

CULTURE AND RESISTANCE SYMPOSIUM - GABORONE 1982.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION - REPRINTED FROM JOURNAL OF THE FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION WITH PRODUCTION.

In October 1980, representatives of the major Southern Africa liberation movements met in Lusaka to discuss the part to be played by education in the struggle for freedom. The seminar on Education and Culture for Liberation was sponsored by the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC-SA), The South West African Peoples Organization of Namibia (SWAPO), The Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU - PF), in cooperation with The Dag Hammarskjold Foundation of Sweden (DHF) and the Foundation for Education with Production (FEP). Cuba, Guinea-Bissau and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were officially represented. This seminar was the third in a series initiated and sponsored by the DHF. The first was held in Dar Es Salaam in 1974, with the theme Education and Training and Alternatives in Education in African Countries. The second focussed on Educational Alternatives for Southern Africa and was held in Maputo in 1978. The fourth has just taken place from August 27 to September 7, 1981. Organised by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education and Culture in association with DHF and FEP, it discussed Education in Zimbabwe-Past, Present and Future.

The decision to hold the 1980 Lusaka Seminar arose from the realization that Education is not only part of, but central to the liberation struggle, and that it is in the course of the struggle that the education of the future is forged, involving the people themselves in developing the institutions of the new nation. All the liberation movements have adopted education policies rejecting oppressive, racist and colonialist education policies of the minority regimes. The struggle against Bantu education has been a major factor in the mobilization of black youth in SA and Namibia. In the course of the struggle, liberation movements have found it necessary to start schools and training centres in liberated areas, or on the territory of friendly states. During the Zimbabwean War of Liberation, both ZANU and ZAPU ran schools for many thousands of young people. Such schools developed new styles of learning, working and living together, as a vital part of the liberation struggle. These schools - invariably based on the linking of education with production - provide models for the transformation of education after liberation. Today the ANC and SWAPO are also establishing and running schools for liberation.

The Lusaka Seminar dealt with eight major topics:

- Educational policy and structural organization of educational affairs;
- supply, training and orientation of teachers;
- curricula and syllabi;
- manpower survey, planning and development;
- the role of culture in the process of liberation;
- adult education
- radio broadcasting
- problems of transition in the field of education.

An edited version of the proceedings of the Lusaka Seminar have just been published by FEP as a book with the title Education and Culture for Liberation

CULTURE AND LIBERATION

The cause of art and the cause of liberation are centuries old; the inevitability of reiterating the finest principle of both is unavoidable, and in this turbulent age their emphasis is inevitable. One may ask what has art, culture, literature, got to do with liberation? The question is usually asked by those who wish to separate culture or art from politics, for when we talk of liberation we are talking of it in its political sense, otherwise we would not be present here. But life is the criterion through and by which the artist's imagery and literary observations are evaluated. When we talk of the relationship between art and life we mean that unity between what is reflected and the manner in which it is reflected, and this is the quintessence of art. What we respond to when we read a poem or a novel is not only life, but also its artistic merit.

But life does not merely mean breathing in and out but involves also man's struggle to reach higher levels of civilization, of social, economic and cultural status, the mighty struggle to conquer his own disabilities and the forces of nature. So then life must include man's struggle for liberation from all that hinders his development, and as we have said that life is the stimulation of artistic endeavour, art cannot be separated from this desire for liberation. The struggle of the peoples of what we sometimes call the Third World for national liberation and independence has become a titanic force for man's progress and is without doubt one of the most dynamic and most important features of our time.

Perhaps we might even say that for the first time man has come to realise the totality of his planet Earth; that all Earth is inhabited by man, and that the principles which seemed once to be the monopoly of apparently learned metropolitan countries now apply equally to those once looked upon as lesser beings. We by no means defend imperialist rule by recognising that, by reducing the world's dimensions, it gave it greater horizons; that it revealed new phases in the development of human societies and, in spite of or as a result of prejudices, discriminations and crimes it perpetrated, helped to impart a deeper knowledge of man as a whole, as a unit in the complex and diverse character of his development. Indeed paying all respect to Europe, one recalls a story that at the pass of Thermopylae where certain Spartans died for independence centuries ago, there was erected an inscription which says: All the world is the grave of Heroes.

