

## ***Towards a New Shift***

*We ain't got tie Blues*

*We got the Reds*

—Baraka in performance. 1977

As a Black cultured nationalist Baraka became prominent as a political figure but he did not follow a consistent revolutionary line. During this phase of Black Nationalism Baraka was not only attacked by the government agencies but also by the critics and by other groups who consider themselves the revolutionaries.

*The Black Panther paper* and *Ramparts* attacked Baraka for his cultural chauvinism, calling it "bourgeois" or "pork chop" nationalism. They felt that Baraka consciously misled the Black masses.

In "1973, the National Caucus of Labor Committee published a thirty page pamphlet on *Papa Doc Baraka: Fascism in Newark*, which is a compendium of all political charges levied against Baraka from the Left, in their most acerbic form. The authors denounce Baraka as a fascist, anti-Semitic *Fuhrer*, whose socialism is that of a Mussolini -impressionistic, schematic, devoid of any context beyond today's "gut radicalism". (Costas

Axios and Nikos Suvriotis, *Papa Doc Baraka: Fascism in Newark*, National Caucus of Labor Committees, 1973- Page 9).

Baraka felt compelled to publish a rebuttal in the cultural nationalist paper accusing the National Caucus of Labor Committees of an "anti-black, anti-Third World, Rightist tone," which makes them "paternalist reactionaries, supported by the oppressive elements of the society". ("Message from the Chairman", *Fundisha 1, No.5 of Black News 2*, October 22, 1973).

One year later i.e. 1974 Baraka renounced cultural nationalism and became a socialist. As Karenga's influence began to wane, Baraka began to search for a new connection with Mao Tse Tung whom he once called the most respected poet in China. It is very difficult to account for Baraka's sudden shift from cultural nationalism to Maoism with any degree of precision. If we consider Kreuzer's paradigm we know that any form of "liberal" reform politics is, of course, a "bourgeois" anathema to Bohemians; and that the whole political spectrum- except the extreme right and the extreme left is usually shunned by avant-gardists. That is why Baraka's latest development was at its extreme i.e. from reactionary aspect of nationalism to the most left wing movement i.e. Maoism. Maoism has allowed Baraka to continue creating in an apocalyptic revolutionary mode to see himself as an advanced leader (Chairman instead of Imamu) whose task has been to raise the consciousness of the people and prepare them

for the violent cataclysm he sees ahead. Changing his ideology also allowed him to extricate himself from a new reification process and to come out violently against Black politicians and businessmen, writers and teachers, who had often accepted some tenets of Baraka's Black nationalist message, but were in Baraka's view, still far from making life any better for the majority of Black Americans.

Baraka's shift took place, within one single year: in the course of 1974 he became a communist looking at a bus full of people, The essays indicate that Baraka transcended cultural nationalism in two ways: on the one hand the African socialist theory of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Amilcar Cabral, made him acutely aware of the contradictions inherent in US Black cultural nationalism; on the other the experience with Black elected officials, and especially with the Black mayor of Newark, he realized the impact of bourgeois politics on oppressed Blacks, whether the policies were carried out by "white-oriented" or by "Black-conscious" middleclass representatives. Two external events precipitated the change: Baraka's participation in the Sixth Pan-African Congress In Dares Salaam, and the campaign for Gibson's reelection in Newark.

In "Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Ujamaa, Their Future in America," written in late 1973 or early 1974, Baraka still argues essentially in Karenga's framework, although he emphasizes the socialist aspect of the Black Value System - Ujamaa, cooperative economies. Leftists still appear

to Baraka as "the most intensely racist group of whites," since they "denounce all black leadership except their own footmen and insist that Blacks must make the leap from slaves to international socialists without passing through a stage frankly most whites are still in. ...nationalism" (UN 89, Page-4). "Capitalist vs Proletariat is a secondary contradiction in America. Whether you lefties like it or not, any serious analysis will show you that. Black vs White influences all other contradictions in America. Rich vs Poor. Educated vs Uneducated. Men vs Women. Polluters vs Ecologists. Homosexuals vs Heterosexuals. Old People vs Young People. Jews vs Gentiles, & c, Black vs White is the most influential, it influences all the others, defines their terminologies, shapes their rhetoric, must be dealt with even after left communists denounce nationalists as reactionaries and talk wildly about the coming hegemony of the proletariat (in spotless university dining rooms) it is still Black vs White, throughout, over and above, under-cutting all other talk or movement in America." {UN 89, page-4).

