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SUBVERSION OF HEGEMONIES IN SUZAN-LORI PARKS'S THE AMERICA PLAY

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DEDICATION

To my late mother, Kounou Etoga, and her late sisters–Ngono Etoga and Ambassa Etoga.

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ABSTRACT

This study, entitled “Subversion of Hegemonies in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *The America Play*,” examines how Parks subverts the different hegemonies in *The America Play* to achieve a new order and a new world. The work further reveals how the playwright deconstructs traditional dramatic conventions, European American historiography, the language system, the traditional patriarchal family set-up and the American Dream as an element of American ideology. It also argues that the playwright’s peculiar dramatic art can be explored to render drama teaching more effective in high school. Written against the backdrop of New Historicism and Postmodernism, the work proves that Parks creates a new world in a bid to reinstate the relegated African American by subverting the aforementioned hegemonies in *The America Play*. Far from being a separatist from norms, Parks recommends unity of races for a better America. Thus, this work displays the fact that drama can be used as an effective means by which suppressed minorities can challenge status quo.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude, intitulée «Subversion of Hegemonies in Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play*» examine comment Parks subvertit les différents hégémonies dans «*The America Play*» pour obtenir un nouvel ordre et, par extension, créer un nouveau monde. Ce travail révèle en outre comment l'analyse affiche la subversion des hégémonies telles que les normes dramatiques traditionnelles, l'historiographie des blancs américain, le système de langue, le prototype de la famille traditionnelle et le rêve américain considéré comme un élément de l'idéologie américaine. Il argumente aussi le fait que la spécificité de l'art dramatique de Parks peut améliorer l'enseignement du théâtre au second cycle du secondaire. Recourant aux théories de la Nouvelle-historicisme et du Postmodernisme, ce travail se fonde sur l'hypothèse que Parks crée un nouveau monde dans le but de rétablir les afro-américains souvent relégués au second plan en renversant les hégémonies suscitées qui prévaut dans «*The America Play*». Loin d'être une anticonformiste, Parks recommande l'unité entre les races pour un Amérique meilleur. Ainsi, ce travail met en évidence le fait que le théâtre peut être utilisé comme un moyen efficace par lequel les minorités réprimées peuvent contester le statut quo.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The socio-political and cultural changes in American life came with a reawakening on the literary scene. These changes involved new polemical forms of writing particularly as it challenged the American Dream and questioned traditional values and beliefs. This new writing style raised acute universal questions and tensions; thereby creating a new literary convention. The new literary style began with common trends as tales on religious redemption and abolition struggles to more universal themes like identity, love and the search for self. It became a forum to question all conventions. Ideas like the American Dream; and traditional values like the family and history as well as belief systems are what we commonly categorize as hegemonies. The questioning of white hegemonies, thus, became the order of the day and the major theme in most African American debates.

Literary writers and critics of underprivileged peoples questioned the world views on hegemonies in a bid to regain prominence and, consequently, their lost identity. They questioned the dominant forces' narratives that perceived the world from a hegemonic perspective which placed these forces at the head of every institution. In the domain of religion, Protestantism was the dominant religion (not from the point of view of the ideologies they embraced) but mainly because it was the religion of the fore-fathers of European Americans and this religious denomination gave them authority over their "subjects." As far as literature was concerned, most narratives aimed at maintaining their subjects under control. They were colonially inclined narratives. The family was seen as an institution in which the father was the ultimate leader while the wife was relegated to the periphery with a chauvinist discourse that pinned her down to her biological endowment as Michel Foucault rightly puts it (Foucault 155).

Historically speaking, the discourse was largely in favour of a white community that was said to have founded America. Most of the historical figures that featured in the history of America were of the white race. These narratives always gave the impression that there existed a superior and an inferior race. A new writing style therefore emerged to destroy all prejudices. In an attempt to reinstate the black identity, African American writers developed a writing style that reflected their past experiences: their history. It was the advent of the new aesthetics. To arrive at this new aesthetics, writers began to claim their historical heritage that had been long erased to suit the white narratives.

However, it was realized that most African American writings were characterized by a tone of victimization. They all denounced the marginalization of the “Blacks.” They had common themes and, sometimes, the same style. It became difficult to distinguish their writings from each other’s. This was true until Suzan-Lori Parks came in to suggest a new mainstream that will no more depict the Africans as victims but will rather restore their history in a bid to reconstruct a society of their own. In the wake of the nineteenth-century, militant African American writers emerged. Parks features amongst writers of this category of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She however distinguishes herself from the majority of these writers because she creates her own world, style and aesthetics. She believes that, by placing the “Blacks” as victims of a racist society, African American writers were simply admitting their inferiority to the Whites. Rather, she resolves to overthrow the established world views in her writings and this engenders the subversion of hegemonies.

The playwright’s interest in discussing fundamental hegemonies relevant for the building up of a nation already predisposes us to foresee an eminent overturn of these hegemonies since she is a doubly subjugated subject: by her gender and her race. The essence of this endeavour is not merely to examine how Parks restores the Africans’ identity or reinstates the Blacks in the history of America in *The America Play*, but rather to show how she builds a new world based on the Black’s values: a world in which everybody is considered as being equal. In analysing *The America Play*, the work attempts to capture the new world as perceived by Parks. To do this, the study shows that contention on hegemonies in *The America Play* paves the way for the creation of a new world void of prejudices and biases. Finally, it portrays the writer’s endeavour to reinstate a long erased history of the African Americans in a bid to cleanse the wrongs and offer a new start to the victims of historical manipulations. Answers to the following questions will make it possible for the work to achieve this purpose:

- What are the existing hegemonies in America that Parks evokes in *The America Play*?
- How does the playwright subvert these hegemonies in the text under study?
- Which new world, order and aesthetics result from Parks’s subversion of these hegemonies?
- How can the theatrical elements in Parks’s *The America Play* be used to improve drama-teaching in secondary school?

This work is, therefore, based on the hypothetical contention that Parks creates a new world in a bid to reinstate the relegated African American by subverting existing hegemonies in *The America Play*. To arrive at this, she resorts to fragmentation, deconstruction, irony, allegory amongst others which are common trends of the postmodernist theory. She thus deconstructs dramatic conventions, European American historiography, language, traditional family prototypes and ideals such as the American Dream. She consequently arrives at a new aesthetics, a new literary creation and, consequently, a new world.

One of the things that prompted the choice of Parks's work, in this study, is the fact that she is amongst the prominent African American playwrights today. Besides, her contribution to the development of a new literary aesthetics is very important. The choice of her play is therefore appropriate for the discussion of major upheavals in the literary creation and presentation of African Americans. Moreover, since this work is concerned with the subversion of hegemonies, *The America Play* seems judicious given that it presents all the hegemonies necessary for the creation of a new world. Such hegemonies pertain to dramatic conventions, history, language, family and the American Dream which is an element of American ideology. Despite the fact that she individually discusses most of these hegemonies in some of her works, she sees the need to bring them together in one text, *The America Play*. This study is therefore limited to the analysis of this play.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that Parks uses theatre to make room for a black presence. Consequently, she emphasizes the utility of drama in the assertion of the rights of oppressed minorities. This is specifically relevant to the linguistic Anglophone community in Cameroon who, like the African Americans in America, is a minority group threatened by greater powers. This study further valorises the literary aesthetics present in postmodern drama which is presently of much interest to scholarship. Better still, this use of theatre appeals to the globalized world since minority groups under menace can reclaim their lost identities by the same means.

At this point, it is important to define some key concepts that are pivotal to this research endeavour. The terms are "hegemonies" and "subversion." To arrive at our work's definition of these key terms, they shall be examined etymologically, linguistically and literarily. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the term "subversion" is derived from the Latin word "subversiōnem" (stemming from subversiō) which means overthrowing. In ordinary usage, the idea of subversion seems to be actively

empowered as a conscious protest or insurgency against the authority of a dominant or ruling elite. This protest is most often envisaged from a cultural perspective wherein one culture tries to assert its identity to avoid being engulfed by dominant cultures. In its etymology, the term “subversion” is defined as actions designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or moral of a governing authority. Subversion here is viewed as the overthrow of the dominant power by the subjugated counterpart. This definition is credited for its discussion of relevant aspects to our study such as political or moral overthrow of the governing authority. Subversion is more or less regarded in this work as being a moral or political overthrow. Though this definition presents a generalized view of what subversion entails, it fails to highlight some important aspects inherent in its process.

Some critics, like Irene Rima Makaryk in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, say that *Subversion is best understood over against the concept of ideology. In this context, subversion would represent the articulation or “becoming visible” of any repressed, forbidden or oppositional interpretations of the social order.* (Makaryk 636)

Like Makaryk, Roger Trinquier defines subversion as a term that could be lumped together with modern warfare. He defines subversion as being interlocking systems of actions, political, economic, psychological and military that aim at the overthrow of established authority in a country (Trinquier 6). These definitions present a good understanding of what the process of subversion is all about. Following these two critics, subversion is more of an ideological endeavour than any other thing. They both present the concept of subversion as the overthrow of whole governments. Their definitions add a political dimension to the process of subversion.

As a political tool, the term involves a kind of systematicity. By this, we mean that the process is planned, organized and, sometimes, supplanted by stages. This systematic perspective is what is relevant to the analysis of Parks’s play in this study. In her previous works, Parks laid the foundation of most of the hegemonies discussed in *The America Play*. This endeavour gets to its peak with this latter play. As a matter of fact, she has made use of the systematic realm of subversion to achieve a goal that is yet to be explored in this research undertaking. This is the case with *The Death of the Last Black Man* or *Topdog/Underdog*. The present study focuses on this polemical dimension of these definitions to effectively discuss Parks’s upheaval of established orders in *The America Play*. The dramatist’s endeavour to

subvert the established norms is done via an ideological and covert means as Trinquier clearly points out.

A suitable definition of this term to fit the purpose of this study can be derived from a blend of the above definitions. Subversion refers to an attempt to transform the established social order and its structures of power, authority and hierarchy. It can also allude to the process by which the values and principles of a system in place are contradicted or reversed. In this light, this dissertation examines the different spheres of influence of the white Americans which Parks wishes to overthrow. This is handled by Chapter One of the work. As earlier mentioned, some of these spheres of influence include dramatic conventions, history, language, religion and the traditional family set-up among others. It is however worth noting that the act of subversion does not necessarily imply a dreary encounter. As an ideological encounter, it requires subtlety. This is the more reason why Parks adopts a light and playful tone together with a highly stylistic approach.

Meanwhile, the term “Hegemony” is from the Greek term “hēgemonía” which means supremacy or leadership, chief command. It can be said that it is the political, economic, or military predominance or control of one state over others. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, “Hegemony”—which was initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within a confederation—is now generally understood to mean domination by consent (106). Hence, hegemony is fundamentally the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted (not by force or even necessarily by active persuasion) but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media. By these means, the ruling class’s interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted.

Besides these definitions, there is that of Antonio Gramsci in *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*. Gramsci defines “hegemony” as domination, not merely through instruments of violence (the police, the army), but also through the control of knowledge and culture. Since language is the major means through which we can achieve subjugation, Gramsci’s definition implies the use of language by the dominant powers to display their culture which they impose on their subjects. The political, cultural, intellectual and social dimensions of the idea of hegemony embedded in this definition are all relevant to this work. Consequently, this definition aptly suits the context of this study since it captures the essence of hegemony which is to dominate (not only through the use of weapons) but through ideologies and intellectual

aptitudes. Thus, it includes all the aspects salient to our study such as the political, cultural, intellectual and social aspects.

The above definitions of hegemony and subversion give a proper orientation which both aims at examining the different artifacts of white hegemony that Parks evokes and subverts in *The America Play*. The notion of hegemonic subversions therefore entails the overthrow of pre-established social orders and their structures of power, authority and hierarchy, in a bid to present a different view of what is the real nature of things. In the context of *The America Play*, Parks questions the white hegemony obvious in a number of domains already mentioned and projects what she thinks the world or America in particular should be. The choice of these domains was not done haphazardly; they were rather chosen because they are the foundation for the creation of any new world.

In order to successfully undertake a critical appraisal of Parks's *The America Play* from the above perspective, New Historicism and Postmodernism serve as the theoretical backing of this work. While New Historicism identifies the social realities that shaped *The America Play*, Postmodernism discusses some aspects of postmodern literature inherent to the play. These postmodern traits like fragmentation, simulacra, word play, irony and deconstruction will be highlighted as part of Parks's unconventional and subversive art. The subsequent paragraphs will discuss tenets of these theories that make the proper analysis of the play possible.

New Historicism emerged around the 1980's as a reaction to New Criticism. Brook Thomas attempted a definition of this theory as any sort of historical method as seen in "The New Historicism and Other Old Fashioned Topics" (Brook 91). Following this general definition, New Historicism entails a new relationship to the literary past; new connections between literature and history. Brook's definition recognizes the power of rhetoric to shape history (Brook 5). Some proponents of this theory are Stephen Greenblatt, Louise Montrose, Jerome McGann, Michel Foucault and Robinson Forrester. They hold that a literary text is important. But to understand it, it should be studied and interpreted within the context of the author and the history of the critic. New historicism embraces the idea that as time changes, so does our understanding of literature too. So every literary work is a record of historical events that shaped its creation. In *The Beauty of Inflections*, Jerome McGann contends that

The governing context of all literary investigations must ultimately be an historical one. Literature is a human product, a humane art. It cannot be carried on (created),

understood (studied), or appreciated (experienced) outside of its definitive human context. The general science governing that human context is socio-historical. (McGann 63)

The above quotation simply highlights the fact that New Historicism involves a blend of general societal and biographical experiences. This implies that the author's biography and the social context combine to shape his literature. New historicists thus believe that the author is a non-negligible witness of happenings in his society and can therefore not write in a vacuum. This contradicts the formalist theory which regards literature as the unique mode of expression, and not as an extension of rhetoric, philosophy or history or again a social or psychological documentary as coined in *A History of Literary Criticism* by Habib M.A.R (Habib 760-762). Formalism thus regards literature as being form-governed (602). As the term "formalism" entails, its focus was on artistic forms and techniques as the basis of literary studies. The writer's works are thus real testimonies of his experiences. This theory is relevant to this study since it helps us trace the historical background of the play under study which Parks tries to expose. Moreover, it makes allowance for the work to scrutinize Parks's biographical experience as an African American and to shed light on the different orders she strives to subvert in her work.

Postmodernism was first identified as a theoretical discipline between the late 1970's and the early 1980's as a reaction against modernism deemed to be more traditional. Postmodernism represents an accumulated disillusionment with the promises of the Enlightenment project and its progress of science so central to modern thinking as rightly coined in an essay titled *From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: the Local Global Context* by Ihab Hassan. Some postmodernists include Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. One of the most well-known postmodernist concerns is "deconstruction," a theory for philosophy, literary criticism, and textual analysis developed by Jacques Derrida. The notion of a "deconstructive" approach implies an analysis that questions the already evident understanding of a text in terms of presuppositions, ideological underpinnings, hierarchical values, and frames of reference (Connor 1-19). A deconstructive approach further depends on the techniques of close reading without reference to cultural, ideological, moral opinions or information derived from an authority over the text. Such an authority could be the author.

Postmodernism is not so much a process of completion, then, as a complex manoeuvring between ending and renewal. To carry out this manoeuvre, philosophical postmodernism has performed a comprehensive demolition job on western orthodoxies. Knowledge is deemed questionable and it is no longer the job of philosophy to provide it. The human subject is dispossessed until it seems no longer to exist (perhaps it never did) and its philosophical corollary (humanism) is unmasked as a form of covert oppression. Narrative logic is broken down, removing one of the central organizing principles of western thought. The notion of the “real world” is permanently encased in quotation marks and even such an (apparently) uncomplicated matter as sexual difference is rendered illegitimate and misleading, while newer, more difficult ways of theorizing gender are opened up. What all of the above share is a resistance to totality (Connor 21).

