

BLACK MILITANT THEATRE: PURIFICATORY RITUALS OR LIBERATORY VIOLENCE?

Samy Azouz

Assistant Professor, department of English, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences,
University of Kairouan, Tunisia.

ABSTRACT: *Amiri Baraka's pre-nationalist and nationalist plays such as Dutchman and Experimental Death Unit # 1 largely incorporates scenes of murder and violence. The cadaverous permeates Baraka's stage. There is a whole sacrificial system that determines the characters' ultimate destinies and lives. This mechanism operates not merely to bring death to those who betray the national black liberation cause, but also to castigate those holders of the slave mentality and chastise the assimilationists who hide behind a white mask. This sacrificial mechanism functions as a generator of purification to cleanse the black community from the vestiges of black docility. In the Marxist plays, violence and murder take the form of political assassination. A play such as The Motion of History displays the dynamics of political struggle that conditions the kind of murder or acts of killings. Whereas in the nationalist plays murder is effected for purificatory goals, in the Marxist plays the intersection between political struggle and the official repression of the state determines the shape of physical elimination for political motives. The neutralization of political opponents assumes that murder is simply a means of exclusion from the political arena and restoration of political and social stability. Because agitation is detrimental to social peace and political order, systemic violence takes a bloody dimension and approximates bloodshed. This paper seeks to highlight the prevalence and, in Frantz Fanon's phrase, the instrumentality of violence as an absolute praxis in Baraka's dramatic works. Violence marshals then a new equation of asserted subjectivity.*

KEYWORDS: violence, murder, victimization, oppression, struggle

INTRODUCTION

When Breaking away from the surrealist theatre, Antonin Artaud contrived and developed his ideas about the theatre of cruelty. For Artaud theatre is not merely mimicry or onstage physical action. Describing Artaud's theatre, Nathan Gorelick says that it is a theatre that "wakes us up. Nerves and heart," and within which the audience experiences "immediate violent action" (*Life in Excess* 263). The impact of Artaud's theatre of cruelty can most clearly be seen in the theatrical writings of Jean Genet, a post World War II pioneering dramatist. Pericles Lewis argues that Genet's plays picture murder and oppression to underscore the damaging repercussions and suffering caused by political subjugation (*Introduction* 200). Bertolt Brecht in his Epic Theatre just like Augusto Boal in his Theatre of the Oppressed envisioned resistance,

struggling and violent action to transform the gritty realities of exploitative capitalism and social injustice.

Amiri Baraka's "Revolutionary Theatre" seems to be derived from Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Harry Elam notes that "in a manner similar to Antonin Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty, Baraka bombards his audience with violent, cruel images" (*Taking* 93). Baraka in his 1964 theatrical manifesto declares: "The Revolutionary Theatre must teach white people their deaths" (Theatre 211). He goes further and announces that the Revolutionary Theatre "is a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fat-bellied white guys" (Theatre 212). Baraka's manifesto is nothing than a incendiary call for an utter ideological and aesthetic insurrection throughout the theatrical establishment. By the year 1965, after his move to Harlem, Baraka's dramaturgy became mostly preoccupied by a kill or be killed mentality. "We must see that work gets done," Baraka states, "Now. We will die with (or at the hands of) white people, otherwise" (*Raise* 19). Invoking killing and murder, Baraka declares: "To be an American, one must be a murderer. A white murderer of colored people" (Baraka 39). Needless to say that killing, murdering, and blood spitting are characteristic of the violence Baraka shows on his nationalist stage and Marxist theatre.

Baraka's pre-nationalist and nationalist plays seem to largely include scenes of killing, murder, and assassination. The cadaverous and the deathly permeate Baraka's stage. There is a whole sacrificial system that determines the characters' ultimate destinies and lives. This sacrificial mechanism predominates throughout Baraka's plays. This mechanism operates not merely to bring death to those who betray the national black cause, but also to castigate and chastise those holders of the 'slave mentality' and the assimilationists who hide behind a white facet. Moreover, the sacrificial mechanism functions as a generator of purification and catharsis to cleanse the black community from the vestiges of black docility and subservency. In urgent times of black revolution and cultural rebirth, the black community must expurgate itself from those impure or polluted elements or individuals who pose a threat to the incipient black consciousness. Immolation is then inevitable. Blood must be shed, so that the black world order may reign and gain ground. This is always true in Baraka's nationalist plays. Murder, whether symbolic or literal, becomes operative along with a vague of violence that targets its counterpart: oppressive violence.

