

A Postcolonial Reading of Amiri Baraka's 21st Century Political Poem on America

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Received: 07-09- 2016
doi:10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.4n.4p.21

Accepted: 13-10-2016
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.4n.4p.21>

Published: 31-10-2016

Abstract

In the fifteen years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, countless literary and artistic works have responded to the incident. This paper examines Amiri Baraka's literary response to this violent event through his most famous poem entitled "Somebody blew up America," which defies American orthodox responses to the attacks. The mainstream reading of the poem swings toward its poetical and political qualities; however, nobody has engaged in a postcolonial reading of the poem so far. Hence, this paper intends to highlight its postcolonial and decolonizing characteristics. Baraka's political poem is significant in terms of its educational role because, as a discovery poem, it attempts to foster private, domestic, and international awareness of both oppressors/ colonizers and the oppressed/ colonized to help them bring about a social change and become new humans carrying ideas of equality, justice, and respect for humanity. The question this paper raises is as follows: What colonial characteristics could be found in Baraka's poem? Drawing upon Césaire, Memmi, and Fanon, it applies postcolonial and decolonization concepts such as dehumanization, "thing-ification," Manichaeism, and reverse Manichaeism to the poem. The paper concludes that both international and domestic terrorism are rooted in America's and Europe's racist, colonial, capitalist, and imperialist involvements.

Keywords: African-American Literature, Amiri Baraka, "Somebody blew up America", Colonial Stance, Fanon, Manichaeism

1. Introduction

Some 14 kilometers away from the third floor of his Newark, New Jersey home on September 11th, 2001, Amiri Baraka, formerly known as Everett LeRoi Jones and Imamu Amear Baraka (1934-2014), witnessed the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Nineteen days after the 9/11 events, Baraka gave his literary response to the terror strikes with a 226-line confrontation poem entitled "Somebody blew up America" (Weiss). Immediately, he circulated the poem around the globe on the Internet. Nearly a year after the Al-Qaeda raid on American soil, on September 19, 2002, Baraka read his 9/11 poem at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival in Waterloo Village in Stanhope, New Jersey. Since then, Baraka has read the poem in various universities across the US and lots of other countries such as Spain, Portugal, Africa, Switzerland, Italy, and Finland, and the poem has been translated into different languages, such as German and Persian. Since the Civil Rights Movement, Baraka has been recognized as one of the most overtly political poets in America (Dowdy, p.97). His 9/11 poem, "Somebody blew up America," is one of the most famous contemporary American political poems which have proved to be a counter-discourse to the mainstream interpretations of the 9/11 events. By political poetry, the researcher of the present paper means a work with a poetic/ literary form but political contents. Political poetry *is* a great educational venue to *raise awareness* of injustice, inequality, and propagated mendacity. This kind of poetry either defies the mainstream untruth, injustice, and inequality propagated in the name of truth, justice, and equality in the mainstream print media or supports a system that approves of truth, justice, and equality. Political poetry is a discovery poem that helps the reader find a different truth from the point of view of less privileged members of the society. Through discovering truth and nurturing communal, social, cultural, and political awareness, it is possible for both the oppressed/ colonized and colonizers/ oppressors to achieve a social change.

The mainstream reading of the poem swings toward its poetical and/ or political qualities (Dowdy 2007; Kotonen 2012; Leon 2013). Nevertheless, nobody has so far engaged in a postcolonial reading of this poem. Hence, this paper intends to highlight its postcolonial and decolonization characteristics. The question this paper raises is the following: What colonial characteristics could be found in Baraka's poem? Drawing upon Césaire, Memmi, and Fanon, it applies postcolonial and decolonization concepts like dehumanization, "thing-ification", Manichaeism, and reverse Manichaeism to the poem. In the following section, the researcher is first going to compare and contrast the situation of African Americans with that of the colonized in European colonies and then turn to a postcolonial reading of Baraka's 9/11 poem.

2. (Post) Colonial Situation of African Americans

[T]he term internal colonialism has been widely adopted to best express the continuum of the colonization of African Americans in America. (Miller, 2001, p.7)

In order to read an African American's poem through postcolonial theories, it is necessary to situate African Americans' racial and oppressive experiences in a colonial structure by asking two questions: (1) is it ever possible to discuss (post) colonialism or decolonization for African Americans who have not been externally colonized in the same way that other European colonies have been?; (2) to what extent could African Americans' situation diverge from or converge with the colonial system? In this section, the researcher aims to answer these questions to highlight commonalities between African Americans' racial experiences and those of the colonized under European colonialism.

In *The Toni Morrison encyclopedia* (2003), E. A. Beaulieu observed that less than 10 percent of works on postcolonialism were about American literature. She explained this by referring to the imperial role played by America as Britain's successor. She stated that less than one percent of works on the subject of postcolonialism were about African-American literature. This is one of the reasons why research into colonial and postcolonial aspects of African-American literature ceases to result in a bulky outcome.

