

The Job of the Writer is “to Make Revolution Irresistible”: An Examination of the Radical Pedagogy and Praxis of Toni Cade Bambara

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Abstract:

Using converging lenses including Freirean (1998) Critical Pedagogy, specifically his conceptualization of teacher as cultural worker, and Ali's (2011) Womanist Performance Pedagogy (WPP), this study sought to understand how a representative case, artist, activist and educator Toni Cade Bambara, constructed a radical teacher identity both inside and outside traditional spaces. Domain analysis was employed to analyze interviews along with document analysis to examine archival materials and published texts. Findings indicate Bambara believed cultural work, including performances and art production, informs professional practice and pedagogy. Bambara further contends aesthetic artifacts should be “usable” as educative texts. Furthermore, the case surmises that one's teaching identity is grounded in personal history as it relates to the larger socio-political context and as such black female teachers are instrumental in theorizing about and creating culturally relevant pedagogies.

Keywords

Toni Cade Bambara; black feminist; womanism; black feminist theory; cultural work; critical pedagogy; domain analysis; womanist performance pedagogy; artist-activist-educator.

1. Introduction

After author-academic Toni Cade Bambara's (1995) death, her friend and esteemed author Toni Morrison (1996) called Bambara's writing “absolutely critical to twentieth century literature” (p. 1). Initially recognized for her short fiction, such as the middle school textbook staple “Raymond's Run,” Bambara was also a novelist, anthologist, essayist, and educator. *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Bambara, was one of the first about Black women by Black women. Prior to *Black Woman* Black males and non-Blacks were writing about Black women and often in pathologizing ways. Dubbing Bambara a “black feminist foremother,” Guy-Sheftall (2008) distinguished the impact of the anthology from that of Millett's (1970) *Sexual Politics* and Lerner's (1972) documentary history *Black Women in White*

America. Aligned with Wall (2008) who remarked that *The Black Woman* “signaled the emergence” (p. 21) of Black women writers, Guy-Sheftall (2008) argued that Bambara's anthology marked the beginning of Black Women's Studies and “was significant because of the value it attached to hearing the distinct voices of black women, arguing that our experiences were different from both black men and white women” (p. 74). Therefore, the convergence of the Black Radical and the Women's movements, for African American women, could be traced to *The Black Woman* (Cleage, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 2008; Holmes & Wall, 2008).

Black female scholars have often been viewed as lacking “intellectual and moral” capacity as their identities are narrowly constructed by the dominant culture (Hull & Scott, p. xviii). When finally accepted as scholarly contributors, Black intellectuals should, according to this view, only talk about “Black folk stuff” (Bambara, 1970). As a result, scholarly discourse by Black women, which can possibly be applied cross culturally and cross disciplines, is regulated to the culture-fetish academic margins. This exclusion necessitated the development of Black feminist and/or Womanist theory and pedagogy that challenges the dominant androcentric rational order. Black feminist/Womanist pedagogy then “aims to develop a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion that stands in contradiction to the Western intellectual tradition of exclusivity and chauvinism” (Omolade, 1987, p. 32). Black feminists and womanist theorists present the Black woman as a thinking subject, rather than a pathologized object, who is also “wanting to know more and in greater depth . . . thus, interrogating the epistemological exclusions she [the Black woman] endures in intellectual life in general and feminist scholarship in particular” (Walker, 1983, p. 86).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The objective of this case study is twofold: (a) to understand how Black women artists construct a radical teacher identity both inside and outside traditional spaces by examining one representative case artist, activist, and educator, Toni Cade

Bambara and (b) to ascertain how pedagogy informs and is informed by teaching identity.

1.3 Significance & Research Questions

Several in depth literary analyses of Bambara's writings and chronicles of her life as an artist intellectual exist (Alwes, 1996; Barrett, 1998; Bone, 2003; Butler-Evans, 1989; Collins, 1996; Franko, 2001; Griffin, 2002; Hull, 2000; Morton, 1999; Muther, 2002; Perkins, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Wall, 2005). However, although Bambara was an esteemed artist-intellectual, producing and editing an impressive body of work including short stories, novels, essays, documentaries, and anthologies, "much more must be done to honor her magnificences as an educator and activist" (Holmes, 2008, p. 8). Using interviews, essays, and primary source material from Bambara's archives this case study was guided by the following questions:

1. What was Bambara's pedagogy? In what ways, if any, was her pedagogy reflective of critical and Black feminist/Womanist educational theories?
2. How did Bambara's background and experience as a Black feminist writer, educator, and activist inform her pedagogy and teaching?

1.3 Relevant Literature

Teacher educator research suggests that contemporary African American teachers continue to carry the tradition of uplifting the race¹ and despite access to other work opportunities, teachers and teacher educators' implicit activism is to assist students of color (Kemp 1997, Goodwin 1996; Collins 1990; Ladson-Billings' 2005; Hill-Brisbane

2005; Foster, 1993; Dixson 2003; Irvine 1989). There is also and emerging research regarding who, within the Black community, has historically participated in the construction of community literacies and how texts that inform community funds of knowledge are produced (Alim & Baugh, 2006). Of particular interest are the works that analyze the contribution of artist-intellectuals during the Radical 1960s to community funds of knowledge (Crawford & Collins, 2006; Fisher, 2009). Some texts produced during this era took forms that appear informal-talk, games, dance, and song and others, appearing to follow formal modes of textual production yet center community funds of knowledge-newspapers, pamphlets and books.