Unfortunately through historical circumstances the Phillistines of Europe ignoring the lofty principles which had risen around them since the times of ancient philosophers, in the words of "La Marseillaise", the works of Heine and Goethe, the ideals of Byron - set out to plunder and subject other peoples. This was described as a civilizing mission. It is hardly question as to who was the more "civilized": those naively friendly Indians who welcomed Columbus, the people of the Cape who met Van Riebeck; or their European visitors who returned these greetings quickly with fire power and "The Royal Hunt of the Sun". "A clash of cultures" it is designated: these burnings for accumulation of gold by the inquisition, this description in Van Riebeck's diary of the massacred and plundered local people as "a stinking nation", this blowing from a cannon of Sepoy "Mutineers", and the "civilizing" war-cry, "The only good Indian is a dead one", as the prairies were seized from their owners.

In Europe herself the common people groaned under the yokes of her own ~~xxx~~ slavery and feudalism. The example of the Russian revolution released the energies of millions of people, gave them confidence in the ultimate success of their own aspirations. The period after World War II in particular saw the development and success of anti-imperialist struggles particularly in Africa and Asia. The degrees of independence might vary from country to country, but certainly major advances have been made in ~~xxxx~~ destroying the old colonial empires governed from Europe. The people of these countries are reaching towards modern forms of civilization and culture, working to end the heritage of the colonial past, to catch up what they missed during centuries of foreign oppression and to take their rightful place alongside advanced countries.

On a subject people, colonial domination may be imposed by way of traditional ways of living and thinking, together with the introduction of alien ideas and values, since the essential feature of colonisation is the destruction of a people's identity. This may be done through various agencies of the colonial power. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo says:

A Chinese, a Frenchman, a German or an Englishman first imbibes his national literature before attempting to take in other worlds. That the central taproot of his cultural nourishment should lie deep in his native soil is taken for granted. This abc of education is followed in most societies because it is demanded by the practice and the experience of living and growing. Not so in ~~xxxx~~ Africa, the West Indies, the colonized world as a whole, despite the crucial role of the twin fields of literature and culture in making a child aware of and re-discover his environment... The other day I found my own son trying to memorize a poem by William Wordsworth... I asked him: What are daffodils? He looked in the book: Oh, they are just little fishes in a lake... (At another school) they told us about a poem of fourteen lines called a ~~xxxx~~ sonnet written by William Shakespeare comparing old age to Winter!

If many Africans become alienated from their cultural background, if they are so uprooted that they dare not assert it openly any longer, this never dies completely. It survives the death of tribal economic structures and remains hidden, ready to be used as a basis for future development. The late Amilcar Cabral said:

The exercise of imperialist domination demands cultural oppression, but the people are able to create and develop a liberation movement because it keeps its culture alive and in the teeth of organized ~~xx~~ repression of cultural life - because its politico-military resistance being destroyed, it continues to resist culturally.

The colonial power cannot impose a complete cultural occupation. The majority of people ~~x~~ retain their identity and are the one entity really able to preserve and create it - that is they can make history. A people's cultural manifestations, including their literature, oral and written, their songs and poetry, reflect this resistance, reflect the various stages of development of the anti-imperialist movement. (c.f. The Literature Syllabus of the ANC Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College). At a certain time cultural resistance may take on various forms, politically passive or active, economic or armed; as it develops, it adopts political methods,

The crucial role of the twin fields of literature and culture in making a child aware of and re-discover his environment... The other day I found my own son trying to memorize a poem by William Wordsworth... I asked him: What are daffodils? He looked in the book: Oh, they are just little fishes in a lake... (At another school) they told us about a poem of fourteen lines called a ~~xxxx~~ sonnet written by William Shakespeare comparing old age to Winter!

including violence, to end imperialist violence. Perhaps the best examples of these cultural plus political manifestations are contained in the ~~poetry~~ poetry of the former Portuguese colonies. Investigation shows that the history of the poetry of the people of these ~~territories~~ territories for centuries against the Portuguese is also the history of their revolution. In South Africa there is now an upsurge of poetic writings with 'struggle' and 'liberation' as the main theme.

The liberation struggle is the most complex expression of the people's cultural energy, of their identity, of their dignity. Liberation opens up new avenues, helps to enrich art and culture, and in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle finds new forms of expression. These manifestations also become a powerful instrument for political information and training not only for independence but also in the great battle for progress.

What should be taken into consideration is that the anti-imperialist struggle involves that a ~~national~~ national liberation, a struggle for the consolidation of a cultural community, for national statehood, national territory, a national economy. Colonialism and its attendant manifestations prevents this process. In addition the anti-imperialist struggle has united millions of people across borders and across continents. Out of the artistic manifestations of this struggle can also be traced a common desire, ambition, aspiration, that of international friendship and indeed a brotherhood, based upon equality which includes the fusion of all that is good in all cultures into the basis of an eventual common world culture.

