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Rhythm of Resistance: The Interrelationship of Music and Literature in The Works of Ijeoma Oluo

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between music and literature has historically played a crucial role in shaping cultural expression within marginalized communities. In African American cultural traditions, music and literary narratives frequently intersect to articulate experiences of racial oppression, resistance, and emotional survival. This paper investigates how Ijeoma Oluo works demonstrates a profound connection between literary discourse and musical traditions of protest and storytelling. Through a close reading analysis of So You Want to Talk About Race and Mediocre e a Revolution: How Everyday People Are Fighting Oppression and Changing the World and Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male Power. The study examines how Oluo's essays adopt rhythmic narrative techniques, emotional resonance, and collective cultural voices similar to those found in African American musical traditions such as blues, jazz, and hip-hop. Drawing upon frameworks from affect theory, cultural studies, and Black feminist thought, this paper argues that Oluo's writing transforms literature into a performative space where emotional expression, social critique, and communal resistance converge. By situating Oluo's work within the broader continuum of Black artistic traditions, the study demonstrates that literature and music operate as interconnected cultural forms that amplify marginalized voices, document racial trauma, and mobilize social change.

KEYWORDS: Affect theory; Black cultural expression; Black feminist writing; Literature and music; Racial trauma; Resistance

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between music and literature has long been defined as an important feature of African American cultural expression. From the spirituals sung during slavery to contemporary hip-hop narratives addressing racial inequality, music has functioned as both a medium of storytelling and a tool of resistance. Similarly, Literature has served as a platform through writers document social reality, critique oppressive structures, and preserve cultural memory. Within this tradition, the works of Ijeoma Oluo show how literary discourse can reflect and extend the emotional and political functions traditionally associated with music. Recently scholars have noted that Black Literary traditions are deeply intertwined with musical forms, both structurally and thematically (Floyd, 1996; Gilroy, 1993).

'Jazz is the music of freedom.'- Duke Ellington

This quote highlights how jazz is seen as cultural resistance and creative freedom among African American communities. In the beginning of the book "So you want to talk about race Oluo highlights jazz and hip-hop played vital roles when they discuss race and oppression Oluo's writings often address the complexity of contemporary issues of race, privilege, and systemic inequality in American society. While her works are primarily essayistic and analytical in form, they illustrate the characteristics that vibrate with musical traditions of African American cultural expression. These characteristics include rhythmic narrative patterns, emotional intensity, and the articulation of collective voices that mirror the communal nature of musical performance. In texts such as So You Want to Talk About Race, Oluo examines the complexities of racial discourse in modern society. Her narrative style blends personal reflection with social critique, creating a literary rhythm that echoes the cadence of spoken word poetry and protest music. Likewise, in Be a Revolution: How Everyday People Are Fighting Oppression and Changing the World and How You Can, Too, she highlights the role of art and storytelling in mobilizing communities to join for entertainment and social transformation. The study contends how Oluo's literary works show the historical relationship between music and literature within African American cultural traditions. By analysing her narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and emotional registers, the study argues that Oluo's essays function as a form of cultural performance that parallels the expressive and political functions of music.

In this way, music has historically played a central role in African American cultural expression. Spirituals, blues, jazz, and hip-hop have all served as tools for articulating resistance, survival, and community identity. These forms of musical traditions often influence Literary terms and forms by shaping writers' constructed voice, pacing, and emotional impact. Scholars have already noted that rhythmic qualities of speech and music frequently overlap in Black literary traditions, especially in her works she addresses

themes of racial injustice and cultural resilience. In Oluo's writing, rhythm appears through rhetorical repetition, conversational cadence, and the strategic use of personal narrative. Her essays often mirror the pacing of spoken-word performance, creating a dynamic flow that engages readers while emphasizing key arguments. This stylistic approach reflects how music and writing are connected in modern social commentary.

'Black literature is often structured by the rhythms of the oral tradition, where repetition, musicality, and voice play a central role in shaping meaning.'

— Henry Louis Gates Jr.

