

### اهتداء

**الكاتب الأمريكي لوروا جونز ( اميري بركة ) من المسيحية الى الاسلام مع  
الاشارة الى اعماله الشعرية والمسرحية**

يعالج هذا البحث موضوع هام جدا ألا وهو اهتداء الكاتب الأمريكي لوروا جونز ( اميري بركة )، المشهور والمؤثر في الأدب الحديث، من المسيحية إلى الإسلام الحنيف. وفي هذا الصدد، يتناول البحث العوامل والدوافع المؤثرة الجديرة بالاهتمام التي جعلت هذا الشاعر والكاتب المسرحي الأمريكي يعتنق الدين الإسلامي الحنيف بعد خروجه من المسيحية. وقد بذل هذا الكاتب كل وقته وجهده وكذلك موهبته الشعرية والمسرحية لكشف النقاب عن حقيقة وممارسات المجتمعات الغربية ومنها معاناة السود والتفرقة العنصرية داخل المجتمع الأمريكي. ووضح هذا الكاتب أيضا الآثار السلبية للنظام الرأسمالي الذي أوجد فجوة شاسعة بين الفقراء والأغنياء. ويتطرق البحث إلى عامل هام الذي ساعد هذا الكاتب إلى التخلي عن المسيحية والدخول في الإسلام وهو ارتباط المسيحية بالمادية البحتة وبالتالي مساعدة الرأسمالية على البقاء وكذلك العبودية. ولذلك، اعتنق أمير بركه الإسلام بسبب فشل المسيحية في حل مشاكل السود داخل المجتمع الأمريكي. واهم من ذلك انه وجد في الإسلام التوازن بين الجانب الروحي والجانب المادي. وسوف تكشف هذه الدراسة أيضا أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين أمير بركه وبعض معاصريه

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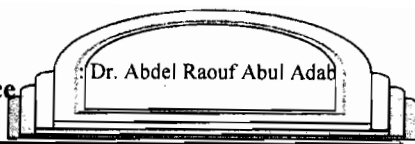
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revolutionary poet and dramatist, he devotes his energy and time to expose the oppression, brutality, the loss of identity and racial discrimination done to the black community inside the American society. He also sees capitalism as an evil that creates a wide gap between the rich man and the poor man. As a result, this study aims at showing the factors and motivations that led him to embrace Islam. He embraced Islam because of its high morality. This study also shows that the significant concept of peace in Islam is one of the basic factors which helped him to convert to Islam. On the other hand, Christianity helped so much in transforming the majority of African Americans into slaves. As a result, he completely lost his faith in Christianity because of its failure to end or reduce the suffering of the black people. The present study also attempts to expose the points of differences and similarities between Amiri Baraka and his contemporaries.

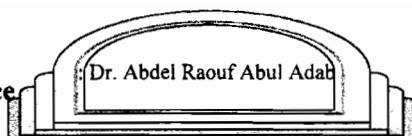
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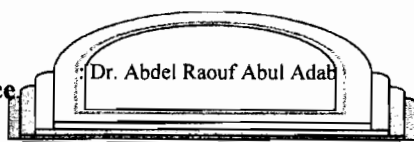
**The Conversion of the American Writer LeRoi Jones ( Amiri Baraka ) from Christianity to Islam with special Reference to His Poetry and Drama**

The objective of the present study is to inform about the conversion of the American writer, LeRoi Jones ( Amiri Baraka ), from Christianity to Islam. Amiri Baraka ( b. 1934 ) is one of the most influential writers in modern American literature. As a



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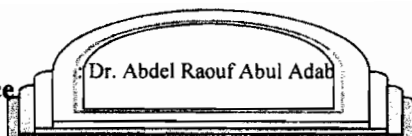
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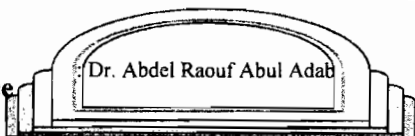
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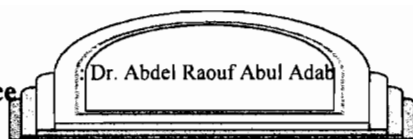
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**Islam with progressive social thinking. At that time, that is as much impact as it made on me – the idea that Islam was being connected with progressive social thought and with black Nationalist thinking. ( 45)**

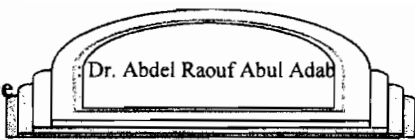
Again, having been converted to the Muslim faith, he changed his former slave name from LeRoi Jones to an African Muslim name ; Amiri Baraka :

**Converted to the Kewaida sect of the Muslim faith, he took the name Imamu Amiri Baraka and moved to Newark, New Jersey. “ Imamu is the Swahili word for spiritual leader ; “ Amiri Baraka “is the Arabic name Jones adopted. In Newark he directed Spirit House, a religious, cultural, and educational black community. He lived with his second wife, their son, and his wife ‘s three daughters by a previous marriage. ( 46 )**



