

التفاعلات المضادة: دراسة ما بعد استعمارية لتصوير الاستعمار في قصائد مختارة لأميري  
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## Counteractions: A Postcolonial Study of the Portrayal of Colonialism in Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka

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### ABSTRACT

This paper, titled “Counteractions: A Postcolonial Study of the Portrayal of Colonialism in Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka”, claims that Baraka’s poetic work is a powerful act of decolonisation. It uses foundational concepts of Edward Said (Eurocentrism), Aimé Césaire (Thing-ification), Gayatri Spivak (Epistemic violence and Othering), and Frantz Fanon (Manichaeism world). Through qualitative, textual analysis, the paper examines literary techniques and themes such as inequality, racism, dehumanisation, and systemic violence. It explores Baraka’s critique of White supremacy’s ideological foundations and its lingering effects within American political institutions. The paper concludes that, by

reversing Manichaeian structures and subverting the coloniser's civilisation narrative, Baraka portrays the Black (African American) as civilised. He uses linguistic innovations to undermine colonial discourse while reclaiming agency. These findings indicate that his writings are proactive instruments of a critical consciousness that serve as intellectual and spiritual emancipation, reinforcing the need for creative subversion toward decolonisation.

### المستخلص

هذه الدراسة بعنوان "التفاعلات المضادة: دراسة ما بعد استعمارية لتصوير الاستعمار في قصائد مختارة لأميري بركة"، تزعم أن العمل الشعري لبركة يُعدّ عملاً مؤثراً في إنهاء الاستعمار. وتعتمد على مفاهيم أساسية لإدوارد سعيد (المركزية الأوروبية)، وإيمي سيزير (التشبيء)، وغاياتري سبفاك (العنف المعرفي والتمييز بين الأعراق)، وفرانز فانون (العالم المانوي). ومن خلال تحليل نصي نوعي، تدرس الدراسة تقنيات أدبية ومواضيع مثل عدم المساواة، والعنصرية، ونزع الصفة الإنسانية، والعنف المنهجي. وتستكشف نقد بركة للأسس الأيديولوجية لتفوق البيض وآثاره المستمرة داخل المؤسسات السياسية الأمريكية. وتنتج الدراسة إلى أن بركة، من خلال قلب البنى المانوية وتقويض سردية الحضارة لدى المستعمر، يصور السود (الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي) على أنهم متحضرون. يستخدم ابتكارات لغوية لتقويض الخطاب الاستعماري مع استعادة الفاعلية. تشير هذه النتائج إلى أن كتاباته أدوات استباقية للوعي النقدي، تُعدّ تحرراً فكرياً وروحياً، مما يُعزز الحاجة إلى التخريب الإبداعي نحو إنهاء الاستعمار.





## 1. INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is not a historical phase, but an ongoing system of domination whose pathologies continue to shape contemporary power relations. Colonialism is, as Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Edward Said (1935-2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942- ), and Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) have put it critically or affirmatively in different ways, ultimately a total system of psychological and epistemic domination which produces a stable hierarchical order that sets the coloniser as the superior rational "Self" and the colonised as inferior irrational "Other". This dehumanising process, which Césaire calls 'thing-ification,' results in what Spivak terms 'Epistemic violence,' the systematic erasure of indigenous knowledge and culture. Previous studies of Baraka have situated the writer's work within this tradition of resistance. In his paper, Singh maps Baraka's political evolution and situates him within the African American literary tradition [1, p. 498]. By contrast, Joshi presents Baraka's work as a form of cultural resistance to racism [2, p. 1105]. Yet these studies tend to be thematic and often overlook a rigorous analysis of the formal poetic technique, such as rhythm, sound, and performance, which are the core elements of Baraka's radical project. In addition, Khan suggests that Baraka's poetry uncovers the underlying duality and tension within American culture [3, pp. 1-7]. Although valid, Khan's interpretation does not explain in depth what lies at the base of this division. The lack of a sustained postcolonial reading that connects Baraka's formal innovations to his political critique is what this study aims to address. The current article aims to highlight these gaps by examining Baraka's selected poems through the lens of postcolonialism; it holds that Baraka's poetry works as an act of decolonisation, claiming that his work not only critiques the contemporary American political system (Post-slavery) as a continuation of colonialism but also enacts its resistance through formal innovation. By subverting the Manichaean dualism at the heart of colonial discourse, Baraka demonstrates that the coloniser and its heirs are inherently savage and violent. The value of this study is to show how literary form can contribute as a means of decolonisation and provide a model of resistance to epistemic violence within creative practice.