The above quote talks about rhetorical repetition and rhythmic speech patterns in African American writing. Scholars have noted that the rhythmic qualities of speech and music frequently overlap in Black literary traditions, especially in works that address themes of racial injustice and cultural resilience. In her writing, rhythm appears through rhetorical repetition, conversational cadence, and the strategic use of personal narrative. Her essays often reflect the pacing of spoken-word performance, creating a dynamic flow that engages readers while emphasizing key arguments. This stylistic approach shows how music and literature interact in modern social commentary.

The objective of this research paper is to examine how musical elements influence the literary style and thematic structure of Oluo's works. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do rhythmic and musical qualities appear in the narrative style of Ijeoma Oluo's writing?
2. How does music work as a cultural framework for resistance in her writing?
3. How does the intersection of music and literature enhance the political and emotional impact of her social commentary?

By addressing these questions, the paper enhances an interdisciplinary comprehension of how artistic traditions intersect within contemporary activism and cultural critique

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of literature elucidates how literature and music are closely connected in African American cultural traditions. Many Scholars argue that musical expression has historically served as both a cultural archive and a form of resistance against oppression. Music has given voice to marginalized group's identities, protests against injustice, and collective memory through genres like spirituals, blues, jazz, and hip-hop. In the works of many writers' musical traditions have also influenced literary forms, shaping narrative voice, rhythm, and rhetorical style. And also, they believe that these writings have also influenced writing by shaping voices, rhythm and rhetorical techniques.

Houston A. Baker Jr. (1987) was one of the earliest scholarly arguments that connection between African American music and literary expression can be found in the writings of other black others. Baker suggests that blues music functions as a foundational structure for Black literary expression, arguing that the rhythms, themes, and improvisational qualities of blues music inform narrative techniques used by African American writers. According to Baker (1987), the blues tradition allows writers to turn their experiences of oppression into creative works that express resilience and cultural identity. This perspective highlights the ways in which musical traditions provide not only thematic inspiration but also structural influence on literary works and also allows writers to transform experiences into artistic expression.

Angela Davis (1998) she also explains the cultural significance of blues music in shaping Black feminist thought. Davis contends that blues music serves as a historical repository of Black women's experiences, revealing themes of independence, resistance, and self-expression. Blues musicians used lyrics to tell lyrical storytelling, about realities that were often left out of documented historical accounts. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining contemporary writers such as Ijeoma Oluo, whose work emphasizes personal narratives as a means of addressing systemic inequality. Although Oluo writes in a different historical context, the tradition of using storytelling to articulate resistance remains central to her approach.

Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s (1988) theory of 'signifying(g)' also looks at the relationship between music and narrative form. Gates argues that African American literary traditions frequently incorporate rhetorical strategies derived from oral and musical performance. These strategies include repetition, improvisation, and tonal variation, all of which foster a unique literary style grounded in cultural communication practices. Gates emphasizes that such techniques reflect the influence of oral traditions, where storytelling, rhythm, and audience interaction play a crucial role. These elements can be observed in contemporary nonfiction writing that adopts conversational and performative styles to engage readers.

Scholars investigating the role of music in contemporary cultural discourse often focus on hip-hop as a continuation of earlier traditions of resistance. argues that hip-hop music is a way for people to express themselves and speak out against social norms while also giving voice to marginalized communities. Africans, asserts that hip-hop lyrics combine storytelling, rhythm, and political critique to create unique forms of narratives that reflect lived experiences of inequality. While Oluo's work is not explicitly connected to musical performance, the focus on narrative voice and social critique in her writing aligns with the overarching tradition outlined by Africans.

Paul Gilroy's (1993) concept of the 'Black Atlantic'. Also talks about how musical structures affect literary style. Gilroy says that cultural expressions within the African diaspora including music, literature, and political discourse are interconnected through

shared histories of resistance and cultural exchange. Music, especially, is very important in shaping the cultural identity of communities that have moved away from their home countries. Gilroy's framework suggests that the relationship between music and literature must be contextualized within a broader historical and cultural framework, where artistic forms interact to produce new modes of expression. This perspective provides a useful lens for analysing contemporary writers whose work reflects the legacy of these cultural traditions.