We have talked of this struggle for national liberation, of anti-imperialism, this implies of course that imperialism and its colonial system is not yet dead. Only recently the people of Zimbabwe entered victoriously the final stages of their battle to set up a truly independent state. To the south of them the White minority regime, still menaces and frustrates the ambitions of the peoples of ^Namibia, and South Africa, who are engaged in heroic resistance to this regime. A quotation from a Short History of the African National Congress illustrates concisely the cultural basis for the national struggle of the African ~~majority~~ majority:

The most astonishing feature of that conference (1912) was the no. of tribes who sent representatives. There were Zulus, Xhosas, Tswana, Sothos, Vendas, Shangaans, Tsongas and others. These tribes some of them only recently locked in feuds, had looked upon each other with suspicion; each was proud and could only, with difficulty look upon others as equals. For two years before they had seen the ~~bitter~~ bitter fruits of their disunion and division when, at the formation of the Union (of South Africa) they had all been ignored when Boer and Briton met to form the so-called Union of South Africa. As Dr. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, prominent leader and lawyer, stated at the Conference: "We are ~~one~~ one people. These divisions, these ~~jealousies~~ jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our ~~backwardness~~ backwardness and ignorance today". And further: "The ANC realised from the outset that the preconditions of forging unity among Africans was the KEY to our freedom struggle. The formation of the ANC therefore, marked the birth of a nation whose foundation were laid in a stirring call by Dr. P.I.Seme, later to become its Treasurer-General

when in an article written in 1911 he declared: "The demon of racialism, the aberrations of Xhosa-Fingo feuds, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tsongas, between the Basotho and and every other Native, must be buried and forgotten... We are one people".

To appreciate what culture means in the pre-liberation movement needs a distinction between culture and cultural manifestation. Cabral said that culture is the dynamic synthesis at the level of individual or community consciousness, of the material and historical reality of a society or human group, of the relations existing between man and nature as well as among social categories. Clearly a multiplicity of social categories and particularly of ethnic groups, makes the role of culture in the liberation movement more difficult to define, but this complexity cannot and must not lessen the importance to the movement, most of all to recognize and define the contradictory data so as to maintain the positive values and channel them in the direction of the struggle, with an added dimension.

The National Dimension.

Within the indigenous society the action of ^{the} liberation movement on the cultural plain entails cultural unity, corresponding to the moral and political unity necessary for the dynamics of the struggle. With the opening up of the closed groups, tribal or ethnic racist aggressiveness tends to disappear and give way to understanding, solidarity and mutual respect, a unity in struggle and in common destiny in face of foreign rule. These are sentiments which the mass of the people adopt readily if the process is not hindered by political opportunism.

South African white domination moved away from a policy of elimination or enslavement of the immediate local population, to an advanced stage of capitalism and imperialism within which the black population serve as colonial serfs and a major part of the industrial working class, all within one geographical boundary. It must be observed that the attitude of the ruling power is hopelessly contradictory. On the one hand the white ruling class has to maintain divisions, a system of apparent conservation conditioned by confinement of the indigenous society to geographic zones or reserves called homelands or Bantustans, to destroy the cultural unity of the African people; on the other hand to maintain in its industrial enterprises a working-class contrary to ethnic or tribal division. The late Dr. Verwoerd conveniently equated "tribe" with "nation" and claimed that the so-called Bantu homelands established the rights of the different "nations". Mr John E. Fobes, deputy director-general of UNESCO stated in Paris, in April 1975:

South Africa has made much of her protection of separate cultures. What does this amount to? Does this mean restoring the economic and political bases on which independent African civilizations were built? Certainly not. These were broken in a series of wars of conquest, in the introduction of wage labour and in the alienation of the land. Does this mean restoring the trade routes, the cultural exchanges which archeologists now tell us existed before European conquest? Certainly not, for in the place of so-called tribes absorbing each other, constructing as did the Zulus, a ~~xxx~~ coherent Kingdom, we have tried tribal separation.

Does the South African protection of separate cultures mean what UNESCO means by the diversity of cultures? Certainly not. For the diversity of cultures also implies a relative equality of power relations and the right of groups to maintain, to change, to borrow. It is for the cultural groups themselves to decide the direction of the evolution of their cultures. On the other hand we have in South Africa a Government-imposed "traditionalism" - in fact the use of traditional culture to maintain the legitimacy of a culture of domination.

