



Limbo State of Mind: Black Diasporic Repetition and Return through Dramatherapy

Varia Williams

Provoked and inspired by the polysemantic nature of the word *limbo* and its specific resonance for the Black diasporic experience – particularly descendants of African enslavement – I explore the continued loss, grief, rage, and trauma concomitant with our racial complex (Brewster 2020), leaving many Black people suspended in a transitional *limbo state of mind*. This limbo state of being relates to the psychological, physical, and emotional impact which racialized systems of oppression, suppression, and repression exert on Black communities in the Western collective, resulting in an unresolved existence stuck between past and present.

The work also examines the *limbo state of mind* as a manifestation of repetition and return within the Black diasporic psyche. Drawing on Cavafy's *Ithaca* as an allegory of journey, discovery, and homecoming, I consider the psychological and cultural implications of existing 'in limbo' – betwixt past and present, loss and longing, trauma and transcendence. The concept of limbo speaks to a cyclical and ritualistic re-enactment of displacement and grief, where colonial and racialized histories repeat and resurface through inherited memory, bodily tensions, and artistic expression.

Through the lens of Sesame Dramatherapy, I query the psychological impact of this centuries-old trauma on the Black being, and how – through personal explorations, including the use of poetry, movement, ritual, and art – creative arts psychotherapies can acknowledge and address themes of rage, grievance, grief, shame, belonging, and internalized/ externalized race dynamics within a therapeutic encounter.

Reflecting on how creative processes can transform repetition into renewal and return to Self, this work invokes *ancestralism* as an act of re-remembering – a conscious return to ancestral presences that transforms inherited trauma into creative and spiritual renewal. It is in this through this return, the limbo state itself evolves from paralysis into passage.



Biography

Varia Williams is a Barbadian Creative Arts Psychotherapist, educator, and performing artist, and one of the pioneers of Dramatherapy in her island home. She is the founder of *Creative Arts Therapy Barbados* and holds an MA in Drama and Movement Therapy from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. Her practice integrates drama, movement, art and ritual, to explore identity, ancestral memory, and resilience within Caribbean and diasporic contexts. Varia's work investigates how creativity, culture, and embodiment can foster healing, belonging, and social transformation.

Recent Publications

Williams, V., **Limbo state of mind: Reflections from a Sesame trainee dramatherapist 'in the wake of being Black'**. *Dramatherapy, Volume 45, Issue Diasporas in Dramatherapy, Oct 2024*. p. 171 – 193. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/dj_00018_1