Indeed African American women have made vital contributions but are often underrepresented in the "literary landscapes of either the black or the white west" (Clarke, 2005, p. 1). The Black feminist tradition in its late 20th century incarnation was shaped and nurtured by African American women artist intellectuals. Most available information on the connection of Black power era Black Feminist or Womanist ideologies and pedagogy are theoretical or anecdotal (hooks, 1989; Henry, 1993; Hull, Bell-Scott & Smith, 1982/2003; Omolade, 1987). Additional research exists on the Black Arts and Power Movements' role in cultivating the ideologies of black artist-intellectuals and their impact on black culture, literacy, and the epistemologies constructed within the African American community (Alim & Baugh, 2005; Crawford & Collins, 2006; Fisher, 2009; Gayle, 1971; Joseph, 2006; Lemelle & Richards, 2005; Neal, 1971; Smethurst, 2005, Watkins & Anderson, 2005). The ideologies of the Black Arts and Black Power Movements also have informed both formal and informal education in the Black community (Richards & Lemelle 2005; Watkins, 2005). Richards and Lemelle (2005) contend the writings of Black radicals and public intellectuals "whether in policy, prose, or poetry, creates a significant body of literature that serves as educative text" and, therefore, exploring the Black radical tradition in education is an emerging and fertile field (p. 27). Education for participants in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) (the artistic arm of the Black Power Movement that spanned from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s) was centered on an ideology of freedom and self-determination and had both formal and nonformal educative strands. Formal mechanisms included the founding of Independent Black Institutions (IBI), particularly independent Black schools such as Uhuru Sasa Shule (Freedom Now School) and Weusi Shule (Black School) in New York (Richards & Lemelle, 2005) and Shule Jumamose in Sacramento (Fisher, 2009). Additionally, nonformal educational mechanisms

¹ Scholars have problematized Washington's notion of Black "racial uplift" (1901) as an accommodationist ideology; one that insisted that racial uplift included the cooptation of whitestream practices by African Americans and their assimilation into the dominant culture. Scholars including Dubois and Woodson challenged the concept on different grounds. Woodson (1933/2000) surmised that Washington's philosophy denigrated African American culture and practices and privileged those of Whites. Although these critiques problematize the idea of race uplift, as first defined by Washington, the intent of education as a means of social mobility can also be seen from a later Black Nationalist stand point (both political and cultural nationalists) who saw education as a form of self-determination (Lemelle & Richards, 2008) (Kujichgulia) rather than as an accommodationist assimilatory measure. It is outside of the scope of the studies reviewed here to explore what strand of race uplift thought the Black female teachers, who cited race uplift as a goal, were accessing—the more radical or the assimilatory. Therefore, following previous researchers, the term 'race-uplift' is generalized to regard education as a means of social and political advancement for African-Americans.

allowed artists to engage in the creation of art, poetry, dance, adornment, and drama that promoted the mission of Black liberation from racist oppression, as well as Black unity, political mobilization, and nation building. Though earlier scholarship centered on the historical aspects of the Black Arts Movement, current research uncovers the Black Art Movement's influences on African American literacy practices (Fisher, 2009). Also researchers have explored Black liberation movements' influence on African American pedagogy, formal and informal mechanisms of learning and linguistic practices (Payne & Strickland, 2008; Smitherman, 1999; Watkins, 2005). But less research has unearthed the role of Black women, specifically, as individual agents and co-constructors of Black independent thought, action, aesthetics, and pedagogy. Black feminist art has challenged the multiple forms of racialized and gendered oppression in both academia and within the Black Arts and Black Power Movements through ethnographic explorations of Black feminist/Womanist and lesbian identity for some time (Ater, 2007; Bambara, 1980; Clarke, 2005; Collins, 2006; Dubey, 1994; Farrington, 2005; Smith, 1983/2000; Walker, 1983). Scholars have extended the research that acknowledges Black women as artist-intellectuals and sought to illumine how Black women have functioned as co-constructors of African-American education through their work, art, and activism. For some of the movements' adherents, women represented a painful past of racialized conventions that threatened to undo the warrior charge of Gayle's (1971) aptly dubbed "Black Aesthetic".

1.4. Theoretical Framework: Cultural Work and Womanist Performance Theory

Freire's conceptualization of teaching as cultural work and Womanist Performance Pedagogy (itself a convergence of theoretical perspectives) frame this case study. As a framework, these theories allow for the interrogation of the ways in which teaching practice is grounded in personal history and becomes the basis of identity development (Eakin, 1999, 2008; Feldman, 2005). Ticknor (2014) surmises that teaching can be one's sole social justice activity in that teaching can be a device in advancing political aims. Certainly teachers, both inside and outside of the schoolhouse can use knowledge production and sharing as tools to dismantle the proverbial "master's house" (Lorde 2000); these "tools of combat are passionate expression of pen, ink, and voice (Bailey, 2010, p. 69). Thusly, teachers function as cultural workers in Freirean sense.

Teaching itself is performance—both literally and figuratively a performance of the self that filters the content. Singer initially introduced the theory of cultural performance, and it was adopted

by anthropologists and folklorists to refer to a unit of analysis to circumscribe "[p] lays, concerts, and lectures . . . but also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic" (as cited in Bauman, 1975, p. 291). Performance exposed sites of cultural convergence in which race and gender intersect, not only with each other, but also with politics, aesthetics, and pedagogy. Performance, as it is currently defined by cultural anthropologists, is "a highly reflexive mode of communication . . . a specially marked, artful way of speaking" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 60). Performance can become textual, which indicates the "interaction of verbal performance with accompanying media" including music, films, and books (p. 78). Recognizing the ways in which black women artist intellectuals reframe the meaning and utility of performance, critical performance theories challenge "dominant western conceptions by prompting researchers to stress the cultural organization of communicative process" (p. 59). Critical performance ethnographers evaluate the various communicative processes that shape performance by first considering the cultural factors that inform it. According to this view, any set of public utterances or "illocutionary forces" (Bakhtin, as cited in Bauman & Briggs, 1990), beyond just traditional dramaturgy can be considered performance, including speeches, rituals, dance, and storytelling. Studying the performative aspects of these texts—performances of teaching, curricular materials as well as film, poetry, essays and novels—is important in evaluating the cultural factors that shape the subject's theory. Including Womanist Performance Pedagogy allows for an additional lens to evaluate these reflexive modes of communication in that it affords researchers a way to understand the cultural processes that influence the producers of these texts—Black women. For this line of inquiry, in addition to other "illocutionary forces," I am evaluating the performativity of teaching as an "artful way of speaking" in that teaching, in the black community, extends the oracular traditions embedded in the Black church and undergirded by ancestral verbal performances exemplified in the West African griot tradition.