While much of the research on music and literature is focused on poetry and fiction, more and more researchers are realizing that increasingly recognized that nonfiction writing can also reflect musical influences. Narrative essays and cultural criticism often use rhythmic prose, repetition, and conversational tone, creating a reading experience that resembles spoken performance. According to scholars of rhetorical studies, this stylistic element can make nonfiction text more persuasive by engaging readers emotionally as well as intellectually. In this broader scholarly context, the works of Ijeoma Oluo have attracted significant attention in discussions of race, feminism, and social justice. Her books So You Want to Talk About Race and Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America analyse systemic inequality in the United States while encouraging open dialogue about privilege and discrimination. Scholars say that Oluo's writing style is characterized by clarity, accessibility, and conversational tone, which makes it possible to talk about complicated social issues in ways that appeal to a wide range of people.

Oluo's work has significantly shaped modern discourse on intersectionality and social activism. Intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), refers to the ways in which different forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and class inequality interact with one another. Oluo frequently addresses intersectionality in her writing by highlighting how systemic inequalities affect individuals differently depending on their social identities. Her focus on personal stories and lived experience reflects broader traditions in Black feminist scholarship that value storytelling as a method of knowledge production. While there is an increasing amount of research on Oluo's work on race and social justice, not much has been done on the stylistic and cultural factors that affect her writing. Most studies focus on the political themes in her work instead of the rhetorical techniques that make it powerful. Consequently, the connection between musical traditions and Oluo's literary style remains a relatively unexamined field of study. Investigating this relationship can yield new insights into how contemporary writers draw on cultural traditions of resistance. By examining the rhythmic qualities of Oluo's prose, scholars can better understand how narrative structure and rhetorical style contribute to the effectiveness of her social commentary. This approach also highlights the broader connections between artistic expression and political activism, demonstrating how literature and music continue to interact within modern cultural discourse. Furthermore, the concept of rhythm in writing extends beyond stylistic considerations to include the pacing and emotional progression of arguments. In musical compositions, rhythm organizes sound into patterns that guide listeners through different emotional experiences. Similarly, in literary texts, rhythm shapes how readers interpret and respond to ideas. Writers who incorporate rhythmic patterns into their prose can create a sense of movement and emphasis that enhances the persuasive power of their arguments. In the case of Oluo's work, rhythmic patterns often emerge through repetition, rhetorical questions, and shifts between personal narrative and analytical discussion. While there is an increasing amount of research on Oluo's work on race and social justice, not much has been done on the stylistic and cultural factors that affect her writing. Most studies focus on the political themes in her work instead of the rhetorical techniques that make it powerful. Consequently, the connection between musical traditions and Oluo's literary style remains a relatively unexamined field of study.

In, existing scholarship on African American cultural expression highlights the deep connections between music, literature, and resistance. Studies by Baker (1987), Davis (1998), Gates (1988), and Gilroy (1993), demonstrate how musical traditions have shaped literary forms and political discourse across generations. At the same time, modern research on writers like Oluo has mostly looked at themes instead of style. This gap signifies the necessity for additional research investigating how musical traditions influence the narrative techniques employed in contemporary nonfiction writing regarding race and social justice. Researchers can better understand how rhythm, storytelling, and cultural memory make resistance literature powerful by putting Oluo's work in this larger academic context. This kind of analysis not only adds depth to how we understand her writing, but it also shows how musical traditions still have an effect on modern writing.. Such analysis not only enriches interpretations of her writing but also underscores the continuing influence of musical traditions on contemporary literary expression.

Bradley (2017) explains that hip-hop poetry combines rhythm, oral storytelling, and lyrical expression to construct political and cultural meaning. He argues that "rap lyrics should be understood as a complex poetic tradition" (Bradley, 2017, p. 12). Similarly, Oluo's writing style in So You Want to Talk About Race reflects spoken-word traditions through direct language, repetition, and conversational rhythm. Her work transforms social criticism into an accessible oral-like narrative structure.