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**They allow Christianity because Christianity doesn't exist the way they practice it ; it's a debased form of an Eastern religion ...they allow this debased form because it allows the black people to have a certain amount of emotional liberation. You can get happy in church. they'll let you scream in church. they think all these niggers are going to be sitting up and screaming Halleluja and what not, and then they are going to head back and start eating that that pig and drinking that wine and working for the Man If they thought there wasgoing to be a whole lot of black people saying ' Allah be praised " and talking about righteousness and cleaning themselves up and stopping to eat that big and drink that wine, they wouldn't allow that kind of religion. ( 44)**

The above quotation exposes why the American governments use Christianity as a weapon to build their brutal social, economic and political structures in which the rich victimize the poor :

**Islam first influenced me through Brother Malcolm, Hajj alik, because he was, actually, the first black man that I associated**

Baraka repeatedly asserts the negative materialistic dimension of Christianity. More than this, he defines the commercial basis of slavery with Christianity as a means of repression:

**Slavery was not any thing but an unnecessarily cruel and repressive method of making money for the Western white man ...Even though the slave trade, for instance, was entered into for purely commercial reasons, after a few years the more liberal – minded Americans began to try to justify it as a method of converting heathens to Christianity.( 43)**

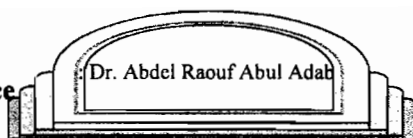
In reality, Baraka's conversion to Islam and his significant and remarkable emergence as an individual of faith may provide glimpses of the power of the redemption through Islam. To him, Islam is not a religion which supports peace by tolerating injustice and oppression. He defends Islam as a viable solution to the problems of America. As a result, Amiri Baraka expresses thoroughly the foolishness of black allegiance to Christianity and the high moral quality of Islam :

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What we want to confirm is that Amiri Baraka sees capitalism as an instrument of evil designed to oppress the lower economic classes. Also, capitalism is one of the core component of the West African trade. Most remarkably, Baraka is very sensitive and quick to attack Christianity for its complicity in maintaining and supporting the status quo of America concerning racial injustice and class disparity. The religious leaders of Christianity had used the teachings of the Bible to mentally enslave the black men by urging them to accept salvation through death. In other words, one can not ignore the impact of Christianity on the formative stages of capitalism and consequently the American slave system :

Capitalism is a development by refinement from feudalism, just as feudalism is a development by refinement of slavery. Whereas capitalism is a development by refinement from slavery and feudalism, socialism is obviously not development from capitalism, it needs to share a fundamental principle, that of exploitation.(42)



In this context, what is more significant to mention is that Amiri Baraka called for the emancipation of Black women. To him, women should play an important role in the construction of the black community. He exerted much effort to achieve and ensure the rights of Black women. Women should exert influence on men's lives. They should play supportive roles to black men. He insisted that black women should take a positive and complementary role to their Black men. This is because the woman stands for the African values of the older generations which were personal freedom and dignity :

**We do not believe in equality of men and women. We could never be equals. Nature has not provided this. We will complement each other. There is no house without a man and his wife. When we say complement, completes, we mean that we have certain functions which are more natural to us, and you have certain graces that are yours alone. We say that a Black woman must first be able to inspire her man, and then she must be able to teach our children, and contribute to the social development of the nation. (41)**

Native “ encourages and supports the return of the speaker to his blackness and his roots. Also, his poem “ Black Art “ affirms the wide responsibility of African American art in general and poetry in particular :

**Poems are bullshift unless they are  
Teeth or trees or lemons piled  
On a step. Or black ladies dying  
Of men leaving nickel hearts  
Beating them down. Fuck poems  
And they are useful, they shoot  
Come at you, love what are,  
breathe like wrestlers, or shudder  
strangely after pissing. We want live  
words of the hip world live flesh &  
coursing blood. Hearts Brains  
Souls splintering fire ...  
We want a black poem. And a  
Black World.  
Let the World be a Black Poem  
And let All Black People Speak This Poem. ( 40)**

To add, Baraka urged the black readers to ignore any work written by the white. He asserted repeatedly that African American literature has been strongly hindered by the black author's reliance upon European models of artistic style and value :

**When I die, the consciousness I carry I will to black people. May they pick me apart and take the useful parts, the sweet meat of my feelings. And leave the bitter bullshit rotten white parts alone ( 38)**

Another and more impressive quotation :

**Because the slaves were not allowed to read or write, their lives, beliefs, and adaptations were never a part of the historical record . The writings that were recorded about blacks, by whites at the time, were distorted and differed from one writer to another. The different perspectives were not recorded in related historiography. There are no primary documents that can be attributed to the early lifeways of enslaved Africans.(39)**

Again, Amiri Baraka wrote poems which were openly and faithfully meant to speak with the voice of the collective Black community. For example. Baraka's poem, " The Return of the

