



**Revisiting Black Lives and Aesthetics: Poetics of Racial Pride and
Prejudices in Langston Hughes's Poetry**

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Abstract

Langston Hughes, a famous African American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, raises his voice like other Afro American writers such as Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer and others regarding the collective black consciousness which was eclipsed by the European High Modernism. Harlem modernism brought out new avenues for the blacks by privileging upon their own southern black vernacular, the rhythms of blues, and jazz. Thus, the Harlem modernism, having its fervor of intense racial consciousness spurned European cultural tropes, and thereby attempting to recuperate the souls of the black folks from the ideological repression of the white mythology. African American identity refers to the split personality, which a diasporic individual usually undergoes on a daily basis in the host country. Langston Hughes, an African American poet, seems to recouse to, to put in the words of Salman Rushdie, the concept of 'imaginary homelands' in the United States of America with a view to accentuate upon Afrocentricity because a large number of African Americans used to be fond of considering them Americans in the United States of America. It, concomitantly, drives Hughes to think of them as white induced African Americans, who kept themselves away from their ancestral cultural heritage enshrined in the Afrocentricity. It stands in the way of the resurrection of the Africans in the United States of America. Although, it may be indicative of foregrounding the 'ghetto mentality', he feels a dire necessity to mobilize the oppressed Africans, and thereby asks for forging a racial mountain for the blacks in Black Lives Matter from where they can anticipate their strategic positions by performing their own ethno-cultural slabs; it appears to be counter hegemonic and self-contemplative, too, in carving out one's own niche, which the present paper seeks to show.

Key words: Harlem Renaissance, Ideological conflicts, Langston Hughes, Afrocentricity, Resistance

Introduction

Langston Hughes, one of the prominent Afro-American poets of the Harlem Renaissance, attempted to carve out a niche for the Blacks by providing them leeway to reveal themselves on their own without being interpolated into the colonial subject as cloaked in the white culture. Hughes, desiring to advocate

the Black supremacy among the African American people living in the United States, underwent acrimonious circumstances. African Americans for instance, who belonged to his own cultural community, nourished a pipe dream to be white. African Americans, thus, fall prey to this epistemological snare in which they were trapped more as a result of their history of slavery. In fact, White aesthetics was embedded in their sub-consciousness in such manners that they could hardly avert it. It, consequently, created a racial mountain in which white remained at the apex-supremacy-and black occupied a lower position. Such social stratification tended to foreground an egalitarian society which was oppressive and ethnic exclusionary as well. Western thought has conceived the self or being as totalized and excludes others. Hughes anticipated the voices of the blacks through his poetry in order to exonerate the blacks from the ideological repression of the West.

Socio-Political Background of the Blacks: A Journey from Slavery to Self-Awakening

The history of black people can be divided into two sections: the early phase refers to the Pre-civil war and the subsequent phase indicates the post-civil war period, which reveals the era of slavery. However, the post-civil war period is gradually replaced by the equally oppressive tropes like racism, which hollowed out the-*Vox populi*-general voice of the people, especially the Blacks. Black leaders are dedicated to fighting the White supremacy ideology in order to abolish such system that name a group as 'Negroes' until the early twentieth century. Later, the nomenclature evolved into such an appellation like 'coloured' people as opposed to 'white people'. However, Black Panther Party launched the Black power movement in the year 1950s and 60s with Martin Luther king Jr, on the other hand, initiated the successful non-violent campaign for Civil Rights Act of 1964. But it was the Black power movement, which emphasized upon the intense racial consciousness with the slogan "Black is Beautiful". In fact, the time span between 1920 and 1930 became the crucial period in the history of America, and especially for the blacks, because many African Americans migrated from southern region to the northern region of the United States, especially to New York where Harlem was situated. As a matter of fact, Harlem became a place teeming with African American urban population, and the upsurge of the radical African American intellectuals resulted in the 'New Negro Consciousness' movement or the 'Harlem Renaissance' (1890-1920). Harlem modernism offered new literary voices and avenues for the blacks by privileging them with their own southern black vernacular, the rhythms of blues, jazz. Thus, the Harlem modernism, having its fervor of intense racial consciousness, spurned European cultural tropes, and thereby attempting to recuperate the souls of the black folks from the ideological repression of the white mythology. Langston Hughes, a famous African American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, raised his voice like other African American writers such as Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer and others regarding the collective black consciousness which was eclipsed by the European High Modernism. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry, and thus disseminated the intense racial consciousness, which was on the verge of extinction during that time. Although,

it may be indicative of foregrounding the 'ghetto mentality', he feels a dire necessity to mobilize the oppressed Africans, thereby forging a racial mountain for the blacks from where they can anticipate their strategic positions by performing their own ethno-cultural slabs; it appears to be counter hegemonic and self-contemplative, too, in carving out one's own identity .