Brooks (2021) examines Black feminist sound traditions as intellectual spaces of resistance and empowerment. According to Brooks (2021), Black feminist music "creates alternative modes of political and emotional survival" (p. 45). This idea closely relates to Oluo's feminist discourse, where discussions of race and gender become forms of empowerment and social activism. Cobb (2007) connects hip-hop aesthetics with urban realities and racial politics. He notes that hip-hop emerged from communities attempting to survive social exclusion and economic marginalization. Oluo's work parallels this idea because her discussions of systemic racism expose how marginalized communities continue to experience structural inequality in contemporary America.

Fleetwood (2020) examines artistic resistance within systems of incarceration and racial control. She argues that Black artistic production documents experiences of confinement while also imagining freedom. Oluo similarly critiques institutional racism and social structures that limit Black experiences and opportunities. Forman and Neal (2019) describe hip-hop as a cultural movement that integrates music, politics, identity, and storytelling. They argue that hip-hop studies reveal "the intersection of artistic expression and social struggle" (Forman & Neal, 2004, p. 8). Oluo's writing also operates within this intersection because her literary discourse merges personal narrative with political activism. Gaines (2012) explores Black transnational identity and the historical search for cultural belonging. His discussion of diasporic consciousness can be connected to Oluo's examination of race and identity in America, particularly the emotional effects of exclusion and cultural displacement.

Avilez, G. (2020) investigates Black queer identity and emotional survival within oppressive social systems. He argues that marginalized identities often create alternative cultural spaces of belonging and resistance. Oluo similarly emphasizes intersectionality and highlights how race, gender, and sexuality intersect within structures of discrimination. Watkins (2005) discusses the political significance of hip-hop culture within contemporary America. He argues that hip-hop remains central to discussions of race, identity, and resistance. Oluo's work aligns with this perspective because it critiques systemic inequality while encouraging collective awareness and activism. Sakakeeny, M. (2024) argues that music continues to operate as a protest within African American communities. According to Sakakeeny, M. (2024), music preserves "historical memory, resistance, and communal identity" (p. 91). Oluo's literary activism reflects these same cultural functions by connecting personal experience with collective social struggle. Havas, Á., Johnson, B., & Horn, D. (Eds.). (2024), examines jazz traditions and African American musical heritage as foundational components of Black cultural identity. The improvisational and expressive nature of jazz parallels Oluo's flexible and emotionally engaging literary style, which combines personal narrative with broader political critique. Overall, these studies demonstrate that music and literature function together as interconnected forms of resistance, identity construction, and cultural survival. Ijeoma Oluo's works continue this African American artistic tradition by integrating rhythmic language, emotional intensity, feminist consciousness, and political activism into contemporary literary discourse.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine the presence of musical elements within selected works by Ijeoma Oluo. The primary texts analysed include So You Want to Talk About Race and Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America and Be Revolution. The analysis focuses on several key literary features associated with musical expression: Rhythm and cadence, Voice and tone, Cultural references, Structural patterns The research also incorporates insights from cultural studies and literary theory that explore the relationship between sound and storytelling. By combining textual analysis with cultural context, the study aims to identify how musical influences contribute to the rhetorical effectiveness of Oluo's writing.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Music as Cultural Memory in African American Tradition

In African diasporic communities, music has always been a way to remember things about their culture. During slavery in the United States, spirituals and work songs helped enslaved individuals to communicate emotions, express their feelings, send secret messages and maintain a sense of cultural identity despite oppressive conditions (Floyd, 1996). Throughout African American history, musical traditions such as spirituals, blues, jazz, and hip-hop have served not only as artistic forms but also as powerful mediums for political expression and cultural survival. Scholars such as Angela Davis (1998) have emphasized that Black musical traditions often tell stories of struggle, resilience, and identity. These traditions also influence literary forms by shaping narrative voice, rhythm, and thematic structure.