To add additional context, Freire's (1998) summation of cultural work begins with the assertion that education, in all its forms, is a political process. Schools can become institutions designed to impose majoritarian values and beliefs and teachers must, with humility, love, and care, work with students and mentees to dismantle oppressive hierarchical relationships. Teachers who view students as co-constructors of knowledge and recognize the "absurdity of the authoritarianism that claims that all

these spaces belong to the educational authorities, to teachers” (Freire, 1998, p. 52) can be viewed as cultural performers/workers. Freire (1998) theorizes that teachers, as they perform the teaching task, must disavow authoritarianism, share the educational experiences with their students, and be culturally astute. To construct a democratic classroom, teachers must know the cultures and epistemologies of the students they encounter—teachers must be *cultural workers*:

Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it. (Freire, 1998, p. 72)

Sharing much ideologically with a feminist ethic of care (Foster, 1990; Noddings, 1992), Freire’s (1998) conceptualization of the teacher as cultural workers asserts, “teachers must have humility, coupled with love and respect for their students” (p. 39). According to Freire teachers cannot be cultural workers without loving their students and their vocation: “even realizing that love is not enough. It is not possible to be a teacher without loving teaching” (p. 15). For teachers, as cultural workers, to become loving practitioners they must incorporate the practice of care.

2. Methods

Analyzing interviews from Bonetti (1982), Chandler (1990), Guy-Sheftall (1979), Massiah (1996), Salaam (2008), and Tate (1989) as well as Bambara’s books, essays, and archival materials, this study inquired about Bambara’s educational and social theories, how her ideologies informed her identity, and how her identities shaped her pedagogy and practice. These interviews and documents reveal Bambara’s critiques of policies and practices that shape America’s educational climate for people of color globally as well as elucidated her ideas about schooling. The study triangulates data to answer the research questions: primary data, which include documents and interviews, and secondary data from other theorists and critics to provide context to and a critique of Bambara’s educational theory.

Table 1. Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
What was Bambara’s pedagogy? In what ways, if any, was her pedagogy reflective of Black feminist/Womanist educational theories and traditions?	Interviews: Bonetti (1982) Chandler (1990) Guy-Sheftall (1979) Massiah (1996) Salaam (2008) Tate (1989) Essays Personal and professional letters Syllabi, course descriptions, lesson plans, and relevant notes
To what extent has Bambara’s writer and activist identities influenced her pedagogy and practice?	Interviews Essays Personal and professional letters Syllabi, course descriptions, lesson plans, and relevant notes

2.1 Data Sources and Collection

I analyzed interviews by first looking for themes relevant to the following preliminary categories in Table 2. Many of these topics were covered across the interviews, so no interview fell strictly under one axial category. Next, interviews were inductively coded and related coded responses were grouped into memos. In third level analysis, domain analysis worksheets were used to record memos and to find semantic relationships within Bambara’s responses. In my fourth level of interview data analysis, I constructed a list of hypothesized domains and subsumed coded responses beneath them. Some codes fell under more than one domain because the semantic relationship could be represented by either critical pedagogy or Black feminist/womanist pedagogy.

Documents. Using domain analysis, I accessed the archives of Toni Cade Bambara at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. The archives contained Bambara’s personal papers and manuscripts as well as documents related to the Southern Collective of African American Writers (SCAAW).

I employed a Womanist textual analysis methodology². By using this methodology, I sought to discover, through personal and public documents, the multiple oppressions women face and how it informs the work they produce. According to Brown-Crawford (2002), a Womanist analysis allows researchers to consider a document’s sociohistorical

² This method of analysis is steeped in the tradition of Womanist hope theology that explores, through women’s narratives, the ways that women’s voices and contributions have been marginalized in the traditional Christian church. Brown-Crawford (2002) merged Womanist critique and critical textual analysis to form her Womanist textual analysis.

context. Most importantly researchers are able to discern how a document's sociohistoricity informs both the content and intent of sources. According to McCulloch (2004) the use of documents in research has been viewed as exclusively the domain of historians. But the value of primary and secondary historical documents in social sciences especially in education continues to grow.

In my first level of document analysis I used the preliminary categories in Table 2 to inform my selection of documents. The axial codes in Table 2 were developed based on my preliminary conceptual hypothesis informed by Black Feminist Pedagogy.

Table 2. Preliminary Coding Categories

	Axial Codes
(1) Pedagogy	(4) Theory
(2) Formal educational events	(5) Politics and Activism
(3) Informal educational events	(6) Art

During the second level of, I used an adapted Miles and Huberman's document analysis guide to identify the personal documents including syllabi, course guides, journals, sketches, letters, and manuscripts to gain an understanding of Bambara's life and work. I coded the documents for emergent themes, organized related codes in memos and, using the taxonomy developed from the interviews, organized the memos according to the relevant hypothesized domains.

Adapting Spradley's (1999) idea of domain analysis to fit within the Womanist textual analysis process, I decided what ideas and themes are salient throughout the data and grouped them together, and categorized the documents by relevance to (1) education-general (2) art, including literature and film, as educative text (3) critiques of educational structures (4) education and women (5) discussion/ideas of other social theories as they relate to education, and (6) education and "Third World" peoples.

