

M39 The Organization of African Unity

Pan-African Cultural Manifesto (1969)

The essence of the ideology of Pan-Africanism, which had its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, was a belief in the racial solidarity of Africa and its diaspora: all African peoples needed to unify under the banner of race in order to achieve their potential. The hope was that this would foster a sense of racial pride and identity that would overcome the legacies of slavery and colonialism and help solve the continuing problems associated with racial discrimination against those of African race and heritage.

Between 21 July and 1 August 1969, the first Pan-African Cultural Festival was held in Algiers. Four thousand artists from all over Africa and its diaspora came together to promote the idea of a single African cultural consciousness, denounce colonialism and continue the fight for freedom from external oppression. For the next ten days, artists, poets, writers, musicians and intellectuals performed, debated, exhibited art and collaborated in a highly creative atmosphere. The choice to stage the festival in Algeria was significant; its eight-year struggle for independence had been brutal, with countless atrocities. It had also been the adopted home of anti-colonialism's most articulate voice, the Caribbean philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. His revolutionary analysis of the Algerian War of Independence in *The Wretched of the Earth (Les Damnés de la terre, 1961)* became an essential text of the black liberation movement and inspired many later manifestos, including that of the Senegalese group Laboratoire AGIT'art (M78) and the British artist Rasheed Araeen's 'Preliminary Notes for a BLACK MANIFESTO' (M59).

The festival's participants, who included members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), used Fanon's writings to

challenge the prevailing Négritude philosophy (M7), which they believed to have a Western bias. Their manifesto, a substantial extract from which is featured here, was published as part of the festival. Among other things, it called for a black culture that would support the development of a brave, new, modern Africa, and hasten the achievement of continental unity.

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Introduction

Taking as a basis for study, reflexion and discussion the inaugural address by His Excellency, Houari Boumediene, President of the Revolutionary Council, President of the Council of Ministers of the Algerian People's Democratic Republic and Acting Chairman of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the O.A.U., the Symposium of the First Pan-African Cultural Festival held in Algiers from 21 July to 1 August 1969 fully discussed the theme of the Symposium, i.e.:

the realities of African culture;

the role of African culture in national liberation struggles and in the consolidation of African unity;

the role of African culture in the economic and social development of Africa.

I. Realities of African Culture

Culture starts with the people as creators of themselves and transformers of their environment. Culture, in its widest and most complete sense, enables men to give shape to their lives.

It is not freely received but is built up by the people. It is the vision of man and of the world and is thus systems of thought, philosophies, sciences, beliefs, arts and languages.

It is likewise the action of man on himself and on the world to transform it, and thus covers the social, political, economic and technical fields.

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Culture is essentially dynamic: in other words it is both rooted in the people and orientated towards the future.

We must go back to the sources of our values, not to confine ourselves to them, but rather to draw up a critical inventory in order to get rid of archaic and stultifying elements, the fallacious and alienating foreign elements brought in by colonialism, and to retain only those elements which are still valid, bringing them up to date and enriching them with the benefits of the scientific, technical and social revolutions so as to bring them into line with what is modern and universal.

Colonialism is an evil that has been experienced and endured by all our people, first in its most distinctive form, the slave trade, which devastated almost all the African continent, and in its most tangible and insolent form, political domination, over which we must strive to triumph.

But its machinery is complex and cannot be simplified into a single operation. It is a well-known economic, social and political fact that colonialism is a total action, both in its essence and its spirit.

In order to survive it has to justify itself morally and intellectually by force and coercion to extend its hold over all fields of human activity.

In order to exist as such, it must exercise a social and intellectual hold in addition to its concrete and material hegemony.

Thus it manages to achieve what it believes to be the perfect synthesis and, consequently, thinks that it can challenge men with impunity and destroy their very essence.

We believe, we spontaneously feel, that liberty is one and the same as nationhood, and that the welfare and progress of our peoples have to be achieved around our specific personality. We naturally accept that liberty, nation, personality and, eventually, universality are but the product and origin of culture.

Culture is the essential cement of every social group, its primary means of intercommunication and of coming to grips with the outside world; it is its soul, its materialization and its capacity for change.

Thus culture is the totality of tangible and intangible tools,

works of art and science, knowledge and know-how, languages, modes of thought, patterns of behaviour and experience acquired by the people in its liberating effort to dominate nature and to build up an ever improving society.

An imposed culture generally bred a type of African intellectual not at home in his national realities because of his depersonalization and alienation.

