

THE AFRICANA SPIRIT IN MUSIC:
TOWARD AN AFRICANA PNEUMATOLOGY OF
BREATH, VOICE, AND FIRE

A thesis submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree,
Master of Arts

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Madison, New Jersey

May 2019

ABSTRACT

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M.A. Thesis by

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May 2019

*“All around me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel,
the earth grasps under my feet,
and there is a white song, a white song,
All this whiteness that burns me.”—Frantz Fanon*

In Fanonian terms, the lived experience of the black, colonized body can be likened to an all-encompassing white song that ultimately consumes one’s life, silences one’s voice and extinguishes one’s breath. As a sonic measure of the interconnectedness of the colonized and the colonizer, the slave and master, the empire and the oppressed, this metaphor demonstrates the will and desire to colonize the mind, body and spirit of the *Other* within a binary, object/subject relationship that is enforced on its subject. This entangled relationship between the colonized and the colonizer can best be understood in terms of the rhizomes of dependency, subjectivity and complicity that are constantly striving for resistance and revolutionary social change. In the building of the American Empire, the entangled roots of the colonized and the colonizer begin with the Middle Passage and the fact that the construction of whiteness depended entirely on the construction of blackness as the ultimate subaltern subject. Entanglements are what connect the subaltern African Diaspora to an empire with interconnected, oppressive socio-economic and political systems that have caused the systematic dislocation, displacement, dispersal, exile, and erasure of African diasporic people.

In the spaces between the empire’s entangled roots of systematic oppression, Spirit resides in a third space with its own rhizomes—systems of divine justice that connect the subaltern to the Spirit of truth. It is a task of Africana critical theory and its revolutionary, decolonizing discourse to find

Homi Bhabha's "third space of difference." It is within this space of difference that Spirit becomes the breath and the voice and the fire for the subaltern African Diaspora. It is in the third space that the creativity of hybridity rises up with a revolutionary Spirit that embraces difference and is able to dismantle oppressive systems of empire. This revolutionary concept of an Africana pneumatology that creates an empowering counter discourse of decolonization is armed only with the understanding of systems of divine justice that have the ability to spark transformation. So, what resides at the root of this interconnectedness between the white song and the subaltern African Diaspora? Is it an Africana pneumatology—a still, small voice that commands justice in the name of revolution for the ultimate struggle between life and death? Does this still, small voice reconcile the white song for a subaltern African Diaspora trapped and entangled inside the haunting refrain of a never ending white song? Perhaps a Fanonian postcolonial psychoanalysis of the colonized and the colonizer will construct a space for difference and the revolutionary work of the Spirit as disrupter can begin to enter this postcolonial discourse. To recap, the role of the Spirit is the song that this work will interpret for the African Diaspora.

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INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIALISM AND AFRICANA THOUGHT

1. A Postcolonial Theoretical Framework for an Africana Pneumatology of the Spirit in Music:

In their relational, interconnectedness with the colonizer, the colonized of the subaltern African Diaspora are constantly grappling with the challenge of balancing their hope against their realism and despair—in other words, their afrofuturism against their afropessimism. However, there may be some good news for the colonized as recent evidence emerging in popular culture signals that society may be preparing to lean more toward optimism. Although this work will focus primarily on discourse related to music from the African Diaspora, it would be remiss not to mention the recent phenomenon around two popular films with postcolonial themes involving the subalternity of Africa and the people from the African Diaspora.

First, the Fanonian, postcolonial theme of revolution and the colonized and the colonizer is embedded in the Marvel film, *Black Panther*. Second, the psychoanalytic, Lacanian/Fanonian, postcolonial theme of desire and the gaze is central to the theme of the 2016 Academy Award-winning race and horror film, *Get Out*. This recent emergence of the theme of the Black Hero/Heroine that stands against colonialism in popular film demonstrates an interest for new discourses on colonialism and imperialism. Those who identify with both the colonized and the colonizers are willing to begin this dialog in the “safe spaces” of popular film. In these films, traditional narratives of imperialism are being challenged and the relevance of postcolonialist thought is being introduced to new generations. These films have brought the discourse of the colonized and the colonizer back into the public sphere in new ways and reopened the discourse in spite of the ambivalence and the denial about the subalternity of the African Diaspora among the colonizing segments of our society. It is interesting to see the commercial success of these films. Both the colonized and the colonizers want to fantasize

about a never-colonized, futuristic, technologically-superior African society, even if engaging in this fantasy existence only lasts in one's mind for the duration of a two-hour movie experience. It is nonetheless such visual representations that seem to portray best the revolutionary, Africana radical tradition and project the best understanding of the original intention of the postcolonial vision for our entire world.

When will white supremacist state power representatives take responsibility for whiteness and the systematic oppression that have yet to be dismantled and deconstructed? As the world population is browning rapidly, imperialist and postcolonial narratives—from a historical perspective—are being challenged by voices of “difference” from the subaltern that are demanding new, more historically accurate cultural interpretations of the colonized and the colonizer and of empire and the oppressed. Postcolonialism along with the radicalism of Africana critical theory will become more relevant in understanding and furthering this discourse of “difference” and its place of urgency in today's society. If we intend to progress forward as a society, the colonizer will have to move away from whiteness and its position of ambivalence and begin to take responsibility for the subalternity of the colonized.

The upcoming sections will survey a sample of the existing postcolonial scholarship and begin to set a foundation for a new postcolonial discourse in the Africana context based on the following four key sections: 1) *Postcolonialism: The Colonizer and Whiteness* through the lenses of Albert Memmi and Thandeka; 2) *Postcolonialism: The Colonized and Blackness* through the lenses of Paul Gilroy and Michelle Wright; 3) *Postcolonialism and Psychoanalysis* through the lenses of Frantz Fanon, Jacques Lacan and Alfred Lopez; and 4) *Postcolonialism and the Subaltern African Diaspora* through the lenses of Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, bell hooks and Michelle Wright.

Postcolonialism: The Colonizer and Whiteness:

Who are the colonizers? The answer to this loaded question depends entirely on who one might ask. For the subaltern African Diaspora, which is the group this essay will examine, the colonizer is identified as those European descendants who left their homeland to embark upon the American empire—a socio-economic experiment or scheme to create a great nation the likes of which this world had never seen before. To do so, these European settlers would have to endure war with their own native land, conquer the local inhabitants of a distant land, and export multiple millions of enslaved Africans as human chattel over a four hundred-year span to develop the American wilderness into anything remotely close to resembling an empire or a world superpower. To make this scheme to build an empire work from a moral standpoint, the colonizers had to hold three guiding principles in place to accomplish their conquest narrative. These are the principles that recent postcolonial theory names difference, Othering, and subalternity. For without these concepts, the conquest of North America and the development of the United States into a superpower could not have been accomplished.

The enslaved Africans were defined as savages to establish a binary system of difference that subjugated them as the Other and reduced them to a subaltern class. This line of thinking served as the justification for slavery and assuaged any feelings of guilt that might be found in the hearts of the colonizers. This binary relationship of difference in blackness and whiteness finds its origin in this American conquest narrative. The history of the concept of whiteness does not have major relevance prior to the *Transatlantic Slave Trade*, which is the point where whiteness, as a binary opposite to blackness, was necessary to highlight the difference between the colonizer and the colonized. In order for the American scheme to work, the colonizers had to create a subaltern identity for this binary opposite—blackness. In this entangled connection, one sees the interdependency whiteness has on this subaltern identity. If difference, Othering and subalternity had not been incorporated into this narrative, one cannot say with all certainty that colonizers would have been able to accomplish the

violence and brutality necessary to both conquer and develop this land into a superpower. Whiteness should always be viewed as an interconnected theme with empire and blackness. One must wonder what the outcome would be for whiteness and the United States empire if in fact this binary was removed someday. Albert Memmi offers a portrait of the colonizer as those who accept and those who refuse to engage in the system of colonial dominance. The colonizer individually decays if he accepts, and repudiates himself if he refuses to accept.¹ Isn't the price for whiteness that holds this entire globalized, social contract together a bit too steep? Is it sustainable and if so, for how long? What happens to whiteness after empire or what happens to empire after whiteness?² When can difference be affirmed as the grace of human engagement?³ Next, let's examine the construction of blackness and the colonized for more clues and insights into this entangled enigma:

Postcolonialism: The Colonized and Blackness:

Who are the colonized? Again, this answer depends upon who you ask and how you interpret their answers. Although it is understood that the African Diaspora includes many other ethnicities of the colonized and extends to much of Latin America, for the purposes of this essay, the colonized being referenced here are the enslaved West Africans who arrived in the America approximately 400 years ago. Stolen from Africa, these black bodies were brought to America as captured, enslaved Africans and were curated into "Negroes"—a sub-human free labor force cultivated to provide farming and agricultural services as products of *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*. What is fundamental here is that the economic success of the slave trade depended on the construction of a subjugated identity of the Negro that focused primarily on 1) the Negro's difference; 2) the Negro's ability to be Othered;

¹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 147-148.

² Alfred J Lopez, "Whiteness After Empire," in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. Lopez (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 1.

³ Thandeka, *Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), 135.

and 3) the ability for the Negro's class and cultural identity to be reduced to a subaltern status of blackness.

In all of this, what was created was whiteness. Whiteness can be described as a social construct of primarily European-descendant people which places this group at the top of the social strata by creating a cultural identity based on privilege, exceptionalism, superiority, dominance and patriarchy. Whiteness can be understood as an entangled, binary, symbiotic relationship that exists only in relationship to blackness or any form of ethnic subjugation that is based on difference, promotes Othering and creates a subaltern socio-political status for those outside of the parameters of whiteness. This discourse of difference, Othering, and subalternity becomes the primary justification for establishing this binary relationship of opposites between blackness and whiteness, which becomes the justification for committing one of the greatest crimes against humanity—*The Transatlantic Slave Trade*.

To better understand the construction of a blackness, one might consider the Middle Passage as a seminal moment for the development of black identity in that this was the moment when the black bodies were dehumanized to the subaltern status of commodified products, thus, subalternity is the historical legacy for the descendants of these enslaved Africans. We are all well aware that blackness was not a scientific discovery but an economic and political argument first used to justify *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*.⁴ The U.S. Constitution declared the non-human, subaltern status of the Negro by defining these captured Africans as “3/5ths of a man.” This construction of blackness for the purpose of creating a colonized product for the Americas stands at the core of America's moral fiber. Long after slavery in America has ended, the affects of the falsehoods embedded into the narrative of blackness are still having a damaging impact on the sons and daughters of the enslaved Africans.

⁴ Michelle M. Wright, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), 2.

According to Gilroy, the discourse around blackness is about black expressive culture, identity, and the commodification of black bodies during the slave trade as an example of mass marketing popular culture through his model of the “Black Atlantic.” This model suggests that it may be easier to appreciate the utility of a response to racism that doesn’t reify the concept of race—and to prize the wisdom generated by developing a series of answers to the power of ethnic absolutism that doesn’t try to fix ethnicity absolutely but sees it instead as an infinite process of identity construction.⁵ This model, which is more in line with afro-futuristic strivings, is relevant to the idea of one day being able to remove these binary notions of whiteness and blackness.

Postcolonialism and Psychoanalysis:

From the perspective of the colonized, the metanarrative of the colonized and the colonizer grapples with a Fanonian psychology and the psychoanalysis of race for the purpose of understanding racialized subjectivity. The focus for this work is to understand black subjectivity and the construction of race from a psychoanalytical/poststructuralist view of the rational for the construction of blackness as a subaltern identity. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon describes the look (which is interpreted as the gaze) he received from a child on the street in France as the moment in which he knew he was the Other and the genesis moment when he understood racialized difference. He speaks authentically and candidly about how this disapproving gaze from the child’s mother altered something deep within his soul. Below is a psychoanalytic account from an interview on the influence of Fanon’s theories on the psychoanalysis of race that describes with accuracy the pathological origins of racism beginning with the gaze:

Racism appears in the field of vision. But he sees something else that has been talked about a great deal, which is the sexualized nature of the look. Looking always involves desire. There’s always the desire, not just to look to see but to look to see what you can see, to look beyond, to see more than you can see to look beyond. To see behind. The reaction in racism between black and white partly arises when the white looker

⁵ Paul. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 223.

becomes aware that he is attracted to the black subject. The act of racism is a denial of that desire which is in the gaze itself.⁶

To further reinforce this principle of the gaze as a way of understanding black subjectivity, Jacques Lacan states, “I see only from one point, but in my existence, I am looked at from all sides.”⁷ This orienting perspective on the topic of the gaze is what gives Fanon the language to express what is happening to his humanity in the moment when he encounters whiteness in normal day to day experiences—a look that has the suggestive power to “fix one in his place” as stated in *Black Skins, White Mask*. From a historical context, in Fanonism the first understanding is that the slave master doesn’t even see the slave. Or does he? Here is where the analysis of the gaze is missing and the complexity of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer begins. The postcolonial discourse of Homi Bhabha defines the relationship between colonized and the colonizer as ambivalent, meaning that there is a relationship of attraction/repulsion, and exploitation/nurturing of the colonized subject by the colonizer. Thus, Bhabha’s work cleverly sums up the entire entangled paradox of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer as a twisted love-hate relationship.

Postcolonialism and the Subaltern African Diaspora:

According to Ashcroft’s *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, subaltern, meaning (within military culture) “of inferior rank”, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes.⁸ Gayatri Spivak, a key theorist of subaltern studies, has worked to create a subaltern discourse from the economic and political perspective that demonstrates, in Marxist/capitalists terms, how the roles of desire and power in representation are an essential part of the construction of class and creating subaltern identities. In response to Spivak’s defining work,

⁶ Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Mask*, Directed by Isaac Julien (United Kingdom: Arts Council of England, 1996), DVD.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 72.

⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 198.

Can the Subaltern Speak?, with its strict distinctions between the subaltern and the marginalized, African Diaspora scholar Michelle Wright appropriates this theory for the subaltern African Diaspora by posing the chapter title, “If the Black is a Subject, Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁹ Wright suggests that the lack of speaking is what creates racialized subjectivity of blackness.

bell hooks summarizes Wright’s issue of black subjectivity and the lack of the right to representation among the subaltern African Diaspora with the following revealing portrayal of the colonizer’s opinion about the voice and representation of the colonized:

No need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still your author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.¹⁰

This example by hooks sheds light on the underlying pathological behavior of the colonizer toward the colonized. Since the colonizer typically does not ask to hear about the pain, one could also acknowledge that hooks is not speaking of the imperial model of dominance but of the self-deceptively, race-sensitized white authors. Otherwise, these statements can be viewed as examples of the binary structures of the power and dominance of the empire over the voice of the subaltern and this statement reveals the colonizer’s true motives, motivations, and desire to represent the voice of the colonized. It is the position of this work that to give the subaltern a true voice, these unjust racist and classist hierarchies of socio-political representation must be dismantled before the subaltern has any chance of representing itself. But can they be dismantled without more self-representation?

⁹ Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 229.

¹⁰ bell hooks, “Marginality as a Site of Resistance,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, edited by Russell Ferguson, Cornell West, et. al. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 242.

Violent Revolution and the Colonial vs U.S. Context of African-Americans as Colonized:

How can the concept of the colonized be applied to African Americans in the U.S. context? The etymology of the word colony (n.) comes from the Latin word *colonus*, meaning farmer, which reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of the now dominant population to a new territory where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin.¹¹ To be clear, African Americans are not a “colonized” group based on any of the technical definitions of colonialism researched during the preparation of this paper. Some Africans were colonized in their native lands while it was more advantageous for some Africans to be transported throughout the African Diaspora to provide free labor within the emerging capitalist economic model. However, African Americans do have a unique connection to the colonized epistemology in the fact that they were enslaved for the specific purpose of being used in the scheme of American colonialism that involved mass farming of various crops for the land as a substitute “native people” for American colonialism. Thus, Africans were enslaved for the sole purpose of developing the political economy of the thirteen colonies of the United States.

