



Exploring Third Space: Cultural Identity and African Traditions in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)

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DOI: 10.21608/misj.2024.319971.1064

Received: 10-9-2024 Accepted: 19-9-2024

Published: 30-10-2024

https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_380918.html

Citation: Abdulaal, L., & Nagieb, M. (2024). Exploring Third Space: Cultural Identity and African Traditions in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988). *Mişriqiyā*, 4(2), 48-66. doi: 10.21608/misj.2024.319971.1064

Abstract

African American writers construct African traditions within American society to help African Americans form a new, empowered identity. Reclaiming such an identity requires reconstructing the erased cultural traditions. This paper focuses on how Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space enables August Wilson to empower African Americans by introducing their cultural elements within the mainstream American culture. For African American playwrights, the concept of the third space provides a framework for understanding the complexity and fluidity of African American cultural identity. Also, it highlights the transformative potential of the encounter between African and American cultures. By exploring the third space, African American playwrights can challenge dominant narratives and redefine identity in hybridization. The paper applies the idea of third space to August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988). In his plays, August Wilson introduces the concept of the third space where African Americans can freely practice their African traditions and form their new hybrid identities. He empowers African Americans by bringing African traditions and heritage on the stage to help them recognize themselves as Africans and Americans. In his play, Wilson creates a liminal space for his characters to enable them to practice their cultural heritage and connect with their ancestors. Performing cultural heritage in the liminal space represents the power of human connections and highlights personal transformation.

Keywords: Homi Bhabha, hybridity, liminality, interculturality, empowering

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For African American writers, the idea of cultural identity requires a search for the forgotten past of African Americans. The reclamation of such identity has been achieved through reconstructing the erased cultural tradition. African American writers confirm that reconnection with one's ancestors is essential in understanding and strengthening the present. Thus, they emphasize retrieving African traditions from the American landscape to achieve the self-validity of black people in American society. They construct African tradition within American culture to help African Americans form a new hybrid identity in a liminal third space and enable them to be part of American society. The concept of the third space provides a framework for understanding the complexity of African American cultural identity and its representation in American society. It highlights the transformative potential of the encounter between African and American cultures and captures the fluidity of the African American experience and its hybridity. Thus, by exploring the third space, African American playwrights can challenge dominant narratives and redefine the notion of identity for African Americans.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of the third space to provide a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of cultural identities in postcolonial studies. He defines the third space as a space where different cultures, identities, and ideas interact, and people navigate between their original culture and the dominant culture of their society. In other words, it is a space of negotiation and contestation where marginal identities are reconstructed by exposing them to multiple cultural elements, which help them develop a hybrid identity (pp. 36-8). Therefore, the third space refers to the dynamic cultural transformation. In this sense, the concept of the third space is essential in African American drama, where the intersection of race, culture, and history plays a significant role in shaping narrative and performance.

The concept of the third space in African American drama highlights the complexities of African American identity, history, and tradition. Accordingly, it helps to create a new transformative identity by challenging the conventional notion of race, gender, class, and identity. According to Bhabha (2009), the third space disrupts the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized and center/margin. It

opens a space for negotiating cultural differences between the colonizer and the colonized, producing a new cultural identity. It is “a moment of enunciation, identification, negotiation – that was suddenly divested of its mastery or sovereignty in the midst of markedly asymmetrical and unequal engagement of forces” (p. x). This moment enables two cultures to interact and construct a different cultural identity.

Cultural identity is constructed through interaction with other human beings, which leads to some plurality in identities even in the same society (Dervin, 2012, pp. 183-4). Such plurality challenges the dominant narratives and power structures by providing a space of ambiguity and difference. This space challenges the essential notion of identity by highlighting the fluidity of identities in which cultural identities are not fixed (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). For Bill Ashcroft (2009), “no culture is static, but is a constant process of hybrid interaction and change.” This is the third space where the process of appropriation and transformation occurs, and the third space becomes a space of resistance and sharing (p. 116). The interculturality in the third space leads to “the revival of traditional cultural and religious practices or even the creation of new identities to maintain continuity” (Dervin, 2012, p. 184). Therefore, the interaction between African culture and tradition and the dominant culture gives African Americans a space to represent themselves within American society.