The African man of culture, the artist, the intellectual in general, must integrate himself into his people and shoulder the particularly decisive responsibilities incumbent upon him. His action must inspire that revolution of the mind without which it is impossible for a people to overcome its economic and social underdevelopment. The people must be the first to benefit from their economic and cultural riches.

Culture is experienced by the people through concrete experiences and expressions tied to history. Consequently, corresponding to this culture as far as we are concerned, there is an Africanity of specific expressions. Africanity obeys the law of a dialectic of the particular, the general and the future, of specificity and universality: in other words, of variety at the origin and starting-point and unity at the destination.

African culture, art and science, whatever the diversity of their expression, are in no way essentially different from each other. They are but the specific expressions of a single universality.

Beyond similarities and convergent forms of thought, beyond the common heritage, Africanity is also a shared destiny, the fraternity of the liberating struggle and a common future which should be assumed by all in order to master it. Africanity springs from the double source of our common heritage and our common destiny and that is why it is worthwhile, at the present stage of our historical development, to examine a number of problems linked with the origin, the existence and the development of our culture.

Culture is a dynamic means of edifying the nation over and above tribal or ethnic divisions and African unity above all forms of chauvinism. Culture, which is created by the people, may be confiscated by a dominating class. Now culture should be a

constant search for the people's creative consciousness. Any African cultural policy should therefore be based on the necessity of enabling the people to become informed, educated, mobilized and organized so as to make them responsible for their cultural heritage and its development. The preservation of culture has saved Africans from the attempts made to turn them into peoples with no soul or history.

Culture protected them. It is quite obvious that they would henceforth wish to use it to forward their progress and development, for if culture – a permanent and continuous creation – is a definition of personalities and a link between men, it also gives an impetus to progress. This is the reason why Africa devotes such care and accords such value to the recovery of its cultural heritage, to the defence of its personality and the creation of new branches of its culture.

It would have been easy for certain people and convenient for others if we had not set out conditions for our political independence – we could have been satisfied with merely that and have borrowed thought, language and art from those who had the good fortune to enjoy a harmonious internal development. We might have also been satisfied with a folkloric cultural past, a poor man's culture, and have given up all thought of true freedom and real independence. But the colonized peoples have never given up their inner identity.

In this, the national language plays an irreplaceable role, it is the mainstay and the medium of culture, the guarantee of popular support both in its creation and its consumption.

Once we had recovered our sovereignty, it was a first essential duty for us to revive the national languages inherited from our forefathers, without in any way calling to question the profound unity of our nations.

Language is one of these features in the life of peoples which embody their genius. It develops with them, and they cannot be deprived of it without being cut off, wounded and handicapped.

Nevertheless, and in order to survive and fight, some of our peoples had to learn the language of our colonizers.

There is no one language which is basically more suited than another to be a mainstay of science and knowledge. A language translates and expresses the lives and thoughts of men. From the time when our development was suspended, our cultures trampled underfoot and the teaching of our languages often forbidden, it has been obvious that we must double our efforts to make African languages efficient instruments for our development.

The analysis of our cultural realities reveals to us the dynamic elements in the life of peoples, in both their spiritual and material aspects. Among these elements which make up our indomitable African personality, we should emphasize these values which have come down to us in spite of the vagaries of our history and the colonialist attempts at depersonalization. From them can be abstracted a sense of ethics revealing a profound inborn sense of solidarity, hospitality, mutual aid, brotherhood and the feeling of belonging to the same humanity.

These values and this sense of ethics are to be found expressed in our African languages, in our oral and written literatures, in our tales, legends, sayings and proverbs, transmitting the wisdom and experiences evolved by our peoples. Our African cultures, media of knowledge and spirituality, are an eternal source of inspiration for our arts and letters. Our artists can draw from them dynamic themes in which our peoples will recognize themselves.

The knowledge of our history will scientifically establish the bases of our personality and will thus be a factor for progress, enabling us to measure our limitations and to assess our possibilities.

The modes of organization of African society can teach us lessons which will enable us to be ourselves whilst at the same time taking our place in the modern world.

The inventiveness of our techniques would suffice to show our creative potentialities.

Our cultural existence and presence are proven by our arts, paintings, sculptures, architectural styles, music, songs, dances and drama.

This culture, for a long time condemned by colonialism to exoticism or confined to the solitude of museums, asserts itself today as

a living expression of the modern world. This world in which we seek to have a place, this future which it is our duty to construct, are dominated by problems of development and progress.

