



Identity, Ideology and the Mass Movement: A Hofferian Reading of Amiri Baraka's Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT: Utilising Hofferian analysis, this essay investigates the concepts of identity, ideology, and mass movements as they pertain to a selection of Amiri Baraka's poetry. In order to demonstrate how Baraka's poetry demonstrates the mental impacts of shared fanaticism, ideological fervour, and identity creation during revolutionary revolutions, the analysis makes use of Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*. In order to demonstrate how Baraka's poetry language reflects the sociopolitical milieu of the Black Power movement and greater racial justice movements in the United States, this article studies Baraka's poetic style within the perspective of Hoffer's theories on mass movement psychology. In order to demonstrate how Baraka's ideological shifts reflect communal identification and public mobilisation, this study offers a comparison between his early poems, which were more conservative, and his later poems, which were more radical. An emphasis is placed in this article on the ways in which Baraka utilised language, imagery, and symbolism to condemn oppression and to encourage cohesiveness in communities that were oppressed. The poems are analysed in terms of their depictions of the individual's position in mass movements, the intricate relationship that exists between ideology and personal identity, and Baraka's function as a contributor to avant-garde passion as well as a critic of it. By locating Baraka's poems inside Hoffer's "true believer" and mass movement psychology, this study reimagines art, politics, and social revolution. Specifically, it does so by analysing the poetry of Baraka.

KEY TERMS: *Amiri Baraka, Eric Hoffer, Identity, Ideology, Mass Movement*

حركة الجماهيرية: قراءة هوفرية لمختارات من قصائد أميرى باراكا

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ملخص:

تستخدم هذه المقالة التحليل الهوفري لدراسة مفاهيم الهوية والأيديولوجيا والحركات الجماهيرية في سياق مختارات من شعر أميرى باراكا. ولبيان كيف يُظهر شعر باراكا التأثيرات النفسية للتعصب الجماعي والحماسة الأيديولوجية وتكوين الهوية خلال الثورات، يستعين التحليل بكتاب إريك هوفر "المؤمن الحقيقي". ولبيان كيف تعكس لغة باراكا الشعرية البيئة الاجتماعية والسياسية لحركة القوة السوداء وحركات العدالة العرقية الأوسع في الولايات المتحدة، تدرس هذه المقالة أسلوب باراكا الشعري من منظور نظريات هوفر في سيكولوجية الحركات الجماهيرية. ولبيان كيف تعكس تحولات باراكا الأيديولوجية الهوية الجماعية والتعبئة العامة، تقدم هذه الدراسة مقارنة بين قصائده المبكرة، ذات الطابع المحافظ، وقصائده اللاحقة، ذات الطابع الراديكالي. يركز هذا المقال على الطرق التي استخدم بها باراكا اللغة والصور والرمزية لإدانة الظلم وتشجيع التماسك في المجتمعات المضطهدة. تُحلل القصائد من حيث تصويرها لمكانة الفرد في الحركات الجماهيرية، والعلاقة المعقدة بين الأيديولوجيا والهوية الشخصية، ودور باراكا كمساهم



في شغف الطليعة الفنية وناقد لها في الوقت نفسه. من خلال وضع قصائد باراكا ضمن إطار "المؤمن الحقيقي" لهوفر وعلم نفس الحركات الجماهيرية، تعيد هذه الدراسة تصور الفن والسياسة والثورة الاجتماعية. وتحديدًا، يتم ذلك من خلال تحليل شعر باراكا.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of social movements, identity and ideology have been at the center of the movement, particularly in excluded communities that are looking for recognition and permission. Poet, dramatist, and activist Amiri Baraka (1934–2014), whose work echoes the struggles of Black identity and the fervent ideology of the 1960s and 1970s civil rights and Black Arts movements, was one of the most preoccupied with this relationship in American literature. Baraka's work was a reflection of the relationship between black people and their identities. This article uses Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer* (1951) as a basis for discussing selected poems by Baraka from a Hofferian point of view. The purpose of this discussion is to explain how Baraka's poetry reflects the relationship between individual identity and common ideological commitment in mass movements.