Such space gives voices to marginalized groups and enables African Americans to challenge the traditional representation of identity and culture by creating a liminal space beyond the binaries of black and white. This traditional representation creates a fixed and repeated stereotypical image. Stereotype is an essential tool for making Others. According to Stuart Hall (1997), it is a “part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” that is designated to exclude the Other and different (p. 258). In this sense, liminality enables social interactions and self-construction by providing a space to stand outside the center and challenge its authority. Bhabha (1994) remarks that the in-betweenness space enhances the question of culture’s representation of difference. In this sense, the boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood is interrupted (p. 184). Therefore, he remarks that this liminality allows marginal groups to speak and represent themselves.

Accordingly, creating a liminal space on the stage helps African American playwrights challenge the dominant narrative and stereotype by creating a new

hybrid identity. This new hybrid identity develops from the cultural negotiation of the center and margin. In this context, Neil Lazarus (2004) states that Bhabha's third space is "a fighting term, a theoretical weapon, which intervenes in existing debates and 'resist' certain political and philosophical construction" (p. 4). Such resistance occurs by interrogating the legitimacy and validity of the essentialist cultural identity. It can liberate marginal groups psychologically and spiritually. Therefore, the third space decolonizes the mind of the colonized by concentrating on the formation of subjectivities in the in-between space of cultural encounters between the colonized and the colonizer (Bhandari, 2022, p. 174). It enables the marginalized to create a hybrid identity.

Bhabha underlines that the third space is not merely a space of negotiation but a positive and empowering space (Ikas & Wagner, 2009, p. 2). It is a space where hybrid identity is constructed, and the dominant cultural authority is challenged. This empowering nature of the third space inspires marginal individuals to rethink cultural boundaries and embrace the potential of in-betweenness, where cultural traditions and heritage can negotiate and challenge the mainstream. Therefore, traditional culture and knowledge can be refashioned by the effect of cultural resources of another place. Bhabha (1994) calls this process "restaging the past" (p. 3). Such an act does not recall the past "as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of necessity, not the nostalgia of living" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). This in-betweenness not only disrupts the notion of past and present but also challenges the fixed notion of identity and offers new possibilities for self-definition. It challenges the limits of self and determines what is liminal in the cultural representation of other peoples, times, languages, and texts (Bhabha, 2009, p. xiii).

Therefore, hybridization is an empowering process that disrupts the purity and authenticity of the culture. This process creates what Bhabha (1994) calls "the third space of enunciation," in which the in-between space provides "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovate sites of collaboration, and contestation, in act of defining the idea of society itself" (pp. 1-2). In this sense, Bhabha asserts that culture automatically implies difference, and the third space is a response to the intervention of people's daily lives. Thus, the space of in-betweenness or liminality creates new cultural meanings where people can feel connected.

In African American drama, writers attempt to create alternative spaces in which black culture and identity can be explored. Such alternative spaces help African Americans create multiple discourses to overcome marginality (Dixon, 1986, p. 2). These spaces are marked as liminal, a threshold between two different states (such as the binaries of black and white and margin and center). In this sense, the margin acts as a threshold, in which liminality can be understood in Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness." Double consciousness, hence, refers to the internal conflict African Americans experience as they navigate their dual identities within their society. Thus, inhabiting a liminal space enables African Americans as a marginal group to become more adaptive and empowered. Victor Turner (1995) explains liminality as a state where the individual can claim his/herself by moving in an ambiguous state called the threshold stage. He states, "Liminality is thus the in-between and marginal state, in which an individual resides before becoming integrated into his or her new position in society" (p. 125). Thus, the liminality opens up the possibility of creating different social positions, encouraging the marginal to resist the dominant culture.

African American playwrights challenge the dominant culture in this liminal space by introducing African traditions, rituals, music, history, and stories. In this sense, the liminal space helps them redefine the dynamic relationship between the center and the margin and between African tradition and American mainstream culture. Thus, individuals in the liminal space are "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1995, p. 95), in which this space redefines the concept of unity, authenticity, and origin. In this sense, African American drama often uses rituals and ancestral connections to create a liminal space, disrupt binary thinking, and allow cultural mixing.