DISCUSSION

In *Dutchman*, Clay is murdered because he denies his blackness and obliterates his black identity. Complacent with his status as a black middle-class man reveling in the merits of integration and intellectual consensus, Clay detaches himself from the black values. Clay, actually, forfeits those vital elements proffered by black culture and black lore. Consequently, he falls prey to Lula's odd fancies and perverted logic. In this sense, Clay is seen to be allured to his death by Lula's dazzling whiteness and stupefying beauty. Clay, the culturally assimilated, is led to demise by the Bitch/Goddess's sexual barter

and deliberate erotic innuendos. Lula, a vampire-like figure, is bent on deciding Clay's last breath and subsequent entombment. Lula seems to be driven by some devilish compulsion, for she anticipates Clay's death at her hands at the end of the play.

Baraka provides some clues that might lead to infer the ineluctability of Clay's sacrifice. Lula alludes to Clay's murder in her various utterances which translate her murderous philosophy. At the outset of Act II she hints at the fact that Clay would be her scapegoat. She deliberately refers to Clay as her prey. Clay seems to preserve his naïve naturalness and innocence. He is Lula's puppet manipulated throughout until his death. Because Clay is her potential crucified Christ-figure, Lula calls him at the end of act one "My Christ. My Christ" (20). Lula's demonic impulses are established. In order to survive and preserve the image of white preeminence, she must be a bloodsucker. Black America must yield to the racial myth of white superiority. And if he rises to resist her or denies her prestige, his life is doomed. In both cases, Clay is sacrificed. Neither assimilation nor resistance could save Clay. Everything is predetermined and planned ahead. In this context Sollors states that "for Lula, too, has been transformed from the omniscient Bohemian into an incorporation of everything that is murderous in white Western society. An agent of repression, Lula must crucify Christ, must silence Clay in order to bring the Dutchman ritual to an end" (*Populist Modernism* 128).

In the throes of her ghoulish fantasies and psychic malady Lula, seemingly enough, projects images of death, graves, and extinction of human life. She makes of herself the fatal suitor. She herself seems to be in the grip of death or some dark forces. After the party is over, she tells Clay that she will take him to her room which is as "black as a grave," a room Clay will describe "like Juliet's tomb" (*Dutchman* 26). Lula's scheme of murder seems incontestable and veritable. From this point onward, Lula's lethal personal attributes are emphasized. Action is further pushed. Lula now speaks ambiguously about Clay's claim to keep her alive. Puzzled, he asks her: "keeps you alive? I don't understand" (27). In a fit of anger, Clay shouts: CLAY. Morbid. Morbid. You sure you're not an actress? All the self-aggrandizement.

LULA. Well, I told you I wasn't an actress... but I also told you I lie all the time. Draw your own conclusions.

CLAY. Morbid. Morbid. You sure you're not an actress? All scribed? There's no more? (Baraka 27)

Etymologically "morbid" is connected to morbus (disease) and mori (to die). The word "morbid" refers then to death. Clay uses another keyword (scribed) which implies that his story with Lula is predetermined, recorded in the register of death.

In the phase of reversal of the situation or what Aristotle terms as 'a change by which the action veers round to its opposite' (*Poetics* 34), Clay threatens

Lula with murder. This reversal is actually induced and coincides with what Aristotle labels “recognition” or “change from ignorance to knowledge” (Aristotle 34). In his verbal reprisal, Clay seems to adhere to the logic of violence in order to counter Lula’s claims about his manhood and self-identity. Violence seems his utmost asset. And violence alone will allow Clay to rediscover pride and dignity. Clay’s violence is liberatory, because it will ward off his passivity and inaction. It will thus spark off his desire to act. Logically, violence may implicate murder. But it remains an absolute drastic praxis. In this respect, Frantz Fanon in *Les Damnés de la Terre* explicates:

Cette violence représente la praxis absolue. La violence assumée permet à la fois aux égarés et aux proscrits du groupe de revenir, de retrouver leur place, de réintégrer. La violence est ainsi comprise comme la médiation royale. L’homme colonisé se libère dans et par la violence. Cette praxis illumine l’agent parce qu’elle lui indique les moyens et la fin. (82-83)

Clay, apparently, seems to construe art as an act of sublimation of violent emotions and murderous proclivities. And that is why Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker perform their art in coded language with covert intentions. Clay inverts Wright’s Bigger Thomas conception of the act of murder; while Bigger Thomas considers the act of murder as a perverted form of creation, Clays conceives art as a neurosis or more accurately as a neurotic perversion of violence. In this regard, Clay points out that only violence could regain the black man’s sanity and psychic health:

And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder. Simple as that. I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would begin to understand me. You understand? No. I guess not. If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn’t have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane. (*Dutchman* 35)

The question is: who will take the lead to murder the other Clay or Lula? The answer can be summed up in posing one other question: who will initiate the first fatal strike?

