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Hershell N. Proctor-Walden

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(EN)ACTING *REAL* BLACK(NESSES) IN THE THEATRE: THE BLACK ARTS
MOVEMENT AND WOLE SOYINKA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Hershell N. Proctor-Walden

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Title: (En)Acting *Real* Black(nesses) in the Theatre: The Black Arts Movement and Wole Soyinka

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This dissertation has as its object of investigation the similarities between two distinct cultural entities that occurred at roughly the same time: the United States-based Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the career of African writer and political activist Wole Soyinka. These similarities are intriguing because, despite there being no discernible paths of influence, Soyinka and the BAM represent parallel developments concerning four key issues that shaped their effort to destroy the hegemony of white supremacy: (1) critical perspectives on essentialism, (2) commitment to the oppressed, (3) innovative leadership, and (4) use of theatre. My introduction describes the roles these four key issues played in both the U.S. and Africa. Next, it discusses the roles of Black Nationalism in Black literature and literary studies and the usefulness of a Black Aesthetic in the development of a self-loving Black nation. DuBois's concept of double-consciousness is an essential fact of Black or non-European existence for the BAM and one that also shapes Soyinka's works, though few have noted this. Chapter One, examines the BAM's position on the aforementioned critical issues. I will examine what the BAM writers did as a collective in a concerted effort to celebrate and critique Black culture, their commitment to the theatre as both an art form and institution, and their concern with Black essentialism and a critical attitude towards the Harlem Renaissance. Chapter Two, articulates Soyinka's concern for the same four aforementioned critical issues. For Soyinka, cultural productions must be political; aesthetics cannot be divorced from politics. The artist, first, must make use of Black

expressive culture in order to advance a Black Aesthetic. This conception represents the hallmark of Soyinkan theatre. In Chapter Three, I compare and contrast the BAM and Soyinka regarding the politics of theatre as popular art, a vision of a just civil society, and the conception of theatre as a people's art. Key to my comparative analysis is the fact that the BAM focuses on Black urban folk culture, while Soyinka's plays focus on Yoruban African traditions and myths and a multicultural conception of Blackness.

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APOLOGIA

This project is both ambitious and audacious as it is a study of a study. In addition, I had to produce a defensible document in a short amount of time, while under tremendous pressure and working a full-time job as an Instructor of English. However, I am aware of a few areas where one might question the depths of my research and understanding of the breath of the literary periods discussed in this dissertation. Moreover, I elected to discuss very specific genres of literature with a clear understanding that the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement were profuse in all genres. Furthermore, I was not concerned with contemporary ideas of these periods because of my interests in immersing myself in the responses from the BAM during the 1960s and 70s to HR.

As for my discussion of Wole Soyinka's response to Négritude, often times I found his text *Myth, Literature and the African World*, aloof and very difficult to engage with and articulate what he suggests would supplant what he recognizes as the shortcomings of the architects of this movement. After about the fifth or sixth reading of this text, I concluded that if this book is a compilation of Soyinka's essays, then maybe I was looking for ideas that he did not offer in this in this text. Moreover, my "Chapter Two" makes use of subheadings in discussing Soyinka and the ideas of Frank Martin to distinguish to my readers that I purposely treated *Myth, Literature and the African world's* chapters as separate works with different arguments that do not necessarily build upon or furthers a claim from the proceeding chapter.

Lastly, my decision to spend a great deal of time to flesh out the basic music theory may cause one to grow impatient. However, I felt that for those who read my research who have no prior knowledge of music theory will appreciate my "lecture" and gain a clearer understanding of my methods of processing the connections I see and my willingness to take risks and commit to

them. Furthermore, there are a few areas regarding the plays themselves that needed more attention, but time did not permit. I do; however, understand with a critical awareness all of the elements working within the works of Wole Soyinka and Amiri Baraka during the BAM and Post-Négritude periods.

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INTRODUCTION

REVISITING THE BLACK AESTHETIC

Through the works of various artists, playwrights, and others, attempts were made to free the “New Negro” from Euro-American cultural hegemony. In the Black Arts Movement (BAM), this revolt against “whiteness” necessitated a move from “art-for-art’s sake” and a “propaganda to sway white folk’s souls” to an “art-for-peoples’ use”; that is, an overtly political aesthetics oriented towards African Americans alone. Under the inspirational influence of Harold Cruse, many intellectuals, artists and playwrights such as Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, and Maulana Karenga struggled to divorce the Black Aesthetic from white literary influences, especially the institutions. Their quest for “literary nationalism” was premised on the development of a “national culture that could stand in opposition to the high imperial culture from which they needed to break”.¹ The development of an authentic Black Aesthetic requires the idea a “political avant-garde” that is anchored in “folk practices right here, right now, and yet still countercultural”.² Hence, Black folk cultural practices and traditions become the foundation for a Black Aesthetic, rather than an imitation of European literary culture as reflected in the works of Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen and Victor Hugo.

Wole Soyinka is a renowned writer and a political activist. In addition to being known as a poet, a novelist, essayist, drama critic, and theorist, he is also a distinguished playwright. His upbringing and education, both in Nigeria and Europe, exposed him to the cultures and literary traditions of both worlds, as fully evidenced in his works. His greatest inspiration, however, comes from the religion, culture, and worldview of the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria to which he belongs, though his ideological and social vision was also influenced by social and political issues in Nigeria and Africa more generally. His plays examine how multiple Black identities or

“Blacknesses” engage with bourgeois European modernity. As a counter narrative to this Eurocentric modernity, Soyinka’s works demonstrate how a distinctly performative Blackness is grounded in multiple “Blacknesses” and resist the notion of a monolithic Blackness characteristic of the Négritude movement, a movement of which he was highly critical.

I am interested in the connection between the drama and theory of the BAM and Soyinka. The relationship of Black culture to the hegemonic European culture is central to the Black Arts Movement and Soyinka’s work in theatre. DuBois’s concept of double-consciousness is an important backdrop for BAM and one that also shapes Soyinka’s works, though few have noted this. For DuBois, African-American culture and life is not considered to be a part of “white Americanism.” Yet, the aesthetic standards of American civil society always define the value of African American culture and life. African Americans are continually “measuring [their] soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”. Thus, Black people will never completely “bleach [our] Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism.” The defining character of Black culture and life is the reality of double consciousness, “two warring ideals,” “two unreconciled strivings.”

Although living in Africa and writing about African culture, Wole Soyinka’s work parallels that of the Black Arts Movement. While there is no direct contact between Soyinka and members of the Black Arts Movement that we know of, his work shares many elements of the Black aesthetic metanarrative, while exploring issues uniquely African. Moreover, for Soyinka, cultural productions must be political; aesthetics cannot be divorced from politics. The artist, first, must make use of Black expressive culture to advance a Black aesthetic according to Soyinka.

The development of a Black Aesthetic metanarrative—an idea we normally think of as unique to the BAM—is crucial in the development of Soyinka’s critique of Négritude. Further, conceptions of Négritude were also common in the U.S. prior to the BAM and the BAM responded to them in critical fashion. Developed in the 1930s, Négritude was a literary and ideological movement developed by francophone Black intellectuals, writers, and political activists.³ Négritude was one of the dominant literary trends to critique Eurocentric visions of Africa. Léopold Senghor, who played a major role in articulating the basic ideas associated with Négritude, posits for Africans, and indeed for all Black people, a different way of apprehending the world from the European. Négritude, according to Senghor, is “nothing other than the authenticity of Negroes”.⁴ In Négritude, we find a myth of Africa, Abiola Irele argues, “which involved a glorification of the African past and a nostalgia for the imaginary beauty and harmony of traditional society”.⁵ However, as many have noted, Négritude, in its quest for authenticity, merely reverses the imperialist myth of Africa without subjecting its foundation to an empirical or ideological critique. As the philosopher Jacqueline Trimier points out, “Senghor simply and uncritically accepts the European dichotomy, not realizing that even though he accepts its more favorable aspects, he never challenges its basic assumptions and foundations.”⁶

Similar to Trimier, Soyinka explicitly states that Négritude went wrong in this respect because it is

[t]he contrivance of a creative ideology and its falsified basis of identification with the social vision... Négritude proceeded along the route of over simplification. Its re-enactment of black values was not preceded by any profound effort to enter into this African system of values... It took far too much from European ideas while the founders pronounce Africanism. (Myth, 127)

In opposition to the European “master narrative,” Négritude offers what many have criticized as a monolithic conception of Blackness. In Soyinka’s *Myth, Literature and the African World*, he criticizes Négritude’s narcissistic ideologies because “[i]t not only accepted the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontation but borrowed from the very components of its racist syllogism” (127). Soyinka astutely notes, “Negritude did not free black races from the burden of the notion of European defined standards” (127).

Through his plays, Soyinka offers a seminal critique of Négritude’s views about the authentic representation of African people. Moreover, he writes plays in the interest of African people and draw on African myths and realities. Consequently, Soyinka moves beyond the European normative standards of beauty and culture. In order to provide a transformative approach to the Black theatre, Soyinka self-consciously employs native African languages, music, symbols, and other cultural tropes and traditions in his plays. In this dissertation, I will construct a comparative study of the Black Arts Movement and Soyinka’s conception of the Black and African theatre, addressing both theories of theatre and dramatic works. I explicitly argue that Soyinka develops a Black Aesthetic. For Soyinka, the good theatre should exemplify something familiar to scholars of the BAM: “art-for-peoples’ use”. Similarly, Soyinka’s critique of Négritude parallels the Black Arts Movement’s critique of the Harlem Renaissance.

Four key problematics arise that will be central to my study: (1) Black essentialism, (2) commitment to the oppressed, (3) innovative leadership, and (4) the functionality of theatre. Similar to Baraka and Neal, Soyinka wants to present a concrete concept of Blackness grounded in the material realities of the African experience rather than the racial fantasies of Négritude. This is what I consider a critical perspective on essentialism. My discussion will acknowledge the essentialism/constructivism divide. Diana Fuss has argued that the

essentialism/constructivism binary blocks innovative thinking, providing people with too easy a basis for unreflective dismissal (67). Similarly, in the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Gayatri Spivak suggests that essentialism can indeed be a strategy to invoke a collective category and critique this category at the same time deeming it theoretically unrealizable—a self-reflexive critique. As a means of furthering the discourse of essentialism, I will introduce anti-essentialists Paul Gilroy and Manuel DeLanda’s philosophies to analyze racial identities without essences, while acknowledging racism as a system of physical processes determining structural possibilities. Both Soyinka and the Black Arts Movement view their art as reflecting the material folk culture of oppressed people. Both believe that activism should come in the form of an innovative leadership strategy that moves away from a “victim analysis” approach that prescribes predetermined solutions and ideas to *fix* the person, community, or situation based on the individual’s belief of what is *right* or *best*. Instead, they advocate, both theoretically and in their dramatic works, a “power analysis” approach, which uses the people’s *empowerment* to determine what is *best* for the collective then responds to those ideas to facilitate dramatic change the improves the situation, when addressing institutionalized racism.

Soyinka is a major figure, his dramatic and theoretical work targets specific issues of significance to the Black diaspora, and yet there are major questions about his work that are either not being asked or answered in the right way. The Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic are, I would argue, very much in congruence in terms of those specific issues of significance, and we see there those same questions being asked in a way that suggests real pertinence. By putting the BAM and Soyinka in conversation, I both clarify the intentions of both and suggest new connections between African American and African cultures and cultural

movements. This dissertation thus contributes to our knowledge of literary criticism, theatre studies, the BAM, Soyinka, and Black Atlantic drama.

To accomplish my goals, I will operationalize the following frameworks: (1) Boykin's theory of The Triple Quandary and (2) Martin's theory of Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black and Meta-Black(nesses). Black psychologist A. Wade Boykin paints a portrait of how the deficiencies found in black cultural studies can be addressed through nine interrelated dimensions that speak to biculturality and cultural patterning in the form of what he calls The Triple Quandary: "The mainstream experience, the minority experience, and the Black cultural experience" (65). Boykin's framework rejects the view that Black people are plagued with a social pathology. He discerns a need to move beyond a "victim analysis" of Black people. Whereas DuBois concerns himself with the Negro as a problem, essentially a "victim analysis" despite his commitment to positive propaganda and social uplift, Boykin discusses the movement from the Black as a problem to the problems of Black Americans and potential solutions to those problems, enabling a concrete "power analysis." The shift from the DuBoisian double-consciousness is limited by the experience and cultural climate of the Black Power movement. As an agent of political change and personal growth, this development within the Black working-class of the 1950s through the 1970s, marks a critical moment in the Black community. Boykin's Triple Quandary is a discourse that humanizes Black people and provides a nuanced way to read the BAM's preferred genre of literature: drama and the theatre. Likewise, Soyinka's position on Négritude is comparable to that of many writers on the Black Aesthetic and Blackness more generally: he, too, prefers an analysis based on the analysis of power relations and a dramatic understanding of social transformation. By examining Soyinka's position, one can better understand the issues and complexities facing the Black writer who is interested in creating great

art as s/he is destroying racism and colonialism. Soyinka's most cited text, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, provides what art historian Frank Martin's research coins as an ontology of a pre-Black, Black, post-Black and meta-Black predicament for the colonized African identity and world-view. Moreover, Soyinka's collections of essays a reminder of a (pre-Black) historical tradition rooted in an African metaphysics, demonstrates using the theatre to perform enactments of escaping the trauma of a (post-Blackened⁷) colonized "self" to reshape a meta-Blackness that reconciles heritage, political responsiveness, and personal identity choice(s). This marks Soyinka's conception of Blackness as distinctly dramatic.

In the first chapter, "Theatre as a People's Art," I examine the BAM's critical-theoretical positions on the aforementioned critical issues: Black essentialism, commitment to the oppressed, innovative leadership and the functionality of theatre. I will examine what the BAM writers did as a collective in a concerted effort to celebrate and critique Black culture, their commitment to the theatre as both an art form and institution, and their concern with Black essentialism and a critical attitude towards the Harlem Renaissance.

Neal asserts that, to achieve non-Western form and break from the neo-colonial control of African Americans, the playwright must explore indigenous cultural forms and non-Western metaphysical systems. Considering that, I argue that the BAM focuses on inspiring, motivating, and developing the leadership skills of those persons who follow, placing emphasis on responding to the needs of the people while working alongside them. This chapter provides a narrative history of BAM similarly to that of James E. Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement : Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. However, by drawing on the scholarship of Larry Neal, Addison Gayle, and Maulana Karenga, among others, I suggest a slightly different historical framework, beginning with the limitations of the Harlem Renaissance and the BAM's

efforts to advance an idea of Blackness that seeks neither approval nor input from a racist paradigm or a white-dominated culture—the “rejection of anything that we feel is detrimental to our people” (Neal, “And Shine Swam On,” 638).

As Mike Sell observes, there are three distinct intellectual formations of the BAM. First, the Black Arts Movement offers a vision of people’s art. Through plays, art and poetry, Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, and Ed Bullins present art as reflecting and analyzing the lives of Black people, particularly African-Americans living in urban cities. Second, participants in the Black Arts Movement offer a vision of a just civil society. Here, art plays a seminal role in voicing the right of African-Americans to self-determination. Lastly, by engaging in cultural struggle, the Black Arts Movement is intimately involved in contesting state power in the United States polity. There are three dimensions to the Black Arts Movement. According to Reginald Martin⁸ these dimensions “included ... art by black Americans could never be accepted by white Americans; separate criteria ... to appraise properly the talent of black artists; and all art should be toward a political/humanistic end ...but especially [for] black people--to a higher consciousness...” which are seminal to understanding Soyinka’s plays and clarifying his understanding of Blackness.

In the second chapter, I examine Soyinka’s development of what I consider to be an African literary critical standard that aligns with the BAM African American standard. Soyinka’s goal is to liberate audiences’ minds from the “superstition of Power.” I examine Soyinka’s concern for four critical issues: Black essentialism, commitment to the oppressed, innovative leadership and the functionality of theatre. Soyinka deploys an African identity that is shifting and fragmented while still grounded in concepts of cultural authenticity. More specifically, he presents a concrete concept of Blackness grounded in the material realities of the African world

rather than the racial fantasies of Négritude, which challenges essentialism. The philosopher William R. Jones best captures the revolutionary implications of Soyinka's Black Aesthetic metanarrative. Jones explains that, if we identify that the author is Black, i.e. a member of a particular ethnic community, then we are implying "that his primary, but not exclusive, audience is the black community, that the point of departure for his philosophizing or the tradition from which he speaks...can be called in some sense the black experience."⁹ Moreover, Jones suggests that the meaning of "Black" in Black philosophy has reference to such factors as author, audience, ancestry, accent and/or antagonist. As Jones observes, "To identify that the author is black, i.e. a member of a particular ethnic community, that his primary, but not exclusive, audience is the black community, that the point of departure for his philosophizing or the tradition from which he speaks or the world-view he seeks to articulate can be called in some sense the black community."¹⁰

For Soyinka, this necessitates a focus on absurdity. Soyinka's Black Aesthetic metanarrative allows him to explore the absurd in life as well as in drama. Since all members of civil society are capable of performing acts of absurd injustice, Soyinka's *oeuvre* covers the full gambit of society. They range from the traditional ruler and dictators as found in *Kongi's Harvest* to politicians and elites in *The Interpreters* to ordinary men and women as in *Brother Jero* and *Madmen and Specialists*. Throughout his plays, Soyinka sets up an antithesis to the revolutionary hero. Despite having the qualities and status of a revolutionary hero, the tragic figure in his plays utilize their talents and visions to oppress and victimize mankind. Such a man is Kongi in *Kongi's Harvest*, who usurps the power of the traditional leader and rules tyrannically. The specialist in *Madman and Specialists* is a medical doctor who uses his medical expertise to commit murder. The work combines Yoruba rituals of song and chant with sharp

parody, creating deft plays-on-words that distort their meaning while accentuating the potency of language.

The work of James Gibbs and Bernith Lindfors's *Research on Wole Soyinka* and James Gibb's *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* will serve as primary sources for my close reading of Soyinka's works, both critical and dramatic, though I argue that Soyinka's vision of a civil society is reflected most effectively in his drama. His plays often present dramatic situations of great relevance to the African community and their role in post-colonial struggles against imperialism—a key concern of the BAM.

Soyinka's plays address political power, social cohesion, and the consequences of economic underdevelopment with a particular focus on *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (1971). In Soyinka's plays, we are given a view of the prevailing political and social conditions existing in Nigeria. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explains, "With the emergence of the state, the artist and the state became not only rivals in articulating the laws, moral or formal, that regulate life in society, but also rivals in determining the manner and circumstances of their delivery" ("Enactments of Power", 434). Drawing on theatre reviews, literary criticism, and published interviews of Soyinka, I argue that Soyinka's plays seek to affirm the humanity of Africans in postcolonial Africa in a way that is both critical of essentialist conceptions of Blackness, but remains focused on the lived realities of the black African.

In the third chapter, I seek a critical synthesis between the BAM and Soyinka. I compare and contrast the BAM and Soyinka regarding the politics of theatre as popular art, their vision of a just civil society, and the conception of theatre as a people's art. I will use *The Toilet*, *Dutchman*, *The Slave* and *The Slave Ship* by Baraka to demonstrate these ideas by comparison.

Key to my comparative analysis is the fact that the BAM focuses on Black urban folk culture, while Soyinka's plays focus on Yoruban African traditions and myths and a multicultural conception of Blackness.

The cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's intervention in terms of the Black Atlantic is critical to this chapter's argument because it successfully posits the globality of the African Diaspora. His text has led to wide acknowledgement of the Black Atlantic opening up the exploration of the international connections with greater depth, to imagine this relationship in a more comprehensive, fluid, creative and objective framework. The Black Atlantic as a spatial formation can be transmuted into a paradigm for analyzing the myriad practices emerging from the African Diaspora in modernity. And that is what I attempt to do here.

Thus, Soyinka and the BAM's approach to theatre marks a quest for an innovative, self-reflexive form of popular art. Both Soyinka's theatre and the theatre of the BAM deliberately attempt to sow doubts in the minds of its audiences about what is being presented—is what they're seeing a rehearsed formal piece of theatre, an "event," or a "happening"? They set out to challenge and disturb their audiences in ways that printed text does not always convey. The style of the plays and the fact they are written by Baraka and Soyinka wrote them indicates their desire to communicate and confidence that audiences—people—can be affected by theatrical experiences. However, Gibbs mentions that, "while trying to give power *to* the people by making them more alert, Soyinka knows that power does not at present, in Africa, come *from* the people (160).

I argue that Wole Soyinka's plays articulate a term commonly understood in the BAM: a Black Aesthetic, or an explicitly ethnicized aesthetic. By characterizing Soyinka's work as governed by a Black Aesthetic, I am not implying an essentialist Black worldview as we may

find in Maulana Karenga's ideology of Kawaïda. Rather, I would argue that the "Black" in the Black Aesthetic references such factors as author, audience, ancestry, accent and/or antagonist. As the African American philosopher William R. Jones explains, if we identify that the author is Black, i.e. a member of a particular ethnic community, then we are implying "that his primary, but not exclusive, audience is the black community, that the point of departure for his philosophizing or the tradition from which he speaks...can be called in some sense the black experience."¹¹ Therefore, I argue that to call for a Black Aesthetic—and to attempt to unify African American and African theorists and artists within it—is to offer an implicit attack on racist and nationally limited representations of the Black experience, especially in its conceptual, institutional and commercial expressions.

The BAM focuses on Black urban folk culture, but BAM dramatists like Amiri Baraka used "criticism as the object of the critique itself." For example, *The Toilet* explores the tension between masculinity and homosexuality by way of his main character Foots/Ray, who has two identities that cannot coexist, at least not in the world of his high school. His masculine self or "Foots" is evident when he is in the bathroom amongst his friends who are skipping class to smoke and plot the attack of Karlois, who is perceived as effeminate—a threat to the social norms of their crew. However, Karlois and "Ray" are in a homosexual relationship privately. This privacy is challenged when one of Foots's homeboys discovers a written letter from Karlois to Ray. Although Karlois is brought to the bathroom badly beaten, Foots's homies encourage him to "finish the job." It is not until Karlois begins to call for Ray as the person he *will* fight that the audience becomes aware that Foots is living two different lifestyles. Sayer notes that "criticism becomes a critique when we not only show that certain beliefs are false but explain why they are held and what produces them" (159). I maintain that in *The Toilet* we see that

Baraka dramatizes a natural expression and experience of love, but in the context of male homosexual relationships, questions the normative behavior of what it means to perform black masculinity.

Though many of Wole Soyinka's plays focus on African folk culture and make extensive use of African mythology, he too dramatizes critical themes. *Kongi's Harvest*, is an examination of the conflict which arises when the authority of traditional rule (spiritual as well as secular), unquestioned for centuries, is suddenly challenged by the authority of contemporary political power. Because the new authority does not derive from tradition, it can only establish itself by some form of coercion. This play – which is purportedly a biting satire on the President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, President of Guinea Sekou Touré and President of Malawi Hastings Banda – took on a great significance considering military coup d'état which overthrew Nkrumah on February 24, 1966, one month before its production. Following Biodun Jeyifo, I argue that Soyinka appears to support the “patriarchal feudalism” tradition of the ancient Oyo kingdom. Jeyifo and other critics take Soyinka to task for his “metaphysical profundities” and failure to offer a clear positive revolutionary alternative to social decadence in contemporary African societies, again, is another example of “criticism as the object of the critique itself.” Soyinka challenges the expectations of both the theatre and his audiences by disrupting their state of complacency and confronting them with the realities of their situations. This disruption includes forcing audience members to witness enactments of the truth through fiction. According to Gibbs, “it forced them to come to terms with a particular image of what was happening in their [world]” (134).

In this respect, there is an interesting parallel with Larry Neal's dramatically oriented aesthetic theory. Neal asserts that, to achieve non-Western form and break from the neo-colonial

control of African Americans, the playwright must explore indigenous cultural forms and non-Western metaphysical systems. Moreover, before the artist can have a meaningful role in the transformation of a society, the “destruction of the white thing...white ideas...and white ways of looking at the world” is necessary (64). Hence, a new system needs to be created that validates the forms, values, histories, symbols, and myths for a new vision of the world from the perspective of Black people—a Black aesthetic. Neal makes it clear that this endeavor is “predicated on an ethics which asks this question: Whose vision of the world is more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or the oppressor?” (64).