**Competition has been a characteristic of all class-divided societies. But it is particularly and uniquely characteristic of capitalism at least in its most extreme forms...The case is proved ! Capitalism is the breeder of race prejudice.(36)**

Most of Baraka's works show and assert the damage that happens to a black man who ignores his African cultural roots and tries to adopt white European American materialistic values. In other words, he supports the concept that the African Americans are a separate race and that they should have no connection to American thought and ideas :

**We do not believe that better jobs and bigger houses, color televisions and late- model cars prove that people have attained the abundant of life of which Jesus spoke. That abundant life can not be experienced by a people captive to the idolatry of a sensate and materialistic culture. Commitment to physical gratification as the purpose of life and voidance of the gospel's moral, ethical standards provide false foundations for hard choices. Such false values divide and separate a people who would be free ( 37)**

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to eliminate its cause . For the cause of racism is not the false ideas or racial myths conceived and spread by the white supremacists. Nor is it the legal structure erected to give these false ideas the force of law. The cause of racism is rather the irrational, strife – ridden, class –divided capitalist system.

There were other hatreds and other prejudices before capitalism, but the capitalist era was the first in which man, driven by material interests, discriminated against his fellow man because of the color of his skin. It is worth pondering that the very concept of race, and even the word itself, are products of the capitalist era...We shall trace the historical conditions in which racism developed in the United States –thereby giving the lie to the claim that segregation practices are rooted in ancient “folkways.” We shall prove that these practices are themselves of comparatively` recent origin, and that they were deliberately enacted by the capitalist class of the Southern states in order (a)to ensure themselves an ample supply of cheap, unresisting labor, and (b) to keep the working class divided on racial lines ...Therefore, it is plainly in the capitalists’interest to prevent the working class from uniting. And race prejudice is one of the most insidious and effective devices ever inventing for blinding the workers to their class interests, and keeping them divided and fighting each other.



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divisions in the working class through promoting white chauvinism because the capitalists benefit so much from racial discrimination. Many writers think that one of the arguments made by the American government to garner support for the Cold War was the material benefit that many Americans were receiving due to the strength of capitalism ; benefits that the African American community did not enjoy. One can understand that the unwillingness of the United States to allow any challenge to the economic basis for its power had profound and painful consequences on the Africa American community. Also, Baraka's insistence on the inability and weakness of Christianity to put an end or reduce the suffering of the black people is very obvious. As Baraka declares :

**When the Beast emerged from the Western sea  
We had no soul, they'd  
Created money, the animal king, the coin, the khan  
The con, had currency. ( 35)**

Eric Hass, in his book Capitalism Breeder of Race Prejudice, affirms :

**While a great deal of effort has been made to minimize and alleviate the effects of racism, nothing whatever has been done**

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other black radical writers, Amiri Baraka identified capitalism as the central source of black oppression. The system of capitalism and its aftermath has attempted by many devious ways and ugly means to destroy the humanity of all people, and particularly the humanity of black people. More specifically, this ugly system led to many psychological problems inside the black community. Also, Baraka strongly lays the blame for black men's economic deprivation at the feet of capitalism and racial discrimination. Capitalism produced and created a large group of black workers who live without steady employment or resources or available opportunities . Shannon Grevious states :

In the financial arena, White discriminatory practices excluded African Americans from most job opportunities that could lead to economic stability for their communities. These practices restricted Blacks in the jobs they could pursue such as agricultural labor, domestic work or menial tasks. For many Blacks, saving money to build wealth became difficult due to discriminatory business practices. (34)

So, the American capitalists are unable and unwilling to integrate the black Americans into this society on the basis of genuine equality. In reality, the American capitalism supported and maintained the racial

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work towards this instead of waiting for God to do it for them, then obviously the church no longer had a meaning for them “. ( 32) In this connection, Baraka goes beyond criticizing Christianity and its role in the oppression of African Americans. He goes on to offer a new religion to African Americans based on them and their past as well as their struggle:

**we worship the strength in us  
we worship our selves  
we worship the light in us  
we worship the wormth in us  
we worship the world  
we worship the love in us  
we worship our selves  
we worship nature  
we worship ourselves  
we worship the life in us,and  
science, and knowledge, and transformation  
of the visible world ( 33 )**

The above quotation shows that Baraka called for the destruction of the capitalistic order and its replacement with a new order where economic and political power were shared equally. Like

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juke house –the latter a term for pleasure and party house in which blues, dancing, drinking, and gambling all occurred simultaneously on a Saturday night – participating bodies collectively experience heightened emotion and orgiastic release ...The church may have been aware that people dance to the blues for the same reasons they jump and shout in church : emotional and physical release.(30).

