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Book Title: Revolutionary lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917

Book Editor(s): David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg, Alan Rice

Published by: Manchester University Press. (2022)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2fwfzxx.18>

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‘Hard Facts’: Amiri Baraka and Marxism-Leninism in the 1970s

David Grundy

From 1974 until his death in 2014, poet, playwright, activist and critic Amiri Baraka was a committed Marxist. Baraka announced his transition to Communism in a series of speeches and essays from 1974 through to 1975. Influenced by his encounters with African leaders and intellectuals committed to socialism and by an older generation of African-American Communists, Baraka called on his organisation, the Congress of Afrikan People (CAP), to examine ‘the international revolutionary experience [namely the Russian and Chinese revolutions] and integrate it with the practice of the Afrikan revolution’.¹ By October 1974, CAP was reorganised as a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist organisation, forming part of the New Communist Movement (NCM) – an understudied but vital attempt to build a vanguard revolutionary party in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. CAP changed its name to the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) in 1976, merging with the Asian-American and Chicano organisations I Wor Kuen and the August 29th Movement to form the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) in 1979. LRS continued to organise throughout the 1980s, eventually disbanding in 1990. Following the dissolution of LRS, Baraka continued in political and artistic organising, though not a member of a particular party, remaining a resolutely anti-imperialist, anti-racist voice to the end.

This story is too little told. Baraka criticism still focuses almost exclusively on his earlier involvement with the New American Poetry and the Black Liberation Movement (BLM), perpetuating a wider erasure of African-American internationalist Marxist traditions. This chapter therefore has three primary objectives. First, it outlines Baraka’s trajectory from cultural nationalism to Marxism and subsequent activism within the New Communist Movement. Second, it participates in recent NCM historiography, suggesting that we might learn not only from the NCM’s failures – dogmatism, sectarianism and an emphasis on polemics over successful mass mobilisation – but also from its resolute commitment to anti-imperialism, anti-racism and to organising among communities of colour.²

Third, the chapter's second half introduces Baraka's Marxist poetry from 1974 to 1979, reading poems from his collections *Hard Facts* (1975) and *Poetry For The Advanced* (1977) alongside recordings with funk group The Advanced Workers, to show their combination of 'lyric necessity' with political agitation, their presentation of 'class struggle in music', and their surge towards a promise of revolution that at the time of writing seemed very much a present and realisable horizon.³ All three aspects seek to challenge the legacies of historical forgetting that have rendered this work apparently unreadable to generations of critics, and that characterise the broader scholarly neglect of internationalist Marxism among black radicals in the United States. Remembering these writers' and activists' participation in global anti-fascism and anti-imperialism reminds us of revolutionary possibilities that are too often passed over. As Baraka himself put it, 'there is a gap in American history' – and, we might add, in the international and internationalist histories of the Red and Black Atlantic.⁴ This chapter aims to help close that gap.

From nationalism to Marxism: ideological development and early influences

Born Everett Leroy Jones in October 1934, in Newark, New Jersey, Baraka's father worked for the Post Office and his mother was a social worker. Encounters with the violent racism of US politics marked recent family history: Baraka's grandfather, Tom Russ, was first run out of Dothan, Alabama after he opened a supermarket, and then nearly killed when he ran against the Republican Party as an independent Assemblyman in Newark.⁵ Nonetheless, Baraka described his class background as comfortably lower middle class, with his father aspiring to be a member of the 'black bourgeoisie'.⁶ Baraka studied at the HBCU Howard University, where his teachers included the great poet Sterling Brown, before joining the Air Force, an experience he would later mockingly refer to as the 'Error Farce'. Tipped off by an anonymous letter accusing him of being a Communist, his superiors discovered Soviet writings in Baraka's possession, and he was dishonourably discharged.⁷ However, while he'd read the *Communist Manifesto*, Baraka was not at this stage either a full-blown Communist or a political activist, his interests remaining predominantly literary.⁸ Upon his discharge, he made his way to New York, renaming himself 'LeRoi Jones' and quickly becoming part of the city's blossoming literary intelligentsia, co-editing the little magazines *Yūgen* and *The Floating Bear*, and establishing friendships with poets such as Diane di Prima, Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara. Baraka's 1959 visit to Castro's Cuba with a delegation of other writers was

in some ways a political turning point, inspiring the essay 'Cuba Libre', published in *Evergreen Review* that year. His correspondence with the Cuban writer Rubi Betancourt, who challenged his bohemian claims to artistic autonomy, caused him to re-evaluate his political stance, and, during the early 1960s, Baraka was increasingly involved with political activism, first with the group On Guard for Freedom, who protested the assassination of Patrice Lumumba at the UN Building in New York in 1961, and then with his own Organisation of Young Men and In/Formation. Baraka was also becoming positioned as a literary spokesperson on the 'race issue', particularly with the success of his controversial play *Dutchman* in 1964.⁹ Though many of his intimate relationships and friendships were with white writers, Baraka was increasingly attracted to the modes of black nationalism espoused most famously by Malcolm X, meeting to discuss politics with Malcolm X and Tanzanian politician Muhammad Babu in 1965. Following Malcolm X's murder in 1965, Baraka abruptly broke ties with his white friends, moving from Greenwich Village to Harlem and founding the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BART/S). Using government anti-poverty funds, BART/S produced classes, theatrical productions, concerts and street theatre with a militantly anti-white stance, urging the people of Harlem to revolution and declaring Harlem an independent black nation. Within the year, the BART/S experiment ended in violence, and Baraka moved back to Newark in December.

Baraka was now a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) which spread across the nation through a series of grassroots artistic endeavours in cities like New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Teaching for a semester at San Francisco State in 1967, he came under the influence of the nationalist thinker Maulana Ron Karenga: Karenga's 'black value system', *Kawaida*, was a mode of thinking which borrowed from left-wing anti-imperialist thinkers such as Fanon and Mao, yet was explicitly hostile to Marxism. (It was around this time that he took on the 'Bantuised' Arabic name Imamu Amiri Baraka (literally, 'blessed prince', with the honorific 'Imamu' meaning 'spiritual leader').¹⁰ Baraka soon became involved in political activism in his home town of Newark, New Jersey, with the United Brothers, Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN) and Congress of Afrikan People.¹¹ Beaten and jailed by police in the 1967 Newark Rebellion, Baraka had first-hand experience of Newark's racialised inequality, which CFUN and CAP sought to challenge through developing educational institutions such as the African Free School, agitating for affordable housing with the Kawaida Towers project, conducting 'Stop Killer Cops' campaigns, and contributing to Kenneth Gibson's 1970 election as the city's first black mayor. Baraka was also emerging as a national voice in what Komozi Woodard calls the 'Modern Black Convention Movement', most

notably through the 1970 CAP Congress in Atlanta, Georgia, and the 1972 National Black Power Assembly in Gary, Indiana. Dedicated to building a 'black united front' in the US, the Convention Movement helped elect black officials such as Gibson and Carl Stokes, and espoused Pan-African solidarity with African anti-colonial struggles, most notably through the 1972 African Liberation Day demonstrations in support of national liberation parties in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa.¹²