Central to the conception of Blackness constructed in the theories and dramas of the BAM and Soyinka is a critical confrontation with essentialist conceptions of Blackness and the possibility of a popular, dramatic conception in its place. According to Michael Etherton, an African theatre historian, “Plays informed by the spirit of Négritude, focus upon a leader: hero, king, or warrior. They are positioned in that a central figure rises to power and become a symbol of a group of people or a nation” (145). Soyinka, in his literary works, creates lone heroic figures who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the communal good. Unlike the Greek tragic hero, whose tragic death is a catharsis that elicits pity and fear in the audience, the death of a Yoruba tragic protagonist is a beginning of a new life for his community, since the catharsis resulting from the death brings the people to a new national consciousness. Addressing African writers, intellectuals and political leaders, Soyinka demands,

A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions, these are qualities possessed by literature

of a social vision. Revolutionary writing is generally of this kind, though whether most of the writing which aspires to the label is always literature is another question.¹²

Soyinka's plays and the theatre of the BAM highlight the illness of certain social behaviors, and predict the pitfalls that could result from it if unchecked, always with the hope that society can take a new direction.

In my afterword, I discuss the value of my comparative analysis for future work in literary studies. Here I draw upon the notion of "Black internationalism," which serves as a conceptual framework guiding my dissertation. I will operationalize this concept as defined by West, Martin, and Wilkins as a struggle against oppression, whether manifested in slavery, colonialism, or racism.¹³ Black internationalism takes the term diaspora and broadens its scope as a discourse. It has a single defining characteristic: struggle.¹⁴ Moreover, the work of Patterson and Kelley in their essay, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," claims that the African diaspora should speak to Africa's encounters Indian Ocean societies, Asia and the Islamic world. Furthermore, the essay argues that the limitation of diaspora in the twentieth-century context "limits the full range of Black transnational political, cultural, and intellectual link" (14). This creation of a diasporic consciousness enables dialogues across Black communities and national boundaries.

Both the BAM and Soyinka offer a unique revolutionary concept of theatre. Considered together, they open the possibility of a nuanced Black Aesthetic, an aesthetic that is self-reflexive of multiple Black identities or Blacknesses, both within specific African-diasporic communities and across that diaspora. I argue that to call for a Black Aesthetic is to offer an implicit attack on racist representations of the Black experience, especially in its conceptual, institutional, and commercial expressions. Both the BAM and Soyinka are great examples of what Paul Gilroy

refers to as a “counterculture of modernity.” Both dramatize the limited perspectives of cultural nationalism to explore a more original way of capturing the everyday life of Black people and modeling ways for them to challenge white supremacy and celebrate their history and their future.

Notes

¹ Smethurst, James E. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 59.

² Ibid., 61.

³ See Abiola Irele, "Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3(3) (October 1965), 312-348.

⁴ Cited in Trimier, Jacqueline, "The Myth of Authenticity: Personhood, Traditional Culture, and African Philosophy," in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.) *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 201.

⁵ Abiola Irele, "Negritude—Literature and Ideology," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1965 3(4): 509.

⁶ Trimier, Jacqueline, "The Myth of Authenticity: Personhood, Traditional Culture, and African Philosophy," in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.) *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 205.

⁷ My own addition to Martin's use of "post" black.

⁸ See Reginald Martin's essay in his text, *Ishmael Reed and the New Black Aesthetic Critics*, "New Ideas for Old: New Black Aesthetic Critical Guidelines and Black Writers." (25-40).

⁹ William R. Jones, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," *The Philosophical Forum* 9 (2-3) (1977-78), 152-53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 152-53.

¹¹ William R. Jones, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," *The Philosophical Forum* 9 (2-3) (1977-78), 152-53.

¹² Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 66.

CHAPTER ONE

THEATRE AS A PEOPLE'S ART

The Expansive Nature of The Black Arts Movement (BAM)

The Black Arts Movement (BAM) mounted an ideological critique of United States civil society. The critic Larry Neal called it the “aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept,” and as such, it sought to achieve a traditional avant-garde goal—to change literature and therefore life (62). How did it do this? First, the BAM offered a vision of “the people’s” art, the common folk steeped in their culture. Especially in the theatre, playwrights such as Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Ed Bullins, and Adrienne Kennedy presented art as assessing and analyzing the lives of Black people, particularly African Americans living in inner cities. Second, participants in the BAM offered a vision and demanded an America that recognized African Americans as equal citizens treated fairly in a civil society. In both cases, art plays a seminal role in voicing the right of African Americans to self-determination. Implicit in BAM art is a leadership strategy that moves away from what Anthony Graham refers to as a “victim analysis”¹⁵ approach that prescribes predetermined solutions and ideas to fix the person, community, or situation based on the individual’s belief of what is right or best. Instead, the BAM used a “power analysis”¹⁶ approach, which was directed at empowering African Americans so that they could determine what is best for the collective. The response to that analysis would lead to change in racial layers of American society to improve the situation economically, socially, politically, and educationally. Lastly, by engaging in cultural struggle, the BAM contested state power in the United States polity.

The movement’s critical issues—Black essentialism, a commitment to the oppressed, innovative leadership, and the functionality of theatre—respectfully rescues what did not work in

the Harlem Renaissance and situates these issues during a time of civil rights struggle to move Black art forward with a clear purpose intricately connected to the people. The BAM defines the Black Aesthetic in a way that allows for Black people—Africans and the diaspora descendants—to connect and function regardless of condition. The BAM does not suggest, but mandates that Black art must be transformative to evoke change. Therefore, the notion of “art-for-art’s-sake” shifts to “art-for-community’s-sake.” This approach to celebrate and critique Black culture demonstrates their commitment to the theatre as both an art form and institution and their concern with Black essentialism and a critical attitude towards the Harlem Renaissance. The scholarship of Larry Neal, Addison Gayle and Maulana Karenga, among others, establishes and maps the limitations of the Harlem Renaissance and the BAM’s efforts to advance an idea of Blackness that seeks neither approval nor input from a racist paradigm. The centrality of the theatre is at the forefront as the most effective literary form—unlike the preferred genres of the Harlem Renaissance, poetry and the novel—because the co-creator relationship between actor and audience becomes a demonstration of concrete culture and community, versus that of the Harlem Renaissance, which was perceived as a construction of a Blackness based on negation. Exemplary among these, Neal asserts that in order to achieve non-Western form and break from the neo-colonial control of African Americans, the playwright must explore indigenous cultural forms and non-Western metaphysical systems (452).

I will explore these ideas in response to a body of significant scholarship, both primary and secondary. James Smethurst’s historical analysis of the BAM helps bring clarity to the scholarship on the BAM as a productive period whose motives went far beyond the literary into the streets of Black life. Smethurst’s *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* will serve as primary source. Also, critical to this chapter is Harold Cruse’s

magnum opus *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*. Cruse's work impacts my discussion of his perspective of transformational leadership, particularly in terms of theatre. The BAM focuses on inspiring, motivating, and developing the leadership skills of those persons who follow their ideological lead, placing emphasis on responding to the needs of Black people while working alongside them. Lastly, from the critical analysis of Cruse, Mike Sell coined a term, the "triple front," naming the necessity of combining struggle simultaneously and performatively in terms of economics, politics, and culture. Both Cruse's contemporary essays and Sell's scholarship provide a framework to assess the success of the broader goals of the BAM including innovative leadership and the theatre.

This chapter argues that the Black Arts Movement articulates a Black Aesthetic, or an explicitly ethnicized and performative aesthetic. The Black Aesthetic does not necessarily imply an essentialist Black worldview as found in Maulana Karenga's ideology of Kawaïda; rather, the "Black" in the Black Aesthetic also references such factors as author, audience, ancestry, accent and/or antagonist. As the African American philosopher William R. Jones explains, "If we identify that the author is Black, i.e. a member of a particular ethnic community, then we are implying that his primary, but not exclusive, audience is the black community, that the point of departure for his philosophizing or the tradition from which he speaks...can be called in some sense the black experience".¹⁷ Critical to this discussion is Stephen Henderson's "The Question of Form and Judgement in Contemporary Black American Poetry: 1962-1977." His work cleverly provides both essentialist and constructivist criteria by considering the perspective of the stakeholders in the "notion of standards and evaluation" of literature once the descriptor "Black" is attached (165). Therefore, I argue that to call for a Black Aesthetic is to offer an implicit attack

on racist and stereotypical representations of the Black experience, especially in its conceptual, institutional, and commercial expressions.

This chapter will examine the BAM's conception of theatre as the people's art, analyzing the way the BAM's dramatic texts and authors utilize Larry Neal's concept articulated in the *Negro Digest* when questioned about Black Aesthetic. Neal says, "There's no need to establish a 'black aesthetic.' Rather it is important to understand that one already exists. The question is: where does it exist? And what do we do with it?" Henderson says in response to Neal's keen observation that "Neal not only demonstrated an understanding...but also an extensive grasp of the roots..." "...an important linkage, for it ...ensured historical continuity" and is "open to a wide range of approaches" (168). They challenge the expectations of both the theatre and their audiences by disrupting their state of complacency and confronting them with the realities of their situations. This disruption includes encouraging audience members "to observe a reflection of the truth in the fiction they are watching." According to Gibbs, "[I]t forced them to come to terms with a particular image of what was happening in their [world]" (134). Drawing a parallel with Larry Neal, I will further illustrate a commitment to the oppressed in Black Arts drama and theatre. In addition to communicating honestly and authentically with the African American community, Neal asserts that, to achieve non-Western form and break from the neo-colonial control of African Americans, the playwright must explore indigenous cultural forms and non-Western metaphysical systems. Moreover, before the artist can have a meaningful role in the transformation of a society, the "destruction of the white thing...white ideas...and white ways of looking at the world" is necessary (64). Hence, a system needs to be created that validates the forms, values, histories, symbols, and myths for a new vision of the world from the perspective of Black people—a Black Aesthetic. Neal also makes clear that this endeavor is "predicated on

an ethics which asks this question: Whose vision of the world is more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or the oppressor?" (64). The plays I discuss here highlight the illness that affects certain social behaviors and predicts the pitfalls that can result from it if unchecked, always with the hope that America will view African Americans as equal citizens who make up the distinctive flavor of a society and take a new direction.

In sum, I will discuss, first, the Harlem Renaissance and the tension of a constructed representation of identity based on negation of the ethnic *Other*. Second, I will examine the paradigm shift from DuBoisian double consciousness to Boykin's Triple Quandary as a discourse that humanizes Black people and provides a nuanced way to read the BAM's preferred genre of literature and understand their utilization of drama and the theatre. Third, I will describe the impact the BAM has on the Black literary front with the infusion of components of basic music theory as a social, political, and economic perspective. Moreover, I will use two different pairing of music components: (1) the arpeggio and chord and (2) melody and harmony to demonstrate how I see the BAM as adding complexities of aural texture to the gaps in the literary ideology of the Harlem Renaissance period. In addition, I will argue that the shift from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement is critical in understanding how the philosophy of double-consciousness is limited by the experience and cultural climate of the Black Power movement as an agent of political change and personal growth and development within the Black middle-class of the 1950s through the 1970s.

Double-Consciousness and the Harlem Renaissance

The development of the Black Aesthetic has its beginning at least in the Harlem Renaissance during the early 1920s. The African American philosopher Alain Locke is generally

touted as the gadfly of the Harlem Renaissance. In the title essay of the 1925 anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, “The New Negro,” Locke declares that the “New Negro” is no longer shackled by the “psychology of imitation and implied inferiority”; the day of the Black Sambo, aunties, uncles and mammies is gone. The “New Negro,” he announces, sheds the “old chrysalis” and experiences a “spiritual emancipation,” it signals key themes and questions: (1) folk culture versus an imagined culture; (2) constructing identity based on negation; (3) rootedness versus invention. As Richard J. Powell astutely notes, this trend did not begin nor end with Locke’s anthology. Powell writes,

Six years prior to Locke’s essay, the pioneering black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux called for similar changes. In his film *Within our Gates*, Micheaux represented a virtual cornucopia of ‘New Negro’ types: from the educated and entrepreneurial ‘race’ man and woman to the incorrigible Negro hustler, from the liberal white philanthropist to the hard core white racist. Micheaux created a complex, melodramatic narrative around these types in order to develop a morality tale of pride, prejudice, misanthropy and progressivism that would be revisited by Locke and others.¹⁸

In 1926, W. E. B. Du Bois organized a symposium in *The Crisis* devoted to “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?,” which featured essays by prominent intellectuals and artists such as Charles W. Chesnutt, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Countee Cullen, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Benjamin Brawley, and Walter White, among others. For these, the importance of the “New Negro” cultural renaissance rested “in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective.”¹⁹ As David Levering Lewis smartly observes,

The New Negro was Locke's modest effort to create a work comparable in objective to Fichte's "Addresses to the German Nation." Eurocentric to the tip of his cane, Locke sought to graft abstractions from German, Irish, Italian Jewish, and Slovakian nationalisms to Afro-America.²⁰

However, in Langston Hughes's seminal 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," we witness the birth of a political critique of white patronage in the Harlem Renaissance and a rejection of that Eurocentrism. Hughes raises his voice against efforts to make Black art an imitation of whiteness. Yet, despite this and despite the significant contribution of Alain Locke and others in terms of drawing attention to black America and its folk culture, the Harlem Renaissance must be deemed elitist, privileging a sort of Eurocentric aesthetic cosmopolitanism, and constrained by white patronage and philanthropy.

In relation to the Harlem Renaissance, DuBois's concept of double-consciousness is a feature in the texts of the period, namely because the period does not embrace the question of the problems of Black people more generally, but rather the construction of the Black person as a problematic identity or subjectivity. Arguably, poetry does not allow for the public consumption of literature as a political act due to the context in which the works are most often appreciated; in other words, on the page, in the hands, in the private room. For instance, in Hughes' poem, "I, Too Sing America," there is acknowledgment of the darker *self*, feeling ashamed of its condition, thus supporting a poetics of *victim analysis*. There is no challenge to the political or economic condition of the Negro in American society. It appears the Harlem Renaissance's treatment of double-consciousness is literal: It is about black and white and the problem of body relative to internalization of one's condition. Implicit here are three issues: First, double-consciousness and the general critique of the literature of the period, considering Hughes's and Locke's efforts to

overcome it, although they mostly failed; second, the issue of poetry as a genre; and third, the general presence of victim analysis in poetry, including that of people who attempted to move beyond it, like Hughes.

Critics of the Harlem Renaissance such as Larry Neal felt the need to address the limitations of the period as well as the need for a more socially, politically, and economically relevant literary movement—and literary form—that could address the “working-class” Blacks where they were and not as victims. To be clear here, my rationale for isolating “working-class Blacks” is twofold. First, as I have stated, the Harlem Renaissance’s (Black) audience was the elite and the petty bourgeois Negro located in the north (Harlem) and, second, the acknowledgement of the working-class citizen as the driver of culture acknowledges a tradition of resistance versus a tradition of assimilation. Thus, the move from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement “represents the flowering of a cultural nationalism that has been suppressed since the 1920s” (Neal 78). Although there is not much discussion about Larry Neal in Harold Cruse’s critique of the black intellectual and theatre, I will use a few of his keen observations to describe Neal’s approach to and rejection of double consciousness as a critical framework. Additionally, I will argue that Neal attempts to address the “triple front” in the development of a much-needed “cultural school of thought.”²¹ Moreover, his aim is to reconcile this “two-ness” for the Black artist by focusing heavily on the politics of culture and art—the “problem” of art representing integrationism versus a nationalist tradition.

In line with Cruse and his notion of a functional art, Neal argues that the Harlem Renaissance “was essentially a failure...It did not address itself to the mythology and the life-styles of the black community. It failed to take root, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit” (78). For those artists and critics of the Harlem

Renaissance, “the concept of Black Power is predicated” on and establishes the necessity of a black art form for a Black Aesthetic that was grounded in Black Power and rejected Eurocentric ways of thinking and living. Furthermore, critics like Neal and Karanga questioned the completeness of the literary revolt against double consciousness and the need for a more comprehensive theoretical analysis of literature to “capture the richness and integrity of the Afro-American experience is to cast it in terms of interplay among three realms of experiential negotiation: The mainstream experience, the minority experience, the Black cultural experience” (qtd. in Boykin 65). Thus, what I would call “Triple Quandary Theory” further articulates how the Black Arts Movement moves beyond the limited perspective of the Harlem Renaissance into a realm that addresses the text beyond specific time and place (the performative specificity of theatrical performance), and into a broader discursive space for a more holistic social, political, and economic critique of everyday Black experience in the light of the need and inevitability of revolutionary transformation.

Triple Quandary and the Black Arts Movement

I would argue that the articulation of a Black Aesthetic, though begun in the 1920s on a theoretical level and in limited ways in its literature, reaches its highest point with the BAM, which lasted from 1965 to the mid-seventies, though acknowledging that it too, needs criticism considering its attitudes regarding gender, sexuality, location, and so on. Defining themselves against the apolitical tendencies of the Harlem Renaissance, but affirming the idea that Blackness was a unique and specifiable identity, the Black Arts writers and artists saw themselves and their work as serving an overtly political function. Black artists who have freed themselves from Eurocentric illusions and influences can only create Black art. In the summer of 1968, Larry Neal declared,

[T]he political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists. A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. The Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics.²²

The BAM, from Neal's perspective, was the "aesthetic and spiritual sister" of the larger Black Power movement; it was part of the broader movement for African-American self-determination and nationhood (62). The term "Black Power" came into prominence during the Meredith March in the summer of 1966. The grassroots activists Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks made the concept of Black Power popular, largely through their use of the term while organizing with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and later with the book *Black Power* co-authored with the Black political scientist Charles Hamilton (62). The BAM was a part of the cultural politics of the day. Black Power was a household name from Washington, D. C. to the Mississippi Delta to Nigeria.

The earliest known usage of the term, "Black Power" is found in a 1954 book by Richard Wright entitled *Black Power*. Nevertheless, we see hints of the concept earlier. In the classic 1937 essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Wright outlined what he envisioned as the historical imperative that must guide future writing on African-American life and culture. Originally published in the short-lived left-wing magazine *New Challenge*, in this essay, Wright is openly critical of the works that defined the Harlem Renaissance or what he labels as the "Harlem school of expression". Wright – with his usual literary flair – observes,

Generally speaking, Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white

America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do clever tricks.²³

He argues that Black artistic productions should be addressed to everyday African-American life and culture, expressing the needs, sufferings and aspirations of African-American working-class men and women. He argued that literature should take its cue from the Black workers' movement and incorporate a Marxist perspective, bringing Black working-class life and culture back into African-American literature, rather than the limited worldview of the Black bourgeoisie. Wright notes,

It means that a Negro writer must learn to view the life of a Negro living in New York's Harlem or Chicago's South Side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class. It means that a Negro writer must create in his readers' minds a relationship between a Negro woman hoeing cotton in the South and the men who loll in swivel chairs in Wall Street and take the fruits of her toil.²⁴

By drawing on Black working-class life and folk traditions, the Black writer would be able to express the "complex simplicity" of Black life. Although the Marxist perspective that informs much of the essay would not be accepted by most members of the BAM, the call for a socially engaged literary practice that this essay presents would come to embody Black Power ideology. In so many respects, Wright's literary oeuvre laid the "blueprint" for the Black Arts Movement.

In "The Black Arts Movement" (1968), Larry Neal offers us an opportunity to both salvage and build upon the "virtual space of (infinite) possibilities"²⁵ of the Harlem Renaissance. The writers of the BAM advanced an aesthetic that privileges the beauty of Black culture over

that of European of white America; thus, it further politicized and problematized art. However, the advancement of the Black Aesthetic is not only intended to liberate the beauty of Black culture from a neatly compacted, white-oriented story of the black middle-class and black middle-class values, but also to address the realities of the common folk and how art relates to the community it describes. In those moments, the real becomes relevant – even when expressing the oppressive forces that disempower Black Americans. Therein lies the real beauty, the experience that can promote change through “meaningful statements about the nature of Western society...the struggle for black survival, and the coming confrontation between white America and black America” (Neal 78). From Neal’s standpoint, Black culture is necessarily distinct from white culture at an ontological and epistemological level. There is a substance, a being, that comes from knowledge of one’s heritage that informs and directs an idea of that being which is, first, human and, second, although in constant conflict with white privilege, a conception of value and a worldview that is rooted in an African metaphysics. As Larry Neal explains, the relationship and roles of Black art and Black Power are both political and self-reflexive. Black Power advocates like Neal criticized the view that only Eurocentric culture is universally human[e] and will set the cultural guide for “primitive” peoples [of color]. Historically, this problematic does not recognize that the categories being used themselves are part of the issue. Moreover, these self-imposed categories fail to educate effectively what the oppressive “structure” looks like, because Black Nationalism operates on the fringes—i.e. outside of the power structure. Cultural movements do not necessarily have the intent of politics, which is to transform. In short, one of the goals should be explicitly to make people see themselves in a political way, the powerless need to make the powerful see themselves as inhumane. This is the beauty found in the Black Aesthetic as established via the BAM.

So far, the impetus for the BAM has been explored and its critical concerns have been articulated; however, theory has to be put into practice in order to move forward. In other words, as the term “movement” has been affixed to the Black Arts, I contend that the best way to teach and demonstrate simultaneously is via the theatre. In addition to its obvious performative usefulness, there is a strategic effort to execute the goals of the BAM theatrically because the leaders of the movement understood theatre as a powerful art form as well as as an institutional form of, by, for, and near black people; thus, the full instantiation of DuBois’s formula for an art that evaded double-consciousness. One of the leaders of the BAM, Amiri Baraka, opened the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BART/S) in the streets of Harlem to teach and create plays that “shattered the illusions of the American body politic, and awakened black people to the meaning of their lives.”²⁶ This theory for the production of art meant that art had to have a purpose and that its purpose had to be determined by whether it advanced the liberation of Black people. It promoted interaction between artist and audiences, and enabled audiences to see that artists are people. There was no separation between the artist and the audience. This separation was quite evident when it came to addressing the movement from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement. There are several concerns to be addressed in this movement, the concept of double-consciousness and how this concept needs to be further complicated by the complex nature of black life that is presented in the BAM, specifically when dealing with the static nature of the poetic medium prevalent in the Harlem Renaissance versus the medium of performance found in the Black Arts Movement. The DuBoisian notion of double-consciousness unfortunately does not pertain to an added complexity that literature from BAM artists considers: that black people are not *the* problem, but rather *have* problems. This is the movement from victim to problem analysis, which is where the third issue resides. Now, not only do the arts deal

with the problem of being a black in American society, but also how being black must be internalized by Black people, a psycho-social adjustment to cope with as well as resist the mainstream philosophies that reinforced racist ideologies which manifest themselves, though inherently in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

One way to address the limitation of double-consciousness and the complexity of the BAM is through what A. Wayne Boykin calls “Triple Quandary Theory.” If Black people are simply viewed as “The White Man’s Burden,” then the only solution becomes assimilation to the dominant (white) culture via cultural assimilation. Black psychologist A. Wayne Boykin paints a portrait of how the deficiencies found in black cultural studies can be addressed through nine interrelated dimensions of Black culture that speak to bi-culturality and cultural patterning in the form of the Triple Quandary: “The mainstream experience, the minority experience, and the Black cultural experience” (65). Boykin’s framework rejects the view that Black people are plagued with a social pathology. He clearly discerns a need to move beyond a “victim analysis” of Black people.

Whereas DuBois concerns himself with the Negro as a problem, essentially a “victim analysis” despite his commitment to propaganda and art created of, by, for, and near black people, Boykin discusses the movement from the Black as a problem to the problems of Black Americans and potential solutions to those problems – in other words, a concrete “power analysis.” According to Prager in “American Racial Ideology as Collective Representation,”

The black experience in American is distinguished by the fact that the qualities attributed to Blackness are in opposition to the qualities rewarded by society. For blacks, then, the effort to reconcile into one personality images which are diametrically opposed poses an extraordinarily difficult challenge. No other group in America has been so acutely

confronted with this dilemma, for no other group has been simultaneously so systematically ostracized while remaining so culturally significant (111).

Therefore, Boykin's Triple Quandary Theory offers an analysis of cultural hegemony that aligns well with the BAM's effort to speak for, to, and from the broader black community. Boykin outlines the way the distribution of wealth, power and status shape the social and individual psychology of Black people. In the context of the United States, the dominant ideology, Boykin argues, functions to reproduce the status quo. More importantly, the dominant ideology "supports the existing unequal distribution of wealth and power in [American] society and the prevailing cultural ethos." (67) Boykin observes: "Those who differ from Euro-American cultural ideals are easily seen as inferior along a single linear dimension of human perfectibility... The prevailing cultural ideology sees social homogenization as a natural goal because it treats deviations from the cultural ideal as deficiencies and imperfections" (68). An explanation of why Boykin references a West-African cultural ethos is because of the presence of double-consciousness in a twentieth-century context, "African roots and American fruits" that are "[in]commensurable" (63). The Triple Quandary, as Boykin sees it, is useful in that it articulates a "minority" experience that further problematizes the DuBois's philosophy by adding another realm of experience that serves as the missing linkage between this "twoness".