What is interesting about American colonialism is that the settlers decided to engage in mass genocide of the indigenous who were people living on the land and to then import another group of indigenous people from a very distant land (Africa) that they would ultimately treat as “the natives” for their new acquired land. In the absence of those actual colonized natives who were erased (Native Americans) by the American settlers, the enslaved Africans functioned as the natives for their American colonial scheme by default. In the American colonial scheme, the enslaved Africans provided free labor and they take on the lowest political economic status for the rest of the society to build its wealth upon (capitalism). In other conquest narratives, this is the same role that is assumed

¹¹ Kohn, Margaret and Reddy, Kavita, "Colonialism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/>>.

by the natives of any colonized land. From a political economic standpoint, in the American scheme, the enslaved Africans were just like any other conquered group of natives under the dominant rule of the colonizers. The only difference is that the enslaved Africans happened to be from another continent that was also being conquered simultaneously by other groups of Europeans. But politically and economically, the enslaved Africans served the same purpose for the American colony as any other group of natives would serve, socially, politically, and economically speaking.

With this understanding of how the concept of being colonized can be applied to the African American narrative, how does one explain the differentiations of violent revolution in the African colonial context verses enslavement of African Americans in the U.S. context? One could argue that the answer to this question can be found in an understanding of the various types of violence both groups endured. Enslaved Africans were dislocated, taken from their homeland, and dispersed to strange lands while colonized Africans who remained, faced centuries of invasion, war, and conquests. Both groups—enslaved Africans and colonized Africans—endured various levels of physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual violence at unfathomable levels and degrees. This work will not be able to conduct a full, historical analysis of the casualties that resulted from the *Transatlantic Slave Trade* which can then be contrasted with war casualties related to colonialism across the continent of Africa. However, this work does find it important to acknowledge the fact that multiple forms of violence did occur in both the African conquest and African American enslavement narratives.

To transition to the matter of revolution, one must not forget to account for the value of human lives as one engages in political and ideological struggles. Fanonian references to violent revolution in general, or to the African Revolution of Algeria specifically, are meant to lend to the historical narration of the actual events that occurred in the name of decolonization and independence and are not meant to promote any modern day retaliatory fantasies. This work is not a platform to promote violence but to understand it. What must be emphasized is the complete conquest of African

resources by European settlers. The raping of (both human and non-human) resources from the African Continent is probably one of the most violent events in the history of humankind because of the sheer size of the land involved and the total length of time that the resources have been being plundered or depleted. The most important contribution Fanon makes to the discourse on violence is his acknowledgement, as a psychiatrist, of the impact of violence on both the colonized and the colonizer. One should never underestimate the role of violence in maintaining and sustaining colonialism and its impact on all involved. For the Africana, colonized world, this knowledge is the real beauty of Fanon's philosophy. Next, an overview of enslaved African Americans and violence in the U.S. context shall be offered.

In response to the various forms of violence associated with 400 years of enslavement in the U.S., African-Americans took a different approach, which aligned their civil rights/human rights struggle with a philosophy of nonviolence. More specifically, it was a philosophy of nonviolence grounded in Christian love that motivated and guided determined Black people, allied Whites, and others in achieving unprecedented progressive transformations of centuries-hardened, intellectually well-supported social, political, and, to notable extents, economic life in the United States of America. A society which has been ordered, since its founding, by philosophies of White Racial Supremacy and Black racial inferiority and subordination.¹² The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's began to show itself as the best resolution to the problem of racialized violence and subjugation in America. Still, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s articulations, firmly and uncompromisingly grounded in thoughtful commitments to Gandhi-inspired nonviolence ("Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 1957; "The Power of Nonviolence," 1958) and Jesus-inspired *agape* love ("Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," 1961; "A

¹² Outlaw Jr., Lucius T., "Africana Philosophy", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/africana/>>.

Gift of Love,” 1966) await full and widespread appreciation as the truly phenomenal gifts of inspiration, commitment, and guidance to the social movement that they were.¹³

Within the African American discourse on violence is this complicated struggle between nonviolent and violent measures as the best response to supremacy and domination. “The Movement’s integrationist agenda, moral-persuasionist strategies, commitment to nonviolence, and explicit commitment to a theologically and religiously grounded notion of love for the Movement’s opponents was strongly challenged by other organizational forces...These were inspired by the revolutionary philosophies conveyed in the speeches, writings, and organizational activities of Malcolm X and the anti-colonial engagements and writings of Frantz Fanon as well as by major figures in decolonizing liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere that were being waged through armed struggle.”¹⁴ Thus one begins to see the exact conflict of ideologies around violence.

Even with peace or the pacifist role always being the more excellent way, what did the discussions of more revolutionary responses lend to the discourse? The Black Power Movement, in particular, overlapped with and both fueled and was fueled by philosophizing and engagements that were reflective of more expansive and consequential Black Consciousness and Black Arts Movements. These, as had the Harlem Renaissance of several decades earlier, spurred an intensive and extensive renaissance of aggressively radical and expressive creativity in the arts that was centered, once again, on reclaiming for self-definition and self-determination the ontological being of persons and peoples of African descent, often with influences, from various Leftist ventures, nationalist and internationalist as well as socialist and communist.¹⁵

It is here within the work of The Black Arts Movement that this work will convene. This movement represents a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic that serves to eliminate the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

need for violent conquests and enslavements when the colonizer's worldview is challenged to walk in the shoes of the Other. The colonizer begins to understand what it is to walk in the shoes of the colonized as a preventive measure for future conquests, not a retaliation for past violent conquests and historic enslavement narratives. Perhaps this reversal of worldview understanding becomes adapted as a means to protect the colonized of the African nations, historically enslaved African Americans, and other native people from domination. Experiencing the suffering of another is one of the best ways of creating an atmosphere of change.

An Introduction to Postcolonialism in Africana Spirit:

What is Africana pneumatology and can it be described in postcolonial terms? This essay defines Africana pneumatology as the decolonizing, revolutionary work of the Spirit as a radical disrupter that creates a “third space of difference” for the subaltern, subjugated “Other” to progress toward political action. This definition of Africana pneumatology is rooted in Homi Bhabha's ideology of the “third space of difference” and Reiland Rabaka's ideology of Africana Critical Theory (ACT), which are both very critical to this postcolonial political theology of Africana Spirit. An Africana pneumatology constructed from ACT and the black radical tradition, as defined by Rabaka, aims to “create a new anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-sexual orientation sensitive critical theory of contemporary society.¹⁶” Because of its ability to deconstruct, decolonize, liberate, resist, and create revolution, this postcolonial envisioning of Africana Spirit from the ACT and black radical tradition creates a new, more inclusive space for new discourses. Homi Bhabha's concept “third space of difference” is so critical to this model because it establishes how “difference”

¹⁶ Reiland Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition*, from W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 6.

becomes the colonizer's primary justification for "Otherizing" and subjugating the people to subalternity.

The black radicalism of Frantz Fanon and Fanon's concepts of decolonization can be applied to this construction Africana pneumatology because the construction of a revolutionary concept of Africana Spirit, in the Marxist sense, is based on the revolutionary form of resistance that cries out for decolonization and the deconstruction of empire's systems of oppression. This pneumatology is based on Fanonism—a radical, decolonization revolutionary conception of Spirit that manifests itself in resistance. The incorporation of Fanonian liberative, revolutionary concepts of decolonization were chosen for this construction to counteract the many complexities and entanglements of empire that hinder social change. Africana pneumatology understands the nature of rhizomic domination and imperialism and discerns when revolutionary ways of dismantling systems of oppression are necessary. This Fanonian construction of Spirit is not focused on individual spirituality but focuses on the contributions to the socio-economic, political and systematic changes that can be accomplished to change violent conditions for the subaltern African Diaspora.

What particular problems does Africana pneumatology address for the subaltern African Diaspora, and how can radical disruptions by the Spirit stop the violence against the colonized, black body? Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is famously quoted as saying, "the voice of the people is the voice of God." In Africana pneumatology, this voice is responding to both the material and spiritual manifestations of violence against black, colonized bodies as their lived experience endures both spiritual pain and spiritual violence alike. Colonization is a form of physical, spiritual and psychological violence. Africana pneumatology creates a postcolonial political theology of Spirit that addresses the trauma of the colonized that live under the colonizer's oppressive systems of empire who bear the generational, spiritual pain of dislocation, displacement, dispersal and feelings of abandonment by God. In Spivak's understanding of subalternity, the emphasis is on changing the systems of empire so that the subaltern

can speak for themselves and use their own voices as a way to confront the issues that have led to trauma. Africana pneumatology is about the subaltern having the courage to raise their voices for revolution and liberation, the divine courage to speak truth to power, and the power of the Spirit of God to be a radical disrupter.

The upcoming sections will survey a sample of the existing postcolonial scholarship and begin to set a foundation for a new discourse based on the following two sections: 1) *Revolution, Decolonization and African Spirit* through the lenses of Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o; 2) *Postcolonialism/ Bhabha's Third Space of Difference and Africana Critical Theory* through the lenses of Homi Bhabha and Reiland Rabaka.

Revolution, Decolonization and the Africana Spirit:

Revolution, defined in Fanonism, is the life/death struggle for power between the colonized and the colonizer—a struggle that will assuredly last until the last breath. For those considered, in Fanonian terms, *The Wretched of the Earth*, when is it the time for revolution for those who have declared loud and clear that they do not wish to sleep to dream but dream to change the world?¹⁷ Stuart Hall, states, “What is the relationship between armed struggle and political reform? These questions are at the heart of *Wretched* and make it the bible of the decolonization moment.”¹⁸ On postcolonial breath and revolutionary violence, Fanon lends the colonized subject this clue:

The colonized subject thus discovers that his life, his breath, his breathing, and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist's. He discovers that the skin of a colonist is not worth more than the native's. In other words, his world receives a jolt. The colonized revolutionary new assurance stems from this. If, in fact, my life is worth as much as the colonist's, his look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice can no longer petrify me. I am no longer uneasy in his presence.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publisher, 2005), 3.

¹⁸ Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Mask*, Directed by Isaac Julien (United Kingdom: Arts Council of England, 1996), DVD.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 16.

So, when the subaltern African Diaspora is subjected to the physical, spiritual, and psychological violence of the colonizer, there will come a time when language runs out and Spirit pushes its way through, in the name of revolution, to take over the negotiating space just as Fanon's theories of revolution have predicted. This is the revolutionary moment. This is the foundation for a Fanonian Spirit of Africana pneumatology, which can be imagined as a revolutionary, radical, resisting, decolonizing, and deconstructing disrupter that descends from the spiritual realm to interrupt the political realm of the subaltern, dispensing distributive justice against the rhizomic systems of empire's power structure. The subaltern African Diaspora needs an Africana pneumatology that moves swiftly toward political action in the most radical way to address the various forms of violence against black, colonized bodies, spirits and minds. In Fanon's words, "Decolonization, [as a key characteristic of Africana pneumatology, emphasis mine] therefore, implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation...its definition can be summed up in the well-known words: "The last shall be first."²⁰ Let it be so for the colonized subaltern African Diaspora, decolonization in the name of the Africana Spirit.

Postcolonialism/Bhabha's Third Space of Difference and Africana Critical Theory:

In the preface to his book, *The Location of Culture*, there is a description that describes the way in which Bhabha shows how legitimate narratives of cultural domination create a "third space" where the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries in-between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, and location."²¹

²⁰ Ibid, 2.

²¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), front cover.

As a construct for pneumatology in the Africana context, the merger of the concept of Bhabha's third space for difference with Rabaka's *Africana Critical Theory* creates a point of origin for the discourse on the radical work of Spirit to begin. These often subaltern "third spaces" or intersections between race, class, sex and gender, and the socio-political realm of the Spirit provides the ideal location to begin a postcolonial discourse on difference. Interpreted as both a social theory and a political theology of Spirit, Africana pneumatology challenges, in a revolutionary way, racialized subjective difference. This creative, third space work of the Spirit in the intersections of subaltern places is where this postcolonial discourse difference as the foundational principle of Africana pneumatology begins—in one's cultural identity.

An Introduction to Postcolonialism in Africana Music:

*Many political philosophers, for example, made no contributions to metaphysics or ontology; and many famous epistemologists made no contribution to ethics. And then there are the grand philosophers, such as G.W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who seem to have touched on nearly every area of philosophical thought.*²²—Lewis Gordon in *An Introduction to Africana Thought*

This section seeks to begin a discourse on postcolonialism in Africana music based on Spivak, Gramsci and Halls' subaltern theme of representation in such a way that connects the will of Africana music to representation within the cultural hegemony of society. To do that, this section must first frame the theory of pessimism from western philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, within the context of theodicy and the Africana philosophy of Lewis Gordon. Both theodicy and pessimism (as it relates to afropessimism and afrofuturism) are essential to the understanding of how music culture is created in the African Diaspora. Gordon's referencing of Schopenhauer—a philosopher that reflects deeply on the concept of pessimism—will help set the foundation for the broader understanding of how Schopenhauer's pessimism is relevant to Africana philosophy's theodicy in the cultural arts. Although

²² Lewis Gordon, *Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. Philadelphia, PA: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 10.

Schopenhauer is a key source for Gordon, in using Schopenhauer as a key theorist for constructing Africana methodology, we should bear in mind some of the contradictions of how great thinkers are read across racial lines...Foucault, for instance, read Marx as trapped in the nineteenth century, yet he built his ideas on Nietzsche's thought (which in turn was built on Hegel's contemporary, Arthur Schopenhauer).²³ As identified by Gordon, the African Diaspora struggles with pessimism and theodicy, and the following words by Schopenhauer provide a great example of the tension between pessimism and hope in the future that is inherent within the Africana worldview: "What gives to all tragedy, in whatever form it may appear, the peculiar tendency toward the sublime is the awakening of the knowledge that the world—life—can afford us no true pleasure, and consequently is not worthy of our attachment. In this consists the tragic spirit: it therefore leads to resignation."²⁴ In Gordon's view, Schopenhauer ultimately makes life itself tragic, and this existential crisis of one's existence or humanity being viewed as a problem is what the African Diaspora has struggled with historically.²⁵ It is the sheer difficulty of defending one's own cultural identity and the tragedy of life that accompanies life and living in the African Diaspora that Gordon relates to and Schopenhauer speaks so well of in his broad understanding of the pessimism inherent in the human condition. In the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea*, he [Schopenhauer] writes that in tragedy: "The Unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent, is here presented to us: and in this lies a significant hint of the nature of the world and of existence. It is the strife of will with itself, which here, completely unfolded at the highest grade of its objectivity, comes into fearful prominence." Although Schopenhauer's words are meant to reflect the broader human condition without making privileging to the tragedy of one group over the others, it is clear to see why he has been selected as one of the western philosophers that informs the work

²³ Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*. NY: Fordham University Press, 2015, 18.

²⁴ Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. NY, Routledge Press, 1995, 213.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 72.

of Africana theorist, Lewis Gordon. For these and other reasons, the next section will begin to show the bridge between Schopenhauer's work and the discussion on cultural representation.

How does this discussion on the theories of a western philosopher lead to a discourse on postcolonialism and Africana music? Two words: will and desire and their importance in the formation of cultural identity. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), is known as both "the artist's philosopher and the philosopher of pessimism." Schopenhauer is the author of the book, *The World as Will and Representation*, which, for the purposes of this work, connects postcolonialism/subaltern theory of representation to the role of the will in creating music and the role of representation in cultural identity. Discussions on Schopenhauer will be limited here to the aforementioned topic of will and representation as it relates to music. It is also important to shift approximately 100 years to connect the formulation of this discourse on representation to Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian/Marxist philosopher who was very influential in understanding and describing the parameters for defining subalternity as a societal class structure. The concepts of will and representation in cultural identity are themes that resonate with subaltern African Diaspora in that they echo the revolutionary demands for the voice of the voiceless to be heard. In Gramsci's work the definition of subaltern identity is based on class and representation.