Eric Hoffer (1902-1983), According to social philosophers, the motivation behind mass movements is because individuals are looking for closure and connection, which frequently comes at the sacrifice of their identities. From his point of view, the True Believer is someone who incorporates their individualism into a shared vision in order to discover solace and significance in their lives. The needs of individual and common identity are addressed in Baraka's poetry, which is presented in this summary, which offers a fascinating viewpoint on said poetry. The majority of the time, Baraka's poetry is a reflection of the hardships that African Americans face against repression while simultaneously navigating the process of selfhood within a culture that defines and confines them.

In addition to being emotionally charged and socially sensitive, Baraka's poetry is committed to accurately portraying the lives of African Americans. His investigation into his identity is intricately intertwined with the ideals of his century. The goal of the Black Arts Movement, which was founded by Baraka, was to both celebrate blackness and challenge the dominant narratives that are prevalent in American society. Because of this paradigm, Baraka's text is an influential way to investigate how individuals deal with their identities and the ideas that shape the conflicts they engage in with one another.

In the course of this research, Baraka's poems will be analysed in order to investigate his themes of legitimacy in a world of repression, the role of the artist in producing social change, and the transforming force of cooperative acts. We might be able to observe how Baraka's poetry reflects historical events as well as contemporary identity and ideology issues in social movements if we look at the psychology of mass movements through the prism of Hoffer's theory.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM



The relationship between identity and ideology in mass movements has been the subject of research conducted by academics, particularly in literature that focuses on historically marginalised communities. There is a lack of comprehensive examination in the existing literature about the ways in which poetry expressions can reflect human identity within the context of social movement cooperation.

This is especially true for Amiri Baraka, whose poetry navigates the intersection of art, activism, and philosophy during a period of significant change in the United States. In spite of the fact that Baraka is well-known for his contributions to the Black Arts Movement and his perceptive criticisms of systemic racism, his poetry has not been thoroughly analysed for the mental intricacies that it contains, as Eric Hoffer explains in *The True Believer*. Hoffer's research provides an explanation for why individuals join huge movements, frequently abandoning their individuality in order to conform to a shared worldview. In what ways does Baraka's poetry depict the conflict between personal and shared identity?

These are crucial concerns that are raised by these aspects. As an illustration of the mental processes that contribute to social movement ideology, how does his work represent these processes? Studies that have been done up to now tend to place more of an emphasis on the political and societal aspects of Baraka's poetry, while ignoring the deeper mental inferences that it contains regarding identity development and ideological commitment. This misunderstanding hinders our comprehension of the manner in which Baraka's poetry challenges preconceived notions about society and analyses the internal conflicts that are experienced by individuals who are struggling to come to terms with their identities in a politically charged setting. As a means of addressing these deficiencies, this study employs a Hofferian approach to evaluate the poetry of Amiri Baraka in order to investigate the ways in which identity and ideology interact within mass movements.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The fields of literary criticism, social movement theory, and cultural studies all recognise the significance of this work. In this article, a Hofferian outline will be utilised to analyse a selection of poems written by Amiri Baraka. The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate the intricate relationship that exists between identity, ideology, and mass movements, particularly in regard to the Black Arts Movement and American social justice.

The purpose of this research is to enhance literary criticism of Baraka's poetry by concentrating on the mental elements of the poet's work. This study focuses on the issues that Baraka had with his personal identity and beliefs in his poems, despite the fact that Baraka is often examined for his political and social commentary. The implementation of this method not only enriches Baraka's creative contributions but also motivates researchers to investigate the emotional challenges of other writers who are involved in social movements. Collaboration between the fields of literature and social psychology is encouraged through the



study of Hoffer's theories and Baraka's poetry. Through an examination of the ways in which ideological convictions create both individual and collective identities, this study bridges the gap between literary analysis and theories of social conduct. These interdisciplinary perceptions can notify future research in both fields, inspiring a more all-inclusive vision of the subtleties of mass movements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poems

The Pre-Revolutionary Writings of Imamu Amiri Baraka (1973) by Fischer begins by introducing Imamu Amiri Baraka (previously known as LeRoi Jones) as a significant African-American poet, dramatist, and activist recognized for his dominant writings throughout the civil rights movement. His poetry often revolved around themes of race, identity, social justice, and the political landscape of America. In this paper, we find out that the examination of this poet's poems, plays, and essays written before his more fundamental political shift emphasizes his stylistic novelties and thematic apprehensions (pp. 259-285).

