

The Black Identity Promulgation in Amiri Baraka's Selected Poems

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Abstract

This paper explores how Baraka, the African American poet, creates a timely radical political consciousness and Black identity through his poetic voice and style in “Ka’ Ba,” and “Black Art.” Looking at Baraka poetry as a literary resource in teaching and developing social radicalism with special reference to racism and Black power. The analysis focuses on key themes in Baraka's writing that reflect his ideological shift from integrationist to Black nationalist perspectives, including: Rejection of assimilation and demand for cultural/political autonomy; Interrogation of white power structures and the myth of American meritocracy; Celebration of African diasporic heritage and pride in Blackness and Inspiring revolutionary action to overturn racial oppression. Through the analysis of Baraka’s poetic voice in his work, the paper elaborates on how his role served as an important prerequisite of the Black Arts Movement’s call for art that reflected the Blacks’ free will. His lyrical particularity, the meteor that brought him a new poetic music based on black jazz, and that street language is also analyzed in order to show how radical politics may be made popular and inspiring. The study positions Baraka’s poetry within the tradition of African American literature and its tradition of awakening the political consciousness to insist on the importance of Baraka as a black literary figure who used written word to galvanize Black liberation struggle.

Keywords: Amiri Baraka, “Ka’ Ba,” Black Arts Movement, Black identity, political consciousness, racial oppression.

نشر الهوية السوداء في قصائد أميري بركة المختارة

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الخلاصة

يستكشف هذا البحث استخدام الشاعر الافريقي الامريكي اميري بركة للوعي السياسي وهوية السود من خلال صوته الشعري واسلوبه في قصائد "كعبة" و "ادب السود" والنظر الى شعر امير بركة كمصدر ادبي في تعليم وتطوير الوعي الاجتماعي الراديكالي مع اشارة خاصة الى العنصرية التي تواجهها قوة السود والتي تتضمن رفض الخضوع لهوية الاخر والمطالبة بالاستقلال الحضاري والسياسي ومساءلة مفهوم الجدارة الامريكية وتراكيب القوى البيضاء. والاحتفال بارث المهجر الافريقي وكرامة السود والهام الفعل الثورث للاطاحة بالظلم العنصري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اميري بركة ، كعبة ، حركة ادب السود، الهوية ، الوعي السياسي، القمع العنصري.

Introduction

Amiri Baraka, also known by his former name LeRoi Jones, is considered as strategic part of the over arched American literature and is best known for his crucial role in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. This movement was artistic and cultural revolution that aimed at changing the black people's image in America, to give voice to oppressed individuals and to provoke social and political transformation. In the 1960s, a historical epoch characterized by heightened racial tensions and significant societal disruptions, Baraka emerged as a prominent and influential figure within the African American literary milieu. The individual endeavored to reimagine the function of literature and art in promoting societal transformation and enhancing the agency of Black communities. Baraka uses poetic language, images, and tactics in his works "Ka' Ba" and "Black Art " to effectively communicate the pressing nature and profound impact of political ideology on the formation of personal and communal identities.

Pivotal to this period of transition was Baraka poetry, which was intended not only as a poetic narrative, but as a powerful call to political consciousness, and the building of a solid black consciousness. In his oeuvre, Baraka steered viewers through the storm of race, and cultural politics and social revolution incorporating implicit messages of a new order of freedom. Baraka's poetry revolves on the concept of establishing identity. In his poetry, he delves into the many aspects of African American identity, questioning conventional depictions and confirming the abundance and intricacy of Black culture and history. Baraka's poetry repudiates assimilationist inclinations and instead welcome a revolutionary Black awareness that exalts Black dignity and autonomy.

Some of Baraka's most famous poems which are regarded as his master's pieces include; "Ka' Ba" and "Black Art " all these poems held provocative untamed language and images which challenged the existing white-washed regime. In his verses, he painted recognition on Black people and their ability to work through adversities on their own and regain control of their lives.