Furthermore, Lyotard sees the breakdown of the narratives that formerly legitimized the status quo as an important aspect of the postmodern condition. This has resulted into the postmodernist’s rejection of grand narratives. Of course, modernists also questioned such traditional concepts as law, religion, subjectivity and nationhood; what distinguishes postmodernity from this modernist practice is that such questioning is no longer particularly associated with an avant-garde intelligentsia. Postmodern artists will employ pop and mass culture in their critiques and pop culture itself tends to play with traditional concepts of temporality, religion, and subjectivity. Think of the popularity of queer issues in various media forms or the tendency of Madonna videos to question traditional Christianity (“Like a Prayer”), gender divisions (“What It Feels like for a Girl”), capitalism (“Material Girl”), and so on. Whether such pop deconstructions have any teeth is one of the debates raging among postmodern theorists (Felluga 7).

Linda Hutcheon, in her books *The Politics of Postmodernism* and the *Poetics of Postmodernism*, has outlined some of the major aesthetic features of postmodern literature, particularly of what she terms “historiographic metafiction” (122-123). Her discussion of parody and irony has also been highly influential, helping scholars and students alike think through the value and effectiveness of various postmodern artistic forms. She thus provides a positive spin on the strategies of postmodern works. And Parks resorts to some of these aesthetic features in her highly postmodernist play.

To conclude, postmodernism tends to break free from societal norms and notions to adopt models that fit a local context— the construction of mini-narratives. Fragmentation,

deconstruction, irony, allegory are some of the tools it uses to revisit some preconceived thoughts of the West. This conceptual framework is therefore a judicious theoretical framework for a profound understanding of this work which aims at presenting the shift from conventional norms to a freer stance in all walks of life. Postmodernism attempts to fragment the biased historical records of “dominant” powers, authority or hierarchy and highlights the fact that there is existing simulacra of these very notions. Hence, the local and the contextualized replaces the absolute and/or the universal.

This study presently looks at the author’s biography which is indispensable to the understanding of this work. Suzan-Lori Parks was born in Fort Knox, Kentucky—on May 10, 1963—to Francis McMillan and Donald Parks. Raised as an army brat, she lived in six states before attending high school in Germany. Her various displacements enabled her to encounter different hegemonic powers and the evil of marginalization. This somehow prompted her to develop a writing style of protest marked with outrageous audacity as critics put it. Parks attended and graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1985 with a B.A. in English and German literature as pointed out in her biography (Minderovic 1-5) and many other biographical reviews. She studied under James Baldwin who encouraged her to become a playwright. Her audacity in writing was also incited by her marginalization by an English teacher who often discarded her works and even suggested that she should switch to another domain. It is on account of these biographical experiences that Parks’s works have audacious overtones of and poses as counter discourse.

Suzan-Lori Parks has received 11 awards. She was the first female African-American to receive the Pulitzer Prize for her play, *Topdog/Underdog*, in 2002. She has also received a number of grants including the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant in 2001. Some of her other works are *Pickling*, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* published in 1984, 1989 and 1992 respectively.

Her works have attracted both extreme praise and condemnation. The *Time Magazine* and *Vogue*, for instance, have written with respect to her art. The first has noted that “Her dislocating stage devices, stark but poetic language and fiercely idiosyncratic images transform her work into something haunting and wondrous” (Zoglin 62). Meanwhile, the *Vogue* observes that “she burst through every known convention to invent a new theatrical language, like a jive Samuel Beckett, while exploding American cultural myths and stereotypes along the way (3).” These remarks made by the *Time Magazine* and *Vogue*

suggest that Parks's works transgress writing conventions and forms. The contention of this work is that the aim of Parks's writings is not just to transgress forms. The dissertation strives to prove that it is a way of writing back to the dominant race.

With respect to this, Park Yong-Nam— in his dissertation *The Melting Pot where Nothing Melted: The Politics of Subjectivity in the Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks, Wendy Warsserstein, and Tony Kushner*— clearly points out that Parks's position towards the “black play” is inspired by her interest in the representation of African-American identity and history (1-7). In line with her viewpoint on the limiting perspective of the discourse of victimization, Yong-Nam's observation suggests that Parks creates her own discourse to raise this matter, combining implicit political statements with her omnipresent emphasis on theatre as a medium. In this work, emphasis is laid on the fact that Parks's aim is to arrive at a “new aesthetics.” She starts by reasserting the African-American identity (by restoring their history— long erased— in the history of America) and moves towards a new black identity. According to him, Parks is out to assert the self. It is worth noting that Parks's works actually began with the aim of redefining the self. Highlighting the ways in which she does so is part of the objectives of this dissertation.

Similarly, Shawn-Marie Garrett (in “The Possession of Suzan-Lori Parks”) highlights the recurrent themes in Parks's plays such as family, language and history. By making direct quotations of some of Parks's interviews, Garrett illustrates the fact that Parks dramatizes some of the most painful aspects of black experience that led to the erasure of the African American's history (23). Viewed from the prism of reconstruction, Parks's works pave the way for future African American assertive drama. This criticism is important because it clearly points out some of the hegemonies which this study analyses. Though it is not an exhaustive list, it is a foretaste of what will be found in the work. The assertive nature of her art equally creates a forum for the subversion of white European hegemony.

As Katy Ryan and other critics have pointed out that it seems that Parks is not only writing about America as such, but also about those who have been invisible in American history. She is not specifically writing about the famous president on the front cover of her book but about the people who were pushed into the background. By staging the *Lesser Known*, Parks is seemingly creating a space for African Americans in the great annals of history. In effect, in an interview with playwright Michele Pearce, Parks elaborately discusses her construction of history as she does not believe in the historiography of the dominant

culture: “I take issue with history because it doesn’t serve me, it doesn’t serve me because there isn’t enough of it. In this play, I am simply asking, ‘Where is history?’, because I don’t see it. I don’t see any history out there, so I’ve made some up” (Pearce 26). This quotation of Parks validates the claim of Ryan and others. She considers a prevalent lack of black historiography. Parks obviously does not believe in one true history. She is of the opinion that history can be formed or revised. That is why she adds that she creates history in her plays because she does not find any history (probably of the Black) out there. This writer’s flair for constructing and establishing a new order is one of the interests of this work.

The above reviews, in one way or the other, only highlight some of the major hegemonies presented by Parks in which this study is interested. As such, they serve as resource to this study. The criticisms of Garrett, Yong-Nam and others shed light on the various hegemonies dwelt on in Parks’s work. This research compliments the above criticisms by representing Parks’s aim of creating a new world and a new order. The work contends that Parks’s depiction of these hegemonies is a means of creating a new world for the African American community, long wronged by the historical discourses of Western ideologies.

This work comprises a general introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One focuses on the different existing hegemonies represented in Parks’s *The America Play*. It examines these hegemonies from the point of view of their global conceptions and highlights the kind of society in which Parks lived. This chapter is titled “Existing Hegemonies and the Emergent Society.” The second chapter is captioned “Towards a Paradigmatic Shift”. It sheds light on the subversion of these existing hegemonies. In this light, the chapter discusses Parks’s deconstruction of the existing power structures and the existing order. Chapter Three portrays the fact that the playwright’s hegemonic subversions eventually result into the creation of a new world and is hence entitled “Achievement of a New Order.” Chapter Four handles the pedagogic dimension of the study. In this chapter, the work shows how postmodernist theatre can enhance drama teaching in Secondary School. It has as title “The Pedagogic Relevance of Parks’s Dramatic Art.” The conclusion summarily captures the aim of the study, the conceptual framework on which it hinges and the main ideas raised in the work. Lastly, it suggests areas for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

EXISTING HEGEMONIES AND EMERGENT SOCIETY

As a new nation, America was founded on some key hegemonies. This chapter sets out to discuss the different hegemonies represented in Parks's *The America Play* from a New Historicist perspective. The chapter further examines the existing hegemonies from the point of view of their global conception as earlier mentioned in the conclusion of the general introduction. As pointed out by Shawn-Marie Garrett in "The Possessions of Suzan-Lori Parks, recurrent themes in Parks's works include family, language, and history (Garrett 22-26). These recurrent themes constitute the hegemonies the work focuses on in this chapter. Focus is therefore mainly on conventional dramatic conventions, the European American historiography, the language system, the traditional family set-up and the American Dream as an element of American ideology. For the purpose of organization, these hegemonies are first of all defined and then they are surveyed as emanations of America's historical experience. They are finally presented as they appear in Parks's *The America Play*. The chapter ends with a representation of the kind of society that emerges from this overview.

An early attempt to identify the basic principles of playwriting came from the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) in the *Poetics*. Aristotle's theories gradually came to be considered rules, and these have been applied through the years by many dramatists. As part of his discussion of tragedy, he describes what he considered to be the key elements of a successful play. Traditional drama falls within the period known as "Neoclassicism". The rules established during this period were called the "Neoclassical Rules of Drama". The five rules for producing acceptable drama were: verisimilitude, purity of the dramatic form, five act form, decorum and purpose of drama.

Every literary creation is regulated by certain rules. In the field of drama, these rules are termed "dramatic conventions". The term "dramatic conventions" is extremely broad and covers a multitude of aspects. They can therefore be seen as those rules and principles that govern the writing of a dramatic piece of work or the techniques and methods used by the playwright and director to create the desired stylistic effects. The conventions in drama can be broadly grouped such that we have traditional drama and modern drama. Traditional drama is always seen as drama that emerged during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. it is notably exemplified by Shakespearean and Sophoclean plays.

Common features that can be regarded as conventions of traditional plays are that they are generally about courtly life like the court of Queen Elizabeth in England. As such, the characters set on stage were people of noble birth like lords and nobles amongst others. Another classical influence on Elizabethan drama are the prescription from Aristotle's *Poetics* in which he prescribed the rules governing the writing of drama with regards to a tragedy. The plays were more expansive with more sub plots and introduced comic relief and the introduction of blood on stage. Also the political history of England and the growing sense of nationalism under Elizabeth I equally contributed to the development of this traditional drama since theatre houses served as channels of public education. The dramatist of the time drew from their history to produce plays that taught the audience the history of their nation. The plots were linear, settings were very significant and themes were related to domestic issues. These plays respected the unities of time, place and action. They were in the same place, lasted for at most 24hours and were restricted to a single action that could comprise a main and a sub-plot.

Needless to say, these rules are quite restrictive and limiting, and in fact, they echo the strong handed control of the French Academies, Cardinal Mazarin, and the French monarchs, Louis XIV-XVI. The advent of the 20th century and its wave of protest brought about changes in the field of literature, in general, and drama (in particular). This new wave was known as modernism. "Modernism was a predominantly European movement that developed as a self-conscious break from traditional artistic forms. It represents a significant shift in cultural sensibilities, often attributed to the fallout of World War I" (Eksteins 3). Modern drama greatly differs from traditional drama at the level of theme and style. Modern drama deals with elements such as realism, absurdism, naturalism and others in an attempt to give a faithful account of the changes in society.

Modern drama therefore refers to plays produced against the background of the 20th century experiences, especially the traumatic experiences of the two world wars. This type of drama deviates from the conventions (rules) established by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, that is the drama of the previous centuries. Modern playwrights experiment with new forms and styles so as to reflect the sufferings, frustration and hopelessness of the century. It is a highly symbolic type of drama. Common features of this drama include illogical and cyclical plots, settings that are always static and themes are linked to suffering, starvation, existentialist concerns and others. Labelled the Theatre of the Absurd, this drama places characters that are

pegs with a few exaggerated traits on stage. The language that they speak is also incomprehensible (Esslin 3-15).

These dramatic conventions become hegemonies when a play is denied universal recognition and even literary credit for failing to abide to the established norms. The rules elicited above fail to take into consideration the African oral form of literature. This form of literature is very poetic and translates some African traditional values that are disregarded by the European literary norms. This is the more reason why African literature, in general, and African American literature (in particular) has been absent from the literary field for some time. However, Parks's style is at the margin of traditional plays like that of Shakespeare that are usually structured in five acts in which the first act represents the dramatic expository, the second act presents the rising action, the third act shows the climax, the fourth act is the anti-climax and the fifth act is the resolution or denouement. She equally does not quite conform to the conventions of modern drama portrayed above. Her style shall be discussed in Chapter Two as a deconstructive endeavour.

White historiography also clearly emerges as hegemony in America in the play under study. With the allusion made to the 16th American president (Abraham Lincoln) and the Hall of Wonders where the parade of great historical figures takes place, it becomes evident that one of the hegemonies Parks subverts in her play is American historiography. This play, which centres on the unveiling of the historical events which led to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, presents in parallel American history from a racial point of view. In this way, we are presented with a character who traces the life of Abraham Lincoln and lays emphasis on his assassination. We are given a physical portrait of this great historical figure of the American society that the Lesser Known tries hard to impersonate.

But, besides the ridiculous simulation of the life of the Founding Father by the Foundling Father, Parks presents the American historiography that has been silent over the exploits achieved by African Americans. In the play, Lucy and the husband sit by the Great Hole of History to watch only white American figures parade by. This is thought-provoking as one wonders what history has recorded about African Americans. In effect, in *A Short History of the United States*, it is recorded that the arrival of the new settlers was marked by the establishment of colonies. Amongst the early settlers were “the ancestors of Franklin, the Adamases, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Abraham Lincoln” (Nevins and Commager 12). Looking at this historical record, no allusion is made to the ancestors of any African American family.

This absence of a black ancestral pageantry already prepares the ground for the absence of prominent African Americans in the history of America.

An examination of America's history shows that focus is on European American "heroes." The exploits of great European American figures are recorded extensively and celebrated. No record is made of African American heroes like Nat Turner and his peers. In American history, the major allusion made to the black folk is made in connection to slavery. The reason is that slavery is an undeniable fact of the history of America. It is rather impossible to talk of America without mentioning the slaves. But this history limits itself just to the woes of the African Americans during the Middle Passage and as slaves in America.

This deliberate silence over the history of African Americans is caused by racism. European Americans regarded their African American counterparts as sub-humans. That is the more reason why they were refused American citizenship. History thus became a weapon used by European Americans to totally dismiss any racial equality between Whites and Blacks.

In *The America Play*, this is highlighted in these terms:

Him and Her would sit by thuh lip uhlong with thuh others all in uh row cameras clickin and theyud look down into that Hole and see... Amerigo Vespucci himself made regular appearances. Marcus Garvey. Ferdinand and Isabella. Mary Queen of thuh Scots! Tarzan king of the apes! Washington Jefferson Harding and Millard Fillmore. Mistufer Columbus even. Oh they saw all the greats. Parading daily in thuh Great Hole of History. (Parks 1. 180)

The excerpt above suggests that only European American "great" figures paraded in front of the Lesser Known and his newly wedded wife, Lucy. People like Amerigo Vespucci, Mary Queen, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are all prominent Whites recorded in historical archives as having achieved one exploit or the other. And though the "black" Marcus Garvey is mentioned among these great historical figures, he was not a Black at heart.

Garvey agreed to the views of acclaimed European American political leaders like Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln that Blacks, though equal to Whites, were too different from the latter for the two races to live side-by-side in a harmonious society. That is why he championed the cause for the return of freed Blacks back to Africa. Meanwhile, the other white figures above range from those who discovered America to those who ruled it.

One of the historical figures discussed at length in this play under study is the sixteenth American president, Abraham Lincoln. The play offers a physical as well as a moral portrait of Lincoln. His political profile is also well portrayed. He is also credited for diverse handicraft skills (Parks 2. 185-186).