Table 3. Expanded Code Matrix

Hypothesized Domains	Emergent Codes
(1) Black Feminist Pedagogy	Education-general Classroom as a site of resistance
(2) Critical Pedagogy	Art for usable truths Art as educative text Artist intellectuals as cultural workers Art, including literature and film, as educative text Classroom as a site of resistance
(3) Education for Liberation	Liberatory pedagogy; education as resistance Critiques of educational structures
(4) Teaching for social justice	Education and women Women communities of choice; Black feminist/womanist pedagogy Implicit formal political teaching strategies Explicit formal political teaching strategies Implicit informal teaching strategies Explicit Informal teaching strategies Usable truths
(5) Discussion/ideas of other social theories as they relate to education (ST)	Critical Race Feminism; Antiracist; Womanist; Queer; Post-structuralist; Performance Theory; Black Nationalism Community literacies; Border building
(6) Education and Third World peoples. (ETW)	Students as co-constructors of knowledge; workshops/talks as liberatory educative practice
(7) Teaching Strategy (formal and informal from course guides or syllabi) (TS)	Women communities of choice; Challenges to hegemony and patriarchy (in writing in teaching).
(8) Relationship and social structure (RSS)	

I ensured the validity and reliability of the findings by making sure the documents I analyzed and the conclusions I found were credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The inclusion/exclusion rule that I used during my data analysis is multilayered. First, any document in the targeted time period (1970 to 1995) that discussed education including, syllabi, personal letters, course guides, and descriptions were accessed and summarized for the study. Any articles before and after my time period were excluded from my study.

I slightly altered my approach when analyzing essays Bambara wrote herself. I made assumptions based on the subject matter as to what possible question Bambara responded to and considered the entire essay a response. I assumed, for example, in "On the Issue of Black English" that Bambara (1974) was responding to those interested in understanding or critiquing Black English or African American Vernacular English (AAVE). I analyzed the essay looking for semantic relationships, in this case strict inclusion, just as I did with the interviews.

Documents included notes, manuscripts, syllabi, workshop descriptions, posters, CVs, resumes, grant proposals, correspondence to and

from other teachers, university contact people (academics/administrators), editors, colleagues, mentees, and other artist-academics and intellectuals. Additionally, using theoretical sampling, that is, deciding what primary sources or secondary sources, to include next, I was able to collect and analyze data to the point of saturation. As new ideas or theories that better explained Bambara's pedagogy emerged, I reconsidered the applicability of the theoretical frame and my assumption of findings.

2.2 Limitations

The findings from this case study are limited to this particular case. Because this study is centered on one subject, the results are not generalizable. However, as a within sample case of Black women artist-educator-activists, Bambara provided a case for analysis. As Firestone (1993) points out, "the most useful generalizations from qualitative studies are 'analytic' not 'sample-to-population' (cited In Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). According to Miles and Huberman (1994) within-case samples are always nested. Miles and Huberman (1994) state, "choices of informants, episodes, and interactions are being driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for 'representativeness'" (p. 29). The choice of the subject as a representative member within a group and the primary and secondary source material associated with her work is theoretically driven as well. As the 'foremother' of Black feminist theory (Guy-Sheftall, 2008) Bambara is a good choice to explore the work of this group.

Additionally, the Bambara documents housed in Spelman's archives and the supplementary interviews did not allow for an exhaustive investigation of Bambara's social and educational theory. I addressed this limitation by triangulating the data from interviews and essays written by and about the case subject. However, incorporating these secondary texts may indicate an over reliance on the words of those essayists. There is also a possibility that I may have overlooked important ideas and associations. Finally, many archival documents were from the mid to late eighties so much of the analysis regarding her earlier work came from published essays and interviews.

3. Findings

Bambara was not only a writer and activist in the Women's and Black Liberation movements but also a cultivator of her own brand of radical pedagogy that pulled from and added to the ideologies of those social movements (Holmes, 2008). The study uncovered the ways in which Bambara's ideas about education could have been an early iteration of what is contemporarily termed culturally relevant pedagogy. Finally, Bambara

functioned as a "cultural worker"³ who sought to teach, preserve, and transmit African American "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Bambara conceived her writings and film as "usable texts" to transmit cultural practices and traditions, build community consciousness, and to foreground Black women's social justice issues. In her performance as a cultural worker, Bambara nurtured the ideologies and theories of the Feminist's and Black Nationalists movements in ways that were often ignored by Black male artist intellectuals and White feminists of the era.

3.1. Bambara's Pedagogy, Cultural Work, and "Usable" Educative Texts

Bambara's early iterations of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (17-18). Black women teachers come from an African diasporic culture in which teaching centers aspects of performativity including projected speaking, storytelling, inquiry, improvisation, and movement as part of knowledge exchange. The teacher then is not the central actor in the performance of schooling—instead she models students' communicative practices in order to facilitate student inquiry. Performance in this study then deviates from other understandings of teaching as performance. Here performance means, the teacher and her classroom are an extension of the community and replicate student ways of knowing in order to facilitate student inquiry. Afrocentric scholars have long contended that these Black American educative practices have their roots in the African diasporic experience and have incorporated these practices specifically in Black nationalist schools during the radical era, during which Bambara emerged. Knowledge sharing through storytelling of proverbs for example and dance are extensions of traditional West African communicative practices. Boateng surmises that the "educative and communicative practices in traditional Africa lies in their use of validators of traditional procedures and beliefs...like other aspects of traditional African culture, proverbs are inextricably linked with the ancestral spirits and other for or magicoreligious life."

Bambara offers Four Models of Western Schooling wherein the model she privileges is a culturally relevant one. Illustratively, in her short story "Broken Field Running" (1977) the protagonist

³ Though Freire was not the first to use the term, I used Freire's (1998) perspective in *Teacher's as Cultural Workers* to analyze how Bambara fits within this frame.

proclaims that as a society, “we blind our children; I am thinking blind them to their potential--the human potential--cripple them dispirit them. Cripples make good clients, wards, beggars, victims” (p. 76). Equating the quote to the state of American education, Bambara (1982) shares: “What always brings me to my knees about the schools is the degree to which we appeal to the worst of children.” The three destructive models represent institutions that “bring out the worst in children” by dispiriting, crippling, and blinding them. The first model sees children as “Public Enemy Number One.” The second model of education sees children as “Immoral Illiterates.” The third “Progressive” model acknowledges children as thinking creative beings but lacks a theoretical grounding. This model sees children as “Free Expressives.” The fourth model of education Bambara outlines sees the child as “Competent, Efficient and Principled.” This fourth model is the one educators should strive to implement, aligns best with current models of Culturally Relevant pedagogy and is informed by the philosophical undergirding of Bambara’s pedagogy.