For the subaltern African Diaspora, the postcolonial discourse on culture can never begin with a notion of creating "art for art's sake." It is understood that one must take on the responsibility of using one's artistic platform in the struggle for cultural identity and resistance. One can look to the historic tragedy of the Middle Passage as the defining event and a point of origin for the discourse on cultural representation for the subaltern African Diaspora. Cultural theorist and sociologist Paul Gilroy theorizes on the Middle Passage and the commoditization of black bodies as the beginning of popular music mass marketing of culture in America. This theory by Gilroy attributes to meaning-

making for the descendants of the enslaved and colonized to gain a better understanding of the rationales behind the subjugation of the black, commoditized, colonized body in popular culture.

In Fanonism, one can recognize the ways in which cultural representation in music portrays black bodies as figures of ambivalence through the eyes of the colonizer. The racialized identity of the music of the subaltern African Diaspora reflects the colonizer's capitalist desire and power to exploit the artistic expressions of the colonized. It is important that the subaltern African Diaspora understands the power of its own will when it raises its voice to speak up for itself as cultural representation and expressions through its arts. What does one sing in response to the white song—a metaphor that maintains that the colonized stay colonized? Music is one of the most powerfully expressive ways that resistance becomes voiced. Music as an act of resistance goes to the heart of the struggle between the colonized and the colonizer. What is expressed in Africana music's multi-lens spectrum—optimism, pessimism, theodicy, lament, The Spirituals, and the Blues—is considered sacred, black music that connects to the trauma, melancholia, and shame of the colonized and should not be haphazardly aligned with socio-economic and political systems of empire that enrich the colonizer. With musical roots connected to the ocean's floor along the route of the *Transatlantic Slave Trade*, the music of the Black Atlantic is intertwined by the rhizomes, ancestral will, that hope and dream for the kind of full representation that gives voice to voiceless colonized black bodies for generations through time.

The upcoming sections will survey a sample of the existing postcolonial scholarship and begin to set a foundation for a new postcolonial discourse based on the following three sections: 1) *Postcolonialism and Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Music*; 2) *Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies* through the lenses of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy; and 3) *Postcolonialism and the Arts/Poetics of Resistance* through the lens of bell hooks.

Postcolonialism and Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Music:

Schopenhauer philosophy of music, as it relates to the will, states that unlike other arts, music expresses no Platonic ideas, but rather the will itself.²⁶ For Schopenhauer, music goes straight to the inner reality, the will.²⁷ This understanding of the will, as an expression of one's inner reality, is useful for understanding why music is such an important part of the subaltern African Diaspora—a group whose voice has not had full representation. Through this philosophy, the subaltern African Diaspora can proclaim as an act of protest that—although we are lacking representation, this musical expression represents our will, which is a true, inner manifestation of our reality or actualized, lived experience. How would one describe the “will” of the subaltern African Diaspora, and how does that will give voice in terms of political action and representation? For the underrepresented, subaltern groups in our society, does the will aid in the construction of cultural identity through music and resistance art? Now that Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will and representation has set the foundation for a postcolonial discourse on music within the context of representation and subaltern identity, the following two sections will begin to examine cultural identity formation, cultural hegemony (Gramsci), and the role of representation in resistance art.

Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies:

The role of the will for the African Diaspora in creating its own cultural identity against cultural (norms which stigmatize and violently punish difference, and create a class stratification of subalternity) is to foster and maintain a cultural hegemony within society that reflects the representation of the colonizer and/or empire, not the colonized. This section looks to Gramsci, Hall

²⁶ Frederick Copleston, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1975), 123.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 139.

and Gilroy for clarity and direction for the development of this emerging discourse on postcolonialism in music of the subaltern African Diaspora from a cultural studies perspective.

If Gramsci adopted the term “subaltern” which means, “of inferior rank” to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes,²⁸ then one could ask through Spivak’s classic theory, “Can the subaltern African Diaspora speak through its cultural identity?” To briefly introduce Spivak within the context of this particular aspect of her broad research, she is the scholar best recognized for theorizing on how the voices of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have been relegated to a status that is less than marginalized or subaltern. These subaltern groups are, for Spivak, understood as not even within the scope of being recognized for the purpose of cultural representation in the same way as western society is recognized. Her research highlights the notion that subaltern groups are expected to abandon their culture and adopt western systems of knowledge if they want to be fully recognized and represented in society.

Now let’s return to the question of the African Diaspora speaking through its cultural identity. Is this a viable space for the disenfranchised to have a voice? In Gramsci’s definition of cultural hegemony, which he implies based on the histories of subaltern groups, that “subaltern groups are fragmented and episodic since they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups even when they rebel. Clearly they have less to the means by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions.”²⁹ For Gramsci, this act of exclusion from cultural and social institutions silences subaltern voices that have been written out of history during pivotal moments when they should have been able to express, as stated by Schopenhauer, the will’s inner reality, thus creating a more accurate account of true society. For the voiceless subaltern African Diaspora, who is excluded from many historical narratives that portray the colonizer as the hero/ine,

²⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 198.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 199.

what could be more essential? On the human right to express one's will and have one's own cultural identity represented, when that representation is one of racialized difference, the Other or a subaltern class identity, one still has a right to have one's voice represented for its contributions to culture. At the very least, one has a human right to have one's human existence represented.

If the next logical question in this section should be, "Can the subaltern African Diaspora speak through its identity of difference?" one must then look to Stuart Hall for guidance on the importance of identity formation to gain a better understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of this question from a cultural studies perspective. For Hall, identity is described within the discourse of difference as follows:

Like all signifying practices, it [identity] is subject to the 'play' or *différence*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of frontier effects. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.³⁰

This answer to the question of identity becomes critical as the will, a manifestation of the inner realities, is told by the colonizer that difference is not an acceptable identity, thus leaving one vulnerable to physical, spiritual and psychological violence in the forms of colonization, enslavement, erasure, exile, dislocation displacement, and dispersal. These are some of the violent outcomes of difference or of its misrepresentation.

Taking the subthemes of will, representation, and cultural identity another step further, one might ask "if the subaltern African Diaspora can speak through its cultural history?" This section explores the Middle Passage through Gilroy's Black Atlantic as a means of understanding the commodification of black bodies and the cultural bi-product of its legacy—modern popular music. For Gilroy, the important point of the Middle Passage/Transatlantic Slave Trade and its impact on the American economy is not just to register this linkage as a historical event, but to show how the

³⁰ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay (ProQuest: Sage Publications, 1996), 3.

ongoing effect of that exchange remains the constituting factor in a discursive economy that continues to dominate the practices of the modern world...which Ashcroft includes the interdependence of all cultures which depended on this exchange of enslaved bodies across the Black Atlantic.³¹

When examining the popular music of modern times, here one finds the traces of the damaging effects of the slave trade, which is made evident in the voices and the will manifested as the inner reality in the various forms of popular music that have been mass marketed for cultural consumption. (Strange how the subaltern—that which is “of inferior rank” is so popular, culturally.) This inner reality includes all the music forms from The Spirituals to the blues to hip-hop, just to name a few. But, does this popular music voice give the subaltern African Diaspora cultural representation among legitimate cultural institutions? With the United States, as a world power and, consequently, is the center of the global and cultural production and circulation...Hall concludes that this emergence is both a displacement and a hegemonic shift in the definition of culture—a movement from high culture to American mainstream culture and its mass-cultural, image-mediated, technological forms.³² So, as the market demand for United States products grew, the demand for the cultural products of its colonized grew as well and expanded to include the music of the enslaved and colonized.

Postcolonialism and the Arts/Poetics of Resistance:

Where do those who have been systematically oppressed conjure up the will to resist and the courage to fight for representation? For the final topic, the question, “Can the subaltern African Diaspora speak through its resistance music?” will be examined to get to the core of the revolutionary, Marxist influences in the arts and how they relate to the will and representation for those demanding cultural representation and identity.

³¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 22.

³² Stuart Hall, “What is the ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 465.

Related to the question of will, bell hooks states it differently when she asks, “Where is the spirit of militant resistance?” which can be likened to Spivak’s notion of power/desire/interest and power of the subaltern hierarchy of the class structure and social ordering.³³ In hooks’ social theory work on domination, oppression, and marginalization, her message of resistance to all forms of domination has been consistent throughout her books and teachings.

It is important to mention black artists from the Black Arts Movement concerned with producing work that embodied and reflected liberative politics and who knew that the important parts of any decolonization process are the critical interventions and interrogations of existing repressive and dominating structures.³⁴ The emphasis here is on the potential for resistant art to decolonize systems of domination. The Black Arts Movement’s insistence that all art is political, that an ethical dimension should inform cultural production, as well as the encouragement of an aesthetic, which did not separate a being from its artistic production, were important to black thinkers concerned with the strategies of decolonization.³⁵ There is no line of separation between one’s politics and one’s artistic expressions, which, in the case of music, reflect one’s will as their inner reality. And, that inner reality is a desire for decolonization for the subaltern African Diaspora, expressed as resistance through the arts, and manifest in radical forms of revolutionary art derived from class consciousness and class struggle. Artistic creativity must be discussed in the same terms as other segments of an ideological formation because it figures among the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, in terms of ideological forms in which wo/men become conscious of the class conflict and fight it out.³⁶ It is this struggle in the understanding of politics and art that has to shift.

³³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*”, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (United Kingdom: Macmillan, 1988), 66.

³⁴ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 111.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

³⁶ Jerry Palmer, “Contribution to a Marxist Theory of Artistic Activity,” in *Situating Marx*, ed. Paul Walton and Stuart Hall (London: Human Context Books, 2012), 152.

2. Decolonizing the Spirit: The Last Shall Become First: Political Theology of Spirit and the Process of Becoming

Its [decolonization] definition can be summed up in the well-known verse, ‘the last shall be first.
—Frantz Fanon

Why does Fanon frame his definition of decolonization within an apparently hierarchical, “first,” “last” stratification between the colonized and the colonizer? What does his definition share in common with the way Spirit/pneumatology is positioned within the hierarchies of philosophy and theology?³⁷ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, also known as “The Bible of Decolonization,” Fanon begins with a description that states: “decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder.”³⁸ Was this decolonizing imagination of a new world order Fanon’s dream of becoming—full of possibilities and potentiality—for the colonized subject of the African Diaspora? Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o references the hope of the colonized in *Wretched*, when Fanon writes of those “who have declared loud and clear that they do not sleep to dream, but dream to change the world.”³⁹ Yet, any dream that involves the subaltern African Diaspora changing the order of society is quickly dismissed by the ruling class as a utopian, revolutionary fantasy that need not be indulged.

It was Bhabha who insightfully described Fanon’s decolonization work in *Wretched* as a secular form of spirituality, which is why this quote by Fanon is foundational to this particular construction of an Africana pneumatology. In this way, Africana pneumatology works from the core assumption that for Spirit to serve the needs of the African Diaspora, it is essential that a Fanonian, revolutionary spirit emerges that constantly disrupts and challenges the world order. Africana pneumatology’s disruptive work begins by identifying the destabilizing spaces where Spirit movement can begin to work through the rhizomes, complexities and entanglements of the established power structures of

³⁷ D. Lyle Dabney, “Why Should the Last Be First?,” in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. by Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee, MN: Marquette University Press, 2001), 240.

³⁸ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, 1963, 2.

³⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 2005), 3.

empire. This is how the decolonization work of changing public policies and political systems can begin.

As its main objective, this work examines the problem of how the human spirit of both the colonized and the colonizer has been impacted by colonialism and enslavement in terms of the psychological effects of the spiritual pain and spiritual violence caused by what may be named postcolonial trauma. As a major task this work will also seek the spaces in which to implement the kinds of political actions that can create public policies and decolonize the binaries of Spirit in the Western context for the benefit of both the colonized and the colonizer. This work seeks to find the spaces where Spirit is working within civil society—specifically, within the third sector—to disrupt binaries and seek social change in particular by understanding the therapeutic role of music in healing spiritual pain caused by postcolonial spiritual violence. Finally, this work strives to understand decolonization as the breath of Africana pneumatology—a radical disrupter of the world order, which gives preference to the “last” to one day achieve their dream of becoming. Our ability to become what God intended us to be is essential to us reaching our fullest human potential. This theory will be constructed through an examination of the field of spirit and trauma in a postcolonial context.

“Almost a half century after Fanon writes ‘The Wretched of the Earth,’ it is my purpose to ask what might be saved from Fanon’s ethics and politics of decolonization...”—Homi Bhabha, Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*

And the last shall be first as a process of becoming. Selah! To answer Bhabha’s question of what might be saved from Fanon’s ethics and politics of decolonization, and to redefine the guiding principle that centers this work, it is Fanon’s dedication to the process of becoming for the purpose of the colonized gaining representation that should be preserved. It is because this process of changing the order, which is at the heart of critical public policy changes and mobilization toward political action and activism, that this work can be recognized as a spiritual movement. Bhabha states, “As we catch

the religiosity in Fanon's language of revolutionary wrath"—the last shall be first, "the almighty body of violence rearing up...—and run it together with his description of the widening circle of national unity as reaching the boiling point in a way that is reminiscent of a religious brotherhood, a church or mystical doctrine."⁴⁰ Based on this overarching religious tone in Fanon's decolonization work, one has to wonder if this Fanonian ideal, this revolutionary dream of the last becoming first as a process of the colonized *becoming* fully represented human citizens in society involves changing the order of things as not only political action, but also as spiritual action. Where does Spirit factor into Fanon's process of *becoming*? Is it a first consideration or a last? Based on Bhabha's analysis, spirituality appears to be prioritized as a first consideration in Fanon's decolonization work. This process of *becoming* a better society is not divided by human constructs or divine (Spirit) binaries based on difference, dominance or sub-ordination. Fanon's commitment to the process of *becoming* within the most extreme revolutionary measures imaginable is what makes Fanon the central figure for this construction of an Africana pneumatology that addresses the urgency of the needs of the community as the top priority.

And the last shall become the first can be understood as a process of becoming a more just, more civil society. Fanon's gift was in his decolonizing imagination which allowed him to see the world in process—a process of becoming significantly better—through the political and Spiritual disruption and destabilization of entangled, often corrupt systems within our binary colonized/colonizer worldview. What are the pneumatological possibilities for the subaltern that can arise from a political theology of Spirit that suggests a new world order(ing), and how does the importance of ordering in the process of becoming affect postcolonial systems of both order and chaos? It is within Fanon's strict commitment to reordering society by rejecting these hierarchical systems and his rejection of a compartmentalized, Manichean structured colonized society, in all its extreme binaries, that engages

⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), ix.

this Africana Spirit work. His courageous way of demanding, in militant combat terms, that (some) power needs to shift from the center to the margins is such a revolutionary concept in that it changes the way we determine our morals and values for the ordering and stratification of our society. This model of Spirit—which is capable of speaking broadly to subaltern realities and identities and positions of dominance and submissiveness—will strive to bring into the postcolonial discourse a paradigm shift that moves the power structure from the center to the margins and will examine the role of music and culture in creating these power shifts away from the status quo.

