

**HAKI MADHUBUTI (DON L. LEE), A POET OF
THE BLACK PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION**

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Haki R. Madhubuti straightaway inscribes his poetry in a radically militant perspective. He does not make use of any circumlocution to state his goals: to provide African-Americans with a new perception of their predicament in white America and endow them with a new vision of life; in short he wants to urge them to look with a critical eye at their own destiny. He proclaimed this thematic and artistic stance right from the publication of his first collection of poems that he aptly entitled *Think Black*, a title rather evocative of the new spirit he means to infuse in the Blacks. In this collection of poems he invites with insistence Black people to grasp the reality of their lives from a "black perspective."ⁱⁱ

What does it entail "to think black"? For the poet it is to assume one's blackness totally, without any mental reservations or psychological restrictions. On this point he is quite clear and even peremptory: "Black. Poet. Black poet am I. This should leave little doubt in the mind of anyone as to which is first." (TB: 6) If blackness is the paramount reality of black life, what does such a stand imply? For the poet it is not limited to having black or tan skin color even though that fundamental fact cannot and should not be denied. It goes beyond that mere biological contingency. Blackness for Madhubuti is "culture, a total way of life which includes the development and perpetuation of a common language, history, and future, as well as the development of the sciences, art, technology, education, communications, etc."ⁱⁱⁱ

This black radicalism informs the poet's aesthetic stance and his objectives as a writer. He delineates these objectives as follows:

I am a Black man, a man of Afrikan descent who writes. Writing picked me. I am not a born or trained writer. I did not plan or choose writing as a vocation. I use writing as a weapon, offensively and defensively, to help raise the consciousness of myself and my people. At earlier times in my life I may have written for somewhat personal reasons, but I now write for these five: 1. For the total, uncompromising liberation of Black people. 2. For the creation of a just world ~~order~~ where each and every person is able to reach his or her highest potential and in doing so not violate the cultural or human rights of his or her neighbors as we all strive to live and develop

in an atmosphere of productive peace. 3. Writing is the most lasting and the major (yet limiting) form of communication that I have access to that reaches a good number of Black people. 4. Writing is a cleansing, dialectical, meditative and communicative process that helps keep me honest and committed to struggle, keeps me open minded and active among those I dearly care for, many of whom I do not have daily contact with. 5. I love my people and know the greatness we have in us and know that that greatness, at this time in our lives, must be continuously pushed and forced out of us if we are to survive and develop as a people. Writing is one of the enforcers that I use." (Enemies: ii-iii)

It can be inferred from these aims that for him poetry is not the ultimate principle, an absolute pursuit or an end in itself. It is simply a means to a more important task that prevails over everything else, namely the rehabilitation and redemption of the Black race. A race which for centuries has been oppressed, denigrated and ostracized; a race whose members because of the vicissitudes of their history as once enslaved or colonized people are still the victims of a host of negative prejudices, discriminatory and segregationist practices^{3/4}so many factors that somehow warp their personalities and prevent them from blossoming and coinciding spiritually with themselves. By insistently highlighting his blackness, by qualifying his poetry and art black, Madhubuti deliberately adopts the posture of a radical defender of the Black cause; better still he makes his art a "weapon" in the fight for the emergence of a new generation of Black people endowed with a clear consciousness of the stakes involved by the presence of Black people in white America. This ideological position has many aesthetic implications which we suggest to analyze in this study. For this purpose we are going to deal with some of the main themes that run through his poetry and then we shall consider its form always bearing in mind his authorial ideology.

The Primacy of the Ethnic Imperative

A cardinal idea runs through Madhubuti's poetry, a premise from which he constructs his work: the United States of America is a fundamentally racist country still tangled up in pro-slavery reflexes and unequal practices. To prove his statement, he reminds us that the very year in which he was born "110,000 persons of Japanese descent were placed in protective custody by the white people of the United States. Two out of three of these were American citizens by birth; the other third were aliens forbidden by law to be citizens. No charges had been filed against these people nor had any hearing been held. The removal of these people was on racial and ancestral grounds only." (TB: 6) However, even though Germany and Italy were at war against the U.S.A., no American of German or

Italian origin was harassed, no enemy agent from these countries was arrested. This difference in the way white Euro-Americans treat their so-called colored citizens in violation of the very principles and rules laid out by the Constitution makes him write that he was born "into slavery in Feb. of 1942" (TB: 6) at the very time when the U.S.A. was claiming far and wide her determination to crush tyranny so as to ensure the triumph of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. This gap between the principles and the actual practices is to be ascribed, according to the poet, to the racism prevailing in the U.S.A. Since race is the most basic fact of American life and since the white race is the one that subjugates the others, it ensues that the oppressed segments of the American people must urgently reverse the predominant state of things, by knocking down the white power structure and throwing away the hierarchy of values imposed on the whole nation by the White-Anglo-Saxon Protestants (W.A.S.P.s). It behooves the victims of racist oppression^{3/4} particularly Black people to replace those corrupted values and practices with new ones, more in tune with their own racial aspirations and more in keeping with the stated ideals of the American creed. In that respect, Madhubuti calls upon Blacks to destroy the producers and disseminators of those white values. (TB: 6) The white values once destroyed, new ones have to be elaborated and disseminated. To annihilate the old ways and outlooks^{3/4} that is the Euro-American ideology and create new perspectives, visions and ways, these are the basic tasks that the poet assigns himself. However before delving into the depth and scope of his poetic work, let us first consider the socio-historical context in which it has originated.

As mentioned above Don L. Lee was born in 1942. Later, under the influence of the Black Muslims doctrine he rebaptized himself Haki Madhubuti. The poet was born at a time when the U.S.A. was undergoing deep changes. The African-Americans whose participation in the 2nd World War has been decisive, now resent to be treated as second-class citizens. They couldn't understand that their country sends them as soldiers over foreign seas and in foreign lands in order to "promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free"^{iv} and that, at the same time, those very rights are denied them at home. They have therefore resolved to fight for full citizenship rights and to put an end to discriminative and segregationist practices.

The most outstanding event of the post-World War II period for Blacks was undoubtedly the Montgomery bus boycott. This non-violent mass action which began as protest against the backward racist practices of the Southern city transportation system ended with the desegregation of the city buses on 21st December 1956, after the Supreme Court had ruled that segregation on buses and other public means

of transportation was illegal. Two years earlier the same court in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (Topeka) case, had invalidated the "separate but equal" doctrine laid out by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling (163 U.S. 537, 1896). The 1954 decision held that the "separate but equal" doctrine was unfair to African-Americans and other minorities and that therefore "separate education is unequal." These events mark the beginning of a new surge of activism among Blacks who organized themselves in order to undermine the foundations of the U.S. discriminatory, segregationist and racist system. This militant activism also stirred Northern campuses into a vigorous pursuit of social change; it "banished the ugliest features of McCarthyism from the American campus and resurrected political debate"^v as it galvanized white students into action.

This period of Black activism also saw the emergence of a new black leadership with such prominent personalities like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. The powerful rhetoric and forceful ideas of these spokespersons endowed many African-Americans with a new racial consciousness and inspired them into action. The objectives and methods of action of those leaders might differ, yet their ultimate goals were the same. For instance Martin Luther King's avowed goal was the end of segregation and discrimination, and finally the integration of African-Americans into the mainstream culture on an equal basis with the other racial segments of the country, a goal that should be attained by non-violent direct action. For his part Malcolm X, by then a minister of the Nation of Islam commonly referred to as Black Muslims was radically opposed to any plan aiming at erasing Black cultural specificity, by dissolving it into whiteness. He consequently proclaims loudly his exclusive adherence to and support for the values of the Black nation and the Black race as a whole.

Malcolm X's direct speech, his call to militant action lead many Black youngsters to side with him in order to work for the rehabilitation of their race. Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) was one of them. His poetry delineates the different stages of his political evolution and of his struggle for the advent of the Black nation. However his stance as a militant writer did not spring into existence as a sudden revelation; it is rather the result of a long and gradual process which began with the shock he experienced at the bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama; a racist bomb attack that caused the death of four black little girls. This heinous crime by retrograde white supremacists provoked a wave of indignation

in the USA and strengthened the poet's determination to take a more active part in the struggle for the liberation of his blood brothers and sisters. He therefore resigned from his executive job in a mail-order business and went back to college to complete his training so as to put his pen at the service of Black people's cause. Under the pressure of events he decided to re-orientate his life by becoming a writer and singularly a poet. The circumstances that presided over that change of mind, the urgency of the actions to be undertaken, and finally his uncompromising dedication to the cause of the Blacks' liberation give a new aesthetic and ideological imprint to his work. This special orientation first expresses itself in the themes he deals with and which can be classified as belonging to the categories of opposition and affirmation. The poet's goal is to stand in opposition to everything that, in white America, works towards making the African-American a second-class citizen. In that task of denunciation, he reaches the conclusion that the main enemy of Black people in the U.S.A. is white racism. The second mark he prints on his poetry is his positive vindication of blackness. The goal for him is to sing the black values and make them desirable, much in the tradition of the Negritude poets. However his position shows neither historical narcissism nor any mystifying self-complacency toward past and present shortcomings of Black life. Nor is it primary anti racist racism. When he evokes the past and emphasizes the specific values of Black people, it is in order to reinsert them in their historical continuity and therefore render their present more intelligible. Such moves are necessary for the construction of a sound future. It is why he insists on the primacy of the ethnic imperative and fights whatever is likely to endanger it.