As a political movement, the BAM refused to accept the Euro-American/Anglo-American cultural ethos as the defining principle for Black culture. Moreover, this shift is the defining principle of how BAM differs from the Harlem Renaissance and speaks to the establishment of a critical Black Aesthetic that is qualitatively unique from Euro-American philosophies of artistic beauty. As Black Arts literature, the theatre plays a critical component to understanding the connection of the African Diaspora to the Black American literary landscape

through the West-African Cultural Ethos that defines Eurocentric modes of production and critique. What is augmented here is the notion that the theatre is a place where people can gather, where people's struggles are shown, where a movement beyond "being a problem" to "solving problems" happens.

The conflicts created by these the realms of negotiation create a Triple Quandary for Afro-Americans. They are incompletely socialized to the Euro-American cultural system; they are victimized by racial and economic oppression; they participate in a culture that is sharply at odds with mainstream ideology. Thus, institutionalized problems and cultural suppression lead to the difference in content and artistic expression during the Black Power movement. There was a need to employ different techniques and medium to not only address a middle class that needed a voice and space to resist the white mainstream. Boykin suggests the existence of nine interrelated dimensions of Black culture necessary create a sense of cultural integrity: (1) spirituality, (2) harmony, (3) movement, (4) verve, (5) affect, (6) communalism, (7) expressive individualism, (8) oral tradition, and (9) social time perspective (61). Thus, "Afro-Americans participate in a Black cultural experience that is rooted in a traditional African ethos. It is a culturally indigenous basis from which Afro-American interpret and negotiate social reality" (Boykin 66). The Black Arts Movement as a cultural movement uses art—the theatre—as a covert vehicle for self-determination. The content of many BAM plays, offers a context that enables audience members to rethink what Black social norms look like when controlled by the people it depicts. In fact, the creators of this movement were unapologetically clear in their critique of whiteness and the anxieties associated with acculturation of Blacks in the U. S. In their efforts to liberate the minds and hearts of Black people, these social norms in turn inspired its audience to rid themselves of outside influences and resist white people and white hegemony.

Moreover, viewing enactments of black people liberating themselves in commonplace situations begat a language of resistance, and implicit in this language is action and activism. From the perspective of the theatre and performance of the BAM plays, the dimension of oral tradition plays a tremendous role. In short, one that speaks to the “preference for oral/aural modes of communication in which both speaking and listening are treated as performances and in which oral virtuosity – the ability to use alliterative, metaphorically colorful, graphic forms of spoken language— is emphasized and cultivated” (61). The functionality of theatre in the Black Art form translates a cultural behavior where the theatre is a vehicle to perform and connect in literature.

Given that the minority experience is based on exposure to social, economic, and political oppression (Boykin 66), the role of the BAM theatrical performance can be understood as building a multi-faceted psychological connection between audience and text. That multi-faceted connection produces adaptive and compensatory reactions, social perspectives, and defensive postures that help one to cope with the predicament created by the oppressive forces (Boykin, 66). This is one way we can understand the differences between the Harlem Renaissance and the BAM: As distinct postures and coping mechanisms for the predicament – “the problem” – of Blackness. The former was confined to a “safe” place that required members of the Black community to come to the haven, Harlem or the privately read text, to function and have a space of Black creative expression. Contrarily, the BAM takes that movement beyond the safe space in recognizing the predicament created by the oppressive forces (white authority) to find solutions to the problems via the literature. The BAM requires its artists and audiences to meet in contexts of performance. Thus, the movement was not limited to the virtual, but was

expansive and allowed Black society to see itself not as the problem, but rather the agent that could address the problems where they were, beyond the safe place and beyond victimhood.

Cultural hegemony is a fundamental concept in understanding not only how literature is produced, but also the role of the author/artist as intellectual and that transition from the Harlem Renaissance model of Blackness into the Black Arts Movement. The role of the intellectual in the Harlem Renaissance is best described by Boykins: “The intellectuals produced in a hegemonic system typically fail to understand that the status bestowed upon them is linked in a zero-sum relationship to the oppression of other groups” (67). These individuals were more concerned with the structural interests of power, wealth, and status distribution, rather than cultural patterning of values, life styles, behavioral reactions and beliefs (67). Therefore, Harlem Renaissance artists were more concerned with bringing Others to them rather than reaching the masses where they were. This essentially bourgeois mentality did not seek to confront the issues of the working-class Black individual, asserting instead a universal, humanist conception of Blackness. Situated in Harlem, the safe place protected by white gatekeepers, only reinforced hegemonic ideologies. As, the intellectuals produced in the hegemonic system “uncritically accept certain ‘ideological categories,’ such as value-free, dispassionate science or the abstraction and absoluteness of the individual; they rarely realize that their status depends on that acceptance” (Boykin 67). Thus, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance participated as members of a system that did not comprehend that they were being rewarded, often by white publishers and critics, for embracing those categories. They inherently legitimize the way the system operates, often without even recognizing their role in the hegemonic system. As Boykin further explains, “The approach they take to their responsibilities shield them from questioning the

social system from which they themselves have profited,” becoming personal agents of hegemony “in spite of the best of intentions” (67). The BAM seeks to confront this issue.

Another consideration of the shift in response and responsibility regarding the black community from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement is the move from passive coping styles of being victims of oppression to more active strategies that arise out of resistance to oppression. To begin with, we must understand that our comprehension of Black literary forms and the historical profile cannot ever be fully addressed. Tradition is a unifying notion in that there is a marker of some sort that has a dated existence; therefore, becomes a framework, which has the possibility of evolution. Moreover, something that has been established out of necessity with limitations because of what was not available then; thus, growth or expansion is inevitable. Reverence is there for *that* past, but reverence also looks forward to the future. In this sense, there is a direct connection to an African ethos by way of the notion that history is not teleological, that it moves beyond place (time specific) to space (action – discursive),²⁷ in Black Aesthetic terms. This addresses the “social time perspective” of Boykin’s nine interrelated dimensions of Black culture, an orientation in which time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one, in which time can be reoccurring, personal, and phenomenological (Boykin 61). The passive coping style assumes the adoption of either striving to “out-white White people” or assuming subservient postures in identifying with the oppressor at the expense of the integrity of the Black experience (73). However, in line with the Black Arts Movement, the artists serve as activists, taking a more active stance on resistance to oppression. In the BAM, “a very different strategy to resist oppression by defying the system, to be consistently against anything that “whiteness” stands for (73).

In short, the psychology of a “triple quandary” as explained by Boykin, supports my ideas of moving from the existing discourse of the double-consciousness, during the Harlem Renaissance, to language that is more representative of what the BAM began to articulate. I argue that the Harlem Renaissance spent a lot of necessary time discussing the problems of “The Negro,” but their activism impacted the people who were in Harlem, without at least acknowledging roots of any kind to the folk culture in the south. Moreover, the BAM artists understood this third layer of experience which Boykin refers to as the “minority” realm which seeks to address “whiteness” directly; thus, offering another way of looking at “Blackness,” as an essence that does have power to change the plight of Black people wherever they are. Furthermore, it becomes necessary for a collective effort to figure out strategies to negotiate power structures in a way that suppresses the damage of the double consciousness, as they see it. This vision for Black people is one the by way of the arts, as it is the best way for the working-class (the masses) to become stakeholders in the transformative task of self-determination which begins with viewing oneself as an individual who is not a problem but is conscious of the implicit optimism in knowing that one has problems, but, with many possibilities for solutions.

Problems: Being, Having, Solving

According to theory Boykin’s Negotiational Schemes,²⁸ there are three main areas of self-identification for an individual. For the African-American, the areas are Black Cultural experience, Minority experience, and Mainstream (American) experience. Both African Americans and Euro-Americans share the mainstream experience. The minority experience is the exposure to social, economic, and political oppression. Lastly, African-Americans participate in a Black cultural experience that is rooted in a Traditional African ethos. According to Boykin, the tension between these three realms of existence, create a triple quandary for African-

Americans. Euro-American, seen in the Figure 3.2 is much simpler: mainstream, majority and Euro-American cultural are essentially isomorphic, so their psychological/behavioral repertoires—more focused or concentrated codification of reality (74). The mainstream experience in America is tantamount to the Euro-American cultural experience; both are equivalent to the majority mentality itself (74).

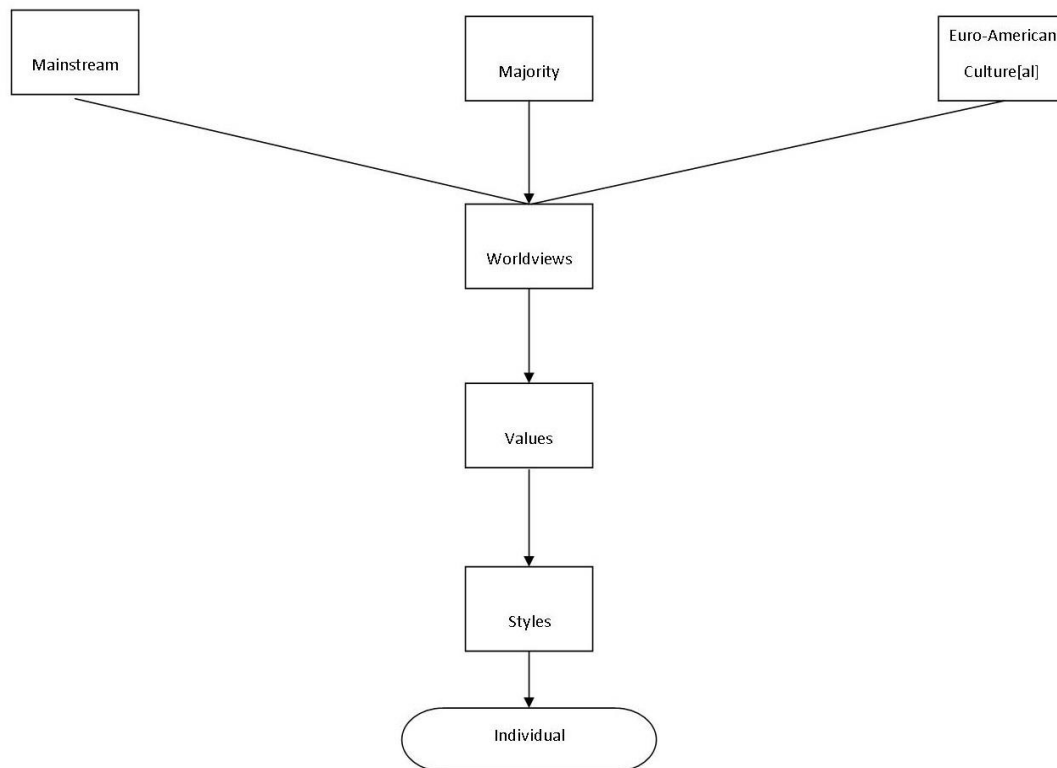


Figure 1. Illustration of Boykin's Euro-American Negotiation Scheme. The 3 realms of experience according to Boykin, shows the categories Mainstream, Majority and Euro-Cultural, connected and aligned directly to the individual. This direct connectedness confirms control and no outside influential factors—a succinct shared experience.

In the diagram, the single arrow attempts to depict the convergence of the three realms of Euro-American social negotiation. It attempts to explain why Euro-Americans have a highly-focused codification of reality, to the point where they become oblivious to other honorable negotiational possibilities.

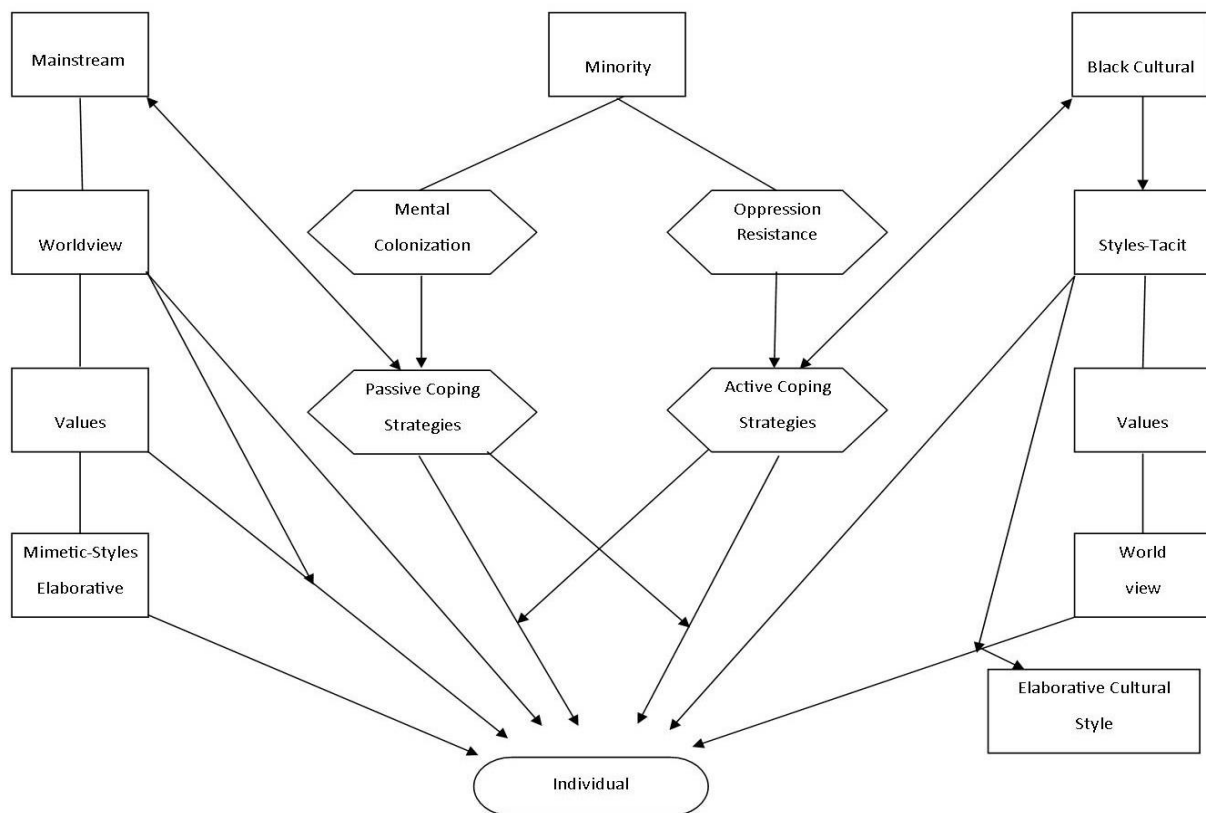


Figure 2. Illustration of Boykin's Afro-American Negotiational Scheme.

The 3 realms of experience according to Boykin, shows the categories Mainstream and Black-Cultural, as opposites with some sort of connection within the Minority realm. However, it shows that the Mainstream and Black-Cultural will never meet but instead forces one's Minority experience to have two options—functions like a double-consciousness.

To the contrary, Boykin's diagram of the triple quandary, charting the Afro-American negotiational scheme, seen in Figure 3.1, shows the three realms of experiences as separate.

Therefore, operating independently with coping strategies—some passive that derive to mainstream and some active coping strategies are related to Black culture—being the only point and place of contact to both the realms and the individual. The quandary for the Afro-American is indeed a psychological dilemma as there is no way possible to reconcile the mainstream, minority, and the Black cultural because of the two distinctly different tracks in the middle realm—the minority experience.

The minority realm of experience is the most complex for the Afro-American. There are two psychological levels operating as opposites instead of binaries. Polar opposites as part of multiple layers, further complicates this experience because it both implies and requires that a choice is made or one is privileged over the other, unlike binaries that offers the option or ability of coexistence. Furthermore, according to Boykin's diagram, the Afro-American has a disconnect with either the mainstream or the Black cultural experiences dependent upon which one of the two "minority existences" is experienced by the individual. Moreover, the two levels beneath the minority realm do not connect—creating this quandary because there is no point of intersection producing a balance and or reconciliation of the individual's experiences.

At this point, references to DuBois' early 20th century ideology of "double-consciousness," are relevant. The negotiational scheme from minority down to the individual has many categories; however, the diagram demonstrates that these categories are positioned like a quilt with no connectivity—rendering the individual in a continuous state of identity crisis. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois writes in the chapter titled "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," what he coins as the double consciousness of the Negro:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (7).

The triple quandary re-envisions DuBois' double-consciousness by categorizing the psychological turmoil of this "two-ness" of a problematic minority experience for the Negro at

the turn of the century. This force driving the outlook of the Negro viewing himself as a problem stems from the two lines of a psycho-social experience within one realm of existence. One in which a connection to what the Negro is told is desirable yet unattainable and the other which is connected to an authentic self-identity that has been forgotten and relies on a cultural memory that has some trauma associated with it. The tracks are minority-mental colonization-passive coping strategies connected to the mainstream realm— “unattainable” or minority-oppression resistance-active coping strategies connected to the Black cultural realm— “authentic self” but forgotten and somewhat detached culturally and geographically. I argue that DuBoisian double-consciousness can be reimagined²⁹ and understood by the addition one of Boykin’s three main areas of self-identification for the Afro-American as a “minority.” Moreover, the mainstream-passive coping strategies exchange, influenced by mental colonization versus the Black cultural-active coping strategies influenced by oppression resistance is what best describes DuBois’s thinking when he states:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, ... (7).

This internal conflict of reconciling “two warring ideas,” is one of a constructed identity. One that is of an ever longing to be acceptable, although the Negro is synonymous with “a problem” versus a cultural identity rooted in a West African ethos which would challenge the dominance a

white(ness) racist paradigm and bring about an awareness of the Negro in America “having problems” with the implications of resolutions being possible. Here is where I see the BAM and their activism being most relevant. As mentioned earlier, the theatre is where Black people can visualize (the performance) through (a communal) experience, what it looks like for Black people to confront the problems (of whiteness) pervading the Black community (rootedness, location) and witness (in the safe space of the theatre) many options (given back to the people) to consider for resolution (self-determination).

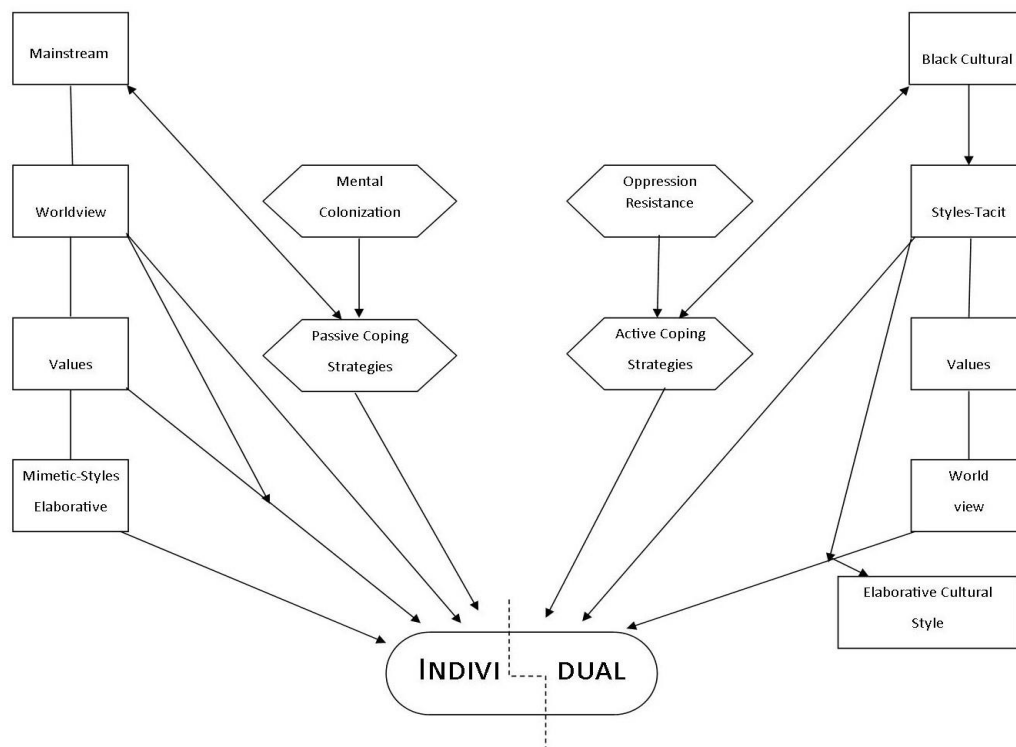


Figure 3. DuBoisian Double-Consciousness using Boykin's Model.
My interpretation of the what the DuBoisian double-consciousness looks like using Boykin's framework. It shows that there is no “Minority” realm of experience and no connectedness of the Mainstream and Black-Cultural realms.

Boykin's theory of the Triple Quandary adds depth and complexity to DuBois' philosophy and psychology of the double-consciousness. By developing a scheme of a top-down strategy of a three-pronged approach rooted in the individual's experiences helps in the understanding an

epistemology of the socialization of Afro-Americans in the United States. He says, “They are incompletely socialized to the Euro-American cultural system; they are victimized by racial and economic oppression; they participate in a culture that is sharply at odds with mainstream ideology (66). His negotiational scheme serves as an analysis of the problems in connect all three realms of complex combinations of experiences. Therefore, enabling a paradigm shift in a discourse that evolves from “being a (the) problem” that objectifies the Negro existence to realities of an existence that has many complex issues as the direct result of the inhumane treatment of the enslaved human beings; thus, a minority group of people who are “having problems,” and the possibility of “solving problems” with a particular constructed experience.

Up to this point, I have discussed the compelling ideas of the realms of experience from Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory, to advance my views of the psychology of the BAM’s strategies for achieving self-determination and self-identification. As one of the tents of the BAM is to counter the damage of the double-consciousness as illustrated in many of the literary works of the Harlem Renaissance writers, who in that instead of “looking” to reinforce find a Black identity that is rooted in folk culture, they set out to foster an identity for Black people that originates from a West African ethos coupled with Black (folk) cultural experience in the U. S. This Black (folk) cultural experience, I argue is translated, and transported through the arts, more specifically through music and enactments performed as theatre.

This discussion so far, further addresses the larger matter of this research, which is my overarching claims of the BAM rescuing the ideas of the Harlem Renaissance that laid the groundwork for ongoing evolution of a Black Aesthetic. As one of the architects of this mission is playwright, intellectual, critic and poet, LeRoi Jones who later becomes Amiri Baraka, his works, primarily his plays are revered as the hallmark of the BAM. However, it was his

disenchantment with the state of what he calls “Negro Literature,” that focuses his motives for expanding, along with others, Black art to encompass the experience of Black people in the U. S. Moreover, an experience that represents common Black folk, in a way that is the truth, and celebrates the creativity of an aesthetic that is already present, not the “imagined truth” or incompleteness of the identity constructed by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, that in turn, reinforced white(ness) opinions; fostering their notion of an acculturated Negro.

Musicality of Theatre and Art for Community’s Sake

BAM playwright, LeRoi Jones, and creator of pan-African inspired holiday of Kwanazza, Maulana Karenga’s works have very specific ideas regarding the reshaping of “a peoples’ art,” and the role that such art plays in terms of the emotions, values, ethics, and long-term goals of a liberation movement. Jones’s essay, “The Myth of a ‘Negro Literature’,” written in 1962, which I consider a pre-Black Arts Movement piece, sets the tone as he expresses his disenchantment with the current state of “Negro Literature.” With this in mind, the ideas in Karenga’s work “Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force and Function,” published in 1968, further expounds in a very deliberate manner on Jones’s pronouncement as to what Black literature should do and how it should function. Moreover, because Karenga’s work was published during a pivotal moment, as this is the year when we see several comprehensive statements published as well as the emergence of second-wave feminism as well as the first Black Studies programs, its foci become the hallmark or blueprint for artists who self-identified as Black to establish a Black Aesthetic that is inclusive and destroys a Eurocentric, bourgeois notion of “art-for-arts’-sake.” In other words, it calls for art that demonstrates a psychology of “Blackness” to evolve the socialization of Black people on their own terms, in that it comes from the people; therefore, it belongs to the people. It belongs to the people in a manner that is not discriminatory within the culture. For

example, one's socioeconomic status will not be criteria for granting access. Instead, it will be an art that captures an agenda that is Black, for people who are Black, by people who are Black, with an explicit theme of revolution.