And the last shall become the first—as the breath, voice, and fire of Africana pneumatology and of the Africana Spirit in music. Africana pneumatology in the decolonizing, Fanonian revolutionary Spirit of the last becoming first, more than anything, provides an opportunity for the colonizer to imagine what it would be like to walk in the shoes of the o/Other through the long history of colonialism and enslavement. What does it mean to experience the breath, voice, and fire of the o/Other in postcolonial terms? The critical message for this work is to acknowledge that in the conquest narrative between the colonized and the colonizer, both sides lost. The reality of postcolonial trauma, spiritual pain and spiritual violence perpetrated by the colonizer not only victimized the colonized and the enslaved, but also became a self-inflicted victimization of the colonizer himself and his actions. In this way, decolonizing the Spirit becomes both a spiritual and political act of finding those sacred spaces and safe places where the healing discourse of postcolonial trauma can truly begin, authentically, once and for all. Perhaps it can be within the creativity of the Africana Spirit in music that a safe space is provided, somewhere on the margins far away from the power center of empire and all its rhizomic entanglements of power structures, where the healing work of postcolonial trauma can begin for both the colonized and the colonizer. The role of the music of decolonization in the process of becoming should be a regular part of the postcolonial discourse, which can begin here in this Africana context as Africana music can be a valuable tool for cultural decolonization aimed at

breaking down and decolonizing difference, race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. With this decolonizing imagination, Africana pneumatology and the Africana Spirit in music, in this Fanonian conception, works within both sacred and secular spaces. It is therefore not limited to Christian, Trinitarian doctrines in order that this discourse might privilege spaces for working with traditional African religions and also within other multi-faith dialogues.

I. THE DECOLONIZING RHYTHM OF BREATH FOR AFRICANA PNEUMATOLOGY

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of history. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and humanity. —Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

This Fanonian journey of theorizing Africana pneumatology has now led to a path that finds the need to conceptualize a notion of decolonization of the Spirit, a notion that aspires to be the catalyst for a future spiritual movement based on this work. Fanon, a secular non-religious figure in modern history, and his signature work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, is not merely a text or collection of such, but a complex phenomenon in relationship to which people attempt to access or recover their most poignant memories of a utopian return home.⁴¹ *Wretched* as a scripturalized, secular text provides the fertile ground for developing an Africana interpretation of Spirit that possesses the *breath*, *voice*, and *fire* necessary to spark the mobilization of a spiritual movement of decolonization that serves as spiritual action for political change in the subaltern African Diaspora. This sacred/secular dichotomy can be useful when engaging in the problem-solving process of addressing the comprehensiveness of social issues and public policies within critical race theory and the African Diaspora. In this way the sacred and the secular work in tandem to address Diasporic issues and make a place for peacemaking

⁴¹ Vincent L. Wimbush, "It's Scripturalization, Colleagues!," *Journal of Africana Religions* 2 (2015): 198.

activities within a spiritual movement where Spirit takes over the negotiations. This work represents the initial or preliminary phase of theorizing on the topic of Africana pneumatology, which is the foundation for a future scripturalization project on *The Wretched of the Earth*—which will become the practical application of decolonizing the Spirit. More research and theorizing on the scripturalization of *Wretched* will appear in future applications of this work.

1. Decolonizing the Spirit and the Rhythm of Breath as Becoming:

Spirit Unchained
by Keorapetse W. Kgositsile

Rhythm it is we
Walk to against the evil
of monsters that try to kill the Spirit
It is the power of this song
That colors our every act
As we move from the oppressor-made gutter
Gut it is will move us from this gutter
It is the rhythm of guts
blood black, granite hard
and flowing like the river or the mountains
It is the rhythm of unchained Spirit
will put fire in our hands
to blaze our way
to clarity to power
to the rebirth of real [wo/men].⁴²

In Fanonian terms, what is the role of destabilizing movement in decolonizing the Spirit and what can be learned from decolonization as a process of becoming, as stated by the poet Kgositsile, that creates a “rebirth of real wo/men” or identities? The process philosophy of Max Scheler maintains that the human being is no “thing,” but rather a “becoming,” a “between” a “self-transcending being.”⁴³ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines becoming as a dynamicity of the experience of

⁴² Keorapetse W. Kgositsile, “Unchained Spirit,” in *Nommo: An Anthology of Modern Black African and Black American Literature*, ed. William H. Robinson (New York: The Macmillan Company), 217-218.

⁴³ Zachary Davis, “Max Scheler,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified March 11, 2014. <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

reality that can be interpreted metaphysically, which analyzes the reality of becoming as “what there is,” “what is occurring” and the “ways of occurring.”⁴⁴ It is important for this work to clearly establish the use of the epistemology of becoming, which is to convey the importance of change, transformation and transcendence in identity formation of dynamic beings and to emphasize the importance of the process by which beings form. Becoming, in the rhizomic, relational context of decolonization for the African Diaspora, represents the infinity of possibilities and potentiality for rebirth, renewal and change for those who are willing, in Fanonian terms, to resist and fight for one’s humanity as a political and spiritual right.

In another sense, this work also presents itself as a direct challenge to the ideology of Fanon as the central figure in that Fanon deemphasizes the role of Spirit in his own words when he states, “Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power. The thing colonized becomes a [wo/]man through the very process of liberation.”⁴⁵ This work aims to show how the decolonization/teachings of Fanon are fundamentally in origin spiritual acts that get to the source of the work of Spirit in terms of radical disruption, independence, and liberation. In Fanon’s understanding of decolonization, there is a connection to a spiritual transformation, which makes Fanon’s theorizing on decolonization the ideal foundational model for Africana pneumatology and the spiritual formation of the new [wo/]man through the struggle.

Ashcroft defines decolonization as the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms.⁴⁶ So what is a colonized spirit and what is its relationship to subjugated identity formation? Let’s begin to address these questions. As a result of the colonized and enslaved subaltern identities that convey difference or Otherness, there is a need to create new identities so that, as taught

⁴⁴ Johanna Seibt, “Process Philosophy,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified October 26, 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 2.

⁴⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 63.

by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, decolonizing the mind is approached from the context of language and literature. Perhaps there is the need for new identities that originate from the knowledge of one needing to possess not only a decolonized mind, but also a decolonized spirit through a process of becoming in the destabilizing, transcending and transforming Fanonian context of decolonization. In the introductory quote for this section on the process of becoming, Fanon describes a new rhythm, which I liken to the rhythm of breath—new rhythm for new life and breath, and therein lies the transformative potentiality of decolonization to “infuse” new rhythms in the form of Spirit. This Fanonian understanding of decolonization creates new identity, in that decolonization, he states in *Wretched*, “fundamentally alters being” through destabilizing rhythm and movement. This can also alter the world order in a world where one’s difference can defer one’s dream of becoming. Breath, in Fanonian terms, places an emphasis on the rhythm of breath and the ability to create new life, being or identity through decolonization and the destabilization of mobility and movement. This point of destabilization is where the relevance for this notion of decolonization of the Spirit begins with breath in its rhythmic form that involves both stabilizing and destabilizing movements, which are both equally necessary for change. This motif of the rhythmic movement of breath is intended to assist in the understanding of the decolonization of the individual and the community as a process of becoming. Becoming in this way will always involve getting into a rhythm. Sustaining breath—still breathing—still becoming.

2. Dislocation Rhythm of Breath as the Spirit of a People: An Exodus Poetics of Becoming:

Rhythm of Breath: An Exodus Poetics of Becoming
By Sharon Kimberly Williams

All throughout the African Diaspora
the Spirit is manifest
as an exodus of human souls
dispersed the world around with
a common purpose

carrying a certain rhythm
in the souls of the people
A uniquely syncopated African breath that is
simultaneously
individual and collective
African, Caribbean, Afro-American, Latino and Latina
An exodus rhythm of
dislocation, displacement, dispersal, exile
sometimes erasure—not often return—
a syncopated cycle
of breath for the African Diaspora

What happens when the rhythm is disrupted?
Keeping in time with the rhythm
of exodus is essential breath
for an African Diaspora whose
survival depends on
keeping faith with this rhythm
which dictates the
movement of a people
in a wilderness of *becoming*
more divine after
being dehumanized

We keep with the rhythm lest the cycle stop!
Wisdom chooses to keep time
with the rhythm of this world order
which was predestined by the colonizers
when they decided
who will be “the first” and
who will be “the last”
For black bodies, for “the last,”
who refuse to be dislocated
the cycle stops at erasure

What does this movement reveal,
what revelation does it conceal?
Could we ever divine its divine purpose?

Perhaps it is the colossal dislocation
of the African Diaspora
that is in due time to create
a sustained, stabilizing
rhythm for all of humanity
But at what cost?
But at what cost?

(This is not to infer that God is somehow responsible for the horror of enslavement but more to imagine a world where the people of the African continent were never dispersed around the world. Imagine how different society would be? Does the dislocation/dispersal of Africans have a deeper meaning for all of humanity?)

In his book, *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy uses the images of slave ships sailing on the water to create a repetitive, haunting image that vividly represents the rhythm of the politics of dislocation. An image of black bodies in a rhythmic flow moving across the Atlantic to feed a capitalist system of trade dependent upon Otherized human chattel for its economic life breath. Gilroy states, “I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise... [T]he image of the ship—a living, micro-culture, micro-political system in motion... Ships immediately focus attention on the Middle Passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland.”⁴⁷ This foreshadows the role of ships in the book of Revelation where the vessels of the imperial Roman empire conduct trade under government oppression of the people. African diasporic communities often use culture and the arts to deal with this phenomenon of dislocation. As an issue of theodicy and abandonment, the African Diaspora uses creativity to address the ways colonialism and enslavement has disrupted identity in the African Diaspora, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

From dispossession and lost land to the loss of identity, who were the people of the African Diaspora then—before colonialism and enslavement? Who are we to be now? Is this dilemma for the African Diaspora a nostalgic notion of a homeland, juxtaposed against the realities of dislocation and the point of no return? Ashcroft defines dislocation as the phenomenon that can be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location.⁴⁸ As a key

⁴⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

⁴⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 65.

postcolonial theme for African diasporic studies, dislocation is critical for the understanding of racialized subjectivity that promotes identities of difference and Othering throughout the African Diaspora. This colonial binary construct of the Other robs native people of their identities when they are dislocated by colonizers who justify their actions by using difference or Othering, in terms of barbarism and savagism, to colonize and/or enslave native subjects. This has been the primary rationale for dislocating large populations of native people from their homelands to be placed in servitude for the purpose of building empires on foreign lands to serve imperialists' ends. The Brazilian term, Saudade is a longing or nostalgia for what once was and may never be again or for something that never was but the idea of which produces a deep grief and/or desire, a bittersweet memory of what never was.⁴⁹ For these and many other reasons, the topic of dislocation and the loss of a sense of home are at the heart of critical race issues within the African Diaspora and require both a spiritual movement and political action to reconcile with the African Diaspora or provide reparations for all of that which has been lost spiritually, mentally, physically and psychologically in the forms of colonial trauma, spiritual violence and spiritual pain.

3. Decolonization by the Creative Spirit as the Process of Becoming:

Like the pulse of a beating drum, the movement of dislocation within the African Diaspora has created a sustained, stabilizing rhythm that has developed ancient and modern empires without the colonized and enslaved subjects being granted gratitude or grace by the colonizers. A breath cycle characterized by violently, forced off-beat a-tempo movements caused the enslaved Africans brought to the Americas to lament in songs of theodicy, abandonment and forgottenness with poignant soul cries like, "Lord, How Come Me Here?" They sang in poly rhythms and exaggerated breaths, gasping on rhythm, lamenting as a way of clinging to the fragility of life. Singing spontaneous rhythms in and

⁴⁹ Valerie Bridgeman, "A Long Ways From Home: Displacement, Lament and Singing Protest in Psalm 137," *Journal of the NABPR* (2016): 219.

out of time trying to create a new reality for a people. Perhaps it was the calming rhythm of breath in The Spirituals that is the best representation of the Spirit of the people, becoming. Breath as becoming makes a way of connecting with potentiality. It is the aesthetic of rhythm that introduces the desire of keeping the focus and intention on breath as the means by which one stays connected to the realm of all possibilities—becoming.

Political rhythms of oppression, subordination, domination, marginalization and supremacy do not dictate the tempo. Spirit does, as the new rhythms create resistance. In the politics of location and rootedness, the African Diaspora can be likened to a rhizome, which is a root system that spreads across the ground rather than downwards, and grows from several points rather than a root tap.⁵⁰ Where then does the individual or community identity form? If one is constantly being dislocated, displaced or dispersed? The word Diaspora in ancient Greek means “to disperse”, referring to the dispersal of pollen and spores of plants that then take root and flourish elsewhere in new soil.⁵¹ Because of the forced movement within the African Diaspora, the interruption of a sense of place has had a significant impact on identity formation and has led to fragmented identities and a fragmented sense of self. Place can be a constant trope of difference—a continual reminder of colonial ambivalence, of separation yet continual mixing of the colonizer and colonized.⁵² For the colonized and enslaved people of the African Diaspora who, in most cases, will not be able to return home, one must learn to grow where one is planted—in new soil—with the hopes that the roots to an existential African homeland are still able to connect beyond time and space and oceans and borders.

Rhizomic reverberations connect to ancestral spirits to release creativity along the diasporic journey—an exodus of the people that moves with the destabilizing and stabilizing rhythm of breath to reconnect that which has been disconnected over time and space. In *The Poetics of Relations*,

⁵⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 190.

⁵¹ Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Dictionary* (John Wiley Publishing, Ltd., Wiley Online Library, 2015) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

⁵² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 179.

Edouard Glissant defines the root as a stalk taking all upon itself and killing all around it. Glissant cites Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who propose the notion of the rhizome as an enmeshed root system, a network of spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently...it creates the idea of rootedness but challenging the idea of a totalitarian root.⁵³ This demonstrates the destabilizing nature of creativity in dislocation. In response to the extreme form of physical, social and individual dislocation involved in the institution of slavery, Glissant suggests that dislocation is the key to a release of a distinct form of cultural energy.⁵⁴ The disruptive and disorienting experience of dislocation becomes a primary influence on the regenerative energies of a post-colonial culture.⁵⁵ Salman Rushdie and Bhabha celebrate displacement as productive because, they claim, it gives the individual the opportunity to acquire a new, hybrid identity.⁵⁶ Thus, both Bhabha and Glissant have acknowledged how new hybrid and creolized identities form from destabilizing movements and create new cultural synergies. But can these new forms of identity truly reconcile issues of difference and Othering for the dislocated, colonized subject? Perhaps a case can be made for this creative, new hybrid identity in the narrative of African Americans. Yet, overall for the people of the African Diaspora, one must constantly reconcile the theodicy—there is no return—only relational remnants of recall and re-memory of a distant home. A now foreign land to its former sons and daughters.

The significance of breath is in the Spirit's rhythm—both politically and poetically—and how it animates and represents survival. Rhythm in this context represents how communities think of themselves and allows them to move beyond their circumstances to connect with the rhythm of life. The rhythm of movement is the breath of life for the displaced people. This theorizing on breath is an attempt to mobilize toward a decolonizing, revolutionary, Fanonian construction of Africana Spirit.

⁵³ Edouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11.

⁵⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 65.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁶ Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Dictionary* (John Wiley Publishing, Ltd., Wiley Online Library, 2015) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

It is attempting to find the rhythm and creativity of breath in destabilizing movement, motion, and mobilization needed for creating the space and place for decolonizing change in both the spiritual and political realms. As this section on breath prepares to conclude, let's look to Fanon to learn the proper breathing technique for the African Diaspora and to learn what is most important and worth fighting for—cultural identity. Cultural identity is not necessarily the ultimate. However, this research is grounded in a discourse around the importance of culture and culture can be used as an indicator of how well a society is performing.

4. Conclusion: Fanon's Combat Breathing and the Fight for Culture as Becoming:

There is no occupation of territory on the one hand and independence of person on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final deconstruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. —Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*

“We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.”—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In conclusion, Fanon's words quoted above most accurately define the colonized Spirit with his description of the colonized breathing being “observed” and “occupied” by the colonizer in such a way that it forces the colonized subject to enter into a form of “combat breathing” in order to sustain one's life. For the colonizer, these tactics of scrutinizing breath imprison the Spirit of the colonized, as in Fanon's poetics, and control the very breath of the colonized subject through observation and occupation of the subjugated colonized body. Thus, forcing the colonized to fight for the right to breathe independently is a symbol of independence. Yet, there is a dualism in his understanding of combat breathing. Combat breathing can also be interpreted offensively as a way of the colonized challenging the existing first/last world order by allowing breath to become the weapon of resistance when presented with death. The dream of becoming for the colonized and enslaved involves the latter form of combat breathing as it attempts to change the world order through decolonizing the spirit of

a wo/man in the process of becoming an independent being. It is with our first and last breaths that we begin and end our lives, which makes clear the importance of breath in the broader life/death, first/last, stabilizing/destabilizing, order/chaos discourse on Spirit and decolonization. Perhaps between the position of the “first” and the “last” there will be a chance to repair some of the psychological damage done by colonialism to both the colonized and the colonizer. Had he lived longer (past some of the anger), perhaps even Fanon could have embraced this notion as a man of medicine and healing.