The only way to recapture one’s sanity is through violence and murder. Obviously, the black Baudelaire is determined to strike first. Instead of being a victim of hers, Clay intends to victimize Lula by neutralizing her power of doing harm. This is at least apparent in his last statements. Clay’s speech actually reaches its acme, when he outlines Lula’s death at his hands. Clay is one of the ‘coons’, who has very rational reasons for his act of murder. Clay’s speech is extreme, violent, and poignant. He speaks about mutilation of the human body. His intention is to maim and dismember the body’s limbs, so that bones and flesh become separate. Clay’s thirst for Lula’s blood is doubtless. The only way to restore his rationality is to murder Lula and

annihilate her forever. For Lula is the embodiment of Clay's loss of humanity. The way to regain his senses and intellectual power as a poet passes through Lula's loss of breath; her death will redeem Clay and allow him thus to gain a new lease of life. But Lula, the demonic Goddess, initiates the ultimate strike. She is fast to stab Clay with a knife that she retrieves from her handbag. This is the outcome of the "grand tour" or the "little pageant" they both design to perform:

CLAY. Looks like we won't be acting out that little pageant you outlined before.

LULA. No. we won't. You're right about that, at least. All right!

CLAY. [*Bending across the girl to retrieve his belongings*] Sorry, baby, I don't think we could make it.

[*As he is binding over her, the girl brings up a small knife and plunges it into Clay's chest. Twice. He slumps across her knees, his mouth working stupidly*]. (*Dutchman* 33)

It can be argued that Lula, Lucifer's agent, manages to kill Clay first because Clay's hesitation and ambivalence are fatal in such an encounter. Clay is thus Lula's scapegoat. The original victimizer eventually triumphs and knifes Clay's "pumping heart." Clay is the one to blame and to sacrifice for the wrongdoings, flaws, and imperfections of others. Broadly speaking, he is the lamb made to sacrifice by historical distortions, racial conflicts, and cultural domination. Clay must die to atone for the shortcomings and flaws of a whole system that is deficient. In this context, Benston comments:

If we think of the tragic action of the play in more ritualistic and ironic terms, however, we gain additional insight into Clay's character. As already noted, there is much to suggest that *Dutchman* is a shadowy ritual of sacrifice, Lula being the devouring demon, Clay the "tender, big-eyed prey". Seen from Lula's animalistic, hellish point of view, Clay is a scapegoat, a pharmakos who is selected for ordeal and death in order to strengthen Lula and her society" (*The Renegade* 163)

Eventually, the cynical Lula performs her rite of sacrifice and stabs him. Although Clay intends, or more accurately, plans scripts for her murder, Lula appears resolute enough to satiate her thirst for the black man's blood. In killing him, she nullifies his security and neutralizes his mankind. There is actually in *Dutchman* a whole pattern of victimization and persecution. Acting under a compulsion to make victims and spill the blood of others, Lula seems to be the pillar of a certain persecution process or what René Girard labels as *processus victimimaire* (86). Not only Lula tempts Clay and seduces him to satisfy her sexual fantasies, but also she is herself tempted to commit homicide. Clay becomes, in the final analysis, a lamb made for immolation. In his comment upon *Dutchman* as powerful drama, Sollors sees in Clay a scapegoat:

Dutchman is powerful as a drama because it functions as a social construct, as an absurdist play, as a drama of the self and as a "modern myth". The mythical dimensions extend from the frequently observed Edenic connotations to American

popular culture and to the African and Afro-American archetype of a white witch; from the names of the protagonists to setting and meaning of title. Clay, who is also identified with Christ, Uncle Tom, and Bigger Thomas, denotes an Adamic quality as well as moldability; he is, at the same time, the “original man” out of whose mirror image Lula is created, and the sacrificial lamb whose blood must be spilled to seal a new covenant. (*Populist Modernism* 129)

The “sacrificial lamb,” whose blood is shed to expiate for America’s history, may be considered an appeasement of the American God at large.

