



ISSN: 1812-0512 (Print) 2790-346X (online)

Wasit Journal for Human Sciences

Available online at: <https://wjfh.uowasit.edu.iq>



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Keywords:

Critical Discourse Analysis,
power, agency, resistance,
rhetoric, civil rights

Article history:

Received: 2024-01-04

Accepted: 2025-01-27

Available online: 2025-02-01



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Power, Agency, and Resistance in Malcolm X's Speech The Ballot or the Bullet

A B S T R A C T

This paper critically analyzes Malcolm X's The Ballot or the Bullet from a CDA perspective to examine how power, agency, and resistance are constructed in the sociopolitical context of America in the 1960s. Guided by Fairclough's analytical framework to CDA, this study explores linguistic features, discursive practices, and social practices to illustrate the way Malcolm X criticizes the system of oppression, furthers Black Nationalism, and places African American struggles within global anti-colonial movements. The findings reveal Malcolm X's mastery in deploying rhetorical strategies to mobilize marginalized communities and to redefine the civil rights movement as part of the larger human rights struggle. Contributions to the variegated strands of CDA and to rhetorical studies are made by this research since the orientations of Malcolm X's discourse are put into use even today in struggles for justice and equality.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss1/Pt1.868>

تحليل نقدي للخطاب حول القوة والفاعلية والمقاومة في رواية مالكوم إكس ,,الورقة الانتخابية أو الرصاصة“

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المُستخلص

يحلل هذا البحث نقدياً كتاب مالكوم إكس "الورقة أو الرصاصة" من منظور تحليل الخطاب النقدي لفحص كيفية بناء القوة والفاعلية والمقاومة في السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي لأمريكا في الستينيات. وبتوجيه من الإطار التحليلي لفيركلوف لتحليل الخطاب النقدي، يكشف هذا البحث عن السمات اللغوية والممارسات الخطابية والممارسات الاجتماعية لتوضيح الطريقة التي ينتقد بها مالكوم إكس نظام القمع، ويعزز القومية السوداء، ويضع نضالات الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي ضمن الحركات العالمية المناهضة للاستعمار. تكشف النتائج عن براعة مالكوم إكس في نشر الاستراتيجيات الخطابية لحشد المجتمعات المهمشة وإعادة تعريف حركة الحقوق المدنية كجزء من النضال الأوسع لحقوق الإنسان. يساهم هذا البحث في الخيوط المتنوعة لتحليل الخطاب النقدي والدراسات الخطابية منذ أن تم استخدام توجهات خطاب مالكوم إكس حتى اليوم في النضالات من أجل العدالة والمساواة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، السلطة، الوكالة، المقاومة، الخطابية، الحقوق المدنية

1. Introduction

1.1 Brief Overview of Malcolm X and the Speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in 1925 and became one of the most important African American activists and revolutionary thinkers who shaped the ingredients of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. A member, and later a vocal critic of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X challenged systemic racism, economic injustice, and political subjugation of African Americans through his rhetoric. The orations of Malcolm X were always imbued with the themes of self-determination, empowerment, and resistance to oppression (Bajri, 2019).

Delivered on April 3, 1964, *The Ballot or the Bullet* remains one of the most iconic speeches ever given by Malcolm X. Speaking in Cleveland, Ohio, he urged African Americans to adopt a more active approach towards the realization of civil rights. The very title of the speech pointed out a dichotomy-jacklegging their way to justice through the democratic process, the ballot, or taking to more aggressive means, the bullet-if justice were to continue being inaccessible (X, 1965). This address marks a pivotal moment when Malcolm X transcended religious ideology to focus on broader issues of racial and economic oppression, thus appealing to a wider audience (Marable, 2011).