As it was mentioned before, Christianity's connection with capitalism is very strong. In his poem " When We'll Worship Jesus", Baraka attacks Christianity severely . In his opinion, this religion helped so much in transforming the majority of African Americans into slaves because slave owners gradually came to realize that nothing suited slavery better than the complete and passive submission embodied in Christianity :

**We aint gonna worship jesus cause jesus don't exist except in song and strong except in ritual and dances except in Islam Stained Tears or trillion dollar opulence stretching back in history ... Stop moanic about jesus, stop sweatin and crying and stompinAnd dyin for jesus. ( 31)**

Also, Carter Harrison remarks, " As soon as black people conceived of the possibility of changing the world and began to

**or scatting recognizable jazz melodies to frame a poem or to establish a syncopation between word and song.(28)**

In this connection, there is a strong point of similarity between Du Bois and Amiri Baraka. Like Baraka, Bois has encouraged the African Americans to embrace black music as a way of understanding life. In his opinion, music is used as a healing tool and a healing process to social discrimination and exploitation. In describing the importance of black music, Bois remarks in The Souls of Black Folk, " I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world ...They are the music of an unhappy people , of the children of disappointment ; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways " ( 29) What is more significant to remember is that many people converted to and embraced the Nation of Islam in the United States because of its connection with the rap music at a time when Christianity absolutely rejected it :

**Scholar Albert Murray points out that the church labeled the act of dancing to the blues and themerriment of the blues singer as sinful and of the devil because the church itself, on some level, saw a ritual that too closely resembled the actions of the congregation on a Sunday morning. Within the church and the**

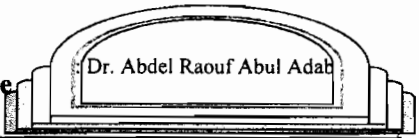
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Americans' position within American society. Baraka strongly believes that music and poetry have the ability to create immediate change. Also, music is an integral part of performance. In Baraka's poems, music plays an essential role in the total effect. For example, Baraka is very serious regarding the use of sound in his poem "In the Funk World". Kenneth Sherwood observes :

With the announcement of the title a framing gesture Baraka introduces the poem in a strong voice. The pace and tone with which the next lines are delivered give them the feel of an improvisation, perhaps even of an aside. This quickly, quietly delivered historical catalogue of the misrepresentation and appropriations of African American musical forms is marked by the modulation of such paralinguistic features as rate, pause, pitch, tone, loudness and stress. As the listeners lean forward to audit the rapid, soft stream of words, they are brought up short by the final phrase of the second line, which is shouted and followed by a pause. The short lines that make up the second half of the poem are delivered forcefully, with a definite, rhythmic timing that establishes a contrast and leads to a close that arrives with the force of a comic punchline ... Baraka explicitly brings his poems into relation with music by humming

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**Baraka contends that although slavery destroyed many formal artistic traditions, African American music represents certain African survivals. Most important, African American music represents an African approach to culture. As such, the music sustains the African worldview and records the historical experience of an oppressed people. Baraka also argues that while Africans adapted their culture to the English language and to European musical instruments and song forms, they also maintained an ethnic viewpoint that is preserved and transmitted by their music. Stylistic changes in the music mirror historical changes in the attitudes and social conditions of African Americans ...Baraka's view that music is capable of expressing and maintaining a group identity leads to his assertion that even in later decades, increasingly dominated by the recording and broadcasting industry, African American artists continued to be the primary contributors and innovators. A classic work of its kind, Blues People offers an interesting view of how cultural products reflect and perhaps determine other social developments. ( 27 )**

The above quotation shows that music, as a cultural expression, reflects strongly the condition of the people who produce it. In other words, black music has removed the veil about African

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formation. Many critics see that music can be used as a standard to measure the cultural assimilation of Africans in America from the early eighteenth century to the twentieth century. For example, The Slave Ship is a good example in this direction. The use of music throughout the play is central to this theme of African American cultural identity and communal solidarity. Undoubtedly, this drama is replete with slaves who always moan and groan, filling the stage with the sounds of terrible pain. Additionally, during the historical moment of black struggle, music played an important role in the determination for social justice and black pride. Bebey admits this fact, “ African music is fundamentally a collective art. It is a communal property whose spiritual qualities are shared and experienced by all. “ (25) So, Baraka is deeply rooted in the black community and committed to the survival and development of black community literature and music. He asserts :

**Blues and jazz have been the only consistent exhibitors of “  
Negritude “ in formal American culture simply because the  
bearers of its tradition maintained their essential identities as  
Negroes ; in no other art ( and I will persist in calling Negro  
music, Art ) has this been possible.(26)**

There is another and more convincing quotation :



**Clay clubs the drunk to the floor without releasing Lula, who is still screaming. Clay finally gets her to the seat and throws her into it ...Clay : ( Slaps her as hard as he can, across the mouth. Lula's head bangs against the back of the seat. When she raises it again, Clay slaps her again.( 24 )**

The above quotation shows that Clay's rage comes from abuses, humiliation and racial oppression. Moreover, his rage results from the loss of his own identity. It can be said that he rages violently to achieve and restore his own true identity.

