong, A Duet", she portrays Africa as a source of eternal light or epiphany: "Then you rose into my life/ Like a promised sunrise" (Angelou 1994, 128). In the poem "Thank You, Lord", Jesus Christ is portrayed—in mystic terms—as "brown-skinned/ Neat Afro/ Full lips" (Angelou 1994, 175).

Mystically speaking, the first stanza of Angelou's "A Brave And Startling Truth" is a clear reference to the Valley of Wonderment, one of the seven valleys of mysticism. The speaker is conscious of the glory and vastness of God's creation, thus discovering the divine mysteries behind these wonders. Realizing the beauty of God's creation, the speaker can touch the inner mysteries of a better human being abundant in peace, mercy, love. Such realization would allow inner peace to flourish and hostility to wither. When humans realize that they all belong to a single, divine spirit, they can touch the true essence of their existence, a crystal-like essence devoid of all impurities:

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet
Traveling through casual space
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns
To a destination where all signs tell us
It is possible and imperative that we learn
A brave and startling truth
And when we come to it
To the day of peacemaking
When we release our fingers
From fists of hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms. (Angelou 2019, 1)

The Hybrid Aesthetic of *Rasquachismo*

Maya Angelou's poetry incorporates the hybrid aesthetic of "*rasquachismo*" which apprises blacks and whites not to exoticize the counter culture in order to open up new horizons for a cultural compromise. This process of hybridity is compatible with an affirmation on Bhabha's concept of "The Third Space of Enunciation" in which mutual respect is possible via cultural syncretism, a strategy for resolving conflicts between cultures. Thus, the concept of otherness does not exist. No room for hatred can be observed, but rather a room for coexistence and tolerance of the otherness of the counter other. In a sense, Maya Angelou's works reflect that due to the white dominating cultural milieu, black Americans are not given an opportunity to be fully accepted by the mainstream culture (Du 2014). According to Angelou, however, "Until blacks and whites see each other as brother and sister, we will not have party. It's very clear I respect myself and insist upon it from everybody. And because I do it, I then respect everybody, too" (Angelou [n.d.], 1). In a similar vein, Angelou once declared: "It's important for young black men and women. I think it's imperative for young white men and women. You see, only equals make friends. Any other relationship is out of order" (qtd in Whitaker 2013, 1). In the eyes of Maya Angelou, all humans can be regarded as students, and hence they should always learn how to take up the burden of creating a better human identity and fraternity through adopting negotiation rather than negation, or as she tells Audrey T. McCluskey: "I think each of us is a teacher, and according to our understanding, if we are lucky and courageous, each of us is a student all the time" (McCluskey 2001, 4).

In the poem "A Georgia Song", Angelou calls for cultural appropriation in order to make a "new moon" loom large in place of the "whitened moon" which represents the nullification of the black race (Angelou 1994, 187). She also condemns the dominance of the white culture being an obstacle in the wishful harmony between the two warring cultures: "Chant for us a new song. A song/ Of Southern peace" (Angelou 1994, 188). More specifically, she seems to be asserting that hope deferred makes the heart sick and the fulfilling desire is a tree of life when she points out that betrayed love brings about disappointment: "We need a wind to

strike/ Sharply, as the thought of love/ Betrayed can stop the heart / A cool new moon a/ Winter's night, calm blood,/ Sluggish, moving only/ Out of habit/ We need/ Peace" (Angelou 1994, 176-188). For Angelou, it is high time to bury the hatchet and stop fueling the fire as all modes of hostility shall never give an opportunity for coexistence, love, warmth, and peace, all of which are represented by the fresh wind, the new moon, and the winter's night.