1.2 Problem Statement

Malcolm X's speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, is a crucial artifact in understanding the interplay between power, agency, and resistance within the sociopolitical struggles of the 1960s United States. Although much scholarship has focused on the stylistic and thematic elements of Malcolm X's rhetoric, less attention has been paid to the nuanced ways in which his speech constructs and negotiates these themes through discursive practices. Moreover, his ability to frame African American struggles within a wider global context of anti-colonial movements is underexplored. This research gap is addressed in this study, which looks at how Malcolm X's speech operates as a site of ideological negotiation and empowerment for the marginalized.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by Malcolm X in addressing systemic oppression and fostering agency among African Americans.
2. Deconstruct the ways in which African American identities are framed within a broader sociopolitical and anti-colonial context.
3. Examine how Malcolm X's discourse constructs a collective framework for resistance and mobilization against racial injustice.

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the fields of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and African American rhetorical studies. First, the research deepens an understanding of how discourse operates as a site of power negotiation and ideological struggle. It underlines the relevance of Malcolm X's rhetoric for contemporary discourses on racial and economic justice. Finally, this

research points to the role of language in effecting social change by providing valuable lessons that might be useful in contemporary activism and advocacy.

The paper critically examines Malcolm X's speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* for connecting historical and contemporary discussions of race, power, and resistance in such a way that it provides nuanced insights into the intersection between discourse and social change.

1.5 Research Questions

To realize these objectives, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the rhetorical and discursive strategies Malcolm X deploys in *The Ballot or the Bullet* to critique systemic oppression and encourage resistance?
2. How does the speech constitute African American identity and agency against institutionalized racism?
3. How does the rhetoric of Malcolm X embed the civil rights struggle in the international struggle for human rights and anti-colonial solidarity?

2. Background of the Study

2.1 Historical and Sociopolitical Context of Malcolm X's Speech

The mid-20th century was that transformative period in American history when the struggle for civil rights and social justice was tremendously fierce. Entrenched racial segregation, systemic discrimination, and deprivation of basic civil liberties were the ongoing struggles of the United States with regards to African Americans. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s had its genesis in the need to dismantle such injustices, and its iconic moments now include the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954, which declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-1956, symbolizing the power of collective resistance from below (Fairclough 2001).

Against this background of events, Malcolm X emerged as the silver voice that articulated and put words to the frustration and aspirations of downtrodden African Americans. Unlike most other leaders of the movement, Malcolm X did not preach non-violence; he was perceived to be more self-defensively militant, emphasizing a need to be self-sufficient on one's own and seeking urgent changes in the system.

2.2 Malcolm X's Philosophy and Rhetoric

Although Malcolm X's philosophy greatly evolved in the course of his life, the content of *The Ballot or the Bullet* expresses an important transition within the way he thought (Cobb, 2018). Whereas his earlier rhetoric, as part of the Nation of Islam, was highly devoted to religious themes of racial separatism, this speech is indicative of a shift toward an inclusive and secular approach. He pinned the universal struggle for human rights and called for unity among African Americans regardless of religious or political affiliations (X, 1965).

Perhaps the mainstay of Malcolm X's oratory was an unflinching critique of systemic oppression, cogently articulating frustration felt within the African American community. Indeed, "his speeches often mixed vivid metaphors, historical allusions and logical arguments in their challenges to the legitimacy of white supremacy and in their advocacy for black empowerment" (Duarte, 2011).

3. Literature Review

3.1 Overview of Previous Studies on Malcolm X's Rhetoric and Speeches

Scholars have long been interested in Malcolm X's rhetoric, particularly its effect on American political discourse and the Civil Rights Movement. Early scholarship focused essentially on the stylistic and thematic elements of his speeches, with specific attention given to how direct, unapologetic language resonated with marginalized communities. For instance, Fitriyani (2018) looked at Malcolm X's use of narrative and metaphor to urge on a notion of collective identity among African Americans.

Recent scholarship has been inclined towards the wider ideological arenas of his rhetoric. Fitriyani (2018) identified Malcolm X as an important figure in the development of Afrocentric discourses; he located Malcolm X's speeches as a counter-narrative to the dominant Eurocentric ideologies.

The notion of empowerment and resistance is not confined to political speeches, but it overflows into cultural tools such as music. For instance, a recent feminist critical discourse analysis of the song "Change Your Life" by Little Mix has demonstrated how pop music can become an instrument of women's empowerment (Farah & Sairan, 2023).

