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**“Still I Rise...”:
A Tribute to Maya Angelou**

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CPI Special Issue, ‘Still I Rise’: A Tribute to Maya Angelou

From the Co-Editors: Maria Wallis and Cecille DePass

This special issue creates multiple spaces in which critical pedagogy, cultural and postcolonial studies dance to music infused, explicitly and implicitly, with southern rhythms and songs of resistance. Since Maya Angelou, in her early adulthood, during the Civil Rights era, co-produced a musical review in order to raise funds for the social movement, dance and song metaphors are particularly, applicable, in symbolic and literal terms. (See Angelou, e.g., 2009/1997/1969; 2003/2002; 1997 for detailed autobiographical narratives).

Generally, the special issue analyzes central issues, dilemmas and nuances associated with historical and contemporary patterns of asymmetrical power relationships and concomitant uses and abuses of power, in a few former European colonies. To a large extent, the CPI issue explores dynamics of power imbalances, specifically, in Canada, itself, a former colony of France and Britain. It spotlights further dances of power in at least, two former British colonies. Firstly, Yvonne Brown in Toronto, relives, sings and dances colonial narratives and personal stories of resistance in childhood, Jamaica. Secondly, in continental Africa, Charles and Plaxedes Chikunda, present lively dances of disparities in the contemporary Zimbabwean educational system. In South America, Carlos Arcila, the trained musician and conductor, sings and tells compelling narratives concerning the African origins of the marimba music in Colombia.

Continuing to incorporate a range of textual discourses, in particular, a satirical play, poetry, and as importantly, images from visual arts and music, the ‘Still I Rise’, CPI Special Issue, spotlights multiple ways in which different forms of domination and resistance are often played out in our lived experiences.

To this end, the CPI Call for Papers, published in Fall 2015, identified major forms of oppression, in the following manner:

“Structural and systemic racial oppression is normalized and legitimized in Canadian society in myriad ways. Current conversations suggest the necessity of witnessing and representing these oppressions and interpreting them to suggest possible interventions.”

For the most part, contributions selected for inclusion live up to the stated sentiments identified.

Inspired by Maya Angelou’s poem, ‘Still I Rise’ (See audio link to the poem in the concluding parts of this issue), and the seminal works of Franz Fanon (a psychiatrist, philosopher and activist, originally from Martinique), this special issue zooms in on issues of individual and collective resistance, hope, and as importantly, emancipation. Fanon states unequivocally:

“The self takes its place by opposing itself... Yes and No... Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But man is also a No. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: Freedom” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 1967, p. 222).¹

Fanon’s clarion call is demonstrated in, several if not, most of the works included.

In her published narratives, Maya Angelou (1928-2014) demonstrates a very strong sense of agency. She discusses her family's positive and negative influences in teaching her how to develop the strength and skills needed to oppose oppression in societal institutions and systems. Evidence is seen, for example, when she describes graphically, some of the actions by her grandmother who reared Maya's brother and herself in the southern USA, during the Jim Crow era. Her mother, a performing artist, who lived in California, carried a small gun in self-defence. She deliberately integrated several mainstream institutions. Angelou presents, in several autobiographies, multiple demonstrations of her abilities to survive and even flourish, often despite, extremely difficult situations and conditions.

We begin the special issue with a life-like image. It is Rose Wallis, Maria's daughter's photograph in which she captures a stunning, pink rose, in full bloom. Maria deliberately selected this rose because it is a perennial and grows in her summer garden. It symbolizes desire, love and beauty. Furthermore, the rose is a reminder that the innumerable manifestations of nature, from its beauty, grandeur and majesty to its simple alpine plants, to the mosses and lichens of the Arctic and Antarctic regions --- inspire, sustain, and as importantly, rejuvenate us. Accordingly, the rose symbolizes, our strength, inspiration, hope, determination, resiliency and change. One remembers too, that the rose's strength is seen in its resiliency (to survive a Canadian winter) and ability to protect its spectacular blooms with very sharp thorns.

In part one of the special issue, contributions by Yvonne Brown, Charles and Plaxcedes Chikunda and Sonia Aujla-Bhullar explain ways in which one can resist domination. In doing so, one exposes the often taken for granted assumptions, policies, practices and procedures regarding, the trite acceptance of such truisms as, 'don't fight city hall'; 'don't rock the boat'; 'keep below the organization's radar'; 'to survive, keep a very low profile'; 'it's too big an issue, accept the inevitable, integrate, assimilate'; 'don't fight'; 'it's policy'; 'it's just the way things are and have been'.

The second part of the special issue, "Postcolonial Ballads", begins with a play by Hilary Burke, "The Woman and Her Prize". It reveals the underbelly of the dominant Canadian migration narrative. Burke, originally from Jamaica, has lived and worked in several countries. She states that her play is based on experiences of immigrants, a few of whom emigrated from different African countries to live in Canada.