In his CAP paper, "Revolutionary Party: Revolutionary Ideology," presented on March 31, 1974, Baraka already sounds different, as he establishes a "historical perspective," points out that primitive accumulation of capital was "based directly on the slave trade," and admonishes his audience that Black nationalist opposition to "industrialization, and computerization or scientific progress" may be the result of "petty bourgeois elitism" which "objectively" aids imperialism.

We must struggle to defeat priest craft and meta- physical accommodations with racism and monopoly capitalism as overtly as is tactically sound! (UN 93, Page No.3)

He now denied that one can be revolutionary "merely by dressing in African clothes and speaking Swahili and cultivating superior diet" (UN 93, Page-4) Baraka's syncretism is obvious in the series of demands made on the ideology of the revolutionary party he envisions:

*It will be a Black Liberation Party.....*

*It must be a Marxist influenced Party.....*

*/( must be a Leninist influenced party.....*

*It must be a Maoist party.....*

*It must be a Nkrumatiist party.....*

*It must be a Nyerere influenced party.....*

*/(must be a Cabral inspired party....."*

*/(must be a Maulana Karenga influenced party*

*(UN 93, Page-5-6)*

When "Partially Evaluating the Legacy of the "GO's" (UN 107), Baraka hopes for a synthesis of Black Panthers and Black value system, beyond cultural nationalism and "gun- cultism," yet in "Black people and Imperialism" (UN 100), he considers the breakdown of strict segregation as negative legacy. At this transitory stage, Baraka sets himself the task of

fusing these heterogeneous elements, of "Creating a unified Consciousness" (the title of another CAP ideological paper).

The essay "Toward Ideological Clarity," dated May 24, 1974, opens with a quotation from Lenin Instead of Karenga; and in the course of the argument, which is concerned with Afro-American history, Baraka comes to define racism merely as "one aspect of the ideology produced by the slave trade." As racism becomes understandable to Baraka not as an ontological quality, but as a byproduct of capitalism, cultural nationalism appears increasingly "chauvinist." Baraka now sides with Cabral's Marxist definition that "culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production" (UN 101, Page-7), and attacks the mistake made "by so called cultural nationalists" (including himself): they take "the concept of culture as a static concept" (UN 101, Page-10) instead of understanding it historically.

In his speech at the 6th Pan-African Congress in Dares Salaam, June 19-27,1974, Baraka argues that it is the Black revolutionary-writer's task to "transform his culture from an exploited culture to a militant fighting culture" (UN 104, Page-16). In this transformatory process, nationalism is only one step; and "if nationalism is not merely a form of preparation for true national liberation struggle which should in any progressive guise lead directly to socialist construction or socialist revolution, then nationalism,

black or yellow, becomes as reactionary as the European variety " (UN 104, pp. 6-7)

These abstractions go back to Baraka's concrete observations on Black bourgeois politics. Baraka sees the possibility that

"The pseudo-powerful American Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie could, objectively, be the new agents of yet another scramble for Africa. By saying Black is beautiful or we are an African people, yet representing the values and designs of U. S. imperialism:" (UN 104 p-7)

Baraka kept on criticizing Newark's Black mayor Kenneth Gibson. Baraka also changed the name of his paper from *Black New Ark* to *Unity and Struggle*, and its motto from "Black people must unify" to *Unite the many to oppose the few*, and then again to *Unite the many to defeat the few*. While Gibson was certainly part of the "Unity" envisioned in the motto of Black New Ark, Baraka now would place him closer to the "few" than the "many" of the new motto. In 1970, Baraka had actively campaigned for a Black mayor in Newark. In 1973 he called Gibson a "puppet" of the Prudential Insurance Company, using one of his favorite popular culture images: "It is a Charlie McCarthy- Edgar Bergen relationship with the Negro's mouth flapping but white racist words coming out." Baraka is disillusioned by what happened to the concept of Black Power in practical politics.

"Instead of black power, we have seen black faces animated by white desires. We have seen obscure blacks become influential Negroes, risen to prominence on the backs of the black community only to become apologists for racism and capitalism" (UN 106, p-10).

He opposes the policies of Newark's Black administration as he says "A four year old rent strike, people crowded into public dungeons, and what is done, some petty bourgeois Negro or negress is appointed to the housing commission. What does it mean? Another salary. Another paycheck. Another party. Another handshake. Another grin ... Nothing to make real change" (UN 106, p-13),

Though he criticizes the Black bourgeois, he did support the reelection of the Black Mayor in 1974. He wants to oppose imperialism and in doing that it cannot be all Black. The only way to that end is his conversion to Mao Tse Tung thought. Baraka's Bohemian search for the absolute opposition to bourgeois liberalism seems to have come to what he considers a scientific stage. After different forms of antibourgeois negation, he now embraces the frame work of scientific socialism as the ultimate, unbourgeois certainty. In "Revolutionary Nationalism = Scientific Socialism" he explains:

"Scientific Socialism is the opposite of Bourgeois ideology, yes, and only a reactionary so called nationalism that is in actuality part of bourgeois

ideology (like talking Black but trying to get into the system) could seem to be the opposite or opposed to Socialism" (UN121, p-12).