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Power, Agency, and Resistance in Discourse

The concepts of power, agency, and resistance in discourse are central to understanding the dynamics of social interaction, identity formation, and political struggle. Contemporary scholarship on these issues draws from a number of theoretical traditions, most notably Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, and more recent interpretations in postcolonial discourse and critical theory.

3.2.1 Power and Discourse: A Foucauldian Perspective

Michel Foucault's work on power underpins discourse theories, particularly his assertion that power is not merely repressive but also productive (Foucault, 1980). According to Foucault, power generates knowledge, reshapes social norms, and constructs identities, rather than serving solely as a tool of domination.

Recent scholarship has extended Foucault's ideas to examine how discourse can serve both to construct and to challenge power. For instance, his concept of biopower—the control over populations through language and knowledge—has been applied to analyze contemporary political movements, especially in postcolonial and racial contexts (Foucault, 2003; Mitchell, 2016).

3.2.2 Agency in Postcolonial Discourse: Spivak and Bhabha

Agency, particularly in the context of postcolonial discourse, remains a contested concept. Gayatri Spivak (1988) critiques the limitations of hegemonic discourse in representing marginalized groups, emphasizing that the subaltern's voice is often silenced or co-opted within structures of power. By contrast, Homi Bhabha (1994) theorizes hybridity as a form of resistance that disrupts colonial and hegemonic power.

Within this framework, Malcolm X's speeches exemplify acts of discursive agency that resist hegemonic colonial narratives, particularly concerning race and identity. His rhetoric is not merely reactive; it actively reconstructs African American identity and reclaims agency in the face of oppressive systems.

3.2.3 Resistance through Language: Fairclough and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as advanced by Norman Fairclough (1995), provides a lens for understanding resistance as a discursive practice. Fairclough argues that language is a critical tool for social change, capable of challenging established hierarchies and ideologies. In this sense, discourse becomes a site of struggle where competing ideologies are both contested and reinforced.

Malcolm X's speeches, particularly *The Ballot or the Bullet*, exemplify this framework. His use of language served both as a critique of racial oppression and as a means of empowering African Americans. Through powerful metaphors, direct address, and strategic rhetoric, Malcolm X disrupted racialized discourse that portrayed African Americans as passive victims.

3.2.4 Extending Theoretical Perspectives: The Case of Malcolm X

Building on these theoretical frameworks, this analysis examines how Malcolm X's language constructs and negotiates themes of power, agency, and resistance within *The Ballot or the Bullet*. By integrating Foucault's concept of power as relational, Bhabha's notion of hybridity as a subversive strategy, and Fairclough's CDA, the study reveals how Malcolm X's rhetoric functioned as a form of resistance to racial and political oppression.

Recent scholarship has extended these theoretical approaches, demonstrating the continued relevance of Malcolm X's rhetoric in contemporary movements for racial justice and empowerment (Luo, 2020; Nordquist, 2020).

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Principal Scholars and Applications

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the strongest frameworks that one could use to set out to analyze how language and the social exercise of power are related. One of the basic models of Critical Discourse Analysis, put forward by Fairclough (1995), centers on the grammatical, discursive, and social levels of language intersection. Fairclough's approach will be quite relevant for analyzing Malcolm X's speeches because it enables deep focus on how linguistic choices reflect broader sociopolitical contexts.

The first development beyond the initial formulation of CDA, which Van Dijk (1993) puts forward, is that there is the salience of ideology as its basis in shaping discourse. He proudly proclaims that while language legitimates the power of dominant groups, it simultaneously affords marginalized groups the opportunity to use counter-discourses against such structures.

3.4 Gaps in Existing Research and How This Study Addresses Them

Even though Malcolm X's rhetoric has received extensive scrutiny, there are some aspects in which improvement might be achieved. First, much of the scholarship from before is focused on stylistic and thematic aspects of his speeches, with a relative underdevelopment of the discursive means by which power, agency, and resistance

are constituted. Second, while CDA has been applied to a wide range of political discourse, relatively few studies have used this framework in an analysis of Malcolm X's speeches-especially *The Ballot or the Bullet* speech.