'Music is a weapon in the struggle for freedom'. - Angela Davis
(Davis, 1998)

This quote is often used in studies of protest music and cultural resistance. This quote often symbolizes the African American people who use music as a weapon for freedom that makes them feel strong. Ijeoma Oluo mostly writes nonfiction essays and cultural criticism instead of music or poetry, but her work comes from a culture that has been heavily influenced by these traditions of resistance. Oluo talks about systemic racism in So You Want to Talk About Race using simple language and personal stories. In So You Want to Talk About Race, Oluo addresses systemic racism through accessible language and personal storytelling. Her approach resembles the communicative style of spoken performance traditions, where the audience is directly engaged through conversational tone and repetition. Resistance literature often uses rhythm and repetition to emphasize key political messages. Oluo's essays frequently repeat phrases or rhetorical questions to guide readers through complex discussions about privilege, oppression, and accountability. This technique resembles the call-and-response structures common in Black musical traditions, where repetition reinforces collective understanding and emotional engagement (Rose, 1994). Music also functions as a cultural archive of shared experiences. Blues lyrics, for example, historically documented everyday struggles while simultaneously expressing resilience. Similarly, Oluo's writing often blends personal narrative with social analysis, creating a form of storytelling

that captures lived experiences of racial inequality. Her work therefore participates in a broader cultural tradition in which artistic expression becomes a means of preserving collective memory and advocating for social change.

The idea of rhythm as a way to express emotions is another important link between music and literature. In jazz and other types of music, rhythm lets musicians' express feelings that go beyond words. Oluo's writing also uses pacing and emphasis to show emotional intensity. In Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America, she uses the flow of the story to make points about systemic power structures, slowly leading readers through historical examples and modern-day effects (Oluo, 2020). Through these rhetorical techniques, Oluo's writing demonstrates how literary discourse can reflect the structural and cultural qualities of music. The rhythm of her prose strengthens the emotional impact of her arguments and aligns her work with longstanding traditions of resistance in Black cultural expression. Scholars such as Paul Gilroy have argued that Black musical traditions constitute a 'counterculture of modernity', offering alternative narratives that challenge dominant historical accounts (Gilroy, 1993). In this sense, music operates not only as entertainment but also as a form of historical documentation.

This cultural function of music parallels the role of literature within African American communities. Writers including Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison have incorporated musical rhythms and motifs into their works to reflect the lived experiences of Black communities. Hughes famously described jazz poetry as an attempt to capture 'the rhythms of life' within literary form Kim, M. (2021). The works of Oluo continue this tradition by translating the emotional and political power of musical expression into essayistic prose. Her narratives often begin with personal anecdotes that reflect the lived realities of racial injustice. According to literary analyses, her use of personal storytelling enables readers to understand how systemic racism affects individuals on a daily basis. By framing social critique through lived experiences, Oluo's writing mirrors the storytelling function of blues and hip-hop music, both of which narrate personal struggles within broader social contexts.

B. Cultural Appropriation, Music, and Power

One of the most significant intersections between music and literature in Oluo's work appears in her discussion of cultural appropriation. In So You Want to Talk About Race, she examines how dominant cultural institutions often appropriate elements of marginalized cultures, including music. Oluo argues that cultural appropriation becomes problematic when it occurs within systems of unequal power. For example, she notes that white artists often receive greater recognition for musical styles originally developed by Black musicians. As she observes, when mainstream culture rewards such appropriations, it effectively 'changes the definition of rap for American culture'.

This critique aligns with broader scholarly discussions of cultural commodification within the music industry. Scholars such as Angela Davis have demonstrated how Black musical traditions are frequently commercialized while the communities that created them remain marginalized. By addressing these dynamics in her essays, Oluo highlights how music functions as a site of cultural struggle where issues of identity, power, and economic inequality intersect.

C. Rhythm and Literary Musicality

One of the most striking features of Oluo's writing style is its rhythmic narrative structure. Rhythm in literature refers to the flow created by sentence length, repetition, punctuation, and emphasis. In spoken traditions, rhythm is particularly important because it shapes how audiences absorb and respond to messages.

'Hip-hop is not just music; it is a way of living and thinking'. -(KRS-One, 2000)

Music is healing therapy that can lead a black people in a useful way. when discussing hip-hop as a cultural movement influencing literature and social commentary. In So You Want to Talk About Race, Oluo frequently employs short, direct sentences followed by longer explanatory passages. This pattern creates a sense of conversational rhythm that mirrors natural speech. For example, when discussing privilege and systemic inequality, she often introduces a concept through a brief statement and then expands on it through anecdotal explanation (Oluo, 2018). The alternating pattern of concise and detailed sentences produces a cadence that keeps readers engaged while clarifying complex ideas.