One of the primary lessons Fanon gives to Africana pneumatology is that if one wants to determine one’s own cultural identity, then one will have to fight from the margins of the subaltern existence. For Fanon, fighting for independence as the means for the ability to determine a people’s own culture was paramount and culture is created in fighting and resistance for independence and liberation. It is the rhythm of combat that creates culture—after the last breath has been fought and won—culture can be found in the breath of independent wo/man. Independence produces the spiritual and material conditions for the conversion of [wo/]man.⁵⁷ For the African Diaspora, it is the transcendent wo/man who emerges after overcoming the postcolonial trauma of colonialism and enslavement—a decolonizing breath for spiritual conversion and rebirth of becoming a new wo/man as an independent, liberated being.

II. DECOLONIZING VOICE: THE COMBAT RHYTHM OF VOICE IN BREAKING THE SILENCE BEHIND THE VEIL:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.
—II Corinthians 3:17-18 (NRSV)

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 179.

The veil covers the body and disciplines it, tempers it, at the very time when it experiences its phase of greatest effervescence. The veil protects, reassures and isolates.⁵⁸—Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with new evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief.⁵⁹—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*

1. Combat Rhythm of Dissonance and the Dissidence of the Voice Unveiled:

In the rhythm of combat, there is a dissonance that clashes against established norms that find their fullest embodied expressions in dissident voice. Dissonance being voiced repetitively in this way creates its own unique form of combat rhythm. A rhythmic form of dissonance that uses sound to disrupt and resist until the silence behind the veil has been broken. This is how Fanon taught the colonized masses to engage their dissident voices as weapons in the fight for recognition. Becoming its own form of combat fighting, dissident voice becomes a primary tool for persons to challenge the established world order to gain full representation within humanity. This rhythmic style of dissonance in combat is a wearing down tactic, which also aims to unveil the motives of the colonizer. The challenge for the colonized is to overcoming fear, postcolonial trauma, and the history of enslavement. For the African Diaspora, the challenge is also to discover spaces where both dissonance and dissidence can break the silence and unveil the truth [Spirit] behind the veil. It is this continued rhythm of resistance from dissident voices that breaks the patterns of systemic racism and oppression in the Africana world.

In his book, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method and Practice*, postcolonial biblical scholar R. S. Sugirtharajah proposes the following critique, which states, “the marginalized are spoken of, or spoken to, but rarely do they themselves venture to speak.”⁶⁰ This essay

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 59.

⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 194.

⁶⁰ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 163.

offers a counter discourse to Sugirtharajah's claim based on a Fanonian metanarrative, which outlines the importance of colonized voices speaking for themselves regarding religious and cultural identities. Fanon's work exemplifies the notion that dissident voices are best able to change the world in that they often voice the need for a radical reordering of western culture. Through his own particular theorizing on decolonization, Fanon emphasizes the importance of reordering world systems by privileging the role of the voice that which guides the rhythm of mobilization movements for change.⁶¹

The world of the colonized and the colonizer is described by Fanon as a fight to the death⁶² and silence has played a major role in perpetuating the violence maintained within the relationship between these binary opposites. One could say that the fight between the colonized and the colonizer has been primarily about preventing the introduction of dissonance—in the form of dissent voices—into the discourse of an already established world order that benefits one dominant group above all the other groups. As observed by Fanon in his quote above, cognitive dissonance maintains the core beliefs of the colonizers, which have kept the dissident voices of the colonized veiled for so long. For the colonizer, to protect their core beliefs, they made voicing dissonance about the world order a life or death matter for the colonized and enslaved under their command. Thus, this combat tactic of one speaking for oneself requires a complicated paradigm shift to say the least. And once the concept of the veiled and the unveiled voice are introduced, the ability to speak and use one's voice becomes even more complicated within this motif.

In II Corinthians 3:17-18, the Apostle Paul urges the church of Corinth to come to God with their faces unveiled or open, not hidden from God's glory. Paul teaches the church that if they wanted to be transformed by the Spirit, then they must not mask their faces so God's glory can reflect back onto them to begin the process of becoming through transfiguration and liberation. This can be

⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 2.

⁶² *Ibid*, xxxiv.

interpreted as no change or transformation for those who are masked or veiled or separated from the presence of the glory of God. For it is only in this unmasked state of being that one becomes transformed into the image of God, which is the fulfillment of all human possibility and potentiality.

In Fanonian terms, this motif of the veil seems to operate in the reverse order from what has just been described in the Apostle Paul narrative. For the colonized world, the veil is often represented as a form of covering and protection. For the Apostle Paul, it is the unveiling that removes the barrier of the old covenant and offers liberty for humanity in a new, rhythmic transformation that changes the individual from glory to glory. One could imagine there are critical life or death moments when one's voice must remain veiled in the face of direct, immediate violence, and there are other moments when one can remove the veil and gain liberation. This dualism in the veil motif highlights the positivity of unveiling as described by the Apostle Paul in the process of transfiguration and liberty and the positivity of remaining veiled as described by Fanon in the protection of the colonized from the colonizer's violence.

In the same Fanonian description of the way the veil controls the dissonance of the body, one could image the veil serving the same purposes within the context of the Spirit. In his book *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon emphasizes how the veil "covers" and "disciplines" and "tempers" its subject when he speaks of the Algerian-Muslim women who are on the front lines of combat. In their violent world, there are moments when the need to be veiled versus the need to be unveiled should be left to the interpretation of the wisdom of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul's description of the importance of unveiling in the liberative moment is not being discounted. Rather, it is being balanced against the strategic way Fanon interprets the so-called docile, veiled Muslim women who were able to transport weapons, in the presence of French soldiers, while hidden in plain sight. These veiled women held leadership roles on the front lines of the revolution. Because their identities were strategically hidden or masked, they were able to contribute to the struggle for the independence of their people. Because

of their hidden identities they had a voice, able to respond in the process of war. What exists behind the veil, first and foremost, is a dissident voice that strives to speak with an epistemology of combat that begins with the veiled voice awaiting the revolutionary moment between the spark and the flame to ignite.

For this construction of Africana pneumatology, the work is to interpret the instances when one should unveil the voice for the moment of transfiguration and liberation and when one should veil or silence the voice to protect oneself from violence. Like the tension of racial profiling in African-American U.S. life, it is because of this tension and the dualistic nature of the veil which makes this motif so important for the understanding of Africana pneumatology. And although one could say that the space behind the veil or the mask is sacred, becoming is the refusal to mask or hide one's voice as a way of unveiling truth by unveiling the silence. In this way, the decolonized voice is the unveiled voice speaking for the representation of one's religious and cultural identities, which will be explored in more detail in the upcoming sections.

2. The Decolonization of Religious Identities: Dissident Voice and the Possibility of the Impossible Becoming

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.⁶³—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*

As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negative activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for creation of a human world—that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions. He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible.⁶⁴—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*

i. Revolutionary Voice in Religious Identity and Spiritual Formation:

⁶³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 179.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 170.

What exactly is revolutionary voice? Fanon, known by Sartre as “the voice of the Third World,” embodies the definition of revolutionary voice because of his theorizing on decolonization that vocalized the radical notion of changing the world order based on his “the last will become first” interpretation of the work of decolonization. One description of Fanon by Jean-Paul Sartre describes the importance of Fanon’s voice in identity formation and representation of the colonized when he states, “The Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through Fanon's voice.”⁶⁵ One could also say Fanon possessed a revolutionary voice because of his ability to speak through his theorizing on transformation and the struggle for independence as a critical part of the spiritual work of becoming.

When Fanon states, “Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The thing colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation,” he is clear about his desire not to default into a reactionary way of spiritualizing or giving credit to supernatural powers for what he believed to be the efforts of human beings.⁶⁶ So then who gets to take the credit for the colonized subject becoming a liberated wo/man, human beings or divine beings? In Fanon’s own words, fighting for liberation and the creation of new wo/men is the result of human effort, not divine intervention. On the contrary, this essay on decolonizing voice seeks to demonstrate ways in which the human/spiritual and immanent/transcendent all work together within the realm of the voice toward becoming by overcoming empire, power and colonial injustices. This work seeks to find the synergy, connection and balance between these symbiotic entities in the revolutionary moment. Contained within this moment is the culmination of the human/spiritual and the immanent/transcendent—all converging toward the same truth Spirit of becoming by achieving the possibility of the impossible. In Fanon’s terms, the rebirth of a new wo/man as an independent, liberated being is a process of becoming, which results in a more fully

⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), xivi.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

recognized human being that has voice and agency. Thus, decolonizing voice begins with the simple understanding that exercising one's voice is the means by which one gains greater representation within humanity. When The Spirituals and freedom songs of the Civil Rights movement rang out, "We Shall Overcome" or "My Soul Looks Back and Wonders," the African Diaspora was claiming its humanity. It was becoming and using the gift of song in the process.

ii. The Dissident Voice of Africana Religions Studies and the Role of Christianity in Colonialism:

See, the Lord your God has given the land to you, go up and take possession of it.
—Deuteronomy 1:21

When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.
—Bishop Desmond Tutu

He carried the Bible; the soldier carried the gun; the administrator and the settler carried the coin.
Christianity, Commerce, Civilization: The Bible, the Coin, the Gun: Holy Trinity.
— Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*

What happens to the voice of the African Diaspora when it is possessed by the same 'tool' of religion that was so instrumental in the enslavement and colonization of millions of its people? The notion of decolonizing the voice provides an opportunity to put religion into its proper perspective as it relates to the voice and the wounds of postcolonial trauma. To summarize Fanon's thoughts on the tools used by the colonizer to enslave, he states, "I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possesses the man."⁶⁷ Thus, the complexity within the work of Africana religious studies often begins with the attempt to understand the enigma of how the people of the African Diaspora have been able to adopt their oppressor's religion. By accepting versus rejecting the religion used to colonize and enslave hundreds of millions of people, do Christians from the African Diaspora become complicit in the so-called "God-ordained" capitalist schemes of colonization and enslavement, which

⁶⁷ Richard Pithouse, "That the Tool Never Possesses the Man': Taking Fanon's Humanism Seriously," in *Politikon*, no. 30:1, 107 (2003) DOI: 10.1080/0258934032000147255.

utilizes religion to maintain this current world order? Today the fact remains that one of the fastest growing demographic group in Christianity comes from the continent of Africa.

To create even more tension for this emerging Africana pneumatology model, which desperately wants to merge Christian pneumatology within the broader context of Africana religious studies, one also has to reconcile the overarching themes of secular (and sometimes anti-religious) humanism that are often found in Fanonism, Africana philosophy and among many intellectuals from the black radical tradition. Thus, the follow-up question becomes: How has Christianity helped or hindered the colonized in their Fanonian process of becoming independent, liberated beings? What has Christianity done to both silence and liberate the voice of the colonized and enslaved and is the work within black liberation theology sufficient for justifying the need to keep Christian pneumatology as the foundation for this Africana model of pneumatology? What role has Christianity played in creating a voiceless, subaltern identity for the African Diaspora? Can Africana pneumatology find ways to reconcile the misuse of the Bible and Christianity as tools of silence and oppression in the conquest narratives of empire? Does focusing on the liberative role of Spirit, in the Christian context, over secular humanism have a specific value? If so, what are those spaces and places where Christian pneumatology, in the form of black liberation theology, should be given “first” priority over the secular humanism of Africana philosophy and black radical thought?

In the black radical tradition, the humanist/supernatural conflict in assigning credit to humans or God (Spirit) provides both a tension and a fertile ground for the construction of an Africana pneumatology that I am attempting. This is because of the fact that its foundation in Fanonism with its secular, sometimes anti-religious form of humanism, often displays spirituality in its most authentic sense as part of the struggle for independence and humanity. Therefore, the Fanonian notion of spirituality should be interpreted as both secular and sacred in this work—a binary that often finds its boundaries becoming blurred in the pursuit of justice. This project’s construction of Africana

pneumatology works from a religious foundation that is grounded in the Christian faith but remains committed to making space for other traditional, African religious practices and multi-faith dialogues. Lastly, on the issue of reordering, there is a unique role that Spirit can play in Africana pneumatology. It is Spirit that fills in when the appropriation of Christianity and the Bible begin to fall apart for the African Diaspora. This is the critical work of Africana pneumatology.

iii. The Dissident Voice of Immanence and Transcendence:

Vox pouli vox Dei. The voice of the people is the voice of God. —Proverb, Author Unknown

In the field of post-colonial studies, Manicheanism is defined as the binary structure of imperial ideology, and is a term used by Fanon to define the nature of the implacable opposition of the colonizer and the colonized and also by Abdul Jan-Mohammed to describe the dualistic aspect of imperial discourse that polarizes the culture into good and evil.⁶⁸ The burning question for Africana pneumatology is this: Can the Spirit of God be found indwelling the community in the revolutionary moment or can Spirit be found transcending Manichean binaries of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and all forms of difference and Otherness?⁶⁹ Perhaps the answer is both. As stated in the proverb quoted above, the voice of the people is the voice of God—one unified voice of immanence and transcendence working together toward liberation that begins with the action of the people speaking with dissident voices. This proverb suggests a transcendent God who is also able to be found indwelling among the community. Here the tension between immanence and transcendence grapples with finding truth Spirit by locating dissidence in the voice of the people who struggle for independence and liberation. To reiterate the words previously stated by Sartre, Fanon was the voice of the Third World. It is the Spirit that speaks through its immanence for the oppressed and the poor.

⁶⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 134.

⁶⁹ Richard Pithouse, "That the Tool Never Possesses the Man?: Taking Fanon's Humanism Seriously," *Politikon*, no. 30:1, 112 (2003) DOI: 10.1080/0258934032000147255.

In the decolonizing work of Fanon is the example of how the sacred is immanent in humanity.⁷⁰ Fanon's spirituality, unlike that of certain forms of orthodox religion, does not preclude human freedom, finds expression in the prayer with which Fanon ends *Black Skins, White Masks*: "A final prayer: Oh my body make of me always a man who always questions!"⁷¹

3. The Decolonization of Cultural Identity: Dissent Voices of Resistance in Cultural Representation

Can the subaltern speak?⁷²—Gayatri Spivak

i. Can the African Diaspora Speak?:

Can the African Diaspora speak? The African Diaspora speaks to the world through a cultural identity, formed from centuries in a crucible of oppression. How does voice equate to cultural identity and cultural representation within the trope of subalternity? For Gayatri Spivak, the subaltern strictly conceived, is that which is structurally and systematically written out or excluded from any hegemonic ideology, official history, developed economic structure, or political system of representation.⁷³ Voice, in terms of cultural representation, is such an important trope in colonialism because it recognizes how silencing and fear immobilizes the colonized subject and how overcoming that fear allows one to speak and gain more representation. For the people of the African Diaspora, masking one's voice, one's true identity is a survival technique that is taught during the early period of human development and socialization. Empire has invested much of its energies in silencing the colonized world as a way of maintaining the established world order. For the colonized and the enslaved, to speak or not to

⁷⁰ Ibid, 125.

⁷¹ Ibid, 127.

⁷² Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson (UK: Macmillan, 1988), 66.