Interestingly, one can say that music occupies a strong and prominent place in Baraka's works because it is connected to his anger and the way things were inside the black community. His poems show an interest in music and he has written many books on this subject dealing with the influential force of black music on a black audience. Baraka insisted that African American music must be the primary source for all forms of African American creativity. He strongly believes that " black music "is important for the spiritual life of the Negro and it is an integral part of his life. As for Baraka, music played an integral role not only in igniting and motivating black people, but also in the promotion of positive differential identity, group solidarity and national and cultural

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In this connection, black rage is an essential part and one of the core components of Baraka's plays. His plays express and reflect clearly black rage because it is used as an influential and healing process one way or another. His characters rage greatly because they can not see a way out of their lives. In other words, racial oppression at the hands of the white majority is always the main source of black rage. For example, Dutchman shows clearly how the black man, Clay, uses violence against the white woman, Lula, in order to maintain himself in this contaminated hostile society of white America. He refuses to remain in his passive role and to let Lula humiliate him. The tension grows gradually as Lula turns Clay into an angry revolutionary :

**Clay : Lula...you dumb bitch. Why don't you stop it ?**

**( He rushes half stumbling from his seat, and grabs one of her flaiting arms.)**

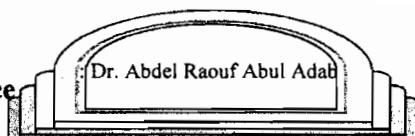
**Lula : Let me go You black son of a bitch.**

**( She struggles against him. )**

**Let me go Help**

**(Clay is dragging he towards her seat, and the drunk seeks to interfere. He grabs Clay the shoulders and begins wrestling with him around.**

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time of the September 11. 2001 attacks Amiri Baraka wrote a very remarkable and provocative poem titled “ Somebody Blew Up America “ about the bloody event. The poem was controversial and highly critical of the American government because of racial terrorism and social inequality. Many critics agree that the basic underlying theme of this poem focuses on how Black Americans have suffered so much from domestic terrorism by Slave Owners, State Laws, lynching, denial of rights, national oppression, racism and character assassination. Besides, the concerned poem contains information supporting Israel’s involvement in this conspiracy, because the Jews in New York had been warned previously not to go to the targeted buildings on that day. In any case, in this poem Amiri Baraka attempts seriously to remove the veil about the evils of imperialism :

**Who knew the World Trade Centre was gonna get  
bombed**

**Who told 4000 Israelis workers at the Twin Towers  
To stay home that day**

**Why did Sharon stay away ?**

**Who know why Five Israelis was filming the explosion  
And cracking they sides at the notion. ( 23)**

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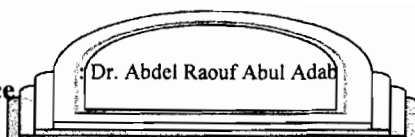
**that killed him, let us never breathe a pure breath if We fail, and white men call us faggots till the end of the earth. (21)**

In the same context, the African American writer and activist Du Bois declares his strong belief in communism and his deep hatred of capitalism :

**I have studied socialism and communism long and carefully in lands where they practiced and in conversation with their adherents, and with wide reading. I now state my conclusion frankly and clearly : I believe in communism. I mean by communism; a planning way of life in the production of wealth and work designed for building a state whose object is the highest welfare of its people and not merely the profit of a part. Once I thought these ends could be attained under capitalism. After earnest observation, I now believe that capital and free enterprise are leading the world to disaster ... We are now ruled by those who control wealth and who by that power buy or coerce public opinion.(22)**

According to Amiri Baraka, foreign and domestic terrorism has been used by the U. S. as a means to silence the oppressed African peoples inside the American society. For example, at the

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which were deeply created by American hostile media and white literature because the blacks were not in a strong position to project and produce their own images . The following poem, in which Amiri Baraka powerfully and successfully projects Malcolm X, is very expressive :

**For Malcolm's eyes, when they broke The face of some dumb  
white man. For Malcolm's hands raised to bless us all black and  
strong in his image of ourselves, for Malcolm's words fire darts,  
the victor's tireless thrusts, words hung above the world change  
as it may, he said it, and for this he was killed, for saying and  
feeling, and being / change, all collected hot in his heart, For  
Malcolm's heart, raising us above our filthy cities, for his stride,  
and his beat, and his address to the grey monsters of the world,  
For Malcolm's pleas for your dignity, black men, for your life,  
black men, for the filling of your minds with righteousness, for  
all of him dead and gone and vanished from us, and all of them  
which clings to our speech black god of our time For all of him,  
and all of yourself, look up black man, quit stuttering and  
shuffling, look up black man, quit whining and stooping, for all  
of him, for Great Malcolm a prince of the earth, let nothing In  
us rest until we avenge ourselves for his death, stupid animals**

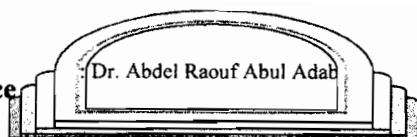
The above quotation demonstrates that Amiri Baraka admired the African American Muslim man and militant Malcolm X and regarded him the best model and representative of the black community. Daniel Martlin affirms :

The ferocity of Malcolm 's tirades against white America and against the integrationist, nonviolent civil rights leadership had endeared him to Jones. For many young black Americans, as for Jones, this latest assassination was the final confirmation that only nationalist and revolutionary doctrines would liberate black people."