Baraka’s nationalist stage is also replete with acts of murder and killing. This time it is not murder for murder’s sake or for the sheer sake of blood spilling. Physical elimination works in the direction of the purification of the black community from those who threaten black nascent consciousness and burgeoning black pride. Murder takes a purificatory dimension; black avant-gardists must murder the agents of the oppressive system and the representatives of reaction inside the community. Their elimination enhances black cultural affirmation and fosters awareness. The brutality of bodily liquidation parallels the primordality of black cultural values, resistance, and seizure of power.

Experimental Death Unit #1 exposes Baraka’s clear vision of the world and the role of black consciousness to eradicate promiscuity and ethic decadence of white and black people alike. Baraka’s vision translates his cognizance of moral chaos and conviction that a new moral order must be established. Baraka’s view and method can be summarized in three points or cycles: pinpointing degeneracy and moral decay; second, eradication of the decaying morality, and third, re-establishment of a novel moral order. The black woman in the play embodies the rottenness of the American moral code and the sexual perversion of black Americans. Woman is a debauchee, who sells sex to white would-be artists. Her prostitution, broadly speaking, can be said to represent the long black experience in pursuing acceptance, integration, and inclusion within white America. in this “terrible Charlie land” (13), Woman seems to exhibit her physical charms to survive. Baraka characterizes her as the undignified fallen woman. In his article *Plan for Revolution*, Owen Brady sees her as “a waste product of America” (59). Duff, Loco, and Woman, epitomize America’s moral downfall. Wanting to relish her physical charms, Loco and Duff engage in a dispute over who shall first taste the black pleasure.

Woman, in the midst of the raging battle between Loco and Duff, becomes a sort of a catalyst. Her prostitution not only causes white America’s disagreement and aggression, but also black shame and need of retaliation. In the throes of physical contact, language increasingly implies threats of murder and slights. This can be applied to Loco and Duff, who vehemently fight each other to savour Woman’s beauties. As in *Dutchman*, the black man or woman seems to menace or spark off an act of murder and ultimately he or she dies. More interestingly, it is Loco who is apparently murdered, by his fellow man. Woman is not actually a participant in the act of murder, but she is an

instigator. Woman, led by revenge, seeks vengeance upon her sexual abusers. With Loco's murder (at least his annihilation), America's moral decadence is also murdered. Baraka's depiction of a white man murdering a white fellow citizen is symbolic. Actually the original cause of this scattered form of decay, is originally the responsibility of the white man and not the black one.

The entry of the death squad marks the final phase of the action. In this phase, the stereotypes represented by blacks are polarized. It is at this point that the play takes on instructive significance. Baraka, however, does not preach moral dogma or one definite ethic creed. Instead, the degenerates are shot dead, and the black moral enforcers remain alive. Woman, as a black profligate, shows a complete loss of self-worth as she auctions her body to two intoxicated white intellectuals. In Baraka's vision, Woman suggests several levels of decayed morality. First, as a woman selling her body; second, as a black woman selling sex; and third, as a black woman selling her body to white men. It is the last of these conditions on which Baraka's message of black consciousness depends; for to the cultural nationalist, it represents the ultimate symbol of capitulation to white values. The image of the white man sodomizing the black body retains its early degrading stigma from ancient times of slavery.

The other pole of Baraka's moral code is represented by the Manichean opposite of the prostitute's lax bohemian morals—the experimental death unit. In addition to the multiple connotations of discipline, order, unity, and moral fortitude suggested by their military cadence, they represent a type of antidote efficient in defeating the agents of the sterile environment. They assume the role of totalitarians in deciding who is fit to live and die.