In *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die*, Angelou imparts a universal message emphasizing the essentiality of cultural harmoniousness rather than cultural rejection. Harmoniousness and juxtaposition demand the end of the assault against black folks so that a sanctuary of love and fraternity can be erected:

No More
The hope that
the razored insults
which mercury slide over your tongue
will be forgotten
and you will learn the words of love
Mother Brother Father Sister Lover Friend. (Angelou 1971, 40)

Added to this, Angelou sees that the blacks' zero self-image can never open up horizons for integration with whites because such hateful image is connected with a sense of inferiority and worthlessness: "African-Americans always find that they are in possession of a zero image which results from their sense of worthlessness" (Gutman 1977, 534). So, in her poem "Savior," Angelou asserts that the negative sense of shame within the blacks shall give birth to a negative sense of anger and disrespect towards the whites, thus working against human integration. For her, it is wise to have a strong sense of self if blacks desire to build up a sanctuary of love and fraternity with whites: "Your children, burdened with/ Disbelief, blinded by a patina/ of wisdom" (Angelou 1994, 250). In the poem "Just Like Job", Angelou directs a scathing satire against the worthless existence under which blacks are living because this sense of worthlessness works against their wishful looking for the join; that is, the oppressed's desire to be accepted by the oppressor: "When my blanket

was nothing but dew, Rags and bones/ Were all I owned” (Angelou 1994, 172). As a result, she firmly opines that the blacks must have a positive sense of self in the country for which they sacrificed themselves: “My life give I gladly to Thee/ Deep rivers ahead/ High mountains above” (Angelou 1994, 172). She also warns that hope for integration will be shattered if blacks are haunted by deep fears of nullification or dehumanization: “But fears gather round like wolves in the dark” (Angelou 1994, 172). In other words, she wishes to drive the blacks into equalism: to be equal is not to be the same. Blacks must sense they are equal to whites if they want to come to a cultural compromise with them, while it is not a must to act according to the white ideologies and modes of thought.

The Accentuation of the Positive and Elimination of the Negative

Maya Angelou’s romantic wish to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative is an endeavor to minimize what Bhabha refers to as “projections of otherness” (Bhabha 1994, 12). It also fosters Fanon’s “reciprocal recognitions” between the black and white cultures (Fanon 1967, 170). It can, furthermore, eradicate cultural belatedness as a consciousness-contaminating mode of thought, since nostalgia for the past reinforces cultural fetishism in the collective consciousness of diverse cultural groups. The accentuation of the positive and elimination of the negative thus supports the hybrid mediums, for it throws the light on the affinities between cultures rather than their divergent ethics and aesthetics. It, above all, propels blacks and whites to forget about their insistence on difference or supremacy. This cultural practice, however, requires the circulation of liberal aesthetics and secularism in order to tolerate the cultural tensions between the black and the white cultures such as the effects of the Great Depression, the American Civil War, and the history of racial discrimination, a series of events that negatively affected the black race.

L. B. Hagen argues that the poetry of Maya Angelou is mainly about “the pride of blackness and African heritage” (Hagen 1997, 118). Similarly, Juan Du rightly observes that “the source for black self-definition, Angelou believes, is the union of Black pride and African American culture. Thus, she devotes herself to educating and affirming the positive meaning of blackness” (Du 2014, 67). In this context, Angelou, in the poem “Ain’t That Bad?”, glorifies blackness and the black

heritage in a way which places black culture at the forefront of all cultures: “Black as the earth which has given birth/ To nations, and when all else is gone will abide” (Angelou 1994, 165). Besides, in her theological poem “Thank You, Lord”, Angelou extols the star figures of the black culture such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and W. E. B. Du Bois. These figures are highly praised in the poem to the extent that their souls are portrayed to be reincarnated into the soul of Jesus Christ who is metaphorically described as a “brown-skinned” black persona with “full lips”:

I see You
Brown-skinned,
Neat Afro,
Full lips,
A little goatee.
A Malcolm,
Martin,
Du Bois. (Angelou 1994, 175)

By the same token, in the poem “Weekend Glory”, Angelou eulogizes a black woman who jumps over the distorted identity or the zero image of the self in order to take pride in her black positive cultural identity: “If they want to learn how to live life right,/ they ought to study me on Saturday night” (Angelou 1994, 206). Due to her positive self-image, the woman can lead a life identical to that of whites that she “then get spruced up/ and laugh and dance” (206). Conversely, in “Sepia Fashion Show”, Angelou despises the black American bourgeois who conform to the racist ideology to attain material gains like whites in a capitalist-ideologized society at the expense of their black cultural identity: “The Black Bourgeois, who all say ‘yah’/ when yeah is what they’re meaning” (Angelou 1994, 48). The Black Bourgeois brings to mind Fanon’s insight that when the oppressed, i.e. the black, embraces the Manichean allegory of the oppressor, i.e. the white, “he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values” (Fanon 1963, 4). To use Abdul R. JanMohamed’s diagnosis, the Black Bourgeois, who are misrepresented by Maya Angelou, can be “seen as a vacant imitator without a culture of his own” (JanMohamed 1985, 5).