Mr Fobes further put the matter in a nutshell. "The Republic's protection of cultures means for Africans the external trappings of once great cultures reduced to folklore and caricature". To maintain the legitimacy of a culture of domination - these ~~wx~~ words explain the white supremacists' rationalisation of their fear of being culturally drowned in the sea of liberated black cultural development. "Our culture will be obliterated" or "We shall be swamped". This, direct economics and politics apart, is the rallying cry of the white laager. It is an old pretext. Forgetting what Europe gained from mathematics, the compass, and a multitude of cultural and scientific contributions by non-Europeans, the racist insists that the blacks or asiatics ~~hx~~ have nothing to offer but a return to barbarism. A variation of "East and ~~wxx~~ West is West; and never the twain shall meet". It is not a digression to point out that Japan, constituting a people who prefer chopsticks to knives and forks, is today one of the great industrial nations of the world. Nearer to our home, we might point out that the impoverished and "barbaric" black working class man the most advanced industrial enterprises, so-called manifestations of "Western" culture, in modern South Africa.

The preservation of "our culture", the "clash" of cultures are old cliches which conscious or subconscious racists have mouthed for "latter centuries" in order to preserve a system of economic exploitation and deliberate subjugation of so-called inferior peoples. We say "latter centuries" because contrary to the belief that racial prejudice always existed, racism is a phenomenon of capitalism and did not exist as a social phenomenon before the advent of that system. The slaves of ancient Greece and Rome knew of no difference in their master's attitude to them dictated by their outward appearance. The white gladiator Spartacus received the same treatment, took the same risks as the gladiator from Africa. Moslems were received into the Christian or Jewish religions in the Middle Ages, and vice-versa without consideration for racial origin, religious differences were the main ideological differences (or excuses) for overrunning alien lands in the epoch of feudalism.

The development of the plantation system production for profit gave rise to the slave trade. Africa became the main source of supply. At first the ~~kxx~~ plantation owners and traders were content to claim that slavery was essential for the nation's economic prosperity. Later when the opponents of slavery stepped up their opposition, the idea was propagated that blacks were inferior beings with no sense of morality, they were apes, they had no souls. Racism became characteristic in the ideology of exploitation since this time. Thus it is doubly easy for the "embattled" white minority, defending their "culture" from the majority "black hordes" seeking liberation. ~~xxx~~

The white minority is fulfilling a good-given mission on the tip of Africa, defending civilization against barbarism. It is in the name of these so-called principles that many innocent people of Western Europe have been led into supporting or passively acquiescing to the racist regime of South Africa. We will say nothing here of the support of big business, international monopolies, and multinationals for reaping super profits from the exploitation of the blacks. Compelled to make gestures in favour of assisting black economic backwardness, some of their few hypocritical contributions have made no difference to the dire plight of the African Majority. Arms are supplied to the racist South Africans in the same old name of "Western" civilization, culture and anti-Communism. We will not deal in detail with these matters here, nor with the question of apartheid in its details. What we are rather confronted with is the question whether those here are content to let this matter go by the board. All men of letters have always been in the question of the people's freedom. No doubt you will be able to point out numerous examples of the artist's identification with progress, justice and true development of culture. Authors and playwrights have condemned apartheid in South Africa and withheld their plays from segregated audiences. Inside South Africa censorship in the name of a minority government curtails publications. Long lists of names of writers banned in South Africa have been published. Local white writers have also started fretting over the claustrophobic cultural atmosphere prevailing within the country.

His Master's Voice.

In the face of this, the recently retired head of the Publications Appeal Board, Mr Justice Lammie Snyman was in April this year quoted as saying that he knew the public supported his censorship because he had received numerous letters from various persons and groups. He found "The coloured people...very conservative, Indians most conservative", but the "black majority - I am not referring to a few westernised blacks - are inarticulate people who, I am sure, are not interested in the whole matter"(6).

If there are white artists and writers in South Africa itself who are concerned with apartheid, we may look on them with some degree of regard but we who are engaged in the struggle to destroy once and for all the very basis of racism, apartheid and national oppression are not impressed by the obscurantist emphasis on black-white sexual gymnastics, the negative elusion of the pass-laws, the psychological cripples who may engage in revealing but fruitless dialogues and never dare in the words of Athol Fugard Himself "like the revolutionary, to break eggs in order to make an omelette". This literature glosses over injustice and oppression and does not inspire resistance to oppression.

The dynamic of the South African people will always be represented by militant poetry and songs, by the writings of those who do not fear to reflect in real struggle, that is to overthrow white supremacy, not merely nibble at the fringes, lagging behind the inevitable advance. If as we have said, life is the criterion for artistic creation, then the dynamism of the developing revolutionary situation in South Africa will

inspire the artistic manifestations of our people, their artists, ~~writers~~ writers, poets, black and white. Our art and culture, as somebody stated elsewhere, will be warmed by the fires of the battle for liberty. As this struggle develops, the people's art, as we have pointed out in the case of the former Portuguese territories, will reflect our struggle. Revolutionary poetry is used in evidence today against students arrested for opposing the South African State; academics, black and white, are being arrested for identifying themselves with the struggle for liberation. Drawn by the lodestone of the people's struggle, those who unhappily have had to accept the ruling power's cultural colonisation in segregated universities, fed on the crumbs of so-called Bantu education, are forming part of the people's wide movement for national liberation.