Fischer has also offered a consideration of how Baraka condemned American society, chiefly in terms of race relations, cultural identity, and the implication of art in public alterations. He has similarly discussed Baraka's role in the Black Arts Movement and how his previous writings laid the basis for his later, more groundbreaking poems. Another important point of this paper is the investigation of Baraka's individual journey and how his experiences affected his writing and political ideology leading up to his more drastic level. Generally speaking, this article investigates how Baraka's pre-revolutionary poetry echoes his growing views regarding race, culture, and politics, setting the stage for his later, more confrontational expressions (pp. 292-305).

Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts of Black Art (1986) by Smith studies the effects of Amiri Baraka on the Black Arts Movement and how his poetry exemplifies the values and aesthetics of Black art throughout that era. An examination of Baraka's implication as an essential character in the Black Arts Movement, which intended to establish a discrete Black aesthetic reveals the experiences and brawls of African Americans. Likewise, the inspection of Baraka's faith in the power of art as a means of activism and social justice is another goal of this study. The article discusses how his writings meant to defy social standards, challenge racial repression, and encourage political awareness among Black societies (pp. 235-244).

Smith also analyzed the detailed aesthetic abilities and themes existing in Baraka's work, such as the usage of African cultural elements, jazz influences, and an emphasis on the real experiences of Black folks. He examined how Baraka's writings refer to issues of cultural identity, legacy, and the significance of regaining Black narratives in literature and art. Investigation of Baraka's disapproval of mainstream American culture, mainly with respect to its dealing



with Black people and the ways in which he wanted to redefine Black identity through his art is another implication of Smith's research (pp. 245-254).

Art as Resistance: Black Aestheticism in Amiri Baraka and Maya Angelou's Selected Poetry (2021) by Awan discusses the the themes of Black Aestheticism as articulated in the poems of Amiri Baraka and Maya Angelou. Awan starts by describing Black Aestheticism, a movement that accentuates the cultural and imaginative expressions of Black identity, often in reply to discrimination and repression. Baraka, recognized for his influential and often challenging poetry, is analyzed for how his poetry symbolizes the ideologies of Black Aestheticism. The article then discusses his usage of language, form, and themes that mirror the brawls and resilience of the Black community. Awan has compared and contrasted the attitudes of Baraka and Angelou, emphasizing how each poet employs their art as a sort of confrontation, including the investigation of their different styles, historical backgrounds, and the explicit subjects they referred to in their poetry (pp. 1-4).

Within the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement, the essay places the poets in question and discusses the ways in which their works reflect the times in which they were written. Baraka and Angelou's poetry, according to Awan, has been a mainstay of American literature and has played a significant role in shaping debates around issues of race, identity, and artistic expression. (pp. 5-6).

The Theory

The True Believer: The book "Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements," which was written by Eric Hoffer in 1951, is an important look at the emotional and sociological underpinnings of mass movements as well as the fervent followers of these movements. His theories have had an impact on academic fields such as sociology, political science, literature, and psychology. Mass movements, according to Hoffer's definition, are organised struggles that aim to alter society, politics, or their religious beliefs. The occurrence of these movements typically follows the emergence of perceived difficulties or widespread discontent. Hoffer asserts that the urge for personal fulfilment and belonging, in addition to ideology, is the driving force behind various mass movements. (pp. 4-8).

The notion of "true believer" people who are devoted to a cause or idea, generally to the point of fanaticism, are people who are considered to be fanatical. According to Hoffer, genuine believers are willing to give up their identities in order to support the movement. It is especially helpful at times of indecision or despair to have this giving because it provides both resolve and purpose. An overwhelming majority of genuine believers, according to Hoffer, are unsatisfied, disappointed, or frustrated. When they experience feelings of isolation, they look for solace in a movement that might help them better. (pp. 12-24).