Critical discussion of *The Ballot or the Bullet* discourse draws on the frameworks of Fairclough and Wodak, filling these gaps in the present study. This paper applies concentrated attention to knowledge of speech in constructing power, agency, and resistance from the study of rhetorical scholarship and that of CDA.

4. Methodology

This paper will adopt the approach of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) due to its effectiveness in examining the relationship between language, power, and society. Fairclough's model has been conventionally utilized to systematically uncover how discourse reflects, reproduces, and challenges social power relations. His framework is based on the premise that language is not a neutral medium but a social practice imbued with ideological significance (Fairclough, 1995).

1. Textual Analysis:

- Vocabulary: The analysis examines emotive language, colloquial expressions, and binary terms to understand how language conveys emotion, urgency, and solidarity.
- Grammar: Imperative sentences, short declarative phrases, and parallel structures are analyzed to show how they collectively enhance clarity, urgency, and the memorability of the message.

2. Discursive Practices Analysis:

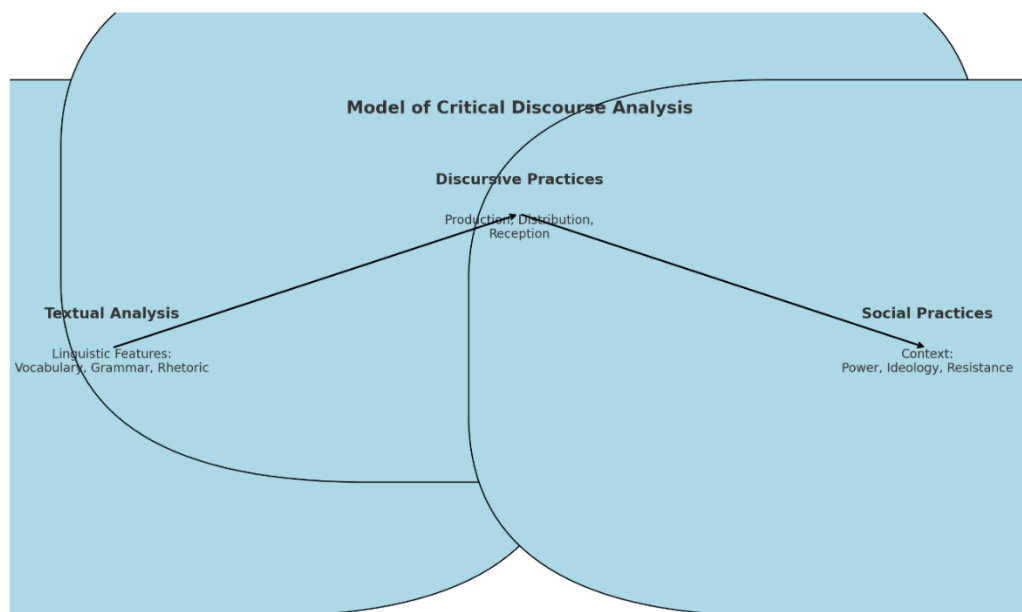
- Production: This aspect situates the speech in its historical and political context, examining Malcolm X's strategic positioning and rhetorical stance.
- Dissemination: The study explores how the speech was spread through media and public platforms, resonating with diverse audiences and political movements.

3. Social Practices Analysis:

- The speech is contextualized within the sociopolitical landscape of the 1960s, highlighting systemic racial oppression, global anti-colonial movements, and economic exploitation.
- Malcolm X's critiques of American democracy, his advocacy for Black nationalism, and his promotion of economic autonomy are analyzed through the broader lens of power struggles and resistance.

This multidimensional approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical aspects of Malcolm X's rhetoric in *The Ballot or the Bullet*. These methods are closely aligned with the themes and elements identified in the analysis sections, ensuring a focused and precise examination.