Like other African American playwrights, August Wilson engages with the concept of the third space to explore themes of identity, belonging, and power dynamics. He navigates the complexities of African American traditions, the historical legacy of slavery, and the contemporary realities of racial discrimination and social inequality in the United States. Wilson's characters inhabit a space that is neither purely African nor American but rather a complex state between cultural heritage and the American dominant culture. In his plays, Wilson emphasizes retrieving African traditions from the American landscape to achieve the self-validity of black humanity. He suggests that drama can help African Americans to understand the importance of celebrating their heritage. In his interview with David Savran (2006), Wilson asserts:

All art is political. It serves a purpose. All my plays are political but I try not to make them didactic or polemical. Theater does not have to be agitprop. I hope that my art serves the masses of blacks in America who are in desperate need of a solid and sure identity. I hope my plays make people understand that these are African people, that is why they do what they do. If blacks recognize the value in that, then we will be on our way to claiming our identity and participating in society as Africans (p. 37)

He considers African heritage a source of inspiration for African Americans. He confirms the possibilities they can realize when they reconnect with their ancestors and reach a deeper understanding of their present strength.

Accordingly, Wilson uses ritual and cultural elements to confront the negative stereotype. As his characters experienced much suffering in their lives because of slavery and racism, they face and overcome this suffering and stereotype by using African rituals and traditions in their daily life. Paul Carter Harrison (2002) states that black writers retrieve rituals from traditional folk life to illuminate the specific aspects of social experience that reaffirmed the presence of the human spirit struggling to overcome the conditions of oppression (p. 6). In this sense, Wilson attempts to unite the African American community despite poverty and oppression by recovering African cultural elements. He believes that without African traditions and rituals, the grandchildren of slaves will absorb the racist images formed by white culture. Thus, in Wilson's point of view, African ritualistic activities and indigenous heritage can give African Americans special power.

Kim Pereria (2007) asserts that Wilson's achievement lies in transforming black culture's stories, myths, language, and social rhythms into a vital drama registered in the national consciousness (p. 67). Therefore, the traditional aspects found in Wilson's plays articulate the demands of blackness through the performance of ritual elements that create a connection between actors and spectators, as well as African Americans and the dominant culture. Throughout this performance, Wilson explores his characters' unique entities to help them find new sides of themselves beyond the trauma of painful experiences. To achieve this goal, Wilson creates a space for his characters to practice their heritage and connect with their ancestor freely. This space helps them to heal, retrieve, and transform their identity. It also helps African Americans enter a new state of being, which heals and empowers them. Such space becomes liminal, according to Bhabha.

Using the concept of the third space in performance represents the power of human connection, allows internal cultural critique, and highlights personal transformation. bell hooks (1990) notes that we need to examine the factors that give life meaning despite deprivation, hardship, and despair. She adds, “The arts remain powerful means of cultural resistance, a space for awakening folks to critical consciousness and new vision” (p. 39). Thus, African cultural elements, such as music, storytelling, singing, and dancing, help African American writers resist the mainstream stereotype and liberate the path for African Americans to express their selfhood. In *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (1988), using African traditions enables Wilson to unite African Americans and give them exceptional power.

In *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, Wilson creates a third space that helps his characters tell their stories about the traumatic past of slavery and their present painful experience of racism. The boardinghouse in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* represents a liminal space where the characters freely express their cultural heritage and tell stories about their past and present. By telling stories in familiar surroundings, they are spiritually empowered. Harry Elam (2009) explains that the tensions of African Americans can be solved by “confronting the past, finding room for forgiveness as well as resistance, remembering the ‘father’s story’ in ways to allow one to hold on but also let go” (p. 145). Creating a third space enables those characters to fulfill this goal.

Joe Turner’s Come and Gone reveals the African American experience of the Great Migration, a transitional phase in American history. It takes place in the 1910s, in which most of the blacks were deprived of their cultural practices because of the legacy of slavery. Slavery destroyed their identity and their sense of self-worth. The play presents the struggles former slaves faced in their migration to the North, searching for a new life and new identity. The protagonist, Herald Loomis, recently released from forced labor on Joe Turner’s plantation, arrived at Seth’s boardinghouse searching for his wife. Loomis was deeply traumatized and lost connection to his past and cultural tradition. In the boardinghouse, he meets several characters; one of them is the conjurer man, Bynum. Bynum helps Loomis to reconnect with his true self by connecting to his African culture and tradition. Although Loomis believes he is searching for his wife, Bynum lets him see that he is searching for his lost identity.