However, nothing has been recorded about their African American counterparts. In Elissa Haney's *The History of Black History*, it is stated that the silence on African American history was ruptured only in the 20th century. It is at this period that they gained "respectable presence in history books" (Haney 1). This means that American historiography has been silent on the Black's legacy to the nation for at least three centuries from when the first slaves were brought to the New World. That is the reason why most African American exploits are nowhere to be found. For example, no historical book has been written to celebrate Lucy Terry, an enslaved lady in 1746 who becomes the earliest known black American poet when she writes about the last American Indian attack on her village (Deerfield, Massachusetts). Her poem, *Bar's Fight*, was not published until 1855. Nor has history acknowledged Nat Turner, an enslaved African-American preacher who led the most significant slave uprising in an attempt to free slaves. He died in the process but his heroism is recorded nowhere.

The best history does is to label him a rebel. Apart from these aforementioned African Americans, there are other epitomes of Black greatness. For instance, there is Hiram Revels of Mississippi who was elected the country's first African-American Senator. To him, can be adjoined the fate of around 600 Blacks who served in Congress and state legislatures during the Reconstruction. The thousands of Blacks who fought during the Civil War but have never received recognition neither from the then President— Abraham Lincoln— and his cabinet, nor by historians are also worth being mentioned.

The history of America has therefore been a forum for deliberate discrimination against Blacks. While recording historical facts, white historiography has ensured the absence of Blacks. They have concentrated on celebrating any form of greatness in the White at the expense of black heroes. The omission and misrepresentation of African Americans in American history has resulted in the creation of a hegemony. Parks's *The America Play* subverts this white hegemony in the country's historical record.

The concept of language can be defined in general terms as a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar rules used by people in a particular country. As

language is a system of communication of a particular group, so does it have particular characteristics which distinguish it from another geographical area. In the American context, the language system varies according to regions. Three major regional variations of language can be identified namely: East Coast, Midwest and Midland varieties.

The East coast of America was the anchor area of the puritans who came from England. With the traditional groups that characterized these puritans, came a linguistic variety of English. The main features of Coastal speech can be traced to the speech of the English from the West Country who settled in Virginia after leaving England at the time of the English Civil War. As far as the Midwest is concerned, it can be situated around the borders between Canada and the United States. This region is characterized by its unique vowel shift. The Midwest or North Inland speech is characterized by influences from the German and Scandinavian settlers of the region (like "yah" for yes, pronounced similarly to "ja" in German, Norwegian and Swedish). The distinctive speech pattern of the Midwest sharply contrasts that of the Midland. The Midland is situated in between the North and South of America. Its mid-ward position entails that the Midlands speech bears some of the Northern and Southern speech characteristics. As coined in *The Story of English* "This sea voyage [...] provided a kind of language melting-pot in which the regional differences began to intermingle" (Mc Crum et al. 99).

American English can further be categorized into the white American variety and the African American variety of English. Here, the white variety is considered the standard language of American English whereas the African American variety is considered a "vernacular." According to Dan Mosser's notes on the origins of English in America, the origins of Black English (referred to variously as Black Vernacular English, African-American English, and Ebonics) are disputed. One theory holds that this variety of English developed from a pidgin that resulted from the conditions of the slave trade during which speakers of different African languages were thrown together and forced to communicate through a pidgin language. This pidgin was used by slave traders and slave owners to communicate with Blacks, and by Blacks of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other. Out of this developed a Black English creole spoken by the first generations of slaves born in North America. Another view holds that Black English results from the retention of British English features that have not been retained in other varieties of American English.

When one pauses to take a look at her biography as discussed in the general introduction, it is evident that Parks's linguistic deviations began right back in her school days. Her biography reveals the fact that the language she used to write in school was so uncommon that her teacher advised her to change her field of study and go to one that will not require her to write. It is possibly this stigmatization for the language she used that prompted her to write in this "uncommon" language which characterizes all her works and the play under study in particular. Once more, the status given to the white American English points to language as another means through which white hegemony is established and this stigmatization of Parks's language use. Another of such hegemonies is derived from traditional family prototypes.

In every society, the family unit is considered a pivotal institution for socializing children and creating a nation built on these socializing principles inculcated in these spheres. As a mainstream in many cultures, the family unit changes and evolves as culture does. Tricia Hussung rightly points out in an article entitled "The Evolution of the African American Structure" that mainstream culture in America is constantly evolving to reflect the predominant values and belief systems of the day, including what are often considered immutable social systems such as the family (Hussung 1). Instead of being one unit, the institution has been in a constant state of evolution since the founding of America itself. Most families consisted of a breadwinning husband and a homemaking wife. When the history of the American family is surveyed in-depth, it becomes apparent that this is not the case today. Before we go further, it is important to determine what the concept of family really entails. Then the work will proceed to analyze the changes over time and according to races in the American family construct.

The word "family" comes from the Latin word "familia." According to McDaniel et al, "family" refers to "any group of people related biologically, emotionally, or legally. That is, the group of people that the patient defines as significant for his or her well-being" (McDaniel et al. 2). Going back to Charles Stack, he says:

Ultimately, I define 'family' as the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival (Stack 31).

Stack's definition emphasizes the fact that blood ties may not be very important to determine who members of a family are. This represents the colonial family construct which

is characterized by its large network of members including apprentices. Following this definition, it is evident that the binding factor here is the household in which all of them live. This definition fails to depict the traditional American patriarchal family unit.

James Stewart further defines the family as “an institution that interacts with other institutions forming a social network” (Stewart 10). Stewart's definition concludes that the African-American family has traditionally used this definition to structure institutions that uphold values tied to other black institutions resulting in unique societal standards that deal with “economics, politics, education, health, welfare, law, culture, religion, and the media.” These are just few definitions amongst a wide range of definitions. The great number of definitions suggests that it is difficult to arrive at a common definition since this term can be defined from three main angles: law, biology and nurturance. This concept became prominent around the 17th century in Europe as it only applied to the European society. It denotes the father and his children with a woman. In the classical family structure known as the nuclear family, there is the father, the mother and their children. The roles of both the father and the mother are well defined. The father is seen as the “breadwinner” meanwhile the mother is seen as the person responsible for home-making and child-rearing. Though other family set-ups like the extended family, blended family, complex family or the adopted family do exist, this study is specifically interested in the nuclear family set-up as presented in *The America Play*.

In the course of reading Parks's *The America Play*, two distinct family units can be identified. The first family unit is a white family with Abraham Lincoln, his wife and their son. The second unit comprises the Lesser Known, Lucy (his wife) and Brazil— their son (Parks's 1. 163). This is the prototype of the American nuclear family. In the play, Parks already presents the disparity between the white American family and the black American family. The play opens with a presentation of the Lesser Known's profession as a grave digger who takes delight in enacting and re-enacting the Founding Father's life and death (Abraham Lincoln). This family unit presents a type of simulacrum of the traditional American nuclear family with the Lesser Known as a bread-winner. He initiates his son and wife in the funeral trade wherein his wife is the confidant and his son, the mourner. Meanwhile Abraham Lincoln is the President of the country; his wife is a house-wife and their son probably goes to school. This family type is predominant in the modern American society but it has not always been so.

The paragraphs that follow trace the historical progress of the family unit in a European and an American context in particular, from the pre-colonial to the modern era. Such a survey gives insight into the preference given to the traditional American family prototype that poses as a hegemony which Parks subverts. During the pre-colonial era, the family set-up in Europe generally consisted of the father, the mother and their children. This household configuration was dominant at the time and, for that matter, was crucial to the creation and definition of the cultural roles of men and women. The role of wives was to assist their husbands within the home, both keeping the house and raising children. Husbands, in contrast, were managers and providers in the family. In the face of such well-defined roles, the father alone had legal recognition, whereas women were denied legal identity because they were not supposed to own property as highlighted in MacLean's *History of the American Women: Women's Rights after the American Revolution*. The man was given total authority over his family since he was responsible for providing his household with the basic necessities of life. The various defined roles made the family unit a rigid construct.

The advent of the 19th century brought some radical changes to this rigorous family structure due to the advent of industrialization. During this period, married women began to have property rights through the Married Women's Property Acts, first enacted in 1839. Another important change during this period was at the level of family ties. Family constructs were based on love. And this love made roles to be redefined with both the father and the mother having equal responsibility in the upbringing of their children. This stability was somehow disrupted with the Great Depression and the two world wars. The post-war context brought about a shift in the family system. The standard structure of the family in post-war America consisted of a "breadwinner male, his wife who did household chores and looked after the children, and the children" as discussed in Tricia Hussung's article entitled *The Evolution of the American Family Structure*. In the face of fear and distrust caused by the political tumults mentioned above, family links tightened.

However, this general set-up of the family greatly differed from that of the American society. They differed at the level of their set-ups, roles and plight. The African-American family unit was very different from the European American family. Not only did they differ in their structure, but they also did in their roles. Daniel Patrick Moynihan hypothesized, in a report known as The Moynihan Report in 1965, that the destruction of the Black nuclear family structure would further hinder progress toward economic and political equality due to poverty. This racial dichotomy is presented in Parks's play under study. In this play we have a

depiction of both the white American family and the African American family. A survey of the Moynihan's report shows that the African Americans rather had a matriarchal family system. In this family system, the family unit is solely controlled by the mother who puts to bed out of wedlock at a very tender age. Although the black family Parks presents in her play is not exactly like this, Chapter Two shows how the dramatist portrays the dominant place of the woman in her designed family prototype.

One of the key elements of American ideology is The American Dream. This concept is well represented in *The America Play* through the character of the Lesser Known. Here, Parks paints a black character known as the Foundling Father who dies in the course of trying to attain the American ideals of happiness, liberty and prosperity. The Lesser Known, as he is otherwise referred to in the text, leaves his family in the West and moves to the East to make use of this strong resemblance with Abraham Lincoln in order to become more prosperous. The aim of this Eastern drift echoes the American's striving to achieve the American Dream. A grave digger by profession, the Lesser Known intends to make use of his resemblance with Abraham Lincoln to change his life's prospects. It is an opportunity to make sure that he will be remembered as an important figure too. This can be likened to the various displacements Parks's family made probably in search of better prospects. As a hegemonic point in the play under study, this element of American ideology needs to be surveyed. In this light, the work presently discusses its origin, attempts a definition of the concept and presents its ideals.

The idea of an American Dream is older than the United States, dating back to the 1400s, when people began to come up with all sorts of hopes and aspirations for the new and largely unexplored continent. In Allan Nevins and Henry Steel Commager's *A Short History of the United States*, it is noted that:

It was to gain opportunity for themselves and still more for their children that a host of settlers had come to the New World. They hoped to establish a society in which every man should not only have a chance, but a good chance; in which he might rise from the bottom to the very top of the ladder. (Nevins and Commager 57)

Many of these dreams focused on owning land and establishing prosperous businesses which would theoretically generate happiness. Puritans, for their part, incorporated ideals of religious freedom into their dreams. The classless nature of the New World made such prospects possible. Unlike the highly stratified old world that solely privileged the aristocracy, it was possible for any immigrant in the New World to achieve success and wealth through

hard work. This is the ideal of upward mobility. During the Great Depression, several people wrote about an American Dream, codifying the concept and entrenching it in American society.

The American Dream formally saw the light of day in the Declaration of Independence which states that "all men are created equal with the right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (quoted by Nevins and Commager 105). The authors of the this Declaration of Independence, among whom were Thomas Jefferson, held certain truths to be self-evident: "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (ibid). This sentiment is considered the foundation of the American Dream. It simply reiterates the rights of every American citizen. Equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were to be enjoyed by all.

Following this survey of the founding of this concept, it is clear that the meaning of the American Dream has changed over the years to suit individual aspirations. For instance, in the 19th century, the Modern Age broke free from the stringent rules of the traditional period. Hence, the political domain became very loose since there were no more hierarchical distinctions that limited individual aspirations. In the United States, the concept of the California Dream emerged as a result of the discovery of gold in this area. A good number of men went in search of this gold to change their living conditions and many of them did achieve success. This concept of the California Dream is said to have spread all over the nation as depicted in the works of the historian H.W Brands (442).

In the 20th century, the notion of the California Dream was redefined to mean the American Dream. The historian, James Truslow Adam in his book *The Epic of America*, later on popularized this concept. In this book, he attempted a definition of the concept of the American Dream as:

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Truslow 214-215)

Truslow's point here is that the concept of the American Dream should be based on the opportunity to achieve success according to how much effort you put in. But this statement highlights the fact that the Europeans cannot adequately interpret this dream; probably because they do not know how to work but only know how to use others to do so.

This dream goes beyond the acquisition of land and cars to bring in the dimension of the social order. This is a dream that is meant to maintain the gap between the rich and the poor, the Blacks and the Whites because it is innate. Some were born to achieve the American dream. Others are predisposed by their social order to achieve the dream while others, no matter how hard they work, will never achieve it because their social order inhibits this ascension. As such, slaves or African Americans cannot fulfil the dreams of attaining equality, liberty and prosperity. Since these are the European American's monopoly. Leara Rhodes's works show that the ethos today implies an opportunity for Americans to achieve prosperity through hard work. According to the Dream, this includes the opportunity for one's children to grow up and receive a good education and career without artificial barriers. It is the opportunity to make individual choices without the prior restrictions that limited people according to their class, caste, religion, race, or ethnicity.

From the background knowledge discussed above, the American Dream may have a variety of definitions. According to *The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, the concept refers to a phrase connoting hope for prosperity and happiness, symbolized particularly by having a house of one's own. It possibly adds that the dream applied at first to the hopes of immigrants but now applies to all except the very rich and suggests a confident hope that one's children's economic and social condition will be better than one's own. This definition denotes a life of personal happiness and material comfort as traditionally sought by individuals in America. It may also be understood "as the freedom to choose exactly how we will undertake anything we wish to do in this life, provided that in doing so we respect the rights of all others to do the same thing" as coined by Stephen Stone in his article "The Dying American Dream" (Stone 1).

As the explanation of the term states, everyone has the opportunity to achieve the American Dream, depending on how much effort they put in or how fortunate they are. In other words, some people will be able to work hard and achieve their dreams, while others will work hard and not end up being fortunate enough to complete their goals. To avoid the conflicts that may arise from the understanding of the American Dream, it can be agreed that

the concept is fundamentally about hope and the potential for change such that people who enact change in some way, even in a small way, may be said to be living the dream. The dream can be detected in *The America Play* at two levels. First, there is Abraham Lincoln as the embodiment of the success the Lesser Known seeks to achieve. As the sixteenth President of the United States, Lincoln is amongst the country's most popular presidents. History acknowledges his act of liberating slaves by naming him the Great Emancipator. Secondly, Parks captures the eastern expansion that was the dream of the frontiersman.

This representation of the Lesser Known's attempt to achieve the American Dream sustains the ideals of freedom, equality, an opportunity traditionally held to be available to every American. The grave digger exercises the freedom to live as he chooses to live in all dimensions of life: materially, spiritually, vocationally and maritally. Whether he does so in harmony with the divine laws of the Creator who gave him life and endowed him with natural rights remains to be verified. It is worth noting that the American Dream is a national ethos of the United States which seeks to achieve the ideals of democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity and equality. The notion of freedom, here, includes the opportunity for everybody to become prosperous and successful, and an upward social mobility for the family and children, achieved through hard work in a society with few barriers. The American dream therefore offered the opportunity to everyone to move from a "nobody" to "somebody" as said in the Cameroonian context. In *A Short History of United States*, it is stated that "the new land was a land of promise, of hope, of steadily widening horizons" (Nevins and Commager 58). These words entail that, with hard work, it is possible for every American citizen to reach the top of the social ladder.