Metaphorically, in her poem “Just Like Job”, Angelou pictures natural objects for which Africa is known such as the deep rivers and high mountains, markers of African civilization with which African Americans should identify themselves: “My life . . . / Deep rivers ahead/ High mountains above” (Angelou 1994, 172). By analogy, in the poem “Where We Belong, A Duet”, Angelou identifies herself with Africa as a source of inspiration and pride: “Then you rose into my life/ Like a promised sunrise” (Angelou 1994, 129). In this vein, Angelou tells Audrey T. McCluskey that her long visits to Ghana make her realize the glory and the genius of her origins, thus romanticizing the aboriginal according to cultural critic Gayatri Spivak: “What we are dreaming of here is not how to keep the aboriginal in a state of excluded cultural conformity, but how to learn and construct a sense of sacred nature by attending to them” (Spivak 1996, 116). Put another way, Angelou’s visits to Ghana become the umbilical cord which accentuates the positive of the rituals of the land through sensing the great magic of the return to ancestral memories. From this angle, Angelou asserts: “When I returned I thought, ‘This is my land, my people have bought it with their blood, their sweat, their tears, their prayers, their laughter, and their dance’” (McCluskey 2001, 3).

Significantly, Angelou is against categorization and demonization of blacks. This is quite apparent in her ironical lines which scandalize America’s obsessive desire to categorize and epitomize the “niggers” as just an “N” during the Second World War, a derogatory epithet which mirrors depersonalization and dehumanization, if not a desire for nullification. For her, blacks should revolt against persecution and bullying in order to eschew the low self-esteem and the sense of inferiority arising from the endless attempts of categorization because such abominable sense works against the possession of self-assertion:

With the “N” in caps
was like saying Japanese
instead of saying Japs. (Angelou 1994, 43)

Furthermore, in her poem “Our Grandmothers”, Angelou bitterly satirizes the white mentality which tries to dehumanize and debase blacks by naming them in a way which is morally condemnable, socially unjust, and has no justification

whatsoever. The whites call them “nigger, nigger bitch, heifer, /mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon/ whore, hot tail, thing, it” (Angelou 1994, 256). Therefore, she encourages black Americans to build up a collective positive cultural identity: “Give a legal name to beg from/ for the first/ time of its life” (Angelou 1994, 83). Likewise, Angelou ambivalently eulogizes the historiography of naming blacks in the course of time “from colored man to Negro” (Angelou 1994, 43), from “niggers” to “Blacks” to the degree that the label “Blacks” becomes a prestigious marker for the black identity. In the poem “The Calling of Names”, Angelou attests to this view when she underscores the pride of being black: “Now you’ll get hurt/ if you don’t call him ‘Black’” (Angelou 1994, 46). Also, in her poem “Willie”, a black man asserts that blackness becomes the dominant in all rituals: “Watch for me and you will see/ That I’m present in the songs that children sing” (Angelou 1994, 150). Angelou ends the poem with the following adamant wish uttered by Willie:

When the sun rises
I am the time.
When the children sing
I am the Rhyme. (Angelou 1994, 151)

Above all, in her *Just Give Me a Cool Drink 'fore I Die*, Angelou directs a scorching satire against America’s rejection of the black cultural constructions which are purposefully cast aside from the rhetorics of the so-called American Dream, thus throwing blacks into the abyss of non-recognition forever. The description of the White House as “America’s White Out-House” is illustrative of the statist policies which cannot tolerate the otherness of the black other, who is metaphorically contextualized in the form of “the kitchens and fields of rejection” (Angelou 1971, 40). Furthermore, in the poem “When I Think About Myself”, Angelou satirizes the whites’ hostile contempt for the cultural legacy of African Americans and charges them with duplicity and misleading:

The tales they tell, sound just like lying,
They grow the fruit,
But eat the rind,