'Silence is a luxury that oppression cannot afford'

This quote highlights the necessity of speaking against injustice. Oluo argues that silence protects oppressive systems. The statement resembles spoken-word poetry and protest music traditions where voice becomes a political weapon.

Repetition is another important rhythmic device in Oluo's work. Repetition has long been used in both literature and music to emphasize key themes. In many African American musical traditions, repeating phrases reinforces emotional expression and communal participation. Similarly, Oluo often reiterates core concepts such as systemic racism, privilege, and intersectionality to ensure that readers grasp their significance. This rhetorical repetition also serves a pedagogical purpose. Because Oluo's work aims to educate readers about racial injustice, repetition helps reinforce important points and encourages reflection. By revisiting key ideas throughout her essays, she creates a rhythmic structure that mirrors the reinforcing patterns found in musical performance.

Additionally, Oluo's use of rhetorical questions contributes to the rhythm of her writing. Questions invite readers to pause and consider their own perspectives before continuing with the argument. This technique resembles the interactive dynamics of spoken-word performance, where the performer engages directly with the audience. The rhythmic qualities of Oluo's prose therefore play

a crucial role in shaping how readers interpret her arguments. Rather than presenting information in a purely academic format, she structures her writing in a way that echoes oral communication and musical expression.

D. Affect, Emotion, and Collective Experience

Affect theory provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between music and literature in Oluo's work. Scholars of affect theory emphasize that emotions play a crucial role in shaping social and political experiences. Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium for expressing collective emotions such as grief, anger, and hope. Similarly, Oluo's essays foreground the emotional dimensions of racial trauma. She frequently recounts personal experiences of discrimination and marginalization to illustrate how systemic racism affects individuals on an emotional level. For example, she describes moments when racial hostility forces individuals to suppress their emotions in order to maintain social harmony. Such experiences reveal how racial trauma operates not only as a structural condition but also as an affective experience. By foregrounding these emotional realities, Oluo transforms her essays into spaces where readers can engage with the affective dimensions of social injustice.

E. Literature as Protest Performance

Throughout history, music has served as a central element of political movements. Protest songs during the Civil Rights Movement provided emotional solidarity and helped mobilize activists. Oluo's writings function in a similar manner by encouraging readers to confront systemic injustice and participate in social change. Her essays often conclude with practical suggestions for addressing racism at both personal and institutional levels. This activist orientation reflects the performative dimension of protest music. Just as songs inspire audiences to take action, Oluo's essays aim to transform awareness into activism.

F. Oral Tradition and Spoken-Word Influence

The influence of oral tradition is a defining characteristic of many forms of resistance literature. Oral storytelling has historically served as a method for transmitting cultural knowledge, preserving history, and fostering communal identity. Scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) have argued that African American literary traditions often incorporate elements of oral performance, including improvisation, repetition, and rhetorical play. Oluo's writing reflects several of these characteristics. Her essays often read as though they are part of an ongoing conversation with the reader. Rather than adopting a distant academic voice, she speaks directly to audiences using accessible language and personal anecdotes. This conversational style reflects the influence of oral storytelling traditions.

Spoken-word poetry and performance activism also provide useful frameworks for understanding Oluo's rhetorical approach. Spoken-word performances typically combine narrative storytelling with rhythmic delivery, creating a powerful emotional connection with audiences. Although Oluo writes primarily in prose, her essays exhibit similar qualities of immediacy and engagement. For instance, when discussing personal experiences with racism, Oluo often frames her narratives in ways that emphasize emotional authenticity. These moments resemble storytelling segments within spoken-word performances, where personal testimony becomes a powerful form of political expression. The oral qualities of Oluo's writing also enhance its accessibility. Academic discussions about race and systemic inequality can sometimes be difficult for general audiences to understand. By adopting a conversational tone and rhythmic narrative structure, Oluo ensures that her arguments remain clear and relatable to readers from diverse backgrounds.

