

A VOICE OF PROTEST IN 'GOD BLESS AMERICA' AND 'SOMEBODY BLEW UP AMERICA': A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HAROLD PINTER AND AMIRI BARAKA

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Abstract

Literature of Protest proclaims the voice for the plight of enslaved, deprived, victimized and marginalized people. Both Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones) and Harold Pinter through their Poetry have evoked the voice of protest against racism and violence respectively. Specifically both of them have targeted America. Harold Pinter has ironically voiced his protest against atrocities of war on the contrary Amiri Baraka has castigated violence and racism executed by America. The current paper aims at comparing and analyzing the two selected poems of Pinter and Baraka. They meet commonly to protest America's game of violence and racism through the poems as "God Bless America" (2003) and "Somebody Blew Up America" (2002). Both Pinter and Baraka's use of language, style, diction, form, themes, religion, culture and conflicts create difference in their mindsets but their approach provides commonality towards their protesting voice of America.

Key Words: protest, violence, racism, atrocities, war...

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- **Introduction:**

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) has a long standing literary carrier as an Afro-American Poet, dramatist, novelist and music critic. He received PEN open Book award in 2008 and also known for controversial tenure as Poet-Laureate of New Jersey, during which he wrote a poem "Somebody Blew Up America?". Amiri also went through accusation of anti-Semitism. He was formerly known as **LeRoi Jones** and **Imamu Amear Baraka**. Amiri's poem "Somebody Blew Up America?" created much controversy and criticism for him as the protesting content of the poem and reference to blow of WHO in America. On the other hand, Harold Pinter (1930-2008) was also well known figure of Post-Modern period of English Literature. He won 2005 Noble Prize for his utmost contribution to English Literature and 2004 Wilfred Owen Poetry Award for his "War" Poems. He was also a bold voice who protested foreign policies and brutality of America against gulf countries through his political activism as well as war poetry. His one of the poems "God Bless America" from his 2003 War collection shows his protest for violence.

- **Amiri's Voice of Protest in "Somebody Blew Up America":**

Baraka's career covers nearly fifty years and his topics range from Black Liberation and White Racism. The poem begins with how Black Americans have suffered from domestic terrorism since being kidnapped into US chattel slavery, e.g., by Slave Owners, US & State Laws, Klan, Skin Heads, Domestic Nazis, Lynching, denial of rights, national oppression, racism, character assassination, historically, and at this very minute throughout the US. The relevance of this to Bush call for a war on Terrorism, is that Black people feel we have always been victims of terror, governmental and general, so we cannot get as frenzied and hysterical as the people who while asking us to dismiss our history and contemporary reality to join them, in the name of a shallow patriotism in attacking the majority of people in the world, especially people of color and in the third world. Baraka proclaims further;

Actually, in my focus on various forces of terror Afro Americans and other oppressed people of the world have suffered, slavery, colonialism, Imperialism, Neo neo-colonialism, National Oppression, the ADL disingenuously makes no mention of my probing into the creators of the holocaust.

Baraka's protest of racism is clearly seen in the lines;

It wasn't
the gonorrhea in costume
the white sheet diseases
That have murdered black people
Terrorized reason and sanity
Most of humanity, as they pleases (SBA).

Amiri has indirectly attacked on the brutal war activities of American raising history and repeated question with 'Who' which indicates America. In the following stanza it can be easily traced.

Who killed the most niggers
Who killed the most Jews
Who killed the most Italians
Who killed the most Irish
Who killed the most Africans
Who killed the most Japanese
Who killed the most Latinos
Who/Who/Who (SBA)

Amiri's protest for colour discrimination reflects his identity as an activist. The language in the poem show his quest for peace and exposition of reality. Baraka has used direct reference in the poem for more clarity to the readers.

Who made Bush president
Who believe the confederate flag need to be flying
Who talk about democracy and be lying
WHO/ WHO/ WHOWHO/
Who the Beast in Revelations
Who 666
Who decide
Jesus get crucified
Who the Devil on the real side
Who got rich from Armenian genocide
Who the biggest terrorist
Who change the bible
Who killed the most people
Who do the most evil
Who don't worry about survival

Who have the colonies
Who stole the most land
Who rule the world
Who say they good but only do evil
Who the biggest executioner

• **Pinter's Voice of Protest in "God Bless America":**

Pinter's another anti-war poem 'God Bless America' from his collection *War* published in 2003. The poem like *American Football* is a satiric picture of horrors of war. As Ezard characterizes that Pinter's anti-war poems, in which he takes action as an outspoken critic of war in Iraq as well as other hostilities, combine literal and symbolic meanings (*The Guardian*). The poem assimilates religious and elegiac tone to enact a world in which American military's global ambition and near-global reach are both sanctioned by an exclusively Christian deity (Basil 150).

To begin with title of the poem, it signifies ironical blessings to US foreign policies which undertake war to overpower the gulf countries in the name of terrorism. Pinter's noble lecture throws light on facts:

The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public (ATP EP 8-9)

The poem describes the scenario of awful landscape of deads where joyful Yanks parade in order to have their food. Yanks here refer to Americans who are again on their usual mission of killing.