This analysis investigates the complicated processes of Baraka's artistic and poetic rhythm, examines the specifics of his language with its

concerns as well as thematic and poetic strategies that underpinned his work and the way his poetry addressed political consciousness and the building of a strong Black identity. As the twist of embracing cultural nationalism, voicing accusations of systematic oppression and calling for revolutionary change became themes in his verses, Baraka's poetry will become rallying cries for social change and a rebirth of racial pride and, in effect, political consciousness of a whole new generation of Blacks.

In this context, the study lays down an endorsement of art and activism as key markers of identity creation. It aims to determine how Baraka's poetic contribution and political ideology are relevant to raising Black awakening and the fight for race and Ethnicity Equality in America by closely analyzing his collections of poems and short stories. This article seeks to illuminate the significant role of literature in forming identity, encouraging emancipation, and developing social justice movements by examining the transformational influence of political ideas in Baraka's poetry. The analysis of "Ka' Ba" and "Black Art " provides evidence of the lasting significance of Baraka's artistic contributions and their influence on the conversations pertaining to race, identity, and political engagement.

The Effect of Amiri Baraka on The Black Arts Movement

The Harlem Black Arts experiment served as a catalyst for the emergence of a nationwide Black Arts Movement and the creation of around 800 black theaters and cultural centers throughout the United States. The objective of the Black Arts Movement was to establish a self-governing creative manifestation that accurately represented the encounters and ambitions of African Americans, while questioning the dominant cultural standards and artistic styles that were centered on white individuals. Larry Neal (1971) writes in "The Black Arts Movement" - an important manifesto concerning Black Arts Movement Drama that:

When we speak of a 'Black Aesthetic' several things are meant. First, we assume that there is already in existence a basis for such an aesthetic. Essentially, it consists of an African American cultural tradition. But this aesthetic is finally, by

implication, broader than that tradition. It encompasses most of the usable elements of Third World culture. (p. 28)

The Black aesthetic which Neal championed as a feasible way of pushing black artists to adopt another way of defining blackness in the course of creating art, had a great influence on the Black artist. They wanted to align black authors with a cultural formation more visually appropriate, genuine, and, in its authenticity, 'black.' James Stewart paid much attention to the fact that black artists should develop models relevant to the black people's real-life experiences, non-violent behavior, black style, naturalism, moral /spiritual models. The emphasis on black culture was justified for its intent, but arguably failed in its execution inasmuch as it did not strictly provide the container for addressing the pragmatics of how black literature indeed works, a project that Adam Paul said it seemed to pursue (Lawrence, 2003: p.24).

Authors and creative individuals from several urban areas initiated a collective effort to establish alternative establishments inspired by the Harlem Black Arts Repertory Theater/School, amalgamating the realms of Black Arts and Black Power. Stephen Henderson examined the distinctive methods in which poets, especially those of his contemporaries, expressed themselves. Henderson is among a select group of Black Arts critics who sought to provide a practical framework for black poetics. The individual in question recognized structural and linguistic elements that had a "black" quality, and effectively expressed the metaphysical way blackness is conveyed via black writing. The author examines many language patterns exclusive to black individuals, like "Understatement" and "Virtuoso free-rhyming." Additionally, the author develops concepts such as "saturation" and "mascon" to denote a significant presence of Black experience energy. Henderson's objective is to emancipate black literature from the culturally uninformed and unsympathetic perspective of racist white reviewers. However, he also draws upon essentialist conceptions of blackness that are exclusive and possibly exaggerated (Henderson, 1973: p.44). In this manner, Kimberly Benston (2013) writes:

It seems to me that a potentially self-disabling theory is at work here. The black poet is “saturated” by that which he demonstrates, asking his audience to identify with what they already are. The poet becomes thereby a curiously reactionary figure, for the poem 's performative activity is denied any transformative force, whether didactic or subversive. The energies unleashed by performance are finally neutralized or contained by the privilege of a mutually “saturated” subject. The poet/audience merges into the stabilizing order of a priori, external, reified 'blackness.' (15)