Baraka's poetry diagnoses the problems created by colonialism, which manifest not only through political and economic exploitation but also a total assault on the colonised individual's identity, culture, and humanity. Such issues, based on what postcolonial thinkers name Eurocentrism,



Othering, and Epistemic violence, do not belong to the past but gain visibility in the form of contemporary (Post-slavery) systemic racism and oppression. His poetry brings these issues to the forefront by connecting historical traumas such as slavery or genocide to his contemporary realities, including police violence, cultural erasure, and mass incarceration.

The paper is organised into three main sections. The first section examines how Baraka's poetry undermines the core Manichaeic allegory of colonial discourse by inverting it. The second section explores the historical thread of colonial power from practices like slavery to contemporary (Post-slavery) versions in institutions like policing and mass incarceration. The third section demonstrates how Baraka's art actively retrieves and affirms a live Black cultural tradition in a direct challenge to colonial epistemic violence and cultural genocide.

Thus, Baraka's work not only exposes the colonial past but also severely criticises the present and so claims a living Black tradition that stands against the 'real face' of oppression. Such conclusions prove the significance of Baraka's poetry as a resource for critical awareness rather than merely a historical record. They show how art may work as a decolonising tool by diagnosing the structures of oppression and facilitating resistance. Therefore, understanding Baraka's work allows one to recognise the continuing effects of colonialism in the present and addresses the urgent requirement for creative and intellectual activity of subversion.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The analyses are based on concepts derived from the work of Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Césaire. They interact with Fanon's Manichaeism, Said's Orientalism and Eurocentrism, and the construction of the 'Other' developed by Spivak. The discussion then turns towards Césaire's concept of 'Thing-ification'. Such thoughts lead to Spivak's recognition of 'epistemic violence' that systematically erases subaltern knowledge that aligns with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call to dismantle the "ideologically oriented English departments" and foreground the marginalised voices that had been systematically excluded [4, p. 4]. In the context of postcolonial theory, Fanon defines a concept, Manichaeism, as a situation that creates a world of dualism, thus, situating nations (colonised/colonisers) and their individuals in a struggle between good and evil on polar extremes, the black and the white; usually, the black people is conceptualised as evil and uncivilised while the white as good and civilised [5, pp. 6–7]. Drawing on this primordial binarism (Manichaeic structure), the study of Eurocentrism shows how the





division generates a cultural and epistemological hierarchy. The concept places Europe as the world's superior centre of reason and progress, and the colonised world as its inferior periphery 'Orient'. The latter is usually deemed static, irrational, and always requiring Western instruction, thus drawing the geographical category of human otherness [6, pp. 33, 62–66], [7, p. 378]. By definition, this system of hierarchical differentiation leads to the creation of the figure of the 'Other' and/or the concept of 'Othering', which generally refers to the marginalised, non-European, and non-white subjects of colonial invasion. The 'Other' is positioned in all discourses: intellectual, political, racial, cultural, and economic, through which Europe asserts its authority and dominance over the rest of the world [8, pp. 13, 40, 88].

These interrelated concepts (Manichaeism, Eurocentrism, superiority versus inferiority, and Other) that are rooted in the racial hierarchy and White Supremacy are reinforced by colonial rule, systematically devaluing non-European peoples. The ultimate form of this dehumanisation is 'thing-ification'. This is a metaphor for the debasement of human beings into things, mere tools or commodities within the colonial economy [9, p. 5]. In addition, the interrelated concepts construct a justification that provides the ideological pretext for the physical and epistemological subjugation of the colonised. The ultimate consequence is 'Epistemic violence', which means the colonisers consider multiple efforts to stereotype the colonised subject 'Other' by assaulting their (the colonised) ability to define themselves and their world and destroying their systems of knowledge, history, and identity [10, pp. 280–281].

