# Resistant Creativity: A Survey of the Tradition of Struggle in the Black Art and Literature

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**Abstract:** Art and literature by Africans and people of African descent around the globe tend to be a matter that transcends mere aesthetics; that is, an aesthetics for its own sake. In fact, when Africans write, they endow the written word with politics and ideology, which remind of a legacy of resistance and struggle. The same applies to African Americans whose literature and artistic representations are mostly engaged and committing.
This paper seeks to survey the tradition of resistance and struggle in Black people's writings and art. It purports to answer the questions as to how art is defined and how resistance is formulated and expressed in the creative arts of Black people.

**Key Words**: Resistance, Black, creativity, art, literature, aesthetics, politics, society, culture and liberation struggle

> *Art never achieves greatness through transcendence of socio-historical reality. On the contrary, even as it transcends specific circumstances and conventions, it is deeply rooted in social realities*.[1] (Angela Y. Davis).

> *Whatever the value of Black writing, it must proceed as a direct result of the service it will perform for the Black community, and the sooner we accept our roles as the community voice, the closer we will be to the solution to the struggle*.[2] (Charles H. Fuller, Jr.)

The struggle for independence, self-determination and freedom as undertaken by Africans and people of African descent has been, and still continues to be waged on many levels, among which are the political, the economic and the cultural. In the continent, the struggle for freedom from Western imperialist and colonialist powers was first staged by Western educated Africans who were sent to the Metropole to be brushed off from any thing that looked African in nature and appearance, and thereby adopt the Western ways. They thus became civilized, cultured and fit for humanity according to the standards of their colonial masters. However, these intellectuals came to the realization that their true liberation and humanity could only be achieved through a resort to their identity, culture and civilization. Thus, the Negritude movement was created by late Leopold Sedar Senghor from Senegal, Leon Gontran Damas from Dominique, and Martinican Aime Cesaire. These men appropriated Western tools of expression to wage their battle for freedom and achieve recognition as human beings as much as white people do by making the claim that their African ancestors did bequeath to them a cultural heritage, something worthy of being named civilization, thereby dismantling the myth of the inferiority of the Black, the worthlessness of people of darker complexion, and most of all the myth of white supremacy. They challenged the dichotomous representation (binary oppositions) of the colonial space: the colonizer/colonized or civilized/barbarous.

In the Diaspora (here I refer to people of African descent in the United States and the West Indies as opposed to the Paris group, which includes the Cesaires, Damases are obviously from the West Indies) the same struggle for emancipation from the so-called "peculiar institution" was under way for quite a long time. In the United States, the people of African descent were enslaved since the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492. The Emancipation proclaimed in 1863 did not improve the condition of the newly freed slaves. Their status of slave, by reason of how they kept on being perceived and treated, remained whole; they simply saw a flipper of hope only to relapse into their former condition. The proclamation of the end of slavery took other various sad shapes. As resistance against it went under multiple manifestations among which was mob lynching by white people seeking to avert any attempt on the part of ex-slaves to be their equals. The most notable manifestation of the old order was segregation and racial discrimination operating on the basis of the inferiority of people of African descent and white supremacy.

From slavery up to this day, Americans of African extraction devised their means of protest against their predicament through diverse forms of arts sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. These forms of resistance and protest against colonialism – in Africa – slavery and

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[1] Angela Davis, *Blues Legacy and Black Feminism*, p.112.
[2] Hoyt Fuller, *Liberator*, p.10.

semi-colonialism in the United States will be the main focus of this paper. Artistic creativity by Africans and people of African origin played a determinant role in the betterment of the condition of these people because they appropriated, for political purposes, the tools that their enslavers and oppressors used tools that are first and foremost considered by Westerners as means of entertainment and pure art. Being a student of literature, I shall focus on all the artistic achievements of Black people; i.e., Africans from the continent and those of the Diaspora, and as well as on how their view of creativity overlap or how they all serve the same purposes. How is resistance formulated and expressed in the creative arts of Black people? What is their definition of art and creativity? These are the questions I shall attempt to answer in this paper.