The USA: A Basically Racist and Anti-Black Nation
One idea runs through and dominates his first category of poems 3/4the poems of denunciation. According to the poet, the American nation is founded on the myth of white supremacy and racism and is therefore incapable to assimilate non-whites into its social fabric. The demarcation line in American society is neither religion nor ideology but exclusively skin color and continent of origin. Hence the hostility and the hatred white people harbor against non-whites, and especially Black people. In the poem "Mainstream of Society" he clearly states the stakes involved in the relations between the races in the U.S.A. His conclusion is that assimilation into mainstream American culture is in direct proportion to whether you descend from Anglo-Saxon stock or from Irish, Latin, Slavic or African origin:

Irish American, white man too
He assimilated into society true
Italian American, he passed on through

Assimilation was not easy but he made
it come true
German American, white and pure
Assimilation taken for granted
no problem to endure
Jewish American, am I not white too?
Let me assimilate
I can buy my way through.
African American, black man true;
Instant hate, (a mile away)
ANNIHILATE!
Hell No!

He can't assimilate. (TB: 21)

What Madhubuti wants to drive home to his readers in that poem is that, if historically, such white segments of Euro-Americans as the Irish, the Italians or the Jews have had assimilation problems and have suffered from discrimination on religious grounds, they were yet able to integrate into White Anglo-Saxon Protestant mainstream culture because of their white skins. This is not the case of colored minorities whose skin colors, it is alleged, disqualify them for any preferential treatments. Another reason evoked by Euro-Americans to explain their hostility towards black people's integration is to pretend that they lack "culture" and have "uncivilized ways." Their misbehavior supposedly justifies their exclusion. To put it plainly the Black American does not deserve to enjoy his fully-fledged citizen rights because he cannot live according to the standards established by Whites. The poem "They Are Not Ready" illustrates this well:

They tell me that I am not
fit for society-
not because I am black but
because I am fight dirty, and at night.
They say that I take advantage of
nature, by using her to help carry out
my misdeeds of looting shops,
burning realtors' offices
and keeping firemen out. (TB: 23)

For Madhubuti the arguments advanced by Whites to justify why they exclude Blacks from American life is, in the final analysis, a big imposture. Taking everything into consideration, Blacks are bound to be second class citizens as they are invited to respect norms established by Whites for the Whites. The poet who is not taken in by the hypocrisy of their remarks about the so-called unpreparedness of the Blacks simply resorts to irony. As he expresses it, society equals white people and that is all:

You are society-white anglo-saxon,
standard setting,
example setting,
do it like me pure Christian Americans. (TB: 23)

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In reality what white people want is, according to Madhubuti, to impose their norms on the other segments of American society either forcibly or by enticing the latter to adopt their ways and conform to their ideals. Non-white minorities are expected to willingly accommodate themselves with the prevailing state of things. They should not complain, hurl abuses at their white "lords", set fire to properties or "destroy what is evil to them" (TB: 23). To behave otherwise is to display one's "savagery" and prove one's incapacity to live in "civilized" company. The white standard-setters and disseminators of norms are not concerned, in the least, with knowing whether their standards are just and suitable to everybody else, their goal is that every other racial segments of the nation follow them. But when non-Whites reject those values as non-valid and pattern their behaviors according to their own conceptions of life, ludicrous situations may occur. This is illustrated by the poem "Stereo" in which the poet casts ridicule on the irrational attitudes of white racists who would desert swimming pools, restaurants, entire blocks, and even churches whenever a Black person is around:

i can clear a beach or swimming pool without touching water.
i can make a lunch counter become deserted in less than an hour.
i can make property value drop by being seen in a realtor's tower.
i ALONE can make the word of God have little or no meaning to many in Sunday morning's prayer hour.
i have Power,
BLACK POWER. (TB: 3)

By running away from the Blacks as if they were plague-stricken, the Whites are in fact empowering

them and giving strength what Madhubuti calls their Black Power. It is that power that makes white people adopt irrational behaviors. However, to fully profit from that power, Blacks should take in their hands the vital elements of their life. The most basic element that they must necessarily control is, according to the poet, the education imparted to their children.

The Necessity of Having an Authentic Education.

The assertive black person who refuses "to know his place" does not obviously fit in with the idea that the white people hold of Blacks. The type of Blacks that white people crave is, to the poet's mind, "negroes" who "can dance, play football/baseball". Those they need are "nannies and cooks, and negroes who can entertain ONLY". The others are not wanted (& are considered extremely dangerous)" (TB: 6). To put it plainly, the black people American Whites want are the alienated ones, those whose stunted consciousness prevent them from grasping the actual stakes of the Black presence in the U.S.A. The warped personalities of American Blacks, Madhubuti contends, taking up one of the fond reflections of Carter Godwin Woodson, is the result of their "mis-education." "Negroes trained" by white teachers and presidents of Negro schools and colleges prevented by "law and custom from participating freely in the life of the Negro" necessarily "become downright cowards, [who] in life will continue as slaves in spite of their nominal emancipation." vi

Falling in line with the arguments developed by Carter Woodson years ago, Madhubuti strongly stresses that education being the means through which the white power structure most effectively keeps Black people in mental bondage, the latter must halt that process and even reverse it. In the poem entitled "Education" he points to the gap that exists between the education given to Blacks and their social predicament in America. The inadequacy and inefficiency of that education as regards Black people's aspirations and concerns is underscored. The charge the poet levels against it is that it lays emphasis on fake values and attitudes, overlooks facts of black life and culture while belittling that which is fundamental to them, namely, to come to terms with themselves. (TB: 11)

It is obvious that such a deleterious kind of education has to be jettisoned. It has no relevance for the new aspirations of Blacks as it is inspired from the outside. Back in the 1920s, Carter G Woodson sadly remarked in connection to the African-American situation that, apart from the Negro Church and "a few all but starved-out institutions, the education of the Negroes is controlled by the other element; and save the dramatization of practical education by Booker T. Washington, Negroes have not influenced the system at all." (57) Writing five decades later, Madhubuti reaches the same conclusion. As a result he urges his black fellows to do something about the situation. His major concern is not so much to hurl opprobrium at white people as to raise the political

awareness of the Blacks. What is important to him is to redeem his blood brothers by reeducating them along new lines and principles, to bring them to positively reassess and reevaluate their own culture and social condition. However, he insists, only Black experts working in an appropriate educational system can adequately perform this major task. What is at stake is to emancipate the minds of the Blacks in the U.S.A. and elsewhere from the shackles of Western values and standards. He states in that respect:

The rejection of that which was/is ours has been the basis for the acceptance of that which is someone else's. The most effective weapon used against us has been the educational system. We now understand that if white nationalism is our teacher, white nationalism will be our philosophy regardless of all its contradictory and anti-black implications. The educational process is set up largely to preserve that which is, not that which necessarily needs to be created, i.e. Black Nationalism or black consciousness. (WNW: 12)

However ridding the minds of the Black people of the infected white values is not enough. Black educational experts and intellectuals in all fields of activity are called upon to shape the thinking abilities of their people. To build a new educational system capable of doing away with the "cultural nihilism" in which Blacks existed in the late 1960s is, for Madhubuti, a paramount task of which the corollary is to bring about the emergence of a new type of African-American "innovators and producers of positive change." (WNW: 19) A main pitfall to be avoided in that process is the metaphysical thinking that consists in qualifying all Whites evil and all Blacks good. Since the writer focuses his energy on black salvation, he cannot bear the irresponsibility and foolishness of those African-Americans who keep on aping white people. The latter he scornfully labels "negro/nigger/ igga/knew/grow," terms that he contrasts with Blacks, that is race conscious and politically aware Americans of African descent. Consequently the targets of his criticism are not only white supremacists but also and more so Negroes with "black skins and white masks." Such people he calls "attaché-case carriers", and "Uncle Toms." He also takes to task "negro intellectuals" (with "Ph. D[s]. in psy-chol-o-gy and holes in [their] brains") and the "european-african" who struts about because he "took a double at oxford." (DCS: 49) However inauthentic those alienated Negroes, they are not so much to be treated as enemies as victims to be re-educated for a positive change. Here the poet is speaking out experience. He himself was nearly lost for the race. Had he kept his executive position in the mail-order business with which he was working, he would certainly have become a status-seeking mem-

ber of the "negro bourgeoisie". He would have been spending his days trying to imitate white middle class people, in his endeavor to be integrated into Caucasian society. And he certainly would have been cut off from his race and would have suffered the psychological traumas that are the common lot of the misfits. ("Back Home Again", TB: 7)