### 3. METHOD

This paper employs a postcolonial theoretical perspective to trace the processes of colonial domination. The study adopts a qualitative research design and text analysis as the main method. This method is appropriate for close reading and exploring literary texts to discover hidden implications, ideologies and rhetorical strategies. Concepts of key postcolonial thinkers are employed as analytical instruments necessary to deconstruct the hierarchical power relations of the colonial project. Baraka and some of his poems are selected because of his explicit and radical engagement with colonialism and its legacies. His poetry serves as a primary site of resistance, actively deconstructing colonial mythology and articulating the lived experience of its enduring violence. In this framework, as Fanon and other scholars argued, colonialism is not just about politics and/or economics but an all-encompassing project that controls consciousness and the system of knowledge [7, p. 306].

In conclusion, this methodological approach puts the theories of Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Césaire in dialogue with Baraka's selected poems to illustrate the unequal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. It represents the colonisers as active oppressors; their physical and epistemic domination functions to create a world that justifies their hegemony, while the world of the oppressed and colonised people is represented as shattered, where identity is mutilated, and voice is suppressed through the processes of Othering, thing-ification, and what can be described as epistemic violence.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 DECONSTRUCTING THE COLONIAL MYTHOLOGY

Demonstrating how Baraka dismantles the myth of colonial superiority in race and culture, this section examines concepts such as Eurocentrism, Manichaeism, and Other in his selected poems. These concepts illustrate colonisers as superior and the colonised as inferior. By portraying brutal practices of the coloniser against the colonised people, Baraka exposes the fundamental character of the coloniser.

Therefore, Baraka's poetics systematically refutes the foundational myths of racial and cultural superiority of the colonisers. Starting with reversing 'Manichaeism', Baraka shows the humanity of the oppressed and depicts a grotesque portrait of the coloniser as a source of violence, revealing this dualism to be a fabricated ideology. Then, he challenges Eurocentrism by replacing African and African American perspectives to shift the "civilising mission" into an oppressive mission. Finally, Baraka interrogates the construction of the "Other" by amplifying the voice of the colonised and, in this way, illustrating that the violence that the colonialist projects is simply a reflection of their moral bankruptcy.

Baraka performs a reappropriation of colonial terms that reinforces the myth of colonial superiority. By far, his use of "Heathen" in his poems is a potent example. The "heathen" has been a prominently adaptive and durable instrument in the American cultural and political imagination. Although the term is now typically dismissed as simply an old-fashioned religious concept, its past function was to create a foundational "other". As historian Kathryn Gin Lum argues, "The heathen, a figure and a concept that has been used repeatedly, whether named or not, as reason and justification for a range of actions that have stemmed from Americans' conviction that other people need to be transformed"[11, p. 1]. This perceived need for transformation provided the moral engine for projects like the forced assimilation of Native Americans, the "civilising" missions of 19th century imperialism. Lum's work corrects a common misconception by noting that "The heathen is often imagined to be an





antiquated figure and a primarily religious one whose significance has fallen as other categories of difference, particularly racial ones, have risen in importance” [11, p. 1]. In practice, the concept of the heathen never vanished; rather, it sometimes developed or mingled with categories of secular and racial identity. The savages, the fallen; the uncivilized savage of colonial discourse; or the "backward" native in need of Western development, are secular heirs to the heathen, revealing that the final justification, the belief in the need for transformation, has remained despite its change in primary vocabulary.