Art is said to be the whole of the forms of creative beauty. In other words, it is the activities enjoyed for the beauty they generate. It is the beauty that authors represent through painting, music and literature. Art deals with the beautiful and thought-provoking works produced through some creative exercise. Creativity would therefore be the imaginative ability to develop new and original ideas or things especially in an artistic context. From this definition of art and creativity, it appears that artistic creativity is an exercise in the search for beauty, aesthetics and entertainment. Artistic forms are the mirror image of the culture of a given people because it is the materialization of the ideas the people in question have of themselves and of others. An art that does not address the socio-historical conditions of the people to whom it is intended is a dead one; it is an art that lacks life and fails to serve any practical purpose. According to Fela Sowande " it is the LIVINGNESS of art that makes it art. Form, style, structure, craftsmanship, are of the highest importance to the creative mind in man, for meaningful ideas have nothing to say to the man who has not mastered the tools of his trade. Nevertheless, it is only when even the superb craftsmanship has been successfully wedded to - and has become a channel for - a "Poetic Content" that adds new dimensions and insight, greater depth and clarity to man's awareness and understanding of himself in relation to a dynamic Universe of which he is an integral and indispensable unit, that we have Art in which there is that LIVINGNESS that makes it art. Only in terms of that "Poetic Content" can that Art be profitably approached and examined, and appraised. Only by being in the final analysis primarily concerned not with the formal and structural elements, but with the LIFE-QUALITY in that Art one can be certain that he is handling the Art itself and not its mere container."[3]

From this reflection it appears that the thing called Art in the African perspective is not a matter of form simply put; it is first and foremost a matter of content, of the ideology behind the form of art.

In their struggle for the shifting of the barbarous/civilized paradigm erected by the West in order to justify the invasion of Africa, African intellectuals set out to show to the world the beauty of African cultures and traditions through their writings and other forms of arts. This romanticization of African history did help disprove the arguments having it that the people of the Dark Continent did not have any historical reference, any civilization and that they were incapable of producing works of arts and literature, which were viewed as the pointers of refinement and culture. However, these intellectuals were trying to prove that despite their immersion in, and assimilation of, Western values they had a source, cultural values that could be utilized to set themselves free, and the people in the end. The same rationale lurks behind the artistic and literary production of Black people in the United States Harlem Renaissance movement, which sprang a little bit earlier than the Negritude movement in Paris in the early thirties. Both the Harlem

[3] Fela Sowande quoted by Bill Cole in *John Coltrane*, p.29.

Renaissance and the Negritude movements got caught up in the mere praising of African cultural heritage and the analysis of their situation through Eurocentric lenses. They had to do so in order to prove that they mastered the White man's tool of expression and they estranged from the real priorities of the Black writers and artists, which boiled down to raising of the consciousness of their people through their creativity. Most importantly, for them art bore the same definition as the one provided by the master. Among the few texts that have a strong edge of radicalism are Zora Hurston Neale's short story "Sweat" published in the 1920's dealing with patriarchy and violence against Black woman in African-American communities, and Claude McKay's powerful poem "If We Must Die" that laid down the way the African-American artist should go about the race relations in the US. The text runs as follows:

> If we must die, let it not be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot
> While making round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
> Making their mock at our accursed lot.
> If we must die, let us nobly die
> So that our precious blood may not be shed
> In vain; then even the monsters we defy
> Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
> Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
> Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave
> And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
> What though before us lies the open?
> Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack
> Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back![4]

Setting the tone for what Black art must be; that is to say, an art deeply rooted in politics and revolution, Claude Mckay was debunking the idea that works of art and literature were to be produced along the straight line of aesthetics, or better according to the so-called "art for art's sake." The Black artists and their creativity have other priorities and challenges to deal with; namely those of taking full-fledged part in the struggle for the improvement of the sociopolitical and economic condition of Black people. The latter should be the working material as well as the audience of Black artists. In clear terms, art for the Black person has a very different meaning insofar as it speaks to and for the liberation struggle of the colonized, the enslaved, and the exploited. In an address entitled "The Political Leader as a Representative of a Culture" the revolutionary leader and late president of the Republic of Guinea-Conakry Ahmed Sekou Toure tries to dissuade the African artist from using his creativity to serve a mere aesthetical purpose. Most interestingly, he believes that the artist should be part of the struggle, of the African revolution, which to him was the only way to get out of the claws of western imperialist powers. Addressing the Black Writers and Artists at their second Congress in 1959, Sékou Touré declared that:

> To take part in the African revolution, it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion it with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves.

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[4] See Claude McKay, "If We Must Die", *Norton Anthology: African-American Literature*, p. 894.