On the whole Madhubuti's stance on black people's education is that the type of education that has been given to them so far at best favors material security and individual salvation to the detriment of more collective and perennial values. This can only lead to a dead end. For in proportion as Blacks ingest white values, they lose grasp of and distance themselves from the cultural values of their people. Unfortunately in spite of all their efforts they never succeed in becoming white. Worse still, they willingly enslave themselves to the white dominant power structure and are more efficaciously controlled because it is their minds that are now held in bondage. This is why Haki Madhubuti insists on the responsibility of Blacks to conceive of, implement and control all the stages of the educational process and build instead a system that best suits their needs. (Enemies: 6)

The Celebration of the Black Woman

The importance of education in Madhubuti's concerns takes goes a step further when it comes to raising black females. For the poet, black women should be the first target group to be given a sound education. As a rule his work is replete with poems devoted to Black women. Whether in such collections of poems as *Think Black*, *Black Pride*, *Don't Cry*, *Scream*, *Book of Life*, *We Walk the Way of the New World* and in books of essays and social or literary criticisms like *Enemies: the Clash of Races* or *Dynamite Voices: New Black Poets of the 1960s* vii, the writer devotes a large part of his reflections to the black womanhood. In the *Way of the New World*, a special section, "Blackwoman Poems", is consecrated to the topic.

The poet's first poems are celebrations of the black woman much in the tradition of the Negritude writers. As a point of fact he quotes Leopold S. Senghor's poem "Naked Woman, Black Woman" as epigraph to the section. However he does not limit his goal to praising the beauty and grace of the Black woman. He goes beyond the singing of her physical good looks to wholly appraise her in all her dimensions and make her an agent for bringing about a positive change in the life of her people, and a fighter in the struggle for the liberation of the black race. For Madhubuti the importance of the Black woman is capital: she is at the base of the construction of the Black nation he is calling for. Without her active and conscious participation, the Black nation is doomed to failure. He makes this clear in section 37 of *Book of Life*:

a nation cannot grow without its women
 the intelligence of a nation
 is reflected in its women
 who bear children for the nation
 and are charged with the early education of the
 nation.
 a nation cannot have intelligent women
 unless the women are treated intelligently
 and given much love. (BoL: 53)

The Black woman's central position in the building of the nation explains why the writer indicts the foolish people who hamper her blooming and her development by putting limits on her. Their stupidity, he contends, derives from their incapacity to see the dialectical connection that exists between the development of the black woman and that of the Black nation. They seem to be blind to the truth that "the full potential of a nation/cannot be realized unless the/ full potential of its women is realized." (BoL: 53) If the women of a nation are left in idleness or confined to petty positions and menial jobs, the nation runs a great risk since "the substance and mental attitude of a nation can be seen in the way its women act and move throughout the nation being productive. If the women have nothing to do, it reflects what the nation is not doing. If the women have substance and are given responsible positions, the nation has substance and is responsible." (BoL: 54)

The place of choice that the Black woman occupies in the edification of the black nation also imposes on her specific duties that she must necessarily perform if she does not want to betray her historical mission and disappoint her people's expectations. Her first task in that regard is to endow herself with a stable psychological base apt to wholly immerse her in the culture of the Black Nation. In other words, she must build for herself an authentic cultural and racial identity and avoid irrational behaviors likely to cut her off from the nurturing roots of her culture. Madhubuti strongly resents those black women who don white women's liveries, who paint themselves up, or who bleach their skins. In *Book of Life* he sends them the following warning:

If a woman covers herself with paints/ of blues, red,
 grays, and yellows/ she unknowingly kills her skin. / she
 unknowingly smothers life from the first layer covering.
 / to paint a flower white that is naturally red is to / close
 its breathing pores and interrupt its natural skin growth/
 the flower will soon die./to paint black skin green, or-
 ange and other colors/ is to display black skin as some-
 thing that/ should be hidden from the actual world/ and
 slowly suffocated from life. (BoL: 54)

The appropriation of white beauty as norm is, according

to the poet, not only harmful to the individual but also ultimately destructive for the race. Of course, Madhubuti is aware of the reasons why some women foolishly adopt such self-destructive attitudes. Indeed the dominant Euro-American culture with its smothering tentacles has succeeded in imposing its standards of consumer beauty on all aspects of American life and black women with weak self-images easily become unwilling victims of those norms. But what escapes their sagacity, Madhubuti remarks, is that that manufactured beauty is "the exact opposite of our own self image. / Due to this we see beauty in others / and fail to see it in ourselves. / This leads to destructive self-concepts that/will not only affect our relationship / with ourselves but will affect our / relationship with the world for the worst." (BoL: 55)

The poet's will to create psychologically balanced and mentally sound Blacks also leads him to stigmatize what he deems self-destructive and inauthentic attitudes in Blacks. The targets of his razor-edged criticism are those black women who invest their fortune in the acquisition of expensive wigs and suits, and who fast move from one club to the other looking for wearied white clients who come in with "i don't want to hear bout nothing black tonight" (WNW: 33) The poet also expresses his disappointment with the sisters who pretend that they are militants of the black cause but who, in their daily lives, are consorting with white men. Their inconsistencies provoke the poet's indictment. In "Poem for Black Women" for instance, he speaks of a strong and beautiful sister "whose words cut thru me like rat teeth" forcing him to take a clear stand for the cause. Her words not only stimulated him, but also "moved" him to the point that he even "dreamed about our union, two black people grooving". His disappointment was inversely proportional to the consideration he had for her when he saw her in a white man's arm, "smiling those words: 'blackness ain't not shit.'" (TB: 10)

What he is pointing out for indictment is the inconsistent attitude of the sister and the damage it is likely to inflict to the black cause; moreover it is an expression of self-deception and alienation. Another example of some black women's foolish behavior he criticizes is the one that consists in giving more preference to pets than to human beings. To transfer positive and enhancing feelings to animals while underrating one's fellow human beings is a clear indication that one has lost one's human attributes. To overfeed dogs and cats while leaving black people to starve to death is, at best, a regression to nimalistic condition. This is precisely the case of the Supremes' singer Diana Ross who went "madddd" and "cried her eyelashes off on the occasion of the death of her two dogs Tiffany and Li'l Bit". Her refusal to be consoled and her avowed attachment to her dogs make the poet to call her

"a dog lover". Of course Madhubuti has no antipathy for pets; however he cannot understand that human beings be left to wallow in misery in a "land where poodles eat/ live cleaner than their masters." His indignation reaches its peak when the dog lovers "use the colored people to walk that which they love, while they wander in & out of our lives running the world" (WNW: 37). As he reminds "little supreme" Diana, "only the well fed forget" (38) the elementary facts of black misery. His refusal to side with her is due to the fact he cannot understand how someone of her kind who "once knew/ knows the hungry days" could behave the way she was doing. The shallowness of her "childlike vision" is simply worrying; it is the expression of the alienation she has undergone and which has "moved her deeper into lassieland to become the new wonderwoman of the dirty-world." (37) What Madhubuti cannot accept, he says, is the change undergone by the star who has now cut herself off from her roots and revels in ego worshipping. (WNW: 38) The gifted voice who could have become a positive role model for emerging generations has instead joined "the hippy generation to become unhipped, / to become the symbol of a new aberration,/ the wearer of other people's hair./ to become one of the real animals of this earth." (WNW: 38).

Madhubuti's goal, as has been pointed out earlier, is not to merely hurl criticisms at the few inauthentic black women; in fact he does so with reluctance in order to better celebrate the beauty, and courage, in short, the sterling virtues of the majority of them. He wants to pay tribute to them for the physical and moral pains they have endured for centuries. What makes them exceptional creatures, worthy of our admiration, is that the sufferings and ill treatments meted out to them have not broken their determination to raise their offspring with dignity and protect them from the dangers of the insanity of the American system. In that respect, they have saved the race and deserve to be given a warm credit for that. That only feat explains why the poet castigates the machism and the irresponsibility of some male African-Americans towards the black woman. The poem "Understanding But Not Forgetting" deals, among other topics, with teenage pregnancies and multiple pregnancies. He laments the fate and the ordeals of a "sister with five children before the age of 22, she has never known a day of happiness." In face of this dereliction the poet wonders if he is not the one who should actually feel unhappy, for if as he repeats again and again, the black woman is the future of her race, an adequate solution should be found to the problem of unplanned pregnancies. The people responsible of such a state of things are, here again, Black men who fail to do their duties as educators and protectors of their fraternal companions.