In 2001, S. D. Miller argued that African Americans were subject to a domestic form of colonialism lasting even after slavery was abolished. Using theories by H. P. O'Dell (also known as "Jack O'Dell" and "J. H. O'Dell"), b. hooks, and H. Cruse, Miller examined a socio-political and economic framework that emphasized African Americans' ongoing experience of enslavement. She argued that hooks's use of the term "neo-colonialism" in *Killing rage: Ending racism* (1995) was not noticeably different from her use of the term "internal colonialism" in *Outlaw culture* (1994) — both merely represented different moments in the continuous history of subjugation. Concluding that hooks used these terms interchangeably, Miller emphasized that "the term internal colonialism has been widely adopted to best express the continuum of the colonization of African Americans in America" (p.7). Clearly, it was in this sense that African Americans could still be said to be "colonized."

It might be assumed that the colonial situation is structured by a relationship among nations and that, since African Americans are from America, they cannot be discussed within a colonial framework. There are at least five reasons why it is difficult to extend colonialism to the situation of African Americans. First, unlike members of colonial societies, African Americans were removed from their original homeland by force and shipped to America as slave workers about four centuries ago. We therefore cannot readily compare their experience to those living under European colonialism. Furthermore, it is fairly safe to assume that domination was external for most colonies whereas African Americans were confronted with internal domination within the nation they belonged to. They were, as C. Eby claimed, colonized within America, where they constituted an under-privileged and enslaved class (p.442).

Second, unlike colonies in which the colonized rose up against the colonizer to attain independence, African Americans had three different possible courses of action to take: (1) some wanted to join their mythological or ancestral land in Africa; (2) others desired to be assimilated and integrated into mainstream America (Dixon, p.46, p.48); and (3) a third group, as an alternative to the integration, wanted to build towns or cities exclusively reserved for blacks in America — towns/cities such as Mound Bayou, Mississippi, or Eatonville, Florida. The last one was among the first US towns to be built mainly for African Americans. Being proud of the whole black community of this city, Z. N. Hurston, for instance, set all her novels in Eatonville and excluded white characters from her novel. The goal of the colonized is to achieve decolonization by expelling colonizers and turning away from them. However, in the post-Civil War era, the majority of African Americans aimed either to return to Africa or to stay in America and get assimilated into white society. Out of these three possible paths, it was integration that occurred following the Civil Rights Movement.

Third, in most European colonies, colonizers were intent on usurping the land of the colonized and its natural resources; however, in the case of African Americans, the focus was on "kidnapping" Africans from their homelands and shipping them to America, a practice that continued for over a century despite the fact that so many of the Africans died during terrible journeys across the Atlantic in the "middle passage." Colonization continued in the form of slavery institutions, racial discrimination, and Jim-Crow laws and customs.

Fourth, in most European colonies, the colonized comprised the majority of the population; however, in America, African Americans were in a minority. In colonies, colonizers were strangers or, in Fanon's words, "the others"; in contrast, owing to their African background, it was African Americans who were considered aliens in America. Unlike white colonizers, they were not the "governing race" but subordinates who were treated like the colonized. This was another factor causing African Americans to be interested in assimilation.

Lastly, unlike most colonial enterprises which were based on plundering natural resources of the colonized and making huge sums of money for Europe, very little external profit was made from slavery. The country that benefited most from African-American slavery was North America itself. Perhaps due to this issue, African Americans were not generally regarded as valuable property. Therefore, white Americans would not have been economically affected if they had resorted to more discriminatory or cruel treatments like lynching. Furthermore, they tried to compensate for the low economic value of freed or freeborn African Americans by increasing rents and prices of other goods in Black ghettos. Thus, as in other colonies, the profit motive was central to the relationship between white people and African

Americans in the Jim-Crow era. The main difference is that in colonies, the colonized sold their raw materials cheaply. Since African Americans did not have any natural resources of their own to sell, they had to pay even more for their goods. In addition, they did not have educational and vocational opportunities to improve their economic situation.

Despite these differences, as racial, political, cultural and socio-economic control is concerned, African Americans were treated like the colonized. If the goal of the colonized is to achieve independence from colonizers, the final struggle of African Americans lay in obtaining the right to “full” citizenship. America’s internal colonialism established between white Americans and African Americans an inequality relation as unequal and exploitative as the relation between colonizers and the colonized in a European colony. If the colonized had been enslaved in their homeland, African Americans would have remained captive in a foreign land. Like colonized people, they were dominated by white men. They did not have any social, political, or cultural rights in American society until the 1960s. Like the colonized, African Americans were not only physically segregated but also affected by Manichean thinking and white supremacy, which maintained a psychological separation between whites and blacks. If military forces maintained order in colonies, Jim Crowism and segregation placed blacks in their “places” in the post-Civil War era. Like the colonized, African Americans were subject to exploitation, exclusion, and racism. Negative racial stereotypes imposed on both were practically identical. For example, in the Jim-Crow era, biological and racial theories that were used to brand colonized people as savages, animals, apes, and lazy creatures were also applied to African Americans.