Baraka attacks the constructed world where Black people are framed as inferior ‘savages’ and white people as naturally superior (Fanon's Manichaeism). He directly inverts this binary to represent the oppressors (colonisers) not as civilised but as inherently hideous and malevolent [5, p. 7]. He says, “They Ugly / on purpose!” [12, p. 205], in colonial discourse, ‘ugly’ is attributed to the non-European ‘Other’, but Baraka reverts this discourse by situating the coloniser in a state of moral and aesthetic wickedness (ugliness), thus, delivers a decisive blow to Eurocentric beauty standards and superiority myths. Furthermore, Baraka describes the imperial violence and states that “They get high/ off Air Raids” [12, p. 205]. He criticises the colonisers as naturally sadistic creatures who desire to destroy and sabotage the colonies. Alluding to modern means of destruction and genocide, ‘Air Raid’ implies the continuity of oppression by the American political system, evidenced through militarism, police assault, systemic abandonment, and devaluation of Black people. In this context, the freedom of the Black people and asserting human rights are seen as threats to the coloniser’s /oppressor’s fabricated myth of superiority and hegemony.

Baraka also dismantles colonial mythmaking, characterising colonisers as “... the oldest / continuously functioning / Serial Killers!” [12, p. 205]; therefore, Baraka reveals imperialism’s past violent actions “the oldest”. By weaving them together with his contemporary systemic violence in America, Baraka suggests that oppression is not a bygone reality but rather an active ethos. The act of oppression is rationalised through pseudo-intellectual justifications; “They murder / to Explain / Themselves!” [12, p. 205]. This also mocks the colonial need for self-justification, echoing Aimé Césaire’s argument that the process is one of "Thing-ification," reducing human beings to disposable objects [9, p. 5]. Baraka's denunciation removes the illusion of Western superiority and reveals its savagery.

The colonisers stereotypically depict the black people as cannibals; however, Baraka shows that it is the colonisers’ consciousness that is

inherently cannibalistic [8, pp. 37–38]. Baraka stresses that “They think / Humans / are food” [12, p. 205]. He implies that the colonisers, who metaphorically consume human flesh, are cannibals. Such a metaphor critiques capitalism and chattel slavery as a product of colonialism, where Black people were objectified as instruments of labour [13, pp. 21–22]. Turning the coloniser’s civilised picture upside down when he says “they are always naked / and always dirty / the shower & tuxedo / don’t help” [12, p. 205]. These are not just insults but radical deconstructions; in “Shower & Tuxedo”, Baraka suggests the “dirt” is not physical but metaphorically moral and historical, a permanent and ineradicable legacy of the original sins of exploitation and colonialism that no superficial cleansing can erase. This is a direct rebuke to the ‘civilising mission,’ unveiling the moral decadence and wilful savagery that Fanon identified as the core of colonial rule [5, 235–239].

Baraka extends his critique to the coloniser’s religious hypocrisy, “They go to the bathroom / To have a religious / experience” [12, p. 205] to devalue their rituals and undermine their claimed moral superiority. This is an action of confronting colonialism and its legacies; a decolonising project where Baraka can disrupt the coloniser’s claimed superiority. Baraka is persistent in raiding ‘Eurocentrism’ when he surprisingly rejects colonisers as actual followers of Christ, “Christ was never in Europe!” [14, p. 207], since the colonisers are notorious for performing immoral missions. Jesus Christ is universally known as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Showing this immorality of colonisers, the Black activist Kwame Ture (1941-1998) records, “[T]he missionaries came for our goods, not for our good. Indeed, the missionaries turned the Africans’ eyes toward heaven and then robbed them blind in the process” [15, p. 27]. Ture sees missionary religion as a psychological violence, an instrument of material exploitation. Having convinced Africans to tolerate suffering in this world in exchange for rewards in the next world, colonisers had also disarmed the Africans spiritually and politically, making them submissive. This formed a people who would not rebel even as their land, resources, and life were stolen. Hence, the ‘spiritual’ mission was, paradoxically enough, a consciously adopted device to facilitate and mask the violent, repressive economic mission of plunder.