It is apparent from the representation of these hegemonies mentioned in Parks's play under study that the writer's society is one that is subject to white hegemony. The society that emerges from this New Historicist analysis is one whose dramatic conventions are determined by white hegemonic power structures. Failure to respect these conventions, at a given time, made the work irrelevant according to these standards. But these conventions fail to aptly capture the folkloric identity of African art. It was difficult for Blacks to represent their art in a way that enabled them to assert their ancestral heritage at a given time in the past.

It is also a society in which part of its citizen's historical background has been erased. From the analysis of the American historiography, African Americans have been denied the right to claim their belonging to the nation. Society barely recognized them meanwhile they

fought hard for the emergence of the United States. At best, they were known as rebels for attempting to fight for their rights. Parks presents this biased society where history has served to create a gap between the European Americans and the African Americans. To mark their contempt for Blacks, they celebrate European “heroes” or “heroines” as queens, kings, presidents and many others. They are credited for founding America and books, anthologies and other works are dedicated to them. Meanwhile, the Blacks are simply ignored. That is the type of society that emerges from Parks’s play and which this playwright seeks to rewrite.

The society presented to us also illustrates a language dichotomy. This society clearly distinguishes the rich from the poor linguistically through stigmatization. Generally speaking, the European Americans are considered to use the standard form of English whereas the African Americans use a deviant form of English which they refer to as “pidgin English”. The European American variety of English is standardized and used for administrative, for academic, diplomatic as well as literary purposes. The African American variety is rather given depreciative appellations to show that it is substandard. Consequently, those who use it are inferior beings. This explains why it is the language used in ghettos, suburbs and other low-class areas. This is the language used by thieves, slaves, gangsters or any person who is not of noble descent or, most especially, of the white race. In this derogatory campaign, the European discourse failed to point out that this variety of English bears some African linguistic features and could definitely not keep itself from it. They rather used this linguistic difference as proof of their superiority over their African American counterparts.

In line with this, it is a society whose family unit is dominantly patriarchal. The woman is also relegated to the background. The legal domain has restricted her functions to that of taking care of children and the house. This injustice was so serious at one time that she was not even allowed to vote, to own property or to have the right to bring up her children. This made her a second-class citizen and it was worse if she was equally Black.

Lastly, Parks presents a society whose political ideology, as exemplified by the American Dream, does not favour the success of every citizen. Prosperity and liberty seem to be innate. This implies that the society is stratified such that, from ones social status, whether a person will be prosperous or not can be determined at birth. It is a society that refuses African Americans the opportunity to have a better life. No matter the efforts they put in, they generally remain at the bottom of the social ladder. The reason is that their race, social status or birth has condemned them to a life of misery and hardship. They are either slaves or the

descendants of slaves. And while they work for the improvement of their masters' lives, these masters in turn think hard of how to keep them under their yoke. So, the concept of liberty, happiness and prosperity for all is simply an illusion.

Generally, this chapter was out to examine the five hegemonies around which this study centers. It has focused on the existing hegemonies in Parks's *The America Play* thereby highlighting the kind of society in which she lived. The chapter has revealed a society that is "eurocentric." This eurocentrism is seen from the way the European Americans dominate all the spheres of life in America; making sure that anybody who is not European American is second-class. Dramatic conventions, the country's historiography, the chosen language, the traditional family prototype and the American Dream have been examined as hegemonies on which eurocentrism is enshrined. The chapter that follows looks at the subversion of these hegemonies from a postmodernist perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

TOWARDS A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT

The biases inherent in American hegemonies have been depicted in the previous chapter in order to appraise the bounties of a “dominant” white race. This depiction has given a deplorable image of the African Americans in all aspects of life. However, a deconstructive reading of *The America Play* enables us to present a shift from the derogatory European American views of African Americans. So, this chapter is concerned with a clear representation of Parks’s subversive ventures. It sets out to shed light on the subversion of the existing hegemonies discussed in Chapter One. In the course of the chapter, Parks’s deconstruction of the existing power structures and order are discussed. This deconstruction further serves as a shooter to expose Parks’s dramatic style. Consequently, this chapter strives to give a clear view of the shifts in paradigms presented in the play at this point. Since the dramatic analysis done in this chapter has to do with fragmentation, overturning, deconstruction and even satire, the postmodernist critical approach to literature is suitable.

The term “Paradigmatic shift” is an expression that is usually attributed to the American Physicist, Thomas Kuhn, who used it to describe the nature of scientific revolutions. Kuhn explains his notion of paradigm shift in his influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Though this term is science-oriented in origin, its contexts of usage have widened to non-scientific contexts. In such contexts, it describes a profound change in fundamental model, perception or events. This is the case in arts and literature where Parks’s works depict paradigmatic shifts as is the case of the play under study. In it, she presents radical changes to basic assumptions about the approach to ideals. These changes can be seen at various levels such as her dramatic style, her language use, the concept of the American Dream, the family unit and the American historiography.

Hence, in line with every dramatic analysis, this study focuses on stage directions, scenery, costumes and other dramatic elements of style to effectively capture hegemonic overturns as far as her subscription to dramatic conventions and her language use are concerned. *The America Play* by Parks is an example of an American play that attests to the active existence of an American drama and its place in twentieth-century American literary tradition. *The America Play* is a play that does not fall under the category of traditional drama nor does it quite fit as modern drama. It is rather postmodernist. This play is uniquely deconstructive, as the author uses her ingenuity to question dogmatic thinking. She is

innovative. Her uniqueness and originality find expression in the content and form of her plays (in general) and *The America Play*, in particular. Parks rejects the affirmation of the “dominant” white culture and does not define “Black” identity in terms of slavery or racism. This is because, in many Black-American works or narratives, Blacks were always presented as being oppressed. Through this innovative style, she casts a new black identity in what is examined in this work as a paradigmatic shift.

One of the most important elements in Parks’s work is the power of theatre which is not very surprising as she is a product of the postmodernist literary era that is characterized by deconstruction and subversion of values and norms. To Parks, as she states in her article “From Elements of Style”, theatre is pluridimensional and this makes allowance for the playwright to “explore the form, ask questions, make a good show, tell a good story, ask more questions take nothing for granted” (Parks 6). Parks condemns, through this quotation, what she calls the “slim” intentions of most playwrights. She tries to do many things that will widen the scope of this branch of literature that has been made uninteresting by monotony. This explains the view that form and content are inseparable, inter-dependent and linked. Paradigmatic shifts, in Parks’s *The America Play*, can be lensed from her theatrical characteristics. She writes her plays with the intention of enacting them. To Parks, what matters about a play is not the fact that the audience is watching. It is rather the actors’ consciousness that they are being watched as coined in an interview with Jiggets:

Then as I wrote my plays, I thought the most exciting thing about theatre is that it’s about theatre. The most exciting thing about watching theatre is that people are watching, and I think that’s fascinating. That’s why I get nervous when I go outside. There’s so much watching going on. People are watching you, you are watching people. It’s like over-stimulation. I think that is what theatre’s all about. It’s about one person looking at somebody else. What’s really exciting is that people who are watching are dressed up in costumes and pretending they are not who they really are, and that’s really fun to me. (Jiggets 313)

This quotation seeks to redefine the purpose of theatre. We are told here that theatre is not just about loving theatre and doing it. But it is about the excitement derived in watching others perform and those who perform watching those who watch them. That, according to Parks, is the purpose of theatre. This also somehow justifies her meta-theatrical style as an African American female playwright. Note should be taken of the fact that Parks is a creative writer who condemns the phenomena whereby black people only want to see themselves

through the eyes of white men and not through theirs. She reverses this preconceived notion through her content and form. Her play is a satire of minstrel shows in which whites mimicked their stereotypical conceptions of Blacks. In *The America Play*, she reverses these roles by getting a black to mimic Abraham Lincoln.

Mimicry is also a stylistic technique employed by Parks in her works that equally translates the radical changes that she makes from conventional drama. This term dates back from ancient times derived from the Greek language which means “imitation”. When the play opens, the identity of the Founding Father is assumed by a Foundling Father. This Foundling Father calls himself the Lesser Known but plays the role of the Great Man who represents the famous American president, Abraham Lincoln. Parks’s play opens with a performance by the Foundling Father in which he slips out of his impersonation of Lincoln to tell us directly about the various beards and shoes and costumes he alternates between. His performance is very humorous. He always keeps his hat as people do not want Lincoln hatless. Mary Todd, Lincoln’s wife, is equally imitated as seen when her husband dies.

The fact that the Foundling Father dresses up as the historical Lincoln wearing a hat, beard and white make up reminds us of the black tradition in which white performers blackened their skins to take up the appearance of black people embodying certain stereotypes. By revising the roles and putting whiteface makeup on a black skin, Parks is criticizing this tradition. She is making mockery of the minstrel show. The minstrelsy or minstrel show was an American form of entertainment developed in the 19th century performed by white people in make-up or blackface for the purpose of playing the role of black people. Minstrel shows lampooned black people as dim-witted, lazy, buffoonish, superstitious, happy-go-lucky and musical. This amusing tradition functions as a comment on the way in which white America saw black America until the end of the 19th century.

Radical change in Parks’s work is also at the level of comprehension and understanding and this results from her distorted use of language. It would be untrue to say that her work is easily understood and accessible in content and form. As critic Louise Bernard puts it in an insightful article on Parks’s language,

Parks’s work denies the reader/audience easy access to definitive answers... Parks aims not to ‘torture’ her reader/audience but to provide images and ideas of and about black experiences that challenge the historical and contemporary

‘misrecognition’ that is perpetuated not only by the written word but, in the age of postmodernity, by the voice on our Tv’s. (Bernard 694-695)

The playwright’s refusal to open up easily and give access to the meaning of her play is a way of fighting back the dominant powers who claim to master language as pointed out in the quotation above. The power of her language and language deconstruction, provided by formalistic innovations, therefore has repercussions at a more political level. Unlike traditional drama where meaning was relatively easier to get, Parks’s work is strictly hermetical because of its incoherence. This makes her work absurd just like modernist plays in the likes of *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Becket. Her play is very convoluted as one has to read all the play, footnotes and even history before understanding it. Here we are therefore dealing with the Theatre of the Absurd.

However, it is worth noticing that her play does not totally conform to the theatrical conventions of dramatic style. She complicates her plays to the reader through the use of artificially, highly theatrical and metatheatrical elements. This complication can be seen at the beginning of the play where she starts off by quoting the English philosopher and political theorist, John Locke (1632-1704). Locke laid much of the groundwork for the Enlightenment and made central contributions to the development of liberalism. His political theory of government by the consent of the governed as a means to protect “life, liberty and estate” also deeply influenced the United States founding documents. His views are echoed at the beginning of Act One and push the reader into great reflection. If the reader or audience does not know this historical figure, the play’s start becomes very complex for understanding.

Moreover, *The America Play* is composed of two complex Acts that are void of coherence and linearity. It is from this point also that one can underline the paradigmatic shift in Parks’s artistic style. The use of this complicated theatrical device impedes easy understanding of the play by an ordinary reader or audience. According to Parks, it is a way of broadening the African perspective of eyeing things of the globe. This uniqueness in Parks’s work deviates from the defined literary canon and traditional literary narratives. It creates something new and original. Her efforts go with the creation of a black aesthetics which Hoyt Fuller defines as: “A system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflects the special character and imperatives of black experience” (Fuller 204).

Apart from demonstrating her imaginative skills in the genre, Parks demonstrates her linguistic might in the type of language used in the play. She is imaginative in this play. She plays with language and the genre. According to Parks, it is essential for African Americans to develop and own a sense of who they are, as both individuals and as a racial community-free from the long predominant and/or oppressive attitudes of white Americans. Her exploration and dramatization of this perspective come to life in the central character. She formulates a counter narrative by experimenting with the conventional modes of language, form and structure. Her style can be qualified as inventive, for she does not only present those stories about slavery and inequality in the conventional language, but adds more complicated situations and references to the past to her plays. Jeannette Malkin holds that: “Parks’s theatrical inventiveness and her language of loss and mourning (for a forgotten history, a stunted memory) have created new ways of expressing memory in the theater” (Malkin 157)

Thus, *The America Play* explores issues fundamentally tied to the experience of being an African-American and rejects the dominant narratives put forward in American historiography. Parks resists the white-oriented version and uses theatre to create room for a black presence. The actions and language used in this play represent Parks’s vocation with historical reconstruction. She uses language to question the validity of historiography like the linguistic wordplay of the “Foundling father” instead of “the Founding Father”, “Foe /faux father” instead of the “fore-father.” There exist many of these words in her play that are not spelled out as in the “conventional” style. Some of these terms include:

thuh-meaning “the”

uhbouthat- meaning “about that”

uhgo-meaning “ago”

em together-meaning “them together”

HAW-meaning “how”

These subversions retard a rapid comprehension of the play. One could equally note that this play is not destined to the ordinary person but to the governing or bourgeois class in order that they should revisit and rethink the American historiography. Her language-specific nature gives her work its distinctive characteristic. The formal characteristics of her play are a sign of her uniqueness and originality as she rediscovers her theatre both thematically and in form.

Besides the use of these terms that are not standard, she also uses the stream of consciousness technic. This is a literary technic which the author uses to present characters thoughts and emotions as haphazardly as they occur in the characters mind. These thoughts are expressed in illogical pattern and seemingly senseless. This is the case of the funny sounds or words we see in her play. These incomprehensible sounds and words in the play cannot be underrated in the study of *The America Play* as a manifest deviation from the conventional. Some of such sounds are:

OHWAYOHWHYOHWAYOH! (Parks 2.183)

HUH HEE HUH HEE HUH HEE HUH (Parks 2.186)

In effect, stage direction and correct spelling use are some of the traditional norms which Parks deliberately neglects or takes into account. She expresses things the way they sound to her and not the way they sound to others. Parks writes down words as they should be pronounced, offering her action clues about what kind of speech is characteristic of their role.

Stage directions are limited in number in her work, making it challenging to stage directors. Liz Diamond, director of Parks's earlier plays, gives an illuminating account: "That's just learning how to read the play as a musical score, determining that every single thing on the page is there for a reason" (Drukman 69). She continues: "that periods and commas and semicolons and dashes and the distance between the heading and a line of text and the way it is written on a page are all full of rich clues for the director." In other words, in Parks's work, the slightest details can be meaningful and it is the director's and reader's task to find out how to make sense of these linguistic and textual markers. Thus, her plays necessitate an active reflection on the part of the audience.

Parks uses some theatrical technics that are not traditional as Deborah Geis states: "Parks uses an idiosyncratic, poetic form of theatre language that is truly her own and that creates a deliberate form of resistance to "norms" of theatrical discourse" (Geis 13). Redundancy in terminological use is also an experience in Parks's work, for instance the repetitive use of the words "rest" and "spell" in the play. The term "rest" means to take a little time, a pause or to show a place for an emotional transition; while "spell"— means an indeterminate period. These terms are highly symbolic and also stand to testify to the paradigmatic shift in theatrical style in Parks's work. Her language subverts the dominant discourse in historiography and the literary canon. She creates a truly original theatre

language that offers resistance to converters of traditional theatre. Her use of “Rest” and “Spell” challenges the traditional stage direction while, to her, wordplay and language forces the reader to rethink standardized representations.