External colonialism is certainly the commonest form of colonization; however, “internal colonialism” is also rife and is applicable to indigenous people, to those black people who are enslaved in their own country. In *Climbin’ Jacob’s ladder: The black freedom movement writings of Jack O’Dell*, N. P. Singh refers to O’Dell who postulated that, since Jim Crowism established the racial superiority of white Americans in every facet of life through the institutions of segregation and intimidation, it played a significant role in establishing “internal colonialism” for African Americans. O’Dell offers a new and less rigid definition of colonialism, which extends to the situation of African Americans in America:

Generally speaking, the popular notion about colonialism is one of an overseas army and an overseas establishment set up by the colonial power thousands of miles away from its home base. Thus, the idea of colonialism becomes identical with an overseas territory. However, this picture of colonialism is a rigid one and does not allow for its many varieties. A people may be colonized on the very territory in which they have lived for generations or they may be forcibly uprooted by the colonial power from their traditional environment so that the very environment itself is “alien” to them. In defining the colonial problem, it is the role of the institutional mechanisms of colonial domination which are decisive. Territory is merely the stage upon which these historically developed mechanisms of super-exploitation are organized into a system. (pp.138-139)

In brief, African Americans were native to America because they were born there but, because of the color of their skin, they were treated like an outsider. Similar to the European colonized, African Americans were forced to live in crowded, dirty, and poverty-stricken apartments; hence, they were physically segregated from whites as it was the case with natives (the oppressed/ colonized) and settlers (oppressors/ colonizers).

In the following section, the researcher attempts to read Baraka’s poem on the basis of postcolonial and decolonization paradigms. Despite the fact that the (post) colonial paradigm, as this section intends to show, is applicable to African-American literature, research into a postcolonial reading of Baraka’s “Somebody blew up America” ceases to have a promising outcome. Even T. Milosavljević’s article, entitled “‘Let the world be a black poem’: Frantz Fanon in Amiri Baraka’s poetry of revolt” (Fall 2015), excludes a postcolonial reading of Baraka’s 9/11 poem, focusing instead on the impact of Fanon on Baraka, and a brief reading of Baraka’s poem entitled “An agony. as now.” In that article, Milosavljević clarified that Fanon and Baraka never saw each other. They “met only in the ideological sense of the word, as Fanon had died at the young age of 36 in a Maryland hospital some six years before the poet known as Leroi Jones changed his name” (p.12). Milosavljević concludes that Baraka’s poetry “replicates the polarity and extremity of the colonial relationship with a view to effecting its deconstruction, in order to reverse the imperialist binary and pin the colonizer to the position of the colonized, because such reversal precedes any possibility of a future predicated on the abrogation of the binary” (p.23). In the next section, the researcher intends to read Baraka’s 9/11 verse as a postcolonial poem through F. Fanon’s theories due to the deliberate way the main speaker set out to defy national and international terrorism, racism, oppression, and imperialist dominance, and the emergence of a new model of identity for African Americans presented in this poem.

3. A Postcolonial Reading of Amiri Baraka’s “Somebody blew up America”

Baraka is the Frantz Fanon of poetry. (Harris, n.pag.)

Actually, in my focus on various forces of terror, Afro Americans and other oppressed people of the world have suffered slavery, colonialism, Imperialism, Neo neo-colonialism, National Oppression. (Baraka, 2 October, 2002)

Amiri Baraka was above all a man haunted by Frantz Fanon’s work on the wretched of the earth... Baraka’s enduring tenet that poetical is political leads us on the trail of the writings of the great 20th century theorist of decolonization. (Milosavljevic, 2015)

Clearly, influenced by H. Bloom's "The anxiety of influence," Baraka's "Somebody blew up America" attempts to define itself in terms of its difference from its predecessors, swerving significantly from so many American contemporary political poems in the sense that it uses spoken-word performance pieces, hip-hop song qualities, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), and an unusually great length (Dowdy, p.64). Most political poems are short and hardly employ AAVE or hip-hop song qualities. Baraka's political poem is a poem which challenges mainstream responses to the 9/11 attacks by condemning any colonial and racist attitudes toward blacks, African Americans, former American Indians, Asians, and people of South America in the world history. Employing R. Gibbons' definition, which states that political poems are not necessarily oppositional, the researcher of the present paper thinks that this poem is a kind of political poem that speaks "for" the oppressed/ colonized and "against" oppressors/ colonizers (p.279). Since Baraka's poem deals with racism as a common feature that can be found in a colonial structure, the researcher uses some of Fanon's and other theorists' anti-racial, revolutionary, postcolonial, and decolonization concepts to trace the postcolonial and decolonization mindset in Baraka's liberating poem.