Ultimately, Baraka’s works reflect the violent reality of colonialism; they serve as a decolonizing action and counter-violence. His poetics disentangle the ideological structure of coloniality in its historical and contemporary (Post-slavery America) context and further reveal that the capitalist exploitation of the subjugated is not only a by-product but also an ultimate goal of imperialism. Accordingly, Baraka debunks the myth



of racial and cultural superiority so that readers understand how imperial violence reinforces capitalist expansion as well.

#### 4.2 VIOLENCE IN ACTION

Baraka, in the closing lines of "Heathens," emphasises the colonisers' brutality: "Plus Heathens is armed / and dangerous" [12, p. 205], exposing the armoury and dangerousness of the colonisers, reveals that police force and state power, the ever-present enforcers, underpin both the colonial legacy and the Post-slavery American political system's act of oppression. Baraka explicitly refuses to distinguish between past colonisers and Post-slavery American political power(contemporary), as seen in "Wise 2": "I am not a king / nor trader in flesh / I was / of the sufferers" [16, p. 211]. He explicitly identifies not with an idealised, distant royalty ("Kings" that implies imperial power) and slave trading masters, but with the oppressed, since slavery had been practiced under the direction of the imperial power. After Baraka articulates his solidarity with the oppressed African American community within American society, he is paradoxically met with a backlash as though he were the perpetrator of injustice: "I am among those / to be avenged!" [16, p. 212]. This identification constitutes a radical claim regarding historical injustice.

Additionally, in "Wise 1", violence is manifested through the scenario of cultural erasure, when Baraka commences with a depiction of possible aggressive subjugation, "If you ever find/ yourself.../ ...surrounded /by enemies" [17, p. 210]. The 'enemies' are the colonisers, not as benevolent civilisers but as active suppressors, threatening cultural and personal identity of the other; when they "won't let you / speak in your own language" [17, p. 210], and they "destroy your statues / & instruments" [17, p. 210]. These depictions exemplify colonialism's diverse mechanisms to alienate the colonised from their culture, history, and forms of expression, as Fanon elucidates [5, p. 16]. The recurring symbol of banning "your omm bomm ba boom" [17, p. 210] represents Baraka's resistance to colonial discourse. This onomatopoeic phrase conjures the ancient African drum as a force of communication and resistance. Baraka directly connects this to the ongoing, state-sponsored subjugation of Black Americans. Baraka's bitter frustration proclaims: "probably take you several hundred years / to get / out!" [17, p. 210]. This is a powerful testament to the persistence of white supremacy and its institutional inheritance, referencing centuries of slavery and Jim Crow [18, pp. 13–14, 20].

Then, Baraka links this history to Post-slavery American political system's (contemporary) act of oppression, repeatedly chanting 'deep



trouble', alluding to the structural violence of colonialism and slavery as in "Wise 2", he opens: "I was of people / caught in deep trouble... / enemies had took us / surrounded us / in they country [16, p. 211].

The first line of the poem, "I was of people," establishes at once a collective identification that transcends individual subjectivity. The speaker's personal consciousness is wholly constituted by the besieged community, his experience emblematic of its historical subjugation, agonised by slavery. Baraka's labelling of the "enemies" is a key discursive manoeuvre: it identifies not an external military aggressor but dominant structures of power within the United States. This lexical decision functions as a categorical refusal of all conciliatory or assimilationist politics, recasting the Black-white relationship in America as an irresolvable antagonism.

The most incisive critique, however, is contained in the phrase "in they country". This conceptualization radically reframes the nation for African Americans, transforming "home land" into "theirs-land." This articulation recalls the historical continuum of enslavement and systemic racism, asserting that Black people were abducted and forcefully brought to America, "had took us" and since held captive under carceral oppression "surrounded us". As a result, the poem rewrites the nation and its founding ideology as not a land of freedom but as a prison.

The breakage in the African chain of cultural transmission is clear: "then banned our / ommboom ba boom" [16, p. 211]. This rupture serves as a potent metaphor for the settler-coloniser wiping clean indigenous tradition, as Ngũgĩ writes, "[T]o control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition" [19, p. 16]. In this quotation, Ngũgĩ argues that a people lacking a self-defined identity will invariably be defined by their oppressor. Therefore, to reclaim one's culture, sometimes including its language, narratives, and history, constitutes a quintessential act of self-defense and self-determination. Thus, for Baraka, this systemic cultural alienation is a continuous source of "confusion" and "sickness" [16, p. 211].