Strongly influenced by Maulana Ron Karenga's US Organization, Baraka was at this time one of the leading representatives of cultural nationalist politics in the United States. Adopting Karenga's Kawaida ideology, which stressed black self-determination and community control in Afrocentric and often patriarchal terms, he promoted Kawaida widely among his own organisations, authoring expositions of Kawaida such as *A Black Value System* (1970). Baraka had been involved with the Black Panthers in 1967, yet the FBI-provoked hostilities between the Panthers and the US Organization, following the murder of Panthers Bunchy Carter and John Huggins in December 1968, saw such connections downplayed.¹³ Like Karenga, Baraka was hostile to the Panthers' Marxism and willingness to work with white organisations: while Karenga would, in Baraka's words, 'borrow and cop from some-a-everybody [...] Mao and even Lenin and Stalin and Marx', he 'hid the bits and pieces he had taken from the white revolutionaries', influencing Baraka, who'd read Marx and Mao, to 'excise [their] repeated references to communism'.¹⁴ Aware of class divisions within the Black Liberation Movement, denouncing the 'black bourgeoisie' and figures such as Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young, and drawing on Marxist-oriented decolonial thinkers, Baraka was nonetheless wary of the white left's vocabulary of class struggle, disparaging the 'terrible Marx on the dirty Lenin black people have been given by some dudes with some dead 1930's white ideology as a freedom suit'.¹⁵ In a 1970 speech marking the founding of CAP, he called for a 'nationalist, international, nationalist, pan Africanist political party', drawing parallels to the Marxist Vietcong and other 'Third World people', but rejected the terms 'revolution' and 'vanguard' as 'the white boy's thing', insisting that: 'I would rather make a coalition with Roy Wilkins or Whitney Young – with any of the most backwards upside-down Negroes in the world, because even they must be, in the jivist moment, committed to change.'¹⁶

Privately, however, Baraka was beginning to have reservations about such a strategy. CFUN broke with Karenga in 1970, and while Baraka still espoused 'revolutionary Kawaida', he distanced himself personally from Karenga, particularly after Karenga's arrest for kidnapping and torturing two female members of US Organization in 1971.¹⁷ Beginning dialogue

with more explicitly left currents within the Black Liberation Movement, Baraka's left turn was also shaped by the example of decolonising movements in Southern Africa. In 1971, Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller), director of the Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, North Carolina, travelled to Mozambique, meeting with guerrilla liberation organisation FRELIMO; Sadaukai subsequently established the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), which, along with CAP, organised African Liberation Day demonstrations nationwide the following May.¹⁸ Sadaukai's encounters with FRELIMO warned him of the rise of an African neo-colonial bourgeoisie, and this analysis helped activists like Baraka find a framework to understand their betrayal by elected officials like Kenneth Gibson, whose neglect of the working-class black communities who had elected him Baraka saw as a form of domestic neo-colonialism.¹⁹

Key too was the influence of Amílcar Cabral, leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in the independence struggle in future Guinea-Bissau, and one of the foremost anti-colonial leaders in the era of decolonisation. Cabral visited New York and dialogued with African-American activists in October 1972, several months before he was murdered, likely by Portuguese agents; in February 1973, Baraka gave a speech after Cabral's funeral in Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, drawing parallels between elected black officials such as Gibson in the States and neo-colonialist administrators in Africa, and emphasising the role of class in anti-colonial struggles. The funeral also spurred the poem 'Afrikan Revolution', published in leading US journal *Black World*, in which Baraka called on 'Afrikan People all over the world [...] yellow folks brown folks red' to unite against 'all capitalists, racists, liars, Imperialists', insisting that 'Capitalism must be destroyed./Imperialism will die'.²⁰ As Baraka noted later: 'We were finding out about an Africa of imperialist domination and class struggle. For [Kwame] Nkrumah and Cabral the enemy of Africa was imperialism, not just white people.'²¹ CAP newspaper *Black Newark* was renamed *Unity and Struggle*, a phrase taken from Cabral's writings, in February 1974, and CAP began to publicly endorse Marxism that May.²²

Following this, Baraka travelled with the American delegation to the Sixth Pan-African Congress ('Six Pac') held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in June 1974.²³ This was the first Pan-African congress to be held in Africa itself, and Baraka held dialogue with Guyanese activist-historian Walter Rodney, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, President Sékou Touré of Guinea and Marcelino Dos Santos of FRELIMO.²⁴ Baraka had visited Tanzania twice before, where he had been shepherded by Marxist-Leninist Muhammad Babu, Minister of Economic Planning. Babu 'escorted me around to countless affairs, even though he was then Minister of Economics of Tanzania, and the two of us zoomed around Dar in his car, with Babu

driving'.²⁵ Baraka first met Babu through Malcolm X as far back as 1965, at a time when X himself was shifting towards leftist internationalism with the Organisation of African-American Unity (OAAU); the meeting is recalled in the poem 'Class Struggle' from *Hard Facts*: 'you had come as/ambassador from new afrika, when the fumes/of revolution 1st opened our nose'.²⁶ The three 'swore oaths, with another,/of revolution'; visiting Babu some years later, Baraka remembers 'going into his study and wondering why he had all those volumes, some forty-five of them, of Lenin lined up in his bookcases'.²⁷ A consistent left critic of the rise of neoliberalism in former colonial African states, Babu rejected Nyerere's *Ujamaa* model of African socialism – at this stage an important influence on Baraka – for failing to address Tanzania's reliance on raw material exports (a colonial legacy) and for irresponsibly implemented nationalisation. Babu was jailed by Nyerere in 1972 for supposed involvement in the assassination of Vice President Abeid Karume, further alerting Baraka to tensions within newly independent nations and the messy entanglements of colonialism (Baraka saw Babu's arrest as a CIA frame-up).²⁸

Baraka's report on Six-Pac, published that October, advocated 'the anti-imperialist thrust of revolutionary socialism' over 'reactionary nationalism', and the July 1974 Afrikan Women's Congress, organised by Amina Baraka in Newark, 'marked [CAP's] clear evolution [...] toward becoming a vanguard revolutionary party'.²⁹ CAP became a Marxist organisation in October and the transition was publicly announced in December.³⁰ Baraka's return to America additionally saw him encounter a domestic tradition of black Communism. Notably, he learned the 'basics of Marxism – like surplus value' in a three-month dialogue with veteran organiser William Watkins, who 'taught him the fundamentals of political economy and tried to expose the limitations of cultural nationalism'.³¹ The following January, Baraka met with key NCM figure 'Black Bolshevik' Harry Haywood at the Black Women's United Front (BWUF) Conference in Detroit: the two spent an entire day in discussion, Baraka, who 'showed tremendous deference to Haywood', asking Haywood about Communist theory and giving him an overview of the last five years of the Black Liberation Movement.³² Haywood, who joined Cyril Briggs's African Blood Brotherhood in 1922, followed ABB members into the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), studying in Moscow in the 1920s (fellow students included Ho Chi Minh) and drafting the Comintern's 'Resolutions on the Negro Question' in 1928 and 1930, which stated that African Americans in the Black Belt of the United States constituted an oppressed nation, with the right to self-determination, including the right to secession (the so-called 'Black Belt South Thesis'). In the 1930s, Haywood organised campaigns for the Scottsboro Boys and with the National Miners Union

and Sharecroppers' Union. Expelled from the CPUSA in the late 1950s, Haywood sided with Mao in the Sino-Soviet split, regarding the CPUSA's abandonment of the position of self-determination for African Americans, as well as Khrushchev's notion of 'peaceful co-existence', as a betrayal. Working with Malcolm X and with Harlem Rent Strikers, and with the Detroit Revolutionary Union Movement and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the 1960s, Haywood was a key figure in the NCM as it emerged from the confluence of anti-revisionist CPUSA dissidents and newer Maoist currents. Throughout his political career, he held to the 'Black Belt South Thesis' as a key element in US revolutionary struggle. Soon after meeting, this thesis would become a central and lasting tenet of Baraka's political thought.³³