In his public statement, Baraka categorically referred to colonial-like situation of African Americans in terms of their relations with white supremacists. Baraka related the present-day terrorist events in America to race, oppression, and colonization: "Actually, in my focus on various forces of terror Afro Americans and other oppressed people of the world have suffered, slavery, colonialism, Imperialism, Neo neo-colonialism, National Oppression" (Baraka, 2 October, 2002). Similarly, in his doctoral dissertation entitled "Extending the document: The twenty-first century long poems and the archive" (2013), M. Leon, among other issues, sporadically linked the American setting of Baraka's 9/11 poem to the colonial and neo-colonial one, stating, "Representative of Baraka's so-called 'Third world-Marxist' phase, 'Somebody blew up America' attempts to contextualize the acts of terror within larger histories of slavery and colonial and neo-colonial racism" (p.5). In his study, Leon was not concerned with a postcolonial reading of Baraka's poem. He asserted that, like R. B. Kitaj, Baraka exemplifies "a Derridean 'archive fever,' that is, a burning search for historical causes, culprits and explanations; they also expose the limitations of the archive's explanatory and institutive powers" (p.xvi). He argued that Baraka's "Somebody blew up America" was a "critique of archival positivism" (p.xvii). Leon tried to show how archival concerns underwrote the poem's socio-cultural ambitions.

Baraka's revelatory poem starts with a declaration on the condemnation of terrorism, inside or outside America, in brackets: (All thinking people/ oppose terrorism / both domestic/ & international .../ But one should not/ be used/ To cover the other). The first line of Baraka's defiant poem commences with what "they say" [*They say its some terrorist/ some barbaric A Rab, in Afghanistan*] (1-4), as opposed to the ending stanza that deals with what "We hear...": "*We hear the questions rise/ In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog/ Like the acid vomit of the fire of Hell/ Who and Who and WHO who who/ Whoooo and Whooooooooooooooooooooo!*" (222-226). Using the colonial otherizing epithets of "*some barbaric A Rab*" from "*Afghanistan*" as opposed to civilized Americans, the poem turns to the orthodox belief that a foreign terrorist like Osama bin Laden was quoted to be behind the 9/11 attacks. Then it turns to a litany of American and world heroes and enemies who were either the colonized/ victimized/ oppressed or colonizers/ victimizers/ oppressors, respectively. The poem focuses on raising questions on the true identity of these persons, historical causes, and perpetrators without addressing a particular person to be responsible for the attacks — only asking, in a reductionist reading of the poem, "Who did it?"

One of the most interesting aspects of this poem is related to the exhaustive use of the anaphoric "Who" clauses/ phrases. The "Who" phrases/ clauses are important not only because they have been repeated 191 times — an important number whose figures are coincidentally much similar to 9/11 — but also due to the employment of the Manichean structure that Fanon identified as the foundation of the colonial world.

After revealing the identity of the terrorist foreigner in "The war on terror", in lines 5 to 17, the speaker uses a litany of negations of domestic American terrorists who killed African Americans and who could by no means be responsible for the 9/11 attacks: "*It wasn't our American terrorists/ It wasn't the Klan or the Skin heads/ Or the them that blows up nigger/ Churches, or reincarnates us on Death Row/ It wasn't Trent Lott/ Or David Duke or Giuliani/ Or Schundler, Helms retiring*" (5-11). Baraka employs three pronouns throughout the inflammatory poem. We may wonder who the pronouns "they"/ "them", "we"/ "us," and "it" refer to. Since referentiality is one of the characteristics of political poetry, it is necessary to answer who or what the above pronouns refer to.

Despite the fact that Baraka some 191 times asks who "they" were, toward the end of the poem, suspense continues and Baraka ceases to clearly identify exactly who "they" were, because, as M. Dowdy argues, "Baraka collapses centuries of global, historical and geopolitical contexts in order to assume a far reaching purview of oppression, it certainly refers to the white, Euro-American imperial power the poem rebels against — more specifically the military-industrial corporate complex" (p.64). Therefore, the pronoun "they"/ "them" stands for all oppressors and colonizers inside and outside America. By the pronouns "we"/ "us", Baraka means the speaker himself and all colonized and oppressed people in the world. In the first line of the poem, Baraka uses a singular third person pronoun "it" to refer to bin Laden as a barbarian. The researcher claims that this sort of reference to a person can be read through postcolonial and decolonization theories as discussed by Césaire, Memmi, Fanon, and Baraka himself. In fact, the singular third person pronoun "it" is often considered to be a gender neutral pronoun, which does not usually refer to an adult person. Since this pronoun is used for animals, in some cases, and inanimate objects, its use by colonizers in the colonial structure could be dehumanizing. In European colonies, colonizers ceased to attribute humanity to the colonized individual,

reducing him/ her to an inanimate object, an animal, or a child. In his famous work entitled *Discourse on colonialism* (2000), which is also called “Third world manifesto,” A. Césaire reduces the colonial encounter to the equation “colonization = thing-ification” (p.42). He equates racism and barbarism with colonization, claiming that colonization is in fact a form of dehumanization that results from Europe’s racism against black populations in Africa and the Caribbean. The reduction of the colonized individual to an object is harmful because colonizers will not feel any sense of responsibility toward objects.