We must re-emphasize that our culture would be ineffective if it took no account of contemporary science and technology. It therefore sees itself as a personal and original contribution within a single, constant and dynamic movement towards progress and social revolution.

II. The Role of African Culture in the Liberation Struggle and African Unity

It is the duty of African States to respond to total colonization by a total struggle for liberation.

The unity of Africa is based first and foremost on history. Under colonial domination the African countries were in the same political, economic and social and cultural situation. Cultural domination led to the depersonalization of a part of the African people, falsified their history, systematically denigrated and opposed their religious and moral values and made a progressive and officially sanctioned attempt to replace their language by that of the colonizer in order to devitalize them and to deprive them of their *raison d'être*.

Consequently, at the level of the masses, African culture, impeded in its development, found a refuge in its language, in its customs, songs, dances, beliefs and so on . . . And in spite of its diminution, it proved to be an essential bulwark of resistance to colonial intrusion and thus illustrated the perenniality of the African soul.

Colonization favoured the creation of a cultural elite won over by assimilation, which had had access to the colonial culture, and both supported it and often stood guaranty for it. Thus a serious and profound rupture came about between the African elite and the African masses.

Only through adhesion to the concepts of freedom, independence and the nation could the conflict be placed in its proper

context. The transcendence of cultural duality was made possible by the liberation movements, the wars of independence and the firm and unshakeable opposition to colonial subjection. Africa's combat provided the material and spiritual framework allowing the further development of African culture, thus attesting the natural dialectical interaction between the national liberation struggles and culture.

For the African countries which won their freedom and for those that are in armed conflict with the colonial powers, culture has been, and will remain, a weapon. In all cases, armed struggle for liberation was, and is, a pre-eminently cultural act.

The experience of liberation movements shows that the integration of the intellectuals into the masses gives a great authenticity to their work and vitalizes African culture.

Both the winning of true independence and the armed struggles still in progress have permitted a cultural renaissance. The fight for freedom, in all its forms, has logically become the constant factor of cultural Africanity. Thus Africanity is a reality deriving essentially from men born of the same land and living in the same continent, bound to share the same destiny by the inevitable process of decolonization at all levels and complete liberation, notwithstanding regional or national specificities.

Because it is involved in the same struggle, because it is a prerequisite of national and continental liberation – in a word, because it is the primary and final motive of man and because it alone is likely to constitute the first basis of resistance to threats hanging over Africa – Africanity goes beyond national and regional concerns.

Africa's present necessities require from artists and intellectuals a firm commitment to Africa's basic principles and its desire for freedom. Today's cultural act should be at the centre of today's strivings for authenticity and for the development of African values.

The cultural policy of neo-colonialism calls for an objective and concrete critical analysis of our present cultural situation. Neo-colonialism, aware of the still negative aspects of this situation, has

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conceived a new, well-concerted form of action which, although no longer violent, is no less ominous, dangerous, subtle and insidious as it is for the development and future culture of Africa.

Real dangers are menacing our culture as regards both the perpetration of alien norms, and that of mental prototypes of institutions and political life.

A cultural front should therefore take the place of the front of resistance, for culture remains the vital and essential force of the nation, the safeguard of our existence and the ultimate resource of our combat. Therefore only Africanity can bring about a resurrection and a rebirth of an avant-garde African humanism, confronted by other cultures; it will take its place as part of universal humanism and continue from there. Our artists, authors and intellectuals must, if they are to be of service to Africa, find their inspiration in Africa.

Complete independence is thus the basic condition for the development of culture in the service of the masses.

III. The Role of Culture in the Economic and Social Development of Africa

Heirs to a civilization that is thousands of years old and rich in untold economic possibilities, we stand ready today to continue in the total recovery of our personalities, the struggle that won us our independence.

The assertion of our profound identity and the utilization of our material riches for the good of the people will enable us to participate actively in the building of a universal civilization as freed and free partners.

Culture, simultaneously representing a style of life, an economy and social relationships determined at a particular moment in human evolution, forms a totality with political life. As a permanent and continuous creation and the expression of the perenniality of a people, African culture definitely intends to put itself to the service of the liberation of Africa from colonialism in all its forms and from all forms of alienation, and to serve the economic and

social betterment of the people. Safeguarded and experienced by the people, it becomes a motivating element in social and economic development and a factor in the transformation of the environment.

A society or a culture can stay itself while undergoing economic development, providing it takes the necessary steps.