⁷³ Stephen Moore, "Situating Spivak," in *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*, ed. by S. D. Moore and M. Rivera (New York: Fordham Press, 2011), 20.

speak translates into the difference between life and death. So, they learned to veil their dissident voices in the resistance art of their cultural productions.

To continue on the issue of culture and representation, Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space he calls the Third Space of enunciation.⁷⁴ It is in this Third Space where the construction of Africana pneumatology takes place. Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical “purity” of cultures untenable.⁷⁵ Therefore, decolonizing the voice has the goal of breaking the colonizing silence that subjugates cultural identity and representation within humanity. For Bhabha, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favor of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate.⁷⁶

ii. Culture Combat in Identity Formation:

The colonized is forever in combat with his own image.⁷⁷—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*

The Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic.⁷⁸—Larry Neal

In conclusion, who then will speak for the ‘last’—the African Diaspora? Fanon does. With his visionary voice he did venture to speak, in biblical terms, ‘for the least of them’ or the ‘last’—the colonized and enslaved wretched of the African Diaspora by theorizing systems of decolonization that called for a total disorder and a reordering of society.⁷⁹ For the colonized and enslaved, cultural works embody a dissonance of resistance that demands, as described during The Black Arts Movement in 1968, a “reordering of the western cultural aesthetic.” Africana pneumatology strives to continue this

⁷⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 118.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 194.

⁷⁸ Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review: TDR*, 12, no. 4 (Summer, 1968): 29.

⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 2.

cultural combat with the hope of changing the negative identity of the African Diaspora within the western aesthetic.

The people of the African Diaspora have always found creative ways to express disharmony and dissonance within the current world order. Like the modal dissonance in the jazz of Miles Davis, it is the dissonant tension that pushes the boundaries before the resolution of a haunting, harmonically clashing refrain. No matter what the evidence, the avoidance and cognitive dissonance with the colonizer allows the colonizer to think whatever he wants to think. Like playing dissonant notes that clash against the grain, the colonizers will be what they will be. In conventional musical terms, it takes both the qualities of consonance and dissonance to create the balance needed to produce harmonic structures.

In Africana music, Spirit has found a sacred space in the creation of the sound of dissonance that breaks the silence and decolonizes the voice from postcolonial trauma. Creating dissonance against the modality of silence challenges marginality and subaltern identities and allows the becoming of the new, independent wo/man to emerge. There have always been dissonant voices that were silenced in order to maintain the status quo. As Derrida never tires of saying, “the voice is to be understood not as the psychophysiological capacity to produce speech, but as an unspoken and therefore powerful ideology of meaning production.”⁸⁰ That is, as a way to represent the subject’s capacity to secure its prerogative in the process and medium of cultural expression.⁸¹ Speaking for one’s self as a form of combat for the right to claim one’s own identity through the fight to determine one’s own culture is a form of meaning making in response to postcolonial trauma. As a response to postcolonial trauma, music heals the lingering wounds by claiming voice and Spirit through the proclamation of song.

⁸⁰ Anthony C. Alessandrini, “Fanon Studies, Cultural Studies, Cultural Politics,” In *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Anthony C. Alessandrini. London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 94.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 94.

III. DECOLONIZING FIRE: AFROFUTURISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT OF THE APOCALYPSE FOR REORDERING WESTERN CULTURE:

“The lens that I’m lookin’ through
Won’t prescribe me the right glasses, masses are now free
Ashes I’m dumping out, bout to spread all across seas
Sisters and brothers in unison, not because of me
Because we don’t glue with the opposition, we glue with peace.
—Kendrick Lamar, *Black Panther* soundtrack

Imagine a decolonized world where the colonized trade places with the colonizer, the entire world order is reversed and the third world becomes the first world. Where would the people of the African Diaspora be in this new ordering of society and how then would Africana pneumatology be interpreted and understood in this reversed social stratification? In the rise of the success of the mega block buster 2018 Marvel film, *Black Panther*, the demand for more and more discourse around the Fanonian concept of decolonization—the last becoming first—has increased, thus creating a new cultural awareness around the theme of afrofuturism. But what would be the cost for actually achieving this futuristic version of a new world where the last (colonized) are actually first and the first (colonizers) are last? Would this mean the apocalypse or perhaps even total anarchy for westernized society as we know it? Perhaps the answer depends on whether or not this reordering of the socio-political and economic systems occurs incrementally over time or all at once. Thus, decolonization does not have to automatically mean the end of the western world as a negotiated concession for a paradigm shift representing a new beginning for the Others.

Disrupting the status quo by decolonizing or reordering the established social stratification would be no less than an apocalyptic moment for western culture, but it would also represent a moment of affirmation and justification for the humanity of the subaltern African Diaspora. Much like the prophecy told in Revelation that envisions a new heaven and earth, the revolutionary moment is ever present just waiting to ignite in the space between the spark and the flame. In that revolutionary

moment is the combat rhythm of Spirit's journey that travels, as defined in Exodus, like a pillar of cloud and fire. This pillar of cloud and fire, which also best defines the trope of fire for Africana pneumatology, highlights the way Spirit moves with the people of the African Diaspora, from Exodus to Revelation, as a prophecy of hope made manifest in new, contemporary fantasy visions of afrofuturism. Thus, Spirit that is constantly working to reorder our world—in the name of justice—is born out of a culturally decolonized world made anew by the indwelling of the Spirit of cultural creativity. Thus, demonstrating how world reordering is a fiery, creative work of the Spirit, which takes place in small, incremental, revolutionary moments of one defending the right to determine one's own cultural identity. It is within this Spirit space where these moments spread like wildfires to create revolutionary change.

1. The Fanonian, Utopian Idealism in Afrofuturism:

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.—Deuteronomy 4:12

Upon the mountain my Lord spoke, Out of His mouth came fire and smoke.
—Everytime I Feel the Spirit, Negro Spiritual

But the flames have been lit and like an epidemic, spread like wildfire throughout the country.⁸²
—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

i. Decolonization and the Combat Rhythm of Fire for A New World Order:

Does the rhythm of decolonization progress quickly and spread like wildfires or does it move incrementally over time as a sustained rhythm for change? What can the people of the African Diaspora learn from the rhythm of wildfires for understanding the process of reordering world systems? Fanon skillfully uses the motif of wildfires in *Wretched* to express the way violence spreads

⁸² Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2007), 79.

through villages as a response to decolonization efforts and the attempt to unite. Violence in this Fanonian quote serves as the colonized embodied response to the established world order and life under the colonizer's rule. Once the wo/men begin to fight for their humanity, like wildfires, the violence cannot be controlled. In contrast, the nonviolent work of Africana pneumatology suggests that once the conditions are set for the flames of revolution to be lit, there can be a radical disruption in the established societal order that spreads like a wildfire to create systematic change through a nonviolent sustained rhythm of dismantling corrupt systems one by one.

Revolution can also be likened to a wildfire as interpreted within the context of Deuteronomy 4:12, which can be read as God's words coming forth as contagious words of fire that spread among the people with the decolonizing combat rhythm of fire serving to cleanse and purify. Here in this bible passage (Deut. 4:12) is an example of the voice of God indwelling the people through the igniting of the flame, which creates a revolutionary moment for change. This reading of the text makes decolonization a divine concept that uses the phenomenon of fire to shift the power structures for the purpose of obtaining alternate, contrasting worldviews of the colonized and the colonizers.

ii. Decolonization and the Combat Rhythm of Fire in Afrofuturism:

It is hard for one to be a victim of afropessimism when one remains prepared, in a ready state or a combat mode. Afrofuturism is all about combat—existential combat for establishing one's cultural identity, representation, humanity and recognition by not surrendering to fear, hopelessness and pessimism. Afrofuturism takes on the form of combat in that it fights for the right for one to establish one's own cultural identity in such a way that the identity of the people is considered more positive in the future than it is in the present, thus providing a sense of hope.

For the purposes of this work, afrofuturism can be defined as a new, long term vision that allows the African Diaspora to understand its identity, which is not subaltern and has changed over the duration of space and time. This suggests that the cultural identity of the African Diaspora in this

current world reality is not permanent. Third world technological advances, discoveries of new resources, or cosmic changes can all level the playing field between the colonized and the colonizer. Ecological and planetary destruction can certainly shift the balance and reassign who controls our natural resources for everyone. Who knows how the narrative between the colonized and the colonizer will end in the end?

The important thing is for one to stretch one's imagination in the understanding of the binary relationship between the colonized and the colonizer as a relationship where the cosmic paradigms of time, space, and opportunity can shift the balance of the western world at any time. Therefore, it is important not to remain fixed on one world view. This is why theorizing the parameters for Africana pneumatology alongside the theory of afrofuturism, which takes the futuristic, cosmic long view, is so critical to this work. Afrofuturism stretches the imagination beyond the despair of afropessimism and postcolonial trauma toward the potentiality of an alternate world order that looks to the future for clues on decolonizing and improving conditions in the present time.

It is important to understand how the journey of the Spirit begins before theorizing on how it might end. For the African Diaspora, the biblical journey often begins with the appropriation of the Exodus narrative because Exodus offers an easy prescription for liberation to the oppressed. For this construction of Africana pneumatology as a vision of afrofuturism, we will begin this fire essay with a biblical focus on the connection between Exodus 13:21, but we will reconcile it in Revelation 21:3. This connection is important to understand the potentiality of Africana pneumatology within the context of both the Spirit as fire indwelling with the people and as the apocalypse and the creation of a new heaven and earth. Fire in the context of afrofuturism also represents the futuristic notion that some systems will not make it into the next world and will ultimately have to be burned, theoretically speaking, because they have oppressed and left so many in a perpetual state of

hopelessness and pessimism. The purpose of theorizing around Decolonizing Fire in this way is to identify a Spirit of hope and renewal out of the ashes of the apocalypse of the Revelation.

This essay on Decolonizing Fire will explore the following sections to support the construction of an Africana conceptualization of pneumatology: 1) *(Theophany) Pillar of Cloud and Fire: An Afrofuturistic Reading of Exodus X and Revelation 21*; and 2) *Afrofuturism Like a Phoenix on the “Rise-Up” from the Ashes: Decolonizing Fire for a Radical Reordering of the Western Cultural Aesthetic*.

2. (Theophany) Pillar of Cloud and Fire: An Afrofuturistic Reading of Exodus 13:21 and Revelation 21:3:

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. —Exodus 13:21-22

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” —Revelation 21:3

How has the understanding of the apocalypse shaped afrofuturism as it relates to the decolonization of place? The Greek word, Apo-Kalypso means to unveil, thus to reveal, or disclose.⁸³ In *Wretched* when Fanon defined the meaning of decolonization as the last becoming first, were his words a prophetic, apocalyptic afrofuturism to prepare the African Diaspora for a new heaven and earth? Based on the connection between Exodus 13:21-22 and Revelation 21:3, afrofuturism and the apocalypse are important concepts for Africana pneumatology because Exodus is a narrative all about a better, promised future and the Spirit plays a major role in establishing this covenant. Revelation 21:3 is clear that the dwelling place of God is with wo/man.

Decolonization can be viewed as a form of apocalypse that waits for the revolutionary moment and understands the importance of decolonizing places with a fire and passion for justice. What is the importance of time, place and community in the discourse on decolonizing spaces with considerations

⁸³ Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 1.

to the Utopian notion that states the good place is always no place?⁸⁴ Perhaps there is no perfect place but there is a revolutionary hope in afrofuturism that strives to make a better place. God appears, as described by the Ancient Greek word, theophany, through fire to make his/her presence known in the same place with the people. The pillar of fire is described as a raging column of fire pressing urgently against the silent, dark nightscape which is at once a brilliant and arresting spectacle that the people could see as a symbol of God being present.⁸⁵ Therefore, Africana pneumatology is concerned with the pillar of cloud and fire and where it might lead the people of the African Diaspora in the future.

i. Decolonization and the Combat Rhythm of Fire for a New Heaven and Earth:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be disclosed...because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire.—2 Peter 3:10-12

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.—Revelation 21:1

More than any other early Christian text Revelation is replete with the language of war, conquest, and empire, which is why it provides the landscape for discourse on Spirit as a conquest narrative.⁸⁶ In Fanonian terms, the new heaven and earth, as described by 2 Peter 3:10-12, will come by fire [of decolonization]. In this way, fire will cleanse and purify as it prepares to create a new sense of place. The last becoming first, as the Fanonian decolonization prophesy proclaims, is foreshadowed by Revelation 21:1, which delivers the promise of the creation of new planetary systems. This is why the importance of fire in this construction of Africana pneumatology cannot be overstated as Spirit becomes connected to the struggle to keep the promise for reunion.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 141.

⁸⁵ Herbert Robinson Marbury, *Pillars of Cloud and Fire: The Politics of Exodus in African-American Biblical Interpretation* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015), 6.

⁸⁶ Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 114.

What is the real importance of fire for this construction of Africana pneumatology? Why should anyone seek for hope in the apocalypse? What kind of future should the African Diaspora imagine and how can afrofuturism help shape that concept of the future? Fire burns as a symbol of hope in the apocalyptic new world order, new systems, new heaven and earth. In the rise of the generation of Trumpism and white supremacy, some predict that our current world systems may not last. So, what can be learned from the apocalypse and how does afrofuturism, Fanonian, utopian ideals fit into this vision? What the apocalypse veils in the established world order (fear and afropessimism) and unveils in the new world order (hope and afrofuturism) is key, which is that the end (of world systems) is our beginning. This afrofuturistic, apocalyptic hope is the burning fire of Africana pneumatology.

The apocalyptic hope in afrofuturism contains a new cosmic vision with a new paradigm of time and space and place for the colonized to do things better, not to repeat the same oppressive systems as empire and the colonizer and their vengeful wars. Perhaps in this afrofuturistic vision the colonized does not have to play the role of the colonized and the colonizer does not continue as the colonizer but both groups understand the importance of not creating world systems that feed off of marginalized and subaltern groups. One would need to have a keen awareness of not trading one imperialist, colonizing group for the creation of another. As such, the cycle must be interrupted. Afrofuturism becomes part of the dream for the African Diaspora as one subaltern group understands suffering and makes a promise not to repeat the same pattern of conquest and oppression toward others in the future.

In conclusion, the pillar of cloud and fire dwells and remains with the people until the new world order and the end of days. This is the lesson for Africana pneumatology and the African Diaspora. The Spirit is there with the people from the beginning to the end through afropessimism

and fear that the established world order will never change. The end represents the beginning for the African Diaspora.

Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed.
Hope calls for action; action is not possible without hope.—Rebecca Solnit

3. Conclusion: Afrofuturism Like a Phoenix on the “Rise/Up” from the Ashes: Decolonizing Fire for a Radical Reordering of the Western Cultural Aesthetic:

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.—Revelation 21:5

In order to rise from its own ashes a phoenix must first burn. —Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

Would the suggestion of a radical reordering of western culture be equivalent to the apocalypse for the western world? As discussed in chapter 2 on Decolonizing Voice, Larry Neal in his 1968 writings on The Black Arts Movement actually presented this “reordering of western culture” challenge to those who uphold and protect the western cultural aesthetic. Since western culture will never reverse its position on this matter of privilege, what alternatives are left for the African Diaspora? Burning itself down? Perhaps not. However, the African Diaspora must take action and rise in hope as hope requires action. Each time the community is faced with trauma, the important thing is to rise-up and take action knowing that the Spirit will still be there indwelling with the people.

In facing the harsh realities of afropessimism and this current world order, the African Diaspora has burned itself down—materially and existentially—in many instances. But to what end? For the colonizer has nothing to gain and everything to lose in any discussion of a reordering scheme. Radical ideologies of black minds burn to spark a new creativity in the ashes, on the margins, and in subaltern identities as the African Diaspora remembers the sacred Spirit journey from Exodus to Revelation. Perhaps there is peace in the ashes.