Her language is close to African American vernacular. The combination of African-American-based traditions with modernist and post-modernist devices leads to a deconstructed language with great significance. Una Chaudhuri puts forward the idea that the past can only be known to us through language and therefore is always subject to reinterpretation:

Parks’s denial of history occurs at the level of language, or rather of the recognition that history, because it exists as language, is always subject to revision [...] Every fresh repetition of one of history’s privileged textual fragments rewrites the meaning, the substance and affect, of that fragment. This is the performative principle that undermines the Lesser Known’s historical project: instead of recuperating the greatness of the past, the performance of history unravels that greatness, textualizing its performers as inauthentic and belated ‘bit-players’ in the drama of American greatness”. (Chaudhuri 265)

Chaudhuri holds that each time we revisit history by adding any fragment of language, this brings about a different interpretation. By so doing, the facts recorded in history books become questionable as anyone can choose to add whatever he/she wants and give an interpretation that may only suit his/her context. Language therefore becomes the medium through which the supremacy of white American historiography is deconstructed. This is the more reason why the Lesser Known contends the past historical records by simply putting them in textual representations to show its inauthenticity.

Parks’s style is partly influenced by her affection for jazz music. She asserts in her essay “From Elements of Style” that, after years of listening to Jazz and classical music too, she is realizing that her writing is very much influenced by music. She has realized how much she employs its methods. Through reading lots of African plays, she has realized how much the idea of Repetition and Revision is an integral part of the African and African-American literary and oral tradition (Parks 10). Her writing is related to the Jazz style that favours the free expression of emotions. Her artistic freedom is linked to this musical genre. One such example of her ingenuity and emphasis on musical rhythm is provided by Brazil in the play when he says:

Over here one of Mr. Washingtons bones, right pointer so they say; here is his likeness and here: his wooden teeth. Yes, uh top and bottom pair of nibblers: nibblers, lookin for uh meal. Nibblin. I iduhnt your lunch. Quit nibbling. Quit that nibbling you. Quit that nibbling you nibblers you nibbling nibblers you.” (Parks 2. 185)

The alliteration in the last sentence is an example of modernist wordplay while it also helps to establish a certain rhythmical pattern in the text. The combination of these various linguistic and cultural components ultimately results into what can be seen as Parks’s very own theatre language. Parks, as a creative writer, is not only self-inspired but is also inspired by other writers she loves such as Adrienne Kennedy, James Baldwin, and Tennessee Williams. She has been directly or indirectly influenced by these writers some of whom are modernist or postmodernist writers.

The presentation of characters with no words or sounds in dialogue also falls in line with Parks’s deviation from conventional dramatic norms. Parks sets characters on stage even when they have nothing to say. Her work is a great challenge for actors to act or for directors of the cast because of her resistance to dramatic conventions. Some of her words are rather difficult to decode except she explains. One imagines how these new words are staged

A case with no word exchange between her characters in her play can be seen in Act Two:

BRAZIL: K

LUCY: Lean in. Ssfor our ears and our ears uhlone.

LUCY

BRAZIL

LUCY

BRAZIL

BRAZIL: O. (Parks 2.191)

This style depicts an atypical dramatic code which gives room for multiple interpretations. The power of language can not only be defined from a dramatic perspective, but also from a historical perspective. Parks chooses a language that is closer to Africa-

American vernacular than to standard American English to x-ray the fact that Blacks have been oppressed even from the linguistic perspective. Parks reveals the fact that

At one time in this country, the teaching of reading and writing to African-Americans was a criminal offense. So how do I adequately represent not merely the speech patterns of a people oppressed by language (which is the simple question) but the patterns of a people whose language use is so complex and varied and ephemeral that its daily use not only signifies on the non-vernacular language forms, but on the construct of writing as well. If language is a construct and writing is a construct and signifyin(g) on the double construct is the daily use, then I have chosen to Signify on the signifyin(g). (Alisa 75-76)

This quotation puts forth the idea that choosing a language which is closer to African-American vernacular than to standard American English should help to overcome the association with a history of oppression linked to that standardized form. Considering that slaves and the descendants of slaves were forbidden to learn how to read and write on the pretence that they were slaves, they had to hide to learn on their own and without their masters' knowledge. This reminds us of Frederick Douglas who had to hide in his master's house to learn. At first he was trained how to do so by his master's wife. But when his master discovered this he asked his wife never to teach a slave how to read or write. Frederick Douglas had to go learning on his own.

In view of this, the language Parks translates through her characters has much to do with emotion. It is one which reminds the African American of his/her underprivileged position. It is also a language that fosters action. In an interview, she explains with the example of "OK" how significant the smallest detail or difference can be in language. She resorts to a language that is greatly indebted to African American culture and which, at the same time, is suitable to be performed on stage. This is to say that form and content are intertwined and to give an exhaustive interpretation and analysis of her work, one cannot just focus on one without the other.

Another way in which Parks subverts language is through the use of Repetition and Revision. She uses the presence of the audience as a device. The use of Repetition and Revision enables her to challenge the presumed chronology of history. The result is a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear style. This technique is also basically like Jazz that is based on the repetition of texts.

To repeat and revise is to reject linearity and coherence in favour of a spatial open view of time and process. It favours multi-directionality as Parks's plays do not follow a linear plot but are framed in stories interlinked by the past, present and future. Parks holds that "history is time that won't quit and can therefore be acted or represented by denying extermination" (Parks 15). There is a clear relationship between her plays and history, not only through the use of repetition and revision, but equally through her belief that theatre can make history.

Parks believes that there is no single true history and that since all historiographies are constructs we cannot speak of a right and wrong history; she rather believes that there are several versions of history and each version has its own significance. In her play, she subverts the history of white hegemony by expanding the common knowledge and idea of history. To her, African American history has not been remembered adequately. By rewriting this narrative, she tries to restore the place of African American history in the history of the United States of America. In Sandra Shannon's article, "What is a black play?," the critic notes about Parks that "in plays such as *The America Play* and *Topdog/Underdog*, she features characters that she strategically casts as African American but whose radical identities become dramatic devices— not radical or cultural signifiers" (Shannon 603-604). In both plays, black characters feature as Lincoln—the president who is very much celebrated as the Great Emancipator. This identity given to the Lesser Known in *The America Play* and Lincoln in *Topdog/Underdog* serves as a dramatic device because, by insisting on this role reversal between these obscure black men and the famous president, Parks is interrogating white historiography that has silenced the Black and has put him in the shadows

The picture and title of the play in study is also worth examining in relation to the paradigmatic shift Parks opts for. The picture on the first cover shows an empty suit with the hat and beard characteristic of the historical Lincoln displayed while, on the back cover, we see the same costume but now worn by a black man. Katy Ryan says in connection to this that "The humour and despair in the play relies on the discrepancy between black skin and white images. Without blackness, there could be no play on the white construction of Lincoln" (Ryan 90). Instead of commemorating this president "who freed the slaves," Parks introduces his impersonator (ironically called the Lesser Known), a black gravedigger who bears resemblance to Lincoln. She therefore does not only write about America but about those who have been invisible in American history. Her writing is not about the famous president on the

first cover of the book but about those who were left behind in American history. The cover and title of the play are thus ironical.

The setting of Act I is in a Great Hole, in the middle of nowhere and is an exact replica of the Great Hole of history. The first physical action of the protagonist in the play is that of digging. This action is repetitive. He impersonates President Lincoln whom he physically resembles as recorded in Act I:

There was once a man who was told that he bore a strong resemblance to Abraham Lincoln. He was tall and thinly built just like the Great Man. His legs were the longer part just like the Great Mans legs. His hands and feet were large as the Great Mans were large. The Lesser Known had several beards which he carried around in a box. The beards were his [...] Were as authentic as he was, so to speak. His beard box was of cherry wood and lined with purple velvet. He had the initials "A.L." tooled in gold on the lid." (Parks 1. 160)

Parks thus tries to make her audience aware of her role in the play, both as observers as well as accomplices. She is able to offer the reader and audience an original story moving from the traditional discourse in which black characters were portrayed as mere victims and white characters as plain oppressors. She points to the fact that there is more of African-American drama than just the race problem. In this sense, she moves towards a New Black aesthetics in which stereotypical ideas and traditions are cancelled out in favour of formal experimentation and meaningful revisions of existing narratives. Parks revises history by paying much attention to this solitary black man whom she puts on stage.

The setting of *The America Play* literally becomes a hole, a replica of "The Great Hole of History." Parks's deconstructive trait is seen here equally. Instead of categorically criticizing the American or the Western Historiography, she formulates a counter-narrative by experimenting a faithful translation of emotions. The analysis of the subversion of the language system above serves to capture the depth of parts of the endeavour. As far as language is concerned, Parks has resolutely overturned the conventional dramatic style, costumes, scenery and other dramatic elements.

The Foundling Father's wife Lucy, and his son, Brazil, spend their time digging in the hole that the deceased husband had begun, intending to replicate the amusement park—the Great Hole of History. Brazil wants to know all about his father, and Lucy tells him about his father's great fascination with Lincoln, especially with the latter's assassination. Brazil is

digging for relics of his father while his mother is encouraging him. In that Hall of Wonders, all Brazil knows about his father is that he was a great imitator of Lincoln. This is to show that little or less is known about the contribution of Black in the historiography of America. This is why Brazil keeps digging, encouraged by the mother, to know this history.

The only thing he finds about his father are bits and pieces of the Lincoln act. His past has been reduced to a single action. The life of Brazil is threatened to be in the like of that his father since he keeps looking like him every day. That act of digging can be seen as an act of researching, finding and remembering. The Great Hole of History has been the hole in which African American history has disappeared although it is equally of humoristic implication. The hole stands for an absence, a vacuum, a grave. This equally applies to the imagery of death and absence that pervades the play. The Foundling Father and his whole family are in the death business as digger, confidant and mourner. Also, words like “echo” that are used to name Acts symbolize abandonment. In other words, African American history has been dead, buried and forgotten in American historical landscape.

Parks’s subversion of the American Dream is achieved by the way she satirizes and caricatures epitomes of this dream. Amongst these epitomes are the Hall of Wonders, the Tv screen and the Lesser Known’s caricatural attempt to live the dream. The Great Hole of History is satirized through Brazil’s Hall of Wonders. In this hall, he exposes relics he dug from this hole of history. It is ironical that what is being exposed is nothing more than trivial things like beards, hats and others. This is to lambaste the Great Hole of History that was meant to keep important aspects of America’s historiography. By satirizing this historical icon, Parks is telling the audience that what has been recorded as history can be questioned. She does not believe in one true history as history is always formed and revised by others. The Hall of Wonders here simply represents the blindness of the American society who idealize the Great Hole of History.

Towards the end of Act Two, Brazil and Lucy watch the Tv and realize that it presents the Lesser Known’s representations. The Tv that is supposed to show relevant information is rather broadcasting the Lesser Known faking Lincoln. The TV thus becomes the medium through which Parks ridicules European Americans, by questioning the authenticity of the information distilled. The use of digging as a device helps Parks to revitalize the masked past, identity and cultural retention of African Americans and to pay homage to all those who have contributed to the transformation of the African American’s life. It also serves as

stimulus to provoke readers/audiences to study and research the buried aspects of African American history. She digs through all the layers of recorded history so as to exhume the black bones and give them identity and dignity.

As soon as the exhumation operation is done, the resurrection process starts and thus the edification of a new world. The power to resurrect is the power to rewrite and rerecord history, which is to reinforce the dignity and identity of those for whom “the Great Whole of History” has proved to be a “Great Hole of History” in which they have either been absent or voiceless, and thus their memories and experiences have been missed or dismissed. In the play, Parks intends to counter the erasure of African American history and defrost the frozen Great Whole of History through re-inserting the displaced missed ones and re-recording the unheard voices after probing the historical events and gaps. The reason for this is that the major parts of African American cultural traditions and customs are oral rather than written because cultural traditions were transmitted orally and the African Americans have never historically been in positions of power to inscribe and publish their own history.

Parks also subverts the existing variety of the American Dream according to which every American citizen hopes and strives to become rich and to make the continent a superpower in world affairs. The dramatist, in *The America Play*, shows how the African American struggles to achieve this dream at the expense of human relationships. The Foundling Father (at the early part of his life) lives in rural zone. It is stated that

While the Great Mans livelihood kept him in Big Town the Lesser known’s work kept him in Small Town. The Great Man by Trade was a President. The Lesser Known was a Digger by trade from a family of Diggers. Digged graves. He was known in Small Town to dig his graves quickly and neatly. This brought him a steady business.” (Parks 1. 160)

The Lesser known, instead of continuously practicing his grave digging profession in the Small Town, decides to move to the urban town in order to make a name. He strives to move to the “Promised Land” like The Great Man. The pasteboard cut out of Mr Lincoln translates the good life the Lesser Known Man wants to live. He moves from the East to the West in search of fortune:

The Lesser Known left his wife and child and went out West finally. [Between the meat and the vegetables. A monumentuous journey. Enduring all the elements. Without a friend in the world. And the beasts of the forest took him in. He got there

and he got his plot he staked his claim he tried his hand at his own big hole.] As it had been back East everywhere out West out West he went people remarked on his likeness to Lincoln....The Lesser Known had by this time taken to wearing a false wart on his cheek in remembrance of the Great Mans wart. When the Westerners noted his wart they pronounced the 2 men in virtual twinship. (Parks 1. 163)

The fact that the Lesser Known decides to move from East to West by leaving behind his wife and son (Lucy and Brazil) in order to act the role of Abraham Lincoln translates the fact that he lived by the American Dream, wanting to make a name for himself by all means. It is unfortunate that he jeopardizes family's welfare, by forsaking his wife and his son when the latter is only 5, because he wants to live his dream".

The next domain in which Parks's work translates a paradigm shift is at the level of the family unit. The temporal and racial depiction of the American family prototype in Chapter One enables us to understand that records have made the European American family look superior to the African American family. Parks overturns this view by giving a modernist view of what the family unit is all about. As a matter of fact, two major family prototypes emerge: the European American family and the African American family units as earlier indicated. In the play, the European American family is presented as being fragile because the roles of family members are not clearly defined. In such a unit, the absence of one inevitably brings down the whole system. In *The America Play*, the Founding Father's family (President Abraham Lincoln) crumbles with the death of the president. It is evident from the text that, after this assassination, his wife (Mary Todd) goes insane. Such weakness satirizes the traditional patriarchal family type that totally empowers the man and leaves the woman defenceless. Giving so much weight to one person does not help the family. Even the Lincoln children suffer. It is said that one young son dies while the others fall sick (Parks 1. 160).

This model contradicts the African American family unit wherein every member of the unit plays a vital role to keep the family going. In the text, the Lesser Known introduces a business where all the members of his family are included. The mother is a confidant as stated in the text "Lucy kept secret for the dead" while the son is a weeper (Parks 2.194). The father prepares his beloved family for his eventual absence before he leaves for the West. He teaches them how to fake people "for a living" such that they might continue to live happily as though he were around if he happens to leave definitely. Hence, Parks uses contrast through the

juxtaposition of the two family types here to deconstruct the conventional American family set-up.

Moreover, the subversion of this family type is achieved through the empowerment of Lucy. Lucy totally replaces the Lesser Known as family head. She does not only play her role as a mother, but also replaces her husband as the family guide as well as the instructor and disciplinarian of the boy. She successfully does this for about 30 years as Brazil is about 35 when they decide to go West to find out about their late husband's and father's life out there.

This chapter aimed at illustrating the various paradigmatic shifts captured in Parks's representations of dramatic conventions, the American historiography, the language system, the American Dream as well as the family unit in the play under study. The chapter portrays a great difference between the dramatic conventions discussed in Chapter One and what Parks develops as dramatic style. She subverts conventionally prescribed theatrical structures as established by Aristotle and Martin Esslin. Character representations are also subversive to make this shift complete.

The chapter also discussed the subversion of the European American historiography. This part focused on the absence of black history in the great records of American historiography and Parks's attempt at re-writing it by including the Black. The Great Hole of History symbolizes the absence of black history in historical records. She subverts the concept of American historiography by replacing the Great Emancipator by a black man, the Lesser Known. Her conclusion is that history is never fixed as it can be revisited. This revision implies that history cannot be trusted, but should always be subject to contentions. That is why she suggests a counter historical narrative that includes the Black as shown.