Conflicting Ideologies and Regeneration of the Blacks

Artistic explosion, which was the kernel of the Harlem Renaissance, came to the fore with various hues and contested ideologies prevalent in the black community. Cary Wintzin 'Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance' points out,

It (Harlem) reflected the confusing and contradictory position of Blacks in the early twentieth century. It was a symbol of Black migrant who left the South and went to North with dreams, freedom and opportunity. It also symbolized the Shattered pieces of those dreams which lay half buried beneath the filth and garbage of the city slum. Harlem reflected the self-confidence, militancy and pride of the New Negro in his or her demand for equality; it reflected the aspirations and genius of the writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance; but Harlem, like the Black migrant, like the New Negro, and like the Renaissance writers, did not resolve its problems or fulfill its dreams.(14)

In fact, the problem lies in the formation of cultural identity. If social behavior is the ultimate determinant in the formation of cultural identity, exploitative environment as designed by the White cultures leads the ethnic group to be assimilated within the macro-culture. On the other hand, if heritage tampers with the cultural identity, it precipitates the unipolar race bound cultural identity. However, such contested ideologies were borne out of the nature of black identity, place and the function of art. There were certain Blacks who were born in the United States, but were completely oblivious to their ancestral cultural moorings. They preferred to declare themselves Americans. It referred to the diasporic consciousness.

However, such diasporic consciousness creates a split personality, which refers to an ongoing conflict between Africa-centered and African-American ideals. It is related to the phenomenon which Du Bois has termed as 'double-consciousness'. Homi Bhabha also addresses such schism between the dual modes of national self-representation in "DissemiNation":

In the production of the nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitions, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (145-46).

In fact, such prevailing conflict between the performative and the pedagogical issues helps formulate the idea of Nation. African American population belongs to two different but overlapping communities of nation and diaspora; it indicates the social and historical qualities of black life in the United States of America. However, being a descendant of African culture, one could resort to imagination to re-inscribe one's own ethnic enclave within the home country that consequently makes the cartographical border, which the United States encompasses, fuzzy. For the African Americans, Africa becomes, to put in the words of Avtar Brah, 'a mythic place of desire' (192). The so-called American white mythology sucks the voices of such Africans in a way that they are following the assimilationist ideology. But the revival of black consciousness as a vital tool is taken up by some Black leaders and writers in order to reinforce the black consciousness within America, and thereby discarding the assimilationist ideology. However, such ideology of assimilation was initiated by Booker T. Washington, the most popular black leader, who had a faith in black folks. To him, the assimilationist ideology argues for a Black folk culture similar to the White and identical in orientation with the Whites that allows equal practical skills and competitiveness with the Whites in the economic sphere and conformity to the Christian morality.

When the White culture frittered away the voice of the blacks and represented them as jejune and subaltern, Booker T. Washington refuted the concept of otherness as attributed to and imposed upon the Blacks by the Whites. Indeed, he reinforced their sameness in his ideology. This accommodationist/assimilationist ideology was challenged by Du Bois, who expressed his quest for racial solidarity and Black art. He raised his voice against disenfranchisement and segregation, and sought to win the struggle for civil rights. On the other hand, Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican leader, perpetuated Pan-Africanism without its former form of militancy. Rather, Garvey aimed to unite four millions Black people with a view to emancipate not only the African Americans but all the Africans who were incarcerated within the torpor as governed by the White Culture. His philosophy advocated the emergence of a Black consciousness that celebrates Black identity. He embarked upon the Black pride and power which had been manifested in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. He emphasized upon African heritage and culture of the Black people, and thus revealed his essentialist approach to the cultural identity.