Womanist Spirituality and Education to Recreate the Self. There are several philosophies that shape Bambara’s radical pedagogy. Black feminism is at the center of her educational philosophy, but because Black feminism is more ideological, it tends to neglect spirituality and metaphysics which is better elucidated in womanism (Phillips 2000). Bambara’s vision of education was infused with an ideology of spiritual self-realization—an idea that is interrogated Womanist thought (Phillips 2006). The only way true “freedom” can be acquired is if individuals first shed the confines of gendered, racialized, and nationalist constructs and move more fully towards self-actualization (Cade, 1970) and coalition building with other People of Color. Her thoughts on education suggest that Bambara saw education for Third World People as a human right rather than just a vehicle for political positioning. Bambara’s ideas about education include: (1) the argument that current Eurocentric and monocultural western educational forms are inadequate and intentionally destructive for youth, especially Black youth (Bambara, 1982; Bambara, 1970) and (2) the support of theories that seek to access educational forms that lead to a transformation of the self first, then local communities, and later global communities (Bambara, 1970).

Recalling her trips to Cuba, in 1985 (with a delegation of women including Audre Lorde, Jayne Cortez, Rosa Guy, Verta Mae Grosvenor, Gloria Josephs, Mildred Walters, Mari Evans and Alexis DeVeaux arranged by *Black Scholar Magazine*), (Cortez, 2008, p. 113) and to Vietnam in 1975,

Bambara contends that during her trips she “got a certain amount of miseducation behind me and got more serious about self-education” (Salaam, 2008, p. 64). Citing her growth in political awareness and increased involvement in community organizing as a result of the trip, Bambara’s writing and life’s work took a new turn—she began to look at “those forces that impact us, particularly socioeconomic and political . . . I want to look at all the forces that impact” (Salaam, 2008, p. 64). Education in formal and informal modes became for Bambara a shedding of previous miseducation and a search for self-knowledge. Classrooms then become spaces for student and teacher self-discovery and redefinition. The classroom can explore not only the “social forces that impact” but also how those forces personally impact us and the work we do. Furthermore, through this practice of rediscovery students craft mechanisms to challenge social inequity.

Bambara’s article in the student newspaper during her tenure at City College (1969) called for the college to be renamed “Harlem University,” as the students called it, in which there would exist “a master plan for democratized, community-based and community-enriched university” (Holmes, 2008). The article still reeled in the mind of poet and essayist Adrienne Rich who was also a teacher there during the 60s. Rich kept the article “along with the writings of Paolo Freire,” and carried the weathered article with her “into teaching situations ever since” (Holmes, 2008, p. 13). Writing to show solidarity with her students, Bambara demonstrated a culturally responsive practice of disrupting the dynamics of power. Ladson-Billings (1996) explains that educators must develop a critical consciousness to challenge the status quo through collaborative teaching strategies in which the teacher and student play an active and equal role in education. Aligned feminist pedagogy and critical theory, a culturally responsive teaching practice applies learning to social action and social transformation and adopts an intersectional approach to relations of power in and outside the classroom. As exemplified by the Harlem University essay, Bambara demonstrated culturally responsive teaching. While teaching at an unidentified university (Bambara’s resume indicates that she was between Philadelphia with SCRIBE and taking courses towards a doctorate in American Studies at New York State University at Albany) in the fall of 1987, Bambara’s final exam for a Contemporary American Novel course had questions that allowed students to choose which ones they wanted to answer. The questions themselves were focused on multicultural novels including the Native American work by Leslie Silko *Ceremony* that explores the tensions between contemporary Native

American and white American cultures. Students were asked:

Formal schooling in each novel is identified as limited and limiting in its monocultural bias. In each novel, an alternative education or education is presented and mentors (often more than one) are described. Discuss. (Bambara, 1987)

The exam challenges students to examine power relations as they relate to schooling. The question shows that Bambara expected students to see the works they read in the context of struggles for power and liberation.

As theories that inform culturally relevant pedagogy, critical and feminist/Womanist theories disregard essentialist reductions of gender equity and cultural pluralism in favor of intersectional theories of power and identity that emphasize the importance of collaboration between teachers and students. According to hooks (1994), the act of sharing authority in the classroom is key to an engaged pedagogy, or teaching for freedom. Students' images of their teachers are complicated because instructors have different access to power, determined by their institutional positions and tied to their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual preference (hooks, 1994). However, Bambara sought solidarity with her students inside and outside the classroom and believed that students were responsible co-creators of knowledge. For example, Bambara supported activist student organizations throughout her life and while at Livingston College she served as an advisor and supporter to many student led organizations including the black student organizations, performance troupes such as the Harambee dancers, Malcolm Players, and Sisters of Consciousness. She saw solidarity with these groups and viewed the process of revising authority in the classroom "as part of efforts to provide creative vehicles for black revolutionary thought" (Holmes, 2008, p. 15). Additionally, espousing her belief in the merits of liberatory educational forms, Bambara (1972) writes in "On the Issue of Black English," that the goal of teachers of Black children should not be to "force-feed Standard American English, white conversational rituals, or thoughtless answers to questions" (p. 74). Instead, teachers must seek "to develop question-oriented students. Inquiring. Explanatory. Curious. Critical. Analytical. An informed citizenry is one that can raise the intelligent question itself" (Bambara, 1972, p. 74-75). A major tenet of Black feminist and critical pedagogy is the belief that students are active participants in the shaping and development of their own knowledge and the teacher's role is to assist students in their inquiry rather than push them into mindless rote learning.