Remarkably, these acts of murder are extremely violent. In reality, Baraka's use of violence as a symbolic means of distancing his spectators from the negative effects of assimilation assumes a much more focused role in *Experimental Death Unit #1*. The violence is actually restricted to the command of the leader of the black execution squad, who is quite earnest about his mission. His squad exhibits firm decidedness. The two murders and three decapitations (in addition to evidence of a previous vehement exorcism as is suggested by the "white man's head still dripping blood"), which the troop has carried out appear to accentuate for blacks a frighteningly literal means of ending such degeneracy. The play not only seems to advocate the organization of self-righteous vigilante units, but its extremism in advocating high standards of morality may also distance members of the community and encourage them to adopt these fundamental moral standards. Moreover, the violence administered in eliminating the black lecherous woman points out that selling one's body is morally more blameable than murder. Baraka, accordingly, lessens the value of human life in favour of the cultural revolution. According to his cultural nationalist view, black consciousness is of utmost priority. Theodore Hudson, one of few critics who have dealt with the prostitute's significance to the play's cultural message, notes, "A black who would literally or symbolically prostitute or, worse still, pervert himself (in this play, herself) to the white

world deserves summary execution” (164). The three decadent are thus executed, because they are moral polluters of the derelict environment.

Of all of Baraka’s revolutionary plays, few come as close as *Death Unit* to depicting such blatant violence in the interest of the black man’s consciousness. The “white man’s head still dripping blood,” which the military group exposes suggests that similar past exorcism has occurred; the executions that take place on stage allow black members of the community to witness the bloody violence included in an episode of the troop’s constant clean-up or purificatory efforts. And as the death unit moves forward, there are scripts for future crusades. Helen Johnson, author of “*Black Influence in the American Theater*,” offers the following comment on Baraka’s display of violence on stage:

Although Jones speaks of murder with great frequency, it is clearly symbolic murder. He says specifically: ‘we’ve got to change America as we know it now’. He does talk of killing people, and there is a symbolic bloodletting to which he returns again and again, as the title *Experimental Death Unit #1* suggest. Unfortunately, however, far too many people under Jones’ political and artistic influence fail to perceive the level and shape of his thought. (706)

Johnson’s appraisal posits a necessary understanding of the dramaturge’s dramatic choices to wake up black men and women to realize their worth. But many other critics who assess Baraka’s revolutionary plays in complete disregard of his own choices and strategies, view his works as products of a maniac obsessed with violence and blood shedding, and hence see his work essentially as agitprop rather than solid art. At any rate, murder and violence remain omnipresent only to signal the need to disperse the institutional violence of the state and its apparatuses. The moral decay can only be eradicated by this cleansing regenerative violence. Because their debased morality is “beyond the hope of redemption,” writes critic Lance Jeffers, Baraka ‘turns outward to the great breadth of black people, turns outward to the cleansing fire’ (47).

Slave Ship comprises scenes of murder and acts of homicide. Murder, as in other revolutionary plays, is directed against those agents of the slave system and representatives of reactionarism. The play’s pantomimic structure highlights gestures of willing liberation from the claws of slavery, and emphasizes developing acts of resistance. Action is accompanied with music throughout accentuating the play’s pantomime. The play demonstrates the spirit of struggle with which black slaves intend to overthrow exploitative slavery. Murder is foreshadowed. This time it culminates in throat-cutting:

SLAVE1. Reverend, what we gon’ do when the white man come?

SLAVE2. We gon’ cut his fuckin’ throat.

SLAVE3. Devil. Beast. Murder of women and children. Soulless shit eater!

SLAVE 1. Reverend Turner, sir, what we gon’ do when the massa come?

SLAVE 2. Cut his godless throat. (139)

Violence calls up violence because conciliation between oppressor and oppressed seems inconceivable and beyond reach. The human disaster that bondage represents seems only redeemable in blood spilling and bloody murder. Only human blood can atone for past maltreatment and historic torments. Apparently, a bloody rebellion is going to be staged to topple the institution of slavery and its extended structure of exploitative economy and repressive state regulations. The play is actually a pageant that goes back in time to portray the forceful displacement, the plantation system, and the civil rights struggle.

Still, the clamours, cries, and humming of the slaves are heard. Strategically, Baraka indicates that the spirit of rebellion is as old as the first cries of slaves within the hold of the slave ship. Aspiration to liberty is more powerful than any oppressive power could imagine. Baraka points at this spirit of combat by showing black slaves looking for arms and weapons to ignite rebellion and start revolt. The intention is to kill. It is not killing for the sake of killing. In this respect, Stephen Brechet notes, "It is not urging a criminal act. Nor an act of revenge. Nor the physical elimination of a branch of humanity. It is not even suggesting the intention of a war, merely a more decided response to a war begun by others and going on anyhow.... killing... is to recover dignity. It is not just an expedient but a purificatory act. Killing the powerful not only eliminates their power: it shows power to have had the merely finite extent of their existence" (216-17). Killing, in this context, can be said to be an attempt to subvert the whole power structure and to expurgate collective traumatized psyches.