Afrocentricity, which was an important feature of the Harlem Renaissance, referred to the innate potential of the Blacks who could elevate their own positions by means of utilizing their own cultural tools, and thus sought to generate an enviable space for them; it was quite challenging to the European dominated thinking. Molefi Asanta has rightly pointed out, "Without Afrocentricity, African-Americans would not have a voice to add to multiculturalism" (21). In fact, African Americans generated a distinct culture in the United States, depending upon their African heritage – an Afro-American perspective helped recognize and understand that culture from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. Thus, it brought out a tradition in African American letters that drove Black literature to go beyond the protest writing, and thereby enabled them to edge out the White cultural monopoly. Proper

realization of Afrocentricity was, in fact, a quintessential problem faced by the Black artists in the Harlem Renaissance. It provoked generating an intellectual debate within the Harlem Renaissance: proper cultural expression vis-a-vis authentic cultural expression. In the 1990s, Afrocentricity would realize the Afro-American culture from the inside out. But in the 1920s, it was a luxury that the Black artists and men of letters found very difficult to afford. Du Bois argues that:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the eyes of others of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of his strife – his longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. (3)

Thus, such Black thinkers spoke of the regeneration of the Blacks in the United States and so they were in an attempt to establish their sole existence. Many Black artists instilled a wee bit of artistic energy into the creation of their cultural identity. To this end Richard Wright states:

Generally speaking Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to White America. They entered the court of American public opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do never tricks.(403)

It directly tended to formulate a ghetto culture in the United States in which Africans sought to engage themselves in performing their own ethno-cultural slabs. Afro-American diasporic consciousness was thus tied to their past memories, which were associated with Africa. Hence, they reincarnated their home culture in the host culture; and it is akin to Willaim Safron's concept of diasporic subjectivity formation. Safron proclaims,

Diasporic community includes several categories of individuals (refugees,expatriates, alien, residents, ethnic and racial minorities) living outside their homeland and sharing a sense of common features, such as a history of dispersal, visions and memories of lost homeland, alienation in the host land, yearning for an eternal return and collective identity. (83)

However Langston Hughes, as a prominent Afro-American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, attempted to carve a new path of identity supremacy for the Blacks by providing new aesthetics that celebrates African heritage without being interpellated into the colonial subject as cloaked in the white culture.

Langston Hughes' Poetry: A Representation of Afrocentricity and New Negro Consciousness

Hughes, who preached the Black supremacy among the African American people living in the United States, underwent difficult circumstances. To the African American in his community, the ideal personality is the white supremacy which is their dream to become. But the white aesthetic is a lure into an ideological repression, which consequently, created a racial mountain in which Blacks were placed in the lowest rung of the societal ladder. Such social polarization forged an oppressive mechanism which was ethnic exclusionary. Western thought has conceived the self or being as totalized and excludes others. Who is this without a first or last name? Emmanuel Levinas condemns such western thought which yields importance to conceive 'Being' or the 'Totality', and thus occludes the voices of the others. Levinas believes in the freedom which refers to "the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other(s)" (Levinas 45). He feels that such totality, which is emblematic of Western self, has entered into the tyranny of the state which refuses the existence of the others. He conceptualized the notion of the others as infinite. Others, indeed, acknowledge the idea of infinity, an excess, transcendence or alterity which undermine the significance of the totality.

Hughes ostensibly perpetuated the same tune which resonated with the recuperation of Black consciousness from the metanarrative of the White mythology. In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926), he vituperated the condition of the African American people who were inspired by the Whites and wanted to be white. Hughes reflected such mentality of his own community with utmost grief in this essay:

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet, meaning, I believe, I want to write like a white poet; meaning subconsciously, I would like to be a white poet; meaning behind that, I would like to be white. And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible (1).