I laugh until I start to crying,
When I think about my folks. (Angelou 1971, 25)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the poetry of the black American poet Maya Angelou offers cultural logic for how humanity can rethink the sense of disorientation associated with the black and white cultures, dissolve cultural barriers, and develop patterns for a cultural compromise as well as a better human identity. According to Angelou, in order to prevent cultural fetishism and eradicate projections of otherness, it is essential to romanticize culture as a better way of being. This line of thought would increase the likelihood of intercultural concord. Romanticizing culture is thus a process of self-recovery that entails escaping from the hostile images that serve as a barrier in the way of blacks and whites to move towards romantic self-consciousness through the dissemination of mystic, liberal and secular aesthetics. It may also offer a chance for a new mindset that is oriented towards integration and perfection. Angelou's manifesto of romanticizing culture, however, consists of certain tenets such as the poetics of mysticism, the hybrid aesthetic of "*rasquachismo*", and the accentuation of the positive and elimination of the negative. Angelou uses the poetics of mysticism to offer a spiritual leap over the perverted material American world and the dominant white culture. For her, accepting mystic insights is crucial for a greater human identity, which is the hallmark of the realization of truth. So, the poetics of mysticism works for the betterment of humankind. According to Angelou, however, the black fractured persons can be saved from the failures they encounter through spirituality, which she sees as a light amid the darkness of the material American culture. Besides, Angelou's poetry embodies the "*rasquachismo*" hybrid aesthetic, which warns blacks and whites against exoticizing the counter culture in order to broaden possibilities for cultural juxtaposition and integration. Furthermore, Angelou's emphasis on the positive and eradication of the negative fosters a hybrid medium since it highlights cultural connections rather than differences in ethics and aesthetics. Importantly, Angelou opposes categorizing and demonizing black people. Her satirical comments, which scandalize America's obsession with categorizing and euphemizing the "niggers" as merely an "N" during the Second

World War, are fairly clear examples of this. Above all, Angelou delivers a scathing satire against America's deliberate rejection of black cultural constructions, which are purposefully left out of the rhetorics of the so-called American Dream.

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إضفاء الطابع الرومانسي على الثقافة كقوة من أجل الخير: رؤية مايا أنجلو لعالم أفضل

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المستخلص:

تفك هذه المقالة رموز خريطة الصدام الثقافي أو ما أسمته الروائية النيجيرية تشيماماندا أدينشي "خطر رواية الطرف الواحد" (٢٠٠٩) من خلال تقديم مسار فكري من خلاله يستطيع الأمريكيين البيض والسود إعادة التفكير في الشعور بالارتباك المرتبط بالثقافتين السوداء والبيضاء لتجنب التمييز الثقافي، وإذابة الحدود الثقافية، وبناء أنماط للتسوية الثقافية. من خلال التعمق في التراث الشعري لمايا أنجلو (١٩٢٨-٢٠١٤)، يمكن للمرء صياغة مبادئ بيان لإضفاء الطابع الرومانسي على الثقافة. إن إضفاء الطابع الرومانسي على الثقافة هو مسعى نقدي لإمكانية سد الفجوات الثقافية لتحقيق الانسجام الثقافي من خلال نشر جماليات الليبرالية والعلمانية والحداثة الثقافية للقضاء على التقديس الأعمى للثقافة والتخلي عن تمظهرات الأخيرة. إنها عملية تعافي ذاتي تتضمن القفز فوق الواقع المشوه من خلال نشر جماليات التصوف للهروب من الصور العدائية التي تمنع الأمريكيين السود والبيض من تحقيق الوعي الذاتي الروحي. علاوة على ذلك، يوفر إضفاء الطابع الرومانسي على الثقافة إمكانية ظهور عقلية جديدة تتجه نحو الامتلاء والكمال. يشتمل بيان أنجلو الخاص بإضفاء الطابع الرومانسي على الثقافة على هذه المبادئ: شاعرية التصوف، جماليات تهجين منظور المقهورين التي صكها توماس يبارا فروستو والتي تدعو إلى تحطيم العدسة المكبرة التي تُضاعف حجم التوترات الثقافية، وإبراز الإيجابيات وطمس السلبيات، وهو نسق فكري يمكن أن يُخفف من تمظهرات الأخيرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مايا أنجلو، رومانسية الثقافة، شاعرية التصوف، جماليات تهجين منظور المقهورين، إبراز الإيجابيات وطمس السلبيات.