As controversial a writer as ever, Baraka describes reactions to his new politics in the poem "At the National Black Assembly" (HF 26-27).

*EEK*  
*a nigger*  
*communist, the lady democrat*  
*nigrita squeeked (HF p26)*

Interestingly, Baraka still casts his opponent, here a Black woman politician, in his traditional imagery of "Black bourgeoisie," from gold fetishism to hypocrisy.

*Going to the airport*  
*Interviewed by WLIE*  
*She smiled powdering her*  
*Conversation*  
*& caught a plane*  
*to*  
*petit bourgeois*  
*Negro*  
*Heaven. (HF 27)*

In the introduction to the poems of *Hard Facts* Baraka demands that "we need a poetry that directly describes the situation of the people and tells us how we can change it". Baraka's previous emphasis on white racism as "the sole cause of our disorder + oppression" (*Hard Facts*) as the "motivating rationale behind the continual suppression of non Europeans by Europeans" ("Blue print for Black Criticism, First World 1, 1977) is now rejected by Baraka as part of an irrational outlook on life as a "subjective mystification" which leads to "mysticism, metaphysics, spookism, rather than dealing with reality". In *Hard Facts*, Baraka maintains that nationalism becomes reactionary and merely the "newly emerging Black bureaucratic elite" when it focuses on "white people as the cause of our oppression rather than the system of monopoly capitalism". (*Hard Facts*) May be Baraka became Marxist to raise the consciousness of the people and prepare them for the violent revolution. Baraka is against the Black bourgeoisie and Black businessmen who he felt were far from making life any better for the majority of the Black Americans. In *Hard Facts* he says that in order to "raise the level of the people", the artist must learn, not just from one ethnic group, but from the people, these "dynamic working masses". His poetry and drama since 1974 reflects this new shift. The poems in *Hard Facts* are same as those of Langstone Hughes's socialist poems collected in *Good Morning Revolution* and "When we'll Worship Jesus" reminds us of Langstone Hughes's "Goodbye Christ".

*We'll worship Jesus when*

*he get bad enough to at least scare*

*somebody -cops not afraid*

*of Jesus*

*pushers not afraid*

*of Jesus, capitalists racists*

*imperialists not afraid*

*of Jesus shit they making money*

*off Jesus. (HF 6)*

Again like Hughes, Baraka proclaims a socialist revolution as the apocalyptic alternative to "Jesus worship". Since religion is viewed as "opiate of the people", Baraka uses Christianity as only one example of a system of superstitions which misdirect social energies, and Islam is no longer a better alternative:

*Jesus aint did nothing for us*

*But kept us turned toward the*

*Sky (him and his boy allah*

*Too, need to be checked*

*Out! (HF 7)*

Baraka perceives the new Black politicians as a "class of exploiters/in black face, collaborators", at best as "black militants in residence." In their fascination with bourgeois nationalism they do not see the "real enemy," and, indeed, become a part of

*oppression*

*babbling about*

*eternal racism, and divine white supremacy*

*a hundred thousand dollar a year oppression*

*and now the intellectualization, the militant*

*resource of the new class, its historical*

*valorization. Between them, John Johnson*

*and Elijah, David Rockefeller rests his*

*smiling head. (HF p12)*

"If you are a modern artist, who is not some kind of cultural nationalist, you understand that you can learn from anything and any body, see that the whole world culture is at your disposal, because no one people has created the monuments of art and culture in the world, its been collective....." (Baraka in an radio interview 27<sup>th</sup> July 1.984.)

From the above mentioned lines the readers find a different man in Baraka - a mind which has gone through a metamorphosis - a total hundred and eighty degree turn from an angry man in the beat period - to a transitional Black man who tried to glorify the colour Black like Du-Bois the "colour of valour and of triumph". The third phase or the Marxist phase in Baraka's life brings out in him a primitive man a, 'nobel savage' who thinks that the nature in its bountiful is equal to all - and all that has been created or discovered on earth is an act of collective consciousness - all hands put together to create a piece of art. The reader sees in Baraka a beautiful

piece of mind which is at peace with itself - a mind where the T the individualistic syndrome has given way to a moderate and a open man who is ready to accept that "American culture is multinational. Its not just white, Its not just European" (Baraka a radio interview 27<sup>^</sup> July 1985). And this sense of realization is reflected in his poetry. The images that Baraka produced to express his thoughts and feelings also elucidate the way he thinks about social and political changes.