**To Be White or Not To Be: Conflicting Emotions in Hughes' Quest
for Black Racial Mountain**

At the beginning of the essay, Hughes makes a scathing attack on the middle-class families of the African Americans whom he has defined as 'Nordicized Negro intelligentsia' (3), and has showed how they have prioritized the White mentality by putting and reading White newspapers and magazines at home. They often used to arrange parties for the white rich families. It, concomitantly, impacted upon the children of the African American community: 'Don't be like niggers', 'look how well a White man does things' (1). All these forged a white culture and mere practicing of such white cultural tools by the Afro-Americans lagged behind their ancestral cultural heritage. In fact, iterative acts of white cultural habits by the blacks made the white culture alive. Such ideological repression, which the White mythology bears, makes the African Americans inert, submissive; it leads them to suffer from inferior complexity. Jhumpa Lahiri, a famous South Asian writer, has coined the term ABCD (American born confused Desi) in order to delineate the conditions of the second-generation immigrants as they are at the cultural crossroads. It made them confused as to how they should respond to such dichotomous cultures. Such is the condition of the America born Africans who were confused, completely oblivious to their ancestral culture, and were keen on underscoring the White cultural milieu. Thus, it created a rebuff for the proper progression of the black culture. Langston Hughes accentuated the construction of the Black racial mountain which was threatening to the White culture. White supremacy had reigned down the ages and clamped down the voices of the Blacks, and it would continue until the Blacks are not aware of their inner potentials and their own racial values. Contradictorily, while Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands* classified such polarization as ghetto mentality that is a 'dangerous pitfall' (19), Hughes insisted on building up such ghetto mentality to resurrect the battered voices of the Africans by making them conscious about their own ethno-cultural slabs. The implication is that African Americans could generate their own homelands by hinging on their jazz, blues music and poetry. Thus, they would vindicate, as Hughes believed, their own racial mountain with their own racial pride. Hence, he proclaims:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If White people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it does not matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure does not matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain free from within ourselves.(4)

Hughes's insistence on upending the marginalized voice of the Blacks is a vital task through which he brings to the fore the Black aesthetics. Such expression was articulated in his poem "My People":

The Night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
The Stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people
Beautiful, also, is the Sun
Beautiful, also, are the souls of
my people.(5)

Thus, he reveals his sympathetic stature towards the African Americans. He bolsters a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism that redefine the Black identity through a literary ideological movement. The New Negro ideology revitalized African American culture by giving an extra push to the pusillanimity which the Blacks usually assumed. Hughes asked that the Blacks should not adhere to the Western European culture, but ought to be self-reliant so far as their own cultural issues are concerned. He tried to depict the 'low-life' in his art and poetry which indicated the actual lives of Blacks in the lower social economic strata. He attempted to eradicate divisions and prejudices inherent in the color of skin within the Black community. In fact, his work was preoccupied with the innocence and simplicity which Nature possessed.

Colonialism is a System: Alienation and Subjugation of the Black Women

In his poem '50-50', Langston Hughes unveils his pang for the Blacks who have been suffering from the circumstantial sluggishness as generated by the White culture. Hence, he symbolizes the black people's condition to the imaging of a woman's identity condition which is even more precarious as revealed in his poem '50-50': "I am all alone in this World..." (10). Blacks are usually represented under the Western eyes as concocted and adhering to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms 'Epistemic violence' (24). So, the poem reveals the subservient position of the Blacks whereby they are segregated from the rest of the community. The poem further, manifests the plight of a black lady who feels herself alienated and is in need of a help from a person. It reveals her lack of self-sufficiency and a familiar stature of dependence on another individual for identification. To this end, Big boy sums her stature as:

Trouble with you is
You ain't got no heed
If you had a head and used your
mind
You could have me with you
All the time (10).

He seems to refer to her intellectual vacuity and short-sightedness in understanding her own importance in the society. Big boy puts forth his logic in an adroit manner which demands her negotiation with him. It, nonetheless, tends to forge the ground of her deprivation again. This happens due to her lack of self-sufficiency. Moreover, she is unenthusiastic about her own culture due to the influence of White superiority and forgets about the significance of being a woman of color in the society. She devalues herself and allows herself to be

outwitted and exploited. The poem ends with a demand by Big boy, for a neo-liberated Black who becomes voluptuous and materialistic. Concomitantly, it leads him to say: "Share your bed–Share your money...too" (10).