The presumption that the readership has a shared comprehension and acceptance of the concept of blackness within a poem hinders the potential for revolutionary impact and marginalizes those who may be the intended recipients of revolutionary poetics, so impeding their comprehension of its core essence: It is for its blackness. ” The exclusionary kink is one reason for the fragmentary nature of the Black Arts Movement in regard to the question of a genuine black literature. It is for this reason that to understand the black literary identity, one has to focus on the concept of what it means to be a ‘real black’ The core idea of blackness when it comes to a poem is very difficult to unravel through criticism.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Amiri Baraka united the Black Arts Movement with the Black Power Movement to bring back and identify African-originated culture. Baraka then combined these movements into the Modern Black Convention Movement, by articulating Black Position or Black Culture, it encouraged Black aesthetic vision. The purpose of this movement was the positive change of the condition of the black people and the feeling of togetherness. Some of the contributions that stem from Baraka’s leadership include: The mobilization of African American artists, intellectuals and activist the preparation for social, cultural and political change. Politics of this united movement

accentuated the role of cultural voice for liberation, efficiency and transformation of folks' personality (Sinha, 2018: p. 125).

The writings and activities of Amiri Baraka were intricately connected to the objectives of the movement, as he advocated for a transformative revolution in the realms of literature and the arts. Published in 1965, his article "The Revolutionary Theatre" expressed his vision for a theatre that is politically aware, socially significant, and artistically groundbreaking, with the aim of actively involving and benefiting the black community. The creative creations of Baraka, including "Black Magic" (1969) and "Dutchman" (1964), serve as prime examples of the thematic and stylistic elements associated with the Black Arts Movement. His poetry often used potent and thought-provoking language, tackling topics of racial pride, black awareness, and the pressing need for societal transformation. The plays written by him addressed subjects pertaining to racism, identity, and the intricate dynamics of interracial relationships, therefore questioning established theatrical norms (Watts, 2001: p.87).

Baraka had a pivotal role in the establishment of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) in Harlem, serving as a primary focus for creative and cultural endeavors. The individual had a strong engagement in political action and shown unwavering dedication to combatting racism and injustice, while pushing for the rights and empowerment of African Americans. He assumed a prominent position within the Black Arts Movement, actively promoting a dynamic and politically aware form of creative representation that was deeply connected to the lived realities of African Americans. Baraka had a significant role in shaping the ethos of the movement by means of his literary works, activism, and the formation of cultural institutions. His contributions underscored the significance of art as a catalyst for effecting social change, fostering cultural pride, and advancing the cause of black freedom.

Political Ideology: Awakening Thoughts in Amiri Baraka's Poetry

The poetry of Amiri Baraka has a profound interconnection with the thematic exploration of identity construction and the pursuit of freedom through the lens of political ideologies. The author's research delves into the examination of how political awareness and engagement in activism play a role in shaping and enhancing both personal and communal identities. Baraka's poetry serves as a catalyst for readers to actively and analytically interact with the socio-political milieu, effectively tackling matters pertaining to racial inequity, imperialism, capitalism, and systemic racism (Grundy, 2019: p. 85).

Baraka highlights the profound influence of political ideology in molding an individual's identity and underscores the significance of cultural pride, self-governance, and opposition to repressive systems. Baraka's poetic works engage with prevailing narratives and expose instances of injustice perpetrated by those in positions of authority, so challenging the concept of colorblindness. He cultivates a feeling of shared identity, emphasizing the significance of community and togetherness in the fight for freedom. Baraka's poetry, by combining political ideology with creative creativity, serves as a means of emancipation, enabling people and communities to imagine and work towards a fairer and more egalitarian society.

Rebirthing the Blackness

In the question of African American literature, no figure towers as grand and polemical as the poet Amiri Baraka. Distinguished by his harsh exposure of the accepted logic of the society, race, and identity issues, and his strict Black emancipationist's stance, Baraka's poetry enlightens the potential of Art in culturally reconstructing the world. One of the main topics running throughout his collections is blackness, this is a complex and a changing state of being, on the one hand, it is something to be proud of, on the other – a problem to fight against.