A look at the overturn of the language system as discussed in this chapter also enables us to picture the paradigmatic shift Parks has achieved. She has overturned the language system of European America from various perspectives such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics. The overall impression this overturn gives is that we can communicate using different forms of language without necessarily sticking to a prescribed form. All that matters is to ensure that the message is passed across.

This chapter has displayed the dismemberment of the family unit with the absence of the family head in the traditional American family prototype. The Lesser Known leaves the East in pursuit of his dream and dismembers his family in the process. In his absence, his wife

assumes the roles of mother, house-keeper, guide, instructor and breadwinner. There is a shift from a patriarchal to a matriarchal family set-up. Meanwhile, Parks subverts the American Dream by presenting a character who tries to live in the footsteps of Lincoln but fails to achieve the dream because he dies in its pursuit. Moreover, he fails to live up to some of the dream's ideals because his departure to the West causes the dismemberment of his family. The satire on the ethos of the American Dream is achieved through the satirical presentation of the dream's epitomes such as the Hall of Wonders; the TV and the Lesser Known's caricatural attempts to pursue it. Chapter Three examines how Parks achieves a new order. The chapter sheds light on the consequence of her subversive approach to the five hegemonies being analysed.

CHAPTER THREE

ACHIEVEMENT OF A NEW ORDER

The first chapter of this study discussed the existing hegemonies in Parks's *The America Play* and the kind of society that emerges in the play. The second chapter rather focused on the paradigmatic shifts that resulted from Parks's subversion of the different hegemonies. This chapter focuses on the consequence of Parks's subversion of the hegemonies. It highlights the new aesthetics for drama and the societal order that emerges after the deconstruction of the first. The chapter therefore bears on the writer's dramatic art and vision. It is worth noting that Parks's writings fall into the category of works of arts that endeavour to shift the Black-American society from "margin" to the "centre" of world histories and civilizations. Her works are not only intended for leisure and entertainment, but are meant to consensate and transform society. *The America Play* is a vivid illustration of her historical dream to achieve a New Order for African Americans in the annals of American history. She strives to create a new world from the perspective of the five hegemonies explored in this study, which are dramatic conventions, historiography, language, the family unit and the American Dream.

The dramatist's quest to attain a new order is identifiable in her vision of the world expressed during her address at Mount Holyoke, in 2001, when she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize:

Believe that the sort of life you wish to live is, at this very moment, just waiting for you to summon it up. And when you wish for it, you begin moving toward it, and it, in turn, begins moving toward you. (Parks. "Commencement Speech". Pulitzer Prize Award. Mount Holyoke, 2001.)

This excerpt translates her world view according to which one should live and act with clearly defined objectives and should work for them. For, as one works for them, they spring to life.

Parks's dramatic style is also worth looking at when examining her struggle to create a new world. Her dramatic style is strictly unique and particular. It translates the literary epoch in which the play belongs, that is, the postmodernist period. It is a period when traditional literary canons and norms are violated in both form and content. A critical study of *The America Play* reveals that its content is unusual like that of other African American plays that

principally focus on the black experiences of racism, slavery and discrimination. This play, unlike others, principally focuses on the search for the true history of African Americans through the protagonist—the Lesser Known. His life is centered on digging and this is symbolic of the fact that he wants to unearth the buried history of African Americans. Every other thing in this play is shaped to achieve this purpose. In this light, one can say that Parks succeeds in creating a new order. Her unusual contents are accommodated in unusual structures.

Parks's unusual structure is clearly vivid in *The America Play*, a Two-Act play. In this play, the characters are not completely given the opportunity to communicate their ideas and emotions in all interactions. Someone else does it in their place. An instance is seen when we see the name of a character and we expect the character to express his thoughts and emotions as is the case in traditional drama. But this is sometimes not the case in *The America Play*:

THE FOUNDLING FATHER: What interested the Lesser Known most about the Great Mans murder was the 20 feet which separated the presidents box from the stage. In the presidents box sat the president his wife and their 2 friends. On the stage that night was Our American Cousin starring Miss Laura Keen. The plot of this play is of little consequence to our story, suffice it to say that it was thinly comedic and somewhere in the 3rd Act a man holds a gun to his head—something about despair. (Parks 1. 167)

On examining the cited passage, one realizes that the Foundling Father is not the direct author of the speech. This speech is more of reported speech than the protagonist's words. This technique is contrary to the conventional technique in which characters are given full power over speech except when there are stage directions. Parks's drama is a rebellion against traditional drama. Because of the concern of her play, all characters are in the death business: digger, confidant and mourner.

The act of digging (searching) is strictly symbolic in that precious stones (history) can only be gotten if one digs a hole many times and for long as precious stones are not laid on the surface land. She challenges the white historiography with her use of the “Rep & Rev” technique that leads to a forward-backward-forward progression narrative structure. These repetitions, in a way, try to retrieve elements from the past. Malkin holds that “To ‘repeat and revise’ is to reject linearity and causal rationality in favour of a spatially open view of time and process. *The America Play* is interlinked with the past-present and the future. She

therefore succeeds in overcoming fixity and stereotypes and this cannot be underrated when looking at Parks's attempt to create a new order.

Parks's use of footnotes is also worth being appreciated in her endeavour to create a new order. She uses a large number of footnotes in her plays. In *The Art of the Difficult*, Tony Kushner writes:

[Parks] is the only American playwright I know who makes use of footnotes, which also present a conundrum for the production team: How do you stage a footnote? Or do you? Parks doesn't tell you. Her plays are full of these sorts of provocations. A director, actor or designer who believed it to be his or her job to do the footnotes, quotation marks and rests 'correctly' would soon find themselves utterly lost. (Kushner 63)

She resorts to footnotes and cross references in order to clarify the meaning of her play. Any production staff that fails to understand what these footnotes imply may not grasp the correct meaning and know which twist to give to his representation. When asked why she puts footnotes in her play, Parks replied:

But I love them, they're so great! It's not like, "so you'll understand this play you have to read this line." Most of them are totally made up and ridiculous. One of them talks about some of the Foundling Father's unpublished works. One of them talks about what Mary Todd might have said on the night her husband died. It's playing, again, with the form and the idea of a footnote. (Pearce 26)

The footnotes serve as an ironic comment on the authority with which some events are turned into historical truths while others are being brushed aside. They might be relevant as well as they might not be. All that matters is that it is drama and thus requires some ridiculous instances as in real life situations.

The characters in *The America Play* are searching for clues to their identities. Foundling Father's wife and son dig in the sand around the great hole for clues to the truth, and they uncover objects that suggest that many accepted truths are in fact lies and distortions based on perception. The nature of African American character and identity is central to the collection's narratives and its themes. She states, in both metaphoric and literal terms, that at least in her perspective and opinion, it is essential for African Americans to develop and own a sense of who they are, as both individuals and as a racial community, free from the long predominant and/or oppressive attitudes of White Americans. Her explorations and dramatizations of that

perspective come to life in the central characters in the plays. The play incites reflection on who is an African American and who the individual is as a person and seeks to answer the questions: who am I as a person? Who am I as an African American?

Parks follows dramatists such as August Wilson in admitting to the influence of jazz on their writing: “Through listening, with its solos sculpted around revisions of repeated theme, Parks says she’s recently realizes ‘how much this method is an integral part of the African and African-American literary and oral traditions’” (Parks 168). Parks’s dramatic works contrast conventionally written plays with their noticeable structures of Rep & Rev which guide her writing. Jazz is of great importance here as it represents African American literary culture. This form of music comes from the African oral form of literature. Parks uses it “to create a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear narrative style to look and sound more like a musical score” as coined in her essay “Elements of Style” (Parks 9). All the elements of dramatic style examined above contribute to the uniqueness of Parks’s style. This style is very rich as it borrows from both the traditional and modern conventions of drama.

Parks is one of the African American writers who is passionate to rewrite a new history for Americans through the medium of theatre. By re-enacting historical events onstage, she creates a history for the relegated African Americans in *The America Play*. History writing is very important to all societies. As Toni Cade Bambara claims, history writing is of high importance as it keeps African Americans alive and makes them the heroes of tales, preserves and saves their lives, and this is in line with their survival, struggle and wide-awake resistance (Bambara 46).

The need to rewrite history is also seen in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. when he writes, “Without writing, there could exist no repeatable sign of the workings of reason, of mind; without memory or mind, there could exist no history; without history, there could exist no humanity” (Gates 21). Parks, in many circumstances, has revealed her concern with American history. For she is convinced that the American historiography is strictly dominated by the stories and achievements of White People while the past of the African Americans has been systematically wiped out. Without putting the blame on anyone, she tries to rebuild a history that has long been erased. Shawn Marie Garrett holds that Parks’ play comment on the representation of American history by destabilizing the common knowledge of traditional historical events and figures. She replies, the figure of Abraham Lincoln by a Black gravedigger.

The fact that a Blackman incarnates a Whiteman is not for nothing, it is to visualize those that were invisible in American history. Parks is not specially writing for the famous president on the cover of the book but about those who were relegated to the margin. By staging the Lesser Known, Parks is creating a space for African Americans in the Great annals of history. Ilka Saal says that: “this is a play about history itself, about attempts to unearth it, to represent it, to retell it...” (Saal 68). This is to say that, though the play is about America, it also plays with the ideas of America. She presents history as a simulacrum, an eternal replay of our ideas of and desire for history.

In the first scene, the Lesser Known also known as the Foundling father finds himself in a great hole which is an exact copy of the “Great hole of History” He recounts the story of his life, how he was a grave digger by trade and how he went on his honeymoon and discovered a historical theme park, which led him to leave his wife and go to the West to dig his own hole to perform as Abraham Lincoln His whole performance is based on his likeness to Lincoln characterized with his black coat, stovepipe, hat, fake beards. In the second act of the play, both the Great Man and the Lesser known man are in the ground. Both have died, but it is the Lesser Known man whose death is foregrounded now.

In one of Parks’s essays, “Possessions”, she writes that, “I’m remembering and staging historical events which, through their happening on stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history” (Parks 5). In this same essay, she adds that:

Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to make ‘history’ – that is, because so much African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to–through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life–locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it. (Parks 4).

Parks attempts to excavate African American history like an archaeologist and employs two leitmotifs in her plays: digging and resurrecting. To dig is to explore and excavate something that has been buried and hidden. She unearths the hidden knowledge of African Americans and re-instates them in the American historical landscape. Her obsession with the need for this re-instatement is evident in the fact that she gets a Black to impersonate Lincoln again in *Topdog/Underdog*.

Michel Foucault describes her actions in his lecture, *Society must be Defended*, as “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault 7). He offers two definitions of subjugated knowledges. The first defines subjugated knowledges as

Historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations Subjugated knowledges are, then, blocks of historical knowledges . . . , but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship. (Ibid).

The second defines subjugated knowledges as “a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as non-conceptual knowledge . . . hierarchically inferior knowledges” (Ibid). This is to say that subjugated knowledges refer to African American experiences that have been presented by the dominant group as unqualified or disqualified knowledges. They have thus been pushed to the margin. Parks’s vocation in *The America Play* is to desubjugate these historical knowledges of the African Americans. As an archeologist she revives, insurrects and resurrects the hidden or forgotten bodies of experiences.

In *The America Play*, Act Two (Part C) is entitled “Archeology”. In this section of the play, Lucy and Brazil—mother and son—dig a hole, dusting and polishing the unearthed objects like archeologists, in search of precious buried inheritance. As Brazil says, “This hole is our inheritance of sorts. My Daddy died and left it to me and her. And when She goes, She’s gonna give it all to me!” (Parks 2. 185). It can be inferred from his words that even the “hole” itself is a precious inheritance that needs to be preserved from generation to generation, and each heir or heiress needs to continue the digging or excavation operation. During their excavation, they find many things such as a jewel box on which the letters “A. L.”—which stand for Abraham Lincoln—that have been carved in gold. Their other discoveries are one of Mr Washington’s bones and his wooden teeth, peace pacts, writs, bills of sale, treaties, notices, handbills and circulars, freeing papers, summonses, declarations of war, medals for bravery and honesty, to name a few. All of these discoveries attest to white presence in American history. Lucy links up the white’s history to the Blacks when she tells Brazil this is his inheritance. In Lucy’s words, to be a digger as her husband was, is an honour, and accordingly, she urges her son “to be of his line” (Ibid 2. 186).

The America Play can be seen as both a “history play” and as a “counter-history play”. History is a ritual which aims at reinforcing sovereignty and counter-history, as its name implies, refers to the discourse of those who have no glory, or those who have lost it and who

now find themselves in darkness and silence. They then attempt to illuminate those dark spots. Counter-history is thus the reflection of the unheard voices, experiences and memories which have never been fitted into the texture of official history but in the struggle against the monopolization of official knowledge. Parks is therefore actively involved in the insurrection of subjugated knowledge about African Americans.

Besides Parks's stylistic specificity, her endeavour to attain a new order also comes in at the level of the language used in her play. Her language is not very conventional and is strictly specific to her. She creates her proper terms and violates standard or conventional grammar. Parks's language is very innovative and pushes us to think that language is meant to be spoken while writing only comes in to supplement speech. She utters words and speeches through her characters as she feels and thinks and not as it is expected. For instance, to say "how about that" she writes it in the form of "Howuhboutthat," in one word. This example, amongst many in the play, showcases the fact that—although the English Language is English in origin—there could be varieties and registers of the language in the different spheres of the globe. This can be an explanation for the existence of the American English which emanates from African American dialects or vernaculars.

The writer's use of the punctuation sign, the apostrophe (') is another point of interest in her creation of a new language system. The apostrophe has three main uses: to show ownership, to show that letters have been omitted in a contraction and to form the plural of numbers, letters and signs. Parks practically denies the strict applicability of these uses of the punctuation mark as she presents words or expressions that require apostrophes without them. This is the case when he wants to refer to the "President's box" to show ownership. She goes about it without the apostrophe sign as can be seen in the statement, "What interested the Lesser Known most about the Great Mans murder was the 20 feet which separated the president's box from the stage" (Parks 1.168).

Such constructions translate her scorn for strict hegemonic language rules and this extends to orthographical, syntactic, morphological and phonetical elements in the English language. For example, she decides not to add "g" to most words ending with "-ing". A word like "digging" becomes "diggin." *The America Play* is therefore formally challenging as it requires reflection, attentiveness and thinking (on the side of both the reader and the audience) to discern meaning. She is a good example of a postmodernist writer in both form and content. Her unconventional approach is in line with Jean-François Lyotard's remark that

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text [s]he writes, the work [s]he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. (Lyotard 80)

As is the case with dramatic conventions, Parks gives a new shape to the English language by creating her own linguistic forms. She deconstructs syntactic organisations. With regards to conventions, Parks can be likened to a philosopher as she constantly contends or questions established norms. As a postmodernist writer she questions every dramatic or language rule in a bid to make art more liberal. This point matches her desire to step out of the wave of African American writer who follow rules or conventions so that their works may be granted literary recognition.

Another perspective from which Parks succeeds in creating a New World is in the definition of the family. According to Parks the concept of the family (more precisely that of the nuclear family) is one in which both father and mother are important and active. This is seen in the play as she subverts the traditional nuclear family by bringing the woman to vantage point. Parks makes the woman central to the family as earlier said when the Lesser Known goes to the West. Lucy becomes the head of the family, Brazil's guide, her instructor and even more:

LUCY: Your Daddy iduhnt either. Dig on, son. -. Cant stop diggin till you dig up somethin. You something up you brush that something off you give uh designated place. Its own place. Along with thuh other discoveries. In thuh Hall of Wonders. Uh place in the Hall of Wonders right uhlung with thuh rest of thuh Wonders hear?