In fact, the oppressive colonial system – the superiority of one over another – is subjected to the test of its own discourse of benevolence for the subalterns. This poem is a true articulation of such benevolence, which is subversive at the core. Thus, Hughes crops up the sufferings of a violated black woman who is deprived sexually and economically. It also indicates how blacks were treated shabbily by the whites and how black bodies used to be considered as a means of reproduction especially in the realm of slavery. In addition, while black masculinity was at stake in the public domain, the black males always tried to express their anger and protest in the domestic sphere by beating their women and children. Black women were considered as the epitome of sacredness in the Pre-Colonial African period, and were venerated as a spiritual power akin to Nature. They had the quality of leadership and individuality. But, Hughes's portrayal of the lady as lacking confidence emotionally dependent as a result of identity complexity, demeans, the Negritudinal African Woman image and strong personality of the Pre-colonial period. So, he has sharply condemned in the poem the lack of self-reliance of the lady in her double-yoked burden of identity, which is not Pan-Africanist or Negritudinal and not captured within Black/African culture. He, indeed, seeks to evoke a female power that the Black female slaves were known for in the lady that subverts sexist gender norms and superior/inferior dichotomy as designed by the prevailing cultural landscape.

Revisiting Black lives through rivers: Encapsulating baggage of cultural heritage

'Negro Speaks of Rivers' is a beautiful poem by Langston Hughes in which he becomes nostalgic about his own ancestral African culture. Thus, he creates imaginary homelands within the host land by resorting to memories associated with his ancestral cultural heritage. He was daunted by looking at the damp spirit of African Americans, especially in retaining their own ethno-cultural values in their new homeland that has swayed them from their ethnic identity. Hence, it is Hughes's *raison d'être* to bring back African consciousness in the host culture by eulogizing African rivers in the poem. It helps him foreground African consciousness in the new homeland. Africa becomes, to put in the words of Avtar Brah, a 'mythic place of desire' (192) by means of his imaginative fiat. It is beyond the cartographical epistemology. His anticipation of his own African culture is overt in the poem:

I've known rivers
I've known rivers ancient as the
World and older than the
flow of human blood in human
veins(86).

He exposes his affinity with the rivers which refer to his deep-seated Afrocentricity. Such rivers are like the flow of blood in human veins. It also

echoes nostalgically a historical past of the spillage of blood during the great crossing. From the beginning of the poem is the metaphorical river as the repository of his African heritage such as "The Euphrates", "The Nile" and its "Pyramids", "The Mississippi" in order to reinforce the ancient nature of the African heritage, its cultural strength and the new homeland experience. So, he states:

I bathed in the Euphrates when
dawns were young
I built my hut near the Congo
and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised
the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the
Mississippi when Abe
Lincoln went down to New
Orleans, and I've seen its
Muddy bosom turn all golden in
the sunset(86)

The poem dialogically holds conversation with the African American past as created through the poet's imaginative worlds merged by a past and a present in order to build a cohesive Black community. The speaker declares his knowledge for the benefit of his listeners, telling the story of a common past with a view to cultivate a unified consciousness in the present like the Whitemanian speaker of 'Sun Song'.

Dark ones of Africa
I bring you my song
To sing on the
Georgia roads (138).

The "I" that the poem projects, is both an exuberant individual and an embodiment of the community, which can contain multitudes.

Celebration of Jazz and Blues music as the Ethno-cultural Metaphor of Articulating the Black Lives and Aesthetics

In his poem 'The Weary Blues', the poet brings out the mourning of the Negroes who are alienated and depressed due to perennial feelings of 'blackness'. The poet refers to the Jazz or blue music, being influenced by Whiteman and Carl Sandberg, which is thought to be their only means to express themselves freely. 'The Weary Blues', which contains the jazzy, musical rhythms, is latched on to the jazz culture; and it unfurls positive spirit to the readers.

He played that sad raggy tune
like musical fool
Sweet blues

Coming from black man's soul
(118).

Through this jazz music, he seeks to universalize his afflictions:

Ain't got nobody in all the world
Ain't got nobody but ma self
And put ma troubles on the self.
(118)

A Negro feels himself alienated from the world and so he is not happy: "I wish that I had died" (118). And the poem ends with his weariness which indicates cynical tune to life: ... Blue echoed through his head. He slept like a rock or a man that's dead (118).

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnival' might help us understand the condition of the subaltern Blacks in this connection. Bakhtin's concept "...is derived from the practice of medieval carnival when, in an episode of permitted license, the people would enjoy a holiday from their labours and in the process lampoon the authorities of church and state" (Brooker 24). For the marginalized Blacks, such jazz and blues are instrumental in celebrating their joy and sadness freely through their own language in powerful and evocative manners; and it resonates with the ecstasy associated with the concept of 'carnival'. However, such music, a tale of their sufferings and enjoyment, offers them a site for freedom from such an enveloping environment to enjoy a reversal of the power structure.