Figure 1: (Fairclough's 3D model, 1989 & 1995)



4.1 Key Concepts: Power Relations, Ideological Positioning, Discursive Strategies

1. Power Relations: According to Fairclough's CDA perspective, language is not only a site but also a stake where power relations are enacted, negotiated, and contested. Malcolm X leads an attack in the speech against structures of systemic power such as institutionalized racism and political disenfranchisement. As Fairclough (1989) notes, "power operates not only through overt domination but also through subtle, discursive mechanisms" (p. 147).

2. Ideological Positioning: Ideology is a structure of beliefs and values encoded and sustained by discourses. This is brought out in *The Ballot or the Bullet* through Malcolm X's acumen to express another worldview—one that openly attacked white supremacy and American exceptionalism.

3. Discursive Strategies: Discursive strategies are the means and rhetorical means resorted to in discourses to bring about certain effects. As Fairclough (1992) points out, these do not solely bear upon linguistic issues, but they do relate to social practices and power relations. Malcolm X draws on a number of key strategies in *The Ballot or the Bullet*:

- Repetition: The repeating of specific words or phrases to stress the importance of messages, such as the urgency for civil rights "by any means necessary."
- Binary Oppositions: Allowing for clear contrasts to be made between the oppressed and the oppressor, such as stated in the title of the speech itself—a "ballot" versus a "bullet".

5. Analysis of Text as a whole

5.1 Textual Analysis of *The Ballot or the Bullet*

❖ Vocabulary

Malcolm X chose his words intentionally to serve as a provocation to reasoning, emotions, and urgency. He merged the use of accessible emotionally charged language, most times drawing from African American Vernacular English, with speaking directly to the audience.

- **Emotionally Charged Words:**

- Example: "You've been misled. You've been had. You've been took".
- Analysis: These phrases contain strong words pointedly accusing both political systems and leaders of betrayal. Therefore, these are evocative of audience frustrations.
- Example: "Second-class citizenship is nothing but 20th-century slavery".
- Analysis: By comparing systemic oppression to slavery, Malcolm X appeals to a practiced understanding of historical trauma and provides the current struggle as similarly desperate.

- **Colloquialism:**

- Example: "You're a political chump"
- Analysis: The critique is relatable, even to a chump it seems; drawing on colloquial terms, it creates a shared feel of disdain against systemic exploitation.

- **Binary Terms:**

- Example: "It's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death".
- Analysis: This binary invites the audience to view the situation as urgent and dichotomous; there is no middle ground nor space for compromise or passivity.

❖ 2. Grammar

The grammatical construction in this speech is dynamic, often designed to emphasize action, urgency, and clarity.

- **Imperatives:**

- Example: "Stop talking about the South. As long as you're south of the Canadian border, you're South".
- Analysis: Imperative verbs like "stop" are used here to divert the attention of the audience-where ill-conceived beliefs should be broken and their attention is to be given forthwith to the problem.
- Example: "We've got to unite. We've got to work together in unity and harmony".
- Analysis: The repetition of "we've got to" in the imperatives carries a sense of collective responsibility and the urgency for immediate action.

- **Short Declarative Sentences:**

- Example: "This government has failed us. The government itself has failed us".
- Analysis: The brevity of such sentences provides a punch and puts across a definitive tone that leaves no room for ambiguity; thus, reinforcing the strength of an argument.

5.2 Discursive Practices Analysis of *The Ballot or the Bullet*

In the framework of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, discursive practice is the aspect of production, dissemination, and reception that Malcolm X's *The Ballot or the Bullet* has undergone in its sociopolitical setting.

❖ **Production of the Speech**

1. Historical Context:

- The Ballot or the Bullet was delivered on April 3rd, 1964, at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan, shortly into his split from the Nation of Islam. This speech was a point of transition in Malcolm X's public rhetoric toward a more secular and politically inclusive approach while continuing to support Black nationalism.
- The incumbent president, President Lyndon B. Johnson, was up for reelection, while the civil rights movement was at a moment of critical debates on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which dominated regular everyday coverage.