Amid singing, dancing, and humming, the dramatic action is heightened and signals the coming murder scene. The rhythmic moment of the dance intensifies and the black preacher is heard pronouncing his discourse about the necessity to integrate. He preaches non-violence that Baraka considers as the 'Ghandi Syndrome' and which necessitates immediate collective action. As an Uncle Tom or a minstrel figure, Baraka seems to ridicule his position because he transcends historical reality and jumps upon real historical facts and conditions. The preacher's stance is shown as ahistorical, since it makes a leap outside history and falls in the bosom of metaphysics. As such the black preacher must be liquidated. He is the representative of reactionarism among the black mass. His presence is a threat to the black liberation cause. In a moment of culminating tension and shift of sound pitch, the black characters rise *en masse* and murder the black preacher. The act of murder is a collective one. Baraka stresses that rebellion or liberatory struggle is not an individual effort; rather it is the sum total of collective strivings. The act of killing the preacher is twofold; the black characters kill the slave in the preacher and murder the minister in the slave at the same time. It must be remembered that Baraka stage direction indicates that both roles are performed by the same character. So the murder is a double act of murdering. Baraka points out that both figures personify reactionarism.

The execution of the preacher is sensed to dramatize the pressing need of the community to physically and psychologically expunge from their consciousness

the tendency to internalize tyranny. Symbolically, the black characters murder the preacher in the same stage place that previously served as a market place for auction. Their violence transforms the whole area into a symbol of black coming rage and rising revolutionary spirit. The murder of the black preacher is accompanied with the execution of an offstage white voice. This offstage white voice, albeit intangible, incarnates the white power structure and its inherent oppressiveness. Though not tangible, Baraka stresses its continual presence and hints at its symbolism. Its execution extends to a literal execution of this apparatus of representation. The black characters thus negate its authoritarianism. At the close of the play, the preacher's head is thrown into centre stage. More than murder, seemingly, it is decapitation of the preacher in another horrific scene. Baraka's theatre runs counter theatrical illusion and rejects the idea that theatre is a secure environment severed from reality and daily details of human life. Baraka intends to sensitize his audience and makes it aware of this retrograde movement. Once again, another sacrifice is carried out to purify the community and put it on the track of progressive movement. By the middle 1970s, Baraka began a new combat to establish a Marxist-Leninist political party as a weapon to unite the struggle of the black liberation movement with the struggles of the working masses and other oppressed nationalities. During this period, Baraka began to see that the elimination of capitalism, rather than the slaughtering of whites, as the evolutionary avenue of black emancipation, and started to induce oppressed people of all hues to unite and struggle.

In the Marxist plays, murder takes the form of political assassination rather than the enactment of sheer acts of execution or decapitation. The dynamics of political combat conditions in fact the kind of murder or the ensuing acts of killings. The rites of political protest and social mobilization dictate the nature of struggle and the subsequent outcomes. The scenes do not depict acts of murder or deliberate acts of decapitation. Whereas in the nationalist plays murder is effected for purificatory goals, in the Marxist plays the intersection between political struggle and the official repression of the state determines the shape of physical elimination. The neutralization of political foes and ideological opponents assumes that murder is simply a means of exclusion from the political arena and restoration of political and social stability. Because agitation is detrimental to social peace and political order, repression takes on a bloody dimension.

In *The Motion of History* as in the *Lone Ranger* corpses are shown on stage but the details of murder are kept unclear. Apart from suggesting that Felipe is killed with a bullet right in his head (LR 29), the stage direction of *The Motion of History* indicates the discovery of slain bodies. These bodies belong to Reverend Chaney's son and his two white comrades Goodman and Schwerner (MH 31). Apparently, all three characters are murdered by police force in proletarian agitation and political struggle. Details of their murders are absent. This signals the futility of the act of murder itself and sheds light on the noble cause of their struggle. Murder is unimportant. The important is this agitational action to break the chain of exploitation and the shackles of

oppression. In Scene VII and XII of Act IV of *The Motion of History*, the assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are presented as facts of political combat and new black militancy. The overemphasis is on struggle and political action, and the underemphasis is placed on murder. Baraka seems to repudiate murderous political violence and this trivial shedding of blood by a white powerful structure. This ritualized political violent action is barren and sterile, and only the vampires of the system would benefit from this bloodletting.