Consequently he refuses to play the indignant and hypocritical moralist when he speaks of the not very commendable sexual behavior of some black women compelled by the circumstances to trade in sex in order to eke out a living. He contents himself to record the facts but he does not condemn the female forced by poverty and hunger to sell her body. (TB: 13)

The poet's almost natural asceticism, his antipathy and even his active hostility towards any sexual deviation lead him to reprove any sex trading. Yet he knows, out of experience, that when the individual is under duress he will resort to all worthless means in order to survive; his instinct of self-preservation will make him throw away any moral values established by society. Under such circumstances it is not the victim that is to be condemned but rather the society that has provoked his/her defilement.

All in all, when Madhubuti focuses his interest on the Black woman, he explores her in all her dimensions. He knows that she endures a lot of sufferings, that both white and black males exploit her physically as well as sexually. The way Black males sometimes treat her is not only contemptible, but also condemnable. Not to show respect towards one's mother, sister or spouse is simply stupid. However the writer does not overlook her defects. In fact he sometimes lays so strong an emphasis on her shortcomings that one senses that he is not totally devoid of male chauvinistic prejudices. This shows through the poem entitled "Quiet Ignorant Happiness" in which after celebrating the black woman's beauty and warmth, he urges her "Not to be blinded by deceptions and obliquities" and avoid the corrupted ideas disseminated by the mainstream culture. This is so because "the untouched will dwell free and happy and OPTIMISTIC." As a result he concludes by underlining the ideas he is alluding to with the following words: "I dread the day when/ Her womb is broken/ For then/ She will ask for .../ EQUALITY." (TB: 18)

The most plausible explanation one can give of the poet's resentment to hear of equality between the sexes is that his words are aimed at the hazy theories of equality advanced by white women's liberation movements that make abstract man their main enemy. These theories lead up to a curious kind of militantism, which is diametrically opposed to the idea that Madhubuti has of a true revolutionary militantism.

Poetry and the Black Revolution

Madhubuti's militant stance, we have remarked, is deeply immersed in the reality of race. It is the one cause he adamantly defends. His commitment to the black race is total, radical and suffers no compromise. His stand on the question derives from a fact: Black people are desperately lagging behind the other races; they stand mo-

**HAKI MADHUBUTI (DON L. LEE), A POET OF
THE BLACK PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION**

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Haki R. Madhubuti straightaway inscribes his poetry in a radically militant perspective. He does not make use of any circumlocution to state his goals: to provide African-Americans with a new perception of their predicament in white America and endow them with a new vision of life; in short he wants to urge them to look with a critical eye at their own destiny. He proclaimed this thematic and artistic stance right from the publication of his first collection of poems that he aptly entitled *Think Black*, a title rather evocative of the new spirit he means to infuse in the Blacks. In this collection of poems he invites with insistence Black people to grasp the reality of their lives from a "black perspective."ⁱⁱ

What does it entail "to think black"? For the poet it is to assume one's blackness totally, without any mental reservations or psychological restrictions. On this point he is quite clear and even peremptory: "Black. Poet. Black poet am I. This should leave little doubt in the mind of anyone as to which is first." (TB: 6) If blackness is the paramount reality of black life, what does such a stand imply? For the poet it is not limited to having black or tan skin color even though that fundamental fact cannot and should not be denied. It goes beyond that mere biological contingency. Blackness for Madhubuti is "culture, a total way of life which includes the development and perpetuation of a common language, history, and future, as well as the development of the sciences, art, technology, education, communications, etc."ⁱⁱⁱ

This black radicalism informs the poet's aesthetic stance and his objectives as a writer. He delineates these objectives as follows:

I am a Black man, a man of Afrikan descent who writes. Writing picked me. I am not a born or trained writer. I did not plan or choose writing as a vocation. I use writing as a weapon, offensively and defensively, to help raise the consciousness of myself and my people. At earlier times in my life I may have written for somewhat personal reasons, but I now write for these five: 1. For the total, uncompromising liberation of Black people. 2. For the creation of a just world ~~order~~ where each and every person is able to reach his or her highest potential and in doing so not violate the cultural or human rights of his or her neighbors as we all strive to live and develop

in an atmosphere of productive peace. 3. Writing is the most lasting and the major (yet limiting) form of communication that I have access to that reaches a good number of Black people. 4. Writing is a cleansing, dialectical, meditative and communicative process that helps keep me honest and committed to struggle, keeps me open minded and active among those I dearly care for, many of whom I do not have daily contact with. 5. I love my people and know the greatness we have in us and know that that greatness, at this time in our lives, must be continuously pushed and forced out of us if we are to survive and develop as a people. Writing is one of the enforcers that I use." (Enemies: ii-iii)

It can be inferred from these aims that for him poetry is not the ultimate principle, an absolute pursuit or an end in itself. It is simply a means to a more important task that prevails over everything else, namely the rehabilitation and redemption of the Black race. A race which for centuries has been oppressed, denigrated and ostracized; a race whose members because of the vicissitudes of their history as once enslaved or colonized people are still the victims of a host of negative prejudices, discriminatory and segregationist practices^{3/4}so many factors that somehow warp their personalities and prevent them from blossoming and coinciding spiritually with themselves. By insistently highlighting his blackness, by qualifying his poetry and art black, Madhubuti deliberately adopts the posture of a radical defender of the Black cause; better still he makes his art a "weapon" in the fight for the emergence of a new generation of Black people endowed with a clear consciousness of the stakes involved by the presence of Black people in white America. This ideological position has many aesthetic implications which we suggest to analyze in this study. For this purpose we are going to deal with some of the main themes that run through his poetry and then we shall consider its form always bearing in mind his authorial ideology.

The Primacy of the Ethnic Imperative

A cardinal idea runs through Madhubuti's poetry, a premise from which he constructs his work: the United States of America is a fundamentally racist country still tangled up in pro-slavery reflexes and unequal practices. To prove his statement, he reminds us that the very year in which he was born "110,000 persons of Japanese descent were placed in protective custody by the white people of the United States. Two out of three of these were American citizens by birth; the other third were aliens forbidden by law to be citizens. No charges had been filed against these people nor had any hearing been held. The removal of these people was on racial and ancestral grounds only." (TB: 6) However, even though Germany and Italy were at war against the U.S.A., no American of German or

Italian origin was harassed, no enemy agent from these countries was arrested. This difference in the way white Euro-Americans treat their so-called colored citizens in violation of the very principles and rules laid out by the Constitution makes him write that he was born "into slavery in Feb. of 1942" (TB: 6) at the very time when the U.S.A. was claiming far and wide her determination to crush tyranny so as to ensure the triumph of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. This gap between the principles and the actual practices is to be ascribed, according to the poet, to the racism prevailing in the U.S.A. Since race is the most basic fact of American life and since the white race is the one that subjugates the others, it ensues that the oppressed segments of the American people must urgently reverse the predominant state of things, by knocking down the white power structure and throwing away the hierarchy of values imposed on the whole nation by the White-Anglo-Saxon Protestants (W.A.S.P.s). It behooves the victims of racist oppression^{3/4} particularly Black people to replace those corrupted values and practices with new ones, more in tune with their own racial aspirations and more in keeping with the stated ideals of the American creed. In that respect, Madhubuti calls upon Blacks to destroy the producers and disseminators of those white values. (TB: 6) The white values once destroyed, new ones have to be elaborated and disseminated. To annihilate the old ways and outlooks^{3/4} that is the Euro-American ideology and create new perspectives, visions and ways, these are the basic tasks that the poet assigns himself. However before delving into the depth and scope of his poetic work, let us first consider the socio-historical context in which it has originated.

As mentioned above Don L. Lee was born in 1942. Later, under the influence of the Black Muslims doctrine he re-baptized himself Haki Madhubuti. The poet was born at a time when the U.S.A. was undergoing deep changes. The African-Americans whose participation in the 2nd World War has been decisive, now resent to be treated as second-class citizens. They couldn't understand that their country sends them as soldiers over foreign seas and in foreign lands in order to "promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free"^{iv} and that, at the same time, those very rights are denied them at home. They have therefore resolved to fight for full citizenship rights and to put an end to discriminative and segregationist practices.

The most outstanding event of the post-World War II period for Blacks was undoubtedly the Montgomery bus boycott. This non-violent mass action which began as protest against the backward racist practices of the Southern city transportation system ended with the desegregation of the city buses on 21st December 1956, after the Supreme Court had ruled that segregation on buses and other public means

of transportation was illegal. Two years earlier the same court in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (Topeka) case, had invalidated the "separate but equal" doctrine laid out by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling (163 U.S. 537, 1896). The 1954 decision held that the "separate but equal" doctrine was unfair to African-Americans and other minorities and that therefore "separate education is unequal." These events mark the beginning of a new surge of activism among Blacks who organized themselves in order to undermine the foundations of the U.S. discriminatory, segregationist and racist system. This militant activism also stirred Northern campuses into a vigorous pursuit of social change; it "banished the ugliest features of McCarthyism from the American campus and resurrected political debate"^v as it galvanized white students into action.