> In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought. You must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle and of the suffering of humanity.[5]

The African writers and artists are, in this pronouncement, the object of Sekou Toure's condemnation insofar as the tradition of African literature – by this tradition I mean both the continental and the Diasporic– is the carbon copy of Western literature. It is a literature that does not emphasize the "Poetic Content" that Fela Sowande points to. Both its form and content have a great deal to do with the so-called art for art's sake. The Negritude movement set out to prove that Africans had a glorious past, that they had culture and civilization thereby challenging the preconceptions, stereotypes and lies of the Westerners about Africa. The project in itself was not deplorable and useless because it did help to some extent; however, it was serving a special purpose that of those intellectuals or Western educated Africans Frantz Fanon talks about. Those intellectuals were out of step with their identity, their culture on behalf of Westerner's, which they assimilated and almost passed off as nationals of the colonizing empires. The revalorization of the culture they preached could not have a tangible impact on the struggle because they viewed these forms of culture as something monolithic and static. And yet, the culture they were showing to the colonial master as a token of their identity was not considered as a means to make change happen in the predicament of the masses of African people. It is against the grain of this belief that Fanon gives his definition of what he thinks culture, and better still national culture is. He writes that "National culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not the made up of inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on" (Fanon 188).

It is crystal clear that while the African intellectual was struggling for Africa at the same time he or she was standing outside the arena or the battlefield. That lack of courage, responsibility and commitment to the cause of the masses of the people explains why some Anglophone Africans were very skeptical and suspicious about the Negritude movement and its struggle for the African's personality and downtrodden dignity. In this respect one of the most outstanding African intellectuals, the Nigerian playwright and 1989 Nobel Prize laureate, Wole Soyinka, went ahead and declared that the tiger does not proclaim its tigritude, that it grumbles, catches and devours its prey. The tiger may be read as the nigger and tigritude as negritude.[6] This statement is an invitation

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[5] Ahmed Sekou Toure quoted by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.206. Sekou Toure's political and social philosophy has not been thoroughly explored because of his legendary opposition to French imperialism and colonialism in Africa. He is known to have pronounced an emphatic "NO" to General de Gaulle when the latter was trying to piece together into a so-called French Community the French colonies that were falling apart from under his control. Ever since, he has been vilified and dragged in the mud by the French and their allies in power in Africa. It is undeniable that he gave in physical liquidation of his opponents, but this sad part of the Guinean revolution should not be taken out of its context; his opponents were arguably at the destabilizing service of the French. It is my belief that no serious study of anti-colonial study in Africa and in the Diaspora can be undertaken without including his thoughts.

[6] See Wole Soyinka, "The Scholar in African Society" *Mimeo*, p. 22.

to action and commitment, and implicit in it is the need for social revolution, political awareness of those for whom the writers and artists pretend to speak for. Is creative resistance or revolution by means of culture and art productive?

It is not Harold Cruse who will say the contrary. As a matter of fact, Cruse in his analysis of the plight of African-Americans in the belly of United States finds the following diagnosis. In his 1968 book *Revolution or Rebellion* Harold Cruse tries to touch upon the lethargy he thinks Black intellectuals, writers and artists were caught up in. The problem, according to him, arises from the so-called integrationist struggle that certain Civil Rights movements such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) and the NUL (National Urban League) embarked on after the nominal emancipation of Black people. The appeal for integration as cast by Black intellectuals was serving a handful of Black people, namely the elite, the black middle class, which was rather preoccupied with their own social mobility and status than the general interest of the people they pretended to be speaking up for. For Cruse, the liberation of the Black masses in the United States from their semi-colonial situation requires the (re-)fashioning of a culture which must be identified and identifiable as Black. For, "culture is the mirror of true progress. Where culture is dying, weak and evanescent, there is something wrong with its roots. The root of African-American problems in the cultural fields is a debilitating sickness whose diagnosis is Caucassian idolatry in the arts, abandonment of true identity, an immature childlike mimicry of white aesthetics"( Cruse 56).

