

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORY AND METHOD**

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework explores the concepts of Black Existentialism and Black Existentialism in Music, delving into the philosophical and cultural dimensions of existentialism within the context of the Black experience and its expression through music.

##### **2.1.1 Black Existentialism**

Black existentialism is a particular way of thinking which evaluates the exertion of power and emphasizes the strengthening of Black individuals globally. African-Americans are still trying to liberate themselves from the act of discrimination and oppression. (Bassey:2007, 914) Du Bois states the idea of double consciousness as emphasis on the experience as African Americans who have double forms: as a black person and as an American. The implication of this double consciousness according to Du Bois is how they view themselves from the perspective of white supremacy and anti-black racism. This supremacy causes them to claim themselves as lowly and inferior. The anti-black racism is leaning more toward the created contradiction which is caused by the system. The system that has been affected by the thoughts of blames the victim. Du Bois uses many historical facts to indicate how it affects history in shaping black and white society. Du Bois also emphasizes negro music in the last chapter: he labels the sorrow songs as a representation of black folk culture. (1903; Chapter I and IX)

Moreover, there exists a philosophical movement with similar foundations, concerning the challenges faced by black individuals, known as black existentialism. According to Bassey (2007: 914-935), black existentialism revolves around the idea of achieving global black liberation from oppression. This form of black existentialism is a subset of the Africana Philosophical Movement, where individuals of African or African descent discuss their experiences and struggles related to diaspora. Bassey explains that Black existential philosophy serves as a discourse that critiques domination and advocates for the empowerment of Black people worldwide. What distinguishes it most from European existentialism is that black existential philosophy specifically centers on the liberation of all black individuals globally from oppression.

From the definition above the writer wants to restate that both Du Bois and Bassey have a similar common ground. First, Du Bois states the concept of double consciousness exist as African Americans are experiencing a discrimination which has been rooted deeply and causes them to have this thought of the one being oppressed. Second, Bassey emphasizes on the sense of struggles which black people tries to vocalize the philosophical thoughts behind the experience. Additionally, Du Bois expresses this struggle and philosophical thoughts through music. Accordingly, music is growing more to be a culture that is still growing to this day in the African Americans community. In the meantime, Bassey highlights the liberation of discrimination and racism which is the goal of the philosophy. Therefore, this thesis serves as a discussion of liberation for black people in

African American music through the philosophical thought of black existentialism.

### **2.1.2 Black Existentialism in Music**

Music has served as a potent means for the expression and empowerment of the Black community. The principles of Black existentialism find diverse applications in the realm of music, one of which involves producing music that mirrors the trials and tribulations of Black individuals, emphasizing their humanity and fortitude when confronted with challenges. Genres like hip-hop, jazz, and blues have especially played a crucial role in this context, acting as platforms for the expression and empowerment of Black voices.

Needless to say, Black existentialism can be applied within the music industry. Where structural racism and inequalities often exist, Black existentialism can serve as a means of challenging systemic oppression. In this sense, the application of Black existentialism philosophy in music can serve as a powerful tool for empowering Black individuals and challenging systemic oppression. This can be achieved both through the creation of music which reflects Black experiences and through promoting equity and representation within the music industry.

In his Black Existential Essay on Jimi Hendrix, Lewis R. Gordon points out the irony that rock 'n' roll, originally a black art form, has undergone significant cultural transformation to the point where its most celebrated guitarist, who happened to be black, is regarded as an exception rather than the norm. Nevertheless, this doesn't imply that rock 'n' roll produced by white artists is

inherently racist. In fact, many early white rock 'n' roll musicians, like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin in Britain, were passionate about blues music and sought to engage in the music they loved, contributing to the genre in their own authentic way. Black existentialism raises thought-provoking questions about these paradoxical developments, as it explores themes related to humanity, the pursuit of freedom, and artistic self-expression through music, not only in terms of performance but also concerning content and representation (2017: 216).

These themes frequently strike a chord with marginalized communities who have a deep appreciation for the music, even if it goes unnoticed by the mainstream culture. Black existentialism prompts music enthusiasts to contemplate the broader societal and cultural implications of music that go beyond its superficial sound and style. It scrutinizes how Black individuals are portrayed in the music industry and questions the historical favoritism towards white artists who have often received credit for genres and styles originating from Black communities. Moreover, it challenges the industry's tendency to rely on stereotypical depictions of Black artists and their music, such as the romanticization of jazz or the objectification of rap and hip-hop. Consequently, Black existentialism encourages audiences to critically analyze the intersection of race, power, and representation within the music industry and advocates for the support and elevation of Black voices and experiences in music.

Black existentialism focuses on facing the facts of racism and oppression. As these forms of expression are frequently used to explore and question these same

issues, this philosophy interacts with Black culture and Black texts in a variety of ways. Black existentialism emphasizes on how experiencing oppression affects one's identity and worldview, it aims to understand the human experience from a Black perspective.

Texts that explore and elucidate the principles of Black existentialist philosophy and culture are commonly referred to as works of Black existentialism. These writings can take various forms, encompassing academic treatises, fictional narratives, and poetry. Beyond contributing to ongoing dialogues concerning issues like race, identity, and emancipation, they frequently serve as a means to convey Black existentialist concepts and viewpoints to a broader audience. James Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time," for instance, delves into the intricate aspects of Black identity and the quest for liberation in the United States. Similarly, Toni Morrison's "Beloved" delves into the psychological aftermath of slavery on Black individuals and communities. These renowned works exemplify Black existentialist literature.

The writer summarizes that black existentialism as philosophy, culture, and texts intertwine in complicated ways because each form of expression advances the ongoing investigation of the experiences and viewpoints of Black people and aims to counteract prevailing thoughts about racism and oppression. It is crucial to take these connections into account and investigate how they affect how we comprehend Black existentialism as a complex and dynamic framework for comprehending human experience. One of its uses as existentialist music that also

involves the culture of black people to voice the freedom of oppression which they still seek to this day.

Black existentialism provides a framework for black musicians to assert their identity and confront structural inequalities, which is essential in a society where systemic racism and discrimination continue to exist. It also allows for the creation of a supportive community that celebrates the rich contributions of Black artists and embraces the diverse narratives and perspectives they bring. By embracing and promoting black existentialist principles, the music industry can become a more inclusive and socially conscious space that values and uplifts Black artists and their experiences. This is crucial in promoting diversity and equity in the industry and creating a more just and equitable society.

## **2.2 Research Method**

Qualitative research method refers to a methodology used in analyzing data with a focus on comprehending the experience and meaning derived by either an individual or group, and when exploring complex phenomena like attitudes beliefs and experiences which cannot be easily measures, this method is particularly useful. Furthermore, using the close reading method to analyze texts, the writer must carefully examine its language, structure, and themes in great detail. (Katan, Lina and Charlotte Andreas Baarts: 2020, 58-75) Comprehending complex literary works is facilitated by this useful tool. It is extremely advantageous to analyze the nuances and complexities in literary texts, among other types of texts that mandate an in-depth comprehension of their sense and surroundings. A more

comprehensive understanding of the text is facilitated by this approach. This study intends to undertake an extensive examination of Kendrick Lamar's portrayal of the concept of freedom within his discography. The primary objective is to scrutinize the lyrical content across his albums and discern the manners in which Lamar articulates the notion of freedom. Furthermore, the study aims to employ a comprehensive analysis that encompasses both the denotative and connotative meanings present within the song lyrics, thereby delving into the explicit as well as the implicit meanings conveyed by the artist.