Baraka's approach to strategic thinking changed from guerilla warfare, cults, or riots to political campaigns. His work transitioned from vague categorizations of 'Black Dada' to a positive acceptance of blackness, including a strong opposition to white supremacy and a sense of communal racial unity. This transformation was evident in both the

content of the work and the overall environments in which it was created and shown. After relocating from the East Village, Baraka's artistic output progressively shifted its focus towards a black audience (Grundy, 2019: p.84).

Amiri Baraka's poem "Ka' Ba" examines the idea of creating an identity and finding freedom via political philosophy. "Ka' Ba" is a powerful poem tackling aspects of African ancestry, self-triumph over oppression through renewed spirituality. The poem itself is also an anthem for Blackness and struggle, it is also a celebration embracing the Africa of black civilizations. Here is how I think "Ka 'Ba" speaks to the rebirthing of Blackness. As in all his other works, Amiri Baraka in "Ka 'Ba' masterfully builds up layers of imagery and symbolism that signify black identity's tenacious grounding. The very name of the title, Ka, which means an astral double of the soul itself indicates that the root is in the ancestral time and space, which is out of our world.

This is located in a continuous debate involving Pan-Africanism, domestic policy as well as the role of politicized art in the struggle. The poem therefore underscores the prevailing role of political system in shaping of individual together with the communal identity as well as supports the reconstruction of Black culture and history as well as the rejection of the process of Americanization that embraces the assimilation of the Blacks into the dominating white culture. Baraka uses energetic and musical language to stimulate peremptoriness and defiance, therefore calling readers to accept themselves and reject anything that denies people's personality. It performs the role of a passionate appeal to African Americans who should use their creative skills to combat and resist the systems of oppression, as a poem (Smith, 1986: p.241).

Angela Y. Davis, a black activist, has pointed to the contemporary and even past effects of racism on black people and called for the sort of justice that will eradicate racism. Davis explicitly shows how racism is more than people holding prejudiced or racialized thoughts, but a structure that permeates through institutions. She still calls for the structural understanding of racism where ways in which power and institutions reinforce race prejudice is evaluated. She says,

In the heat of our pursuit of fundamental human rights, black people have been continually cautioned to be patient. We are advised that as long as we remain faithful to the existing democratic order, the glorious moment will eventually arrive when we will come into our own as full-fledged human beings. (Davis, 2005: p. 18).

Davis decodes the impediments inherent in structure that hinder the actualization of full human rights of Blacks in democracies. She queries the possibility of a revolution through gradualism in context of systemic and structural oppression, that is to wait for change, and fight it at the same time. She celebrates endurance and lobbying in the fight against structural vices. Altogether, she reflects the nature of the struggle, based on the importance of fundamental rights of people, especially within the Black population, as a both sensible and timely endeavor. In simple terms, she invites a broader evaluation of what requires to be done to create a condition that can be best described as emancipation and acknowledgement of the other within structures of civilization.

In “Ka’ Ba”, Baraka encourages Blacks to stick to their cultural heritage and traditions in order to strength their reality. The poet paints a picture of an oppressed people, but also a people who despite the oppression are vocal, audible and willing to live in a world that deems them otherwise. The themes adopted in the text and the symbols used are an individual’s and a community’s endurance, hope, spirit, and fight against challenges and oppression of racially and economically devalued groups:

A closed window looks down
on a dirty courtyard, and black people
call across or scream or walk across
defying physics in the stream of their will
(Baraka, 1969)