In Jones's essay, "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'," he states that art in its highest form is not determined by the bourgeoisie because it is produced by the elite and it belongs and is accessible only to this select group in an exclusive geographic, centralized area, one that exploits the lives of working-class people in other areas. Thus, for Jones it is clear that "Negro" literature (and art more generally) is in a state of crisis. It is in this state because it lacks authenticity, substance, and truth because of the naiveté of the Black middle-class, one all too similar to that of the Harlem Renaissance. This naiveté is twofold: active participation in assimilation and the denial of acculturation. These two terms need to be fleshed out, in that assimilation is the complete form of acculturation. Furthermore, this cultural fusion is forced and implicit in the process by which one becomes acculturated, the group deemed weaker adopts the stronger group's traits because of a willingness to drop elements of their culture by way of erasure, in favor of the other. Because of acculturation, the knowledge begets skills to function in two or more cultural contexts—situational ethnicity.

However, it is more important to situate and understand the keen insight of Jones's measure of "high art," which is produced by some Black artists. He uses music, more specifically jazz and the blues, as the standard for Black art and the Black artist. He does so because this art form is not relegated to the middle-class and is the purest, most authentic representation of the "Negro" experience in America. Both styles of music are rooted in folk culture: jazz has similar traits of ragtime music and fuses African and European music traditions; blues has a connection to both ragtime and jazz in that it fuses work-songs and spirituals of

southern slave plantations. Furthermore, these genres reflect the sentiments of freedom, rebellion, flexibility, and improvisation, is an aesthetic that is very much Black and more so of the latter, expresses pain and other intense emotions performatively, by way of vocals and/or instrumentation. For Jones, the blues best describes Black people and the Black experience; thus, his later reference to Black people in America as “Blues” people. He describes the blues as an art form that is “a fusion between African musical tradition and the American experience” (652). He goes on to say it is “a natural, yet highly stylized and personal version of the Negro’s life in America...it chronicles the movement from African slave to citizen... whereas for him, Negro literature simply approaches the literary standards of its model—literature of the white middle-class” (652). This assessment of music is critical in that Baraka being a musician, has a working knowledge of music performance--practice which is music theory in motion. Therefore, making a connection steeped in a West African ethos—an emotional connectedness—becomes implicit in his training as a musician; hence, becoming explicit as the BAM’s focus on music as *the* medium and a preexisting aesthetic of the movement, takes shape.

At this point, it is imperative to explain and define a few terms relevant to music theory related and link them back to why I think Jones elected to use music, jazz, and the blues as the standard for “high” Black Art in 1962. My strategy here, is to demonstrate how four elements of executing practice and theory for a musician, will serve as two different sets of analogies. The first pair of components will be the limitations of the *arpeggio* and the flexibility of a *chord*. The next pair of components make further use of chords via the complexities of *texture*. I will introduce the intricacies of texture by unpacking the differences in *melody* and *harmony*. To make my discussion of music theory simple and easy to follow and envision, I will use as many examples and parallels to how one might traditionally compose an essay using the basic

traditional components of writing. Because Jones can now be understood as both a musician and major Black writer-critic, the process of writing and composing a musical piece should not be considered as an unusual comparison. Albeit elementary, I will make clear, through this fusion of music theory and the creative process by which an idea evolves from epistemology to what I would call an ontological representation. Moreover, it serves as my own understanding of Neal's response in *Negro Digest* when questioned about the establishment of what already exist. When questioned about a Black Aesthetic he says, "There is no need to establish a "black aesthetic." Rather, it is important to understand that one already exists. The question is: where does it exist? And what do we do with it" (167-8). Moreover, writing is the act of making one's ideas tangible in the same manner as composing music—they both are mediums that illustrate a narrative. However, what is implicit in both is the role of imagination and drive to communicate an expression using pre-existing (aesthetic) symbols and signs that mean nothing, until arranged by an entity with a vision or story to articulate.

Thus far, I have mentioned my rationale for introducing music theory to suggest that Jones's designation of jazz and blues music as a critical standard of high-art for "Negros," is influenced by the functionality of a few interdependent components that together adds aural texture in music. In short, I have made three forthcoming comparisons: (1) arpeggio and chords; (2) melody and harmony; and (3) the creative processes of an essayist and music composer. First, I will begin with the latter of the three and move in a direction like the movement of music in the blues—cyclical. Consequently, the writing process is also cyclical in nature. Writing, for some is an exercise executed with ease, while for some it brings anxiety. When a writer begins to create a form of expression, many theories, ideologies, methods, and specific identifiable parts might inform the product. The first step in this process is an understanding of the elements specific to

the art form and the tools needed to create. For instance, for a writer to convey an idea, there are methods and elements he/she will employ for articulating a vision. For most, it begins with a pen and paper. The pen or pencil is used to compose ideas onto a sheet of lined notebook paper. If an essay is indeed one's artistic contribution or art, then it must have certain parts to convey ideas and a set of expectations need to be met to discern both skill and quality. For an essay, it would include the basic parts such as title, thesis, topic sentences with effective use of transition, some sort of guidelines regarding the space allotted (page limitations and/or word-count), an identifiable rhetorical mode, evidence to support the thesis, and a reference page. As for its components, there would be words, sentences, and paragraphs, beginning, middle and an ending. These items are the basics and then, of course, there will be various degrees of complexity and skill.

Along those same lines, when musicians compose a piece, at least as they did in the 1960s, they often begin with the similar tools needed for drafting an essay. For example, they both begin with some sort of writing utensil and a blank sheet of paper. However, for a musician, this tool is called notation paper, whereas for an essayist it is notebook paper. They both have lines on which the writer/composer uses characters to compose a language specific to their audiences, who are then able to decode or read this coded language to construct a message(s) or interpretation(s). While the writer's characters are letters from the alphabet arranged in a specific order to form words, the musician's characters are symbols that are arranged in a specific order and produce a sound. In short, the methods and products are similar—a demonstration of a genre of art.

For the musician, there is a process of incorporating a certain level of knowledge, prior to the completion of what is then called *sheet music*. However, before it becomes sheet music, it is

simply a blank sheet of notation paper. The lines visible on notation paper are there for drawing symbols in a clear and discernible way. Notation paper itself also has requirements applicable to its aesthetic form as well. This is like the essay's requirements of paragraphs composed of sentences, use of the alphabet to form words in each sentence, and rules such as the indentation of paragraphs when shifting from one idea to another.

1. Music Theory

In music notation, the arrangement of horizontal and vertical lines is called a *staff*. A staff is a set of five horizontal lines with the four spaces in between, used for note placement. The horizontal lines are segmented with vertical lines referred to as *bars lines* that have a specific function. This form of “punctuation” serves the same function of semi-colons, colons, commas, periods and grammar and mechanics. Other symbols on the staff function in the same way as other elements of writing. The *clef*, which indicates pitch,³⁰ acts as a signal like transitional expressions or conjunctive adverbs. Because there are three types of clefs, a *treble clef*, *C clef* and a *bass clef*, with a specific symbol for each, the *register* usually indicates the instrument family: brass, woodwinds, strings, or voice section. Once the clef has been determined and inserted, the next symbol is the *key signature* of the composition, which indicates what scale family is used. There are two symbols, one indicating *sharp* and the other indicates *flat*, however, the key signature could also be *neutral*.

Next, the musician will determine a *time signature*. This symbol in appearance is like a mathematical fraction in that it consists of stacked numbers—there is a top number and a bottom number, which appears to be separated by a horizontal line. The time signature can be written as either a symbol³¹ or as stacked numbers. It only appears at the beginning of a musical score and not on every line.³² The *top number* indicates how many beats each *measure* will contain. The

measure is a time segment that is determined by the number of beats. Music is measured in bars, much like inches on a ruler. The bar lines mark units of measurement that combine to form musical *phrases*. The number of measures in a phrase varies according to the time signature and style of the piece. Sheet music has such sections and these sections are like paragraphs in an essay.

The *bottom number* indicates what kind of note receives the beat, and this number will always be an exponent of two.³³ A *note* represents the pitch sound. There are five types of notes commonly used in a measure. To keep this part of the discussion as simple as possible, the five notes I am choosing to explain do not represent all types of notes,³⁴ but they do represent the majority. A *whole note* receives four beats; a *half note* receives two beats; a *quarter note* receives one beat; an *eighth note* receives a half beat; and a *sixteenth note* receives a quarter of a beat. These symbols are the equivalent to syllables in words or spoken language. For example, it is the difference between pronouncing the word, “interesting” in these two ways: *in-truh-sting* and *in-ter-uh-sting*. Therefore, the notes used in a measure not only depend on the key signature for the pitch sound, but they depend on the time signature to produce rhythms or shifting tempos.

Next, one’s ability to read the musical piece depends on the placement of the notes. Notes are assigned a specific meaning, whether the note is placed on the actual line or whether it appears in the space between the lines, one can decode the musical language. Decoding music, or as it is referred to as *reading* the symbols, is simple in that the notes on the lines and spaces of a staff, do not change because they are standard. Specifically, on the lines of a treble staff, each note is assigned the following alphabet in ascending order: E-G-B-D-F and for the symbols appearing on spaces in between the lines, in ascending order: F-A-C-E. For the bass clef, the lines are assigned the following in ascending order: G-B-D-F-A and for the symbols appearing in

the spaces: A-C-E-G. To accommodate multiple voicing's, sometimes additional lines must be added above and/or below the staff. These lines are known as *ledger lines*. So as not to become confused regarding the standard note-sequences, it should be made clear that music notation only uses letter A through G for note assignments.³⁵ When learning how to play an instrument, learning how to read music requires a working knowledge of all that has been defined thus far.

Equally important to reading music is the practice and honing the skills, which for most learners happens in a class or rehearsal, eventually becomes easier with playing scales as a warm-up exercise. A *scale* is a group of notes or pitches arranged in either ascending or descending order.³⁶ These sets of notes both ascend and descend in pitch and tempo. In orchestral band music, scales are usually practiced with an *arpeggio*. An arpeggio consists of the first, third, fifth and eighth notes of a scale set or scale family.³⁷ When played together, the notes of an arpeggio form a *chord*. Having explained basic music theory, it is the next bit of information, further expounding on arpeggios and chords, that, I contend signifies Black Art(s)' *movement* from the literary ideologies of the Harlem Renaissance.

Instruments in certain families, such as the string family, can play chords. Other instruments that are unable to play chords individually can do so in tandem. For instance, a group of wind instruments (brass, woodwind) can each play the separate notes of an arpeggio together, producing a chord. High art has the responsibility perform something to be useful and mobile. Unlike "Negro" art, my read of Jones and knowledge of music theory, I conclude that a Black art, which is a high art in form(ation), is fluid in the same way arpeggios and chords are composed of the same notes and when executed achieves the same goal (sound) but it is not a fixed, singular method or approach with limitations—each performance changes at the direction³⁸ of the conductor(s).

Given the BAM's focus on music as *the* medium and aesthetic of the movement, taking the time to discuss some music theory is relevant to the analogy I will present to examine further why it is appropriate for Jones to use jazz and the blues as a measure for *high art* for Blacks. Jazz and the blues developed out of an organic, authentic expression of "the people" (the masses-not a class-based exclusive minority within the minority) because there was no music theory for this genre initially. Before it was created, there was nothing like it and ever since its creation, other music genres bear its mark—high art. One of the limitations of "tradition," which is what I use to refer to Jones's disposition of "Negro" literature, is that it is a fictional abstraction that does not help to understand a reality. Moreover, there are tropes rooted in "tradition" that do not fit in a modern context (e.g. discernment between Negro literature and Black literature). For the next part of this discussion, I will use an instrument from the string family—the piano because when playing jazz and the blues, there is an observable performance difference that cannot be seen with some of the other instrument families.

The piano is the best instrument to use as a metaphor for this "fusion" Jones mentions earlier on. To begin, there are different approaches through which one can play jazz and the blues. The first is by having some sort of *formal* training. The other is what is called *playing by ear*, meaning one can hear a melody and mimic the sound. Let me be clear here and say, that one is not preferred over the other because there is really no way for an audience to know since it is not unusual for sheet music to be memorized or not visible. For the most part, musicians who perform these genres use a mixture of the two—the ability to read sheet music and play by ear. However, with classical music, academic training is necessary. Nevertheless, there are similarities in complexity and skill level between classical and jazz and the blues in that they both use scales in major and minor keys.

I interviewed pianist Marlene Hendricks,³⁹ who has played the piano for 41 years and has 11 years of formal training in practice and theory. The rather lengthy conversation began with her discussing the skills engaged enabling one to play jazz and the blues, as they are different from brass instruments. Jazz as a genre is written in chords, which leaves room for improvisation, flexibility, and freedom. A performance of jazz is emotionally charged with a basic melody and chord structure and the tendency to alter scales—African-American music and rhythms embedded into American (mainstream) melodies. Classical music is not improvisation, at all. It is rigid and intense in both posture and performance. The blues is a fusion of Negro spirituals/work-songs, which are heavily influenced by African rhythms and Christian hymns—personal and highly vocal but not private. A blues artist knows chord patterns and the sheet music sometimes has both the chords on a staff along with the number and letter above the staff denoting the chords only.

The performance of jazz and the blues on a piano is unique because there are techniques that distinguish it from the performance of classical music. Classical music, which is associated with a Eurocentric tradition, is built on structured progressions of chords and melodies. The artist is not afforded the opportunity to improvise, nor is the audience given the opportunity to participate. Jazz and blues are also built on progressions of chords and patterns. However, it is expected that the artist will improvise on those progressions with chords, scale runs, and riffs. Different jazz or blues musicians may each interpret the same melody or chord progression differently depending upon regional differences in style,⁴⁰ genre of choice,⁴¹ and instrument.⁴² Classical music, on the other hand, is open to interpretation but not to improvisation. The melodies and chord patterns are performed as written with only slight variances in the interpretation of dynamics and tempo.

As a musician, Jones was introduced to music by way of piano lessons as a child. In his text, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, he reflects on the first 40 years of his life. In two chapters of the text—“Music” and “Howard: B-B-Y-W cont.”—he discusses music as “an emotional experience and a philosophical one” for him. Although Jones’ autobiography is up to the age of 50 is an insightful read, for the purposes of establishing information that is for the most part, “a little-known fact,” or not a focus of contemporary scholarship written about him or his works (who was Baraka when this work is published), Jones played piano as a child and sang in the All-City Chorus (48). In addition, in high school, he played the trumpet and while in college at Newark Rutgers, as a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)band, he played the tuba (65). Baraka says that it was during his entry into Howard University that “[i]nexplicably (and I didn’t even think about it) I stopped playing the trumpet” (66). Therefore, as a student and connoisseur of music, I argue it is because of his understanding of music theory that he does say explicitly, that high art for the “Negro” should be a fusion of ideas and experiences reflecting a Black experience, and for him it was jazz and the blues. It should not be an imitation of whiteness, in that it meets their criteria and represents their “bourgeois” notions of the state of Negro(ness) as implied is present in the works of the Harlem Renaissance.

His disenchantment with the art of previous movements or periods is that “it was not invested in examining the human soul and its literary models and art were “those that could be socially acceptable to the white middle-class. Its efforts were more of a “social preoccupation rather than an aesthetic one” (652). Jones sentiment harkens back to DuBois’ 1904 essay “The Talented Tenth,” in that Negro art would be the work of its “best and most intelligent” and its artists would be revered as the race’s “cultivated,” “serious,” and “quality” black men (652). This keen assessment supports why he places the burden of this reality on the “Negro” middle-

class as many of the “Negro” artist are members. Then, he charges the middle-class artists with “always going out of its way to cultivate any mediocrity, as long as mediocrity was guaranteed to prove to America... that they were not who they really were, i.e., Negroes” (651).

As Jones departs from his analysis of the creativity and originality of “Negro” music as “the rule” rather than “the standard,” he moves into what I am calling a DuBoisian discussion of both the significance and the problem of Negro literature. He states, “Literature, for the Negro writer, was always an example of ‘culture’” (652). However, Jones says that its aim is not to “represent the philosophical characteristics of a popular group but in a more self-serving manner by representing the ‘cultivation’ or sophistication of an individual within the group” (652). Here is where it is appropriate to talk about the significance of chords and arpeggios. I argue that, as a connoisseur of jazz and the blues, Jones’s selection this music genre is strategic because of the music theory outlined in this section.

1.1 Arpeggios and Chords

One can observe the inchoate transformation of “Negro” literature and his call for something that artistically captures an authentic African experience in America. Explicit in Jones’s argument is a clear suggestion of what high art should do, how it should inform, and whom it should appeal to. Therefore, his “S. O. S” is a reminder that “Negroes” are not creating low art. Instead, they are creating a high art—like jazz and the blues—that reaches the cellular (cultural) memory of Black people. The art is not only high impact because it connects with the masses on so many levels, but it has monetary value too. As a result, these cultural products will naturally evolve and broaden in scope to be more inclusive of “Blacknesses.”

In this respect, the form of chords and arpeggios theoretically and metaphorically symbolize the role of the artist and the responsibility of their art. As mentioned earlier, scales

and arpeggios are used for practice exercises because they help develop agility and proper technique. When played together, the notes of an arpeggio form a *chord*. Instruments in certain families, such as the string family, have the ability to play chords. Other instruments that are unable to play chords individually are able to do so in tandem. For the “Negro” artist, the idea of being viewed as an instrument consequently implies a commitment to developing a proper technique and agility perfected by practice exercises. As I have spent a great deal of time discussing music theory, it is necessary because I contend that music via movement/performance and message does exactly what the BAM artists do in attempting to combine theory and practice as a means to reshape a Black aesthetic. Up to this point, I have done the following: explained basic music theory, as far as the formal textbook knowledge, and illustrated the next step, which is the practice/application of the textbook information. Moreover, I have emphasized two of the important performance components—arpeggios and chords—as an analogy of the literary ideology in place by way of the Harlem Renaissance and its conceptual framework of “the changing same,” to put it succinctly, the performance of chords and arpeggios are different – chords are played simultaneously and arpeggios are played one-at-a-time; however, they are the same because a chord and an arpeggio uses the same notes of a scale family. Hence, the idea of “a changing same,” as a description of the Harlem Renaissance.

As for an articulation of a Black Aesthetic, the consensus of the BAM is that the artists of the HR are, in Baraka’s words, “a changing same,” in that like chords and arpeggios, their literary ideology was no different from W. E. B. DuBois’s philosophy of double-consciousness. Art is supposed to convey a message in a way that expresses and emotion to tell a story. Moreover, the literary genres or form functions like the arpeggio and the literary period (HR) is like the chord. Although the medium may change, the literary ideology that defines the literary

period is persuasive throughout the genres. The vision that an artist has that in turns becomes a tangible, concrete product requires honing one's sensibility. His subject should be studied and captured in its raw and authentic reality. Jones's disgust is a response to the literature of his predecessors. Although the artist was "Negro," their art did not reflect Black people's daily realities and further objectified and confirmed a white societies perception. Their desires to become accepted into a mainstream American meant that many of these artists grew desensitized to the plight of opportunities to humanize Black people. In other words, Jones infers that for "Negro" literature to evolve into "Black" art—his concept of *high art*--it must have an understanding of commitment to the community they identify with, in the same manner that scales and arpeggios are relevant to music theory that enabled the creation of jazz and the blues. The effects of oppression of Black people manifest in many ways.

1.2 Melodic Jazz and Harmonious Blues

Now, I will introduce another layer of complexity called *texture*, which in music theory is another component that helps one understand the possibilities of chords and limitations of arpeggios. Before understanding the intricacies of texture, however, one must first understand the differences between melody and harmony. *Melody* is a distinct series of pitches otherwise known as the tune of a song. It is mainly through the melody that the composer communicates a theme or focus to the listener. In fact, without a melody, what the listener is apt to perceive is no more than an amalgamation of miscellaneous sounds. Thus, the melody is to a musical composition what a thesis statement is to an essay. Furthermore, by manipulating the melody's contour, or shape, the composer may imply a mood or an emotion. *Melodic contour* refers to the way the music ascends or descends in steps or jumps. For example, the first two measures of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," a simple child's tune, descends then ascends primarily in steps: E-D-

C-D-E-E-E. This movement by steps is called *conjunct* motion. In contrast, the first five pitches (or words) of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” (Oh, say can you see) descend then ascend in small jumps: G-E-C-E-G-C. This movement by jumps or skips is called *disjunct* motion. While the contrasts created by conjunct and disjunct motion can be heard, melodic contour is also a visual representation of the music.

It is important to note that even though a melody can stand alone, its sound will be empty unless it has support from accompaniment. This supporting accompaniment is *harmony*, which refers to the playing or sounding of multiple pitches at the same time. Like the setting of a story, harmony adds context or framework for the melody. A melody can be accompanied or harmonized through the use of various techniques, the most common of which are *countermelody* and chords. A countermelody consists of different melodic lines that interweave one another. While it is secondary to and independent of the primary melody, the countermelody is played at the same time and often with equal importance. Interestingly, countermelody does not work with all forms of music⁴³. In contrast, chords, which consist of multiple pitches played at the same time, can be used in a variety of musical styles. A single melodic line may be accompanied by a progression of chords or broken chords or a combination of the two. Moreover, not all harmonies are meant to sound stable or pleasing. Chords built from intervals that clash or sound jarring are said to be *dissonant*. Likewise, chords built from intervals that do not clash but sound pleasing are said to be *consonant*. Composers use the interplay of consonance and dissonance to add tension and evoke emotion, which makes the music engaging for listeners.

Furthermore, the combination of melodic and harmonic elements contributes to texture in music. There are three specific musical textures, each dependent upon the number and types of

layers used. *Monophony* is considered a thin texture in that it consists of only one musical part.⁴⁴ *Polyphony*, on the other hand, consists of two or more melodies performed at the same time, giving it a thicker texture.⁴⁵ *Homophony* is perhaps the musical texture most familiar to present-day listeners as it consists of a melodic line accompanied by chords. Because jazz and the blues were developed by those possessing a working knowledge of the rules of music theory and then reimagining two main elements to produce something new, it is then a fusion of natural talent fused with formal training—African work-songs and Christian hymns. The major difference is that this art is developed and perfected by individuals who are not influenced by white traditional models in part due to the denial of access. In the same manner, African work-songs belong to the masses—the enslaved, it comes from the people, about the people and returns to the people—high art.

1.3 Striking Chords and Textures

Art is cultivated from and by a group of people who have their own unique aesthetic that appeals to their senses as a representation of their reality that challenges ethnocentric monoculturalism—a fusion of product and politics. The writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance laid the groundwork many ways that made it possible for the BAM writers and artists to add depth and complexities like texture in music theory. Moreover, the music genre of jazz and the music theory components the arpeggios and melodies would best describe the arts of the HR. Jazz is a mixture of African-American rhythms from New Orleans with American mainstream melodies; flavored with improvisation the unexpected resulting in freedom and flexibility in attitude. I argue that the Harlem Renaissance can be described in the same manner because for the Negroes who were in Harlem, this was the Black experience. However, like the limitations of the instrument that can only play arpeggios because they cannot execute chords because of

structural limitations, and melodies which function as the tune of the story and moves in steps or leaps, the failures of the HR could be summarized as a period that looked great in appearance as it was the “New Negro,” in a geographic location conducive to shaping a new identity, one that shows the new Negro as carefree and acculturated, like the characteristics of jazz music. But, upon critical examination, the period took too few steps or left (w)holes from missing (leaping) the point and needs some form of accompaniment to be complete—arpeggios and melodies.

Whereas the writers and artists of the BAM set out to add the aural texture by way of complexities of chords and harmonies; hence, furthering an existing Black Aesthetic adding harmony to melody with the endless possibilities of chords. And like the blues, harmonies bring dramatic tension and release as the blues is rooted in southern plantations with the blending of Negro spirituals, field hollers/work-songs, all West African remnants, with a touch of Christian hymnals, thickly textured with the polyphonic and homophonic qualities—emotionally driven and personal but not private; just like the experience of the theatre. Although much of my discussion of music theory is technical in presentation, it is the performance of these elements and their possibilities of arrangements, that I contend is the method by which the BAM writers and artists articulate enactments of Blacknesses. In other words, a concrete form is needed to transform an entity in to ideas that reform a state of being.

In the next chapter, I will explore these West African influences further by examining the literary period of Négritude in Senegal, and Nigerian post-Négritude playwright, writer, and critic Wole Soyinka’s response to it. That chapter will advance my defense of the reasons I believe that the BAM writers and artists were more successful in their ideas of furthering the Black Aesthetic than the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was fixed geographically in that it took place in Harlem and only those who were in Harlem were permitted

access and or participation; furthermore, it was an integrated movement, which allowed for the economic, political, and cultural infiltration of white power. In contradistinction, the Black Arts Movement situated Blackness as a form of personal, community, and geopolitical movement. If Black people are in constant states of movement via Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade or the push/pull factors in the South causing Blacks to migrate to the north, or the impact of revolutionary images on the consciousness of a young person and their friends, then Black art and the Black Aesthetic is everywhere and anywhere Black people exist, resist, and transform; thus, ongoing, and ever evolving.