Freirean Conceptualizations of Teaching as Cultural Work in Bambara's Work

Teacher as cultural worker. Cleage (2000) calls Bambara, "sister, writer, [and] cultural worker" (p. xvi). Having adapted and reinterpreted art through a Black feminist/Womanist lens, Black women used art as a politically informative device and termed this process cultural performance. Drawing upon this concept of teacher as cultural worker, Freire argues that teaching is a political act existing beyond the schoolhouse. Bambara was certainly the quintessential cultural worker skillfully integrating her teaching with her social justice work. In both her formal and informal teaching practice, Bambara built community consciousness foregrounded Black women's social justice issues. Bambara's favorite way of describing herself was as a "cultural worker" (Holmes & Wall, 2008, p. 5), which she "defined as an artist with a strong community base who is committed to organizing for political and social change" (Holmes, 2008, p. 15). However, Bambara may be "best understood as an organic intellectual, who grounded her political and social thought in the lived experiences of everyday people" (Holmes & Wall, 2008, p. 5). An intellectual's role is to not just talk about change but also to have an active role in change as Bambara had through her writing and teaching.

Bambara's teaching as cultural work challenges the banking concept of education (Freire, 1998) and her urging for teacher honesty and humility in practice. Bambara was honest and did not pretend to be the source of knowledge. In an interview with Salaam (2008) Bambara states: "I'm not a good researcher. I'm a good research teacher because I'm a detective and nosey. I'm willing to go anywhere to get the information" (Bambara as cited in Salaam, 2008, p. 61). But as a researcher herself, although able to show students the process, she acknowledged her penchant to reconstruct the information she finds: "I'm not a trustworthy researcher because I reconstruct and most reconstructing means fictionalizing" (Bambara as cited in Salaam, 2008, p. 61). Bambara embodied the notion that as teachers become cultural workers they recognize learners are "as much thinking subjects as are the teachers" (Freire, 1998, p. 90).

Another example of Bambara's culturally relevant pedagogy and her teaching identity manifested in cultural work was evinced in her care practice represented in her mentorship with other black women scholar writers. A specific example of this is in a letter from black-feminist author, activist, and intellectual Cheryl Clarke in a letter dated March 4, 1988, Clarke thanks Bambara for providing feedback on her book *Living as a Lesbian*. Clarke offers her thanks and also comments: "you've always been a role model for me in terms of getting it done"

(Bambara, April 4, 1988). The Clarke letter demonstrates the way in which the community of African American women artist-intellectual-activists supported each other and respected each other's work. In addition to thanking Bambara for providing feedback, Clarke also asked her to contribute to journals *Conditions* and *Z magazine*.

Bambara understood, as a cultural worker and as a citizen of the global community of Black and Brown peoples, "that the intellectual also needed to speak the language of the people" (Holmes & Wall, 2008, p. 5). As a novelist and short story writer, Bambara's work centered oral and written literature as educative text. The salient messages embedded in Bambara's texts are educational because they function as counternarratives. Within Bambara's theoretical framework, pedagogy and practice are inextricably linked to aspects of community identity, manifested in epistemologies and literacies, and shaped by community funds of knowledge. As a community educator and the embodiment of the Gramscian organic intellectual, Bambara's pedagogy, defined by critical theorists as activities that impart knowledge, is therefore informed by and reliant upon her community's funds of knowledge. Her classroom, then, became a hybrid democratic space that relied upon both teacher and student cultural exchange. By creating this space Bambara, bypassed the literary cannon and sought to re-shape and transform what constituted academic knowledge.

Bambara's, speaking "the language of the people" is exemplified in her work as a curriculum developer for the African-American Studies Department at Northeastern University, and as multicultural teacher for the Boston public school system. Requesting an National Endowment for the Humanities NEH grant to provide resources and training to humanities teachers, Bambara (1991) contends that the goal of the training is to: "prepare teachers to evaluate and revise the language arts and social studies curricula in Boston Public schools . . . the study of African American literature is one effective vehicle for improving the quality of humanities education" (Bambara, 1991). The workshops focus "on cultural diversity and pluralism, teacher education and the liberal arts . . . [and uses] African American literature and multicultural education as resources for humanities education." According to the grant proposal the workshops would focus on the Three (3) modalities of writing: narrative, lyric, and dramatic. The document is significant to understanding Bambara's pedagogy as an early iteration of culturally relevant pedagogy in that the grant proposal sought to garner "support from the (NEH) to expand an already established collaboration between the Department of African-American

Studies at Northeastern University and the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The project engaged 30 high school teachers in an exploration of African-American literature and culture:

During two summer institutes (July 8-August 8 1991 and July-August 6, 1992) two (2) day in-service and follow-up activities, teachers and specialists in African American literature and culture will study selected African American novels, short stories, poems and plays as well as methodologies for course enhancement for high school classes. While English teachers and their classes are our primary targets at the urgings of BPS teachers and administrators, participation will be open to history and social studies teachers as well. We are requesting NEH funding over a two-year period for salaries of co-directors, stipends for teachers and related expenses. (Bambara, 1991, para. 1)

Bambara identifies herself as a cultural worker, socialist-feminist-Pan-Africanist and member of the third world community of women (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1979). The common thread among all of these self-defining terms is the idea of coalition building. Pan-Africanist, critical, feminist, and socialist ideologies all espouse the need for border crossing and bridge building. A self-proclaimed internationalist, Bambara saw the most urgent need for coalition building among Third-World women or women of color globally. She lamented this call in her formal and informal teaching. Modeling this in her teaching and in her writing Bambara contended that bridging gaps has been a tenet of the black political and artistic worldview. She surmised, when discussing the characters of the seven sisters and the Korean masseur in the Academy of Seven Arts, the Asian healers in the *Salt Eaters*, in the multiethnic fictional Claybourne, Georgia, that when African Americans speak of coalition they often speak of black and white coalitions. However Bambara envisions a Third World Coalition. Salaam (2008) asks if fiction is "the most effective way to send out a call to build a coalition of Third World Peoples. Bambara responds that it may not be the most effective way, because the most effective way is "to do it" yet she acknowledges writing's potency (Bambara as cited in Salaam, 2008, p. 63). Baraka (2008) recognized Bambara's call to action and points to her work as model for the "revolutionary Black intellectuals and artist" (110). Baraka (2008) states that "like Toni Cade Bambara we must turn

our analysis and criticism into action . . . And from the conscious self-organization of that art, as a method of national development, as education, employment and expression of our lives, we can use our art to revolutionize our lives and our people's and America's" (Baraka, 2008, p. 111).