The influence of women of colour on Baraka's left turn was also hugely significant. It was the build-up to the Afrikan Women's Conference organised by Amina Baraka in July 1974 – and the subsequent establishment of a Black Women's United Front (BWUF) in 1975 – that definitely saw CAP move towards socialism, equally emphasising 'Use of Scientific Socialism – Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse Tung Thought' and 'Struggle Against Male Chauvinism and Equality of Women Activists'.³⁴ As Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard note in *Want to Start a Revolution?*, their vital work on 'radical women in the Black Freedom Struggle', historical studies of this period too often retain a "leading man" master narrative that [...] minimises the contributions of women', 'centr[ing] men and locat[ing] women at the margins of great social change' (the 'men lead but women organise' model).³⁵ Amina Baraka had been central in one of CFUN's main initiatives, the African Free School in Newark, and many other aspects of CAP organising, and it was the influence of female activists within CAP which, more than anything, turned the movement away from the misogyny of the nationalist period.³⁶ As Amiri Baraka later noted: 'it was Amina who encouraged this study [of Marxism] and pressed for its public dissemination to the organisation as a whole'.³⁷ Likewise, Jamala Rogers was a key member of the St Louis branch of CAP, involved with the ALSC and National Black Assembly (NBA), and followed its members into the RCL and LRS. Another key figure, veteran Marxist-feminist activist Vicki Garvin, worked with Baraka in the BWUF and the National Black United Front: a former member of the CPUSA and the National Negro Labor Council, Garvin had worked with Malcolm X in Ghana in the 1950s, teaching English in Mao's China from 1960 to 1970, before moving first to Newark, then New York. And in the later 1970s and 1980s, Baraka worked with Mae Ngai, an important left organiser within Asian-American movements, as part of the LRS. (Ngai was an important commentator on the far right anti-migrant turn under US President Donald

Trump.)³⁸ Baraka's female comrades were essentially giving him a history lesson in lived experience. Through their influence, he could newly link anti-colonial movements, class struggle and the fight for women's equality to his existing focus on the black liberation struggle in America.

'The basis of the party yet to be built': from CAP to LRS

Baraka was now part of the New Communist Movement. Ignored and derided in much historiography, the NCM emerged from 1960s New Left, Black Power, and other formations, including Students for a Democratic Society, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Black Workers Congress and the Young Lords. Its numerous, often small pre-party formations sought to create a vanguard Communist Party; their focus was internationalist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist, heavily influenced by Mao Zedong's thought and by the commitment to internationalism displayed by the pre-Cold War Communist movement.³⁹ Despite its often dogmatic 'anti-revisionist' Stalinism, the movement *was* a large, cross-racial left presence at a time of intense reaction: examining Baraka's role within it serves to illuminate not only our sense of his work but of this period within the left as a whole.

Baraka's involvement with the NCM began with the June 1974 Newark taxi drivers strike, organised by CAP, alongside the local Black Panthers and the mainly white Revolutionary Union.⁴⁰ At this stage, as Baraka suggests, 'we still had a lot to learn'. CAP activists became newly embroiled in heated ideological debates about the niceties of Leninist theory, and often felt disconnected from white left groups, whose struggles were conjunctural rather than structural.⁴¹ Baraka expressed his frustrations at left sectarianism in *Unity and Struggle* that December:

There are some organisations that spend more time plotting how to undermine other socialist organisations than how to struggle against monopoly capitalism [...] We do feel that it will be very positive when 'multinational' organisations face the fact of their not really being multi, but predominately white.⁴²

Embroiled in 'academic word wars, super militant rhetorical battles, to see who has the most grasp of socialist theory', CAP 'repeated the mistakes of some of our new comrades in the new Left movement', losing 'dozens of valuable, experienced activists'.⁴³ Though Baraka initially envisaged transforming CAP into a vanguard party, he soon realised that Marxism-Leninism lacked black nationalism's popular base.⁴⁴ Compared to its earlier incarnation within the Black Convention Movement, CAP (subsequently

RCL and LRS) knew it was small: like all NCM organisations, a pre-party formation, rather than a vanguard party per se.⁴⁵ Yet it did much valuable work. More so than other NCM organisations, it organised among marginalised sectors of the labour force: migrant and undocumented workers in New York sweatshops, Los Angeles metal fabrication workshops, San Francisco, Honolulu and Boston hotels, and Carolina canning plants.⁴⁶

The RCL/LRS conducted campaigns in Newark, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, within the anti-apartheid movement, against slumlords and for education reform, establishing a People's Committee on Education and protesting the 1978 Bakke decision which had effectively reversed affirmative action.⁴⁷ Perhaps its most effective campaign, 'Stop Killer Cops', founded through a mass demonstration against the murder of Claude Reese in Brooklyn in September 1974, 'mobile[zed] thousands of people around the country'.⁴⁸ During the 1980s, strategic debates on how to fight the rise of Reagan and the Ku Klux Klan led to involvement in Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, differences over which saw the LRS dissolve in 1990 (Baraka himself left in 1988).⁴⁹ One of the longest-lived NCM organisations, LRS's dissolution reflected the NCM's broader demise. But Baraka remained a Marxist until his death, continuing to organise in Newark (ultimately leading to the election of his son Ras as mayor in 2014) and stirring controversy with his 2001 poem 'Somebody Blew Up America' in 2001. Presently, I'll turn to Baraka's poetry from 1974 to 1979, in the pre-Reagan years when his Marxism was at its most fiery and immediate. First, I'll outline the legacy of historical forgetting affecting both Baraka's own late embrace of Marxism and existing historiography of this period.