Dominant West and Emergent Blacks: 'Subaltern' does not remain 'Subaltern'

In another poem 'The Ballad of the Landlord', the poet nicely articulates the inhuman and exploitative behavior of the landlord towards a black: representing the stereotypical stratification between the White and the black prevalent in the society. Racial discrimination and White supremacy are nicely overt in this poem. In the conversation between the Negro and the landlord, the Negro says:

My roof has sprung a leak
Don't you remembered told you
about it
Why last week? (110).

But the reason behind showing his reluctance to repair the leakage is that the Negro has a due of ten bucks. The Negro then says:

Ten bucks more'n I will pay you
Till you fix this house up now
(110).

Next a new kind of protest grows in his mind and he unfurls his fume against his landlord by proclaiming,

What! You gonna get eviction
orders
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street? (110).

Then the White landlord threatens him by saying 'you talking high and mighty' (110). It reflects that a Negro does not have any right to unveil his grievances. The landlord attempts to maintain his dominance by calling on the police to douse the Negro's rebellion. The police arrives at the place and arrests the Negro. Finally, the judgment goes against the Negro; it condemns the Negro to an imprisonment for ninety days in the county. Here, the poet addresses the miserable condition of the Negroes in a White-dominated society in which a Negro can barely speak of his inconveniences and disadvantages. The state policy of quelling the rebellious voices of the Blacks is indeed a strategic step to retain the superior position of the Whites, and to diminish any further possibility of the collective protest of the blacks. The incident of calling on the police by the landlord in the poem can be argued in the light of Zizek's order of the police:

The order of the police is never simply a positive order: to function at all, it has to cheat, to misname, and so on- in short, to engage in politics, to do what its subversive opponents are supposed to do (Zizek 235).

In fact, the systematic oppression and inhuman torture of the Blacks by the Whites are neatly manifested in this poem, which adds a level of militancy into their minds, but it ends with a negative implication.

'Theme for English-B' is another beautiful poem by Hughes which harps on the fervent plea of a Negro to forge an alternative world for them in which they can explore their own desires:

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink,
and be in love
I like to work, read, learn, and
understand life
I like a pipe for a Christmas
present,
Or records—Bessie, bop, or
Bach(119).

In fact, the stereotypical representation of the Blacks as the others, naïve, and uneducated is challenged by the Negro in this poem. The White cultural dominance seems to be a lifelong imprisonment for the Negroes. Hence, being a representative of the Black community, he sings a song of disregard for the

White culture, and thereby articulates his allegiance towards the African culture. So, he proclaims,

Sometimes perhaps you don't
want to be a part of me
Nor do I often want to be a part
of you (119).

He further says,

I guess you learn from me
Although you're older and white
And somewhat more free (119).

So, English-B is nothing but a separate space of Negroes which will not be dominated by the Whites.

'I too', a dramatic monologue and blue lyric, is replete with an individual Black's mourning regarding his subjective invisibility in this world. The poem refers to the dream of a Negro to be recognized as a beautiful and legible figure in this planet:

They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed
I, too, am America (57).

Thus, like other poems, Hughes imagines a self-sufficient existence for the Blacks, who can represent themselves on their own.

Conclusion

Harlem is a metaphor as well as the referent point for Langston Hughes, especially in articulating his verve associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes so stated:

I live in the heart of Harlem. I have also lived in the
heart of Paris, Madrid, Shanghai and Mexico City.
The people of Harlem seem not very different from
others, except in language. I love the color of their
languages and, being a Harlemit myself, their
problems and interests. (Arthur P Davis 276)

Hughes reverted to his own African Culture in order to reinforce his ethnic culture inherent in his blood. He, through his literary and critical works raised his objection and intolerance with the tradition in which African Americans were re-enslaved in post-slave era too. He felt an urgency to bring back such folk culture and oral tradition to resurrect the souls of the Black folks to their cultural identity. Harlem Renaissance inspired the Negritude movement as well. However, Langston Hughes as a representative of African American cultural heritage, tried to preserve their folk heritage as an enviable means of assuring cultural and group survival.

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