Lastly, let's take a moment to explore popular culture and afrofuturism at its best as we follow the combat rhythm of decolonizing fire on an adventure through the lens of Marvel's mega blockbuster film, *Black Panther*.

i. Decolonizing Fire and the Afrofuturism of the Apocalypse in Marvel's Black Panther:

The souls of sufferin' men,
Clutchin' on deaf ears again,
Rapture is comin',
It's all prophecy and if I gotta be,
Sacrificed for the greater good,
Then that's what it gotta be.
—Lyrics by Kendrick Lamar
“Pray for Me,” *Black Panther* soundtrack

How do themes of colonialism shape popular culture discourses on afrofuturism, decolonization and the apocalypse? Afrofuturism is defined as a literary and musical movement that explores black identity, culture and struggles through the lens of science fiction.⁸⁷ Ashcroft includes in its definition of colonialism the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years. This year, western culture was challenged by a Marvel film, which required the filmgoer to envision Africans and people of the African Diaspora in a new way that was anything but colonized or subaltern. *Black Panther* and the fictitious African nation of Wakanda, which has never been colonized, can be seen as a prophetic meta narrative that performs Fanon's philosophy for the colonized of the last becoming first as an example of a world view for change that reverses the motivations for colonial violence.

This film represents a visual representation of the possibilities and the potentiality of the colonized to fully cultivate humanity and protect one's resources. Wakanda is an African nation the rest of the world believes to be poor, but is secretly rich, thanks to hidden deposits of the fictional

⁸⁷ Alex Fitzpatrick. “It's Not Just *Black Panther*. Afrofuturism is Having a Moment.” *Time Magazine Online*. April 20, 2018. <http://time.com/5246675/black-panther-afrofuturism/>.

super-metal vibranium as well as its mastery of technological and scientific advancements.⁸⁸ This imagery burns the cultural superiority of a western ideology that would typically never portray an African nation as technologically superior. Wakanda's leaders have long shunned the world stage, mindful of how other African nations' mineral wealth has been exploited by outsiders in the past.⁸⁹

This film tells the “revelation” story of the veiling and unveiling of an African society that needed to remain hidden from the rest of the world as a means of survival to prevent colonization or enslavement. The symbolism in this film is in the Fanonian decolonization prophesy (last becoming first) as it creates various performances of a new, afrofuturistic non-westernized world that generates hope for the African Diaspora. Who we, the African Diaspora, are in this current world order in terms of our identity and whether our humanity and resources are hidden, not hidden, veiled, or unveiled is a discourse for afrofuturism that creates its own Exodus to Revelation/apocalypse narrative for further exploration. This film will burn in the imaginations of both the colonized and the colonizer for years to come.

ii. A Theopoetics for Kendrick Lamar's Black Panther Soundtrack as a *Neo-Spiritual*:

Where does one find the new spirituals for a new generation?

Neo-Spirituals: Poetics on *Black Panther* Film
—By Sharon Kimberly Williams

fictional African nation
never been colonized
means there's no bible lies
from those who colonize

talking drums for battle
trap beats of ancestral patterns
between good and evil
find my way back from modernity

⁸⁸ Ibid, Fitzpatrick.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Fitzpatrick.

from an ancient memory
free as the wind's soul
sing of a new song
of heaven here and now, not hereafter

in the eyes of music
this world is old and new
through time and space
prisms harmonize into flames of hope

music spreads like wild fires of resistance
masked in the apocalyptic
the veil remains hidden in plain sight
until wisdom is revealed

In the context of revelation, the apocalypse, and unveiling, The Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals have always been and will continue to be the voice of prophecy. The final chapter will explore what The Spirituals are hiding and what The Spirituals are revealing; what The Spirituals unveil or unfold for the African Diaspora, and what that revelation says about life in our material world.

CONCLUSION: BREATH, VOICE, AND FIRE OF “THE SPIRITUALS” AS THE AFRICANA SPIRIT IN MUSIC

If you are silent about your pain, (from violence, emphasis mine)
they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.—Zora Neale Hurston

Let the people sing!—Zora Neale Hurston

ABSTRACT

This final section will interpret the *breath, voice, and fire* of “The Spirituals” through the lenses of rhythm, improvisation, and transcendence. For this, we will revisit Fanon’s definition of decolonization from *The Wretched of the Earth*, which defines decolonization as “the last shall be first,”⁹⁰ and pair this concept with The Black Arts Movement’s call for “a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic”⁹¹ as described by Larry Neal. These two guiding principles by Fanon and Neal will now become the foundation of the final trope for this work, which is the musical trope of “The Spirituals. The goal for this section is to demonstrate the *breath, voice and fire* of “The Spirituals” as resistance art that focuses on the rhythm, improvisation and

⁹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched*. Pg. 2

⁹¹ Larry Neal. *The Black Arts Movement*, p 29

transcendence and promotes redistributive justice. By understanding the historical contributions of ‘The Spirituals’, one can better understand their proven ability to reverse and reorder the western cultural aesthetic and create a more just society. Based on their lyrical, cultural critiques of westernized racism stemming from the Antebellum South, these sacred works have forced society to become more just over time through the power of their authenticity to challenge the socio-political systems of empire. For this reason, ‘The Spirituals’ have been quoted frequently in the historic speeches and writings of great Africana scholars including Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr. and continue to be interpreted through new voices of prophetic *fire* like in the voice and neo-spirituals of rap artist and cultural icon, Kendrick Lamar.

In the previous chapters, there has been much discussion about the violent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. As this thesis finds its way to its conclusion on a musical note, one might ask, “How does the *breath, voice* and *fire* of ‘The Spirituals’ reverse the western cultural aesthetic as it relates to postcolonial violence (physical, spiritual, psychological) and postcolonial trauma within the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer? First, one must ask if the Fanonian notion of “the last becoming first” translates into a base theory of revenge and a recipe for suicide and disaster for the colonized or if this Fanonian reversal theory of sorts works through the rhythm of improvisation toward transcendence and redistributive justice. Next, one could ask if the colonized and descendants of slaves should address violence by simply allowing their souls respond to societal injustices through spiritual songs in such a way that the soul transcends that which cannot be changed on earth. The answer may come in the form of the two following questions: When does one return violence for violence and when does one respond to violence by singing? When Zora Neale Hurston commands, “Let the people sing!” perhaps one can interpret Hurston’s words here to mean that the colonized and enslaved people had no other alternative in the face of complete and total domination by empire. So, the soul responded in the form of songs born from human suffering and despair. Thus, the role of “The Spirituals” as a theology becomes like an embodied response of lament in the form of songs that are grounded in feelings of theodicy and abandonment by God.

What is the role of “The Spirituals” in making theological sense of all of the colonial and postcolonial violence historically attached to the Africana world? How do “The Spirituals” as the sacred music of the African Diaspora help reverse colonial and postcolonial violence in all its forms? In the music of the African Diaspora, the quality of lament can be describes as what Brian Ward coined as his phrase and book title, “Just My Soul Responding.”⁹² In the Africana conquest and enslavement narratives can soul responses to violence that manifests in song be considered the proper response to postcolonial and colonial violence? One could argue that it is the improvisation in African music that works best in reversing and reordering pessimistic, violent worldviews that damage the psyche of the colonized and enslaved. Thus, “The Spirituals” promote healing the postcolonial trauma from violence associated with colonization and enslavement by allowing the soul a way to express lament while

⁹² Brian Ward, *It’s Just My Soul Responding*, (title page).

reconciling theodicy and feelings of abandonment and forgottenness. Within the work of decolonization of “The Spirituals” is an underlying lyrical theme of redistributive justice that uses improvisation to change the order of things through improvised “just” responses to systematized injustices through resistance art and sacred songs. As the key cultural product produced to respond to colonial and postcolonial violence, “The Spirituals” address the postcolonial theme of dislocation and allow individuals an artistic platform to work out lament as an embodied, communal practice.

Like a veiled or hidden trope embedded in this work, “The Spirituals” signify an embodied memory that has been traveling alongside the violent, Fanonian-laden narratives of the previous three chapters. “The Spirituals” have been on this journey all along even in the most violent moments of combat breath, voice, and fire in every Fanonian, revolutionary reflection that has detailed the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. “The Spirituals” have been remembered in the descendants of those whose souls responded musically in song—at the highest level of expression—to the relentless, unfathomable colonial and postcolonial violence. This musical salve is still in their DNA especially when one is reflecting on violence of the past. That Africana music, in this context of resistance art, responds in the form of lament is a response to all the various forms of violence, which is most apparent in the historical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. “The Spirituals” reorder society when the lyrical discourse changes the narrative of the colonizer within a breath, voice and fire mosaic that combats violence in all its forms. Thus, improvisation becomes a key principle in destabilizing work of decolonization as it presents creative challenges to the western cultural aesthetic to become more just (as previously outlined by Fanon and Neal). In this way, improvisation works through the vehicle of “The Spirituals” to reorder culture by promoting a lyrical discourse that turns all forms of violence toward redistributive justice in socio-political and economic terms. Thus, as resistance music, “The Spirituals” become the vehicle for changing culture because “The Spirituals” are the authentic soul responses that document both the humanity and human emotions of one of the darkest periods in our history—The *Transatlantic Slave Trade* and American slavery.

“The Spirituals”, with their power to address issues of violence that began with the postcolonial trauma of dislocation, dispersal, and dispersion, help the African Diaspora understand its cultural identity and give clarity to its understanding of cultural representation. This final section will examine three of “The Spirituals”: 1) *Wade in de Water*, 2) *Go Down, Moses!*, and 3) *I’ll Fly Away* to identify the Africana Spirit of God—in the face of colonial and postcolonial violence—that uses improvisation and transcendence in achieving redistributive justice. This section will be written within the context of well-known Spirituals that have shaped our cultural understanding of identity within the African Diaspora.

1. Wade in De Water: Improvisational Rhythm of the *Breath* of Creation in “The Spirituals” That Reverses the Western Cultural Aesthetic Toward Transcendence as Justice:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.—Genesis 1:2

The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy boasted, I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them. But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. —Exodus 15:4-10

Wade in De Water

Wade in de water, Wade in de water, children,
Wade in de water, God's a goin' to trouble de water.
See dat band all dress'd in white,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.
De Leader looks like de Israelite,
God's a goin' to trouble de water
Wade in de water, Wade in de water, children,
Wade in de water, God's a goin' to trouble de water.
See dat band all dress'd in red,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.
It looks like de band dat Moses led.
God's a goin' a trouble de water.
Wade in de water, Water in de water, children,
Wade in de water, in de water,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.

—Negro Spiritual
Arranged by H.T. Burleigh

When the Israelites and the enslaved Africans needed an escape route, the Spirit improvised. Spirit moved on water of the face of the deep as in Genesis 1:2 for the Israelites, and God “troubles de water” for the enslaved Africans as in “The Spiritual,” “Wade in de Water.” The narrative behind the lyrics of “Wade in de Water” is about an escape route for the slaves that foreshadows the Israelites escaping Pharaoh's army and God parting The Red Sea in Exodus 14 and 15. God “troubling de water” is likened to God parting The Red Sea as a way for his people to escape their enemies. Framing Spirit within the creation narrative of Genesis creates an orientating idea in the way Exodus 15 harkens back to it. When you read how the wind blows the Red Seas it brings back the imagery of the face of

the deep from Genesis. Water provides the escape as Spirit is troubling the water and parting the Red Sea.

Like in the creation narrative and the Middle Passage of the *Transatlantic Slave Trade*, water is represented as the Spirit that transports spirits to unknown cosmic realms and distant lands. Creation and water—moving on the face of the deep—creating existence out of nothing. It is with the same water of creation that the African Diaspora will find its life and death.

“...every time our skin goes under
It’s as if the reeds remember that they were once chains
And the water, restless, wishes it could spew all of the slaves and ships onto shore
Whole as they had boarded, sailed and sunk
Their tears are what have turned the ocean salty,
This is why our irises burn every time we go under.
Every December sixteenth, December 24th and December 31st
Our skin re-traumatizes the sea
They mock us
For not being able to throw ourselves into something
that was instrumental in trying to execute our extinction.
For you, the ocean is for surf boards, boats and tans
And all the cool stuff you do under there in your bathing suits and goggles
But we, we have come to be baptised here
We have come to stir the other world here
We have come to cleanse ourselves here
We have come to connect our living to the dead here
Our respect for water is what you have termed fear
The audacity to trade and murder us over water
Then mock us for being scared of it
The audacity to arrive by water and invade us
If this land was really yours, then resurrect the bones of the colonisers and use them as a
compass...”

An excerpt from “Water”
by South African Poet, Koleka Putuma

In her book, *Face of the Deep*, theologian Catherine Keller describes how chaos becomes rhythm in various motifs that interpret Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of the sea returning to sea and rhythm to rhythm.⁹³ Transcendent escapes. There is an ordered chaos in creation that uses water to

⁹³ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep*, New York, Routledge, 2003, (entire work).

demonstrate the depth of Spirit in the relational context of creation. The beauty is in escaping the chaos to the rhythm of the wave that leads to the path of glory.⁹⁴

It is the organized yet chaotic rhythm of *breath* in creation that best demonstrates the improvisational nature of Spirit and creativity in “The Spirituals.” Through the songs, slaves affirmed the universal dimension of the human spirit and its transcendence over the vicissitudes of life.⁹⁵ In this example of Wade in de Water providing an escape route for the slaves, one sees the example of a Spiritual that uses the breath of improvisation in creation to reverse the western cultural aesthetic toward redistributive justice.

2. Go Down, Moses!: Improvisational Rhythm of the Prophetic Voice of Rebellion in ‘The Spirituals’ That Reverses the Western Cultural Aesthetic Toward Transcendence as Justice:

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Let my people, go!—Exodus 5:1

Go Down, Moses!—Negro Spiritual

When Israel was in Egypt land,
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go!
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land.
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go!

“From the African American exile narrative that commands the Hebrew people be brought forth out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. The Spiritual, Go Down, Moses! echoes the haunted cries with the lament, *Let my people go*. Not surprisingly, the modern-day rulers of Egypt of the Confederacy were no more likely than their ancient predecessors to heed the voice of prophecy.”—W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks*

Du Bois raises an important point about the prophetic voice of “The Spirituals” as liberation narratives for the African Diaspora. One could ask how the prophetic voice of rebellion in “The Spiritual,” “Go Down, Moses!” is critical to understanding postcolonial violence and postcolonial

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 17.

trauma in the Africana world. As a Spiritual of rebellion, this song is an embodied response to empire that speaks directly and prophetically to the specific details of the injustice being portrayed and demonstrates the sometimes revolutionary, radical nature of “The Spirituals’ rooted in Exodus and the Moses tradition. [“The Spirituals’] are an artistic rebellion against the humiliating deadness of western culture.⁹⁶ It is the prophetic voice of the rebellion Spirituals like” Go Down, Moses!” that liberate. “Go down, Moses!” refines the fire of divine, majestic movement in a minor tonality that confronts civil authority, orders retributive justice, and evokes prophetic intervention.⁹⁷ Thus, liberation becomes a form of full vocal expression of resistance and grieving for that which traumatizes the soul. Using the same voice that glorifies in both praise and lament, the prophetic voice of liberations sings through this Spiritual of rebellion to achieve its aim. The ascending lines connote transcendence as the sustained tones and pedantic exhortation reflect a contemplative liturgical moment where liberation means wellness, which begins when the oppressed thirsts for freedom and the perpetrator “let[s] my people go!”⁹⁸ It is the act of rebellion, and resistance in these songs that best challenge empire and creates healing for the victims of postcolonial violence and postcolonial trauma.

However, one must always proceed carefully when appropriating the Exodus narrative for the African Diaspora because of the contextual limitations inherent in Exodus biblical text as a liberation theology. The critical biblical hermeneutics of Stephen Moore, Renita Weems and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan caution the use of the Exodus narrative as a liberation theology. On the issue of appropriating Exodus for the African Diaspora, Renita Weems states, “We are left with the realization that one must exercise caution in using these texts in the hope of transforming modern race, gender, and class issues.⁹⁹ Weems notes that the concept of difference is at the heart of Exodus 1 narrative—difference

⁹⁶ James Cone, 6.