Furthermore, by pointing to legacies of colonialism within African American communities, Baraka insists that colonialism's trauma is not eliminated as he says, "I still hear those songs and cries... I still bear that weeping in my heart / that bleeding in my memory" [16, p. 212]. These lines show the speaker not as someone who merely learned this history, but hears it. This auditory inheritance, emphasised by using "still", signifies that the trauma is not a relic of the past but rather a collective and intergenerational transmitted one, a live psychic wound that is





posited in his memory, as the repetitive anaphora “I still hear” the song of “son” and “daughter” further signifies.

By relating the auction block, The Middle Passage, and plantation slavery to the Post-slavery American political system’s (contemporary) police brutality “life exploded / our world exploding us” [16, p. 212], Baraka emphasises the violent disintegration of Black communities, like the past is still ongoing.

In “Brother Okot”, Baraka immediately counters Eurocentric narratives by linking the geographical and ideological "West" with death and hell. Based on an asserted African wisdom, he begins: “Our people say / death lives / in the West” [20, p. 264]. He subverts the colonial idea of the West as the cradle of civilisation, progress, and Enlightenment. When he says: “Any one / can see / plainly, each evening / where the sun / goes to die” [20, p. 264]. Metaphorically, Baraka weaponises a natural phenomenon against colonial propaganda. He turns the figure of the sun, this imperial symbol par excellence, a sun that never sets in the empire [21, p. 1], into a daily funeral pyre in which the morbidity of the West is depicted. This imagery of evilness breaks the stereotype of the colonial White man’s superiority by showing his true nature. In this context, the West is not where vitality is born but where it ends up dead, a place where even stars come to die.

The poem’s assertion that the Ugandan poet Okot p’Bitek is now “in the West / Here w/ us / in hell” [20, p. 264] seamlessly blends the historical violence of European colonialism with the lived experience of systemic Black oppression in America. This is the world famously described by Fanon as the “Manichaeian world” of colonialism [5, p. 16].

Bringing the harshest indictment that collapses the separation between colonial violence of the past and state violence of the Post-slavery American, Baraka says: “I lay in solitary confinement, July 67 / Tanks rolling thru Newark” [22, p. 192]. This exposure takes place against the background of the 1967 Newark Rebellion; Baraka links his own imprisonment and the military occupation of his Black community to the violence of colonial domination. By whistling Trane tunes in his cell, “whistled all I knew of Trane / my knowledge heartbeat” [22, p. 192], Baraka represents a mode of spiritual resistance and cultural retention. This music of Coltrane, a repository of and commentary on the collective history, historical subjugation, and survival of the Black experience, transforms carceral space into sacred space and oppressive time into one filled with memory and meaning. This resistance is part of a long history: where the coloniser’s regime deployed whips and chains, the modern state employs prisons and police. In either period, the structures of

oppression are resisted through maintaining cultural identity. Whistling becomes a fundamental assertion of agency against a logic that has been set up to erase it, asserting one's place as part of the bearer of culture and history.

### 4.3 RESISTING ERASURE

Baraka's project of resisting the erasure of Black identity is intrinsically linked to his linguistic rebellion. He performs a potent semantic hijacking in this regard by appropriating the colonial word "heathen." Originally a pejorative term that characterised natives as subhuman and thereby targeted them as war victims, Baraka inverts its meaning, making it a political and ethical indictment of the coloniser. By redefining the word as "armed" and "dangerous," he reconstitutes it from a religious smear into an accurate descriptor of systemic violence [12, p. 205]. This reappropriation transforms the word from an instrument of oppression into a tool of accusation and reflects the colonial gaze on itself. Thus, renaming is a self-defense of intellect to expose the erosion of the coloniser's moral authority and seize the power to define resistance. This strategic reclamation challenges decolonising what postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak terms 'epistemic violence', the systematic silencing of subaltern voices [10, pp. 280–281]. By appropriating the coloniser's definition of "heathen" and re-signifying it as a critique, Baraka not only refuses this silencing but transforms it into a critical instrument, forging a new, insurgent knowledge from the language of oppression.