Baraka's works explore the concept of sustenance and struggle, particularly for black individuals in oppressive societies. The barred

window symbolizes the division between inside and outside, highlighting the potential for confinement or oppression. The untrimmed hedge represents a neglected yard, reflecting the harsh conditions faced by black people in large cities. The work highlights the voices and actions of these often discriminated and neglected individuals, expressing their spirit of disobedience and rebellion. The concept of overcoming physics suggests independence and vigor, urging Black people to break free from physical and social constraints. Circulation through the courtyard symbolizes perseverance and determination to overcome hardships. The contrast between imprisonment and freedom, quiet and expression, and oppression and resistance express the conceptual duality of the work. Overall, Baraka's works highlight the struggles and resilience of black individuals in a world of oppression.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Spivak shows the same interest of Baraka in dealing with colored people as marginalized and having no voice. Spivak encourages a critical examination of how identities are constructed and perceived across various global contexts, highlighting the necessity of addressing the intersections of race, gender, and class within the historical and social frameworks of postcolonial societies. He says,

Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context into the postcolonial (which is not identical with the third-world) context, the description 'black' or 'of color' loses persuasive significance. (Spivak, 2023: p. 90)

Spivak emphasizes the concept of intersectionality, where individuals experience oppression in multiple ways due to the intersections of various identities such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. This concept shifts from first world to postcolonial contexts, where histories of colonization and imperialism shape identities and power structures. In postcolonial contexts, labels like 'black' or 'of color' may not carry the same weight as in first-world contexts, suggesting a reevaluation of identity markers. The complexity of identity in postcolonial settings is

also highlighted, with colonial legacies, resistance movements, and cultural hybridity shaping identities. The statement calls for a nuanced understanding of identity that considers the historical, social, and political complexities of postcolonial societies, and the need to critically examine how identities are constructed, represented, and experienced within different global frameworks.

Baraka highlights the concept the concept of intersectionality through portraying that Black people have to find a voice to reconstruct their true identity. As a cultural assertion and reconstruction of African origin and history, “Ka ‘Ba” is affirming to Black people and gives them the power. The poem celebrates what African Americans can endure and stressing cultural heritage as valuable and worthwhile. It is also culturally renewal; it makes Black persons to develop feelings of pride, unity and power among Black persons or simply creates appreciations of the versatility of the Black cultural endowment,

We are beautiful people
with african imaginations
full of masks and dances and swelling chants

with african eyes, and noses, and arms,
though we sprawl in grey chains in a place
full of winters, when what we want is sun.

(Baraka, 1969)

Baraka celebrates African heritage and imagination, highlighting the deep connection to African culture and traditions. He uses masks and dances to symbolize the diverse cultural practices found across the continent, symbolizing tradition, spirituality, and community. Swelling chants suggest the power of oral traditions, storytelling, and music. He evokes the idea that Black people have their special voice and identity and this voice is not new but has deep roots in history of nations. He highlights physical attributes that connect individuals to their African ancestry, symbolizing a shared heritage and identity. He references the historical oppression and struggle experienced by Black individuals, possibly referencing the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination. The poem's

longing for "sun" amidst winters conveys a yearning for liberation and renewal, reflecting the desire for a brighter future.

Baraka, in his poetry, enhances the idea of being politically solid. For him, having a solid political thought enable people, especially Blacks, to reconstruct their buried identity. He encourages Blacks to revolt against the injustice that they have faced in their life. He wants them to have a voice to be heard among others. According to Scholz, "political solidarity is a relation that unites a collective of individuals who are collectively responding to a situation of injustice, oppression, social vulnerability or tyranny" (Scholz, 2008, Kindle loc.197-199). For him, political solidarity is built upon an individual's moral character, on the self-avowal and the sense of responsibility to the cave as a member of a community that is willing to fight injustice and domination in society. In "Black Art," Amiri Baraka believes that a poem is devoid of significance if it fails to convey meaning to its audience. A profound poetry deeply resonates with the readers' innermost being, evoking emotions and eliciting responses. Baraka used the metaphorical representation of "teeth" to exemplify the notion that a poem ought to engender lasting imprints inside the minds and souls of its readers, gradually expanding like to a stack of logs until they become aware (Jalaluddin, 2013: p. 7). The poetry should convey a profound essence, arousing the readers' innermost being and eliciting responses:

We want a black poem. And a
Black World.
Let the world be a Black Poem
And Let All Black People Speak This
Poem
Silently
or LOUD (Baraka, 1969: p. 225)

By advocating for a black poem, it prompts us to consider the concept of a black auditory experience in poetry. An innovative auditory experience. There are many reasons why "Black Art," despite its contentious viewpoints and depiction of violence, may contribute to our understanding of the concepts of sense and sound in language. The

significance of "Black Art" lies in its exploration of the interconnections between poetry, individuals, and the broader societal context. As a result, Scholz asserts that having engaged into a broad solidarity movement is imperative to check one's conscience to see if there are any tensions between the values to which one becomes a signatory to as a member of a solidarity group and the manner with which one interacts with fellow members of the solidarity movement ((Scholz, 2008, Kindle loc. 1973). This especially entails learning to abandon some fundamental practices or mentalities besides leaving behind some benefits that result from being somewhat more advantaged in one's own existence. Thus, the poet assumes a tangible obligation towards the world, which cannot be absolved just via the production of the poem as a distinct and visually appealing entity. The poetry must generate tangible impacts:

“We want „poems that kill. “

Assassin poems,

Poems that shoot guns.

Poems that wrestle cops into alleys and take their
weapons leaving them dead ... (Baraka, 1969: p.
225)

Amiri Baraka aimed to emphasize the potential of his poetry as a tool of warfare. The term "weapon" refers to the ability of a poem to cultivate the spirit of African Americans in order to resist and combat the tyranny imposed by the white population. They had the determination to fight the whites in order to secure their liberation. Hence, Baraka opted to compose poetry that might reveal to his community that they have agency when they fostered togetherness. The presence of unity among struggle movements may serve as a very effective defensive strategy, as it fosters a sense of cohesion and strength. The strong camaraderie among them enabled them to ultimately combat white police officers who perpetrate acts of terror on the African American community. Furthermore, Baraka aimed to demonstrate that a poem has the capacity to do harm, specifically targeting white police officers who had inflicted fear onto black people (Jalaluddin, 2013: p. 10).

In this context, art functions like to a revolution, since it disrupts the existing state of affairs with the aim of reconstructing reality in its authentic form. Baraka agrees that art does not include the construction of symbols or stories, but rather the dismantling of illusions via the process of reconstructing reality. He captures the concept of the real by manipulating the visual aspects of objects. He aims to distort the object's look to a significant extent, but in the process of distortion, he aims to restore it to its original state of appearance. According to him, during this process, the genuine and dynamic essence of life is immediately recreated or restored in the viewer's neurological system, acting as an emotional stimulus. Therefore, the use of violence or distortion in the picture is essential in order for the artist to evoke strong emotions and so immerse the viewer in a more intense and intense experience. The observer gets more aware, one might argue uncomfortably, of the actuality of existence while seeing the violently agitated.

Conclusion

The poems "Ka' Ba" and "Black Art" by Amiri Baraka exhibit a profound connection to the issue of identity formation and political contemplation. The aforementioned poems serve to illuminate the African American lived experience, provide a critical analysis of systematic racism, and advocate for the need of collective action and empowerment within the Black community. "Ka' Ba" advocates for the unity and active participation of African Americans in the pursuit of justice and equality, highlighting the significance of political awareness, activity, and the establishment of communities. The need arises for individuals of African descent to reclaim their cultural history, confront prevailing misconceptions, and strive towards a more promising future. "Black Art" highlights the influential role of creative expression in molding one's identity and influencing societal transformation, advocating for the transformation of the world into a "Black Poem" where Black perspectives are acknowledged and honored.

Both poems exemplify the sense of urgency and dissatisfaction encountered by African Americans within a period characterized by racial tension and societal turmoil. They underscore the need of liberating

oneself from oppressive structures and establishing a novel society that accepts and empowers persons of Black descent. Baraka's artistic creations exemplify the convergence of political and artistic realms, fostering a sense of empowerment among African Americans to embrace their cultural heritage, assert their historical narrative, and question prevailing norms.

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