This period of Black activism also saw the emergence of a new black leadership with such prominent personalities like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. The powerful rhetoric and forceful ideas of these spokespersons endowed many African-Americans with a new racial consciousness and inspired them into action. The objectives and methods of action of those leaders might differ, yet their ultimate goals were the same. For instance Martin Luther King's avowed goal was the end of segregation and discrimination, and finally the integration of African-Americans into the mainstream culture on an equal basis with the other racial segments of the country, a goal that should be attained by non-violent direct action. For his part Malcolm X, by then a minister of the Nation of Islam commonly referred to as Black Muslims was radically opposed to any plan aiming at erasing Black cultural specificity, by dissolving it into whiteness. He consequently proclaims loudly his exclusive adherence to and support for the values of the Black nation and the Black race as a whole.

Malcolm X's direct speech, his call to militant action lead many Black youngsters to side with him in order to work for the rehabilitation of their race. Don L Lee (Haki Madhubuti) was one of them. His poetry delineates the different stages of his political evolution and of his struggle for the advent of the Black nation. However his stance as a militant writer did not spring into existence as a sudden revelation; it is rather the result of a long and gradual process which began with the shock he experienced at the bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama; a racist bomb attack that caused the death of four black little girls. This heinous crime by retrograde white supremacists provoked a wave of indignation

in the USA and strengthened the poet's determination to take a more active part in the struggle for the liberation of his blood brothers and sisters. He therefore resigned from his executive job in a mail-order business and went back to college to complete his training so as to put his pen at the service of Black people's cause. Under the pressure of events he decided to re-orientate his life by becoming a writer and singularly a poet. The circumstances that presided over that change of mind, the urgency of the actions to be undertaken, and finally his uncompromising dedication to the cause of the Blacks' liberation give a new aesthetic and ideological imprint to his work. This special orientation first expresses itself in the themes he deals with and which can be classified as belonging to the categories of opposition and affirmation. The poet's goal is to stand in opposition to everything that, in white America, works towards making the African-American a second-class citizen. In that task of denunciation, he reaches the conclusion that the main enemy of Black people in the U.S.A. is white racism. The second mark he prints on his poetry is his positive vindication of blackness. The goal for him is to sing the black values and make them desirable, much in the tradition of the Negritude poets. However his position shows neither historical narcissism nor any mystifying self-complacency toward past and present shortcomings of Black life. Nor is it primary anti racist racism. When he evokes the past and emphasizes the specific values of Black people, it is in order to reinsert them in their historical continuity and therefore render their present more intelligible. Such moves are necessary for the construction of a sound future. It is why he insists on the primacy of the ethnic imperative and fights whatever is likely to endanger it.

The USA: A Basically Racist and Anti-Black Nation
One idea runs through and dominates his first category of poems 3/4the poems of denunciation. According to the poet, the American nation is founded on the myth of white supremacy and racism and is therefore incapable to assimilate non-whites into its social fabric. The demarcation line in American society is neither religion nor ideology but exclusively skin color and continent of origin. Hence the hostility and the hatred white people harbor against non-whites, and especially Black people. In the poem "Mainstream of Society" he clearly states the stakes involved in the relations between the races in the U.S.A. His conclusion is that assimilation into mainstream American culture is in direct proportion to whether you descend from Anglo-Saxon stock or from Irish, Latin, Slavic or African origin:

Irish American, white man too
He assimilated into society true
Italian American, he passed on through

Assimilation was not easy but he made
it come true

German American, white and pure
Assimilation taken for granted

no problem to endure

Jewish American, am I not white too?

Let me assimilate

I can buy my way through.

African American, black man true;

Instant hate, (a mile away)

ANNIHILATE!

Hell No!

He can't assimilate. (TB: 21)

What Madhubuti wants to drive home to his readers in that poem is that, if historically, such white segments of Euro-Americans as the Irish, the Italians or the Jews have had assimilation problems and have suffered from discrimination on religious grounds, they were yet able to integrate into White Anglo-Saxon Protestant mainstream culture because of their white skins. This is not the case of colored minorities whose skin colors, it is alleged, disqualify them for any preferential treatments. Another reason evoked by Euro-Americans to explain their hostility towards black people's integration is to pretend that they lack "culture" and have "uncivilized ways." Their misbehavior supposedly justifies their exclusion. To put it plainly the Black American does not deserve to enjoy his fully-fledged citizen rights because he cannot live according to the standards established by Whites. The poem "They Are Not Ready" illustrates this well:

They tell me that I am not
fit for society-
not because I am black but
because I am fight dirty, and at night.
They say that I take advantage of
nature, by using her to help carry out
my misdeeds of looting shops,
burning realtors' offices
and keeping firemen out. (TB: 23)

For Madhubuti the arguments advanced by Whites to justify why they exclude Blacks from American life is, in the final analysis, a big imposture. Taking everything into consideration, Blacks are bound to be second class citizens as they are invited to respect norms established by Whites for the Whites. The poet who is not taken in by the hypocrisy of their remarks about the so-called unpreparedness of the Blacks simply resorts to irony. As he expresses it, society equals white people and that is all:

You are society-white anglo-saxon,
standard setting,
example setting,
do it like me pure Christian Americans. (TB: 23)

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In reality what white people want is, according to Madhubuti, to impose their norms on the other segments of American society either forcibly or by enticing the latter to adopt their ways and conform to their ideals. Non-white minorities are expected to willingly accommodate themselves with the prevailing state of things. They should not complain, hurl abuses at their white "lords", set fire to properties or "destroy what is evil to them" (TB: 23). To behave otherwise is to display one's "savagery" and prove one's incapacity to live in "civilized" company. The white standard-setters and disseminators of norms are not concerned, in the least, with knowing whether their standards are just and suitable to everybody else, their goal is that every other racial segments of the nation follow them. But when non-Whites reject those values as non-valid and pattern their behaviors according to their own conceptions of life, ludicrous situations may occur. This is illustrated by the poem "Stereo" in which the poet casts ridicule on the irrational attitudes of white racists who would desert swimming pools, restaurants, entire blocks, and even churches whenever a Black person is around:

i can clear a beach or swimming pool without
 touching water.
 i can make a lunch counter become deserted
 in less than an hour.
 i can make property value drop by being seen
 in a realtor's tower.
 i ALONE can make the word of God have
 little
 or no meaning to many
 in Sunday morning's prayer hour.
 i have Power,
 BLACK POWER. (TB: 3)

By running away from the Blacks as if they were plague-stricken, the Whites are in fact empowering

them and giving strength what Madhubuti calls their Black Power. It is that power that makes white people adopt irrational behaviors. However, to fully profit from that power, Blacks should take in their hands the vital elements of their life. The most basic element that they must necessarily control is, according to the poet, the education imparted to their children.

The Necessity of Having an Authentic Education.

The assertive black person who refuses "to know his place" does not obviously fit in with the idea that the white people hold of Blacks. The type of Blacks that white people crave is, to the poet's mind, "negroes" who "can dance, play football/baseball". Those they need are "nannies and cooks, and negroes who can entertain ONLY. The others are not wanted (& are considered extremely dangerous)" (TB: 6). To put it plainly, the black people American Whites want are the alienated ones, those whose stunted consciousness prevent them from grasping the actual stakes of the Black presence in the U.S.A. The warped personalities of American Blacks, Madhubuti contends, taking up one of the fond reflections of Carter Godwin Woodson, is the result of their "mis-education." "Negroes trained" by white teachers and presidents of Negro schools and colleges prevented by "law and custom from participating freely in the life of the Negro" necessarily "become downright cowards, [who] in life will continue as slaves in spite of their nominal emancipation."^{vi}

Falling in line with the arguments developed by Carter Woodson years ago, Madhubuti strongly stresses that education being the means through which the white power structure most effectively keeps Black people in mental bondage, the latter must halt that process and even reverse it. In the poem entitled "Education" he points to the gap that exists between the education given to Blacks and their social predicament in America. The inadequacy and inefficiency of that education as regards Black people's aspirations and concerns is underscored. The charge the poet levels against it is that it lays emphasis on fake values and attitudes, overlooks facts of black life and culture while belittling that which is fundamental to them, namely, to come to terms with themselves. (TB: 11)