Southern Africa today is rapidly developing a revolutionary situation which can turn the tide once and for all in favour of genuine democracy and progress. The heroic examples of Mozambique and Angola have raised the hopes and spirits of millions still ruled by the barbarian vandals represented by the white racist minorities. But changes are wrought by the active participation of people. As we have tried to point out earlier, the anti-colonialist struggle has drawn millions of people together from all parts of the world. The colonised countries, the newly independent countries, the progressive, enlightened people of the metropolitan countries, all from this mighty force, reinforcing each other, in the struggle for the progress of all mankind. South Africa is no longer a localized issue.

The oppressed people of South Africa... have committed themselves to the struggle to recover their legitimate rights in accordance with the universal Declaration of Human Rights...the entire ~~xxx~~ world, the international gatherings have recognized that... it was vital to help the liberation movements in this duty of liberation. Today more than in the past, this assistance has become a necessity. It must be multifaceted: political, diplomatic, cultural, economic...and material.

The result has been that these forces, guided by the strategy and tactics of the struggling African people, have made South Africa racism the pariah of the world. Attacked in the United Nations, expelled from many international agencies, harassed from all sides, support for the white supremacy regime and its policies in all degrees have become the hallmark of reaction in our world.

What must be borne in mind is that while the success of the national liberation movement unites all sections and ethnic groups of a people under the banner of nationalism, and accelerates the process of nationhood, while cultural manifestations will reflect this fusion in terms of national art, national literature and so on, the influence of the international character of the struggle at the same time gives the ~~xx~~ national form an international content. Other things apart, this depends also on whether the liberation movement establishes the precise objectives to be achieved on the way to regaining the right of the people it represents and whom it is assisting to make its own history, to control freely the disposal of its productive forces, with an end to the eventual development of a richer culture - popular, national, scientific and

universal. The South African racists wish to maintain the African people, and indeed the whites themselves, within the narrow confines of a "traditionalist" past. But the advances of the twentieth century cannot entertain the anachronisms of stultifying tribalism and "laagerism", inevitable as their doom may be. Culture is closely linked with economic and social reality, with the level of productive forces and the methods of production in the society in which it struggles or flourishes. Thus it is obvious that the oppressed, once liberated, must make use of the advances made within society in order to advance itself.

The main content of the struggle in South Africa today is the liberation of the African majority. At the same time its programme states that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, these include the other oppressed minorities, coloured and asiatic; that the wealth and the development of such resources shall not be manipulated by any one group or individual. The revolutionary programme of the African National Congress, with whom the ~~xxx~~ majority identifies, state: 'A democratic government of the people shall ensure that all ...national groups have equal rights, as such, to achieve their destiny in a united South Africa. Given equality, the universal and inevitable cultural exchanges with mutual respect will lead eventually to the ~~afrocentricism~~ to the fusion of everything worthy in the cultures of all peoples, leading eventually to the aforementioned development of a richer, popular and universal character of the South African people.

In conclusion let us hear again the words of Nelson Mandela at the Rivonia trial which resulted in his imprisonment for life:

In their relationship with us, South African whites regard it as fair and just to pursue policies which have outraged the conscience of mankind and of honest and upright men throughout the civilized world. They suppress our aspiration, bar our way to freedom, and deny us opportunities to promote our moral and material progress to secure ourselves from fear and want. All the good things of life are reserved for the white folk and we blacks are expected to be content to nourish our bodies with such pieces of food as drop from the tables of men with white skins. This is the white man's standard of justice and fairness. Herein lies his conception of ethics. Whatever he himself may see in his defence, the white man's moral ~~which xxx kxxx xxxxxxxxx~~ standard in this country must be judged by the extent to which he has condemned the vast majority of its inhabitants to serfdom and inferiority. We, on the other hand, regard ~~xxxx~~ the struggle against colour discrimination and for the pursuit of freedom and happiness as the highest aspiration of ~~th~~ all men.

Collection Name: MEDU ON-LINE

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand

Location: Johannesburg

©2022

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice:

All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use:

Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of the Historical Papers Research Archive, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the MEDU Art Ensemble Consolidation Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.