Notes

¹⁵ Anthony Graham. "Transformational Servant Leadership: Are You Preparing to Serve as a Black Leader or as an Individual Who Leads Blacks?" Bennett College Campus, Greensboro, NC. 01 May 2014. Lecture.

¹⁶ The terms "victim and power" analyses are ideas Dr. Graham discussed in a lecture at Bennett College in Greensboro, NC, as part of a Leadership Lecture Series.

¹⁷ See William R. Jones "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations in Philosophy and the Black Experience." *Philosophical (The) Forum Boston, Mass.* Vol. 9. No. 2-3. 1977.

¹⁸ See Richard J. Powell. "Re/Birth of a nation." *Rhapsodies in black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (1997): 14-34. See also, Gates Jr., Henry L. "Harlem on our Minds." *Critical Inquiry* 24.1 (1997): 1-12.

¹⁹ Alaine Locke. "New Negro." pp. 274-84. Redding, J. Saunders, and Arthur P. Davis. *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present.* (1971).

²⁰ See David L. Lewis. *When Harlem Was in Vogue.* New York: Knopf, 1981, p. 117.

²¹ See Harold Cruse. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 1967. p 540.

²² See Larry Neal. "The Black Arts Movement," in *The Portable Sixties Reader.* Ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 446.

²³ See Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing." In *New Challenge* 2 (Fall 1937): 53–65. Reprinted in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994), 97. See also, C. W. E. Bigsby, "Richard Wright and His Blueprint for Negro Writing," *PN Review* 19 (1980), 53–55.

²⁴ Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," 104.

²⁵ Manuel DeLanda defines "capacities" as the virtual space of (infinite) possibilities.

²⁶ Larry Neal, "Black Arts Movement," 450.

²⁷ I use these ideas presented here regarding, "beyond place and space," as an allusion to the connection African-Americans have with West African ethos and metaphysics. This concept is explained in detail in the next chapter of Soyinka and Négritude.

²⁸ A. Wade Boykin. "Euro-American Negotiational Scheme (Figures 3.1 & 3.2)." Chart. *The School Achievement of Minority Children: New Perspectives.* "The Triple Quandary and the Schooling of Afro-American Children." Ed. Ulric Neisser. New Jersey: LEA. Pub., 1986.

²⁹ See Boykin's modified Afro-American Negotiational Scheme, in manner in which I see the inner workings on the DuBoisian double-consciousness.

³⁰ The different types of clefs indicate high or low pitches such as treble for high parts/voices and bass is for low/parts/voices. There is also a middle or C clef for middle parts/voices.

³¹ Like the big C for common time

³² If a time signature appears anywhere else in the piece, it indicates a change in time.

³³ Exponents of 2 are 4, 6, 8, 16, 32 etc.

³⁴ The types of notes not represented in this section are thirty-second notes and sixty-fourth notes.

³⁵ Thus, when ledger lines are needed the note names continue using the next letter of the alphabet up to the letter G, and starts over with the letter A.

³⁶ Scales are often played in *octaves*, or groupings of eight notes.

³⁷ Scales and arpeggios are used for practice exercises because they help develop agility and proper technique.

³⁸ The terms “conductor” and “direction” are meant to have multiple meaning—the former: director artist, interpreter; the later: movement, command, position etc.

³⁹ Marlene A. Hendricks. Personal interview. 03 Sept. 2016.

⁴⁰ I.e., New Orleans vs. Chicago vs. St. Louis

⁴¹ Bebop, bossa nova, fusion, funk, boogie, etc.

⁴² Guitar, piano, and horn

⁴³ Most commonly associated with music of the Baroque and Classical periods

⁴⁴ For example, Gregorian chant, or Plainsong, consists of a single line of unaccompanied music performed in unison.

⁴⁵ Musical compositions that utilize counterpoint (or countermelodies) are examples of polyphony, particularly those musical selections from the late Medieval and Renaissance periods.

CHAPTER TWO

BEYOND NÉGRITUDE

Wole Soyinka: African Personality or Black Aesthetic

The theory of double-consciousness stated by W. E. B. DuBois at the turn of the 20th century would prove to be the core problematic not only for the descendants of the enslaved in the U.S., but also for Black people in the African Diaspora. This shared experience compelled Black intellectuals, writers, and artists to respond in ways that addressed and liberated black people from this problematized existence as they understood and lived it wherever they might be. For example, the writers and artists in Harlem, the so-called Harlem Renaissance from 1914-1940s was an Anglophone response to European hegemony, but in Paris, the Négritude Movement from 1930s-1940 is a Francophone⁴⁶ response, that communicated the particular reactions of a colonized population. For the French-speaking African students studying in Paris at this time, this cultural exchange between Africa and America was itself an agent of change. The founders of the Négritude movement—Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Damas of the French Caribbean—created this concept that would bridge a common awareness of the plight of Black people and a notion of a common heritage which included the experience of alienation—what I am calling a diasporic DuBoisan double-consciousness. The African Négritude movement was a reassertion of confidence in tradition as a unifying notion and embodied a need to re-establish the historical validity of that tradition.

To transcend the imposed limitations of colonization, scholarship needs to revisit the existential questions of Négritude/Black Nationalist ideologies as relevant to the 20th-century avant-garde. This chapter explores the fundamental ideology of the preceding literary-political movements, the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude and its transnational connections and confluence

on the Black Aesthetic in the African Diaspora. In addition, it focuses this exploration on the work of a single writer, Wole Soyinka, to raise significant questions about the nature of African identity in respect to the Black Aesthetic and the quest for a “prescriptive validation of an African self-apprehension.” My point is that there are pockets of Black people via the Black Atlantic who are concerned with destroying oppression by articulating a Black experience and aesthetic that is occurring at the same but in different locations, with similar obstacles as their U.S. sisters and brothers. In other words, in what ways are the pioneers of the Négritude movement and Wole Soyinka, a post-Négritude playwright and literary critic, addressing the need for economic power to control the politics of articulating their culture—an African worldview rooted in West African metaphysics?

Towards the later years of the 1930s, as the writers of the Harlem Renaissance began to travel abroad, especially to Paris, they sparked an interest in their African counterparts from Senegal and the French Caribbean. Writers such as Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Carter G. Woodson, Alain Locke, and others, through their literary works, expressed the diversity in the black experiences in the U.S. This cultural expression was not totally void of the effects of white literary traditions and oppression, but it captured and defined Blackness as a noun and not as an adjective. Moreover, this could be seen in the “Newest” Negro movement. According to Don L. Lee⁴⁷,

We must destroy Faulkner, dick, jane, and other perpetrators of evil. It’s time for DuBois, Nat Turner, and Kwame Nkrumah. As Frantz Fanon points out, “Destroy the culture and you destroy the people. This must not happen. Black artists are cultural stabilizers; bringing back old values and introducing new ones. Black art will talk to the people and with the will of the people stop impending “protective custody.”

As history progressed and African and Caribbean countries won independence, the ideology of Négritude, in the form of cultural nationalism, traveled back across the Atlantic to be unshaped and reshaped during the turbulent times of the 1960s. I would argue that this nuanced, revised, ideology takes shape and is the Black Aesthetic. One example, Négritude was translated to African-Americans via the work of Jahnheinz Jahn's *Muntu* a book that was especially important to Larry Neal. In brief, Jahn argues that there is a distinct way of being African in the world, a neo-African way that encompasses all aspects of culture while always innovating in response to particular conditions of oppression and possibility.

The African in the New World like the African on the continent maintains and adapts a worldview despite cultural contact and colonization by European culture. According to of Mike Sell, “The specific vehicle of the dissemination would be *Liberator* magazine, for which Larry Neal served as Arts editor in 1965, in addition to other key figures such as James Stewart, Charles Fuller, and Maribelle Moore.” I argue that it is in the Black Aesthetic that communalism is understood as both a practice and a keen awareness that deploys activism, which is understood as the change agent. A focus of my enquiry here is the avant-garde status of the Black Aesthetic in that it is innovative regarding the presence/absence of the state of cultural, political, and economic consciousness of Blackness in the African Diaspora in the 20th century. To explain the term Blackness as a definable noun and its status as a change agent, I will examine Wole Soyinka, African dramatist, distinguished Nobel Prize recipient for literature, literary critic, and a major opponent of Négritude ideology. According to Michael Etherton, an African theatre historian, “Plays informed by the spirit of Négritude, focus upon a leader: hero, king, or warrior. They are positioned in that a central figure rises to power and become a symbol of a group of

people or a nation” (145). Moreover, that leader’s power lies in his ability to undermine the authority of his oppressor through a noble character that is positive and inherent.

The next section of this chapter illustrates Soyinka’s position on Négritude as comparable to that of American writers on the Black Aesthetic and Blackness more generally. Through examining Soyinka’s position, I argue that one can better understand the issues and complexities facing the Black writer who is interested in creating great art as one destroys racism and colonialism. I will further the discussion by introducing anti-essentialists Paul Gilroy and Manuel DeLanda’s philosophies to analyze racial identities without essences, while acknowledging racism as a system of physical processes determining structural possibilities. To add depth to my discussion of the “risks of essence,”⁴⁸ adding the discourse of critical realism, Andrew Sayer’s ideas⁴⁹ of varying kinds of *difference* and that they cannot be addressed in the same way thereby the criticism should become the objects of critiques, by discussing why the false beliefs they take issue with are held and what produces them, not just show that certain beliefs are false. While continuing the exploration of the complexities of double-consciousness but framing it in the context of colonization on the continent of Africa, in the section, “Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black(ness), and Meta-Black(ness),” I will introduce these ontological theories as described by Frank Martin. Because of his research on indigenous African cultures, he concludes that most individuals do not think of themselves as “Black”. They are more concerned with localized, ethnic identifications. In addition, it is impositions of race-consciousness that tend to enforce certain prescribed assumptions associated with assertions of “race-specific” behaviors based in misguided, colonized biases. By extension, Soyinka’s most cited text, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, provides what Martin considers an ontology

of a pre-black, black, post-black and meta-black predicament for the colonized African identity and world-view.

Myth, Literature, and the African World is Soyinka's most notable work. It is a collection of essays articulating his ideas of how an African identity might be represented and problematizes the ideology of cultural nationalism as a strategy to understand the realities of the Black experience in the context of colonialism. For these reasons, I aim to pin-down his philosophy of the possibilities of what an African metaphysics is, in a non-essentialist manner. I will situate Soyinka in the conceptual framework as defined by Martin. Moreover, I will perform a close-reading of Soyinka's individual essays in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, and interpret them using the ontology of an African identity in the stages Martin describes as pre, black, post-black and meta-black. This strategy is significant in that it brings some clarity to the way Soyinka destroys double-consciousness without essentializing Blackness. The chapter concludes with a reconsideration of how Soyinka, in his response to Négritude, further complicated the problems of essentialism as a strategy to authenticate a Black identity. He explored in his essays and plays options to overcome double-consciousness in the context of colonialism while refuting cultural nationalism as an ideology to help the people see where they are and instruct them of where to need and can go, regarding progress. Ultimately, Soyinka does acknowledge the significance of Négritude but takes issue with the execution of it as an ideology; therefore, his assessment functions as an assessment of a plan with honorable intentions and poor execution.

The Trap of Cultural Nationalism

To explain the term Blackness as a definable noun and its status as a change agent, I will examine Wole Soyinka, African dramatist, distinguished Nobel Prize recipient for literature,

literary critic, and a major opponent of Négritude ideology. According to Michael Etherton, an African theatre historian, “Plays informed by the spirit of Négritude, focus upon a leader: hero, king, or warrior. They are positioned in that a central figure rises to power and become a symbol of a group of people or a nation” (145). Moreover, his power lies in his ability to undermine the author or his oppressor through his noble character that is positive and inherent. When recalling the defining moments in his life regarding purpose and direction, the Négritude movement would be “the call” for Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, and in his book *Myth, Literature and the African World*, he offered “the response”. Soyinka engages a dialectical conversation with Négritudists by articulating what many viewed as scathing criticism. He unapologetically criticized Négritude’s narcissistic ideologies because “[i]t not only accepted the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontation but borrowed from the very components of its racist syllogism” (127). Moreover, he thinks that, because Senghor, Césaire, and Damas were naïve in their contemplation of self, they developed a Francophone African image that was highly problematic for a myriad of cultural, political, and economical reasons. One of many reasons is that two of its architects had differing ideals—two paths. Césaire’s conception of Négritude was focused on an African identity and positing culture via the literature of the movement, as a way to foster a new Black consciousness. On the contrary, Senghor systemized the movement and formalized it as an ideology with the conclusion that “Blacks were emotionally endowed with artist genius” (69). His views were motivated by the romanticism of political power as a byproduct of economic viability. In short, one who believed in the idea of a “new humanism” not based on race and the other in the benefits of “acculturation” for acceptance into a “perceived way” of accessing political power. However, Soyinka’s criticism should not be read as absolute

rejection, as he says very clearly in *Myth, Literature and African World*, that the “The vision of Négritude should never be underestimated or belittled” (126).

Cultural expressions are keen markers in defining a geographic region or groups of peoples. These expressions have no standard medium. They are regarded as unique in that the mediums may be the universally recognizable shape; for example, poems, music, dance, etc. However, the creative mechanics deployed in the manipulation of language used to interpret and shape its form is the cultural imprints. The cultural posits are individual and collective in its experiences. Soyinka explicitly states that Négritude went wrong in this respect because it is

[t]he contrivance of a creative ideology and its falsified basis of identification with the social vision... Négritude proceeded along the route of over simplification. Its re-enactment of black values was not preceded by any profound effort to enter into this African system of values... It took far too much from European ideas while the founders pronounce Africanism (127).

This over-simplification of shaping a cultural identity is highly flawed because of two very complex issues. First, during the rush to colonize Africa, there were many cultural infusions because of the size of the continent and the presence of multiple ethnicities within the countries. This dichotomy of cultural diversity and identity is a complex mixture of the within and the without. In short, displaced groups of individuals do not own the power to become national spokespersons. Their ideals cannot represent the greater whole. This leads to the Négritude’s limits regarding politics and art. Négritude as an ideology seeks to institutionalize creative agency; therefore, perpetuating a master-narrative that further subjugates the black continent.

Soyinkan scholar Obi Maduakor, cites Soyinka as inferring that Négritude tended to channel its creative energies through a artistic expression—the contemplative narcissistic mode,

i.e. legislation of creativity. This reading of Soyinka's criticism should be revisited. Yes, he was disturbed by the refusal of Négritudinists to consider Africa as part of a world system and to criticize the African sensibility. In other words, he was criticizing its romanticism, although limiting creative freedom—the dogmatism that Négritudinists were sometimes capable of—was a concern for Soyinka, too. Politically this concept is flawed, because it moves in the direction opposite of revolutionary. Fanon, another critic of Négritude, would argue for the creation of new categories of “the human”. He says,

There must be no waiting until the nation has produced new men; there must be no waiting until men are imperceptibly transformed by revolutionary processes in perpetual renewal. It is quite true that these two processes are essential, but consciousness must be helped (304-5).

The hegemonic attempt reflects its European influence. However, its affects are averse to its intentions, Soyinka argues. Instead of freeing black people from the European cultural hegemony, it reinforces their domination. Soyinka infers that this is so because “Negritude trapped itself in what was primarily a defensive role, even though its accents were strident, its syntax hyperbolic and its strategy aggressive” (129). Thus, it circles back around only to be dominated by the dominator again—counterproductive and a moot point.

Moreover, the problematic of positionality--more specifically, location--is a major factor, too. Positionality addresses the relationship of artist, their works, and their situations. Within this context, we can further expound why Soyinka reminds the Négritudinists of problems due to the location and conditions in which Négritude manifests. It was created by and for a small, elite group comprised of black African students studying abroad in Paris. This was clearly not “The African Experience.” Thus, Négritude is the intellectual property of the black bourgeoisie, more

a European experience than that of the black Africans supposedly served by this return to Africa. Therefore, the question becomes, “How does this serve the African peoples?” Soyinka answers, “Negritude did not free black races from the burden of the notion of European defined standards” (127). In addition, he claims that, during this time (the 1940s and 50s), African existentiality was of no major concern for the masses. The masses located in Africa were at the climax of liberation, revolution, and overcoming racism that stemmed from colonialism, in a necessity for reclaiming land and nationhood. This segues to the issues of Négritude failing to address economics.

The ideology of Négritude does not engage the economic role of legislative agency as a benefit to creativity. In fact, Maduakor says that, in this instance, Soyinka is most critical because this aspect addresses his Marxist concerns. As stated earlier, how can the bourgeoisie be genuinely concerned with the plight of the proletariat? The answer is that it cannot be, because the bourgeoisie owns the means and define the modes of production. They are not ethically committed to a social vision that Soyinka thinks will accurately represent the African value system. Moreover, Soyinka says, “Yes to a social vision and no to a literary ideology because the latter limits and imposes upon free operations of the creative spirit... works of literature are essentially fluid operations of the creative mind upon social and natural phenomena” (307).

So, when it comes down to it, the fundamental concern Soyinka has is with the ethos of the Négritude movement. Ultimately, he argues that the “life-line” that is a by-product of Négritude produced a methexis which “enmeshed itself unnecessarily” in negative contradictory definitions. This self-marginalized process perpetuates the tension between the colonizer and the colonized in that “the dissociated individual could be pulled back to the source of his material essence and offered a prospect for the coming-into-being of new black social entities” (64). On

this point, he would agree almost entirely with, for example, Larry Neal, who speaks specifically to this question in many of his essays. The freedom of the artist was always a troubling issue.

Thus, I would argue that, rather than absolutely rejecting Négritude, Soyinka brings to the surface for more critical debate the negative by-products of this movement. The first of many is the notion of Négritude as a concept of a social-racial direction. This provides a mode of expression and thematic emphasis for black societies of the diaspora. Next, it justifies European cultural dominance because its literary works contemplates the “self” in a narcissistic manner, resulting in “abysmal angst of low achievement.” Lastly, it is contradictory and ironic in that it laid its “cornerstone on European intellectual tradition”, and been rejected first by the European critics. As an attempt to destroy Négritude as the African critical standard, Soyinka and other black writers set out to accomplish the same goals as their black American counterparts do in their attempt to destroy the DuBoisian double-consciousness (American –self), but not necessarily the notion that there is a common, if not universal Blackness, either in fact or as possibility. Create and write in a manner that does not reify Blackness and seeks to engage the triple-front—culture, politics, and economics. However, its aim is not to discredit its predecessors, because they are the trailblazers who laid the groundwork for the next movement to improve upon. The task of the neophytes is to acknowledge and uphold ideas that worked well and add another dimension that includes the elements that were absent.

In the U.S., as I have mentioned in my Chapter One, these enactments of Blackness(es) reflect a change in basic assumptions from DuBois’s double-consciousness to Boykins’s theory of The Triple Quandary as a way of offering possibilities to solve problems of the black working-class. However, in an African context, more specifically a west African ethos, these enactments move necessarily from the monolithic imagination of “a self” as prescribed by

Négritudists to what Frank Martin describes as a *pre, black, post* and *meta*-Blackness evolution, which I argue is what Soyinka does in his groundbreaking text, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*. Moreover, I argue that Soyinka's critique of the Négritude movement depends specifically on drama as a genre, as a reminder of a (pre-Black) historical tradition rooted in an African metaphysics. In the theatre, performances of the enactments of escaping the trauma of a (post-Blackened) colonized "self" enable a reconciliation of heritage, political responsiveness, and personal identity choice(s) in the same way that Bertolt Brecht executed his social realist strategy to highlight contradictions between ideology and community.

Black Aesthetic in the Diaspora

Thus far, this essay has addressed the influence of double-consciousness on the Négritude movement and Soyinka's criticism of it. The next section of this chapter illustrates Soyinka's position on Négritude as comparable to that of many writers on the Black Aesthetic and Blackness more generally. Through examining Soyinka's position, I argue that one can better understand the issues and complexities facing the Black writer who is interested in creating great art as one destroys racism and colonialism. Black U.S. writers also responded to the double consciousness concept in a manner that was timely and for the most part coincided with the racial tensions mounting in U.S. societies. Similar to the ways that Soyinka functions as the critic of Négritude in Africa, Larry Neal does the same with the limitations of the Harlem Renaissance writers in America. Key to this criticism is that Neal brilliantly aligns the Black Aesthetic along with the Black Power concept. Neal, in his essay "The Black Arts Movement," says, "The Black Arts and the Black Power concepts both relate broadly to the Afro-Americans desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics" (62). At the core of Larry

Neal's definition of the "Black Aesthetic" is an attempt to reconcile a *twoness* that is present or in some cases absent in African American artistic productions. His essay, "And Shine Swam On," is where he spends a great amount of time unpacking his own ideas of a double-consciousness that existed before DuBois's articulation. Neal attributes this "problem" a direct connection to how one perceives his history and more importantly how one feels about what he views that history to be in America. He says, "the manner in which we see history determines how we act [unites or separates us] and how it is felt determines how it is played" (639). Moreover, Neal observes, "the emotions of the crowd [masses] have always played an integral role in the making of history" (639). Furthermore, he argues that the leadership of the people historically, is "one who best understands and expresses the emotional realities of a given historical epoch" (639). The best example of the type of leader is Malcolm X, because he "better interprets the emotional history of his people better than others" (639). Implicit in using X as the prototype is his use of Black Power. Neal's essay examines the "crisis of a postulated theory of Black Power," as an idea that fails prior to Malcolm's brilliant strategic execution of it as a "synthesis of black nationalism's essential truths as derived" from the historical⁵⁰ voices of prior attempts to liberate Black people in the U. S. He claims that Black Power failed "to evolve a workable ideology—one that allows for separatists and revolutionaries" and does so with the consciousness of "the realities of contemporary American power here and abroad," because of a lack in reliable theories of "social change, rooted in the [total] history of African-Americans" (640). In short, in order to destroy this stronghold of DuBois's double-consciousness, there has to be an ongoing discourse of "knowing and deciding who and what we are" (643). In the same manner, Marcus Garvey attempted to introduce nationalism as a means of self-determination that is contrary to a double-consciousness, in that it *is* a Black conscience(ness) in America.

For Neal, Malcolm X's activist philosophy represents the ideal "critical re-examination of Western political, social and artistic values" (638). It is important to understand that what makes X's leadership transformational is his linkage of the shared conditions of Black people in the diaspora in that "he spoke a truth that only the oppressed could understand—but in a "hip" way" (645). To put it succinctly, X is the essence of Black Power; he is the "synthesis of all nationalistic ideas embedded within the double-consciousness of Black America;" he symbolizes a kind of feeling—a kind of emotional response to one's history...that can only be defined in action, in movement" (646). However, in a post-colonial context for Black people, is an existence of a different problematic of the complexities of double-consciousness. I argue this *twoness* is a double *twoness*: the problematics of art and politics, white and black. This reconciliation is a critique of the previous literary movement – The Harlem Renaissance. Neal says, "The cultural values inherent in Western history must either be radicalized or destroyed, and we will probably find that even radicalization is impossible. In fact, what is needed is a whole new system of ideas" (63). Neal's keen assessment is necessary; he does not abandon or dismiss the creativity of the Harlem Renaissance, but rather examines its failures to add substance to the African American radical tradition. It is in Neal's examination that several significant things occur.

The first critical concern is the idea of location. He understands that one of the failures of the Harlem Renaissance is rooted in the fact that it was inaccessible to blacks outside of New York – it was confined. Neal says that the Renaissance was "a fantasy-era for most black writers and their white friends" (650). This localized period had very little mobility. For example, it is common knowledge that the Great Migration had a significant impact on the North and the Mid-West. Nevertheless, during this explosion of culture, it seemed as if the places where people

came from, such as the south, did not bring this new culture back. The people who stayed behind were left behind culturally. I make this claim very carefully, because this is partially due to the geographic make-up of the south, i.e. living conditions, rural south vs. ghettos in the north. Neal asserts, "The black artist takes this to mean that his primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of black people" (62). Neal's idea of the Black Aesthetic is intrinsic, and if this is true, and there are Black people(s) in other countries, it must be inclusive of their experiences diachronically regarding history. "The Black Arts movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community." He says that what the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance ultimately did was "[a] step taken by the Negro bourgeoisie who desired acceptance on the white man's terms" and "it fails because it was one elite addressing another elite" (655).