For Wilson's characters, the third space is a space to communicate, assert their identities, and resist the existing power structure. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the boardinghouse becomes a third space for the African Americans who have migrated from the South to the North, searching for work and a better life. These characters are in a state of transition. At the beginning of the play, Wilson (1988) describes them in this crossroad:

They arrive carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope, marked men and women seeking to scrape from the narrow, crooked cobbles and the fiery blasts of the coke furnace a way of bludgeoning and shaping the malleable parts of themselves into a new identity as free men of definite and sincere worth (The play's setting).

The boardinghouse represents a liminal space where North and South, city and country, and past and present collide. It brings together a diverse group of characters who are all in a transitional state and seeking to integrate a new identity. Each character represents a unique aspect of the African American experience and reflects the complexities of their identity.

The boardinghouse is a liminal space where the characters can express their experiences. For example, Jerney, one of the boardinghouse residents, expresses his experience of being arrested for doing nothing except having black skin. In Wilson's dramatic world, nothing is about one person. Even when the focus seems to be on a single character, Wilson captures the African experience and releases it back into the world. Mary Bogumil (2007) asserts that Wilson does not write about victims or martyrs; he writes about ordinary black people in American society, "living lives whose value does not depend on their political or social roles nor in their historic function but on their human qualities, sustained, as they are, by an awareness of shared myths, a shared language, a shared fate, a shared humanity" (p. 60). Those ordinary people can share their experiences in a liminal space.

The play explores how the characters in the boardinghouse navigate this liminal space and struggle to define themselves. In Wilson's plays, African cultural ritual highlights the importance of African rootedness throughout the restoration of history and the reconstruction of blackness. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Wilson illustrates that the boardinghouse residents, Seth, Bertha, Bynum, Molly, Mattie, Jeremy, and Herald and Zonia Loomis, meet at the crossroads and connect with their ancestors through African dance and other African rituals. Elam (2009) remarks that Seth's boardinghouse is a liminal space,

a blues matrix, “betwixt and between.” The boardinghouse, he adds, “serves as a way station for African Americans during the great migration from the South to find work” (p. 34). Most of the boardinghouse residents, especially the young ones – Molly, Mattie, Jeremy, Herald, and Zonia Loomis – are searching for their self-identity in American society, so they come to the boardinghouse to define and redefine their cultural identity and connect with their ancestors, which is essential for their survival. Seth, the boardinghouse owner, explains this idea at the beginning of Act I:

These niggers coming up here with that old backward country style of living. It’s hard enough no without all that ignorant kind of acting. Ever since slavery got over with there ain’t been nothing but foolish-acting niggers. Word get out they need men to work in the mill and put in these roads ... and niggers drop everything and head North looking for freedom But these niggers keep on coming. Walking ... riding ... carrying their Bibles. That boy done carried a guitar all the way from North Carolina. What he gonna find out? What he gonna do with that guitar? This the city (Wilson, 1988, pp. 5-6)

The boardinghouse allows its residents to reconnect with their heritage and transform their identity. It plays this role because of Bynum, the heritage keeper, whom Wilson describes as “*a conjure man, or rootworker, he gives the impression of always being in control of everything. Nothing ever bothers him*” (p. 4).

In the boardinghouse, Bynum tells other characters the story about his father and “the shiny man.” This story paves the way for other characters to confront their problem by connecting to their heritage. He asks Rutherford Selig, the people finder, to find the shiny man because he knows the secret of life. Selig tells him, “The only shiny man I saw was the Nigras working on the road gang with the sweat glistening on them (p. 8). For Bynum, the shiny man is someone else; he is not an ordinary man. He tells Selig, “Naw, you’d be able to tell this fellow. He shine like new money” (p. 8). For Wilson, the shiny man symbolizes African traditions and helps African Americans to be empowered by connecting to these traditions. Amanda Rudolph (2009) explains that Wilson is comparing the shiny man and the African god Ogun to introduce the shiny man as a god and as a higher power influencing Bynum and others (p. 107). The shiny man, as a representative of African traditions, can help African Americans overcome the oppression of the past.