The special mention or the preference of art-fields over and against any other domain of activity in Black people's life is justified by the fact that politically, socially and economically Black people are more than insecure and as such there is no chance for them to compete with White people, let alone to challenge the status quo. The only ground available for Blacks in America to stand on and win the battle for equality, social justice and freedom is the cultural and artistic field. The cultural field is the best arena to use in order to undermine the existing social order because, first and foremost, in terms of culture America has none and it thrives on such Black arts as music, chief among these are blues and jazz. Secondly, this United States is based and breeds on capitalism or "free enterprise," which appears to be the weakest point of the system to strike. Why and how can culture and Black creativity help end the colonial practices at work in the United States? According to Harold Cruse,

> It is part of the American economic system that has to do with the ownership and the administration of cultural communications in America, i.e., film, theater, radio and television, music, performing and publishing, popular entertainment booking, management, etc. In short, it is that part of the system devoted to the economics and aesthetic ideology involved in the cultural arts of America. If the Negro rebellion is limited by a lack of original social, political and economic ideas to 'fit the world into a theoretic frame,' then it is only in the cultural areas of American life that such new ideas can have any social meaning. (Ibid, 111)

The underlying idea of Cruse's statement is that up until the struggle for social rehabilitation through the integrationist movement spearheaded by the Black elite, there has only been a rebellion, i.e., the use of force and violence in such a disorderly manner that it is inefficient and always doomed to failure. The energy and abilities of the Black, writers, artists and the masses, should converge into a cultural and theoretical frame in order to convert their rebellion into a revolution. For, "rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than an incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, originates in the realm of ideas. Specifically, it is the

injection of ideas into historical experience, while rebellion is only the movement that leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas. While even the collective history of a movement of rebellion is always that of a fruitless struggle with facts, of an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor reasons, a revolution is an attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fire the world into a theoretical frame" (Ibid. 108).

In the realm of creativity, the Harlem Renaissance movement and its sister Negritude in Africa did confine themselves, first of all, in proving the existence of artistic ability among Black people and in whipping up the pride and race-consciousness of Black people, which is laudable at best because they came into being at a moment when the Black person's humanity and dignity were seriously called into question. Secondly and unfortunately, they have been representing the Black and his/her consciousness with Western artistic values in such a way that a close examination of their achievements reveals that the productions are duplicate copies of Western literature and arts. Importantly enough, their arts were devoted to mere protest, and lacked the revolutionary edge that could make change happen in the lives of people they were artistically and "politically" representing.

Here is where comes the idea of originality and authenticity in the arts produced by the Black. In African literature, some advocacy for the Africanization and politicization of literature and arts has been put forth by such cultural nationalists as Fanon and the Kenyan novelist and revolutionary Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Fanon's analysis of art and literature turns around the latter's inclusion in the fight for national liberation, instead of being simple reports about African culture and past, which approach is an attempt to fossilize culture; culture is rather a living and changing thing. As for Ngugi, a staunch advocate of the indigenization of African literature, there is only a literature of foreign expression produced by Africans.[7] To set the tone in that respect he wrote novels and plays in his mother tongue – *Gikiyu* – for his people and not for a foreign audience. One would object to the fact that the African intellectual appropriates literature whereas it is alien to Africa and therefore what he or she produces is not creative, original and authentic at all. Creativity is not all about novelties or creating things *ex-nihilo*, it is also the refashioning things that already exist in order to make them fit in one's needs and purposes. It is about putting one's twist on someone else's thing. That's why it is creative and original to Africanize literature and use it for the purpose of social change. It does not mean that there is not such a thing as literature in Africa; oral tradition otherwise called *orature* is a form of literature typically African.

Coming back to the necessity of revolutionizing creativity it ought to be said that it will be interesting to take a look at the artistic trend that developed in the chaotic and violent 1960's in the United States. As a matter of fact, the 1960's in America was a period of unfulfilled promises for Black people; the integrationist and non-violent approach to the civil rights for Blacks did not reap much. It was a period of social unrest and violence targeting both the masses of Black people as well as the leadership. Malcolm X, the most revolutionary leader that the history of Black people in the United States ever recorded was assassinated. So was Martin Luther King, Jr. who was preaching the Christian turn-the-left- cheek-when-the-right-one-was-hit. The choice of these two leaders is not guided by some intent upon minimizing the various and heinous murders of such leaders as Medgar Evers, but because Malcolm and King represented two diametrically opposed politics and approach to race relations in America. The one stood for change here and now and by the much misquoted and mishandled "by any means necessary," whereas the other preached the gradualistic and peaceful approach. Though Malcolm X was cool-bloodedly murdered, his ideas

[7] Ngugi, *Decolonising The Mind*, believes that there is no African Literature *per se*, there is a literature by Africans of foreign expression. See pp. 4-9

were getting more and more powerful among his kinsmen and women because the integrationist politics carried out by liberal whites and the Black elite led to blind alleys. The resurgence of radicalism and militancy among Black youth in the sixties testifies to that.