F. Emotional Resonance and Political Expression

Another important aspect of the relationship between music and literature in Oluo's work is emotional resonance. Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium for conveying emotion, and many writers seek to replicate this effect through literary techniques. Oluo frequently incorporates personal narratives that evoke empathy and reflection. These narratives function similarly to emotional passages in musical compositions, where melody and rhythm guide listeners through different emotional states. In literature, pacing and narrative structure serve similar functions by shaping how readers experience the story. In Mediocre, Oluo explores historical patterns of inequality and the ways in which societal structures have reinforced racial hierarchies. Rather than presenting historical information in a purely detached manner, she integrates storytelling elements that highlight the human consequences of these systems (Oluo, 2020). This approach creates a strong emotional connection between readers and the issues being discussed. Emotion also plays a crucial role in political communication. Scholars have noted that narratives capable of evoking empathy are often more effective in motivating social awareness and activism. By combining emotional storytelling with analytical critique, Oluo's writing encourages readers to engage both intellectually and emotionally with questions of racial justice. This interplay between emotion and analysis mirrors the role of music in social movements. Protest songs, for example, often combine lyrical storytelling with powerful melodies that inspire collective action. Similarly, Oluo's writing blends narrative intensity with critical argumentation to create a persuasive form of resistance literature.

G. Interdisciplinary Connections Between Music, Literature, and Activism

The intersection of music and literature within activism reflects broader interdisciplinary connections between cultural expression and social change. Artistic forms often serve as platforms for challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. In the context of contemporary activism, writers like Ijeoma Oluo contribute to a tradition in which cultural commentary intersects

with artistic expression. Although her primary medium is written prose, her rhetorical techniques share characteristics with musical storytelling traditions. For example, hip-hop culture has significantly influenced contemporary discussions about race and social justice. Hip-hop artists frequently address systemic inequality through lyrics that combine rhythm, storytelling, and political critique. While Oluo's writing is not directly connected to hip-hop performance, her emphasis on narrative voice and cultural critique reflects similar goals of raising awareness and inspiring dialogue. These interdisciplinary connections demonstrate how different artistic forms can work together to create powerful messages of resistance. Literature provides space for detailed analysis and reflection, while music often delivers emotional immediacy and collective resonance. When writers incorporate musical elements into their narratives, they bridge these forms of expression.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that Oluo's writing exhibits several stylistic features associated with musical expression, including rhythm, repetition, emotional resonance, and conversational cadence. These features contribute to the accessibility and persuasive power of her work.By drawing on traditions of oral storytelling and resistance culture, Oluo creates a form of social commentary that resonates with readers beyond the boundaries of academic discourse. Her essays combine analytical clarity with narrative engagement, reflecting the influence of cultural traditions in which storytelling and music function as tools for collective empowerment. At the same time, it is important to recognize that Oluo's work remains grounded in nonfiction analysis rather than musical composition. The connection between music and literature in her writing therefore operates primarily at the level of rhetorical style and cultural influence rather than direct musical structure. Future research could expand on this analysis by examining how other contemporary writers incorporate musical influences into their prose. Comparative studies might also explore connections between literary activism and musical movements within broader social justice contexts.

V. CONCLUSION

The relationship between music and literature has long been an important aspect of cultural expression, particularly within traditions of resistance and social critique. This study has examined how the writings of Ijeoma Oluo reflect elements of musical rhythm, oral storytelling, and emotional resonance. Through analysis of So You Want to Talk About Race and Mediocre, the research demonstrates that Oluo's prose exhibits rhythmic qualities that enhance its communicative impact. Techniques such as repetition, conversational cadence, and narrative pacing create a dynamic style that mirrors elements of musical performance traditions. These stylistic features contribute to the effectiveness of Oluo's work as a form of resistance literature. By combining personal narrative with critical analysis, she engages readers in conversations about systemic inequality while drawing on cultural traditions that emphasize collective expression and resilience. Ultimately, the interrelationship between music and literature in Oluo's writing highlights the enduring power of artistic forms to shape political discourse and inspire social awareness.

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