(19)

Like Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X was angry at the way things were in the American society that make the suffering black people inferior and make them act accordingly. He has been regarded as a defender of blacks by urging them to use arms in defense of life. As for him, people will get their freedom only by struggling for it. He encouraged African Americans to fight physically and violently to gain their racial pride, equality and citizenship : " If it is right for America to draft us, and teach how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country. " (20 ) Also, Malcolm did his best to correct the bad and depressing images of the Africans

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nothing less than a socialist revolution because many thinkers believe that only proletariat has the capacity to overthrow capitalism. As for Amiri Baraka, the abolition of capitalism and the construction of socialism represent the only possible solution that can end racial prejudice and oppression. Socialism alone can create the conditions of cooperation and collective interests essential to universal brotherhood and there will be financial security for all. Daniel puts it this way :

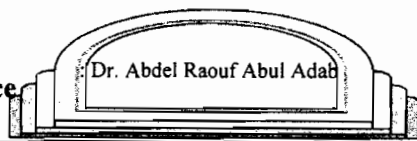
**At the beginning of the 1960s after a brief visit to revolutionary Cuba, where he met Fidel Castro and militant civil rights leader Robert F. Williams, Baraka wrote a prize-winning essay, “ Cuba Libre “ and his involvement with radical politics was begun. Gradually he began to resent the apolitical tendencies of the Greenwich Village Beats. The assassination of Malcolm X triggered a decisive turn in his life. He left his family in Greenwich Village to found the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/ School ( BARTS ) in Harlem ...In Newark, Baraka spearheaded the political radicalization of the African American community ...The BARTS marked a turning point in African American culture, emphasizing black consciousness, self-determination, and cultural revolution against white racism.**

**( 18)**

**submissive, externally determined condition : for him the present and the future are only copies of the past.(16)**

Again, Amiri Baraka's visit to Cuba in 1960 added and marked an important turning point to his life. It is a visit that initiated his transformation into a politically and socially active artist. He came to understand that politics had a strong place and position in art. He met Fidel Castro and writers and artists from third world countries whose political concerns included the fight against poverty, famine and oppressive governments. Accordingly, Baraka began to identify himself with the third world countries and to write powerful dramas of human suffering with strong ethnic and political dimension, opening the eyes of his readers and audience to reality as he saw it . Also, he moved more to Marxist ideology and thought where he supported the oppressed and the poor. He called for a socialist community as one of his significant goal : “ Baraka was not happy with the quality of African American life in the city and soon parted with both the mayor and black nationalism in favor of third world Marxism.” (17) Consequently, Amiri Baraka supported taking an active part in creating a socialist society where the black man can live as a descent human being, free from the pressures of racism, economic exploitation and oppression. So, the struggle to end the oppression and degradation of black America requires and needs





**Clay : Just led me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. A whole people of neurotics, shrugging to keep from being same. 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...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 ...They will murder you, and have very national explanation. Very much like your own. They will cut your throats, and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation.(15)**

Henry Lacy adopts the same attitude :

**The explanation of American racial history that Lula proposes rests upon a myth of black assimilation, resignation, and cowardice. For her the archetypal and true Afro – American is either a raunchy overly potent mindless field nigger or a meek selfless...This double aspect of the Afro – American slave past is, in Lula’s interpretation, ineradicable. Any given black man any random Clay, must either embrace role the oppressor’s neurotic needs, or become a pathetic “Uncle Tom Big Lip,” an object of derision and mockery. In any case, he is chained to a**

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and obtrusive aversions have prevented African Americans from accomplishing their American dream of equality, justice, quality education, employment, and humane treatment.

Those African Americans who are unaware of the subtlety of these racial attitudes may have feeling of inadequacy, after being unable to accomplish their basic goals. These persons may become mentally frustrated if they believe these obstacles are personal or racial, rather than environmentally induced and controlled.(14)

The whites had long controlled and dominated the image and identity of African Americans. The whites were forcefully able to enslave the blacks because these were not considered citizens or humans. Amiri Baraka attempted seriously to oppose and protest against these ridiculous and inhuman black images. His plays and poems are not about slavery, but they are about the painful results of slavery. Consequently, he wanted poetry and drama that would reflect faithfully black life and its history and the positive function of resistance and struggle. He added that the spirit, voice and expression of the black writer must be central and relating to the Black Power Movement. Amiri Baraka's play Dutchman is a good example in this direction where the black man, Clay, is uncertain of himself and his identity :

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The owners deprived them of their just rights and denied them any freedom. Worse than this, many slaves were converted to Christianity by force : ” ...John Butler asserts that between 1680 and 1760 “an African spiritual holocaust” occurred , depriving slaves of their traditional African belief systems and thus rendering them highly receptive to conversion to Christianity.”(12) Also, teaching slaves reading and writing was against the American law : “ Slaveholders limited or prohibited education of enslaved African Americans because they believed it might empower their chattel and inspire or enable emancipatory ambitions. “ ( 13 ). After emancipation, the slaves were free but they did not know who or what they are. In reality, racism has affected African Americans physically and emotionally. The Blacks have experienced anguish and distress because of this racial discrimination. They were psychologically destroyed. Therefore, many critics strongly believe that several of the problems that threaten and plague many black people are actually mental and social illnesses that originated in American slavery. For example, Melvin remarks :