A place must necessarily be made for science and technology as it must for economic rationality, the need to look ahead and other prerequisites of our age. This is because no culture is passively operative. In order to give its resources to aid development, it must be revived and brought up to date by contact with technology which tends to create a universal civilization. A society should both retain its essential being or else crumble away, and its usefulness, or lose its existence and autonomy. It perseveres and adapts itself by a continuous dialectic effort of giving and contributing between national culture and universal values.

Moreover, it is absolutely necessary to watch over the defence and preservation of African dignity and personality. But this looking back or constant reference to the living sources of Africinity must avoid a complacent and unfruitful evocation of the past, but must, on the contrary, imply an innovating effort and an adaptation of African culture to the modern requirements of well-balanced social and economic development.

The following objectives must be adopted: free African society from the socio-cultural conditions hindering its development; rid African culture of alienating factors by integrating it, in particular, with popular action.

African culture, faithful to its origins, must be revived and brought into the modern world by contact with science and technology in order to develop its operative capacities for, while technology progresses by accumulation, culture progresses by creation and fidelity. All means of doing this should be set in motion.

Africa must recover from a delay which is primarily cultural. This entails:

a) a change in attitude towards the material world, towards quantification and scientific rationalism. The role of education may

have a determinant, beneficial or baneful influence according to the importance one attaches to technical instruction;

b) the movement of political power towards a genuine revolution in the climate of opinion;

c) the combined effort of members of the community which will only be possible if the citizens really take their future into their own hands in an atmosphere of freedom and happiness.

In addition to Arabic, which has been for some years an official language of the O.A.U., it is recommended that studies be undertaken to promote the use of other widely-spoken languages.

The immediate tasks impingent upon all of us are to turn African languages into written languages and the medium of scientific thought, and to bring about education, adult literacy and the emancipation of women.

Any delay in the reorganization of the present educational system will result in a delay in the training of responsible cadres and this justifies the continuation of foreign technical and cultural aid. We must get out of this vicious circle as quickly as possible as this aid, if prolonged, could turn into a scarcely disguised form of domination.

The principal aim of higher education is to form the trained personnel needed for both economic and cultural production, and these people need to make themselves understood by both the workers and the masses. This higher education should, then, wherever possible, be given in the national language. These tasks will be all the better carried out by being supported by mass information media belonging to Africa (radio stations, T.V., cinemas, theatres and cultural centres in factories, offices, etc.) and by an increase in the number of cultural events and exchanges.

These values will enable us to face, without frustration or alienation, the inevitable social transformations entailed by the process of development. We must use those that can contribute to economic progress and the mobilization of the masses, so as to arouse the enthusiasm needed for major collective effort.

In this gigantic effort to recover Africa's cultural heritage and adapt it to the needs of technological civilization, the artist, the

thinker, the scientist and the intellectual have all their part to play, i.e. to contribute, within the framework of popular action, to revealing and making known the common inspiration and common heritage which go to make up Africanity. Generally speaking, Africa must return to its original modes of perception, its techniques, its communication media and bring them up to date so as to turn them into powerful means of dominating Nature and of harmonizing the development of African society.

Likewise, we must avoid the obstacle of the academic and futile search for a dilettante culture leading to unproductive and decadent aestheticisms.

We should therefore take systematic and appropriate measures to imbue our youth with African culture so that the young people of our continent may understand its profound values and be better armed to resist certain demoralizing cultural manifestations, and be better prepared to become integrated into the masses.

In this way, African culture, true to itself and drawing strength from the deep sources of its wealth and of its creative genius, not only intends to defend its personality and its authenticity but also to become an instrument in the service of the people in the liberation of Africa from all forms of alienation, an instrument of a synchronized economic and social development. It will thus bring about the technico-industrial promotion of the African, and also a living and fraternal humanism far removed from racialism and exploitation.

Culture, as a decisive force in economic and social development, constitutes the surest means for our peoples to overcome their technological (i.e. economic) handicap and the most effective force in our victorious resistance against imperialist blackmail.

It has become now both urgent and necessary to free Africa from illiteracy, to promote the permanent education of the masses in every field, to develop in them a scientific, technological and critical spirit and attitude, and to render popular culture fully effective.

All our efforts should be directed towards a true revolution in Africa's cultural activity.

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The popular character of our culture should promote a specific conception of scientific organization and the rationalization of our productive activities, as well as the methods of appropriating the means of production (land, natural resources, industry, etc.) and the distribution of the goods produced.

Africinity should be apparent in a concrete and tangible manner in the joint use of our national forces and natural resources to promote a harmonious and accelerated economic, social and cultural development throughout the continent.



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Why Are We 'Artists'?

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