The speaker says:
Here they go again
The Yanks in their armoured parade
Chanting their ballads of joy
As they gallop across the big world
Praising America's God. (War GBA np)

These Yanks on their mission sing the songs of power which they distribute across the world in order to have praise for their God. The groom reality behind the lines suggests US foreign policies which includes the weapon of war that does violence at mass level. Pinter describes:

The gutters are clogged with the dead
The ones who couldn't join in
The others refusing to sing
The ones who are losing their voice
The one who've forgotten the tune (War GBA np)

The material reality is that these Yanks inflict violence to those who couldn't join, so the gutters are clogged with the dead. The intensity of structural violence combines the vision of devastation and death of those who couldn't join, those who "refuse to sing along"- they couldn't emphasize their exclusion from any potential choice or empowerment and who have lost their voices and have 'forgotten the tune' Taking this into account, the dystopian landscape and parade of death are mapped out in such a way that the reader is ultimately subsumed within the apocalyptic scene (Basil 151). The great insightful comedian George Carlin comment on American war policy some two decades ago during the first Gulf War "We like war...we are good at it!... we are not good at anything else anymore...can't give good education to the kids or health care to the old, but we can bomb the shit of out any country (*The Times of India 2013*)". Pinter portrays the heads rolling onto the sand with horrid images of eyes that have gone out and the nose that only sniffs the odour of the dead while 'all the dead air is alive with the smell of America's God.

The riders have whips which cut.
Your head rolls onto the sand
Your head is a pool in the dirt
Your head is a stain in the dust
Your eyes have gone out and your nose
Sniffs only the pong of the dead (War GBA np)

The above stanza makes sense of American military power and brutality through the voice of anonymous speaker. Here the question of humanity arises but when it comes to State power it is stabilizing peace among nations. *War* is a scream in the night that echoes down corridors of silence (Gardner). Pinter rages with the futility of a latter day prophet who knows that God is not only dead, but more frightful, that he is an American who is deaf, as well:

And all the dead air is alive
With the smell of America's God (War GBA np)

Pinter criticizes American hypocrisy in the context of torture exerted in war. His fury at the Western democracies is illustrated as he associates the odor of corpses with the smell of *America's God*. His powerful denunciation of the hypocrisy of American governments is exemplified almost in every line (Dilek 130). His Iraq debate exposes some political realities: The disclosures of torture in Iraq should come as no surprise to anybody. The Americans have been exporting torture for years. They have been teaching torture techniques to military representatives of various dictatorships at Fort Benning in Georgia for a very long time. Fort Benning was called the School of Americas but was actually known as the 'School of torture'. They practice it themselves at home, in the vast gulag of prisons across the United States where over two million people are held in custody, the majority black. (Pinter *Iraq debate*)

‘God Bless America’ is characterized with horrifying images of war and truths of war. Pinter has done religification of politics since American soldier’s act of violence is presented as chanting for God which represents America’s authority in power. Pinter systematically bifurcate the premises of art and truth though they are linked.

...art is driven by the search for a truth which remains elusive while politics, as currently practiced, is driven by the creation of palpable fictions even though there is a bedrock truth...as a dramatist he argues that ‘search for truth’ can never stop; and he is ultimately claiming that the same rigour should be applied to the rhetoric, evasions and downright lie used by politicians. (Billington HP 422-23)

The image of ‘dead’ stands for decimated bodies of victims clogged in gutters gives threat to eyes of readers. Further the imagery of ‘head’ is metaphorized as ‘pool in the dirt’ and ‘stain in the dust’ describes dehumanization of body. Similarly, the poem confronts emergent simulacra of war with the kind of force that gets lost in these mediated signs adulteration of the real of violence and death (Patton 7-8). Pinter significantly compares and contrasts the ‘dead air’ and ‘alive America’s God’ to convey the political breach of power which carries whip to cut the heads that refuse to join it. Pinter’s anger towards human ridden US policies shows his political resistance and urge for peace. His poem ‘*The Old Days*’ (1996) blows the voice of peace, Just kill them.

Well, my wife wanted peace.
And so did my little children.
So we killed all the lefties
To bring peace for our little children.
Anyway there was no problem.
Anyway they’re all dead anyway. (VV 193)

• **Conclusion :**

In this way the common ground for these two outstanding writers of 21st century was peace for world, protest of Oppression, suppression, racism and war or violence. Their use of language in both poems is an attack on American war activities and threat to the world. Pinter’s use of violent language adds to the war oriented atmosphere of the poem. The phrases like ‘armoured parade’, ‘clogged with the dead’, ‘losing voice’, ‘whips which cut’ and ‘sniffs the pong of the dead’ demonstrate Pinter’s poetic sensibilities which remarkably tuned in his anti-war poetry and picturization of physical violence through violent vocabulary. In the same way Amiri used the phrases like terrorized, murdered, genocide, owned the slave ship, Who rape your ma Who lynched your pa, killed niggers create picture of brutality and violence done to powerless. So Pinter and Amiri are great voice of protest in literature of 21st century.

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