It is obvious that such a deleterious kind of education has to be jettisoned. It has no relevance for the new aspirations of Blacks as it is inspired from the outside. Back in the 1920s, Carter G Woodson sadly remarked in connection to the African-American situation that, apart from the Negro Church and "a few all but starved-out institutions, the education of the Negroes is controlled by the other element; and save the dramatization of practical education by Booker T. Washington, Negroes have not influenced the system at all." (57) Writing five decades later, Madhubuti reaches the same conclusion. As a result he urges his black fellows to do something about the situation. His major concern is not so much to hurl opprobrium at white people as to raise the political

awareness of the Blacks. What is important to him is to redeem his blood brothers by reeducating them along new lines and principles, to bring them to positively reassess and reevaluate their own culture and social condition. However, he insists, only Black experts working in an appropriate educational system can adequately perform this major task. What is at stake is to emancipate the minds of the Blacks in the U.S.A. and elsewhere from the shackles of Western values and standards. He states in that respect:

The rejection of that which was/is ours has been the basis for the acceptance of that which is someone else's. The most effective weapon used against us has been the educational system. We now understand that if white nationalism is our teacher, white nationalism will be our philosophy regardless of all its contradictory and anti-black implications. The educational process is set up largely to preserve that which is, not that which necessarily needs to be created, i.e. Black Nationalism or black consciousness. (WNW: 12)

However ridding the minds of the Black people of the infected white values is not enough. Black educational experts and intellectuals in all fields of activity are called upon to shape the thinking abilities of their people. To build a new educational system capable of doing away with the "cultural nihilism" in which Blacks existed in the late 1960s is, for Madhubuti, a paramount task of which the corollary is to bring about the emergence of a new type of African-American "innovators and producers of positive change." (WNW: 19) A main pitfall to be avoided in that process is the metaphysical thinking that consists in qualifying all Whites evil and all Blacks good. Since the writer focuses his energy on black salvation, he cannot bear the irresponsibility and foolishness of those African-Americans who keep on aping white people. The latter he scornfully labels "negro/nigger/ igga/knew/grow," terms that he contrasts with Blacks, that is race conscious and politically aware Americans of African descent. Consequently the targets of his criticism are not only white supremacists but also and more so Negroes with "black skins and white masks." Such people he calls "attaché-case carriers", and "Uncle Toms." He also takes to task "negro intellectuals" (with "Ph. D[s], in psy-cho-l-o-gy and holes in [their] brains") and the "european-african" who struts about because he "took a double at oxford." (DCS: 49) However inauthentic those alienated Negroes, they are not so much to be treated as enemies as victims to be re-educated for a positive change. Here the poet is speaking out experience. He himself was nearly lost for the race. Had he kept his executive position in the mail-order business with which he was working, he would certainly have become a status-seeking mem-

ber of the "negro bourgeoisie". He would have been spending his days trying to imitate white middle class people, in his endeavor to be integrated into Caucasian society. And he certainly would have been cut off from his race and would have suffered the psychological traumas that are the common lot of the misfits. ("Back Home Again", TB: 7)

On the whole Madhubuti's stance on black people's education is that the type of education that has been given to them so far at best favors material security and individual salvation to the detriment of more collective and perennial values. This can only lead to a dead end. For in proportion as Blacks ingest white values, they lose grasp of and distance themselves from the cultural values of their people. Unfortunately in spite of all their efforts they never succeed in becoming white. Worse still, they willingly enslave themselves to the white dominant power structure and are more efficaciously controlled because it is their minds that are now held in bondage. This is why Haki Madhubuti insists on the responsibility of Blacks to conceive of, implement and control all the stages of the educational process and build instead a system that best suits their needs. (Enemies: 6)

The Celebration of the Black Woman

The importance of education in Madhubuti's concerns takes goes a step further when it comes to raising black females. For the poet, black women should be the first target group to be given a sound education. As a rule his work is replete with poems devoted to Black women. Whether in such collections of poems as *Think Black*, *Black Pride*, *Don't Cry, Scream*, *Book of Life*, *We Walk the Way of the New World* and in books of essays and social or literary criticisms like *Enemies: the Clash of Races* or *Dynamite Voices: New Black Poets of the 1960s*vii, the writer devotes a large part of his reflections to the black womanhood. In the *Way of the New World*, a special section, "Blackwoman Poems", is consecrated to the topic.

The poet's first poems are celebrations of the black woman much in the tradition of the Negritude writers. As a point of fact he quotes Leopold S. Senghor's poem "Naked Woman, Black Woman" as epigraph to the section. However he does not limit his goal to praising the beauty and grace of the Black woman. He goes beyond the singing of her physical good looks to wholly appraise her in all her dimensions and make her an agent for bringing about a positive change in the life of her people, and a fighter in the struggle for the liberation of the black race. For Madhubuti the importance of the Black woman is capital: she is at the base of the construction of the Black nation he is calling for. Without her active and conscious participation, the Black nation is doomed to failure. He makes this clear in section 37 of *Book of Life*:

a nation cannot grow without its women
 the intelligence of a nation
 is reflected in its women
 who bear children for the nation
 and are charged with the early education of the
 nation.
 a nation cannot have intelligent women
 unless the women are treated intelligently
 and given much love. (BoL: 53)

The Black woman's central position in the building of the nation explains why the writer indicts the foolish people who hamper her blooming and her development by putting limits on her. Their stupidity, he contends, derives from their incapacity to see the dialectical connection that exists between the development of the black woman and that of the Black nation. They seem to be blind to the truth that "the full potential of a nation cannot be realized unless the full potential of its women is realized." (BoL: 53) If the women of a nation are left in idleness or confined to petty positions and menial jobs, the nation runs a great risk since "the substance and mental attitude of a nation can be seen in the way its women act and move throughout the nation being productive. If the women have nothing to do, it reflects what the nation is not doing. If the women have substance and are given responsible positions, the nation has substance and is responsible." (BoL: 54)

The place of choice that the Black woman occupies in the edification of the black nation also imposes on her specific duties that she must necessarily perform if she does not want to betray her historical mission and disappoint her people's expectations. Her first task in that regard is to endow herself with a stable psychological base apt to wholly immerse her in the culture of the Black Nation. In other words, she must build for herself an authentic cultural and racial identity and avoid irrational behaviors likely to cut her off from the nurturing roots of her culture. Madhubuti strongly resents those black women who don white women's liveries, who paint themselves up, or who bleach their skins. In *Book of Life* he sends them the following warning:

If a woman covers herself with paints/ of blues, red, grays, and yellows/ she unknowingly kills her skin. / she unknowingly smother's life from the first layer covering. / to paint a flower white that is naturally red is to / close its breathing pores and interrupt its natural skin growth/ the flower will soon die./to paint black skin green, orange and other colors/ is to display black skin as something that should be hidden from the actual world/ and slowly suffocated from life. (BoL: 54)

The appropriation of white beauty as norm is, according

to the poet, not only harmful to the individual but also ultimately destructive for the race. Of course, Madhubuti is aware of the reasons why some women foolishly adopt such self-destructive attitudes. Indeed the dominant Euro-American culture with its smothering tentacles has succeeded in imposing its standards of consumer beauty on all aspects of American life and black women with weak self-images easily become unwilling victims of those norms. But what escapes their sagacity, Madhubuti remarks, is that that manufactured beauty is "the exact opposite of our own self image. / Due to this we see beauty in others / and fail to see it in ourselves. / This leads to destructive self-concepts that/will not only affect our relationship / with ourselves but will affect our / relationship with the world for the worst." (BoL: 55)

The poet's will to create psychologically balanced and mentally sound Blacks also leads him to stigmatize what he deems self-destructive and inauthentic attitudes in Blacks. The targets of his razor-edged criticism are those black women who invest their fortune in the acquisition of expensive wigs and suits, and who fast move from one club to the other looking for wearied white clients who come in with "i don't want to hear bout nothing black tonight" (WNW: 33) The poet also expresses his disappointment with the sisters who pretend that they are militants of the black cause but who, in their daily lives, are consorting with white men. Their inconsistencies provoke the poet's indictment. In "Poem for Black Women" for instance, he speaks of a strong and beautiful sister "whose words cut thru me like rat teeth" forcing him to take a clear stand for the cause. Her words not only stimulated him, but also "moved" him to the point that he even "dreamed about our union, two black people grooving". His disappointment was inversely proportional to the consideration he had for her when he saw her in a white man's arm, "smiling those words: 'blackness ain't not shit.'" (IB: 10)

What he is pointing out for indictment is the inconsistent attitude of the sister and the damage it is likely to inflict to the black cause; moreover it is an expression of self-deception and alienation. Another example of some black women's foolish behavior he criticizes is the one that consists in giving more preference to pets than to human beings. To transfer positive and enhancing feelings to animals while underrating one's fellow human beings is a clear indication that one has lost one's human attributes. To overfeed dogs and cats while leaving black people to starve to death is, at best, a regression to nimalistic condition. This is precisely the case of the Supremes' singer Diana Ross who went "madddd" and "cried her eyelashes off on the occasion of the death of her two dogs Tiffany and Li'l Bit". Her refusal to be consoled and her avowed attachment to her dogs make the poet to call her

"a dog lover". Of course Madhubuti has no antipathy for pets; however he cannot understand that human beings be left to wallow in misery in a "land where poodles eat/ live cleaner than their masters." His indignation reaches its peak when the dog lovers "use the colored people to walk that which they love, while they wander in & out of our lives running the world" (WNW: 37). As he reminds "little supreme" Diana, "only the well fed forget" (38) the elementary facts of black misery. His refusal to side with her is due to the fact he cannot understand how someone of her kind who "once knew/ knows the hungry days" could behave the way she was doing. The shallowness of her "childlike vision" is simply worrying; it is the expression of the alienation she has undergone and which has "moved her deeper into lassieland to become the new wonderwoman of the dirty-world." (37) What Madhubuti cannot accept, he says, is the change undergone by the star who has now cut herself off from her roots and revels in ego worshipping. (WNW: 38) The gifted voice who could have become a positive role model for emerging generations has instead joined "the hippy generation to become unhipped, / to become the symbol of a new aberration,/ the wearer of other people's hair./ to become one of the real animals of this earth." (WNW: 38).