Murder in these two plays indicates the fierceness of repression and the brutality of the system. Baraka disparages this form of killing rebels and political militants such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King for this form of murder is nihilistic and bereft of any sense. Murder for the sake of murder can only lead to mass killing. Baraka, in this respect, transforms the slain blacks into martyrs. Hence, their lives serve as paradigms for other black men to follow on their steps. Their deaths become a kind of sacrifice for the black cause. Accordingly, Baraka intends to show that the significance of such a cause is vitally important. Moreover, in light of several slain advocates of black civil rights, Baraka compels commitment and involvement. The sacrifice of one's life is morally supreme and politically viable rather than nihilistic and absurd. This sacrifice that Baraka views as a form of martyrdom is nobler than the gruesome acts of political exterminators and cultural tyrants. Peter Goldman exposes the aesthetic impression that martyrdom creates. He emblemizes Malcolm X memory as "the man layered over by the myth, his gifts and flaws and passions and private ironies—his humanity— all smoothed flat and stylized like the holy men burning coolly in a Byzantine icon" (381). In like manner, Baraka symbolizes the death of these civil rights leaders, whose blood is shed in the arena of struggle. Their deaths is a living symbol of their devotion to the cause and points to the infamy of their persecutors. If murderous violence has the potential of elimination, the living memory will always attest to its opprobrium and stigma.

CONCLUSION

Amiri Baraka's pre-nationalist and nationalist plays such as *Dutchman* and *Experimental Death Unit # 1* amply include scenes of murder and violence. The deathly and the gory pervade Baraka's stage. There is a whole sacrificial system that determines the characters' ultimate destinies. This mechanism operates not merely to bring death to those who betray the national black liberation cause, but also to castigate those holders of the 'slave mentality' and chastise the assimilationists. In urgent times of black revolution and cultural rebirth, the black community must expurgate itself from those polluted individuals who pose a threat to black consciousness. Violence and homicide are inevitable. This is always true in Baraka's nationalist plays. In the Marxist plays, violence takes the form of political assassination. A play such as *The Motion of History* displays the dynamics of political struggle that frames the kind of murder, or the subsequent acts of killings. The rites of political protest and social mobilization dictate the nature of struggle and the future outcomes.

The violent scenes do not depict acts of murder or deliberate acts of beheading. Whereas in the nationalist plays murder is effected for purificatory goals, in the Marxist plays the intersection between political struggle and state repression determines the shape of physical elimination for political motives. The neutralization of political opponents assumes that murder is simply a means of exclusion from the political arena and restoration of political and social stability. Because agitation is detrimental to the social peace and the political order, systemic violence takes a bloody dimension and verges on murderous proclivities and bloodshed.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle (1909) The Poetics. Ingram Bywater Translation. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Benston, Kimberly W. (1976) The Renegade and the Mask. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Brecht, Stephan (1979) "LeRoi Jones's Slave Ship." *The Drama Review* 14.2 p. 212-219.
- Elam, Harry J. (1997) Taking It to the Street: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka. U.S.: University of Michigan Press.
- Fanon, Frantz (2002) Les Damnés de la Terre. Paris: Editions La Découverte & Syros.
- Girard, René (1982) Le Bouc Emissaire. Editions Grasset & Fasquelle.
- Goldman, Peter (1979) The Life and Death of Malcolm X. Chicago: Illinois University Press.
- Gorelick, Nathan (2011) Life in Excess: Insurrection and Expenditure in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. *Discourse* 33. 2.
- Hudson, Theodore R. (1973) From Leroi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Jeffers, Lance (1972) Bullins, Baraka and Elder: The Dawn of Grandeur in Black Drama. *College Language Association Journal* 32-48.
- Johnson, Helen (1976) Black Influences in the American Theater: 1960 and After. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- LeRoi, Jones (1964) Dutchman and the Slave. New York: Morrow & Company.
- (1971) Experimental Death Unit # 1. London: Calder & Boyars.
- (1978) Slave Ship. New York: Morrow.
- (1978) The Motion of History & Other Plays. New York: Morrow.
- (1991) What was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- (1971) Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays since 1965. New York: Random House.
- (1966) Home: Social Essays. New York: Morrow.
- Lewis, Pericles (2007) The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sollors, Werner (1978) Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism. New York: Columbia University Press.