Similarly, in *The colonizer and the colonized* (1990), A. Memmi remarks that the relationship between colonizers and the colonized is both destructive and constructive: “It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor . . . the other into an oppressed creature” (p.89). Memmi discusses, among so many other issues, the devastating impact of racism on the colonized. Memmi asserts that the colonizers dehumanize the colonized by associating them with animals or objects. Since the colonized individual is reduced to the level of a thing or an animal, he is not “protected by the laws of the colony” (8). Nevertheless, animal/object metaphors also carry the implication that the colonizers need not “have a serious obligation toward an animal or an object” (86). That is why colonizers become as indifferent as a stone to the pain, anguish, and suffering of the colonized. Moreover, Memmi states that this distorted image of the colonized as animals/objects helps colonizers justify their desire to dominate and oppress the colonized.

In *The wretched of the earth* (1963), Fanon goes one step further, asserting that in the active period of decolonization, the dehumanization is reversed and a new man is created: “Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men, but this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the “thing” which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself” (36-37).

Using Césaire’s equation and Memmi’s destructive and constructive pattern of colonization and hoping not to be charged with oversimplification or a reductionist reading of the terms colonization or decolonization, the researcher claims that decolonization equals dething-ification. Therefore, if colonization changes the colonized subject into an object/ animal (he/ she→ it), decolonization reverses the order, creating a human being (it→ he/ she). Similar to Césaire, Memmi and Fanon, Baraka opposed slavery and the dehumanization of black people. In an interview with K. W. Benston, Baraka declared: “Slavery is dehumanizing” (313). The researcher asserts that in the first line of the poem “Somebody blew up America”, Baraka drew upon a colonial view that otherized the enemy, that is, bin Laden, by dehumanizing and making him inferior to Americans.

In the third stanza, line 18, Baraka starts the first round of the anaphoric “Who” clauses/phrases, which aims to challenge the orthodox claim of the initial stanza that stated “They say” bin Laden masterminded the terrorist attacks: “They say (who say?)/ Who do the saying/ Who is them paying/ Who tell the lies/ Who in disguise/ Who had the slaves/ Who got the bux out the Bucks” (18-24). The sprawling enjambment in these lines and the rest of the poem makes the speaker’s ranting fluent. That the question marks have been used sparingly in the poem may account for the speaker’s response to the society’s ridiculous taken-for-granted/ unquestionable reaction to African Americans’ racial oppression in the sense that they cease to question America’s domestic terrorism in the form of racial or imperialist involvements. In the above lines, Baraka politically opposes American Standard English by removing the suffix “-s” from the end of the third-person singular verbs “do” and “tell” in order for him not only to stick to AAVE and hip-hop culture but also to make us aware of what mainstream American oppressors (“they”) do and say about the oppressed (“us”). That is, what “they” *did* was more horrible than what bin Laden did in his terrorist attacks on American soil and what “they” *told* Americans and the whole world about this incident and so many other incidents was hardly the plain truth.

The inclusion of hip-hop culture in Baraka’s uncompromising poem is significant because it helps the reader discover a different truth behind the 9/11 attacks. According to Dowdy, “A substantial part of hip-hop’s contestatory urban agency is its truth-teller function. Many rappers feel charged with the role of liberating listeners from lies and illusions perpetrated by the government, corporations, the military–industrial complex, public school curricula, and the police” (p.159). In fact, through this poem, Baraka could redress historical inaccuracies aimed at denigrating America’s domestic terrorism of African Americans during the last four centuries.

The poem mainly questions who the two involving groups, namely oppressors and the oppressed, with the abuse of power in America, both domestic and abroad, were. Baraka’s undeniably provocative “who” questions rant about an exhaustive list of oppressed heroes (“we”/ “us”) and national or international oppressors/ enemies (“they”/ “them”). The catalogue of the oppressed heroes feature general and historical figures such as a “slave” (whose “nuts” were cut off, whose “ma” was raped, and whose “pa” was lynched), “genocided Indians,” “killed” persons (such as niggers, Jews, Italians, Irish, Africans, Japanese, and Latinos), assassinated civil-rights activists and leaders (such as Malcolm X, Dr. M. L. King, Kennedy and his brother, Lincoln, Che Guevara, and Lumumba), locked-up figures (such as Mandela and Garvey), and those who “cut off people[’]s hands in the Congo.” All of the mentioned victimized/ colonized people shared one thing in common: they were all oppressed and were mostly black people.

In the receiving end of oppression, Baraka inquires who were among the list of “oppressors” (“they”). For instance, he asks, “Who got rich from Algeria, Libya, Haiti, / Iran, Iraq, Saudi, Kuwait, Lebanon, / Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine” (170-172) or “Who blew up the Maine/ & started the Spanish American War/ Who got Sharon back in Power/ Who backed Batista, Hitler, Bilbo, / Chiang kai Chek” (178-182). Through the above lines, Baraka makes the reader discover

that the global white supremacy, Western (American and European) hegemony, violence, genocide, imperialism, and capitalism were the driving forces for white oppressors.