Madhubuti's goal, as has been pointed out earlier, is not to merely hurl criticisms at the few inauthentic black women; in fact he does so with reluctance in order to better celebrate the beauty, and courage, in short, the sterling virtues of the majority of them. He wants to pay tribute to them for the physical and moral pains they have endured for centuries. What makes them exceptional creatures, worthy of our admiration, is that the sufferings and ill treatments meted out to them have not broken their determination to raise their offspring with dignity and protect them from the dangers of the insanity of the American system. In that respect, they have saved the race and deserve to be given a warm credit for that. That only feat explains why the poet castigates the machism and the irresponsibility of some male African-Americans towards the black woman. The poem "Understanding But Not Forgetting" deals, among other topics, with teenage pregnancies and multiple pregnancies. He laments the fate and the ordeals of a "sister with five children before the age of 22, she has never known a day of happiness." In face of this dereliction the poet wonders if he is not the one who should actually feel unhappy, for if as he repeats again and again, the black woman is the future of her race, an adequate solution should be found to the problem of unplanned pregnancies. The people responsible of such a state of things are, here again, Black men who fail to do their duties as educators and protectors of their female companions.

Consequently he refuses to play the indignant and hypocritical moralist when he speaks of the not very commendable sexual behavior of some black women compelled by the circumstances to trade in sex in order to eke out a living. He contents himself to record the facts but he does not condemn the female forced by poverty and hunger to sell her body. (TB: 13)

The poet's almost natural asceticism, his antipathy and even his active hostility towards any sexual deviation lead him to reprove any sex trading. Yet he knows, out of experience, that when the individual is under duress he will resort to all worthless means in order to survive; his instinct of self-preservation will make him throw away any moral values established by society. Under such circumstances it is not the victim that is to be condemned but rather the society that has provoked his/her defilement.

All in all, when Madhubuti focuses his interest on the Black woman, he explores her in all her dimensions. He knows that she endures a lot of sufferings, that both white and black males exploit her physically as well as sexually. The way Black males sometimes treat her is not only contemptible, but also condemnable. Not to show respect towards one's mother, sister or spouse is simply stupid. However the writer does not overlook her defects. In fact he sometimes lays so strong an emphasis on her shortcomings that one senses that he is not totally devoid of male chauvinistic prejudices. This shows through the poem entitled "Quiet Ignorant Happiness" in which after celebrating the black woman's beauty and warmth, he urges her "Not to be blinded by deceptions and obliquities" and avoid the corrupted ideas disseminated by the mainstream culture. This is so because "the untouched will dwell free and happy and OPTIMISTIC." As a result he concludes by underlining the ideas he is alluding to with the following words: "I dread the day when/ Her womb is broken/ For then/ She will ask for .../ EQUALITY." (TB: 18)

The most plausible explanation one can give of the poet's resentment to hear of equality between the sexes is that his words are aimed at the hazy theories of equality advanced by white women's liberation movements that make abstract man their main enemy. These theories lead up to a curious kind of militantism, which is diametrically opposed to the idea that Madhubuti has of a true revolutionary militantism.

Poetry and the Black Revolution

Madhubuti's militant stance, we have remarked, is deeply immersed in the reality of race. It is the one cause he adamantly defends. His commitment to the black race is total, radical and suffers no compromise. His stand on the question derives from a fact: Black people are desperately lagging behind the other races; they stand mo-

tionless in a fast-moving world. The reasons for this opposition to progress are to be found in the history of the black people worldwide. They have been enslaved, they have been oppressed and they are currently victims of various forms of racist practices. The challenge they have to take up is how, as people and as race, they can command the respect of the other races and occupy their legitimate place in the concert of nations. To adequately answer that challenge one should have recourse to the history of the black race not only on the American continent but also in Africa. The teachings of that history are that, as a race, the Blacks wield no real power. Because of their prolonged contact with the white race, they have forsaken any racial feelings and scorn concerted action and racial solidarity. In other words Blacks and especially African-Americans betray themselves and jeopardize their own interests because of their inept wishes to be "accepted" by whites. The result is that, at the world level, Blacks are characterized by their inner divisions and internecine wars whereas Whites, in spite of their differences, remain basically united for the defense of their best interests concerned and work every day towards strengthening their unity. From these considerations, the poet states his principles and viewpoints as regards the black race. He insists especially on racial feeling and solidarity: "The only job that is mandatory is working for the race. The only security we have is each other, working for the race together. As long as a people do not know these basic facts, they will not function as a people and will remain enslaved as a people, not as individuals." (BoL: 10-11)

Those Blacks who refuse or hesitate to act on the basis of these stated principles are, he holds, traitors and Trojan horses introduced in the midst of the race to speed up its demise. Those defenders and disseminators of anti-black values would pretend when justifying their standpoint that race or racial identity is of no real importance, that the priority should be given to community of interests or ideas or to religious or political affiliation. More often than not such people will declare: "I'm not Black, I'm Marxist"/ "I'm not Black, I'm Pisces"/ "I'm not Black, I'm a Muslim"/ "I'm not Black, I'm Human"/ "I'm not Black I'm a Christian"(Enemies: 7)

In front of such confused arguments, Madhubuti calls on all conscious Blacks to take a stand and avoid imitating those among them who wish to be everything except being proud of their true dark-skinned selves. The reasons they put forth as justifications of their death wishes consist in belittling the fact of race itself despite the evidence to the contrary. As he put it,

The confusion is out there. Be anything but Black. The concept of Black or Blackness has become a word to some and reactionary to others, depending on their politi-

cal, spiritual or ideological persuasion. We are now told from the "Black" left, right and in-between that the struggle is mainly a mind struggle and has little to do with color. Again, depending on whom you quote or follow, the minds of Black people need, according to them, to be divinely cleansed or ideologically developed or both. If this change takes place we will suddenly understand that skin color is minor to our struggle and at best an "accident of birth." We are told, as if it's new information, that there are Black devils and agents that will kill us quicker than the white devils or agents. (Enemies: 7)

Such twisted appraisals of the black condition amount, according to the poet, to a call to suicide. Reflections like these are bound to end up in ineluctable defeat for the race. In reality, those who subordinate their racial identities to their political or religious or philosophical convictions eventually prove to be the willing accomplices to their own enslavement. This is why Madhubuti is strongly opposed to black membership in white organizations: he considers them as being fundamentally anti-black because their hidden agenda is always to promote white supremacy to the detriment of Black people's advancement. (Enemies: 9).

From such principled positions, Madhubuti draws the profile of his ideal black militant and assigns him the tasks that he holds basic for the redemption of Blacks. His main task in that respect is, he constantly reminds us "to attack the anti rather than be the pro" (BoL: 10). It is why he directs his blows at fuzzy-headed pseudo-revolutionary Blacks who, under the pretext of revolutionary action, would commit such criminal actions as setting fire to apartment houses sheltering black families pretending, so doing, to clean the black ghettos of slums:

u feel that way sometimes
wondering:
as a blackwoman & her 6 children
are burned out of their apartment with no place
to go & a nappy-headed nigger comes running
thru
our neighborhood with a match in his hand cryin
revolution. (WNW: 33)

This false conception of the black revolution is not limited to woolly haired arsonists with shallow ideas. He also indicts those self-styled Black revolutionaries for whom the revolution consists in wearing African dresses like the "dashiki" or in speaking a few words of African languages like Swahili or Yoruba. Shell necklaces and blowout hair fashions and "cool" behaviors alone do not make one a revolutionary, the poet maintains. A genuine revolution is not a passing fad nor is it skin-deep.

cultural nationalism or simple identification with Africa or the Third World. It is why in «The Third World Bond» he heartily laughs at the «blk/revolutionist» who would talk profusely of «the power of china/quoting mao every 3rd word» and «making bonds with the 3rd world thru chinese women.» (DCS: 56) But at the same time they seem to neglect the actual problems prevailing in their neighborhoods. Such criticisms do not entail that Madhubuti is advocating the isolation of Blacks nor their withdrawal into themselves. Quite the contrary. Their struggle, he insists, is part and parcel of those being waged by enslaved and oppressed and exploited people at world level in order to liberate themselves from the claws of rapacious blood suckers. There is a strong community of interests between all «the wretched of the world;» and they have to find the most adequate terms on which to base their collaboration. Unfortunately, the poet regrets, racial solidarity is not yet an entrenched reality among Blacks. He is saddened by the fact that Black people should be killing other Black people for futile reasons, to the profit of their worst enemies.