Baraka unfolds himself as a great humanist, a priest who worships and glorifies the human mind.

*we worship the strength in us*

*we worship the life in us...*

*but we aint gonna worship no Jesus...*

The glorification of the inner soul is complete, the transformation of man over the ages and the complete turn around of the poet's mind is complete. The poet equalises Jesus the supreme sou! with the human mind and Jesus is equivalent to the powers of the human mind. Baraka professes to

- worship the light in 'us' - the light which is not Jesus as the almighty but the realisation and the supreme value of the human mind. Jesus exist because it is the human mind which makes it exist, Jesus is only a figment of imagination of the poet. We worship the light which is a force or current which has enormous amount of energy, a farce which has the vitality and

energy to take a man beyond the boundaries of reality to a different plain of transcendental reality.

Baraka dreams of a world based on "reality and vision", he actually points at the reality of the human mind. The reality which ultimately moves over to the super reality that is 'Jesus' and ultimately the transcendental reality where every thing becomes one according to Indian philosophy "Aanandam" the ultimate joy of being one with the universe.

"Jesus" is portrayed as an agent of change and how it transformed it self through a period of time, it is the phoenix image of Jesus that is predominant in his poetry and Baraka's universal outlook of thesis - antithesis and synthesis, is identical with Marx's theory where ultimately the state withers away and every thing lives on a particular plain. It is universal imagery where the teeming millions join hands to become one. In "A New Reality is Better than A New Movie" there is a continuous change in the poets psyche.

*How wilt it go, crumbling earthquake, towering inferno, juggernaut, volcano, smashup.*

Here Baraka portrays a chaotic life, a mundane nature of existence. The degradation of the capitalist rule is clearly and very forcefully portrayed by Baraka "the feverish fantasy of the capitalist flunky film hacks" , where the

word "feverish" immediately brings into the readers mind the "Hollow man" of T.S. Eliot and the jaundiced existence of the modern man living under the heavy burden of the fopperies of the modern day capitalist age. The real conflict between the 'haves and the have nets' has been clearly portrayed by Baraka when he writes - "to survive with no money In the money world" and of "making the Boss 100,000 for every 200 dollars", which portrays the exploitation of the proletariat who does not have the means to meet the end.

In the second stanza of the poem Baraka tries to shake the proletariat from his drunken stupor - "what yo gonna do about it" and this is where Baraka gains an image of universal preacher, an iconoclast, a revolutionary. The poet wants to breakdown the monotonous complacency, the eternal hibernation of the masses, to rise up - and there come the real block buster which is much more dangerous and volatile than a Hollywood movie: "The real terror of nature is humanity enraged, the true techni color spectacle". The poet wants a new reality which will be a super reality where men and women will demand a society where every one is equal-where the means of production is divided amongst all. The Marxist theory of exploitation, revolution and classless society is clearly portrayed by Baraka, and he attains the image of high priest, an universal poet when he says "we want it all... the whole world".

"The Dictatorship of the proletariat is a pulpit poem where Baraka goes on to preach the readers about the basics of communism, and poetry becomes a vehicle for change and is a medium to shake off the complacency of the masses. In this poem Baraka preaches the down trodden and the suffering masses to rise up and to rule and to break away from the eternal bondage of the society. The poet portrays the capitalists as "blood suckers" a dominant animal image of bats, lice, and leech. In the end of the poem the poet glorifies the rule of the proletariat where the mechanism of the state no longer exists and the commune system of Mao, Lenin and Marx exist.

The poem "Class Struggle" is a narrative poem of a meeting Baraka had with Malcolm X and the Tanzanian Marxist Babu, who was later arrested and jailed:

*Malcolm was murdered a month after the three of us met*

*And for a generation we slept, so many of us, what that ready meant. We disappeared into Islam and Kawaida, into sections of truth that*

*Each*

*Veered away toward fantasy.*

*(HFp34)*

In the unpublished poem "Malcolm Remembered" (dated February, 1977, 12 years after the assassination), Baraka addresses Malcolm as

*Comrade Worker, Comrade*

*Leader, Friend and visionary.*

Even in Baraka's drama after the 1970s is beset with similar ideas. Posters announcing his new plays include the phrase "*Poor whites are welcome*". These radical changes reflect Baraka's new theatrical policy that:

*White working class culture is closer to and more influenced by Black and third world cultures, all of which are opposed to and separate from the bourgeois (or white) culture. (UN 121 page-12)*