Another critical concern is Neal's approach to the de-legitimization of "*art for art's sake*." Here is where he states that the Harlem Renaissance is cultural and not political. The politics that the Harlem Renaissance lacked was the activism and a broader connection of cultural production: "It did not address itself to the mythology and the lifestyles of the black community. It failed to take root, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit" (78). Activism is a problematic, in that it is an extreme contrast to the Harlem Renaissance. Neal writes, "Implicit in the Black Arts Movement is the idea that black people, however dispersed, constitute a nation within the belly of white America. This is not a new idea. Garvey said it and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad says it now. And it is on this idea that the concept of Black Power is predicated" (78). It involves articulating the intrinsic value of Black identity in ways that are radical for the 60s and 70s, but necessary, especially since this period it is at the height of the Vietnam War. It engaged the plight of suffering across the

Atlantic, thus moving from bi-coastal to transnational. The flow of information became a conduit for radical change. These radical changes carefully consider the plight of blacks in the diaspora.

Even though the Black writers of the literary movement seek to destroy the DuBoisian idea of double-consciousness, it deploys the new DuBoisian paradigm of the notion of art that is created of, for, near and by Black peoples⁵¹. Likewise, Larry Neal's sentiment is that "the Black artist must link his work to the struggle for his liberation and the liberation of his brothers and sisters...no change is possible without the psychological liberation of his people" (655-6). The next section brings together a Black Atlantic connection in that the works of Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka's has similar ideas of an African world-view that parallels the critical standards as defined by the Black Arts Movement and the problematics of the Black Aesthetic. In other words, the argument for a Black *self* means that there is a Black essence rooted as Neal argues, in a "collective ritual directed at the destruction of useless, dead ideas...affirming the highest possibilities yet honest" (655). However, I also claim that Soyinka negotiates the traps of essentialism by using a method that differs slightly from the BAM. Furthermore, his art reflects his ideas of what Négritude could have accomplished without essentializing Blackness. Soyinka has a clever way in which he acknowledges different kinds of difference (biological, geographical, imposed, inherited, and chosen).

The Problems of Essentialism

Up to this point, I have been talking about issues and complexities facing the Black writer who is interested in creating great art as one destroys racism and colonialism. However, in a post-modern sense, the focus becomes an idea that most find unquantifiable—essence. Diana Fuss has argued that essentialism/constructivism binary blocks innovative thinking, providing people with too easy a basis for unreflective dismissal (67). Similarly, the essay "Can the

Subaltern Speak?”, Gayatri Spivak suggests that essentialism can indeed be a strategy to invoke a collective category and critique this category at the same time deeming it theoretically unrealizable—a self-reflexive critique. As a means of furthering the discourse of essentialism, I will introduce anti-essentialists Paul Gilroy and Manuel DeLanda’s philosophies to analyze racial identities without essences, while acknowledging racism as a system of physical processes determining structural possibilities. Furthermore, I will explicate Gilroy and DeLanda by introducing the term “critical realism,” which argues for “theoretically informed concrete research,” by way of Andrew Sayer’s text *Realism and Social Sciences*, specifically Part IV, “Critical Realism: From Critique to Normative Theory.”

As Paul Gilroy argues in the text *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, the problems of modernism, nationality, location, identity and historical memory posits the existence of a syncretic and hybrid Black culture. Connecting Manuel DeLanda’s *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* and his *A New Philosophy of Society* with Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, calls for a new approach for critical theories of race and the public sphere for the building of communities. However, Sayer’s *Realism and Social Sciences*, contends “that many kinds of explanatory critique require the defence of normative or critical standpoints, and that these are not necessarily derivable from explanations of situations” (157). I will begin with Gilroy’s challenge to cultural studies methods’ use of modernist paradigms as he demonstrates the groundlessness or fundamentally irrational basis for totalizing essences of blackness. He is anti-essentialist. Through seriously impugning the reconstructionist impulses of Pan-African and Afrocentric thought and their insistence on an unbroken, contiguous path of black experience that sweeps across oceans and millennia, Gilroy reveals the modern concept of race itself as already within the horizon of

Western modernity's irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory. To work against the reifying impulses of modernist claims of taxonomic thinking, Gilroy focuses on the historical processes that produce individual black cultures, thereby offering an epistemic of African American cultural identity that nudges us toward a social ontological account of blackness. In so doing, Gilroy seeks to redirect the nationalistic politics of cultural studies scholarship concerning race and racism. Gilroy opposes Pan-Africanist and Afrocentric understandings of blackness and proposes a rhizomorphic, fractal transculturalism to apprehend a nonreifying cultural formation that articulates blackness as a spatial performance across a kind of cultural flotilla (28). Gilroy's Black Atlantic cultural assemblage of African, European, American, and Caribbean social ecologies are analyzed through his readings of black ethnic genres of folk culture and music in order to transcend the agency-structure dichotomy to configure a reexamination of DuBoisian notions of racial consciousness and critique the ways modern intellectual practices reproduce racism (109).

While Gilroy's configuration of diasporic assemblages of blackness is less directly influenced by Deleuze, DeLanda makes these linkages much more explicitly. DeLanda acknowledges his examination of social ontology as absolutely derivative of Deleuzian thought, positing his assertions as an interpretive resource that is not beholden to deconstructive or ludic discourses (DeLanda, *Philosophy of Society* 2-3). Instead, DeLanda rejects postmodernism's devaluation of meaning in which the materiality of language becomes trivial and independent of reality by asserting materiality as relevant to meaning for how it articulates the significance of whole-part relationships. DeLanda's theory of assemblages is based on his definition of history as including the cosmological, evolutionary, and social realms. Mediated by the extensive properties of the material world, energetic flows produce intensive properties, creating structural

entities that are morphogenetic (DeLanda, *Virtual Philosophy* 10). Dynamic relationships overcome static isolation giving rise to form-generating resources, which are immanent to the material world. Abandoning essence in favor of immanence, as history produces persons who are not the only kinds of individual beings, but individual communities, organizations, cities, nation-states, etc., are also produced by history (DeLanda, *Philosophy of Society* 40). Sayer's ideas⁵² of varying kinds of *difference* and they cannot be addressed in the same way furthers Gilroy and DeLanda's philosophies, that is, his position is there is a need "to examine the standpoints from which critiques are made and the desirability and feasibility of alternatives they imply" (157). Moreover, their respective arguments become the objects of critiques, by taking it a step further in discussing why the false beliefs they take issue with are held and what produces them, not just show that certain beliefs are false.

The fluidity afforded by joining the assemblage theories of DeLanda and Gilroy is useful for describing an analysis of racial identities without essences, while also acknowledging the materiality of racism as a system of physical processes determining structural possibilities. Moreover, Gilroy's claims of blacknesses existing everywhere black people have been scattered, while DeLanda explains that a component of an entity does not lose its identity when it separates and moves to become a part of something else, and Sayer's notion of multiple categories of difference demand different treatments there by problematizes the essentialization of race. In turn, acknowledging the formal processes of racism explains the regularities exhibited by historical practices without the need for viewing race as something that is essential or materially transcendent. These findings have important consequences for the broader "assemblage" of framing a double-consciousness in a non-essentialist and non-totalizing context.

With the consideration of the anti-essentialist's standpoints articulated in this section, the double-conscious dilemma both the BAM writers and artists and Wole Soyinka is how to negotiate the trap of essentialism. Though BAM writers were critical of its predecessors, their aim was not to fully discredit, nor was it of Wole Soyinka's. They viewed their predecessors as trailblazers who forged a path for the next movement. The tasks of the neophytes were to keep present what actually worked well and add another dimension that includes the elements that were indeed absent. Moreover, how does one remain true to a "black(ened)" self and adapt to the conditions of being acculturated? While there is nothing new in the desire to both criticize and build upon the past, there is something different about what Soyinka and the BAM were attempting.

Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black(ness) and Meta-Black(nesses)

While continuing the exploration of the complexities of double-consciousness but framing it in the context of colonization on the continent of Africa, in the section, "Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black(ness), and Meta-Black(ness)," I will introduce these ontological theories as described by Frank Martin. To recall, his research on indigenous African cultures concludes that most individuals in those communities do not think of themselves as "Black". They are more concerned with localized, ethnic identifications. In addition, it is impositions of race-consciousness that tend to enforce certain prescribed assumptions associated with assertions of "race-specific" behaviors based in misguided, colonized biases. Similarly, Soyinka's most cited text, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, provides what Martin coins as an ontology of a pre-black, black, post-black and meta-black predicament for the colonized African identity and world-view.

So far in this chapter, I have addressed two literary movements: Négritude and the Black Arts Movement. These are two different ideologies; however, they are ultimately concerned with one trope—an imagined black identity that has “essential” connections to black subjectivity and that provides black people a way to transcend double-consciousness. Larry Neal asserts the idea that “our” music (blues and jazz), “operated at the core of our lives, forcing itself upon us as in a ritual...it has always, somehow, represented a collective psyche” (655). Furthermore, he says that “Black literature must attempt to achieve that same sense of the collective ritual, but ritual directed at the destruction of useless, dead ideas” (655). In other words, it is the act of a total rejection of everything white [Eurocentric] especially in the Black literary tradition, which had not been done in the HR. In this section, I will discuss and position Soyinka, as a playwright, and position his within the critical-theoretical ideologies of the Black Arts Movement, more specifically the Black Aesthetic; thus, serving as a model for what Soyinka achieves in his plays, which enables this Black Aesthetic positionality. While continuing the exploration of the complexities of double-consciousness but framing it in the context of colonization on the continent of Africa, in the section, “Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black(ness), and Meta-Black(ness),” I will introduce these ontological theories as described by Frank Martin. Because of his research of indigenous African cultures, he concludes that most individuals do not think of themselves as “Black”. Moreover, they are more concerned with localized, ethnic identifications. In addition, it is impositions of race-consciousness that tend to enforce certain prescribed assumptions associated with assertions of “race-specific” behaviors based in misguided, colonized biases. By extension, Soyinka’s most cited text, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, provides what Martin considers an ontology of a pre-black, black, post-black and meta-black predicament for the colonized African identity and world-view.

In order to better understand the way that conceptions of positionality can both affirm black identity but keep it from devolving into simple conceptions of essence; we need to think about the ways in which Africans see their “total” history and how they feel about this perception. In addition, to see if Soyinka, given the theories of the ontologies of Black Africans as outlined by Frank Martin, indeed qualify him to analyze Négritude; thus, articulate an African sensibility because he “better interprets the emotional history of his people better than others” (639). In a lecture on the aesthetic legacy of the African diaspora entitled, “Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black, and Meta-Black: Art Images and the Politics of Identification,” Frank Martin⁵³ indicates that based on his research into and studies of indigenous African cultures, it is apparent that most individuals do not think of themselves as “blacks”. That is, they are more concerned with localized, ethnic identifications⁵⁴ and their major preoccupations were simply as human beings addressing the challenges of daily life. “Black” political identity constructions come about generally because of exposure to impositions of “race-conscious” identifications. The impositions of race-consciousness tend to enforce certain prescribed assumptions associated with assertions of “race-specific” behaviors based in misguided, colonized biases. Thus,

[...] pre-black” identity (identification as merely “human”) is characteristic of melinated persons who have developed no knowledge of or interest in constructions of “whiteness”, either through minimal exposure to or non-contact with European impositions of “white” identity. “Black” identity is an oppositional self-construction predicated upon an imposition of post-European encounters. “Post-blackness” is merely a development of self-awareness after an imposition of constructions of “blackness” in opposition to ideas of “whiteness,” while “meta-blackness” is the arrival at both an awareness of the irony of a dependent “black” identity construction and some authentic integration of heritage, an

informed, contemporaneous political awareness, and an autonomous implementation of personal identity choice.⁵⁵

Furthermore, he likens these existential epiphanies to the commonplace experiences and environments that either bring to one's consciousness problematic differences which are racially inclined in an indirect or blatant manner or when the performer of race is "improper". Although race and gender are always present, these concepts become problematic when one's performance of race and gender conflict with the ideology of a prevailing social norm, which privileges "whiteness" as being "normative" thus rendering other existential options as deviations from the established and socially accepted "norm". In other words, the moment when an individual who is socially identifiable as "Black" realizes that he/she is considered "black" and this realization occurs publicly when whiteness is present, which for some, causes a crisis in identity.

In Martin's work, the categories of pre-black, black, post-black, and meta-black all come with a recognition that people are working toward ontologies that make living in the world more sensible. However, he is clear that he does not reify racial identity as "real". Thus, in his construction of reality, no one *is* "black" except as a descriptive of a specific individual's physical appearance and such individuals are comparatively rare. However, certainly, many people perform politically *as if* "black" is their ontology, but individuals socialized to *be* "black" may so choose to perform or may choose to resist such performances and act instead from an inner narrative of personal authenticity. In line with the ideologies of Gilroy and DeLanda, Martin's conception of an African's ontology in stages further complicates the larger issue of double-consciousness, he too, works against the reifying impulses of modernist claims of taxonomic thinking. In addition to, the ideas of abandoning essence in favor of immanence, as

history produces persons who are not the only kinds of individual beings, but individual communities and individual nation-states.

Pre-Black and Black(ness): Soyinkan ‘Myth’

As I have noted, the text *Myth, Literature and the African World* is Soyinka’s most notable work. It is a collection of essays articulating his ideas of how an African identity might be represented and problematizes the ideology of cultural nationalism as a strategy to understand the realities of the Black experience in the context of colonialism. For these reasons, I aim to pin down his philosophy of the possibilities of what an African metaphysics is in a non-essentialist manner. In order to frame Martin’s ideas of “pre-black” and “black” inner self in to the context of Négritude and Soyinka’s critique of it, a careful close (re)reading of the text *Myth, Literature and the African World* is necessary. It is an arduous task, but provides an understanding of why and how Soyinka feels compelled to make clear what is not an African world-view; thus, by inference articulating possibilities for a world-view that consolidates an African personality by way of an inward understanding of a historicized existence. His text addresses the three phases of a developing consciousness of the African world-view that is intentionally problematic and represents it in a constant, though not tragic state of crisis. This state of becoming, Soyinka says, is not anchored in “social emancipation, cultural liberalism, and cultural revolution;” [however], it is “deflective approaches retain[ing] external reference points against which a progression in thinking can be measured” (vii). Most importantly, this quest is a critique of oppressive ideologies that require a fully determined self, that become a nonproductive preoccupation for those seeking common liberation without essential identity. What makes this position especially interesting is that Soyinka underlines the importance of politics and economics to any cultural

transformation. He explains his Marxist disposition of formulating and realizing a history to counter difference in a European context:

The true self-apprehension is itself still most accessible today in the active language of the cultural liberation i.e. in order to transmit the self-apprehension of a race, a culture, it is sometimes necessary to liberate from, and relate this collective awareness to, the value of others (viii).

To make this argument, he holds the academy a responsible stakeholder in that they have “created a deified aura around what is falsely called intellectualism knowledge and exposition of the reference points of colonial cultures” (viii). Because of the reverence for the African intellectual, it is problematic for the self-apprehension of an African world to be one that supports and maintains taxonomy. One in which the African’s humanity is charted as primitive and incapable or rationalizing a specific vision of history, with its major concern being one of an analysis of a mythology and cosmology that is valid. Soyinka thus interrogates the on-going process of the “simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology and literature for benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, ...whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance in contemporary world reality” (xi).

In “Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype” Soyinka reminds the reader of the efficacy of a people’s mythology. The gods/deities function as the human idea of things being out of their control. There are three that represent the physical, social, and psychic harmonization of the environment and, according to Soyinka, are the “favorites of poets and dramatists: Ogun, Obatala, and Sango. . . [i]n addition they travel well” (1). The mobility of the(se) *orisha* is the cultural memory connection that West African tradition has with the U. S. by way of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade—the Middle Passage. As an illustration, we might consider how

Soyinka's hierarchy is like an American university⁵⁶. In ascending order, the first level is the world of the ancestors. Their role is to oversee and protect the living and the unborn. The next category is referred to as *orishas*, Ogun and Sango have different histories and responsibilities (power) that neither usurp nor abdicates one another. The histories and responsibilities of Ogun and Sango will be explained in detail in the discussion of "drama of the gods," in the latter part of this chapter.

As a central concern, the analysis of myth and ritual is a means by which the formation of an African world takes shape. This process begins with the establishment of an existence historically. Traditionally, this "establishment" was ancient and oral in nature and told the story of an epic-hero who embodies the ethos of a nation. Moreover, the possession of superhuman qualities and favor of the gods is most important because he is of the people and therefore, become the inspirational motivation of idea that shapes culture and an ideology. Furthermore, the narrative of extraordinary feats is a major stakeholder in constructing an identity that is neither imposed nor marred with tragic encounters and consequences. For Soyinka, this process relies on mythology and literature to continue, "a process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its nonexistence or its irrelevance in contemporary world reality" (xi). The literary genres that engaged here are a hybrid of poetry (epic) and drama—epic drama.

In a quest for the "explication of being" in West African metaphysics, the three deities—Ogun, Obatala, and Sango—represent "the passage-rites of hero-gods" (1). Referred to as "drama of the gods," the purpose of epic drama is to provide a framework in which man's existence and his conscious creativity function in tandem with the traditional society posing its communal questions or articulating its principles in the contemporary moment. The best

approach to the drama of the gods and the setting of ritual is by comparing it to the subgenre of poetry—epic narrative. The hierarchy of their society is laid out by cosmology; therefore, space-time relationships and the natural order of the universe becomes an overwhelming preoccupation. Moreover, “it is the earliest expression of man’s fearful of the cosmic context of his existence” (3). Thus, the idea of “myth arising from man’s attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuition,” is problematic in that it reduces mythology to being arbitrary and speculative; consequently, one is always in a state of reacting (3). Of the three deities, Ogun is the most significant because his of his survival of the Middle Passage to which I parallel to the “fourth area of existence” in which Soyinka “label[s] as the abyss of transition” (26). Ogun’s larger relevance will be discussed in Chapter Three when I delve into my analysis of the plays, where I will argue that Ogun is the Black Atlantic connection between the “Blues Ethos” of the Black Arts Movement and the Yoruban world-view. However, for now, continuing the discussion of ritual drama and Yoruban metaphysics Ogun’s power and history, and the fourth space of existence needs further explaining for me to provide a context and make connections in the forthcoming chapter.

As previously mentioned, I carefully contend that the striking similarities of ritual drama to that of Greek tragedies in part because the storylines and plots are based on myth and centered around which ever god/deity is celebrated, does not mitigate the authenticity and rootedness of ritual dramas. It is this very sentiment of “rootedness” that is the central concern of Soyinka that strategically he uses as a logical and obvious opportunity (his analysis of Négritude) to demonstrate the functionality of ritual dramas, primarily because of the nuanced ways it instructs and teaches the history and beliefs of a community (i.e., tribe, kingdom, or nation-state). Just as

there are similarities between ritual drama and Greek tragedies, it is important to note that there two distinct world-views; the myths of the gods/deity are different which indicates,

that the penalties which societies exact from their deities in reparation for real symbolic injuries are often an index to which the principles of ‘natural’ restitution for societal disharmony may be said to govern the moral structure of that society and influence its social laws (14-15).

Ogun is the most significant deity of the three, despite Obatala’s role in the creation of the orishas. This is important to keep in mind because Obatala, is the only deity, other than Olodumare the Supreme God, who is worshipped directly. Ogun historically represents “the story of completion of Yoruba cosmogony—the coming into being” (26). In addition, he is the “master craftsman and artist, farmer, and warrior”; however, what is most significant is that Ogun is the “essence of destruction and creativity” (27). Furthermore, he is the embodiment of challenge...constantly at the service of society for all its self-realization (30).

In Yoruban metaphysics, Ogun symbolizes the embodiment of the social, communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice (30). Therefore, a function of ritual drama is “drama as cleansing, binding, communal, recreative force, disappears or is reiterated during such periods or with such cultures only by the narrowing of the cosmic whole” (5). Obatala has the function of “moulding human beings,” and Olodumare breathes life into them. Sango is the primal becoming of man, and his racial or social origination, which is historically dated. Ogun represents the ultimate expression of cosmic will; explorer of the fourth dark space where inter-transformation of essence—ideal and materiality; he manifests a temperament for artist creativity matched by technological proficiency (26-28). To pursue this further, this fourth space of inter-transformation is representative of a place where this developing psyche and quest for self-

definition evolves. The never-ending cyclical nature of quantifying some sort of comprehensible essence is one that rejects alien influences and embraces intuitive and communal notions of identity, such as tribal and regional—not European and elitists’ preoccupations of power and monoculturalism. Hence, the next stage of an evolving post-Black psyche is to abandon damages of “whiteness” and all impositions associated with this existence as the byproduct of destroying double-consciousness in colonialism.

Post-Black(ness): Soyinkan ‘Literature’

Situating Wole Soyinka in the conceptual framework as defined by Martin, I will continue my close-reading of Soyinka’s individual essays in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, and interpret them using the ontology of an African identity in the stages Martin describes as—pre, black, post-black and meta-black. This strategy is significant in that it brings some clarity to the manner in which Soyinka destroys the double-consciousness without essentializing Blackness. In this part of my discussion, I will argue the relevance of using drama to demonstrate enactments of what Martin coins as a “post” Black identity, which “is merely a development of self-awareness after an imposition of constructions of “blackness” in opposition to ideas of “whiteness”. At this point it is imperative to articulate the way Soyinka defines the differences between European and African drama. Soyinka succinctly states,

The differences we are seeking to define between European and Africa drama is on man’s formal representation of experience is not simply a difference of style or form, nor is it confined to drama alone. Essential difference between two-worldviews, a difference between on culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by periods of dialects (38).

In other words, it is the stark distinction between “art-for-art’s-sake,” which is beneficial and self-serving for an individual, and “art-for-community’s-sake,” which engages groups of people and is, therefore, inclusive of diversity. Moreover, he defines Western drama as “form of esoteric enterprise spied upon by fee-paying strangers,” and African drama as “a communal evolution of the dramatic mode of expression” (39). There are concerns as well as benefits. Western drama, according to Soyinka, is a rigid, alienating spectacle, a cold environment in that the audiences are quiet and reserved; thus, no real sense of any connection with the context is encouraged. He goes on to say that it is an “[a]bandonment of a belief in culture, define within man’s knowledge of fundamental, unchanging between himself and society.” As for the “fee-paying spies” or the audience, they do not participate beyond attendance. For Soyinka, the “audience is itself integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which first must be conjured up and established” (39). He acknowledges the audience as co-creators in the theatre. Because the audience is a key element in the “ritual” of drama, I argue that Soyinka demonstrates an understanding of avoiding the methods of manufacturing a Black identity that is not reflective of a Black experience, which is one of the failures of Négritude. It is this participation from the “crowd” that signifies a connection and truth telling of, in this context, an African reality. This “connectedness” represents a rootedness in and amongst the people. Négritude’s “audience” was not was the theatregoers/the people; therefore, if it does not include “the people,” it is not concerned with realities in a colonized context.

It is common knowledge that plays are written to be performed; however, what is not common knowledge is the audience’s role—other being attendees. Ritual drama attendees go because of the expectation of participatory scenes, as they become actors, too. However, there

are rules that govern and the audience, in this case, because there is a decorum that is very much organized in the same manner of the oral tradition of call-and-response. Moreover, a *call* must be issued in order to signal the *response*, it is a co-existence and reverence for this creative performance. Soyinka writes,

[Any] individual within the ‘audience’ knows better to add his voice arbitrarily...The ‘spontaneous’ participant within the audience does not vent, which might bring him out as dislocated entity from within the choric mass. If it happens the event is an aberration which may imperil the goals of that representation. The interjector...is quietly led out and the appropriate spells are cast to counter the risks of the abnormal event (38-39).

Moreover, there is some form of “order” and enactments of a “civilized” way in which Africans as theatregoers, experience the theatre that is by no means primitive or offensive. Furthermore, it shapes an African world-view in that it is art that reflects a civilized people who are attempting to make sense of an existence that is contradictory.

For the African, ritual theatre serves as a reminder of a historical existence and a colonized self for which culture alone cannot be the answer. Soyinka says, “Theater is one arena in which man has attempted to come to terms with the special phenomenon of his being” (40). Additionally, it is the most important critique of Négritude, in that; an ideology of cultural nationalism does not permit one access to the realities of a Black, colonized experience—African identity. This strategy of cultural nationalism as an ideology does not beget an empowering image of African people as they are and then show them where they need to go. Therefore, I argue that the special phenomenon is a post-Black identity, which Martin says is an attempt to escape the damage after a Black identity. Likewise, this blackened self is also a racialized body, which is the site of enactments of trauma that are implicit and explicit. This damage is implicit

in that this racialized body has an ontology of a colonized psyche while the explicit is the naming of an imposed self with a date of origin that is ahistoric and an ever-constructed detriment. In other words, this “formalized” body now has the psyche of a colonized individual with an identity that has been accepted by force along with continuous reinforcement who now has a history that does not pre-date colonization but begins with this encounter.