In that respect the poem "Nigerian Unity/or little niggers killing little niggers" is quite relevant. The poem, dedicated to Nigerian writers Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka, means to denounce the stupidity and the suicidal nature of the Biafran war. For Madhubuti that war was a war of plunder inspired by Western oil interests and waged through "puppet niggers" with the ultimate aim of breaking Nigerian unity. And while the "puppet niggers" are killing one another, the actual war-makers are growing strong out of the huge profits they make, not only from their sales of lethal weapons, but also from the exploitation of our natural resources. (DCS: 43).

The blindness that goads "Negroes" to sabotage their own interests and pushes "little niggers to kill other little niggers," the madness that arms "the weak against the weak," "the ugly against the ugly," changing the "realpeople" into "unpeople" derives from the cowardice and the cupidity of a handful of negro leaders and intellectuals. For the poet that type of whitewashed Blacks with all their double degrees from Oxford are not only alienated but also the objective enemies of the legitimate interests of their people and their race. (DCS: 49)

However not only arsonists and alienated intellectuals are the targets of the poet's criticisms. He also indicts, as in the poem "The Revolutionary Screw," the Black people who think that revolution consists in hollow or pompous verbiage or in invectives against anything and anybody white. He is particularly caustic towards self-proclaimed militant black writers who cast spite and gall on the "money-crazy Jews" and "power-crazy Irish" but who nevertheless publish their works with Random or

Doubleday, publishing houses owned and controlled by the very whites they pretend to inveigh. Apparently their diatribes against white people do not prevent them from letting themselves be financially exploited by those same people who send the returns of their sales to Israel or Ireland to contribute to the building of their respective nations of origin. For Madhubuti genuine militant activism is taking a concrete part in the building of the black nation. He shares Nick Aaron Ford's opinion according to which an authentic revolutionary movement should be dedicated to "the rejection of current American standards of morality, justice, education, social behavior and aesthetics" and their replacement by "black standards tailored to fit the exclusive feelings and needs of the black American subculture."^{viii} As defined by Palmer, a true revolution, "must give definition to the nation. Revolution must call for and act to bring about an end to white supremacy, colonialism, and oppression embodied in Western ideas which affect and infect the existence of black people. The process of nationhood must conceptualize and structure the projections and possibilities of black existence."^{ix}

It is to a like task that Madhubuti wants to devote himself; his conception of his role as a poet is that of gatherer of people around fecund and progressive ideas about the black race. Therefore his poetic work is more a rallying cry than a war cry. Its aim is "to make people ready for positive action but is in no way a substitute for revolutionary action." In any case, the poet knows quite well "that poetry is preventative medicine and in the event of an imminent threat to existence (physical or spiritual) poetry must be abandoned in favor of direct action."^x Clearly for him, poetry writing is not an end in itself. The revolutionary poet not only shapes and informs minds so as to prepare them for action, but he is also ready to take hold of his gun and spill his blood for the cause he is defending. He makes this clear in his "Two Poems" (Sketches from a Nappy-Headed Poet) especially in the second part:

i ain't seen no poem stop a .38
 i ain't seen no stanzas brake a honkie's head,
 i ain't seen no metaphors stop a tank,
 i aint seen no words kill
 & until my similes can protect me from a night
 stick
 i guess I'll keep my razor
 & buy me some more bullets

As is the case with most of the Black poets who emerged in the wake of the fight for civil rights in the 1960s, Madhubuti is aware that to be socially relevant a poet should go beyond that which is "personal to being an active part of the people:" he has to move to a point where

he feels a "sense of oneness with the community." That oneness is reflected in his use of the first-person plural and in his ability to create images true to the genius of the black tradition. His images, Paula Giddings writes in that connection, "find their being in oral expression—that raps, sings, pounds on old words to form new ones, makes verbs into nouns, nouns into verbs, screams, sings, fills words with color or makes them fall like gentle rain. His language is alive and is not to be doted on for its grace and gentility, like a museum piece."^{xi} Indeed Madhubuti's language is that of the black communities, it is the language they speak when they "leave white schools and / or teachers," the language they speak when they get home. The poet's choice of the Black English Vernacular is important because it legitimizes the black reality and validates his own voice as a race poet. The message he wants to drive home to us by writing in that medium is that "the black verbal expression traditional in the black communities is not an aberration of the "King's English."^{xii} It is a language that attests to the creativity and inventiveness of once enslaved people who have been deprived of their native tongues and denied access to those of their enslavers. As with the Christian church service or with Western standard music, the African in bondage took hold of whatever in their enslavers' cultural traits was in tune with their spiritual yearnings and made it a spontaneous and warm expression of their own culture. Madhubuti's poetry reflects those expressive forms mainly characterized by orality and musicality. His poems are meant to be read aloud and forcefully delivered much in the tradition of the black preacher. His line of poetry is, always according to Paula Giddings, "polyrhythmic, short, uneven and explosive" and conveys a sense of urgency in the recesses of its rhythm. It makes you listen because of the use of that rhythm which serves as a linking force of the diverse elements of the poetry. Rhythm signifies a sense of order, a pulsating foundation from which to internalize the poetry." (312) Another feature of Madhubuti's poetry lies in its absorption of African-American musical and vowel sounds in its texture. Like such jazz singers as Pharaoh Saunders or especially John Coltrane, his poems scream, "sing/ loud & high/ with feeling/ sing loud/ & high with/ feeling/ letting/ yr/ voice/ break" (DCS: 49); like machine-guns they crepitate. The final impression he wants to convey is to make poetic language coincide with music, become music. By so doing he makes us forget the horrors Blacks have suffered while making us "hearken to the clarion call for self-actualization, change and revolution. The style and rhythm and the vocabulary are all based upon traditions set up by past revolutionary writers, but updated to suit modern times. The use of four categories is and other consciences,

the abbreviated words, the slashed words, the fused words, the small letter "i" and the omission of capital letters and certain pronunciation marks are in themselves experimentally revolutionary and befit the poetic utterances of revolutionary writers."^{xiii}

Such a conservative Afro-American critic as Arthur P. Davis has qualified the poetry of Haki R. Madhubuti and the black poets of his persuasion as "the new poetry of black hate" because the latter claim their blackness and use the term black as "a philosophy, a morality and a religion based on the experiences and the sufferings of Africans and Afro-Americans" and because they detest whites whom they call "whitey" or "honkeys" and also because they reject "middle class Negroes who still try to be and act like the best white folks, who still feel that integration rather than separatism is the goal of our fight for freedom in America."^{xiv} But Haki Madhubuti and the revolutionary poets of his school start from the fact that the position of the middle class Negroes on the race question leads to a dead end and that their course of action has to be revisioned. Moreover their respective aims are poles apart. Indeed what Haki Madhubuti wants to fight for is the dignity of the black man and the progress of the black race. His goal is to emancipate the black man's mind from the shackles of Western ideology by exposing his aberrant behaviors and by endowing him with the intellectual and moral and spiritual resources apt to strengthen him psychologically to withstand the subtle and overt attempts of the white power structure and economic interests at keeping him in a subordinate position. If ever that strategy ends up in failure he is ready to go a step beyond to the supreme sacrifice.

Résumé. Le poète africain-américain Haki Madhubuti (alias Don L. Lee) inscrit son œuvre dans une perspective militante résolument afrocentrique. Ce choix résulte en droite ligne du racisme, de la discrimination et de la ségrégation que vivent les Noirs aux Etats-Unis. Eu égard aux conséquences négatives que cette situation exerce sur leur vie économique, politique, et sociale et à ses retombées sur leur existence individuelle et collective tant au plan mental qu'intellectuel, le poète s'assigne pour tâche de les doter d'une conscience claire des enjeux qui impliquent leur présence aux Etats-Unis en les ré-enculturant dans leurs traditions historiques africaines et américaines-américaines. La finalité de cette prise de conscience doit être l'émergence d'un nouveau type d'Africains-Américains politiquement conscients: déterminés à contrôler tous les aspects de leur existence et intellectuellement bien outillés pour opérer la révolution politique et sociale dont les Etats-Unis ont un besoin urgent. Mais la poésie n'est pas une fin en soi, elle est un moyen. En effet, la poésie