After meeting the shiny man, Bynum finds his song. The song here symbolizes the true and authentic identity. He explains:

I turned around to look at this fellow and he had this light coming out of him. I had to cover my eyes from being blinded. He shining like new money with that light. He shined until all the light seemed like it seeped out of him and then he was gone (Wilson, 1988, p. 9)

After the shiny man disappeared, Bynum saw the spirit of his father, who taught him how to find his song. Bynum asked his father who the shiny man was. The father replied that he was the “One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way” (p. 10). Sandra Richards (1999) emphasizes that the story of the shiny man echoes the “Yoruba gods and Ogun and Esu ... who encourages fellow travelers to claim their predestined song in life” (p. 92). For Wilson, finding one’s song is essential to claim the black identity and survive in the dominant culture. As the shiny man helps Bynum connect with his ancestors and see things “bigger than life” (Wilson, 1988, p. 9), Bynum can help others connect with their traditions and find their empowered identities. Therefore, in the liminal space of the boardinghouse, Bynum encourages Loomis to find his song, which is his extraordinary power.

Loomis has lost his spiritual connection to his ancestors and the black community because of his experience as a slave. He is searching for his identity; the only way to find it is to reconnect with his ancestors and cultural heritage. For Wilson, African Americans need to claim their “African-ness” to be stronger people (Savran, 2006, p. 37). Loomis’s crisis lies in his sense of fragmentation and loss. After he becomes a free man, Loomis starts searching for his wife. Finally, he reaches the boarding house with his daughter, where he meets Bynum. Bynum symbolizes the collective African ancestors, as Samuel Hey (2007) remarks, “who made sure that people obeyed ancestral traditions of good and evil, and cleansed themselves of all abominations” (p. 95). Bynum’s power lies in his ability to connect and bend people. He is always highly concerned with looking deep inside other characters and discovering each one’s problem in an attempt to solve it. He explains:

I had the Binding Song. I choose that song because that’s what I have seen most when I was traveling ... people walking away and leaving one another. So I takes the power of my song and binds them together.... Been binding people ever since. That’s why the call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together (Wilson, 1988, p. 10)

Bynum bends people together and helps them bend with their African traditions to heal and transform.

Songs and music are essential in connecting African Americans with their cultural heritage. By using music, Wilson reconnects African Americans to the past and present. Elam (2009) points out, “Music has its own time, matter, rhythms, but the narrating of music in time also connects to concept of memory and allows us to imagine and remember times” (p. 29). Wilson illustrates how singing and dancing help African Americans deal with historical trauma. Singing and dancing are the significant cultural aspects of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. In Act I Scene 4, After Sunday dinner, the boardinghouse residents, except Loomis, engage in Juba dance, which Wilson (1988) describes as:

The Juba is reminiscent of the Ring Shout of the African Slaves. It is a call and response dance. Bynum sits at the table and drums. He calls the dance as others clap hands, shuffle and stomp around the table. It should be as African as possible, with the performers working themselves up into a near frenzy. The words can be improvised, but should include some mention of the Holy Ghost (original emphasis, p. 52)

Wilson writes about African traditions, such as the Juba dance, to emphasize the connection with the past, heal the trauma of this past, and empower the new generation.

During the dance, Loomis enters, but he is not ready to engage with others because he does not yet know his identity. However, this ritual helps Loomis remember a vision of bones rising from the water and walking across it. He tells Bynum:

I come to this place ... to this water that was bigger than the whole world. And I look out ... and seen these bones rise up out the water. Rise up and begin to walk on top of it Walking without sinking down. Walking on top of the water (Wilson, 1988, p. 53)

The bones symbolize the African slaves who died in the Middle Passage. They represent the spirit of black people. Loomis tells Bynum that these bones “got flesh on them. Just like you and me! They black. Just like you and me. Ain’t no difference” (p. 54). For African Americans, the Middle Passage is a psychological threshold characterized by ambiguity and openness. Through it, the slaves lost their former African identities. Paul Gilroy (1992) states that the Middle Passage functioned as a liminal site of ambiguity and indeterminacy. However, slaves did not enter into complete possession of a new and higher status

of identity. Instead, they were forced by the structures of slavery and economics that confronted them on arrival in the New World to remain in an in-between state. He remarks, “The slaves’ situation became permanently liminal” (p. 58). In this sense, Loomis cannot stand up on his feet until he reconnects with the spirit of his ancestors.