Visual representations by Kim Huynh, Ziya Lin, and Carol Campbell play with the dialectic tensions generated between on the one hand, the official histories of Canada and a few countries. And, on the other hand, some major factors and influences concerning one's evolving, individual and collective identities and abilities to push back, are examined in vivid terms. The artists ask, for example: Who am I? In what ways do societal institutions mold and shape my sense of self? Why should I be constrained by societal expectations? How do I break away from rigid molds in which minorities or marginalized people are cast and expected to, at best, survive at minimal levels of existence? (E.g., See too, Brown, Burke, this issue).

Part three of the special issue, "Postcolonial Responses", includes a series of original poems which suggest possible ways to respond to the dilemmas of a postcolonial, postmodern world. **Rita Wong's** poems explicate community responses to the Site C dam project in Peace River, British Columbia. **Carol Lee** reflects on language and its connection to thought. **Cyril Dabydeen** writes of memory, preoccupations and the various stories of our lives. Images, sounds, smells,

memories of places left behind, places we live in now, and places we imagine ‘yet to be’, in order to make our lives one day, fuller and richer (spiritually and materially).

History, Agency, and Creativity transform oppression, systemic racism, exclusion, and hostility. The ‘yet to be’ is inspired by the sounds of music, in the strong presence of Africa in the musical series contributed by Carlos Arcila. His paper on the convergence of three different cultures (Spanish, African and Indigenous Amerindian) demonstrates how music facilitates the flow of life itself, in Colombia. In the marimba music from Colombia, the presence and enduring legacies of Africa, are still markedly, audible and not echoed. After hundreds of years, African Latin Americans have transformed the African music to make it distinctly, their own.

Instead of compliance and deference, in this CPI issue, we zoom in on ways of using our creativity, imagination and desire to envision a world which is more equitable, fairer, and more humane. We dream of one day, living in a world which e.g., Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King Junior, Franz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Paulo Freire, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, et al, by demonstration, have inspired us to create and, one day, achieve. We dream of a fairer, more caring, and peaceful world created by, for, and with human agency and active participation of the many, and not the few. We dream of a world in which all women, men and children in the north and south will live with respect and dignity.

We move from dreams to action: With meaningful and expanding, theoretical and practical knowledges stored in our individual and collective reservoirs, we learn to develop the courage and strength required to see, reflect, develop consciousness (e.g., Angelou, Freire, Fanon, Dubois) and decide how, when and with whom, to intervene in strategic ways (e.g., Freire, hooks). We choose or sometimes, are forced to take action when we encounter the world’s systemic and structural injustices.

Each of us has abilities to create new ways of being, thinking, and acting which respect ourselves and others. Accordingly, the special issue ends with inspirational, yet somewhat, challenging tones and images, namely, by including: the hot link to Maya Angelou’s inspirational poem, and as importantly, a photograph of a young, beautiful, smiling Rose Wallis who captures and radiates light and happiness. (Photograph from Maria Wallis’ personal collection).

In interesting ways, Maya Angelou’s poem and Rose’s portrait/photograph remind us of the photograph of Grandmother, Donna Chin Fatt (a former dancer and retired post-secondary educator), who stands smiling serenely, as she holds her baby grandson, Lincoln, up to absorb the brilliant prairie winter, sunlight streaming in through the window (See CPI, Summer 2015).

The concluding poem and photograph symbolize the reasons why each day, ‘we get up, stand up’, ‘we rise up, move and don’t give up the fight’ (Bob Marley and contributors).² An Indigenous, North American saying encapsulates it best, we care for each other and the earth, not only for self-interests, but more importantly, ‘for seven generations on’.

We change the world even while we walk and talk about the issues. Gandhi’s “Be the Change you want to see” reminds us of our agency, our choices, our social and personal responsibilities. We smile, laugh, pray, cry, love, write, joke, sing, dance and live another day---“And, Still I Rise. I Rise”.

Endnotes

1. Educated in France and posted to Algeria in 1953, Fanon (1925-1961) was a significant contributor to the development of anti-colonial, postcolonial and decolonization movements (See e.g., Fanon, 1967, 1963/1961 and for critique, Ato Sekyti Otu, 1996). Aside: Fanon's works were written in French. Accordingly, one notes Fanon's use of the term 'man' in the quote selected. Like other Romance languages, all nouns are either masculine or feminine. A similar example is noted in Carlos Arcila's work (this issue) in which he has translated his key secondary sources from Spanish. Yvonne Brown (this issue), critiques the generic use of the term to include men and women. The challenge to write in gender neutral, or in more inclusive ways, is part of the feminist legacy to: the global academies, and to socio-economic, social and cultural institutions (internationally and nationally).
2. Bob Marley's social justice songs continue to inspire millions of people of all ages, from all walks of life, and from the wide range of different types of cultural, religious and socio-economic groups. Google search: Bob Marley for a sample of his social justice songs.

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