'There is a gap in American history': black Marxism and historical forgetting

As Angel L. Martinez notes, Baraka 'arrived at [h]is commitment [to Marxism] considerably late compared to other revolutionary internationalist artists'.⁵⁰ 1960s cultural nationalism overlooked an earlier tradition of black Marxism that might have suggested an alternative direction, including Communist activists Cyril Briggs, C.L.R. James, Claudia Jones, Nelson Peery, James and Grace Lee Boggs, Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Harry Haywood and Vicki Garvin. (As Lisa Merrill and Theresa Saxon's chapter in the present volume suggests, the silencing of Robeson and others in the McCarthy era was especially important in terms of the way this earlier tradition of black Marxism became overlooked.) Because of this, Baraka's highly publicised 'left turn' in 1974 caused consternation among large sectors of the nationalist movement he'd helped promote.⁵¹ Before

Baraka left for Six-Pac in Tanzania that June, he gave three speeches, at the CAP Midwest Regional Meeting in Chicago, the Second National Black Political Convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the ALSC Conference at Howard University, which suddenly and polemically announced his transition to Marxism, leading to the resignations of activist-organiser Jitu Weusi and poet-publisher Haki Madhubuti from CAP, and secretary Elizabeth Atkins from the NBA – to be followed by Baraka himself that November.⁵² These resignations led to a bitter polemical exchange in the black press.⁵³ In the succeeding months, the membership of both CAP and the NBA shrank dramatically, and *Black World* itself abruptly folded the following year, Baraka's turn away from the nationalist ideology he'd been so influential in promoting effectively leading to the collapse of the various organisations associated with it.⁵⁴ The controversy over Baraka's left turn reflected already-existing divisions within the Black Convention Movement, as certain elements moved away from independent politics and towards the Democratic Party, while others, such as Sadaukai's ALSC, endorsed Pan-Africanism and internationalist Marxism. But Baraka's individually significant role within the movement should also be stressed, and the way this transition was managed was arguably damaging. Baraka knew this. He initially attempted to balance the multiple influences of Karenga-influenced nationalism with African socialism and Marxism-Leninism: in the first of the three transitional speeches, at the Regional CAP meeting in Chicago, he called for a party simultaneously influenced by Marxism, Mao, Nyerere, Touré, Cabral and Karenga.⁵⁵ As indicated by his resolute commitment throughout the 1970s and 1980s to the 'black nation thesis' inherited from Haywood, Baraka's Marxist concerns were often outgrowths of, rather than sharp breaks from, his preceding political positions. Baraka initially insisted that a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party could work with nationalist organisations within a 'progressive Black United Front', citing James Boggs's arguments on the 'relative independence' of revolutionary and reformist movements.⁵⁶ This two-pronged strategy continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most notably in the League of Revolutionary Struggle's involvement with Jesse Jackson.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, Baraka's handling of CAP's 1974 transition was dogmatic and heavy-handed, alienating nationalist elements rather than winning them over to the left. In particular, his attacks on Weusi and Madhubuti, serialised over eleven issues of *Unity and Struggle*, frequently took a personal tone.⁵⁸ Madhubuti recalls: '[Baraka] came out with both feet jumping on [me]. [...] He talked about my diet ... you know what I'm saying? It didn't have nothing to do with politics.'⁵⁹ And Michael Simanga notes: 'it was the source of a great deal of discussion and disappointment that Baraka's critique was so personal and [the] CAP [...] had chosen to publicly

humiliate people who were as committed as we were'.⁶⁰ Baraka himself later admitted: 'While much of my criticism [...] was accurate, the tone and approach were like beating somebody in the head for disagreeing.'⁶¹ And, for CAP activist Jamala Rogers: 'The [...] evolving ideology [...] was problematic for some both inside and outside the organisation [...] I will be the first to admit that liquidation of CAP as a national-in-form mass organisation was a political error.'⁶²

Elevating one individual's contributions over those of others – not only 1970s activists comrades like Garvin, Amina Baraka, Jamala Rogers and Mae Ngai, but earlier black Marxists – leads to political errors and a distorted view of history. In its skewed focus on the pre-Marxist period, whether the 'New American Poetry' or black nationalism, Baraka criticism further erases traditions of black Marxist internationalism, presenting the Black Arts and Black Power movements as if they magically emerged with the death of Malcolm X, and just as magically disappeared by 1974. Such narratives reflect government-fostered internal divisions within Black Power organisations, such as the Panthers–US split; personality cult; McCarthyite historical erasure; the failure of the CPUSA; and the assassination of leaders propounding a left-leaning, internationalist united front strategy, most notably Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (both of whom were in talks with Baraka shortly before their deaths).⁶³ As Baraka put it in the 1977 poem 'Malcolm Remembered': 'when they killed you/it left a double vacuum/No communist party, no national/leadership'.⁶⁴ It was this in part that meant Madhubuti reacted with such shock to Baraka's Communist turn and that members of the NBA preferred to make alliances with racist Alabama governor George Wallace than with an 'avowed Communist'.⁶⁵

Likewise, earlier African-American socialist writing, most notably that of Langston Hughes, was 'very carefully hidden by American literary marshals [...] You always find out what [...] the literary "avant" of the Right [did], but what about the literary "avant" of the Left? There is a gap in American history.'⁶⁶ Baraka co-edited LRS magazine *The Black Nation* (1981–86) with Michael Simanga, publishing Hughes, Margaret Walker, Askia Touré and Marvin X alongside Jayne Cortez, Amina Baraka, Walter Rodney, Michael Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson, and his own writing reflects this vibrant cross-cultural aesthetic: essays on Aimé Césaire, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ousmane Sembène sit alongside the reggae poem 'Wailers' (1982), for Bob Marley and Larry Neal, and 'In the Tradition' (1980), whose revolutionary roll call includes Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Léon Damas, René Depestre, Jacques Roumain and Nicolás Guillén.⁶⁷ Young Lords founder Felipe Luciano calls this 'the Black Global Aesthetic' and Baraka's son, Ras, notes: 'There was always poetry read and great

speeches given from dignitaries and artists from all over the world [...] I heard artists from Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and activists alike.⁶⁸ Such work continued the collective, performance-based focus of the Umbra Workshop, BART/S and Spirit House, through the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union, Yenan Workshop, The Advanced Workers and Proletarian Ensemble.⁶⁹

Baraka's own autobiography essentially stops 'somewhere in 1974', and we lack a comprehensive account of such activity.⁷⁰ Recent Black Power histories end with the movement's mid-70s decline, and literary critics frequently overlook Baraka's Marxist poetry. Yet critical judgements of the controversies within CAP and NCM dogmatism should not overshadow our evaluation of this work. Far from subordinating 'aesthetics' to 'politics', his work refuses such distinctions and, in the current climate of rising right-wing nationalism, has more to teach than ever. I'll now turn to Baraka's Marxist poetry, outlining its publication contexts and addressing individual poems on religion, family, music and revolution.