In *The wretched of the earth* (1963), Fanon argues that psychological violence in the colony is supported by a Manichean psychology that divides the colonial world into dichotomies such as “us”/ “them,” “good”/ “evil,” “civilized”/ “barbaric,” “the colonizer”/ “the colonized,” “clever”/ “ignorant,” “rich”/ “poor,” “friend”/ “enemy,” “self”/ “other,” and “white”/ “black.” Fanon stresses that the colonial project is the production of a “Manichean world.” Manichaeism permeates the prevailing racist values and beliefs of the colonial world and makes the colonized hate the negative values attributed to themselves whereas all positive ones are associated with the white. “At times this Manichaeism,” Fanon states, “goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal” (p.42). Racist ideology is a fundamental factor in the colony that sustains a belief in white superiority and black inferiority. Fanon initially opposes the psychological effect of Manichaeism that makes the colonized suffer from tensions in a value system. The colonized unwittingly establish senses of self-hatred and hatred toward blacks, on the one hand, and a strong desire to imitate white settlers, their values, their behavior, and their ways of life, on the other. Thus, tensions could be a serious obstruction on the way of decolonization. Fanon asserts:

The people who in the early days of the struggle had adopted the primitive [Manichaeism] of the colonizer — Black versus white, Arab versus infidel — realize en route that some blacks can be whiter than the whites, and that the prospect of a national flag or independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population giving up their privileges and their interests. (p.143)

However, after the colonized become conscious of decolonization, Manichaeism is used against colonizers. “Manicheanism,” as Reys (2009) asserts, “introduced by the colonizer and built into the colonial situation as a whole becomes the basis for unifying the subjugated race against their foreign oppressor” (p.107). The question that is raised here is what happens to Manichaeism and how the colonized use it to their benefit? According to Fanon, in the decolonization period, the colonized resort to Manichaeism: “Thus we see that the primary Manichaeism which governed colonial society is preserved intact during the period of decolonization; that is to say that the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown” (p.50). Fanon does not refer to reverse Manichaeism/ racism, but A. A. Reyes does. In the initial stages of decolonization, “Fanon,” as Reyes states, “clearly regarded ‘reverse Manichaeism’ as a necessary initial stage in the struggle for decolonization” (p.147). According to Reyes, “‘reverse Manichaeism’ within Fanon’s work highlights his ability to read the capacity of the colonized to both appropriate the logic of the colonizer (us vs. them) while almost immediately moving beyond such a logic” (pp.99-100).

Thus, even after achieving their freedom in the Civil Rights Movement, Baraka’s Post-Civil Rights poem draws upon reverse Manichaeism (“us”/ “them.”). That is, the reason why the 9/11 poem has been charged with racism is because racism breeds reverse racism and Manichaeism breeds reverse Manichaeism. The role of the devil/ evil in the colony is given to “the other” as a colonized native. Fanon’s words — “the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil” — are particularly pertinent to Arabs’, particularly bin Laden’s, Africans’ and Asians’ situation in Baraka’s poem. Baraka tries to reverse the order and attribute evil qualities to American politicians by using the following lines: “*Who found Bin Laden, maybe they Satan/ Who pay the CIA,/ Who knew the bomb was gonna blow/ Who know why the terrorists/ Learned to fly in Florida, San Diego*” (pp.130-134). In the following stanzas, trying to extend colonial concepts of reversed racism/ Manichaeism to American setting, Baraka draws an alternate yet indirect picture of white American imperialists/ oppressors/ colonizers as embodiment of the real evil to imply that bin Laden, and by extension, Muslims and Asians should not be blamed for the terrorist attacks because what bin Laden did was what he had been asked and paid for:

*Who the Devil on the real side
Who got rich from Armenian genocide*

*Who the biggest terrorist
Who change the bible
Who killed the most people
Who do the most evil
Who don't worry about survival*

*Who have the colonies
Who stole the most land
Who rule the world
Who say they good but only do evil
Who the biggest executioner*

Who? Who? Who?” (113-125)

Being influenced by poets of the Black Arts Movement and Chicano Movement, Baraka's 9/11 poem takes the subject of race as its central part. According to Dowdy, "Black Arts Movement and Chicano Movement poets oppos[ed] the institutionalized racism of the United States" (p.63). A question that is posed here is whether Baraka would reduce the reading of the poem to racism against African Americans.

In his public statement, Baraka disclosed how the poem ought to be read through the paradigm of race. His disclosure is extremely in line with the explanation on colonial racism and Manichean thinking. He stated, that

the poem[’s] underlying theme focuses on how Black Americans have suffered from domestic terrorism since being kidnapped into US chattel slavery, e.g., by Slave Owners, US & State Laws, Klan, Skin Heads, Domestic Nazis, Lynching, denial of rights, national oppression, racism, character assassination, historically, and at this very minute throughout the US. The relevance of this to Bush call for a ‘War on Terrorism’, is that Black people feel we have always been victims of terror, governmental and general, so we cannot get as frenzied and hysterical as the people who while asking us to dismiss our history and contemporary reality to join them, in the name of a shallow ‘patriotism’ in attacking the majority of people in the world, especially people of color and in the third world. (Baraka, 2 October, 2002)