Accordingly, this vision refers to the slaves who died in the Middle Passage and African Americans who were denied their African cultural traditions. In other words, it expresses the soul of black people. Elam (2009) states, “Wilson depicts black people in liminal space, displaced, disconnected from their history, separated from their individual identity and in search for spiritual resurrection and socio-political reconnection” (p. 29). In this sense, creating a liminal space on the stage allows Wilson to explore the interplay between history and contemporary reality and individual and collective identities. Wilson’s characters often find themselves caught between their cultural heritage and the pressure of assimilation in a society that renders them invisible. That is why Wilson brings African ritual dance to the American stage. He depicts how African Americans live in the new culture by clinging to their cultural heritage and reviving the past. In an interview with Kim Powers (1984), Wilson explains Loomis’s vision and how it connects to his identity. Wilson remarks that the vision is his connection with his ancestors, the Africans who were lost during the Middle Passage and were thrown overboard. Wilson adds:

He is privileged to witness this because he needs most to know who he is. It (the vision) is telling him, “This is who you are. You are these bones. You are the sons and daughters of these people. They are walking around here now and they look like you because you are these very same people. This is who you are” (Powers, 1984, p. 54)

The boarding house's liminality allows the characters to call on the spirits of those people to help Loomis in his journey to find his lost identity.

Loomis’s journey emphasizes that finding his lost identity is connected to his awareness of African traditions and spirituality. Thus, Loomis needs to deal with his traumatic past and forgotten African identity. Wilson asserts that music, especially the blues, can help African Americans deal with their traumatic past and connect with their cultural heritage. Blues Music functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and remembrance. The blues songs serve as the African Americans’ response to slavery. These songs can connect the past and the present. In Wilson’s plays, music is woven into the cultural identity. It derives from the

African American traditions and slave tales. Thus, the recognition of music and the reaffirmation of the song are crucial to integrating African Americans with their African past and their spiritual and cultural roots.

After articulating Loomis's vision, Bynum starts singing a blues song that African American women first sang to reflect their pain and suffering when Joe Turner captured their husbands:

They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone
 Ohhh Lordy
 They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone
 Ohhh Lordy
 Got my man and gone
 He come with forty links of chain
 Ohhh Lordy (Wilson, 1988, p. 67)

The song makes Loomis unstable because it reminds him of his experience at Joe Turner's plantation. However, Bynum uses this song to start his process of healing Loomis's spiritual sickness. Bynum has excellent power to fix things by using the right song. In Bynum's opinion, if you have a song "kicking in your chest" (p. 22), you are reconciled with yourself. For Bynum, being unable to find your song means you are lost and cannot find your way in life. Bynum wisely diagnoses Loomis's problem, "Now I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forget his song. Forget how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is. Forget how he's supposed to mark down life" (p. 71). The connection between Loomis and Bynum is inevitable for the action. Bynum paves the way for Loomis to find his song by forcing him to remember his past and forgive it. Wilson's characters are depicted as needing to discover their songs to get their freedom and overcome their sense of alienation and dislocation. This is only possible in the liminality of the third space of the boardinghouse.

Accordingly, traditional music and songs are artistically intended to help characters overcome their dilemma and griefs. They use blues to empower themselves in their new society. Wilson connects his characters' songs with their ability to go on in their lives. In this sense, when Loomis finds his song, he finds his wife, Martha. But Loomis realizes he cannot reunite with her and still feels lost. At this moment, Martha mentions the blood sacrifice, referring to Jesus, and Loomis realizes that he can bleed for himself and needs no one to do it for him. Patric Tyndall (2004) remarks, "he falls back on the African Traditional Religions that led him to this point and gives him the strength to stand up" (p. 169).

Shedding his blood represents a kind of resurrection, which leads Loomis to his transformation. By connecting himself to the African tradition, Loomis finally becomes a freeman. Tyndall adds, “Loomis’s bloodletting is not violent, but rather a crucial sacrifice of lost Loomis, in favor of a shiny man. When Loomis exclaims that he is standing, this is the same thing as Loomis saying he has found his strong, African identity” (p. 170). By the ritual of sacrifice, Loomis realizes that his identity is also connected to African ancestors and American social history.