As a matter of fact, the Black students who were affiliated to the SCLC of Martin Luther King and other civil-right movement took on the responsibility to make things change through militancy and more direct actions. It is in this context that the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee changed its name into SCC and was led by Stockley Carmichael. Prior to the radicalization of SNCC, the Black Panther Party paved the way for the need for Black self-determination, self-defense and self-help. These ideas are what Stockley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton elaborated on in their well-known book Black Power: the politics of Liberation written in 1968.

There is a need to say a few words on the credo of the Black Power Movement and how it has a bearing on the development of a radical and more militant Black creativity at the time the cry for Black liberation was getting more and more strident.

According to Stockley Carmichael and his co-author, Black people in the United States were (still are) in a situation of colonialism, which they term as an *internal colony*. By that they allude to the similarity between the sociopolitical and economic situation of colonized people in Africa and elsewhere. The decision affecting their lives are made without them, they live below the threshold of poverty, and above all they are subjected to the most horrible brutality and worthy of a police state. Most importantly, they believe that the traditional leadership does not represent the interests and aspirations of Blacks in America, and that the only way to further the living conditions of Black people is to make a move towards self-determination, self-pride, self-defense and self-help. According to the proponents of Black Power, the concept of "integration is based on the assumption that there is nothing of value in the Black community and that little value could be created among black people. Here is what Stockley and Hamilton have to say about their decision to be free via means proper to Black people:

> Those of us who advocate Black power are quite clear in our minds that a "non-violent" approach to the civil-rights is an approach and luxury white people do not deserve. It is crystal clear to us - and it must become so with the white society - that there can be no social order without *social justice*. White people must be made to understand that they must stop messing with black people, or the blacks will fight back! (Hamilton and Carmichael 53)

These words are the response police brutality upon Black people and the authors justify the necessity for the blacks to protect themselves against these assaults by themselves because there is no justice system to help them. "If a nation fails to protect its citizens, then that nation cannot condemn those who take up the task themselves" (Ibid.).

What do the exponents of Black Power signify by the concept? "Black Power means proper representation of and sharing of control. It means the creation of power bases, of strength, from which black people can press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression – instead of from weakness"(Ibid. 46). Since the "patterns of oppression" are deeply couched in racism, white superiority the advocates of Black Power urge the masses of Black people to reject the philosophy of integration, which proves to be unproductive, and take pride in their identity and cultural heritage and ultimately constitute a race-conscious body politic so as to free themselves from the American internal colonial yoke. It is in that regard that the theorists of Black liberation

politics say that:

> Black Power recognizes – it must recognize – the ethnic basis of American politics as well as the power-oriented nature of American politics. Black Power therefore calls for black people to consolidate behind their own, so that they can bargain from a position of strength. (Ibid.)

What is very interesting is that "coalition" is looked askance at because it is a replication of the same pattern of Black people being shepherded by other people. Hence, Black people will enter fronts that share their values and that have the same interests as the Black community. As a matter of fact, it is unproductive and ludicrous on the part of an oppressed and victimized community to coalesce with somebody who is economically, politically and socially secure.

It is clear from that description of the tenets of the Black Power that the movement encourages race-consciousness and dissuades Black people from celebrating White values at the detriment of their own. What is the impact of that philosophy on the artistic and creative sphere of the Blacks?

As a matter of fact, the Black Power movement fired the Black writers and artistic with race-consciousness and the need to set new rules for their productions. The creativity of these people takes a new turn; their imaginative ability must serve the political and propagandistic purposes of Black revolution. The revolutionization of Black creativity gave birth to what is known as the Black Arts Movement. It was spearheaded by such artists and writers as Imamu Amiri Baraka -formerly known as Leroi Jones – Hoyt Fuller, Maulana Karenga, Charles H. Fuller, Jr., Addison Gayle and Hakki Mudhabutti to cite but these. In order to show the substance of the philosophy of Black artists and writers of the tumultuous sixties, let me extensively quote from the *Journal Liberator* of 1967 an article that Charles Fuller wrote in order to explain, and expose the new guidelines for Black writing. Here is what he has to say:

> We have been asked to believe that in order for black writers to become artists, they must forget who and what they are and follow in the footsteps of white men who created work founded on the idea that the highest form of art was self-expression. We are asked at the same time to be and not to be true to ourselves. We are asked to get off race issue when we are tied to it hand and foot - and simply because we *are* the issue. If it is true that Black men historically and presently are in protest of a society that has denied them entrance into its so-called mainstream by every device conceivable, then it is sheer folly to think that they would create work that would not reflect this and act of oppression to assume that what they create is not art. *Socio-creative art is what Black men bring into existence when they sit down to write*…Indeed it corresponds directly for *us* to the meaning of our art. *Our lives and our art are one in the same struggle, and continue to accept or debate the white standards of evaluation, nurtured by racial oppression, is to commit a kind of literary suicide.* [Italics mine] (Fuller 8)

Thus is laid down the basis for the art of the Black, a socio-historically creative art, an art that obeys the recommendations put forth by Sekou Toure and taken up by Fanon. The most revolutionary tones are found in the arts and writings of the African-Americans who not only resolve to load their works with ideology and propaganda, but also undertake to radicalize the form of their expressions. The writers and artists of the Black Arts movements believe that art must serve the cause of the Black revolution and as such it must be *functional*, *collective* and

*committing*, which are the fundamental characteristics of a revolutionary art. A functional art is one that is useful and reflects the value system it comes from; it is violence to the doctrine of “art for art's sake.” Art is collective when the artist does not create for himself, but about and for his community who is the prime judge of his productions. It must deal with the quotidian of the community in more colorful and beautiful form. Ultimately, art is committing when it urges to revolution and change through a glimpse into the past in order to better the present and the future. And since the Black is seeking for socio-political and economic rights his art is social first and aesthetic later. Since works of art and literature are critiqued by white people, and trashed when they do not meet the orthodox canons of white aesthetics, the proponents of Black aesthetics call "for a set of rules by which black literature and art are to be judged and evaluated. For the historic practice of bowing to other men's gods and definitions has produced a crisis of the highest magnitude, and brought [blacks] culturally to the limits of racial Armageddon. *The trends must be reversed*” (Italics mine) (Gayle 46).

In the remolding of Black art in order to make it fit for the revolutionary struggle what role does music play?

The first music by Black people arose out of indirect complaint and protest against slavery in the form of farm songs. It is believed that these songs are the expression of the cultures that Black people were severed from when they were brought into slavery.

As a matter of fact, in Africa during farming season, songs are meant to encourage, revitalize laborers and this happens in freedom and merriment. However, the farming songs of the Black in America were songs of sorrow; they were produced under force harsh conditions of slavery and dehumanization. As such they were expressing their feelings and emotions against the system that kept them in the lowest ladder unimaginable of life. These songs because of the condition, which shaped them, i.e., slavery, were implicit protest but they became real protest after the civil war, which opened up to the emancipation of slaves in 1864. The songs yielded by the experience of slavery, war and emancipation are known to be the blues. The emotional response to these songs is also called blues.

What is more impressive with the blues is that it does represent the first form of Black creative expression in the United States. Important still, it has been brought to life by Black women. It is because blues represents the purest form of Black creativity that such great artists as Langston Hughes revered it and considered that blues singers, these common people, were the first to resist America's attempt to homogenize and wash Black people into becoming White, and thereby losing their true identity. When the Negro middle-class was doing everything possible to distance Blacks from their identity, these singers were seen as the source to turn to. Hughes who is among the few Black artists in the Harlem Renaissance to deal with the blues says that these people “furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps, these common people will give the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself” (Hughes 1268).

Women, who birthed it, brought the blues into prominence in the 1920’s and the 30’s. Its content though not revolutionary was couched in protest; protest against men who played around with women, protest against church prescriptions, which prescribed certain moral conduct for women in such a way that blues singers were viewed as the incarnation of moral depravity, and protest against the existing social order. In terms of protest against racism, discrimination and lynching in blues one of the bearers of flambeau of the blues made an unimaginable indictment of racism at a time when one could not expect it. Billie Halliday shows her personal protest against

the killing of Black people in a song that can be considered as one of the precursor of radicalism in popular culture in the United States. In “Strange Fruit” Halliday addresses head-on the social injustice her people face on a daily basis in a country to whose building they are not foreigners. The song runs as follows:

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit
> Blood on the leaves, blood at the root
> Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
> Pastoral scene of the gallant South
> The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
> Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
> Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
> Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
> For the rain to gather, for the wind to such
> For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
> Here is a Strange and bitter crop.[8]

This song speaks to the savagery that Black people were subjected to in America, and it responds to the criteria of the revolutionary art by Blacks in the 1960's. What is more important is that these forms of expression are what makes up the bulk of American culture. Harold Cruse puts it in a very provocative way when he says that America has no real culture because when one took away “the Afro-American tradition of folk-song, plantation minstrel, spirituals, blues, ragtime, jazz styles, dance forms, and the first Negro theatrical pioneers, in musical comedy of the 1890's down to and Sissle and Blake of the 1920's […] there would be no jazz industry involving publishing, entertainment, recording; there would have been no Greshwuns, Rodgers and Hammersteins, Cole porters, or Carmichaels or popular song tradition[…] there would have been no American musical comedy form […]” (Cruse 114).

In other words, Black creativity is what makes the basis of American “popular culture” which is opposed to classical culture. And yet, that which is called classical culture is indebted to Black creativity because jazz is the fruit of blues, which is African-American. It is because of this appropriation of Black creations that the Black artists consider it to be an imperative to bring home Black music in order for it to be at the service of the community in revolution. Black music has been the vanguard image of Black feeling and the perpetual repository of Black consciousness; it has a symbiotic relation to Black poetry, fiction, drama, painting, sculpture and dance forms. In this respect, music is seen as the key to the survival of Black people and as such it should not be allowed to become popular outside of the Black community.

Like any other form of art in the creativity of the Black, music is meant to sound as revolutionary as possible, to serve the cause of the liberation of the oppressed Black. It has the power of protesting against the social, political and economic conditions of the Black because it served that purpose at its very inception though that kind of protest is deemed mild and ineffective to some extent. The new form of African-American music, which Milford Graves and Don Pullen call “the new Afro-American cultural revolutionary music” possesses the power and energy to motivate and stimulate Black thought to search for its own true nature, to put its mind to work. “This reawakening of Black thought” they say “is music - a music free of western tradition, a

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[8] Billie Holliday's famous song is quoted by Angela Davis in *Blues Legacy and Black Feminism*, p.181

music so powerful that only a glimpse of its potential has been realized ”(Graves 4).

In the final analysis, it is clear that creativity knows no bound; it is not a White man’s thing, and most importantly, it transcends the limits that the White critics of Black arts set against its evolvement. That is to say, so long as it does not comply with the orthodox canons of Western aesthetics Black art is dismissed. But according to the review made of Black creativity both on the African continent and in the Diaspora, it is to be noted that that there is such a thing as Black creativity, one that does not abide by the rules of the “art for art’s sake”. It is a living, daring and resistant creativity. The literary and artistic productions of the marginalized, the oppressed and exploited people is to be used as a tool for social awareness and advancement. It must lay the groundwork and provide for the guidelines of the battle to wage. That’s why it is justified to say that the art and other forms of imaginative abilities of the Black people left a legacy of redemption, of liberation perspective, which needs to be thoroughly explored in the new situation of global imperialism undertaken by the coalition of United States and the West. And yet, art and literature cannot by themselves bring about the radical changes in the life of the people who are using it as a way to decenter power and knowledge from its assumed location; that is to say, from the West or Euro-American hegemony. The success of this undertaking rests on another dimension of the struggle; it is a viable political leadership for which the ideas and programs sketched by art and literature will be the breeding ground. A responsible and committed creativity yes, but the latter will be much more justified if it is legitimated by real political action.

Such is what Angela Davis is trying to say when she aptly puts that: “[…]in order for protest to acquire an explicitly political character, there must be an organized political structure capable of functioning as a channel for transforming individual complaint into effective collective protest. At the same time, social protest can never be made the exclusive or limiting function of art. Art may encourage a critical attitude and urge its audience to challenge social conditions, but it cannot establish the terrain of protest by itself”(Davis 13). Black creativity should be the think tank of the revolution and its legitimacy will be comforted only if a political structure is present and is channeling proposed ideas into action. Black creativity is political and because of the conditions in which Black people are all over the world, it cannot lend itself to pleasing critics who want art to be simply aesthetical.

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