'A weapon of revolutionary struggle': Hard Facts (1975)

Baraka's Marxist political activism and poetry were most closely connected between 1974 and 1979: unfortunately, no single volume collects such work. Returning to the small press practices of the 'Beat' era, Baraka's People's War (formerly Jihad) 'put out an endless stream of inexpensive pamphlets', including most of his own contemporaneous writings and books by Sékou Touré, Cabral and Lenin.⁷¹ Self-publishing was both virtue and necessity. Baraka sardonically notes: 'From the big publishers I published regularly until about 1970. This is probably when they thought it was good business.'⁷² While Baraka's black nationalist work of the 1960s was marketed alongside texts by Fanon, Eldridge Cleaver and others, Marxism-Leninism during the 1970s was a less attractive proposition to publishers.⁷³ As Anthony Monteiro puts it, Baraka 'was whited out by the American mainstream'.⁷⁴

Two major works of Marxist-Leninist poetry appeared during this period. Excerpts from *Hard Facts*, a collection written between 1973 and 1975 during the transition to Marxism, were first published as a People's War pamphlet in 1975, and appeared in full alongside its 1977 follow-up, *Poetry for the Advanced* in Baraka's *Selected Poetry* (1979), published by William Morrow. Written between October 1974, when CAP officially reformed as a Marxist organisation, and November 1975, *Hard Facts'* introduction takes its place alongside Baraka's earlier manifesto 'The Revolutionary Theatre' as a vital statement of revolutionary aesthetics:

Yes, poetry should be a weapon of revolutionary struggle. And we say it again. Otherwise it is 'a teacup in Rocky's summer place,' a distraction, an ornament the imperialists wear to make a gesture toward humanity.⁷⁵

Echoing the call from 'Black Art' (1965) for 'assassin poems, poems that shoot guns', Baraka newly emphasises revolutionary praxis and the study of socialist texts:

[The people] need odes of strength, attack pieces, bomb, machine gun and rocket poems. Poems describing reality and methods of changing it. Rhythmic reading lists, objectivity, clarity, information, science, as well as love and concern.⁷⁶

Calling for a 'new revolutionary art' and a new 'anti-imperialist cultural union', Baraka was still predominantly a cultural worker. As Robin D.G. Kelley notes:

Despite his immersion in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist literature, his own cultural work suggests [...] he knew [...] that [political questions were] not going to be settled through reading Lenin or Stalin. If [they] ever could be settled, the battles would take place, for better or for worse, on the terrain of culture.⁷⁷

For Kelley, cultural work can conduct political struggle; conversely, political work can manifest the same imaginative urge generally ascribed to culture.

Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society. [...] Social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realise that things need not always be this way. It is that imagination, that effort to see the future in the present, that I shall call 'poetry'.⁷⁸

In this vein, *Hard Facts* addresses current political struggles and reflects on those of the past with the benefit of a new-found Marxist perspective, addressing music, family and revolution. 'Red Autumn' reflects on the transition to Marxism-Leninism in October 1974, the month of Baraka's birthday, and one with Russian Revolutionary predecessors.⁷⁹ A personal reminiscence of this life-changing whirlwind of meetings, organising activities and ideological debates, the poem opens with a descriptive cityscape shot through with civic corruption, the headquarters of the gigantic Newark-based company Prudential, 'the largest life insurance company in the world', towering over the 'low houses' below.⁸⁰ Visiting Amina's family, the Barakas 'talk of the city's political corruption', 'readying to go to a women's conference' where 'some sisters/[are] pushing a proposal to call a multinational women's front together, by spring'. Such experiences are presented through the vocabulary of political organising, the specific task of creating

a ‘multinational women’s front’ leading to more general commentary on the need to move ‘from the tactical to strategic, build the whole structure that will/change the century, change the social system, change the way we live, change the peoples / lives and the future of the world’. The movement from ‘indian summer’ to ‘red autumn’ – where redness is both seasonal and political symbol – from ‘winter [...] yet ahead’ to the proposed multinational women’s front ‘by spring’, both provide a metaphor for struggle, and the mundane yet urgent calendar of political work.

This double movement is reflected formally: the tension between the demands of prose statement or description, expressed in the form of the sentence, and the contours of sound patterning and the poetic line, give the poem an affective charge reflective of the movement of politics in the texture of lived experience. As Baraka noted of his recent work in 1977, while ‘the content is always trying to talk about [...] the necessity for change’, ‘the forms themselves are dictated by the time, place, and condition, like anything else’.⁸¹ This has not been well understood. Werner Sollors, for instance, argues that the ‘prosaic’ qualities of Baraka’s Marxist poetry represent the failure of ‘literary logic’, as ‘politics wins out over aesthetics’.⁸² While critics praise the contemporaneous ‘New Sentence’ and other Modernist challenges to conventional poetic forms, they tend to stop short when the ‘prosaic’ material is more explicitly polemical. In doing so, they also erase the internationalism of Baraka’s influences. As well as Hughes, Baraka was influenced during this period by the concise polemical prose writings of Chinese writer Lu Hsun (Xun) to seek ‘a deliberately wider line and a rhythm shaped by the ideological requirements of the statement itself’.⁸³ Hailed by Mao as ‘the sage of modern China’, Lu Xun’s 1920s *zawen* (short essays) ‘combined poetry and revolutionary observation’.⁸⁴ The word *zawen* connects *zagan* (miscellaneous impressions) and *zatan* (miscellaneous discussion), and these short satirical texts, ‘a catch-all name for all kinds of prose pieces’, responded to the miscellany of the moment (*za*: miscellaneous, cluttered, jumbled) with the clarity of immediate analysis.⁸⁵ Formerly a poet and short story writer, with the conceptualisation of *zawen*, Lu Xun moved away from reliance on existing literary forms or standards, finding a way to combine contingency, clarity and accessibility with a sense of personal aesthetic style.⁸⁶ Lu Xun’s work often responds to the demands of a particular moment, and for Baraka the ‘short essay form is really suited for the kind of daily struggle I’m engaged in – it’s a kind of *struggle form*’:

It’s *wider* than a poem, as far as I’m concerned. Because in poetry you usually have a rhythmic dynamic that you either have to force, if you don’t have it with you, or if you have it with you, it flows and has a life of its own. But in the short essay form the rhythm flows from what you have to say.⁸⁷

But Baraka's distinction between essay and poem perhaps oversimplifies his own negotiations between the two. While the introduction to *Hard Facts* is a clear example of the essay form, poems such as 'Red Autumn' also emerge from it. The rhythm of the poem 'flows from what you have to say', but this in turn is rhythmically guided by sound, by 'a rhythmic dynamic which flows and has a life of its own'. Intended as the 'necessary daggers and javelins' for the struggle (the title to Baraka's 1984 collection of essays), Lu Xun's *zawen* were also intended as 'a form of convalescence: a stage of preparation between toil and combat'.⁸⁸ 'Red Autumn', too, mixes apparently miscellaneous impressions with strategic discussions. It is also a 'convalescent' reflection, a preparation for the struggle ahead which freights apparently miscellaneous observations with a wider socio-historical perspective. Baraka unites and structures these observations through techniques that are nothing if not 'poetic'. In the poem's opening lines – 'communist sparrows gnawing on a fire escape/together in bread lines flying off to the next low house' – 'communist sparrows' appears as an arbitrary, near-surrealist application of adjective to noun, but turns out to operate along a witty pun on 'bread lines', uniting observation of the city environment with its connotations of political corruption and poverty. The next two lines – 'cant get up to prudential, that high white, w/the stain glass eyes/while indian summer flutters, drunks mutters' – unite the movement of sound, through assonance and internal rhyme ('*high white* [...] *glass eyes*'; 'summer *flutters*, drunks *mutters*'), the movement of the eye (following the sparrows) and the movement of the mind. The sparrows stay among the 'low houses' of the poor, gnawing on fire escapes because they lack 'bread' (money), leading to the pun on 'bread lines' and social welfare, and 'cant get up to' the Prudential Building, leading Baraka to reflect on political corruption in the city. Perhaps the sparrows were seen at the moment of composition, triggering this reflection on the events of the red autumn; perhaps they were present at the visit to Amina Baraka's grandmother and father, neatly correlating with the discussion of the political discussion in Newark, and providing a symbol for urban spatiality and its power imbalances. What Baraka reveals is that urban space *already has* a poetics: the Prudential Building is a building designed and functioning as a symbol in day-to-day life, its expensive life insurance policies contrasting with those who starve through being unable to reproduce themselves, lacking the necessary 'bread' (money) to buy 'bread' (food). Social community here functions on four levels: Baraka and Amina Baraka (addressed somewhat patronisingly as 'the little girl') and her family; the political corruption against which they fight, concretised by the tenements and Prudential; the political organisations in which they are involved; and the movement of revolution across the world.⁸⁹ The relation between particular and general, poetry and prose,