BRAZIL: uh huhn (Rest) (Parks 2.176)

Here, Lucy assumes the role of the instructor and guide. She tells Brazil to dig, clean whatever he digs out and expose it in the Hall of Wonders with the other findings. This is the role Parks gives to the woman in the family. She empowers the woman through Lucy in a bid to balance up family relationships. Far from being a feminist, she appeals to society to recognize the value of a woman outside the stereotyped role of mother and house-keeper assigned to her. If a woman is capable of instructing and guiding, alongside with her other roles in the family set up, then

she should be considered as being complementary to the man. Families can only be stable if there is a balanced power relationship between male and female parents.

Added to this, Parks suggests the notion of the family is not limited to the father, mother and children. The weakness of a nuclear family like Lincoln's in the play is portrayed. When the Great Man is murdered, only the president's wife and friends come to condole with his wife and children. One would have expected to see more of the family of this famous President at his death. This is unlike the Lesser Known's family about which Parks says:

The lesser Known meanwhile living his life long after all this had happened and not knowing much about it until he was much older[...]knew only that he was a dead ringer in a family of Diggers and that he wanted to grow and have others think of him and remove their hats and touch their hearts and look up into the heavens and say something about the freeing of the slaves. That is, he wanted to make a great impression as he understood Mr. Lincoln to have made. (Parks 1. 166)

This citation indicates that The Lesser Known is from a large family linked by a common history and the profession of grave digging. The excerpt makes us to understand that his aim for impersonating Lincoln is motivated by his desire to create great sensation as the person he impersonates did. Reference to the ancestry of the Lesser Known suggests that the family goes beyond the nuclear family. For Parks here, as is the case for Toni Morrison, it refers to the whole African American community that shares a common history, experiences such as enslavement, the Middle Passage and discrimination. The family, from this perspective, might equally include all Blacks (in America and in the diaspora) who live the same experiences.

In fact, it can be argued that Parks wants to show that the whole American race is a family. Whether one is Black or White should not matter. This can be deduced from the fact that there is a strong resemblance between characters of different races. Parks presents two characters of different races but gets them to resemble each other to the extent that one can impersonate the other. Since there is likely to be such resemblance amongst siblings only, her play suggests that European Americans and African Americans should bond as brothers. They should stop quarrelling over questions of superiority and inferiority of one race or the other. The playwright therefore advocates the brotherhood of all Americans—Black, White, Latino or Mexican.

The last part of this chapter examines what Parks arrives at as far as the ethos of the American Dream is concerned. This two-fold dream has generally been reduced to a uni-dimensional dream by all those who pursue it. Parks succeeds in showing that the pursuit of the materialistic strand of the dream leads to the failure of the dream because this inevitably causes the neglect or abandonment of the dream's humanistic strand. We are presented with the Lesser Known who leaves his family in pursuit of his dream of prosperity but he ends up dismembering his family in vain since he dies without achieving the dream.

Parks's deconstruction of the materialistic variety of the dream shows that she advocates the inclusion of its humanistic layer. This is one akin to the dream expressed by Martin Luther King Jr. in his famous speech delivered on August 28, 1963 to an audience of more than 200,000 civil rights supporters. This was when he led a peaceful march between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. He expressed the dream he had in these words:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'[...] I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. (Martin, Luther. "Lincoln Memorial." Washington D.C, 28 August 1963.)

This speech demands the eradication of institutionalized racial inequalities and the promotion of civil rights. The then leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, after organizing the famous 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery (Alabama), pressed for equal treatment and improved circumstances for Blacks. Throughout his lifetime, he organized non-violent protests.

An in-depth analysis of Suzan-Lori Parks's *The American Play* showcases the fact that she succeeds in achieving a new order at the levels of the five hegemonies discussed in this work. She does not only subvert these hegemonies, but builds a new world and order as shown in this chapter. She rewrites the African American historiography through her play by giving the readers and audience new significations which are contrary to the ones recorded in the Great Hole of History. As such, she challenges and changes both readers' and audiences' perceptions of American history. Therefore, it goes without saying that history in *The American Play* is a site where her thinking assumes a position of resistance against the recorded narratives. Through the use of devices discussed such as Repetition and Revision;

the puzzling names given her characters; the employment of real historical figures and events; the use of footnotes and her unconventional use of the English Language, Parks succeeds in achieving a new aesthetics. She unearths the historical truths buried beneath the layers of racial prejudice and in the process of doing so, creates a new order.

The fact that Parks focuses on the staging of alternative views of history implies that history is subject to subjective representation. There is no objective version of history and s/he who has the pen has the power and right to write as s/he wills. In addition, she believes that much of African American history has been erased from the canons of the dominant culture. Thus, she is determined to destabilize the contents of traditional historical documents. Consequently, *The American Play* provides the foundation for the edifice of subversive versions of history. Suzan-Lori Parks is a playwright who attempts, not only to write African Americans into history, but also to change readers'/audiences' perceptions of recorded history.

It has also been shown that Parks rewrites the American Dream which is an element of American ideology and relies on historical epitomes such as the Hall of Wonders, Tv sets and others. Her subversion of the dream posits the existence of an alternative version that incorporates the humanistic dimension of the dream. With respect to the family unit, Parks advocates families in which both parents complement each other. That is why she empowers "the weaker sex" by making her head of her family. Beyond this ideal nuclear family, she hints at the need for all African Americans, all Blacks and even all Americans to bond as one big family.

The chapter has revealed that the language Parks uses in *The America Play* is neither a version of European American English nor what critics have called African American English. It is a language purely created to suit the exigencies of her new world. This code is meant to match the experiences of the Blacks and to ease communication between them. It is a language system that greatly differs from the standard version of English. These differences are seen at the level of its orthography, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax. Differences in grammar are relatively minor, and do not normally affect mutual intelligibility. It should however be noted that these differences are a matter of relative preferences rather than absolute rules; and most are not stable, since the two varieties are constantly influencing each other.

From all indications, Parks has succeeded in achieving the creation a new world: a world free of prejudices, bias, discrimination and derogatory insinuations. This is the kind of world she dreams of for the African Americans, in particular, and for the marginalized (in general). This chapter has therefore established the fact that Parks has created a new aesthetics with her metatheatrical dramatic style and peculiar language. And she has equally created a new order. She has accomplished this by revisiting the status quo evident in American historiography and the traditional American family type. As far as the American Dream is concerned, she has proposed a new version of the dream – a version that promotes a blend of the humanistic and materialistic values. These findings pave the way for the chapter that follows. The chapter looks at the relevance of Parks’s dramatic art to the teaching/learning of drama in secondary school.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PEDAGOGIC RELEVANCE OF PARKS'S DRAMATIC ART

The study of hegemonic subversions in Parks's *The America Play* is of great relevance both at the pedagogic and academic levels. This chapter therefore seeks to show how the findings of this study could be relevant to these two domains, that is, pedagogy and academics. The chapter therefore has two main parts. The first part makes an appraisal of the different dramatic texts on program in the second cycle of post-primary education in Cameroon. This appraisal focuses on the structural presentation and the content or thematic concerns of these dramatic texts. Next, the chapter is consecrated to the implication of the play under study for the academic system in Cameroon. This second segment of the chapter focuses on three main issues: how drama is taught in secondary schools in Cameroon; how it should be taught and the contribution *The America Play* can make in the field of drama teaching.

Drama in secondary schools in Cameroon is incarnated by a variety of texts on programme. These texts are William Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*; Oscar Wild's *The Importance of Being Earnest*; Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*; and Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons* published in 1623, 1895, 1964 and 1990 respectively. These four texts can be classified under either traditional or modern drama. This classification is done following the dramatic conventions prescribed in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. All drama books that respect the rules prescribed in these poetics are termed traditional drama and those that fail to follow these conventions are modern. The aforementioned texts differ from Parks's *The America Play* structurally and thematically as shall later on be shown.

Structurally speaking, these four texts differ from Parks's *The America Play* with respect to the number of Acts. This greatly influences the plot of the play since the poetics require that each act develops a particular aspect of the plot. Parks's play is presented in two Acts spanning 41 pages. These two Acts have no Scenes as is the case of most traditional plays like *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Act One is entitled "Lincoln Act" which focuses on the Foundling Father, his dreams and ambitions, while Act Two is captioned "The Hall of Wonders." It focuses on the search of the true history of the black people. It is subdivided into sub-sections that have the following sub-titles: A-Big Bang, B-Echo, C-Archeology, D-Echo, E-Spadework, F-Echo and G-The Great Beyond. These sub-titles develop specific ideas in the play. As far as characterization is

concerned, the play has few characters: namely, Lucy, Brazil and the Foundling Father. One of the specificities of Parks's play that distinguishes it from the other texts is focalization. By "focalization" we mean that the actors at times do not act the story but the author comes in to express their intentions. This is the case where we have the Foundling Father as the speaker but his intentions and thoughts are expressed by someone else. Such an extract was earlier supplied in Chapter Three.

This technique, earlier discussed, is not found in the plays studied at the Advanced Level since the speech actions of the personae are presented by the actors themselves except in the case of stage directions. This style is unique as it is neither found in traditional nor modern plays. An examination of the Acts of Parks's play shows that it is difficult to identify the exposition, climax and denouement of the play. This structural presentation equally places this play in the category of postmodern drama. It neither conforms to the poetics nor to modern dramatic conventions. This drama is a drama of protest and is different from the drama of denunciation that modern drama is.

A look at the structure of the play, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, shows that it is traditional drama. The play is subdivided into five Acts with different Scenes and the characters are clearly presented. It respects almost all the conventions of traditional drama especially those of a tragedy as prescribed by Aristotle. The plot is linear and the sequence of events has a cause and effect relationship. Of its five Acts, the first Act presents the exposition, the second Act shows the rising action, the climax is in Act Three, Act Four depicts the anti-climax or the falling action and the last Act is the resolution or the denouement. The setting of this famous play is highly symbolic and significant. Besides respecting the traditional conventions of a play presented in five Acts and in a linear sequence, *Anthony and Cleopatra* also respects the principles of a tragedy. This structure greatly differs from the free style in the postmodern play titled *The America Play*. The structure of this Shakespearean classic accounts for its captivating tone.

The Importance of Being Earnest is structurally written in three acts with each of these acts having two parts. Acts I and II are about twenty pages long with two parts each and Act III is only about ten pages long. The first Act immediately addresses the conflict of Jack's separate identities, and this basic issue compounds into several more conflicts all introduced in Act I. The Act also gives us most of the background information about the main characters, even about those whom we meet only in Act II such as Cecily. Act I also focuses on Jack's dilemmas though Algernon is the main character on the stage and has the wittiest lines. Following the traditional

structure, this Act can be termed the “expository act”. Act II then proceeds to go beyond from Jack to present conflicts with other characters. The action continues to rise as the characters become entangled, but by the end of Act II, things have begun to sort themselves out. This Act constitutes what is known as the rising action. The purpose of Act III, therefore, is to represent the climax: the barriers preventing the marriage of Jack and Gwendolen. This Act is both the climax and the denouement in Oscar Wilde’s play. The play is a modern play because it breaks free from the structure imposed by the *Poetics* as well as deviates otherwise from traditional plays.

Another play that fits the structural description of modern play is *A Man for all Seasons*. It has a two-Act structure. In Act One we see more in the days of his rather uneasy political favour. In Act Two he is under increasing pressure which culminates in his imprisonment, trial and death. Each Act is divided into a number of scenes, that is, eight for Act One and ten for Act Two. This structure greatly contrasts the traditional norms prescribed by the *Poetics*. It cannot be classified in the same category with Parks’s play either.

The *Trials of Brother Jero* is presented in five scenes. Each of these scenes can however be likened to Acts but the fact that they do not follow the prescribed structure makes it a modern text too. With regards to the structure of the texts discussed above, it is evident that three classes of drama texts emerge: the traditional, the modern and the postmodern. The traditional focuses on rules, the next goes against these rules to expose the meaninglessness and absurdity of existence while the last one simply deconstructs every form of prescribed rules express scepticism for grand narratives and universal paradigms. These structural presentations greatly influence the themes of the plays above.

Thematically, there is also a great difference between Parks’s *The America Play* and the plays under study in the second cycle of post primary education in Cameroon. Parks’s Play deconstructs certain issues such as dramatic conventions, history, language, historiography, the family unit and the American Dream that have favoured the subjugation of the African Americans for centuries. This deconstructive nature of Parks’s play is typical of postmodern drama. She writes to search and retrieve the discarded history of the African Americans from the annals of American history as noted before. The traditional play, *Anthony and Cleopatra* has nothing or little to do with history as it principally focuses on love and duty. Such themes were characteristic of traditional drama since it was meant to entertain the nobility.

Oscar Wilde, the Irish writer, uses wit in his famous play – of *The Importance of Being Earnest* a comedy of manner that falls under modern drama. The play satirizes the British upper class. Wilde was one of the chief proponents of the Aesthetic Movement based on the principle of art for art's sake. The Aesthetic Movement was an English artistic movement of the late 19th century, dedicated to the idea of art for art's sake—that is, art should be concerned solely with beauty and should not have any moral or social purpose. Associated with the movement were the artists Aubrey Beardsley, James McNeill Whistler and Walter Pater. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde uses the late 19th-century theatrical form called society drama to create a brilliantly satirical comedy of manners. Frequently making use of the short, pithy and humorous sayings that are his trademark, he ridicules the frivolity of fashionable London society. The title of the play comes from the desire of the heroines, Gwendolyn Fairfax and Cecily Cardew, to marry a man by the name of Earnest simply because they admire the name.

This play has thematic concerns such as pride, hypocrisy, religion, deceit, double identity and marriage. This modern drama that deviates from the conventions of traditional drama is influenced by the collapse of faith in Christianity and traditional values, the philosophy of existentialism, the Marxist social and Darwinian ideologies, the influence of modernism and the two world wars.

The Trials of Brother Jero by Wole Soyinka, the African literary giant and the first African black writer to win the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1986, satirizes and criticizes religious charlatanism and socio-political vices in his native Nigerian society. He does this through his protagonist, a self-named prophet who tells the audience that he was born a prophet and reveals his view of prophethood as a "trade." He acquires a beach-side in the name of his former master, the Old Prophet, by leading a campaign against the other prophets. The Old prophet curses Jero wishing his downfall through women which is eventually fulfilled. He uses all the tricks possible to draw more worshippers to himself and to extort money from them, especially from his assistant Chume, who is ignorant. This play translates the post-colonial African society that is characterized by its hardened criminals in the form of ruthless, quack prophets and power-drunken politicians.

Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons* is about the clash between politics and religion that leads to the formation of the Church of England. It deals with the tragic relationship between English king, Henry VIII (1509-1547), and English statesman, Sir Thomas More. The play

illustrates Bolt's ability to dramatize political and moral issues using a clear dramatic structure, strong characterization and expressive dialogue.

The teachings of these texts in most secondary schools in Cameroon go on without a strict application of the pedagogy of drama teaching. This is because the dramatization of these plays is limited or almost absent in most cases. The plays are taught as if they were novels without practicality: they are not put on scene. The term “Drama” is an Ancient Greek word meaning ‘act’ or ‘deed.’ The Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle used this term in a very influential treatise called the *Poetics*. In this text, Aristotle classified different forms of poetry according to basic features he thought could be commonly recognized in their composition. He used the term ‘drama’ to describe poetic compositions that were ‘acted’ in front of audiences in a theatre. He identified different types of composition within this category, including comedy and tragedy. He regarded comedy as a form of drama because it represented acts that made audiences laugh and he considered tragedy a form of drama because it represented acts that made audiences feel pity or fear.