"Usable" Texts for the "Community that Names Me:" Bambara and Community Driven Theory. Both Black cultural nationalism and Black feminism articulated the relationship between the cultural and the political and considered the acknowledgement of a Black identity as a countercultural strategy. However, marking the points of ideological departure, in her essay "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?" Bambara critiqued the Black Nationalist ideology that denied Black women reproductive control and economic independence. Bambara recalled her participation in cultural nationalist workshop where a Black male speaker asked black women to "throw away the pill and hop to the mattresses and breed revolutionaries and mess up the man's genocidal program" (Bambara, 1970, p. 68). Bambara argued that Black cultural nationalism traded the quest for of collective liberation for a reductive racialized agenda although the two do not need to be mutually exclusive.

If given the forum, Bambara wanted to edit another anthology that exposed Black women's quest for self-definition. Bambara (1979) writes that she was concerned with "usable lessons" and the next anthology she would edit would include the voices of underrepresented women:

The papers that I was most concerned with at that time never got into the book, those were position papers from the Women's Caucus of SNCC, of the Panthers, of a number of other organizations that eventually did produce papers for publication through Third World Women's Alliance. I was particularly concerned with the evolution of women's groups that had begun as consumer education or single-issue action groups, began studying together engaging in community organizing and are now, some ten years later, the core network of, what will soon become, we hope, a national black women's union. I would include a new collection of writings from the campus forces, the prison forces, tenant's groups, and most especially southern rural women's works, particularly from the migrant workers and sharecroppers of the Deep South. (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1979, p. 240)

Bambara's theory embraces the diversity of Black women's identities and experience and

challenges divisive gender binaries. Bambara posits that the idea of the war of the sexes is a very Eurocentric notion and does not fully apply to Peoples of Color. Bambara argues,

It is very facile to talk about male and female antagonisms in the western world or in the United States in a pat fashion that enables you to sound as though you are talking about all people. It's easy to talk about the War Between the Sexes, which is characteristic if the United States as it is no other place. . . That is something peculiarly American, that belligerency, that warfare . . . That's [the generalization] very dangerous and kind of sloppy and not very valid because what distinguishes relationships between men and women in our communities is the level of caring that informs the tension. (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1979, p. 245)

Feminist scholar de Beauvoir affirmed, "The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of the self and the other" (as cited in Olsen, 2000, p. 259). The binary of other and self-presented by de Beauvoir and other second wave feminists is interrogated by Bambara to encompass the "othering" that exists amongst white feminists who ignore the complex intersectionalities of race, class, and culture. The binary is not male versus female, but white woman versus black woman and this dichotomy was enacted by early white feminists who excluded women of color.

Bambara contends that the "community that names" her directs her work. Bambara (1982) states: "My first audience is the people...to get whatever it is needs to get told." She goes on to argue that the "first relationship is between you and the work" and the next important relationship is between the work and "the community that names me." Bambara (1982) further illustrates the ways in which the community directs and critiques her work: "The audience that gives me the most feedback are folks I run across in the washhouse or on the train.... Their review is a gut response nobody writes about those kinds of people." Here Bambara argues that the community evaluates whether what she writes is an authentic or inauthentic representation of the community voice. Bambara further argues:

The task of the artist is always determined by the status and process and agenda of that community that artist serves . . . As a cultural worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible. One of the ways I do that is to celebrate those

little victories within the black community. And to critique reactionary behavior.... and to keep certain kinds of calls out there...the children . . . our responsibility to the children.

According to Bambara a cultural worker accesses the community and ensures that the work that she produces is able to educate by providing “usable truths” (Bambara as cited in Guy Sheftall, 1979). Usable truths dispel the gendered and racialized stereotypes that plague the community and provide information that allows the community to transcend the oppressive regimes that seek to destroy it. Illustrating the difficulty of accessing that audience, due to the politics of publishing and marketing, Bambara (1982) questions: “How do you do a lil’ Brere Rabbit thing of getting to that audience? What gets between you and the audience that values you? That’s the community that calls you sister; that calls you momma...that’s the group I am serving...if that audience doesn’t find anything usable then it’s no point doing it.”

In “What It Is I Think I’m Doing Anyhow” (1979), Bambara referred to her yoking of spiritual and political energies in *The Salt Eaters* and challenged the western rationalist sensibility that disavows spirituality. Bambara (1990) describes the importance of the spiritual:

One of the ways that we pretend ...is to act as though we live in a logical, rational, ‘two plus two equals four’ setup. Yet reality is also psychic. That is to say, in addition to all the other things, for example, the political, we live in [is] a system that is guided by a spiritual order. Now, there is a Western bias against this kind of thinking that goes back in this country to the Pilgrims ...[T] hey proceeded to ban the drum, ban smoke signals, and ban what they called fetish religions. In its place, they would impose a system of logic on the American psyche, the American sensibility, the American political reality, and, indeed, American life and literature that was aimed all the while at a total control of society by a few. (As cited in Chandler, 1990, p. 347)

Sharing her sense of the relationship between the political and the metaphysical, Bambara posits that the American political reality deifies the secular and represses the metaphysical. Bambara (1979) states that the imposition of “this system of logic” by authorities and by extension the institutions

created by American secular authorities such as schools, stifles the spiritual self. A yoking of spiritual and political energies is an important aspect of Womanist theory as well. Because Walker (1983) links spirituality with Womanism, many African-American female theologians apply Womanist theory to their work (Brown-Crawford, 2002). Bambara realized that “for many people, there is a division between the religious or the sacred and the secular. For me it is all sacred. I’ve become recently aware, however, that there needs to be statements made about the spiritual and the political . . . the need for the two to join hands (Bambara as cited in Chandler, 1990, p. 347).