“But the American Dream for African Americans has been a series of nightmares, nightmares that have been constantly filled with the lack of quality education, prejudice, discrimination, injustice, institutional racism, and violence. All of these negative

philosophy of integration. He states that the involvement of the whites in black liberation struggle weakened the movement. His following logical statement also conveys the aftermath and the painful consequences of an integrated society, in which the black community is entirely weakened by assimilation into the white behaviour :

**It's just like when you have got some coffee that's too black, high means it's too strong. What do you do ? You integrate it with cream, you make it weak. But if you pour too much cream in it, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it puts you to sleep. This what they did with the march on Washington. The joined it. The did not integrate it ; they infiltrated it. The joined it, became a part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it its militancy. They ceased to be angry. (11 )**

One can conclude from the preceding discussion that one of the most tragic legacy of slavery and emancipation was the loss of identity. During slavery, slaves did not have any individuality ; they were simply the master's property. The owners had full authority over them. No humane considerations governed this social practice.

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Baraka supported violence as a means of struggle one way or another. So, Baraka's anger due to the procrastination and slow progress of US amends for the sake of Blacks contributes greatly to his declaration that America should be damned. To him, the role of the black artist is to help in the destruction of America, Therefore, his poems and dramas are considered social historical and political documents reflecting and exposing many and various things about the reality of modern African American life. James admitted this fact in 1970:

**The black in the United States are the most socially united group in the country ; they all have one unifying characteristic – they suffer from that historical development which has placed them in the role class citizens. There is no national group which automatically constitutes one social force with a unified outlook and the capacity to make unified moves in politics and to respond to economic problems ...It is from America's urban blacks that many people all over the world have historically gained a consciousness of the problems that black suffer and their attempts to overcome them. ( 10)**

Similarly, Malcolm X's opinion on the issue of integration and assimilation seems to be identical. He did not support the

most well - known and highly praised play, *Dutchman*, he depicts a subway encounter between Lula, a white, Bohemian woman, and Clay, a young middle class, black man. At first Clay seems to represent the aspects of black life Baraka harshly criticized in his earlier works, while Lula appears to embody the values the author prized. Lula taunts Clay about his repressed identity, urging him to release his true black self. When he finally does, it pours forth as a violent tirade against Lula and the larger white world. At the drama's conclusion Lula calmly stabs Clay to death and sits back to await her next victim... As the dominant black theorist and artist of the late 1960s, Baraka was responsible for shifting the focus of black literature from an integrationist art that conveyed a raceless and classless vision to a literature rooted in the black experience. The era over which he presided is considered the most important in black arts since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920. And despite Baraka's rejection of the ideal of an integrated world, his work affected all races. ( 9 )

The above quotation demonstrates that in spite of the fact that the obstacles imposed on the Blacks as a consequence of racial discrimination and oppression they are greatly satisfied with their African heritage, and, thus, do not desire to be white. Accordingly,

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in transforming the African American struggle into an international struggle. This means that the world he looked upon was one in which there was a struggle for the liberation of the oppressed people particularly black people. In other words, Baraka is completely aware of the futility in demanding equality and dignity from the oppressors because they are unwilling to treat African Americans as equals. Haskins declares, “ The real reason why the Harlem Renaissance ended was that the United States was a segregated society and the majority white population never accepted blacks as equals. “ (8) So, Amiri Baraka ridiculed anyone who believed that there would be major racial reforms by non violence revolutions. He considered racial harmony in America impossible and urged the blacks to find other alternatives . He seriously demonstrates that the Black assimilation into superficial and contaminated white thought and behaviour had failed to guarantee full equality and citizenship. In other words, the strategy of racial uplift has failed to achieve even a meaningful change for the majority of African Americans :

**Eventually Baraka’s writing revealed the slow disintegration of his faith in racial harmony. In the poem “ Black Dada Nihilismus “ he ponders the many nonwhite cultures destroyed by Western civilization and concludes by calling on the African god Damballah for help in the destruction of the West. In his**

into alleys and take their weapons leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland, Knockoff poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite politicians Airplane poems. “ ( 6 ) He lived and worked with a profound and high sensitivity believing that the revolutionary change was truly possible. In this context, he wrote an angry manifesto in which he defined his “Revolutionary Theatre “ as one that :

**Should force change, Expose, Teach, Accuse and Attack, take dreams and give them a reality and show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims and that they themselves are victims if they are blood brothers. ( 7 )**