arises organically from the form of the poem itself, registering the social constitution of what the eye/I can see: a dialectic of observation, particular and general. Baraka furthers his existent, essentially autobiographical project, of situating his own struggle within the broader context of ordinary people's lives, the black struggle in America, and the global context of revolution to transform 'the whole world'.

'Class Struggle in Music': The Advanced Workers

Recalling Kelley on the black radical imagination, it makes sense that, in Baraka's poetry, the language of activism takes its proper place within a poetic context; likewise, the language of the aesthetic informs and feeds into politics. Perhaps the most important way in which Baraka's Marxist work links the contingencies of feeling with 'the motion of history' is its figuration of music. 'Literary Statement On Struggle!', which follows 'Red Autumn' in *Hard Facts*, opens with a line that might have come directly from Baraka's earlier work – 'A poem is/the naked advice of the heart' – before clarifying the combination of passion and political analysis – such a statement should 'try to make people progress/our life here go forward' – and ends by invoking Charlie Parker for the revolution: 'Nows the time, Charley Parker sd, Now's the time. Say do it, do it, we gon / do it [...] to say again revolution, and again revolution and again revolution [...] all that's bad and mad and won't be had.'⁹⁰ Baraka's Marxist poetry finds its key figure in music, which enacts the combination of universal and particular, cross-racial unity and particularised cultural experience, that formed the basis of his political organising. Music, as a bridge between individual and community, in which, as Baraka noted in his earlier work on blues, generic forms allow for 'completely personal' expression, 'as arbitrary and personal as the shout', is not only a *figure for* political modes of being, but *already enacts* the collectivity such movements group towards.⁹¹ Baraka writes poems about music – notably 'Pres Spoke in a Language', 'AM/TRAK' and 'In the Tradition', for Lester Young, John Coltrane and Arthur Blythe – formally suffused with musicality – blues patterns, songlike refrains, sonic imitations of scat, be-bop and free jazz, actualised in dynamic performances, often within musical contexts. Manifesting a 'lyric necessity in my own self', these poems also constitute *lyrics*, their insistent auralty involving speech in its wider form, from spoken utterance to political speeches to song.⁹² As Chris Stroffolino notes, 'the poem [...] turn[s] into a [...] prose argument' only 'if read on the page without hearing a live performance'.⁹³

Given this, a pamphlet like *Hard Facts* only tells part of the story. It was, above all, in performance that Baraka's work really came alive, as attested

by the stunning recordings of ‘Dope’, ‘Against Bourgeois Art’ and ‘Afro-American Lyric’ that appear on the album *New Music/New Poetry* and in readings given at Buffalo and Naropa Universities.⁹⁴ In 1976, Baraka recorded two 45 RPM sides with The Advanced Workers and the Anti-Imperialist Singers, a group including members of Parliament/Funkadelic and Kool and the Gang.⁹⁵ These singles, released by People’s War, give a sense of what a viable Marxist pop music might sound like. More accessibly tied to the demands of the pop song than the experimental approach of bands as The Red Krayola, these two songs, ‘Better Red Let Others Be Dead’ and ‘You Was Dancin Need To Be Marching So You Can Dance Some More Later On’ are only fleeting artefacts of the cultural activity that bands such as The Advanced Workers carried out.⁹⁶ Such performances often went unrecorded, emerging out of specific social circumstances, and avoiding the marketisation of struggle that involvement with major record labels might have risked. On the 45s, Baraka’s spoken contributions do not so much ‘lead’ the band – poet as lead singer – as form a galvanising interlude, a short political speech which the band members take up as a chant, somewhere between slogan, song lyric, and slogan, pulsing into and forming the song’s principal, joyous riff: ‘and when you asked what truths they party taught/they’d say Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tse-Tung Thought’. Something of the power of this record was indicated when Paul Gilroy played it as part of his keynote address at the 2014 Baraka conference at the ICA in London, which took place shortly after Baraka’s death. However incongruous the juxtaposition of Maoist slogans with funk, it’s hard not to be exhilarated and inspired, not only by the music but by the conviction with which those slogans are delivered, and the hopes they contain.

**‘Can I get a, like they say, witness’: Poetry for
the Advanced (1977) and beyond**

The Advanced Workers record was made in a period of revolutionary hope. New alliances were being made within the New Communist Movement, and the example of decolonial liberation movements in Africa, as well as struggles in southern Europe, still burned bright. It’s easy to forget that this was an era in which the possibility of an international, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolutionary movement was still a realistic possibility. While the Soviet Union had long since degenerated into a corrupt superpower, movements in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Portugal, Spain and China threatened to dissolve the order of post-war capitalism and the remnants of the old colonial order.⁹⁷ In retrospect, this was the moment

of Reagan, Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping: but at the time, this was by no means set in stone. As Baraka later noted:

This was the era when Mao Tse-Tung said, 'Countries want independence, nations want liberation, and the people want revolution.' Remember that. For our generation, that was the cry. We used to say that all the time; we loved to hear that. We also used to quote him saying, 'Revolution is the main trend in the world today.' That's what we used to say.⁹⁸

Baraka's work from roughly 1974–79 is intensely reactive, charting each new outrage and tactical response with a furious capacity for witness and desire for change. By the time his essay collection *Daggers and Javelins* appeared in 1984, he argued that the trend was now towards fascism. The NCM had largely disintegrated into faction fighting, and the rise of Ronald Reagan led to the very real fear of world war, increased Ku Klux Klan activity, police violence, the rolling back of affirmative action, and continuing exploitation of minority workers. This was 'a deeply reactionary right-wing period', in which the left was faced with 'disorder and splitting and failure', leaving 'only two choices, socialism or fascism'.⁹⁹ Its legacies are still with us. The long shadow of Reaganism, the triumphalism of the 'End of History' and the diminishing presence of visible mass struggles has made it difficult to remember the high level of class struggle and anti-imperialism to which Baraka's Marxist work attests. Yet, in this work, revolution is not something distant and far off, but an imminent horizon.