Genuine believers are also interested in being a part of a community. This requirement frequently takes precedence over critical thinking and individual



values. According to Hoffer, genuine believers are drawn to philosophies that are simple, basic, and provide definitive answers to difficult problems. The pursuit of self-assurance might result in a conflicting attitude of rigidity and intolerance. In addition to this, Hoffer investigates the function that mysterious leaders play in popular movements. The values of the movement are frequently embodied by these leaders, who also serve to encourage confidence and change. They have the ability to motivate and direct followers, but they also have the ability to mistreat genuine believers. (pp. 30-52).

Considerable issues with believing, cooperative identification, and ideological extremism are brought to light by Hoffer's research studies. Individuals are discouraged from becoming radicalised and embracing movements that offer comprehensive solutions to social problems by him. Despite the fact that book was published almost seven decades ago, *The True Believer* continues to be relevant to political action, social movements, and belief psychology for contemporary audiences. As a caution about the temptation to find membership and purpose in collective movements at the price of individualism and critical thought, the book is considered as a warning about the trend.

The Ordeal of Change (1963) Another fascinating look at mental and social change, this time primarily contextualised within the context of social change, is provided by Eric Hoffer. The author, Hoffer, is a keen observer of human behaviour and mass movements. He investigates how people and society react to change, bringing attention to the conflicts as well as the opportunities that occur during times of instability. Throughout this piece of writing, Hoffer makes the argument that change is unavoidable yet is frequently met with opposition. He is of the opinion that humans enjoy consistency and predictability because it makes them feel safe. Nevertheless, change can bring about feelings of uneasiness and indecision. Through the use of historical examples, Hoffer illustrates how civilisations deal with change. He demonstrates that although change can be challenging, it can also result in growth and restoration. (pp. 72-75).

In *The Ordeal of Change*, Hoffer accentuates the significance of the individual in social transformations. He proposes that true advancement often necessitates people to challenge their doubts and hold new philosophies. Hoffer differentiates between those who adjust to change and those who fight it, depicting the latter as often adhering to outmoded ideologies or identities. Hoffer also makes networks between social modifications and the intensification of mass movements. He claims that through times of disorder, people may look for comfort in collective ideologies that offer perseverance and belonging. Though, he notifies the menaces of radicalism that can rise from such movements, as individuals may become so disburbed by the cooperative identity that they lose sight of their independence (pp. 102-111).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



The theoretical viewpoints of Eric Hoffer are utilised in the process of analysing the poems of Amiri Baraka. The ideas of identity, ideology, and mass movements that Hoffer developed serve as the framework's focal point. At the heart of this investigation is the concept of identity, which may be understood as a dynamic interaction between self-conception and shared belonging. Hoffer's "mass man" hypothesis suggests that individuals make an effort to dismantle their individual identities in favour of a collective identity that offers closure and significance to their interactions with others. The multifaceted identity of Baraka as a Black man, poet, and activist is a factor that should be taken into consideration.

Identity theory, in particular studies of race and culture, will be utilised in order to investigate the manner in which Baraka's poetry illuminates the struggle that exists between individual and cooperative identities. The interpretation of the struggle for self-definition in the context of racial and societal expectations will be studied through the examination of major poetry. In order to further understand Baraka's creative obsession with social and political themes, Hoffer's research on ideology as a motor that drives mass movements should be considered.

It is Hoffer's belief that ideology both brings people together and uses them, enabling individuals to collaborate while simultaneously encouraging conformity and zeal. In this essay, we will analyse the importance that Baraka's poetry has on concepts such as socialism, civil rights, and Black nationalism. A rhetorical analysis will be performed on the poems, focusing on how they either question or promote views. Baraka's rejection of ideological extremism and Hoffer's warnings about mass movements decentralising into strictness will also be investigated as part of this inquiry. Hoffer's knowledge of mass movements will be of use in analysing the common complexities that are present in Baraka's poetry. Hoffer is of the opinion that mass movements are propelled by scepticism and a need for meaning, which brings individuals together around a common ideology rather than individual concerns.