The most important feature that makes African Americans different from other Americans is their unique history. Black history is very important to Baraka. As for him, reading history and embracing ancestors undoubtedly give the blacks the capacity to avoid the past painful mistakes and experiences. More specifically, he acknowledges the significance of history in his literary works. To the Blacks, existence meant struggle As for Amiri Baraka, struggle is an integral part of his life. He saw Africans as a part of larger international struggle against oppression. One can say that he helped



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issues such as the oppression of blacks in a white society and the oppression of the poor in a capitalist society. He may have associated Christianity with the capitalistic white rule. He regarded the whites as devils because of their ugly behaviour towards the blacks. While Martin Luther King supported non- violent resistance to the evil of racial prejudice, discrimination and hate, conversely, Amiri Baraka urged African Americans to achieve and restore their rights, identity, dignity and freedom by any means available to them. More than this, he does not believe in the Christian philosophy of non-violent protest. Also, he did not find anything in the Bible to suggest that slavery was wrong. Marcus Garvey asserts this fact :

**The white man held the blacks as slaves,  
And bled their souls in living death ;  
Bishops and priests, and kings themselves,  
Preached that the law was right and just ;  
And so the people worked and died,  
And crumbled into material dust. (5)**

Baraka strongly desired an alternative to the increasing violence waged against the black people. He strongly supported the use of radical language. As a result, he called for “ poems that kill. Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns. Poems that wrestle cops

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social degradation suffered daily by millions of African Americans. He repeatedly admits that his family was humiliated and hurt physically and spiritually by racial violence and discrimination:

**In more recent years, recognition of Baraka's impact on late twentieth-century American culture has resulted in the publication of several anthologies of his literary oeuvre ... Baraka's legacy as a major poet of the second half of the twentieth century remains matched by his importance as a cultural and political leader. His influence on younger writers was significant and widespread, and as a leader of Black Arts movement of the 1960s Baraka did much to define and support Black literature's mission into the next century. His experimental fiction of the 1960 is yet considered some of the most significant contribution to black fiction since that of Jean Toomer, who wrote during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. ( 4 )**

One can say that Amiri Baraka succeeded in opening the eyes of many readers to the plight of black citizens. Also, he played a major role in the twentieth century in reviving the radical ideologies of Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and other earlier leader. He wrote plays and poetry which are openly concerned with political

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**We have a common enemy, we have this in common ; we have a common oppressor,a common exploiter, and a common iscriminator. But once we all realize that we have this common enemy,then we unite on the basis what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy - the white man. He is an enemy to all of us. I know some of you all think that some of them aren't enemies. Time will tell. ( 3 )**

The central objective of the present paper is to help clarify and elucidate Amiri Baraka's conversion from Christianity to Islam with special reference to his poetry and drama. An examination of Baraka's life and motivations can help us to understand the factors that led him to embrace Islam. In other words, we wouldaspire to comprehend the various historical, political and social forces that produced a talented personality such Amiri Baraka. Undoubtedly, Amiri Baraka is one of the most prolific and influential writers of African American literature in the twentieth century. Besides, his impact on his contemporary writers has more to do with the nationalist ideas he exposed in the 1960s rather than his actual writings. As a revolutionary poet and dramatist , he devoted his energy and time to expose the oppression and brutality done to the black community. Moreover, Baraka's significant aim is the elimination of political oppression, economic exploitation and the

**view them in Gaul, Spain and in Britain—in fine, we view them all over Europe, together with what were scattered about in Asia and Africa, as heathens and we see them acting more like devils than accountable men. But some may ask, did not the blacks of Africa, and the mulattoes of Asia ( Arabs ), go on the same way as did the whites of Europe. I answer no ...they were never half as avaricious, deceitful, and unmerciful as the whites, according to their knowledge. ( 1 )**

Another more effective quotation written by Eric Lincoln when he faithfully referred to the political crimes greatly committed by the white man against humanity :

**I charge the white man with being the greatest liar on earth ! I charge the white man with being the greatest drunkard on earth ... I charge the white man with being the greatest peace – breaker on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest robber on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest deceiver on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest trouble –maker on earth. ( 2 )**

Malcolm X also has asserted this fact on different occasions :

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Many thinkers and historians regard the twentieth century as the American Century for the influential role the United States played in shaping and forming the world's politics, economics, history and culture. Amiri Baraka (b.1934 ) was born and grew up in an era where racial tension, brutality, oppression and the victimization of the black people were commonplace inside the American society. The depiction and the images of Black men in American literature also reflect the complex and harsh existence of Black life in America . Also, Christian messages of love, peace, humility and tolerance were completely eliminated in a white dominated society. On the other hand, the message of Islam as one of militant righteousness was desirable and attractive to the Blacks who were greatly disillusioned, tricked and brutalized by the white Christian majority. David Walker puts it this way :

**The whites have always been unjust, avaricious and bloodthirsty set of being, always seeking the power and authority. We view them all over the confederacy ofGreece, where they first known to be any thing, and we see them there cutting each other's throats ...trying to subject each other to wretchedness and misery, to effect which they used all kinds of deceitful, and unfair and unmerciful means. We view them next in Rome, where the spirit of tyranny and deceit rages still higher.- We**



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