Apart from racism as a form of America's domestic terrorism, there was another goal for Baraka in composing his 9/11 and other confrontation poems. In *To write a republic--American political poetry from Whitman to 9/11*, T. Kotonen asserted that, for Baraka, radical reforms, litigation, and reparation were other goals for writing his political poems. Referring to a poem entitled "Why Is We Americans" from Baraka's collection of poems entitled *Somebody blew up America & Other poems* (2003), Kotonen stressed that Baraka was interested in doing justice to the way African Americans were mistreated by white Americans through taking a lawsuit and being paid for racism against the color of his skin: "We want to be paid, [--] for all/ the killings the fraud, the/ lynchings, the missing justice, all these are suits./ specific litigation, as/ represent we be like we, for/ reparations for damages paid/ to the Afro-American nation," "that's what/ my we is askin" (p.100). This is the context in which Baraka expects the reader to read his political poem. Baraka wished African Americans and their descendants could have resorted to litigation to get reparations from the US government.

One of the important aspects of postcolonial literature is subverting Western ways of thinking and creating spaces for colonized subalterns to produce alternatives to the dominant discourse. Drawing upon *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literature* (2002) by B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, the researcher postulates that, since America's imperialist and neo-colonialist behavior could extend to African Americans, Baraka's poem, as a postcolonial poem attempting to write back to the center of the 9/11 incident and to dismantle the Western dominant discourse/ print media, discloses America's liability for complicity and conspiracy in the terror acts by identifying America's latent or submerged thumbprints on the scene of the 9/11 events. Baraka's hugely aggressive poem has collected a store of white-supremacist American and European colonizers' information in the four century-long history of their domestic terrorist oppression against African Americans and in disastrous international events over the last century. Yet, he does not aim to disclose their true identities. As an alternate discourse, the poem attempts to reduce the role of Muslims, Arabs, Afghans, and Iraqis in the 9/11 events. Baraka's blatantly offensive poem unravels that white capitalist supremacists have created a power structure that could silence, arrest, lock, murder, lynch, assassinate, and torture any dissident progressive voice inside and outside America without being charged while the Western print media only singled out al-Qaeda as being responsible for the 9/11 events. Baraka's post-disaster poem presents us an alternative reading of the incident from an unorthodox point of view of the oppressed ("us") who seek justice, equality, and freedom.

Toward the end of the poem, Baraka discloses "Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed/ Who told 4,000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers/ To stay home that day/ Why did Sharon stay away?" (200-204). The above four lines is one of the main passages that have caused the anti-Semitic charges against Baraka's poem, having made Baraka lose his laureateship and stipend and brought about the cancellation of his lectures and recitals at various US universities and other venues. Baraka's rejection of laureateship and expulsion from this post is in parallel with Plato's act of banishing poets from the ideal state, the Republican City, because, according to Plato, poets propagated the untrue, thus they were twice removed from the Truth and that they had to be banished or controlled.

The researcher admits that the lines about five Israelis dancing on the scene of 9/11 attacks could be offending to Israelis. Yet, he does not find charges of anti-Semitism against Baraka relevant as far as the four lines are concerned with the 4,000 Israelis. Truly, there is something left in the indirect undertone of the lines and has not been discussed so far and that could have made American Jews and Israelis quite disturbed. An objective reader relying on Baraka's revelations and sources may burningly search for the degree of Israelis' smartness and trust and ask how come American civilians were kept ignorant or deprived from warning whereas Israelis took it so seriously that even a week before the incident they had shipped to Virginia. If it is what Baraka asserts in his public statement (2 Oc. 2002), then what is concerning is the high level of shrewdness, accuracy, trust, and timely action on the side of Israeli workers in the Twin Tower. It implies that Israelis could be responsible because they were the only ones whose evacuation a week prior to the events, together with a cancellation of Ariel Sharon's speech in New York on 11 September, could make them sound perpetrators in the events though Baraka himself and most defenders of Baraka denied Israelis' direct or

indirect responsibility. The researcher supposes the poem implies that Israelis were indirectly, if not directly, responsible for these events.

In his public statement, Baraka defended his claim by employing the sources of his claim, namely British Newspaper *Telegraph* and two Israeli newspapers of *Ha'aretz* and *Yedioth Ahronot*, stating that the Israeli Mossad already foreknew when and where the attacks would occur: “[N]ot only was the US warned repeatedly by Germany, France, Russia, England but also Israel” (Baraka, 2 October, 2002). Moreover, he demystified that the CIA and George Bush Administration had been warned about the incident in advance. Nevertheless, according to Baraka, the FBI HQ denied its foreknowledge, claiming that the record was missing. Some sources even denied that there were 4,000 Israelis in the World Trade Center at all. Baraka disclosed in that statement that the online Wall St. Journal site mentioned the name of the office, as Zim American-Israeli, and carried the list of those 4,000 Israeli tenants who broke their tenancy a week prior to the 9/11 attacks. Following the Mossad’s (Shabak-AB) warning, they all were shipped to Norfolk in Virginia. Baraka further denied anti-Semitic charges by another piece of information, asserting that, in his poem, he had addressed some victimized and assassinated Jews, but the Jewish print media in America never discussed their presence in the poem. In his public statement, Baraka vehemently stated, “The ADL apparently is not outraged by McCarthy era frame-up and execution of the Rosenbergs, nor the assassination of German Jewish Communist leaders like Liebnicht, Luxembourg. The ADL leaves these things out to try to make their lies more believable and also because these victims of imperialism were on the Left” (Baraka, 2 October, 2002). Strange as it may seem, instead of charging America’s conspiracy theory, Baraka was charged with “the Hitlerian ‘Big Lie’” and the poet’s “spewing Anti-Semitic venom,” and his family, friends, and colleagues were continually warned immediately after the release of the 9/11 poem.