This horizon becomes especially apparent in Baraka's second book of Marxist poetry, *Poetry for the Advanced*. Completed in 1977, it appeared alongside *Hard Facts* as part of Baraka's 1979 *Selected Poetry*, published by William Morrow. As in *Hard Facts*, politics emerges from the texture of lived experience. But Baraka's poetic Marxism is here more honed, the swerve from lyric invective to lineated political argument and back assured, convincing and moving. These poems underscore both 'personal' and 'political' as *interpersonal*: family, lovers, friends. They understand that life is lived socially, and that poetry, which affects life, is produced socially, whether on a wider or more intimate scale. The opening 'Poem for Anna Russ and Fanny Jones' addresses Baraka's maternal and paternal grandmothers. Anna Russ had lived with the Jones family in Newark when Baraka was a child: she and her husband, Tom, who suffered racialised violence after running against the Republican Party, figure throughout Baraka's work.¹⁰⁰

[...] This is the world. We are in it. We can live and survive
at a higher level. We can advance all life to higher ground. And the quiet
grandmothers
died

and went to 'heaven' could take note of the same feeling cause that's what
 they had to
 mean
 if the metaphysical cloak their times had draped on their world was
 translated. [...] There is a
 better life, but its in the world, in the lives of the people, we just have to
 struggle, we
 just have to care and take care and study, we just have to fight some more
 people's wars.
 That wd be the hymn underneath, we will meet again on higher ground.
 That all society
 will
 be raised to higher ground, a more advanced life. And that feeling has
 burned in me
 since
 the dawn of my life.¹⁰¹

Despite denouncing 'metaphysics' – whether Christianity, Buddhism, Islam or Kawaida – the *social* function of religion remained important for Baraka and a spiritual discourse returns in his later work, in a distinct brand of poetic dialectics owing as much to Sun Ra as to Lenin, Monk as to Mao.¹⁰² Critical of Christianity's 'metaphysical cloak', Baraka nonetheless notes its embedded political hopes, 'translat[ing]' 'the same feeling' which 'they had to mean': Marx's 'heart of a heartless world'.¹⁰³ As in the earlier 'Careers', which notes how Anna Russ, working as a domestic, 'stole things for jesus' sake', even if she 'probably asked for forgiveness on the bus', Baraka is aware that Russ's Christianity motivated her acts of quiet defiance.¹⁰⁴ Formally, Baraka's poems reflect Christianity's dialectical nature, appropriating its rhetoric for stinging critique in the abrasively hilarious 'When We'll Worship Jesus' and 'Dope'. Echoing Langston Hughes's 'Goodbye Christ', Baraka proclaims:

We'll worship Jesus
 When jesus do
 Somethin
 When jesus blow up
 the white house
 or blast nixon down¹⁰⁵

Likewise, 'Dope' literalises Marx's famous 'opium of the masses' metaphor. Opening with a kind of prelude – 'ray light morning fire lynch yet/uuuuuuu, yester-pain in dreams comes again. race-pain, people our people our people everywhere' – the poem turns into a dramatic monologue, complete with stage directions, satirising the pacifying 'common sense' explanations of an evangelical Christian preacher who refuses to face up to the causes of such pain:

It must be the devil
 It must be the devil
 it must be the devil
 (shakes like evangelical sanctify
 shakes tambourine like evangelical sanctify in heat)

[...] must be the devil, going to heaven after i die, after we die
 everything gonna be different, after we die we aint gon be
 hungry, ain gon be pain, ain gon be sufferin wont go thru this
 again, after we die, after we die owooo! owowooo!
 after we die, its all gonna be good, have all the money we
 need after we die, have all the food we need after we die
 have a nice house like the rich folks, after we die, after we die, after we
 die, we can live like rev ike, after we die, hallelujah, hallelujah, must be
 the devil, it ain capitalism, it aint capitalism, it aint capitalism,
 naw it ain that, jimmy carter wdnt lie, 'lifes unfair' but it aint capitalism
 must be the devil, owow!¹⁰⁶

Ironised in this poem, incantation and repetition are more often used 'to raise and to popularise'.¹⁰⁷ This is the conclusion to the poem 'Like, This is What I Meant!'

So that even in our verse
 the irresistible tide of revolution
 is unleashed
 yes
 unleashed

So that even
 in our verse
 this Red Explosion
 is unleashed

Yeh
 unleashed
 So that even
 in our
 verse
 even in
 our dancing
 even in
 our song
 yeh
 in our pure lover song



(repeat as song)

REVOLUTION!!!¹⁰⁸

The performance instruction, ‘repeat as song’, attests to the temporal openness of this call: it could go on for as long as necessary, exacerbating the build-up to the final, capitalised ‘REVOLUTION!!!’ Eliding the verb emphasises the focus on action: art as verb rather than noun, process rather than product.¹⁰⁹

Such action is fundamentally collaborative – this work needs an audience to confirm or deny its message. In the introduction to *Hard Facts*, Baraka writes: ‘The question of the audience is key, is central to the work. “For Whom” is the problem as Mao Tse-tung sounded it. For whom does one write, the audience standing there as you compose, to whom, for whom, it is directed.’¹¹⁰ Baraka’s performative calls are ready to be actualised by their occasions of composition and performance: books, rallies, marches, addresses to college students, party meetings, political conventions. These poems urgently call to the audience to confirm or deny their claims: ‘Get a quick consensus, on that’, as he puts it in ‘When We’ll Worship Jesus’. In ‘Against Bourgeois Art’, Baraka repeatedly calls for ‘someone’ to join him in his observations of the white American art world, itself a tool in the American Cultural Cold War:

[...] Is there somebody here to record this? [...] Is
there someone, here, to get this down? Can I get a, like they say, witness.
An eye that can see through this here.¹¹¹

In a pose of mock-disbelief, Baraka’s appeals for a revolutionary art and politics are appeals to common sense, hammering against the shibboleths of avant-garde art and the norms of late 1970s capitalism. While ‘Revolution sweeps the world, Bourgeois artists stare at crumbs of dust in the light’; ‘it is the state, bulshitting/on the wall’.

As wild a motherfucking joint as america is
somebody should get this shit down, otherwise no one will believe it.
Get it down
Get it on the record

The poems seek completion in their audience, and the translation of political aspirations to political action. In his 1964 essay ‘Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall’, Baraka denounced the separation of self-enclosed art objects from the live processes of thought, feeling, performance and creation.¹¹² A decade later, his Beat-influenced focus on spontaneity was developed and expanded by a mature conception of the relation between art and politics, ‘unity gained thru struggle’.¹¹³ Baraka’s Marxist poetry is a vital contribution to debates on the political role of art, the building of cross-racial unity, and the relation of local struggles to world revolution. Given the recent scholarship and renewed interest in the New Communist

Movement, and in internationalist Marxisms and feminisms such as those of Walter Rodney, Claudia Jones, Rosa Guy and Sarah E. Wright, it is to be hoped that further work will be done in this field, to which the present volume forms a valuable contribution. Remembering these writers' and activists' participation in global anti-fascism and anti-imperialism reminds us of revolutionary possibilities that are too often passed over. Such work remains a necessary, reactive and passionate response to injustice, 'an eye that can see through this here'.