This resistance is framed as a collective undertaking from the outset of "In The Tradition." The epigraph, "Not a White Shadow / But Black People / Will be Victorious..." [23, p. 194], serves as a counter-manifesto that explicitly rejects Eurocentric superiority ("White Shadow") and affirms Black self-determination. The poem's task is to undermine colonialism and its contemporary (Post-slavery American political power) embodiments by demonstrating the inhumane fissure of historical chattel slavery and systemic oppression. The lines "Blues walk weeps ragtime / Painting slavery," [23, p. 194] show how fundamental Black cultural forms spring from and are shaped by the experience of slavery. Baraka depicts the Blues and ragtime as a profound, alternative record. They are not just entertainment but a mode of historical testimony, a 'weeping' that 'paints' the reality of slavery, thereby seizing the power to define and represent Black experience from the oppressor's narrative. Moreover, Baraka counters this erasure by witnessing historical and ongoing exploitation. The portrayal of "women laid around / working feverishly for slavemaster romeos" [23, p. 194] remembers the sexual and





economic exploitation that underpinned slavery. This double subjugation is what is argued by the American critic Hortense Spillers (1942-) that the Middle Passage and slavery, which produced a form of “captivity” , systemically eradicated Africans of any sense of gender identity ("ungendering"), rendering them simply "flesh," a site of raw, brutal materiality to be laboured on and violated. The women in Baraka's lines are not figured as “wives” or “mothers” (in any socially identifiable sense) but as bodies “laid around,” and exhaustingly "working," which represents this reduction to flesh (a dehumanised state) rather than the social accessories, as Césaire calls “Thing-ification” [24, pp.67, 72] [9, p.5].

Baraka intertwines this historical violence with contemporary (Post-slavery) cultural oppression, critiquing a mass media that he says has “brainwashed us [African Americans]” [25, p. 19]. This is illustrated through references to “Huggie / Bear from channel 7” and “the White Shadow,” offering advice on how to hold homes together [23, p. 194]. For Baraka, these media figures represent how Black potentiality is degraded and white mainstream paternalism interferes destructively in Black lives, disguising public opinion and devastating the Black communities. Thereby, Baraka posits such media as supporters and perpetrators of the ideology parallel to the historical enslavement of the Black people.

The poem further assaults the hypocritical mask of Western "tradition." Baraka sarcastically questions its fake claim of equality:

why do you want to be  
the president of all this  
of the blues and slow sideways  
horn. tradition of blue presidents  
locked up in the brig for wearing zoot suit  
army pants, . . . [26, p. 196]

Here, political power (“presidents”) is complicit in the criminalisation of Black resistance and aesthetics, alluding to events like the Zoot Suit Riots, where state power enforced racial order [27, pp. 3, 108–109, 167–168]. Baraka reveals this tradition as a “tradition of deadness & capitulation” [28, p. 200], which is built on oppression. A chilling scene presented in the present tense reinforces this continuity: “the slavemasters sipping tea in the parlor / as we bleed to death in the fields” [28, p. 200] exposes the hollowness of the coloniser’s alleged civilisation by directly contrasting the slavemasters' performative civility ("sipping tea") with the visceral, lethal reality they produce ("we bleed to death"). This juxtaposition proves that their "civilisation" is a violent system, not a

cultural achievement, and its refinement is a hollow performance that masks its foundational brutality.

In contrast, Baraka posits a Black tradition characterised by "love and suffering truth over lies," [29, p. 203], where 'love' and 'suffering' symbolise survival and resistance against a White tradition that is based on hypocrisy. This is evident in the line that refutes slogans of equality, "we find ourselves in chains" [29, p. 203]. The word 'chain' implies that the African American 'we' are still treated unequally as their forefathers (slaves). This highlights Baraka's persistent pursuit of justice within the American political system to make reform in the laws that confine the rights of African Americans.