DISCUSSION

Exploring Identity: The Intersection of Self and Society in Baraka's Poetry

The poetry of Amiri Baraka, which investigates topics such as identity, racism, and social justice, is explored in a fascinating manner by applying Hoffer's theoretical framework of society. As has been said, the foundational book written by Eric Hoffer, titled *The True Believer*, makes the argument that people look for their identity through mass movements that provide them with affiliation and importance. It is his opinion that wordsmiths and activists are drawn to mass movements. The ideology of the movement is provided by men of speech, while the movement's impetus is provided by men of action." (Hoffer, 1951, p. 32). This idea is central when examining Baraka's poetry, as it shows how Baraka's poems often echo a deep engagement with the shared identity of African Americans and the more important social matters they encounter.



Baraka's poetry commonly revolves around the close link between self and society, illuminating how personal identity is formed by cultural, historical, and political circumstances. In his poem "*Black Art*," Baraka writes:

"We want 'poems that kill.' Assassins of the old, of the dead, of the past". (Baraka, 1979, p. 36)

The argument that Baraka makes for a fundamental redefinition of poetry is a reflection of his wish to establish a new identity that is liberated from depictions of traumatic historical events. The assertion made by Hoffer that mass movements strive to transcend their history and establish a new identity is supported by this evidence.

In another poem, "*A Poem for Black Hearts*," Baraka demonstrates the brawl between individual identity and social beliefs:

"You are the children of the sun, the children of the night, the children of the streets". (Baraka, 1979, p. 42)

A person's identity is a complex concept that is influenced by a wide range of social factors, including ethnicity and environment. In a manner that is reflective of Hoffer's concept of belonging, Baraka acknowledges the common experiences that black people have while simultaneously highlighting the distinctive identities that are formed by their environments.

Baraka's poetry often condemns the present ideologies and encourages a new comprehension of identity. In "*Somebody Blew Up America*," he challenges systemic racism and fierceness:

"Who ever told you, you were not a god?". (Baraka, 1979, p. 55)

This approach rejects notions that are desensitising to society while simultaneously promoting self-esteem and identity. In order to create a new shared identity that is founded on authorisation and conflict, Hoffer's theories might be utilised to reject the repressive myths that have traditionally repressed African Americans.

Amiri Baraka's poetry investigates the concept of identity at the intersection of the individual and society. Hoffer demonstrates how Baraka's poetry presents human fistfights as a means of defining individuals within the context of a wider societal movement. His poetry offers a critique of the various assumptions that are currently held and suggests a reimagining of identity that incorporates both individual and communal experiences.

Ideology at Play: How Baraka's Work Reflects Collective Beliefs and Values

In the 20th century, the poetry of Baraka was a strong expression of the common consciousness and intellectual struggles of African Americans. The majority of the time, his poetry portrays the perspectives of a community regarding structural enslavement, identity, and liberation. Through unique poetry, Baraka embodies shared ideas and conventions, which are in agreement with the criteria that Hoffer outlines for mass movements..



In "*Black Art*," Baraka accentuates the inevitability of art as a vehicle for upheaval and shared identity. He writes:

"We want a black poem. / We want a black song". (Baraka, 1979, p. 36)

This request for a definitely Black imaginative manifestation emphasizes the shared desire for self-definition and cultural arrogance. Hoffer says:

"A mass movement attracts and holds people because it satisfies their desire to belong to something larger than themselves". (Hoffer, 1951, p. 19)

Baraka's plea for a "black poem" echoes this desire for a collective identity and resolution amid African Americans.

Also, in "*A Poem for Black Hearts*," Baraka refers to the discomfort and resilience of the Black experience. He writes:

"We are the people who are not afraid". (Baraka, 1979, p. 42)

This line alludes to the collective power and willpower of a community grappling with hardship. Hoffer claims that "the true believer is a man who is not afraid to lose his individuality" (Hoffer, 1951, p. 28). Baraka's poem stands for this ideology, as he inspires his addressees to adhere to their collective identity and fight against repression.

Also in "*Somebody Blew Up America*", Baraka dooms racism and vehemence in America. He provokingly notes:

"Who told you to blow up the World Trade Center?". (Baraka, 1979, p. 55)

Via this argumentative statement, Baraka summons the communal irritation and obstruction of a community that has historically undergone relegation. Hoffer writes, "The mass movement is a kind of collective obsession" (Hoffer, 1951, p. 30). Baraka's poetry functions as a promoter for this cooperative preoccupation, linking the community's complaints with an authoritative ideological statement.