⁹⁷ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Refiners Fire, 50.

⁹⁸ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Refiners Fire, 50.

⁹⁹ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, “Let My People Go! Threads of Exodus in African American Narratives,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Revised and Expanded Third Edition. Edited by R.S. Sugirtharajah. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, 264.

of gender, race, and social class.¹⁰⁰ The Exodus story does not challenge or question these differences but merely relates this ideology based upon difference.¹⁰¹ For the purposes of this work, the Exodus narrative is being used, albeit with caution, because of the proven effectiveness of “The Spirituals.” Next, an examination of Moses as described by Zora Neale Hurston should give a better understanding of the Book of Exodus as it relates to the canon of “The Spirituals.”

All across the continent [Africa] there are the legends of the greatness of Moses...He is revered because he had the power to go up to the mountain and bring them down. Many men could climb mountains. Anyone could bring down laws that had been handed to them. But who can talk with God face to face?...What other man has ever seen with his eyes even the back part of God’s glory?
—Zora Neale Hurston, 1939.

In her work, *Spirituals and Neo-spirituals*, Harlem Renaissance author and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston challenges W. E. B. Du Bois’ theory that broadly categorizes “The Spirituals” as Sorrow Songs. In this work, Hurston attempts to advance the discussion about The Spirituals from their historic origins as pneumatic tools for escaping slavery to a new discussion about their cultural relevance in modern times.¹⁰² Hurston understood this potential for “The Spirituals” to serve as disrupters that hold the literary power to change the modern discourse and interrupt socio-political and economic injustices. Hurston urged her contemporaries not just to see these works as “Sorrow Songs” of lament and mourning. She encouraged her generation to create their own new spirituals that speak directly to the injustices of the day.¹⁰³ The real spirituals are not really just songs. They are unceasing variations around a theme. Contrary to popular belief their creation is not confined to the slavery period. Like the folk-tales, the spirituals are being made and forgotten every day.¹⁰⁴

Based on the opening Du Bois quote referencing the song’s climatic lyric, “Let My People Go!” Du Bois was able to see the canon of “The Spirituals” beyond a collection of so-called “Sorrow

¹⁰⁰ Moore, Stephen (et. all). “Ideological Criticism: Decolonizing Exodus and Conquest: Readings in Tension,” in *The Postmodern Bible*. Edited by Stephen Moore, Elizabeth A. Castelli and Regina M. Schwartz. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995. P291.

¹⁰¹ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, “Let My People Go! Threads of Exodus in African American Narratives,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Revised and Expanded Third Edition. Edited by R.S. Sugirtharajah, 264.

¹⁰² Zora Neale Hurston, *Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals*.

¹⁰³ Zora Neal Hurston, *Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals*.

¹⁰⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals*.

Songs” as he takes care to describe “Go Down, Moses!” in such a manner that prizes it as the work of the prophetic rebellion, not sorrow. Some have suggested that in the end, Hurston and Du Bois tended to agree more than they disagreed—at least on the issue of the prophetic nature of one rebellion Spiritual, “Go Down, Moses!” Both could see this Spiritual’s ability to challenge empire and reorder the western cultural aesthetic through resistance. In the double voiced nature of this particular Spiritual, the people of the African Diaspora are liberated through the paradigm of time and space of the ancient text of the Exodus to find a community’s own prophetic voice and the courage to face the evils of empire.

3. ‘I’ll Fly Away’: Transcendental and Eschatological Fire in ‘The Spirituals’ That Reverses the Western Cultural Aesthetic Toward Justice:

I’ll Fly Away

Some bright morning when this life is over,
I’ll fly away.
To that home on God's celestial shore,
I’ll fly away!
I’ll fly away, oh glory!
I’ll fly away in the morning,
When I die, Hallelujah by and by,
I’ll fly away!
When the shadows of this life have gone,
I’ll fly away.
Like a bird from these prison walls I’ll fly,
I’ll fly away!
I’ll fly away, oh glory!
I’ll fly away in the morning,
When I die, Hallelujah by and by,
I’ll fly away!
Oh, how glad and happy when we meet,
I’ll fly away.
No more cold iron shackles on my feet,
I’ll fly away.
I’ll fly away, oh glory!
I’ll fly away in the morning,
When I die, Hallelujah by and by,
I’ll fly away!
—Hymn written by Albert E. Brumley, 1929

Let us cheer the weary traveler...Along the heavenly way. And the traveler girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning, and goes his way.”—W.E.B. Du Bois

“When I think of home” is the opening line to the theme song “Home” from the enchanting 1978 motion picture film, *The Wiz*, which is an adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*. This film takes four fictional African-American characters on their own exodus journey to the land of Oz so that they might receive guidance from the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient “Wiz” to find their way back home. One could wonder who defines the identity and the community that represents home for the people of the African Diaspora when they feel they are abandoned and forgotten. In the fantasy narrative of *The Wiz*, perhaps the answer is clearly stated in the title. Nevertheless, for the people of the African Diaspora, these feelings of abandonment and forgottenness—as deep as the Atlantic Ocean—have produced an alternative hope that is both cosmic and futuristic. In the midst of suffering from postcolonial oppression, the African Diaspora balances the hope and pessimism by giving another alternative way of interpreting suffering.

The alternative to getting to an earthly home is to hold firm to the ideal of a heavenly home that is perfect and that will provide refuge from human suffering. Thus, a life on earth of suffering is endured with the promise of a home for those who have been taken from their homelands. The hymn “I’ll Fly Away” begins, “Some bright morning when this life is over, I’ll fly away. To a home on God’s celestial shore, I’ll fly away.” This song represents an escape from the prison that is earthly suffering. This song represents expressions of lament and mourning the importance for a place to call home in the relation to identity formation and community building. Analyzing systematic oppression at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, womanist scholar Valerie Bridgeman speaks of the notion of the African American people as dispossessed from their homelands and asks how one can long for a land where one has never belonged or for a place to which one has never been. Again, we revisit the Brazilian term, *saudade*, which has been previously described as a longing or nostalgia for what once

was and may never be again or for something that never was but the idea of it produces a deep grief and/or desire, a bittersweet memory of what never was.¹⁰⁵

Once Africans left the Motherland and encountered the bible, they began to identify with the notion of heaven as home. Even after protests, resistance, and standing against modern day Pharaohs and evil empires, heaven was and still is a prominent part of the narrative of Africana spirituality. Perhaps this is because one could only get home in spirit form because there was no earthly home for the descendants of slaves stolen from Africa and brought to the Americas. For the slaves, the only way to get home was to “fly away” home, which becomes its own notion of liberation albeit in the afterlife. The transformative power of the folklore tale of The Flying Africans returns the descendants of slaves to their homeland and promotes diasporic consciousness through an embodied sense of nostalgia. So for the African Diaspora, is the return home the notion of going to the Motherland or heaven? The poem below reflects on a mythical narrative that all spirits will return to Africa.

O Daedalus, Fly Away Home
—Robert Hayden

Drifting night in the Georgian pines,
Coonskin drum and jubilee banjo.
Pretty Malinda, dance with me.
Night is juba, night is congo.
Pretty Malinda, dance with me.
Night is an African juju man,
Weaving and wishing weariness together
to make two wings.
O fly away home fly away
Do you remember Africa?
O cleave the air and fly away home
My gran, he flew back to Africa,
just spread his arms and flew away home.
Drifting night in the windy pines;
Night is a laughing, night is a longing.
Pretty Malinda, come to me,
Night is a mourning juju man
Weaving a wish and a weariness together

¹⁰⁵ Valerie Bridgeman, 219.

To make two wings.
O fly away home fly away.

Black liberation theologian and scholar, James Cone interprets the meaning of heaven in the black spirituals in his book, *Spirituals and the Blues*, to get to core understanding of the eschatology of abandonment and forgottenness in Africana sacred music. Cone suggests that the issue of heaven has not been correctly interpreted in black religion.¹⁰⁶ For Cone, the question becomes how it was possible for black people to endure the mental and physical stresses of slavery and still keep their humanity intact.¹⁰⁷ To which he responds the answer is in black eschatology and he calls for a “reinterpretation” of heaven rather than a complete “dismissal.”¹⁰⁸ He notes that early black slaves referred not only to a transcendent reality beyond time and space; it designated the earthly places that blacks regarded as lands of freedom (Africa, Canada, and Northern United States).¹⁰⁹ Thus, “The Spirituals” had a double meaning. As stated by Frederick Douglass on the topic of heaven being about more than having a transcendent experience as spirit, “We meant to reach the North, and the North was our Canaan.”¹¹⁰

God’s eschatological presence arouses discontentment and makes the present subject to radical change.¹¹¹ Afrofuturism as such that promotes the notion that things can be radically different in the future than they are in the present. Heaven then did not mean passivity but revolution against the present order.¹¹² Within this eschatological motif lies the true, western culture reversing power of “The Spirituals.” In the black spirituals, the image of heaven served functionally to liberate the black mind from the existing values of white society, enabling black slaves to think their own thoughts.¹¹³ It was a black lifestyle, a movement and a beat to the rhythm of freedom in the souls and bodies of black slaves.¹¹⁴ This rhythm improvising of improvisation creates change. Blacks were able, through songs

¹⁰⁶ James Cone, 86.

¹⁰⁷ James Cone, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ James Cone, 88.

¹¹⁰ James Cone, 88.

¹¹¹ James Cone, 94.

¹¹² James Cone, 95.

¹¹³ James Cone, 95.

¹¹⁴ James Cone, 95.

[primarily about heaven] to transcend the enslavement of the present and to live as if the future had already come.¹¹⁵

IV. Conclusion:

Toward an Africana Pneumatology of the Africana Spirit in Music: “The Spirituals” as the *Breath, Voice, and Fire* of Hope and Liberation for the African Diaspora

Africana Spirit Song of Breath, Voice, and Fire
By Sharon Kimberly Williams

Breathe, Africana people!
Lest you forget your source,
Forgotten breath casts a shadow on the memory.

For a dispersed people destined,
To sing in the stranger’s land,
Who else but the Spirit will teach you your song?

Remember the ancestral voice that penetrates the silence,
Like a fire shut up in the valley of dry bones,
Let Spirit move on the Diaspora’s sons and daughters.

Remember the ancestors and don’t forget your breath,
Remember the ancestors and don’t forget your voice,
Remember the ancestors and don’t forget your fire!

There is your Spirit song. —Selah.

In The Spirituals, “Wade in de Water,” “Go Down, Moses!” and “I’ll Fly Away,” there have been examples of how the rhythm of improvisation works toward transcendence to achieve redistributive justice. Liberation requires imagination to overcome struggle. Liberation requires imagination to transform spaces, places, people and systems and the breath, voice and fire motif has promoted improvisational transcendence in the pursuit of imagining a more just world for everyone. The significance of the triple breath, voice and fire trope is in its capacity to understand the

¹¹⁵ James Cone, 95.

liberationist role of the Spirit through each aspect of the individual tropes as well as the collective trope.

How then do the breath, voice, and fire of “The Spirituals” help one envision a new heaven and a new earth in Favianian Afrofuturistic terms? Heaven was a vision of a new Black Humanity.¹¹⁶ Heaven was a primary theme in the theology of “The Spirituals.” The concept of heaven in black music placed the people in a New Earth and transformed their perceptions of black existence from the nothingness of the present condition of slavery into being-for-the-future.¹¹⁷ God making all things new suggests a creativity in an apocalyptic new world order, which connects back to the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus where the Spirit’s covenant promised to keep the people until they were reunited in the end of days. The pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus and the connection to the apocalypse creates a new, creative world order. Could this be the new heaven and earth as an extension of Afrofuturistic fantasies developed through the discourse of “The Spirituals?”

Perhaps herein lies a new way of looking at the future by reinterpreting “The Spirituals” in a way that makes them a vehicle for Afrofuturistic fantasies that transport African people through time and space to a place where they have new breath and new voice and new fire. Thus, they would have the ability to create a new world where they humanity and identity are not considered subaltern. It was this transcendent element of hope (as expressed in black music) which elevated black people above the limitations of the slave experience, and enabled them to view black humanity independent of their oppressors.¹¹⁸ Thus, “The Spirituals” contained both hope for the future and liberation in the present. These songs emphasized the inability of the present to contain the reality of the divine future, thus, “The Spirituals” were otherworldly in this sense.¹¹⁹ Grounded in Afrofuturism long before the term was coined, one could argue that “The Spirituals” produced some of the most progressive

¹¹⁶ James Cone, 100.

¹¹⁷ James Cone, 100.

¹¹⁸ James Cone, 100.

¹¹⁹ James Cone, 100.

ideologies that ever challenged the colonizer and the conquest schemes of empire. Authentic human liberation is found only in the struggle for the future that is grounded in divine liberation.¹²⁰

Woven together into this tapestry of the breath, voice, and fire motif of “The Spirituals” is evidence of healing communal trauma of a community working toward reconciliation with its God and its humanity. The importance of the breath, voice and fire of “The Spirituals” is that they all converge in their connectedness around the topic of healing communal trauma for a community that grapples with trying to understand their feelings of displacement, abandonment, theodicy, and forgottenness. By singing their interpretations of Moses and Exodus, it provides hope and liberation for displaced people of the African Diaspora and gives them a way of coping with their trauma through Spiritual songs. The breath, voice and fire of “The Spirituals” come together to address questions of theodicy about where is God when the people of the African Diaspora are suffering. For the colonized and enslaved, God has always been present in the sacred songs in Africana music.

If you want to find the spirit of a people, one must find the rhythm of the people and follow it where it wherever it leads. It is there in every breath. In every voice, there is such fire and a communal rhythm of the Spirit that animates life to its fullest. The Africana Spirit is the rhythm that moves with the breath, voice and fire that is life. It is with “The Spirituals” that our musical journey to trace the rhythm of the breath, voice, and fire of the people of the African Diaspora begins.

In the Exodus tradition there is a rhythm of retelling one’s story that becomes the embodied breath, voice and fire of life for the people of Israel. Using the embodied poetics of rhythm and the appropriation of the Exodus narrative, “The Spirituals” best demonstrate the decolonizing, destabilizing (and stabilizing) movements of the Spirit rhythm that create change toward redistributive justice. With their own Africana rhythm, “The Spirituals” challenged the rhythm of society’s socio-political and economic systematic injustices by presenting their own counter rhythm for dismantling

¹²⁰ James Cone, 102.

racism and oppression. These changing rhythms embodied with the breath, voice, and fire of the Spirit are what can change a society. New rhythms create resistance to systems of domination and marginalization that maintain the status quo of the colonizer. Rhythm becomes the interpretation of the way communities think of themselves as they grapple with stabilizing trauma. Political rhythms of oppression, subordination, domination, marginalization, and supremacy must be met with resistance and this is what the breath, voice, and fire of “The Spirituals” have achieved throughout history. It is this rhythm of restating the claim of the narrative over and over in song that creates cultural memory that sustains the generations to come.

One might conclude that the Spirit is constantly singing. Therefore, if singing is the ultimate form of expression, the children of the African Diaspora used the breath, voice and fire of “The Spirituals” to communicate their story in strange, postcolonial lands for all the world. As we sing the story of the Africana people, one can see how communal singing has been one of the primary catalyst that brought their humanity into existence—an existence that would be free from the dominance of the colonizer and empire. Thus, the breath, voice and fire of Spirit works through “The Spirituals” to be a liberator for the colonized and enslaved. “The Spirituals’ have represented the breath and the voice and the fire of hope and liberation for the African Diaspora as an Africana pneumatology of a sacred music that reverses and reorders society toward redistributive justice for the colonized and enslaved. And for their descendants, with each breath that they use to raise their voices, the flames of hope will burn eternal like a song.

The Spirit will not descend without song!—African Proverb

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