Throughout the play, Wilson asserts the impact of the blues on African Americans' lives. He believes that the music contains their ideas and genuine soul. So, when Savran (2006) asks him, “When Loomis finds his song, he can stand up again,” Wilson replies, “Yes” (p. 37). At the end of the play, Loomis declares himself a free man. He tells Bynum, “Everybody wanna bind me up. Well Joe Turner’s come and gone and Herald Loomis ain’t for no binding. I ain’t gonna let nobody bind me up!” (Wilson, 1988, p. 91). Bynum tells him he is not trying to bind him; instead, he binds his daughter with her mother. Then, Bynum asserts that Loomis is a free man because he finds his song: “You binding yourself. You bound onto your song. All you got to do is stand up and sing it, Herald Loomis. It’s right there kicking at your throat. All you got to do is sing it. Then you be free” (p. 91). Loomis’s crisis is ended when he admits his anger and lets it go. Although he rejects Martha's Christian belief, he agrees that her daughter Zonia must live with her mother to receive proper guidance. Finally, Loomis realizes the meaning of his life. He tells Martha, “Life don’t mean nothing unless it got a meaning” (p. 93). The meaning of his life is to realize that he belongs to the African and American cultures. This is the uniqueness of his identity and the source of his power. This realization helps him to stand up: “I’m standing! I’m standing. My legs stood up! I’m standing now” (93). Wilson (1988) comments:

(Having found his song, the song of self-sufficiency, fully resurrected, cleansed and given breath, free man any encumbrance other than the working of his own heart and the bonds of the flesh, having accepted the responsibility for his own presence in the world, he is free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contractions.) (original emphasis, pp. 93-4)

Connecting to his cultural heritage empowers Loomis spiritually. Loomis’s transformation depends on his ability to negotiate both cultures in the third space, in which cultural identities are contested and evolved.

The deconstruction of cultural fixity in the ambivalent third space produces meaning for marginal individuals like Loomis. Stuart Hall (1994) remarks that the original culture of the individual has an essential role in shaping the self-perception. In his conceptualization of cultural identity, he affirms the role of historical references and common cultural backgrounds in the notion of “being and becoming.” The concept of being refers to the origin and similarities among a group of people, while the concept of becoming refers to the negotiation with the dominant culture. Both being and becoming conjointly create cultural identity. Our cultural identities, according to Hall, “come from somewhere, have histories ... they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power” (p. 225). Loomis finally integrates himself and becomes a shiny man. Bynum says, “Herald Loomis, you shining! You shining like new money!” (Wilson, 1988, p. 95). This means that Loomis finds his African American identity, which is a mixture of African cultural tradition and American culture. He transcends his liminal existence by recovering his cultural heritage, which enables him to achieve his new social status as a free African American.

Being aware of his new identity helps Loomis to be self-empowered. Bhabha (1994) remarks that the position of authority may be part of the process of ambivalence. He points out, “The exercise of power may be politically effective and physically affective because the discursive of liminality through which it is signified may provide greater space for strategic maneuver and negotiation” (p. 145). This new space of negotiation helps both dominant and marginal groups to demonstrate the forces of social authority by decentering the strategies of signification. It also breaks the binary relationship between minority communities and majority societies to form a hybrid identity. In this sense, hybridity does not mean the mixing of self-contained cultural traditions but rather, as Andrew Smith (2004) states, “the recognition of the fact that all culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the purportedly ‘other,’ and in which the attempts of the dominant culture to close and patrol its hegemonic account are threatened by the return of minority stories and histories, and by strategies of appropriation and revaluation” (p. 252). Accordingly, in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, Wilson brings ancestors’ traditions and ghosts to the stage to help his characters, especially young ones, redefine their identities as hybrid entities. Throughout mixing African heritage and the mainstream culture of American society, Wilson recreates and reshapes the African American identity.

The new identity is hybrid and empowered by the negotiation of African and American cultures.

To conclude, Bhabha's concept of the third space challenges the fixed notion of identity and offers new possibilities for self-definition. It provides a framework for African American playwrights to represent the uniqueness and complexity of African American cultural identity, in which it becomes a positive and empowering space. Throughout such space, African American dramatists challenge the traditional representation of identity and create a new transformative identity beyond the binaries of black and white. Inhabiting this space requires retrieving African culture and traditions and redefining concepts such as identity, unity, authenticity, and origin.

As an African American playwright, August Wilson uses the concept of the third space to explore themes of identity, belonging, and power dynamics, especially in his play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Wilson attempts to unite the African American community and gives them extraordinary power by letting them practice their cultural heritage in the liminal space. Performing cultural heritage in this space represents the power of human connection and highlights personal transformation. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the boardinghouse becomes a third space for African Americans who have migrated from the South to the North. The liminality of the boardinghouse allows its residents to express their experiences, define themselves, and create their new hybrid identity, where Herald Loomis integrates his new identity and becomes a free African American.

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