The teaching of drama in Cameroon is controlled by the Ministry of Secondary Education. The English subsystem of education at the Secondary level is followed up by the GCE Board. Dramatic texts on program are therefore supposed to be taught according to specific Drama GCE syllabuses. Some teachers teach drama with absolutely no drama training at all. Many questions that surround the teaching of these dramatic texts are questions such as: are drama and theatre two separate subjects; do they have different skills and knowledge, or are they aspects of the same experience? If drama is a separate art form, should technical theatre skills, such as lighting and set design, be taught as part of a drama lesson?

The way student’ mastery of drama texts is assessed have greatly influenced the teaching of drama in Cameroon. The component of drama acting, which is major, has been left out. Thus, drama teaching in Cameroon lays emphasis on reading and writing and is examination-centered. Apart from this examination-centered approach of drama-teaching, is the problem of availability of the prescribed plays. Some drama lessons are taught in some areas of Cameroon with a limited number of textbooks in class. The teaching technics or strategies of literary texts in Cameroon’s secondary schools are therefore a major problem to the educational community and administrators.

The teaching of drama, in particular, has been a major preoccupation to many scholars. The history of the teaching and learning processes has known many models or methods of teaching and learning. Major approaches include the behaviourist approach, the cognitive approach and the Socio-cognitive approach. These various models are presently examined against the backdrop of how drama should be taught.

The behavioural school of thought suggests that knowledge consists of a coherent body of information and learned patterns and that teaching is concerned with passing on this body of knowledge. With reference to teaching, behavioural theories tend to address teaching as presenting students with a set of behaviours to be mastered or skills that are taught according to some hierarchy of drill and practice. In the words of Gipps, “A basic tenet of the behaviourist school is that learning is seen as linear and sequential. Complex understandings occur only when elemental prerequisite learnings are mastered” (Gipps 19). In this teaching situation, the learning conditions and the teachers’ classroom strategies are the same in all cases and there is no allowance for individual differences in learners. This involves constant repetition, whereby the learner is a passive recipient of learning and learning here consists of the acquisition of new associations. Progression occurs when simple behaviours are chained together and shaped into more complex behaviour. It is difficult to use this for the teaching of drama as students should actively participating by ‘doing’ in a drama lesson. It would not be possible to have behaviour determined by the consequences it has produced in the past, because drama is so variable in outcome.

The cognitive approach consists of an ordered, interaction between teacher and student. With regard to content, the cognitive school of thought suggests that knowledge consists of an organized set of mental structures and procedures and that learning occurs when the student actively tries to understand and eventually masters these structures and procedures. Action and self-directed problem solving is at the heart of learning development. The cognitive theory became prominent in the 1960s which denied the stimulus response mechanism of behaviourism, and declared that knowledge was operative not figurative. The cognitive model came up to draw attention to the psychological relationship between the teacher and the students, claiming that there was a call for “...considering the bi-directional nature of classroom influences...” (Winne and Marx 676), rather than the one directional teacher-led approach of the behaviourist school. Winne and Marx look at the relationship between knowledge, thought and behaviour then between teacher and student. But they do not consider

the influences at work between the students themselves, which occur regularly in the drama classroom. Cognitive theories tend to present teaching as engaging the students in the learning of concepts and of problem solving exercises, using students' creativity, so that information is interpreted. The emphasis is on both product and process and involves active mental exploration of complex environments, including reflection. Kathleen holds in her thesis that:

There is room for the cognitive approach in drama teaching as drama teachers refer to learning of concepts such as the 'drama conventions' and also use phrases such as 'problem-solving' to describe certain activities in their lessons. Students are also encouraged to use their 'creativity.' The cognitive model recognises such internal procedures, which are concerned with aesthetics, motivation and making judgements. Nonetheless, emphasis on product rather than process is more difficult for drama teachers, who have generally required some emphasis to be placed on the process. (Kathleen 31)

This is to say that if emphasis is laid by teachers on the dramatic conventions in the cognitive model. This explains the essay questions asked that involve thinking processes as the cognitive approach consists of allowing or encouraging active mental exploration of complex environments. However, the fact that the approach neglects "process" makes it inappropriate for the teaching of drama.

With the socio-cognitive approach, the teacher does not necessarily know when s/he starts the lesson and what the final product will be. Therefore, the Socio-cognitive method already indicates a more versatile and flexible style. With regard to content, the socio-cognitive approach suggests that knowledge is not absolute but arises from interaction between teacher and learner, and learner and learner, all within a social setting. It also suggests that learning begins with shared social behaviour. Learners suggest ways forward, improvise and try things out. The teacher is part of the learning process and acts as guide or partner. Assessment from a socio-cognitive perspective requires tasks that are performance based. The socio-cognitive perspective is appropriate for drama. It has creative performance and thinking components that need to be actively exercised, rehearsed and refined with someone who is more 'expert' than the students. At the same time, it involves students' commitment in the learning process.

Kathleen Elizabeth Radley, in her thesis, "The Teaching of Drama in Secondary Schools: How Cambridgeshire Teachers Feel The Subject Should Be Taught In Relationship To The National Curriculum," reveals that there are two schools of thought in the teaching of

drama, that is, the Drama-in-Education Theory of Heathcote and the Dramatic Art Theory of Hornbrook. The Drama-In- Education method holds that the students learn about the content through the drama. This involves learning the dramatic conventions or the mechanics of how art form works. Here, content is not paramount if the students are interested in dramatic forms. This can be seen as a skill based approach.

Meanwhile, the dramatic Art theory by Hornbrook holds that theatre should be part of the subject matter of drama education. There comes the nuance between drama and theatre. Some teachers think that drama was a separate subject from theatre. Drama refers to a written play for performance on stage, television or radio. In the classroom, it can be defined as developing thinking skills, comprehension and bringing written word to life. Theatre is one of the oldest and most popular forms of entertainment in which actors perform live for an audience on a stage or a space designated for the performance. The space set aside for performances, either permanently or temporarily, is also known as a theatre. Martin Esslin, in an essay published in 1976, in *An Anatomy of Drama*, writes:

The theatre is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself. [...] Hamlet speaks of the theatre holding a mirror up to nature. I think in fact it is society to which theatre holds up the mirror. The theatre and all drama can be seen as a mirror in which society looks at itself. (Esslin 101-3)

Theatre is therefore the mirror of the society as people go on stage to act out what happens in society. The plays acted are sometimes criticisms of some societal vices with the aim of bringing about change.

In the introduction of *Teaching Drama in the Classroom: A Toolbox for Teachers* (2011) edited by Joanne Kilgour Dowdy and Sarah Kaplan, Anthony Manna holds that

When teachers harness drama's power with accurate learning outcomes, a precise structure, and appropriate drama techniques, drama activity can become a fertile method for integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, researching, technology applications, and art experiences." (Manna 2)

Hence, drama teaching is seen as that subject that has the capacity to build many skills and talents such as speaking, reading, writing, thinking in learners. This needs to be effectively prepared by the teacher in defining his teaching objectives. Four Manna and his contemporaries, contend that effective drama teaching following precise structure and drama

techniques and activity can only produce accurate learning outcomes. It equally helps in enhancing artistic experiences.

In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Diane Ravitch – Premier education historian and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, passionately advocates school reforms that provide a secure place for the arts, including drama, in every grade. In the curriculum Ravitch envisions, “. . . all children deserve the opportunity to play a musical instrument, to sing, engage in dramatic events, dance, paint, sculpt, and study the great works of artistic endeavour from other times and places” (Ravitch 235). This is to insist on the theatricality that accompanies drama teaching. To be able to enhance children’s creativity in arts, it is important to introduce them to all sorts of artistic activity. Another important point of this quotation lays emphasis on the fact that children should study other people’s works irrespective of epoch and place where the work was created since art has no boundary.

Looking at the different teaching techniques of drama, one realizes that there is a host of drama teaching strategies that cannot be exhausted in this work. A critical analysis of Parks’s style in her famous play, *The America Play*, requires the choice of an approach that is just as metatheatrical as her style. The affix “meta-” from Greek could mean change, transformation, beyond, transcending or above. In 1963, Lionel Abel’s *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* was published where he introduced the term ‘Metatheatre.’ According to him, ‘metatheatre’ is the right term to describe the only form possible to the contemporary playwright who wishes to treat a subject gravely. He held that tragedy, invented by Greeks to describe pain and yet give pleasure, is unfeasible today Lionel Abel attempts to explain “metatheatre” as a dramatic category or kind.

Metatheatre, at one level, can be viewed as one make-believe world superimposed upon another make-believe dramatic world. The most easily understandable example of this relationship is the ‘play-within-the-play.’ Of course, this idea did not come into being in the age of Calderon and Shakespeare. The idea of multiple layers of illusion is as old as theatre itself. But it is only since Abel’s book was published in 1963 that a whole area of criticism and theory has sprung up in the West under the general heading of ‘metatheatre’ or ‘metadrama.’ The question now is what is the theatre that forms the foundation of metatheatre? Parks, in her play, uses metatheatrical conventions and metatheatrical language that demands a metadramatic approach of teaching, that is, which goes beyond the conventional approaches of teaching drama.

Parks's play is that which promotes naturalism and spontaneity in both speech and action. Telling learners to memorize excerpts of her play to act on stage would be misleading given Parks's style. Actors just need to have the subject matter and act it as they feel and without pressure to respect conventions of a language. Teachers here simply act as guides with less intervention on the theatrical display. The content and form of Parks's play therefore requires a pedagogic approach that is more liberal and metatheatrical. It should accept some conventional strategies and other strategies that will respond to her metatheatrical devices. The content of drama should therefore inform how it should be taught and learnt. Teachers have to be clear about what they are teaching before they can devise strategies for teaching it. Drama teaching in schools should therefore take into consideration two aspects: the written text and its acting.

This chapter was intended to make an appraisal of the four dramatic texts in the second cycle of post-primary education in Cameroon, that is, William Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*; Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*; Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*; and Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons*. This appraisal is done in connection to the specificity of Parks's *The America Play*. The chapter has identified and analysed some teaching and learning strategies that pertain to drama teaching and learning. It has also been seen that drama is useful for the teaching of life and social skills. But to regard it solely in the light of dramatic conventions is to deny its existence as a unique art form. Drama teaching and learning, in this context, consists of joint problem solving that involves both teachers and students.

Liz Johnson and Cecily O'Neill hold that: "Teaching drama involves action and interaction between adults and students. Outcomes and knowledge are reworked constantly to find meaning for each individual participant" (Johnson and O'Neill 172). It has also been established that Parks's play could only be taught following a metatheatrical approach that is compatible with her literary style. Lastly, it has been portrayed that the role of the drama teacher is special as s/he acts as a facilitator and not an instructor. Power moves between the teacher and the student and this empowerment enables the students to create their own answers to problems. This eventually equips them with skills for life.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study embarked on the investigation of Parks's subversion of different hegemonies in *The America Play*. The hegemonies identified as having been subverted are dramatic conventions, historiography, language, family unit and the American Dream. The subversion of these hegemonies has led to the creation of a new order and a new world wherein, the "subjugated; dominated; marginalized; and other" may have the chance to live in a world void of biases, prejudices and insults. The New-Historicist and Postmodern theories used in the analysis of the text made it possible to highlight the type of world that existed before Parks embarked on her subversive endeavour and how she deconstructs it to create a new one. These two conceptual frameworks have enabled the study to embark, first on a New Historicist analysis of the five hegemonies listed above, then on the playwright's deconstruction of these hegemonies. The work has then looked at the new order and world the dramatist proposes and has shown how her dramatic art can enrich the teaching of drama in Cameroonian high schools.

The work thus presented above is made up of four chapters preceded by a general introduction and rounded off by a conclusion. The first three chapters represent the thesis, the antithesis and the synthesis respectively. Meanwhile the fourth chapter discusses the pedagogic relevance of Parks's dramatic art as earlier expressed. Major elements of the study have been raised in the general introduction. They include the research problem that highlights the major concern of the study; the hypothesis that is either an assumption or a contention that the study sets out to verify; next comes the scope that delimits the sphere of the study; the significance of the study follows and presents the relevance of the study both at the academic and pedagogical levels; then follows the definition of key terms, next is the discussion of the theoretical framework and ,lastly, the study reviews literature related to the concern of the study. The structure of the work that is closely examined in the paragraphs that follow, is the last item mentioned in this general introduction.

The first chapter of the study is entitled "Existing Hegemonies and Emergent Society." It has portrayed the different hegemonies represented in Parks's *The America Play*. It has equally shed light on the fact that these hegemonies emanate from the kind of society in which Parks lives. The New Historicist theory helped in identifying a society whose

historiography is European American as historiographic records present a deliberate erasure of black American historiography. Also, the society is revealed as one with a language dichotomy that encourages social stratification and social imbalance. Meanwhile its literary tradition conforms to the dramatic conventions of the West. To end, both its conventional family type and political ideology favour the marginalization of minorities.

Titled “Towards a Paradigmatic Shift,” Chapter Two has shown how Parks deconstructs the five hegemonies presented in the previous chapter. She has presented a society whose dramatic conventions are a blend of traditional and modern theatrical styles as well as incorporate non-literary aspects. The chapter has also argued that Parks rewrites American historiography by exhuming the buried African American heritage. In addition, she is portrayed as having a language system that suits the marginalized and contributes to the assertion of their identity. As far as the family unit is concerned, she is shown as having empowered the woman whose role in the family was undermined by the presence of a “providing” father. Finally, the chapter has looked at how she uses elements of the America Dream such as the Hall of Wonders and the Tv set to show misconceptions of this political notion that results into its materialistic version.

Chapter Three of this study is captioned “Achievement of a New Order.” In this chapter, the study has demonstrated that the playwright’s subversion of these hegemonies have eventually led to the creation of a new order and a new world. This world is one that has its own dramatic conventions characterized by unconventional features like meta-theatre, repetition and revision, spells and rests. The historiographic records take into account the accomplishments of African Americans and imply their inclusion in the nation’s historical narratives. Meanwhile, the chapter has projected Parks’s option for her own peculiar language –that is neither standard nor ghetto is– having its own distinct syntax, grammar, orthography and phonetics. She stands for family types with balanced power relationships between the male and female parent as well as advocates the humanization of the American Dream. Most importantly, the chapter has proven that Parks succeeds in presenting the image of a world free of prejudices, discrimination and all forms of stratification.

The last chapter is “The Pedagogic Relevance of Parks’s Dramatic Art.” It sets out to show how postmodernist theatre can enhance drama teaching. The chapter is made up of two parts. The first part has focused on the structural and thematic comparisons of the texts on programme in the second cycle of Secondary school with *The America Play*. The second part

has handled the pedagogic implication of *The America Play* to the teaching of drama in secondary school. The findings of the chapter have revealed the fact that Parks has developed her own style that goes beyond theatre to make drama more true-to-life than ever. This new dramatic form has been termed “meta-theatrical drama.” The chapter has portrayed it as a form that seeks to present drama as more true-to-life.

By way of contribution to research, this work brings into the limelight the fact that drama can be an effective means by which suppressed minorities can challenge status quos. It has shown how Parks, as a woman and a Black, does so in *The America Play*. The work therefore becomes a source of inspiration from which Blacks and other minorities, all over the globe, can copy ways of reasserting their identity and culture. From a pedagogical perspective, it proposes alternative and effective ways of teaching drama in high school. However, the work is not a panacea to all literary questions. As such, it suggests other interesting areas of research. For instance, it will be very interesting to examine the extent to which the Black’s struggle for equality finds expression in the plays of contemporary African writers like Wole Soyinka.

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