Then, Baraka culminates in a blast of revolutionary urgency when he says: "the tradition says plainly to us fight plainly to us / DEATH TO THE KLAN!" [29, p. 203]. The decree 'death to the Klan' shuns submissive acquiescence to the Manichaean order of colonialism. The Klan is a symbol of lasting white supremacy. Inspired by Fanon, Baraka announces this decree, "death to the Klan," to reject assimilation and call the need of counter-violence against systemic violence [5, pp. 235–239], [30, p. 28]. As Baraka's interviewers have noted, his sustaining vision was a "determination to lead his people out of the wilderness of slavery" and into liberation [25, p. xi].

Baraka further undercuts Eurocentric superiority using brutal juxtapositions. In "The Heir of the Dog", he exposes the ongoing logic of erasure in post-slavery America's political system (contemporary) in highlighting the grotesque inequality where "Animal Rights had / a bigger budget / than the NAACP!" [31, p. 304]. This math of budget inequality reveals the American political system's valuation of Black life as less than that of animals, as Baraka demonstrates in "Somebody Blew Up America," the American political system depends on the denial of the humanity of the Black people by means of terror and suppression [32, p. 86]. This dehumanisation sentiment is rooted in colonial discourse, where Black people were animalised to justify slavery. As George Fitzhugh (1806-1881), an American social theorist, attempts to naturalise domestic slavery by including enslaved people in the families, whom he claims are like other "weaker members" of the family, such as children, and domestic animals (dogs, horses, birds) need care, protection, and control [33, p. xxxv]. This dehumanisation classification aligns with Said's argument on intellectuals' complicity in popularising colonial knowledge and justifying its insidious actions [6, p. 15]. But Baraka inverts this insidious ideology; the "dog" becomes a metaphor for the colonisers, and





the “Heir” is the post-slavery American political system that inherits the colonial legacies, such as Black inferiority.

Consequently, Baraka unrelentingly uncovers the brutal reality supporting the American dream (equality is available for every American individual) for Black Americans. His juxtapositions are scathing snapshots of a system that remains the heir to white supremacy’s colonial violence. His work reveals the dehumanising logic of colonialism still in practice.

In essence, Baraka’s work exposes this reality, reflecting the colonial brutal actions and the contemporary power structure (Post-slavery) to reveal their shared foundation in violence and their deadly fear of Black life and freedom. His contention echoes that art must be a weapon since, for Baraka, the battle around art is a challenge for consciousness and for social development [34, 1:49]. In doing so, he ensures that the vision in the blackness will never be erased.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article has validated its main argument that Amiri Baraka’s poetry is not simply about oppression but fundamentally constitutes a decolonization process. It has been clear that Baraka systematically subverts Manichaeism, a continuous unmasking of the machinery of colonial violence from slavery to mass incarceration, and a defence against epistemic extinction through a recovery of language and culture. His work tirelessly destabilises the coloniser’s narrative, depicting Western tradition not as a beacon of enlightenment but as an inheritance founded on brutality and hypocrisy.

Using an analysis of postcolonial theory, it is argued that Baraka’s poetry is more than a historical record; it is a guide for critical consciousness. This can be transformative of the mind to contemporary readers, teaching them not to accept this world, its institutions, media, and rhetoric that continue to perpetuate the logic of colonialism under different names. By acknowledging the ‘legacy’ and “heir” of colonialism in institutions such as policing, readers will be equipped to recognise these structures, enabling them, through informed activism, to combat racism more effectively.

There are limitations to this study that deserve mention. This paper concentrates on the studies of a selected number of Baraka’s poems from a particular theoretical perspective, mainly that of Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Césaire. A more thorough consideration of Baraka’s entire work, including his plays and essays, or in comparison to other Black Arts Movement poets, could result in different or subtler conclusions.

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