2. Malcolm X's Position:

- Free from the restrictions imposed by NOI, Malcolm X widely expanded his political message. He framed *The Ballot or the Bullet* as a call for African Americans to take their own political destiny in hand, threatening volcanic eruptions if that did not occur.

❖ **Circulation of the Speech**

1. Medium and Venues:

- He delivered the speech twice in Cleveland, then again in Detroit. This Detroit version is considered definitive and attracted 2,000 people, critics and allies alike.

2. Political and Media Landscape:

- Malcolm X's fiery rhetoric ran against the non-violent ethos that leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. was promulgating. Such divergence only amplified media attention: to some, he was a militant provocateur, although to others, he was uncompromising in his crusade for racial justice.

3. Global Reach:

- Within weeks after having given the speech, Malcolm X had embarked on an international tour that included a pilgrimage to Mecca. His foreign experiences shaded his increasing focus on relating the African American struggle to worldwide anti-colonial movements.

4. Enduring Legacy: The framing of "the ballot or the bullet" in this speech remains of great relevance to participationist theory and discussions of systemic injustice. Its dual focus inaugurates the complexity of the African American movement for equal rights.

5.3 Social Practices Analysis of *The Ballot or the Bullet*

In the social practices dimension, Fairclough's CDA situates Malcolm X's *The Ballot or the Bullet* within the broader sociopolitical context as it reflects, critiques, and challenges systemic structures of power and ideology in the 1960s United States.

1. Social Practices

Civil Rights Movement and Racial Inequality

- The speech was delivered in 1964, which was a great year toward the Civil Rights Movement because it was identified with the struggle for the passage of the Civil Rights Act. In those times, it was racial segregation and disenfranchisement, too many systemic inequalities everywhere that flourished. Malcolm X critiques the limitation of mainstream civil rights strategies, especially the nonviolent approach championed by Martin Luther King Jr.
- Example: "This government has failed us. The government itself has failed us. And the white liberals who have been posing as our friends have failed us".
- Analysis: By pointing out systemic failures, Malcolm X shifts the focus from individual actors to institutional racism and situates African Americans' struggles in the framework of a broad critique of American democracy.

2. Global Anti-Colonial Movements

- Malcolm X likens the African American struggle to anti-colonial movements across the globe in Africa and even Asia. Malcolm X framed the civil rights struggle as a human rights struggle. Malcolm X ties in the African American experiences within the broader context of colonial oppression.

3. Black Nationalism and Economic Autonomy

- The speech calls for Black nationalism, which is necessary for self-determination in the political, social, and economic domains. Malcolm X attacks both integrationist approaches and economic dependence upon white-dominated systems.
- Example: "The economic philosophy of black nationalism only means that we should own and operate and control the economy of our community".
- Analysis: Malcolm X stimulates economic independence to critique systemic exploitation and create a vision for a community-centered model of empowerment to deal with the issues - racial and class-based.
- Economic self-reliance emphasizes how crucial this concept is in accomplishing self-determination.

❖ Critique of American Ideology and Institutions

1. American Democracy and Hypocrisy

- Malcolm X dissects the very bedrock of ideals of American democracy and juxtaposes the contradictions existing within the nation's democratic principles with the systemic oppression of African Americans.