Moreover, in "*The System of Dante's Hell*," Baraka talks about the brawls of African Americans in a racist societal structure. He portrays:

"I am a black man / and I am not ashamed". (Baraka, 1979, p. 62)

This proclamation of identity is essential in Baraka's work due to mirroring a cooperative pride and disobedience against a history of domination. Hoffer emphasizes, "The mass movement is a way of escaping from the individual's sense of isolation" (Hoffer, 1951, p. 36). Baraka's poetry nurtures a sense of harmony, convincing individuals to find power in their collective experiences.

Mass Movements and the Power of Poetry: Baraka's Role in Cultural Activism

The focus of this investigation is on individual identities and shared concepts. Throughout his research, Hoffer has investigated the ways in which mass movements are driven by a shared identity and purpose, frequently at the price of individual expression. Baraka, who is both a poet and a cultural activist, uses poetry as a means to echo, denounce, and inspire movements that are not only African American but also other movements. The purpose of this discussion is to



examine the cultural activism that Baraka engaged in through poetry and to contrast it with Hoffer's beliefs regarding mass movements.

Hoffer is of the opinion that large movements are driven by unhappy individuals who are looking for significance and resolution. He (1951) says, "The mass movement is a form of collective behavior that seeks to transform society through the promotion of a shared ideology" (p. 18). In most cases, this transition necessitates the rejection of the past and the adoption of a new image of the future. Baraka's poetry, too, undergoes progression. Through his research on African American sociopolitics, he encourages people to identify with their culture and to become politically active. When poems such as "*Black Art*," Baraka declares the power of art as an implement for revolt:

We want 'poems that kill.

Assassins of the old ways,

A black poet is a black man

Who writes poetry in the blood of the oppressor. (Baraka, 1979, p. 36)

This statement features the insistence of his message and the requirement for poetry to echo the socio-political brawls of the time. Baraka benefits from poetry as a gun against repression, bringing into line with Hoffer's idea that mass movements rise from a cooperative longing to discard the current situation. The fact that mass movements combine individual and collective identities is another point that Hoffer underlines. In Baraka's poems, identity is a complicated concept.. In "*A Poem for Black Hearts*," he writes:

"We are the people who have been, "The voice of the voiceless". (Baraka, 1979, p. 42)

The suffering and perseverance of the African-American community is communicated by Baraka, which contributes to the development of a collective identity that is necessary for a mass movement. Not only do his poems contain pictures of personal pain, but they also contain chorales with the purpose of enabling and uniting the struggle. As Baraka demonstrates, poetry has the power to both excite and inspire. His writing is in "*Somebody Blew Up America*":

"Who ever said it was a crime, To be black and free?". (Baraka, 1979, p. 55)
Insubordination is the defining characteristic of Baraka's activity. Poetry is a form of resistance to power and assertion of identity. Hoffer's assertion that mass movements survive on common values and identities is supported by the fact that it brings together people who are fighting for the same goal. In this way, Baraka's poetry is the dominant form of cultural activity, serving as an example of Eric Hoffer's beliefs regarding mass movements..

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the intricate relationship that exists between identity, ideology, and mass movements by employing Hofferian readings of Amiri Baraka's poems. Using Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer* as a reference, I investigated how Baraka's poetry depicts the mental complexities of



individuals who are attempting to come to terms with their identities within the context of the cooperative enthusiasm of social movements. Through the analysis, it is demonstrated that Baraka's poetry not only critiques the power of institutions but also grapples with concerns of identity. This highlights the changes that take place in individuals when they become profoundly committed to ideas.

Through an examination of his themes of legitimacy, the artist as a society observer, and the transformational force of common action, this study has demonstrated that Baraka's poetry is resonant with populations who are marginalised. In his exploration of identity, Baraka reproduces the struggles that people face when they are trying to find meaning and a place to belong in a culture that does not value their voices. Baraka's work investigates the tension that exists in major movements between the expressing of individuality and the formation of ideological alliances.

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