In Sum, the division of the poem into the views taken by oppressors/ colonizers (“they”/ “them”) and the views held by the oppressed/colonized (“we”/ “us”) through a long list of both American oppressors/ colonizers and oppressed/ colonized African Americans is also indicative of the postcolonial situation in America. In parallel with the colonizer who, in Fanon’s words, “paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil,” American mainstream media gave no positive values to colonized African Americans and resorted to the dehumanization of African Americans and the colonized to describe them. Both Fanon and Baraka knew that the impact of racism on African Americans was similar to its impact on the colonized. Fanon adds that the remarkable resemblance between African Americans of Chicago and Nigerians or Tanganyikans is that they have all been defined in relation to whites (p.215). If decolonization in colonies is a physical phenomenon by expelling the colonized back to their countries, it is mental in the case of African Americans because they have been colonized not only internally but also mentally. Since Baraka’s poem incorporates both the colonized and colonizers, the researcher believes that the decolonization of African Americans could happen in their mindsets by freeing themselves from the colonizer’s untruthful representations of truth.

4. Conclusion

Political poetry identified a gap in contemporary poetry to fill. The gap was that there was an assumption that literature/ poetry was far below politics and that poets were away from the public/ society. Carrying artistic values in a creative way, political poetry not only has a significant educational duty to raise the consciousness of both young and adult members inside and outside a country but can also comment on main events in the society and liberate both the oppressed and oppressors from false orthodox views on a relatively true unorthodox reality beyond a political incident. Educational practices and institutions in a country usually follow mainstream sources of political knowledge about an incident. However, it is the task of a political poet to educate the society to see differently and to come to the truth of a political incident. Similar to a postcolonial text, political poetry gives an alternate literary expression to dominant mainstream depictions of truth and knowledge. Both political poetry and postcolonial literature reveal the rebellion of the colonized/ oppressed against the dominant discourse in their country and write back to any means of dominance in the form of racism, capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. In this paper, Baraka’s “Somebody blew up America,” as a postcolonial poem, was approached from Fanon’s theories to counteract national and international terrorism, racism, oppression, and imperialism with the advent of a new model of identity for African Americans who would not submit to their colonial-like oppression. The paper also argued that it was indeed conceivable to discuss colonialism or decolonization with regard to African Americans whose relations with whites were based on racism. It also delineated that there were some striking similarities between the African colonized and African Americans. By extending the acts theorized by Fanon in *The wretched of the earth* and other postcolonial theories by theorists such as Memmi and Césaire to the status of African Americans, the researcher demonstrated some of the advantages stemming from an approach that interprets Baraka’s 9/11 poem through the framework offered by postcolonial and decolonizing theories. Baraka’s political poem is also called a discovery poem, which aims to raise private, domestic, and international awareness of both oppressors/ colonizers and the oppressed/ colonized to help them bring about a social change and become new humans carrying ideas of equality, justice, and respect for humanity. Baraka’s “Somebody blew up America” is a poem that profoundly registers the urgency of writing back to the 9/11 incident through an alternate unorthodox colonized/ oppressed people’s vantage point all over the world. It regards the decolonization of minds rather than countries as a possible passage that African Americans should take. Baraka’s incendiary political poem implies that international terrorism is rooted in the US and Israeli politicians’ thoughts and that it is irrelevant to Muslims, Arabs, Africans, Asians, and Afghans. As a literary disclosure, Baraka’s anti-conformist, anti-materialistic, and anti-colonial poem encourages all of the oppressed/ colonized in the world to be aware of their oppression and do something legal against their corporate oppression.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to extend his heartfelt and sincere gratitude to a team of reviewers, including in alphabetical order, S. Emami, N. Keramatfar, J. Khorsandi, Dr Pourgharib, A. Pourhasan, Dr M. Pourya, T. Rajabi, M. Saadi-e Khosrowshahi, and A. Soleimani, for their assistance in enhancing the quality of the present article. Dr Pourya thankfully provided me with a thorough list of suggestions that were eventually adopted in the final manuscript. The researcher would like to appreciate him for his intimate cooperation. The researcher's special thanks go to M. Aghamohammadi whose final proofreading of the article is duly appreciated.

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