- Example: “You and I have never seen democracy—all we’ve seen is hypocrisy” .
 - Analysis: This statement imagines the African American institution of the American experience as a story of exclusion and betrayal, therefore undercutting a priori national myths such as the "American Dream."
2. Economic Exploitation
- Malcolm X criticizes such variety of economics, which causes racial inequalities to persist, and at the same time accuses political leaders, both white and Black, of maintaining the status quo.
 - Example: “The community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer, the community out of which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer”.
 - Analysis: This critique underlines the entwinement of racial and economic oppression; hence, restructuring economic practices toward empowering Black communities is imperative.
- ❖ Implications for Power and Resistance
1. Redefining the Civil Rights Movement
- Malcolm X's appeal to broaden the civil rights struggle into the sphere of human rights challenges domestic framing of African Americans' issues and demands accountability internationally.
 - Example: “We intend to expand [the freedom struggle] from the level of civil rights to the level of human rights”.
 - Analysis: This framing change undermines the United States as a moral authority on the global stage by making African Americans' struggles a part of the worldwide struggle against oppression.
2. Empowerment through Unity
- Malcolm X appeals for unity regardless of religious, political, and ideological affiliations. He ascertains that there has to be a united front in action against a common enemy.
 - Example: “Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim or a nationalist, we all have the same problem...They attack me because I’m Black”.
 - Analysis: Malcolm X brings attention to the principle of shared struggle against the divide-and-conquer techniques that weaken movements, cultivating solidarity as one approach to resistance.
3. Rejection of Political Manipulation
- Malcolm X critiques both political parties, accusing them of exploiting African Americans while failing to address their needs.
 - Example: “A vote for a Democrat is nothing but a vote for a Dixiecrat” .
 - Analysis: Malcolm X used the trope of political hypocrisy to call them out of the necessity for African Americans to be free from traditional political allegiance and pursue their own independent strategies for change.

6. Discussion

The analysis brings into view how Malcolm X, in challenging systemic oppression and organizing his audience, uses the art of repetition, metaphors, binary oppositions, and emotionally loaded language. For example, the phrases "You've been misled. You've been had. You've been took" create a feeling of betrayal and urgency, hence engendering collective awareness among African Americans. These rhetorical strategies chime with Fairclough's suggestion that language is a site of struggle for power, wherein dominant ideologies are continuously contested and redefined (Rotondi, 2021).

The findings indicate that Malcolm X's rhetorical methods were effective in critiquing systemic racism and mobilizing resistance. Repetition and direct address are strategically used in his speech to instill a sense of urgency and collective responsibility. These techniques are consistent with Fairclough's (1989) view that language serves as a site for ideological negotiation and resistance.

Furthermore, Malcolm X positions African Americans as active agents of social change, with responsibility to take matters into their hands regarding political and economic futures. His call to "own and operate the economy of our community" reflects an empowering strategy that speaks to the critique of dependency on white-dominated systems.

This speech effectively widens the perspective of the African American struggle to an international one—that is, setting it within the framework of anti-colonial movements. Malcolm X draws parallels between the African American experience and the liberation struggles in Asia and Africa: "Just as it took nationalism to remove colonialism from Asia and Africa, it'll take Black nationalism today." This framing, of course, resonates with the postcolonial perspective, as forwarded by the work of scholars such as Spivak (1988), in terms of highlighting salience in linking localized struggles with globalized narratives of resistance.

By reframing civil rights as human rights, Malcolm X undermines the moral authority of the U.S. and places African Americans within a broader, transnational struggle against oppression. This rhetorical move grants more power to his message and underlines the interconnectedness of struggles for justice around the world.

6. Conclusions

This analysis of Malcolm X's speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, has demonstrated how rhetoric can be used to confront systemic oppression, engender agency, and create collective resistance. Malcolm X uses a range of rhetorical devices, including repetition, metaphor, binary oppositions, and emotive language, to great effect in his critique of systemic racism and institutionalized oppression. The ability of the speaker to translate such complicated and complex political and social issues into recognizable and urgent calls to action testifies to language's transformative potential as a method of resistance. These strategies work in tandem with Fairclough's understanding of discourse, 1995, as the site of struggle in which language use is the negotiation of power relations, using these to contest hegemonic ways of believing, valuing, and doing things.

The speech does not criticize but also inspires through its empowering rhetoric. Through his stark dichotomies—"the ballot or the bullet"—through the call for economic independence, political participation, Malcolm X himself summons his audience into taking responsibility in determining their life fates. In accordance with Foucault's ideas regarding power as something quite productive—resistance emerges, in other words, through the making of counter-discourses and practices.

The data within this study provide clear evidence of Malcolm X's continued relevance in today's movements for social justice. His emphasis on unity, self-determination, and global solidarity frames a model that can be put into operation within the modern context—from racial justice movements to broader campaigns against systemic inequality and oppression.

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