Here is an appropriate place to issue a reminder of the relevance of the theatre as a safe space and the genre of ritual dramas as an event. Keeping in mind Martin’s ideas of “post” Blackness as an “attempt to escape damage,” for Soyinka, “ritual theatre uses all of the instruments of definition to control and render concrete, to parallel the experiences or institutions of man in a disturbing environment he defines variously as a void, emptiness, or infinity” (40). There are a few strategic concerns of this type of theatre that are especially relevant as we consider how the effort to transcend double-consciousness can be understood in ways that do not depend on specific dramatic traditions, places, or social structures; nonetheless are about communal identification and performance: spatial definition and vision, the events that make up the enactments, and symbolic functionality of the physical stage itself. In addition, ritual theatre “aims to reflect through physical and symbolic means, the archetypal struggle of the moral being against exterior forces” (43). These enactments are themselves important because of the ongoing quest of “man’s effort to master the immensity of the cosmos,” in relation to his own understanding of himself (40). This spatial definition that ritual theatre “teaches” its audience to consider, not only helps in one’s understanding of the metaphysical self but also his role in his society. Furthermore, these enactments are “themselves a materialization of this basic adventure of man’s metaphysical self,” in the context of an African world—its views and value systems. What becomes clear at this point as we consider Soyinka’s theory of theatre is the

absence of any apprehension, awareness, or necessity of a racialized body. Instead what happens is the theatre serves as a place where opportunities are presented to reinforce natural or cosmic influences as a phenomenon of *every* man's metaphysical self within conditions of cultural continuity and political necessity; thus, validation of one's humanness.

In addition to the spatial definition and visions of the "event," the stage symbolically becomes the place of metaphysical exploration and communal experience (44). According to Soyinka, "This view of the theatre sees the stage as a constant battleground for forces larger than petty infractions of habitual communal norms or patterns of human relationships and expectations, beyond the actual twists and incidents of action and their resolutions" (44). This marks a significant difference between European and African theatre, according to Soyinka, in that, "the creative man is universally involved in a subtle conspiracy, a tacit understanding that he ... relates the plight of man ... to some vague frameworks of the observable truths and realities" (44).

Meta-Black(ness): The Soyinkan 'African World'

Thus far, the ideas presented have examined Martin's conceptual framework of the evolution of an unnatural preoccupation with identity. This preoccupation with defining an African identity is a by-product of Négritude as a theoretical framework for the articulation of an African world-view. For Martin, the logical outcome for Négritude should have been "the arrival at both an awareness of the irony of a dependent 'black' identity construction and some authentic integration of heritage, an informed, contemporaneous political awareness, and an autonomous implementation of personal identity choice—meta-black(ness)."⁵⁷ In this section, I will articulate Soyinka's stance on the relevance of a social vision that is not a byproduct of an ideology but it is an opportunity to uphold what did work with Négritude—its emphasis on communal self-

identification in antagonism to colonialism—while reconstructing an African world-view that is expansive in scope while rooted in real conditions. In chapters three and four of his text, Soyinka addresses the interplay between “Ideology and the Social Vision.” For him it is twofold: (1) a religious factor and (2) the secular ideal.

In Chapter Three, Soyinka broadens his scope from genre to literature in general. This a logical shift which supports my larger premise which is Martin’s theory of a pre, black, post, and meta black identity. Elsewhere I have addressed and made connections using this same progression: one idea building upon another to exist and evolve without omission of any of the stages. With this established, Martin’s last (for now) ontological category is meta-Black(nesses). He states, “meta-[black] is arriving at some authentic integration of heritage, contemporaneous political awareness, and personal identity choice.”

I argue that this category is where Négritude falls short. Moreover, it is here where for Soyinka, Négritude is more of an ideology with no connections or consideration to the social vision. However, there is another narrative engaged in that it is implicit notion. The term “religious” can very easily be read as “religion”; therefore, allowing a misread or disconnect with Soyinka’s point, which his resistance and opposition to a predictability regarding “what African literature is,” and “who’s reality is privileged,” and more importantly “why”? “Literary history is mostly European,” says Soyinka; therefore, a literary ideology poses a danger, which “is the act of consecration and of course excommunication” (61). As a result, any failure associated with a ideology has a shelf life, thus indicating a permanent end of usefulness—it is discarded. Then what happens is “a new set...is fabricated to contain the current body of literature or to stimulate the next along predetermined pattern” (62). This concern is not a preoccupation of either the traditional or the contemporary writer (insider); however, it is a

preoccupation for the critic (outsider). African literature is not framed around any ideology, Soyinka argues. Moreover, ideologies become oppressive situations when, “putting in strict categories what are essentially fluid operations of the creative mind upon social and natural phenomena—stifles the creative process (61). He does recognize a moment in history where a literary ideology has addressed what Mike Sell says is the “triple-front”. The successful example is Bertolt Brecht’s use of drama as a medium and the theatre as the place to discuss politics and aesthetics—theory and practice. Soyinka observes,

Brecht’s ideology of theatre and dramatic literature is the most successful example because mechanics of creativity into a willful self-regulating domain, irrespective of the burden of statement, it elevates its sights to a regenerative social goal which makes continuing demands on the nature of that ideological medium and prevents its stagnation (63).

In other words, traditionally an ideology does not expand a social vision but it can operate from a ‘power analysis,’ position. Brecht’s Marxist views (the political and economic components) are explicit in his epic dramas (culture and political components) and together it reflects a social vision and literary ideology. Moreover, Brecht’s activism had a significant impact on economics, which empowers a group of people to control the politics and culture. To the contrary, Négritude did not achieve these goals because, as I have stated elsewhere, it did not address the “triple-front” either one-at-a-time or in tandem. (63). Soyinka says, “the role of a writer in our modern African society needs to be a visionary in his own times,” not fall into the perils of “instant-assimilation poetics” (63-65).

In short, a social vision must liberate and demystify misconceptions and historical oppressive narratives of acceptances and contentment of un-African social norms.

Contemporary African writers and the literary ideologies postulated from European literary histories must re-examine “propositions on which man, history, nature and society are posited and interpreted,” especially if it is not entrenched in an African value system (66). African contemporary writing is deep-rooted in the idea of literature “as part of the social activity of man,” as it gives “clues mental conditioning by previous colonial culture or shows the will to break free... in the projection of a future society,” as this is representative of Africa’s contemporary reality (67).

The next critical factor in articulating an African worldview is what Soyinka refers to as “the secular ideal”. He raises the question of racial heritage regarding structure. The notion of a secular ideal challenges temporary status of an existence, in this context it is the (dis)continuation of an identity in crisis. Currently there are two contradictory narratives: an accepted history versus an exhumed reality. The critical concern for Soyinka is the authenticity of Negro⁵⁸ art, defined in terms of its connections to tradition and its pertinence to present conditions. Moreover, what constitutes Negro art, if its culture and history has a “found patent nobility in folklore of mercantile intellectualism?” (100). I observe as indicators of a connection to the U. S. by way of racial heritage and helps define Africa’s significance and intellectual contributions. Hence, logical questions for the contemporary African writers are “what was the authentic genius of the African world before the destructive alien intrusion?” (105). Other than articulating a social vision and, perhaps, a literary ideology, another responsibility of literature is “the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social direction” (105). The importance of recalling an experienced history that is a constructed truth and consequently, shapes an identity that is unstable, and at best requires an awareness that is defined in a

contemporary Africa, has evolved to be a fixed one with race and ethnicity in constant conflict. Soyinka declares,

Failure to see the process of racial retrieval in one comprehensive whole, to see the process of anti-colonialism as one which ends with far greater ramification for society “inept” than the rejection of “one” self-assertive set of value, suggests a lack of faith in, or a half-hearted attempt to rediscover and re-examine the matrix of society that proceeded the violent distortions (108).

For him, it is the aggressive combination of a revision of history that makes conducive the potential of “the re-creation of a pre-colonial African world-view with eliciting its transposable elements,” into a necessary reality (115). Moreover, it is “the secular imagination [that] re-creates existing mythology,” that in turn encompasses “the most esoteric world of symbols, ethics, and values must originate somewhere,” a modern literary aesthetic that is unquestionably African, and secular. Ultimately, literature that is grounded on this premise “differs from others by revealing an adoration of constantly revolving relationships between man and his environment above a rigid pattern of existence mandated by exteriorized deities,” which compromises a confident sense of identification and belonging (125).

Without a doubt, reconsidering why Wole Soyinka, in his response to Négritude, further complicates the problems of essentialism as a strategy to authenticate a Black identity. He explores options to overcome the double-consciousness in the context of colonialism and refutes cultural nationalism as an ideology to help the people see where they are and instruct them of where to need and can go, regarding progress.

Conclusion: Reverence and Rehabilitation

Soyinka's critique of Négritude has been an effective change agent because it compelled African writers and intellectuals to address the "oversimplification" of Senghor's ambitious attempt to offer a cultural model based in literature and enabling political activism. Not having any other examples to follow that were rooted on the continent of Africa, the architects of this movement were inspired and used their interaction with Black American writers, in Europe, to mimic what they perceived as a success for the Harlem Renaissance. However, two oversights of Négritude were (1) they did not have the benefit of living in the United States to observe the differences in folkloric *realities*, bourgeois (mis)representation, and the infighting amongst Black writers and intellectuals and (2) that there must be something or idea in place to give rise to an evolving conception of blackness to account for economic, political, and cultural changes. This is why concepts of authenticity and positionality remain important: "The search for racial identity was conducted by and for a miniscule minority of uprooted individuals, not merely in Paris but in the metropolis of the French colonies" (131). Furthermore, not understanding the plight of Black people and the class dynamic is equal to the expression of "putting a band-aid on a wound that is not present."

In other words, Négritude made conscious for Africans an unnecessary preoccupation—a justified, acceptable existence, "the very seductive notion that they had to commence to search for their Africanness...they were never even aware that it was missing" (131). He says,

The problem is the contrivance of a creative ideology and its falsified basis of identification with the social vision. The vision of restitution and re-engineering of a racial psyche, the establishment of a distinct human entity and glorification of its long-suppressed attributes (126).

The problem here is the reinforcement of an identity that needs to be “named” and an essence that needs to be “controlled.” This has two implicit negatives. The first is tied to the act of *naming* that does not enable, but rather limits through expectations. The second factor is the enactment of naming by those with *privilege*. I argue the privilege associated with naming is that it does not consider or plan for failure by way of criticism, with the consequence that it must be replaced or abandoned altogether or be unreflective of an African world-view. Soyinka addresses this lack of authenticity in naming:

They suggest something which is indeed alien to the African world-view—that there are water tight categories of the creative spirit, that creativity is not one smooth-flowing source of human regeneration. The idea of separating the manifestations of human genius is foreign to the African world-view (131).

In addition to predictability and assimilation, Négritude attempted “to refute the evolution to which black reality that had been subjected, it not only accepted...structure of European ideological confrontations but borrowed...its racists syllogism” (127). I have presented Soyinka’s ideas, in detail at the beginning of this chapter; however, what is not emphasized is his reverence of the vision of Négritude’s architects. He states very clearly, “The vision of Négritude should never be underestimated or belittled” (126).

I will argue in the next chapter, which compares the literary dramatic works of the BAM and Soyinka, that Soyinka takes what Négritude sought to achieve and posits an Africa worldview that embodies an authentic African value system that belong to the people without essentializing race. Moreover, I examine the methods used by both BAM and Soyinka to identify moments of criticisms of critiques as explained by Andrew Sayer and enactments of Blackness. This value system is unlike Senghor’s ideology as “Négritude was the property of the bourgeois-

intellectual elite... a diversionary weapon in the eventual emergence of a national revolutionary struggle wherever the flag-bearers... represent the power-holding elite” (135). Thus, I will continue to develop the idea of a pre, black, post, and meta Black identity that reflects a social vision that drives an ideology, instead of an ideology that defines a social vision. African intellectualism in general, and therefore African attitudes to race and culture, have failed to come to grips with the very foundations of Eurocentric epistemology (136). The fundamental error was one of procedure: Négritude and the Harlem Renaissance stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis of man and society and tried to re-define the African and his society in those externalized terms.

Notes

⁴⁶ Moreover, French *vis-à-vis* Anglo superiority, French language, French cuisine, etc., that is what Africans under French colonization are responding to.

⁴⁷ Haki Madhabuti

⁴⁸ Phrase coined by Gayatri Spivak in the essay, “Can the Sub-Altern Speak?”

⁴⁹ From the critical social science (css) approach of Roy Bhaskar, that is, a realist theory of social science which is critical of the practices which *are* its objects of study, Sayer notes that based Bhaskar’s reconstruction CSS, there is an “implication that we can deduce *ought* from *is*,” and if this in fact true, then social science has emancipatory potential. Moreover, this notion of “emancipatory potential” has limits because there are no alternative methods that lessen the problems than those they replace—no guarantee of improvement (157 and 168).

⁵⁰ Malcolm X embodies the sentiment of the legacies of Martin R. Delaney, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, The Honorable Elijah Muhammed, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Wright.

⁵¹ I am using this term in a diasporic context.

⁵² From the critical social science (css) approach of Roy Bhaskar, that is, a realist theory of social science which is critical of the practices which *are* its objects of study, Sayer notes that based Bhaskar’s reconstruction CSS, there is an “implication that we can deduce *ought* from *is*,” and if this in fact true, then social science has emancipatory potential. Moreover, this notion of “emancipatory potential” has limits because there are no alternative methods that lessen the problems than those they replace—no guarantee of improvement (157 and 168).

⁵³ Martin is a member the Association Internationale des Critiques d’Art (AICA), an international journalistic association of art critics.

⁵⁴ For example, Vai, Temne, Mende, Yoruba, Efik, and etc.

⁵⁵ Martin, Frank. “Pre-Black, Black, Post-Black, and Meta-Black: Art Images and the Politics of Identification.” MWI-Humanities Mellon workshop on Internationalizing the Humanities, Claflin University Lecture Series: The African Diaspora. April 24, 2016.

⁵⁶ Department Chairs, Deans, Provost, and President/Chancellor.

⁵⁷ See Frank Martin’s theories of pre, black, post, and meta-blackness.

⁵⁸ Soyinka’s term for African American people.

CHAPTER THREE

POSITIONING BLACKNESS

Self-Constitutive / Self-Conscious

In this chapter, I will comparatively analyze the literary works of the BAM and Wole Soyinka. Moreover, I will examine the methods used by both BAM writers and Soyinka to identify moments that, as explained by Andrew Sayer, constitute enactments of Blackness. That said, I will focus especially on Soyinka, aiming to isolate instances in his drama that demonstrate that he builds on what Négritude sought to achieve and posits an African worldview that embodies what he sees as an authentic African value system without essentializing race. This value system is unlike Senghor's ideology, as "Négritude was the property of the bourgeois-intellectual elite... a diversionary weapon in the eventual emergence of a national revolutionary struggle wherever the flag-bearers... represent the power-holding elite" (135). Thus, I will continue to develop the idea of a pre-, black-, post-, and meta-Black identity based on the notion that it is a social vision that defines an ideology, instead of an ideology that defines a social vision. African intellectualism in general, and therefore African attitudes to race and culture, have failed to come to grips with the very foundations of Eurocentric epistemology (136). The fundamental error was one of procedure: Négritude stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis of man and society and tried to re-define the African and his society in those externalized terms.

This becomes clear when we position Soyinka in comparison with the Black Arts Movement, using the Black Aesthetic as a critical standard. Within this critical assessment, my goal is to investigate the preceding critical standard—Négritude—in order to determine whether or not Soyinka is either new or nuanced in his interpretation of the African imagination. In doing

so, I will deploy as interpretive strategies three of the core problematics of the BAM—Blackness as a tripartite definition of being, knowledge, and action; Black Aesthetic as theory and praxis of the triple front; and performativity as essence, construct, and imagination. However, in order to articulate this comparative Black/African imagination, I will follow Abiola Irele and begin with language; more specifically, orality.

In Irele's book, *African Imagination*, she says that Soyinka's overarching theme is "...the encounter between the traditional ethos and Western values, between a metaphysical and a historical imperative" (19). Moreover, Soyinka speaks to the rupture in the African consciousness produced by this encounter. Thus, although he is not committed to a specific ideology of Blackness, he has benefited from Négritude's conceptual framework, created in response to that rupture. We see this in many of his works, Irele continues, but particularly in *Death of the King's Horseman*, and most acutely when viewed through the critical frameworks of the Black Aesthetic and Soyinka's neo-Négritude theories of identity and community. Irele claims that, since the African imagination relies primarily on an oral mode, it becomes formulaic in its framework because it is inclusive of speech acts, discursive modes and the structure of thought. Irele writes that *Death and the King's Horseman*

. . . progresses from and immediate realization of orality as the expressive mode of a total way of life to what can only be described within its specific context, as the tragic loss of the empowering function of the word in the universe of the African. (19)

Soyinka does not abandon all of the tenets of Négritude in the play, but most certainly does not commit to the development of an entirely new critical standard, either. Rather, he posits subtle complexities within the circle of Blackness in an attempt to expand and reshape the African imagination—and he does this through spoken language and an affirmation of oral culture. For

Irele, orality serves as a paradigm for the written literature in English. Therefore, in the black diaspora a thematic connection exists even if only because of the reference to a common historical experience and a common mode of expression.

Wole Soyinka was an instrumental writer in the discourse of the Pan-African imagination. He, like many black writers in the U.S. during the BAM, uses consciousness as a reference for self-expression. However, for us to understand the nature of activism and performativity, we must reference staging and Soyinka's anticipation of the audience. The theater has the ability to affect its audiences in ways that other genres of literature do not. The act of witnessing a manifesto as a performance, for example, politicizes the bodies of the audience members as much as their minds. Because the majority of performances require a venue, the locations can also become politicized. As an audience member, any action one makes can become political. Thus, for the African playwright, the act of writing plays that construct the history of a people, that are charged with the task of an accurate representation—is inherently and highly political.

Soyinkan Theatre: *Death and the King's Horseman*

Though Négritude and the Black Arts Movement express two evidently different ideologies, they are ultimately concerned with one key concept, an imagined black identity. Moreover, the quest to develop that concept in art and political action is necessarily fluid; it considers, but is not restricted by class and geographic location. In this section, I will discuss and position Soyinka as a playwright within the critical-theoretical ideologies of the Black Arts Movement, more specifically the Black Aesthetic. In order to accomplish this task, I will also make a brief comparison to BAM playwright Amiri Baraka's 1966 transnational play *Dutchman*,

because of the ways that it parallels what Soyinka attempts in his 1975 play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. Both plays evince a uniquely positional approach to a Black Aesthetic.

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is a one-act play divided into five scenes. The play takes place in Nigeria. The King has died and, according to the Yoruba tradition, when a King dies, several things and persons must be present with him in the afterlife. Elesin is the Horseman of the King. Olunde is Elesin's eldest son, who has been afforded the opportunity to study medicine abroad in England. He has returned home upon receiving the news of the King's death, in order to pay his last respect to his father who must perform a ritual suicide. His father is not contrary to this ritual; he is a willing and dutiful servant of the King, at least up until it is time for him to make good of the tradition. However, he ultimately fails to fulfill his duty, and Olunde takes his place. Humiliated, Elesin commits suicide.

There are two scenes in this play that enable it to be situated meaningfully in respect to the Black Arts Movement's articulation of Blackness. These scenes address a few of the problematics of the Black Arts Movement. The first, regarding the means of articulating Blackness, are evident in respect to the tripartite definition of Blackness—as essence or identity, as a body of knowledge, and a mode of activism. The first occurs in scene four during the dialogue between Olunde, Elesin's eldest son, and Jane Pilkings, the District Officer's wife, and again in scene five during the conversation between Elesin and Simon Pilking, the District Officer.

In scene four, Olunde has returned home from his studies abroad in England. It is revealed later in the play that Mr. and Mrs. Pilkings are the means by which Olunde was afforded his privileged education abroad. Elesin has always been furious about this development, as it breaks a taboo concerning the eldest son being in proximity to the King's Horseman.

However, recognizing both his intelligence and the strategic value of breaking up a politically powerful family, they sent him to England to become a doctor, Elesin recognizing the virtue of his education to the community. Olunde has already told Jane that he has come because he knows that his father must die to be at the King's side in the afterworld. But there is a crucial detail about the ritual: It takes place during a time when Britain is at war and the British are occupying Nigeria. Further, the British Prince is visiting. Olunde finds Jane wearing the costume she intends to wear at the fancy-dress ball to be thrown for the prince. Jane has just finished dancing the tango in the garb of an Egungun, a traditional, sacred Yoruban costume:

OLUNDE. What cause Mrs. Pilkings?

JANE. All this. The ball. And His Highness being here in person and all that.

OLUNDE. (mildly) And that is good cause for you to desecrate an ancestral mask?

JANE. Oh, so you are shocked and after all. How disappointing.

OLUNDE. No I am not shocked, Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand. (158)

In this exchange with Mrs. Pilking, Olunde has alerted her to the following regarding knowledge: One, Jane is among the Yoruba people because her husband is a British government official and, two, her whiteness acts as a veil of blindness to her environment. Simply stated, she lacks the knowledge of the historical and cultural significance of two issues: Olunde's acceptance of his father's position and duty and the spiritual tradition and significance of the Yoruban costume. Soyinka is clever in relaying this sentiment on the behalf of Olunde and his people because he does not have this character iterate who he is and why she has offended their culture. Further, Olune represents both Yoruban and European culture—he knows both thoroughly. In a sense,

Olunde's presence is representational of knowledge through embodiment. He rejects any notion of Jane's idea of him finding a sense of identity with Europeans or in Europe. Olunde sees her ignorance as typical of the British in their attitudes towards the ethnic Other.

During their conversation, the tension grows between Olunde and Jane. To Jane's dismay, Olunde tells her that he has come to bury his father before the people of Nigeria begin to riot. Jane takes offense towards Olunde's attitude towards this ritual that she sees are barbaric. She tells him that her husband's duty is to save his father. She tells Olunde that his father deserves protection. Olunde becomes frustrated and says to Jane,

"How can I make you understand? He *has* protection. No one can undertake what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of peace of mind, in the place of the honour and veneration of his own people?"

(160)

Jane then responds with a bit of sarcasm. She says to him that it seems that he is learning a little more than medicine in England: Olunde has learned logic, which she suggests is something that he could not have learned in Nigeria. Here is where Soyinka imparts a distinct, perhaps even unprecedented image of the African:.

OLUNDE. Yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.

JANE. Not so fast Olunde. You have learnt to argue I can tell that, but I never said that you made sense. However clearly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse—it's feudal! The King dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get! (160)

Olunde responds to Jane by reminding her about the war that is going on while they are debating the rationality of Yoruban rituals. Further, they are having this exchange in preparation for the Prince's ball. Therefore, Olunde asks for her response to the absurdity of her people—the British Prince, celebrating in costume amidst a devastating colonial system and world war. “What name would you give that?” he asks. Jane responds, flippantly, “Therapy. British style. The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos.” Olunde then replies,

Others would call it decadence. However, it doesn't really interest me. You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realized that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way. (160-1)

Jane immediately asks by what means—ritual suicides? Olunde returns with the question, “Is that worse than mass suicide? [...] Of course you have also mastered the art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them.” Then Olunde begins to further expound the fact that, while having these many encounters with the British both in London and in his homeland, he has not seen anything that would or should give them the right to pass judgments on the ways of other peoples. It is here where Soyinka becomes most overtly political and most evidently innovative in his thinking about Blackness.

In *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance*, Tejumola Olaniyan argues that “Soyinka is overinvested at this moment because their political and military power over disparate spaces gave Europe the right to pass judgment on the culture of others” (59). But, in fact, Soyinka uses

Olunde not to express a simple message, but to embody the Yoruban culture on many levels. Specifically, we must attend to more than simply his words—Olaniyan's error—and recognize that his body and performance is also expressive of essence and identity. Jane clearly cannot understand the ritualistic nature of Elesin's suicide. She cannot parallel the actions of the British soldiers' duty at war with that of Olunde's father. Jane has no way of seeing that there is a profound logic behind Olunde's claim that his father's death would be an honorable act—she imagines them as barbaric. Olunde reminds her that she (as an exemplary British person) cannot judge something that she does not acknowledge as human or humane if she has imagined the African as barbaric. And he does that in her presence, forcing her to consider not only his words, but his presence as a confident black man, fully in control of his mind and body.