Notes

- 1 Amiri Baraka, *Revolutionary Party, Revolutionary Ideology*, CAP (Congress of Afrikan People) Position Paper, CAP Midwest Regional Meeting, Chicago, 31 March 1974 (Newark, NJ: CAP, 1974). This chapter emerges from a paper at 'The Red and the Black – The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic' conference, Institute for the Black Atlantic, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK, October 2017. My thanks to David Austin, Asad Haider, Max Elbaum, Komozi Woodard, Michael Simanga and Daniel Widener for their insights.
- 2 For NCM historiography, see further the following (partial) list of examples: Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2018 [2002]); Asad Haider, 'Unity: Amiri Baraka and the Black Lives Matter Movements', *Lana Turner Journal*, 8 (2015), <https://web.archive.org/web/20160308193224/http://lanaturnerjournal.com/contents/unity-amiri-baraka-and-the-black-lives-matter-movements> (accessed 9 November 2021); Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, 'Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution' in Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen (eds), *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 97–154; Mae Ngai, 'Democracy, Self-Determination, and Revolution: Baraka's Communist Writings in the 80s' in Haki Madhubuti, Michael Simanga, Sonia Sanchez, and Woodie King Jr with Gwendolyn Mitchell (eds), *Brilliant Flame! Amiri Baraka: Poetry, Plays & Politics for the People* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 2018), 428–438; Paul Saba (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Anti-Revisionism Online*. Marxists.org, www.marxists.org/history/erol/erol.htm (accessed 3 August 2021); and *Unity Archive Project: The Archive of the League of Revolutionary Struggle 1978–1990*, <https://unityarchiveproject.org/> (accessed 3 August 2021).
- 3 For 'lyric necessity', see Amiri Baraka, *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, ed. Charlie Reilly (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994); for 'class struggle in music', Amiri Baraka (with David Murray and Steve McCall), *New Music, New Poetry* (LP, India Navigation, 1981).
- 4 Baraka, quoted in Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a 'Populist Modernism'* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 250.

- 5 Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 14–15 [afterwards cited as Baraka, *Autobiography*]; Claudia Moreno Pisano (ed.), *Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 60.
- 6 Amiri Baraka, *Selected Poetry* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 103.
- 7 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 165, 173.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 9 For more on these activities, see David Grundy, *A Black Arts Poetry Machine: Amiri Baraka and the Umbra Poets* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 35–45, 65–66.
- 10 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 267.
- 11 “‘Unity and Struggle’ – History of the Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M)”, *Forward*, 3 (January 1980), 12–139 and online, www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-3/rcl-history/chapter-1.htm (accessed 3 August 2021).
- 12 Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1–3; Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 123–124.
- 13 Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 119–120.
- 14 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 357, 433.
- 15 Amiri Baraka, *Raise Race Rays Raze: Essays since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1971), 130.
- 16 Amiri Baraka (ed.), *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 93–95, 97, 99.
- 17 Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 116–122; Baraka, *Autobiography*, 278–280, 289–291, 305.
- 18 See Fanon Che Wilkins, ‘Dispelling The Romance With Armed Struggle: Owusu Sadaukai and FRELIMO Guerillas in “Liberated Mozambique,” 1971’, unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Puerto Rico Convention Center and the Caribe Hilton, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2014; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Street Press, 2002), 104; Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 111–113; Baraka, *Conversations*, 443–444.
- 19 Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 254; Amiri Baraka, *Hard Facts (Excerpts)* (Newark, NJ: People’s War, 1975), 18–19. Published in revised/expanded edition in Baraka, *Selected Poetry*, 235–273.
- 20 Amiri Baraka, ‘Afrikan Revolution’, *Black World*, May 1973, 44–48. Reprinted as a pamphlet by Jihad, and in Baraka, *Selected Poetry*, 230–235.
- 21 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 298.
- 22 Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 101–102.
- 23 For more on the Sixth PAC, see Fanon Che Wilkins, “‘A Line of Steel’: The Organisation of the Sixth Pan-African Congress and the Struggle for International Black Power, 1969–1974’ in Dan Berger (ed.), *The Hidden*

- 1970s: *Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 97–114.
- 24 Clairmont Chung (ed.), *Walter A. Rodney: A Promise of Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 71–78.
- 25 Baraka, *Conversations*, 309.
- 26 Baraka, *Hard Facts*, 34.
- 27 Baraka, *Conversations*, 309.
- 28 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 309.
- 29 Baraka, ‘Some Questions About the Sixth Pan-African Congress’, *Black Scholar* (October 1974), 42–6, at 45; Anthony James Radcliff, ‘Liberation at the End of a Pen: Writing Pan-African Politics of Cultural Struggle’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009, 244–245; Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 120.
- 30 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 312.
- 31 Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 103.
- 32 Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 138–139.
- 33 Amiri Baraka, ‘Black Liberation: Socialist Revolution’ (1975) in *Daggers and Javelins: Essays 1974–1979* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 88–101. Published in abbreviated form as ‘Why I Changed My Ideology’, *Black World*, July 1975, 30–43, 133, and in further revised form in *Selected Plays and Prose* (New York: William Morrow, 1979).
- 34 Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 86.
- 35 Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (eds), *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2, 3, 5, 9–10.
- 36 Ratcliff, ‘Liberation at the End of a Pen’, 246–248; Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 122–124, 180–184; Baraka, *Autobiography*, xvi–xix, xxv, 421–426; Gore et al., *Want to Start a Revolution?*, 20n.4; Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 138–142.
- 37 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 425. Amina Baraka’s own neglected poetry is likewise an important contribution to the Black Marxist tradition. See Amina Baraka, ‘Red Poem’ (as Sylvia Jones), *Forward*, 3 (January 1980), 151–152; Gabrielle David (ed.), *Blues in All Hues: Poetry of Amina Baraka* (New York: 2Leaf Press, 2014); *Amina Baraka and the Red Microphone* (ESP-Disk, 2017).
- 38 See Torrie Hester, Mary E. Mendoza, Deirdre Moloney and Mae Ngai, ‘Immigration’s Border-Enforcement Myth’, *New York Times*, January 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/28/opinion/immigrations-border-enforcement-myth.html (accessed 3 August 2021) and Torrie Hester, Mary E. Mendoza, Deirdre Moloney and Mae Ngai, ‘Now the Trump Administration is Trying to Punish Legal Immigrants for Being Poor’, *Washington Post*, 9 August 2018.
- 39 Paul Saba, ‘Lessons from One Left to the Next: *Revolution in the Air* Reissued’, *Viewpoint*, July 2018, www.viewpointmag.com/2018/07/19/lessons-from-one-left-to-the-next-revolution-in-the-air-reissued/ (accessed 3 August 2021); Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 8.

- 40 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 312; ‘Council Weighing Newark Taxi Rise’, *New York Times*, 15 June 1974, www.nytimes.com/1974/06/15/archives/council-weighing-newark-taxi-rise-30-rate-increase-possible-under.html (accessed 3 August 2021).
- 41 Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 98–99, 142–146; Mae Ngai, ‘What do You Mean When You Say “Maoist”?’, *Guardian Weekly*, 29 January 1986 (available from Marxists.org: www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/ngai-maoist.pdf (accessed 3 August 2021)); Saba, ‘Lessons from One Left to the Next’.
- 42 Amiri Baraka, ‘Raise! Sectarianism, Undermining, Secret Agents and Struggle’, *Unity and Struggle*, December 1974, 16.
- 43 Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*, 136, 142.
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