During a 1987 interview with Tate, Bambara (1989) was asked if she attempted to make sense of or whether she just recorded life. Bambara responded:

All writers, musicians, artists, choreographers/dancers, etc., work with the stuff of their experiences. It’s the translation of it, the conversion of it, the shaping of it that makes for the drama. I’ve never been convinced that experience is linear, circular, or even random. It just is. I try to put it in some kind of order to extract meaning from it, to bring meaning to it. (p. 14)

Marginalized groups often use performance to deconstruct “dominant ideologies and expressive forms” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 79) and there are several theories of performance that demonstrate this practice. Illustratively, hooks (1995) surmises, “throughout African American history, performance has been crucial in the struggle for liberation” (as cited in Ugwu, 1995, p. 211). Black performance took a myriad of forms from musical renditions to performative poetry and included any kind of public display designed to evoke a responsive stance from the audience. The dialogic created between speaker and listener was the thrust for action (Ugwu, 1995). Bambara emphasizes this dialogue:

I think when I write I at any time I’m in a state of altered consciousness in the sense that I am self-remembering; that is, I’m acutely aware of the dialogue that is going on between me and the characters which are conjured. I am acutely aware of myself as a reader. I actually am aware of the relationship between what is going on in my head and what I can do with my hands. (Bambara as cited in Salaam, 2008, p. 60)

An extension of this tradition of Black performance, Womanist Performance pedagogy is constructed around the major precepts of feminist, Afrocentric, and post-Afrocentric theatre theory, resulting in a reshaping of dramatic form and narrative. Womanist theatre also seeks to subvert traditional Eurocentric dramatic structures and to expose patriarchal misrepresentation, bias, and oppression. Feminist theatre creates “[p]roductions and scripts characterized [sic] by consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performance that deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power . . . and [places] women characters in the ‘subject position’” (Kisser, p. 1 as cited in Scott-Giles, 1996). Whether performed textually or orally, storytelling/counterstorytelling also uses “public utterances” to illuminate and explore experiences of oppression. As discussed earlier in this study, the counterstory as resistance is a tenet of both CRF and Bambara’s pedagogy. Also, contending that performance, in its multiple guises, is at the heart of the African American, “classical tradition” of resistance, Bambara surmised that stories must be “usable” or should provide “characters who can teach us valuable lessons of life; who give dimension to the type of stereotype that they are closest too” (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1979, p. 234). Further interrogating the necessity of usable narratives that expose untruths and challenge misrepresentations of Black life, Bambara argued that literature is “an act of language . . . a spirit informer. A lot of energy is exchanged in the reading and writing of books” (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1978, p. 236). Textual performance or this “act of language” represented in Bambara’s films and writings, is a form of activism and embodies the reflexive nature of cultural performance. According to Bambara readers and writers both engage in the process of literature production by actively participating in meaning making. In a letter dated February 19, 1988, Toni Morrison celebrates the usable educational nature of Bambara’s film *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*: “I was pleased with the structure, the bubbling of the whole cast and community, the usually subtle ways the information and ‘education’ is presented” (Bambara, February 19, 1988).

Bauman and Briggs (1990) argue “attempts to identify the meaning of texts, performances, or entire genres in terms of purely symbolic, content free context disregard the multiplicity of indexical connections that enable verbal art to transform, not simply reflect social life (p. 69). Invoking the social justice possibilities of art, Bambara (1979) reflects on the usability of Black feminist art to “not simply reflect” but transform social life:

I think the great accomplishment of the Neo Black Arts Movement (sister poets) and perhaps to a lesser degree the dramatists, novelists, short story writers, have contributed a great deal toward not only commenting on, correcting, and countering the stereotypic images, but in blasting open a new road. . . [by] dealing with women who have not been dealt with before, raising issues that have not been tackled before, grabbing hold of a vision that we let slip and maybe never laid out in print before. (Bambara as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1978, p. 236)

Bambara’s texts and films functioned as critical narratives, a form of cultural performance, and her work with SCAAW and other organizations such as SCRIBE and SISA as well as her workshops and readings may be viewed as earlier iterations of African Diaspora PLC’s (Fisher, 2009). This aspect of Bambara’s work is prime for additional study.

Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory line of inquiry sought to uncover how Black women artist-educator-activist develop their identity and how their teach identity informs and is informed by the art they create and the social justice work they do. Limited generalizations, due to the nature of case study methodology, only allow for speculation about what factors may impact Black teacher identity formation and its influence on pedagogy and practice.

Bambara’s pedagogy is situated within a “community that names” her and is an earlier iteration of culturally relevant pedagogy. As a representative case of radical era Black women pedagogues, Bambara supports the notion that a teacher’s identity is intimately wedded to a personal identity informed by the community from which she comes. Because Black women teachers are socialized by the Black community and therefore aware of the funds of knowledge within it they: (a) *are aware of Black communicative practices—“Black English”, and performativity*, (b) *acknowledge Black ways of knowing in which education is not just memorizing rote facts but a means to personal, communal and spiritual development and aesthetic artifacts should be usable* (c) *see the necessity of social justice work and solidarity with women of color as part of a teaching identity in order to challenge the models of schools that encode the disenfranchisement and disrespect of women and Black folks from the dominant monoculture of which affects how and when students can learn*. This acknowledgement of the ways in which Black folks learn and view education and Bambara’s understanding that

teaching is a political act, therefore would place Bambara squarely within the tradition of teaching as cultural work. Because Black folks had been theorizing about this type of teacher for some time, then it follows that conscious Black women teachers are uniquely equipped to embody such an ideal of teacher as cultural worker as these concepts predate critical theorist conceptualizations of this type of teacher practitioner. Indeed Bambara demonstrates that Black female teachers are also instrumental in creating culturally relevant pedagogies and practices.

4. References

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