The next encounter between black and white takes place in the final scene of the play. This conversation takes place after Elesin is detained as a means to prevent him from committing ritual suicide, though unbeknownst to most everyone, he submitted willingly. Pilkings arrests Elesin because he thinks that he is saving his life; moreover, he is saving him from himself. He does not realize what his act has done to the fate of the Yoruban people Elesin represents. His body is to be sacrificed for the good of his people. That is the honorable thing for Elesin because it is his destiny to serve the King. In serving the King in death, he ensures the prosperity of the people. At this point in the play, Elesin tries to gain understanding from Pilkings. He tries to help Pilkings understand the grave error he has made by trying to prevent him from his destiny.

ELESIN. The night is not at peace, District Officer.

PILKINGS. No? I would have said it was. You know, quiet...

ELESIN. And does quiet mean peace for you?

PILKINGS. Well nearly the same thing. Naturally there is a subtle difference...

ELESIN. The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world forever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.

(166)

In this scene, Soyinka integrates elements of myth and truth into Yoruban cosmology.

According to Maduakor, “Soyinka’s style of writing uses myth to capture a people’s worldview and the moral system of that worldview as reflected in the stories of the origin of the world, of gods, and of men” (307).

Later in the same scene, Pilkings and Elesin discuss their ideas about responsibility and duty. As they begin to talk, it is clear that Pilkings holds his position with a higher regard, even though their jobs parallel one another. Both of their loyalties lie with a king. However, Pilkings does not care to understand Elesin’s rationale about performing his duty to a King who no longer rules because he is dead. Then, the conversation addresses Elesin’s forgiveness of Pilkings for taken his eldest son, not only from him, but also from his tradition. He makes him aware of his tendencies to interfere and be disrespectful in ways that are beyond his comprehension because he lacks the essence and knowledge. His activism is to the detriment of a nation of people both present and absent in body:

PILKINGS. Well, I did my duty as I saw it. I have no regrets.

ELESIN. No. The regrets of life always come later.

. . . .

PILKINGS. I’m sorry, but we see our duty differently.

ELESIN. I no longer blame you. You stole from me my first-born, sent him to your country so you could turn him into something in your own image. Did you plan it all beforehand? There are moments when it seems part of a larger plan. He who

must follow my footsteps is taken from me, sent across the ocean. Then. In turn, I am stopped from fulfilling my destiny. Did you think it all out before, this plan to push our world from its course and sever the cord that links us to the great origin?

(167)

In this passage, Elesin makes the connections regarding the significance of the order of things in Yoruban culture. Not only does he explain that order using logic, but also Elesin stands as an example of the very criticism Soyinka wages against Négritudists, revealing both the similarities between African and European cultures but also the political factors that have produced authentic differences. Both Elesin and Olunde have no need to state the obvious—they are black and they are African. However, as the play comes to a tragic end, because of the role that whiteness plays—as an interruption of time and space. Just before he kills himself, Elesin tells Pilkings of this present moment in the history of his people, that he has changed their fate. As Elesin has this conversation with Pilkings, what is noticeable is Soyinka's critique of whiteness and the African image. Elesin tells Pilkings in this passage that when you disrupt the motion of history, man is no longer one with nature—in my terms, is no longer essentially Black. Thus, this moment echoes one of the tenets of the BAM, “the light is black.” It is Blackness in the context of all things absorbed, not just a color or a historical heritage. It is all things absorbed, even those that come from the supposed Other, Europe. According to Abiola Irele, this action marks the significance of a “progressive decentering of the African psyche and imagination in a new dispensation that is imposing itself upon the African world” (19).

Because Elesin does not commit ritual suicide, he finds out that his eldest son Olunde has sacrificed himself to save his community. In *The Writings of Soyinka*, Eldred Jones says because Elesin's will is tested, he has betrayed history. Therefore, Olunde will accompany the King:

“The tragedy is that of a man faced with responsibility which tax human powers to their limit and collapses under weight” (129). Jones also informs us of the third part of Yoruba cosmology. He says that in uncertainty lies the hope of the community. “There is also some indication of strength of the community in the voluntary return of Olunde to assume his traditional responsibility on the death of his father, but even more in his readiness to take his father’s place in death when the latter’s will crumble” (130). Although there is no noticeable sexual tension between Jane and Olunde, she does assume that she knows him as a type. Jane insults his intellectual capabilities regarding his knowledge of self. Soyinkan scholar, Eldred Jones says, “Soyinka is not a committed; not committed to any ideology... his characters and mannerisms are African” (12). Soyinka uses the character Jane as a nemesis of Négritudists. Jane tries to make Olunde profess his Africaness by articulating the words, “I am a proud African!” However, he resists the urge despite the pressure from Jane. He maintains his Blackness in that her whiteness does not collapse his embodiment. In fact, Olunde challenges Jane to re-think *her* existence in Africa and her imagination, from outside of the African peoples, now that she is within their space.

BAM and Barakan Theatre: *Dutchman*

Baraka’s best-known play is *Dutchman*. Among the reasons for its fame is that the characters Clay and Lula are symbolic of the Black experience in an American (U.S.) context. Clay is a twenty-year-old Black man who, while utterly individual, is also an allegorical presence, as his body represents a history that is both imagined and real. His name suggests this, as it means both *made* and *human*. Clay’s antagonist is Lula, who is ten years older, also individual, yet serves as an allegory too, as her name means a “lil’ lie.” She represents the belief of America’s failure to both understand and respect Black people. I read the relationship between

Clay and Lula in terms of their bodies; that is, Lula being older is symbolic of an “existing body” and Clay is a “foreign body” that requires a diagnosis or needs to be identifiable—identified, for “treatment” in order to be contained. Thus, she embodies the false promises as articulated in *The Declaration of Independence*, which we read of “...truths to be self-evident, all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” This is evident at the conclusion of the play, at which point it is revealed that Lula is not a normal human, but a kind of demon, riding a mythical subway and enticing young Black men to their deaths.

The character Lula, first as a white woman and then as a cosmic spirit, is a temptress, luring Clay to submit to her sexual will while pushing his temper to its limits. She achieves this task by issuing one verbal assault after the next, while sending sexually explicit messages towards him. I would argue that Lula represents more than just a figure of white society; she also represents the white spectator. As the African-American philosopher William R. Jones explains, if we identify that an author is Black, i.e. a member of a particular ethnic community, then we are implying “that his primary, but not exclusive, audience is the black community, that the point of departure for his philosophizing or the tradition from which he speaks...can be called in some sense the black experience.” Therefore, to call for a Black Aesthetic—and to attempt to unify African-American and African theorists and artists within it—is to offer an implicit attack on racist and nationally limited representations of the Black experience, especially in their conceptual, institutional and commercial expressions. It is precisely in this entangled relationship between Lula and Clay that we find this theoretical idea put into dramatic form. *Dutchman*, one of his early works, marks the beginning of Baraka’s method of using “criticism as the object of the critique itself.” For example, Sayer notes that “criticism becomes a critique

when we not only show that certain beliefs are false but explain why they are held and what produces them” (159). It is on this subway, this contemporary lost ship, that Baraka shows exactly that.

Form and Mode

There have been a few observations made regarding Baraka’s characterization of Lula regarding her “hyena-like” behavior. She tells Clay that her name is “Lena the Hyena,” and shortly thereafter tells Clay that his name is “Morris the Hyena.” My close read of *Dutchman* uncovers the attention and regard Baraka has for Western standard in literature and genre in two distinct areas: form and mode. The irony here is that one of the major tenets of BAM is to reject all things or ideas that represent white or whiteness in any manifestation. However, Baraka demonstrates his mastery of a literary device: controlling an extended metaphor. I argue that two of these—and they are both vital to understanding how Baraka represents and enacts Blackness—are the characterization of Lula as a hyena and the title of the play *Dutchman*—“a tribe and its voice.”

1. Hungry for Knowledge

As Genesis tells it,

In the beginning, God made man in his image and named him Adam. He was given dominion over the animals and land. In fact, God bequeath Adam with power of naming all the animals in The Garden of Eden. In post=colonial discourse, the act of naming bestows power and control of that which is named. Eventually God made Eve as a helpmate because Adam expressed loneliness. Adam and Eve were endowed with the gift of logic and reason; thus, positioning man to rule over animals and in return He asked that they not eat any of the fruit from The Tree of Knowledge.”

In the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis, there is not a specificity offered regarding the type of knowledge that the tree provided its consumers. But the accepted truth has been defined that it was an apple that Eve took from The Tree of Knowledge, upon the suggestion of one of the reptiles Adam assigned with the name “serpent.” I argue that it was this act of disobedience—Eve eating the apple—that gives her power. However, I am not claiming that Eve had a motive, but more so, she became aware of events happening around her and ultimately given the power of creation. From this narrative, the symbols: apple(red), the serpent, good and evil, and concepts of deception, and disobedience. In addition, women were held accountable as Eve was obligated to Adam’s will. Baraka’s use of the “original sin” of Eve’s disobedience and illegitimate power is used as an extended metaphor to add a layer of complexity to the racialized relationship of Clay and Lula.

Lula operates from a position of power, while Clay, true to his name (and the Judeo-Christian myth of man’s creation) is to be shaped and reshaped. Baraka further layers the extended metaphor of Adam and Eve, along with the symbol of the red apple and the concept of sex as power. The power in *Dutchman*, however, belongs to Lula characterized as a fem fatale, who exercises her domination of Clay, who is young and somewhat vulnerable, like an animal on the hunt for prey. Lula’s name means “lil lie,” as I mentioned earlier, represents her deceptive intents and because she is described as having long hair the same color as an apple, which she devours and occasionally offers to Clay, while on the train. Understanding these extended metaphors will help us to understand the non-essentialist, located, performative understanding of Blackness that the play communicates.

1.2 The Laughing Predator

In my efforts to resist discussing these devices as the examples appear chronologically, I will begin with Lula being depicted as non-human in that her mannerisms are that of a wild animal, the hyena, that is a member of a complex and overtly deceptive social system. It is important to acknowledge the allegory of the hyena in literature and folklore, as it is from the West African region. Traditionally, the hyena is understood to denote negative traits such as “dirty habits, immorality, and the reversal of normal activities,” all of which can be observed in Lula’s presence from the time she boards the train until the end when she has lured her prey to her marked territory—the tenement. Lula is clever and effectively deceptive in that, although Clay, her prey, is college educated, he has no clue that, as she enters the train and spots him, that Lula has initiated what scientist observe as the hyenas’ greeting ceremony. This ritual accomplishes two things: demonstrates her high level of intelligence attributed to the hyena and arouses both Lula and Clay; thus, sexual tension is visible between the two, and her dominance will be realized as she is in complete control of him.

However, though animalistic, it is also mythical. This event can be compared as well to the biblical image of Eve enticing Adam in the Garden of Eden by offering him fruit, an apple, from the Tree of Knowledge. Although Lula does appear before Clay eating her apples and then offering to share with him in more than one instance during their encounter, I argue that what Baraka does is offer an allegory of deception as an accompaniment to the extended metaphor to add depth and challenge the audience to decide what truth is. Moreover, there is a duality in the narrative that lends itself to misreads and interpretations of the relevance of the mistake made by Adam and Eve, and the complexity of an animal on the hunt, like the hyena, whose appearance is confusing from a distance (feline or canine), making it difficult to discern the method of attack

and possibility of survival of its unsuspecting prey. In other words, we see here Baraka blending two extended metaphors, one rooted in African tradition, the other in the Judeo-Christian, both of them alerting us to Lula's dangers.

As a hyena, Lula does two things: lies and laughs. She reminds Clay in Scene 1 three times that she lies "a lot," "told you," to "always" and again in Scene 2, the frequency grows to "all the time." This behavior demonstrates Lula's/hyena's can be effectively cunning as they lie when they do not want to share food. Indeed, it is her lies—particularly when she claims to know about black sexuality—that provokes him to respond to her with violence. But even when he attacks, he is still powerless. But it is her laughs that have sensitized him to her lies. Lula laughs throughout the play: "loudly and cutting it off abruptly," "uncrossing and, re crossing her legs," "continuing to laugh, perhaps more gently than before," "[b]ites and giggles, glancing at Clay," "[l]aughing and going into her bag," and "she howls with laughter." But one might argue that, even when not obviously laughing, she continues to use her voice to provoke. Baraka describes her voice variously: "sharp city coarseness of her voice, which is still a kind of gentle sidewalk throb," "speaking in loose sing-song," "Lula almost shrieks," "[h]er voice darkening with significance," "[s]he yells as loud as she can," and "Bursting out laughing but too shrilly."

1.3 Out to Dinner

Thus far, I have examined Baraka's use of extended metaphor and controlled metaphor in *Dutchman*. I argued that the extended metaphor the "Sin of Adam," parallels the encounter between Clay and Lula, on a train in the subway. This literary device is easy to identify; however, the function of the metaphor is as support that advances the larger, clever move to identifying the controlling metaphor of the spotted female hyena who is on the hunt with the much younger male "Morris the Hyena" as "Lena the Hyena's," intended *kill*. I maintain that it is

Baraka's choice to use an animal who is an "opportunistic and a proficient hunter," lead by aggressive females who specialize in "social and sexual domination," as a symbol of hegemonic elements of whiteness in America (US), to help the audience understand the violent possibilities associated with oppression, Blackness, and powerlessness during the 1960s and 70s.

1.4 Extended Melodies and Controlling Harmonies

In this section, I have deconstructed and analyzed the interplay between Clay and Lula. I have considered the parallels of Lula to Eve, in addition to her characterized as a spotted hyena simultaneously. She also symbolizes Baraka's attitude towards the historically animal-like behavior of America and her oppressive treatment of Black people, especially the Black male. His clever use of the following literary devices (1) the controlling metaphor of Lula as a sexually and socially dominate predatory animal; (2) an extended metaphor as Eve who is the afforded the power of creation, like Adam, and the consciousness of self at the moment she bites into and shares the apple with Adam; (3) the allusion to Snow White and her consumption of a poisonous red apple; and (4) the allusion of her home as "Juliet's tomb," and the idea of Clay experiencing a double-death.

The *Dutchman*, is revolutionary, I contend, because of how his play executes a complex interweaving of the controlling metaphor as the melody of this play and infuses the extended metaphor and allusions to serve as the harmony. This technique advances a politically charge message thus creating the aural textures of the blues. I argue the performance of this play enables the audience to witness and experience the anxiety Clay feels upon his encounter with whiteness, deception, entrapment and ultimately killed spiritually, and socially by Lula who represents white privilege. Moreover, she becomes the reality of a truth that is "the lie." Clay's body then becomes the blues of Black people living in a racist America. Therefore, the

Dutchman is Baraka's attempt at depicting status of Black life as it is now, and shows white audiences how they operate to maintain control and the possibilities of Blackness evolving to inspire Black people.

Fanon: The Connective Tissue

To understand the function of violence in *Dutchman* and *Death and the King's Horseman* it is useful to turn to the work of Frantz Fanon and, especially, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o are instructive. Of course, there are other writers who have discussed the contingency of Black revolutionary consciousness. Among those who directly influenced the BAM is Jahn Janheinz. In *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing*, he discusses the notion of being torn between two diverging trends: assimilation and Black Nationalism. More recently, Robin D.G. Kelly in *Freedom Dreams* and Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* have addressed the ways that radical conceptions of Blackness diverge from typical understandings of Black identity and Black revolutionary politics. Writers like these provide ways of thinking about how power and subversion in colonized societies further complicates the embodiment of time and space within African drama and aesthetic experimentalism. Historically, this problematic does not recognize that the categories being used themselves are part of the problem and the implications of limiting the approach to the aesthetics and political is critical in the analysis of how western ideologies and theatrical representation can be theorized within the Black Aesthetic.

Fanon notes in "On National Culture" that, as a result of the inability to exist side by side with the Europeans culture, the colonial structure fails when he (the colonized) "decides to lose himself and go back to his own side, but also stands as a symbol for the uselessness and shallowness of all the work that has been accomplished" (420). Moreover, this self-reflexive moment comes to fruition in three phases: the native intellectual gives proof that he has

assimilated the culture of the occupying power. Next, the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. Last is the fighting phase. The native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people (421).

But this raises a significant problem regarding the relationship of the Black person to the structures of power that govern their existence. Ngũgĩ states that, “[w]ith the emergence of the state, the artist and the state become not only rivals in articulating the laws, moral or formal, that regulate life in society, but also rivals in determining the manner and of their delivery” (434). In his article, “Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space,” Ngũgĩ makes it clear that the conflict between art and state is power. With art, the power lies in the performance and with the state, it lies in the way it performs power. This becomes problematic because the state and art have contrasting meanings of space, content, goals of performance. However, the one thing they have in common is—the audience as their target. Moreover, this struggle manifests itself in the politicization of performance space. He elaborates on two other ways of conceiving and deploying performance space; however, the one that is most problematic is the way in which this space relates to time, “in terms that is, of what has gone before-history-and what could follow—the future.” This is intriguing because of his mention of the memories that space has the ability to generate. Ngũgĩ’s argument is that the complexity of performance space is to be found “the interplay internal, external relations of these forces in the context of geography, time, and history” (437).

In *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters*, Olakunle George argues, “Ngũgĩ seeks to show the struggles of the proletariat, a positive representation of the authentic laboring masses. Two authenticities, it seems, are vying for primacy: on the one hand a unanimist African authenticity and on the other, an equally unanimist class authenticity” (95). Moreover,

as a writer, Ngũgĩ justifies his position on the issue of language and the politics proper to it has important problems. In order to break the hegemonic forces of Europe, he urges African writers to return to their native languages and to develop a literary tradition in the indigenous languages and the ongoing struggle for Africa's emancipation from the ravages of transactional capitalism (95). Furthermore, with regard to Ngũgĩ, George asserts that

[h]e leaves the realm of abstract-universal theory and tries to concentrate on what specific historical context might teach us about such issues as cultural-political struggle, the way human communities create discourses (academic, literary, as well as popular) to understand and represent their world—in other words discursive agency (74).

In *Decolonizing Mind*, Ngũgĩ distinguishes two functions of language: as communication and as carrier of culture. In this case, the latter is most important because language is a colonizer's means of ideological enslavement. Furthermore, it cannot "carry" the full measure of the reality of the colonized. Language is that construct in which the history of a collective, its conflicts and ruptures, are manifested. It also identifies the individual's location in society and the sense of who one is and can be in relation to a particular society. All these things are bound up in the cultural basis of language.

There is then the notion that, even if the separation from one's home place is trying to be achieved at some point, that connection, even if through language, is not lost. And this is where we can connect Fanon to Ngũgĩ and, as a consequence, both to the critical, performative conception of Blackness that links Baraka and Soyinka. In revisiting the influence that Fanon has on Ngũgĩ, authors Mazuri and Mphande discuss Fanonian ideology in the essay, "Orality and the Literature of Combat: The Legacy of Fanon." They argue first that it is the author's personal experiences that dictate his view and connection of home. This is a twofold idea: The first is the

connection that he makes in his mobility of home. The other is not only his personal memories, but also the memories of others that he chooses to use in his text. These connections that he makes within his own life and those around him lead to the effort of collective memory of a group of people. He takes home country as a landscape with him to re-create a new identity which allows him to be revision history. Thus, home like history is fluid, never consistent, but always being shaped in the construction of new memories. This is relevant because of the idea of what it means to construct and perform “Africanness” without the imprint of “Europeaness.”

Because Ngũgĩ ascribes to the teachings of Fanon in all of his latter more mature works, it is appropriate to examine how language functions. According to Fanon, in acknowledging the impact that Western thought has on other literary traditions, it would be a fallacy to overlook the significant indigenous or oral contributions. Fanon says, “This phenomenon begins with a stage of attempted assimilation into the culture of the oppressor, in which the writer is completely inspired by the aesthetics of European creative writing” (230). As a result, Fanon observes that, as the native writer matures, he turns back to his own and rejects the target audiences of his oppressor, and seeks to address his or her own people. In redefining his audience, Ngũgĩ now writes using his native language. It is this redefinition of the audience (of his home place) that Fanon calls a “creation of a completely new public, which necessarily disrupts the entire vocation of literary creation” (231). In Fanon’s conception, a national literature may be called “literature of combat,” in a sense that, “it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation.” This sentiment reinforces the urgency that comes across to the audience in Ngũgĩ’s plays.

First, Micheal Ehterton’s explanation of the Négritude movement helped to shape the context of Ngũgĩ et al., with respect to the development of African Drama. Next, Frantz Fanon’s

ideological influence on Ngũgĩ helped in my understanding of the maturation process of an intellectual. In addition, resistance and combat literature of African letters is rich with information and underrepresented globally. Finally, the notion that it is impossible to derive any conclusive answers to a struggle that is ongoing.

Again, George introduces the idea of agency-in-motion. This agency includes language and its fundamental uses to negotiate power. However, regarding modernity and African letters, it is actively engaged as previously stated. The theater has the ability to affect its audiences in ways that other genres of literature do not. The act of witnessing a manifesto as a performance politicizes the bodies of the audience members. Because the majority of performances require a venue, the locations become political. As an audience member, any action you make is then political. Thus, for the African playwright, the act of writing plays that construct the history of a people, therefore charged with the task of an accurate representation—is highly political. And it is in this very act of writing texts that are incomplete—awaiting bodies to perform their sounds and movement—that these texts become political and historical, both describing an essential Blackness and a Blackness-as-imagined-future. This is what ultimately ties Baraka and Soyinka.

AFTERWARD

As mentioned in the introduction, this research studies the similarities between two distinct cultural entities that occurred at roughly the same time: the United States-based Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the career of African writer and political activist Wole Soyinka. Moreover, a study of a study. These similarities are intriguing because, despite there being no discernible paths of influence, Soyinka and the BAM represent parallel developments concerning four key issues that shaped their effort to destroy the hegemony of white supremacy: (1) critical perspectives on essentialism, (2) commitment to the oppressed, (3) innovative leadership, and (4) use of theatre.

The BAM represented a particular ideological critique of U.S. civil society. As the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power Movement (as Larry Neal put it), it sought to achieve a traditional avant-garde goal—to change literature and therefore life. First, the Black Arts Movement offers a vision of people’s art. Especially in theatre, writers like Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Ed Bullins, and Adrienne Kennedy presented art as reflecting and analyzing the lives of Black people, particularly African Americans living in cities. Second, participants in the BAM offered a vision of a just civil society. Here, art plays a seminal role in voicing the right of African Americans to self-determination. Implicit in the BAM is a leadership strategy that moves from a “victim analysis” approach that prescribes predetermined solutions and ideas to *fix* the person, community, or situation based on the individual’s belief of what is *right* or *best*. Instead they used a “power analysis” approach, which uses the people’s *empowerment* to determine what is *best* for the collective then responds to those ideas to facilitate change that improves the situation, when addressing institutionalized racism, by engaging in cultural struggle, the BAM contested state power in the United States polity.

Soyinka's greatest inspiration comes from the religion, culture and worldview of the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria to which he belongs, and his ideological and social vision is oriented towards social and political issues in Nigeria and Africa. For Soyinka, cultural productions must be political; aesthetics cannot be divorced from politics. This conception of the aesthetic represents the hallmark of Soyinkan theatre. Like the BAM artists, he uses drama to address significant socio-political and cultural issues affecting Black people in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The analysis is primarily focused on the socio-political themes within his plays. These plays examine how multiple Black identities or "Blacknesses" engage with bourgeois European modernity. Their texts have led to wide acknowledgement of the Black Atlantic opening up the exploration of the international connections with greater depth, to imagine this relationship in a more comprehensive, fluid, creative and objective framework. The Black Atlantic as a spatial formation can be transmuted into a paradigm for analyzing the myriad practices emerging from the African Diaspora in modernity.

Future directions for comparative diasporic work would be (1) focusing on "black internationalism" as the point of departure for such a comparative investigation functions; (2) further discussion of the influence of Frantz Fanon and the understudied criticisms forwarded by Larry Neal will be fruitful; and, (3) the comparative study of Wole Soyinka's play and Amiri Baraka's play, both whom have been refashioned it to work well in another literary genre—film, should be given serious consideration.

Another critical source of information to be integrated into my interests would be the analysis of other scholarly publications that articulate a Black aesthetic and the ideology of Black Nationalism, such as (1) "The Black Scholar Journal of Black Studies and Research" and (2) "Negro Digest-Black World" publications from about 1964-1980. In addition, to reading

laterally about the BAM artists and writers via multi-mediums, there is also a rich collection of the works published during the Harlem Renaissance that has been complied by Cary Wintz. His multi-volume texts allow one to also read the Harlem Renaissance laterally, along with understanding the influence of Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar as precursors giving rise to the Harlem Renaissance.

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