

1969 Pan-African Cultural Manifesto

(Organization of African Unity: First All African Cultural Festival, Algiers, July/August 1969)

Taking as basis for study, reflection and discussion, the inaugural address by His Excellency, Houari Bournedienne, President of the Revolutionary Council, President of the Council of Ministers of the Algerian People's Democratic Republic, and current Chairman of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, the Symposium of the First Pan-African Cultural Festival held in Algiers from 21st July to 1st August 1969 fully discussed the theme of the Symposium i.e. - The realities of African culture - The role of African culture in national liberation struggle and in the consolidation of African Unity - The role of African culture in the economic and social development of Africa.

Realities of African 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. 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 in addition to its concrete and material hegemony, a social and intellectual hold-particularly over the ruling classes on which it relies. It consequently thinks that it can challenge men with impunity and deny their very essence. The peoples of Africa believed and spontaneously felt that liberty is one and the same as nationhood, and that the welfare and progress of our people have to be achieved around our specific personality. They naturally accepted that liberty, nation and personality are essentially the origin and product 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 materialisation 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 depersonalisation 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 radical transformation 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. But culture is the sum total of experiences and concrete expressions, linked to the history of peoples. Thus culture, from our point of view, must embrace the particular expressions that characterise each major civilization. But our Africanity is determined by profound similarities and common aspirations. Africanity obeys the law of a dialectic of the particular and the general of specificity and universality, in other words of variety at the origin 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 expression 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 nor 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 out of it, wounded and handicapped. Nevertheless, and in order to survive and fight, a part 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 made 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. The knowledge of our history will scientifically lay the foundations of our personality and thus constitute a factor of progress, enabling us to show our capabilities and examine our possibilities. The methods of organizing African society are lessons for us and will enable us to be ourselves while acceding to the modern world. The ingenuity of our techniques, if there is need to mention it, show our creative capacity. Our arts, paintings, sculptures, architecture, music, songs, dances and our plays are a testimony to our existence and that of our culture. This culture, which has for long been considered by colonialism to be outlandish and only relegated to museums, is today a living expression in the world. This world in which we want to take our place and the future which we have a mission to build, are dominated by problems of development and progress. We reaffirm that our culture would be lifeless if it ignored modern science and technology. It requires therefore a personal original contribution to the one and the same heritage, the same dynamic progress and social resolution.

Role of African Culture in the Liberation Struggle and African Unity

It is the duty of African States to answer total colonization with a total liberation struggle. Unity of Africa is rooted first and foremost in History. Under the colonial domination, African countries found themselves in the same political, economic, social and cultural situation. Cultural domination entailed the distortion of the personality of a part of the African peoples, their history, systematically disparaged and suppressed, their religious and moral values, attempted to replace progressively and officially their language with that of the colonizer, thus rendering them powerless and stripping them of their *raison d'être*.

Consequently, African culture, though checked in its development at the level of the masses, was enshrined by its language, manners, songs, dances, beliefs, etc... But despite the underestimation it suffered, African culture has revealed itself to be a vital rampart for resisting colonial intrusion and has in this way stood the test of time alongside the African spirit. Colonization favoured the formation of a cultural elite for assimilating and imbibing colonial culture, even sustaining it and often serving as guarantee. Thus, there was a serious and profound rift between the African elite and the African popular masses. Only the adherence to the concepts of freedom, independence and nationhood enabled the conflict to be placed in its real context. The dual culture lapsed with the advent of liberation movements, wars of independence and firm and unshakeable opposition to colonial servitude. Africa's struggle has provided both material and spiritual structures within which African culture can develop and thus prove the natural dialectical correlation between national liberation and culture. For the African countries which won their freedom and for those that are in armed conflict with the colonial powers culture had 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 vitalises 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 essentially deriving 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 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 striving 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 to this situation, has conceived a new well-concerted form of action which, although no longer violent, is no less ominous and 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 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 masses.

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 economic and social relationship 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 perennality 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 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 place its resources to the aid of 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 return to its essential being or else crumble away, and to 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 Africanity must avoid a complacent and unfruitful evocation of the past, and must, on the contrary, imply an innovating effort and an adaption of African culture to be modern requirements of well-balanced social and economic development. The following objectives were adopted-to free African society from the socio-cultural conditions hindering its development and to 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 retardation 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 in 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 OAU, 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 make African languages into written languages and the medium of scientific thought, to ensure that education, adult literacy and the emancipation of women are open to all Africans. Any delay in the reorganization of the present educational system will result in a delay in the training of responsible public servants 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 for being supported by mass information media belonging to Africa (Radio stations, TV, 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 transformation 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 media of communication 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, it rests with us to avoid the obstacle of the academic and futile search for a dilettante culture leading to unproductive and decadent aestheticism. 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 may be better armed to resist certain demoralizing cultural manifestations, and 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 Africa, 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 towards a true revolution in Africa's cultural activity. The popular character of our culture should promote a specific conception of scientific organization and the rationalisation 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. Africanity 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.

Recommendations

The symposium made the following suggestions for the dynamic utilisation of the elements of African culture: 1. To reinforce and intensify Africa's cultural activities by giving the OAU Committees for Education, Culture, Science and Health a more active and continuous role. 2. To create cultural magazines edited in the working languages of the OAU and if possible in other African languages. 3. To assemble a corpus of the arts and an encyclopaedia of the African continent and support fine arts organizations in the member countries of the OAU and the publication of an encyclopaedia of literature and the arts; to establish courses in the universities to teach the values and the realities of African culture. 4. To promote and co-ordinate research in all spheres of traditional medicine and African pharmacopoeia in order to modernize them by giving them a scientific foundation and by ridding them of their esoteric and empirical character so that they may become a source of enrichment for modern medicine; to promote, encourage and co-ordinate scientific research in Africa. 5. To set up a Pan-African Institute for the film industry. In this field, Africa should produce its own mode of expression and choose suitable means to make its expression available to the people. The African States should, therefore, organize themselves to produce, release and market their own films and to fight against the limits which are holding up the development of a truly African cinema. 6. To establish organizations for the publication and sale in Africa of books, school handbooks, records and newspapers so as to fight speculation and make them instruments for mass education. The symposium supports the OAU's decision to set up a Pan-African News Agency; so as to intensify the exchange of news between African countries. 7. To establish suitable organizations to integrate African arts into industry and business. 8. To protect the intellectual property of Africans by appropriate legislation. 9. To take all necessary steps, including that of calling upon international institutions, so as to recuperate the works of art and archives seized by the colonial powers; to take necessary steps to stop the drain of cultural assets leaving the African continent. 10. To increase cultural exchanges through such means as exhibitions, conferences, seminars and meetings of young people, women and workers, intellectuals, militants and officials for a greater mutual understanding. 11. To organize inter-African economic and technical aid. 12. To promote the use and the teaching of national languages necessary for the authentic expression of African culture as a popular tool for the spreading of science and technology; to give competitive prizes for practical techniques invented by Africans, so as to stimulate creativity in the technological field.

13. To reform and develop education at all levels so as to give it the efficient means for the fulfilment of its mission to promote and develop the African peoples. The contents of this teaching, the methods, and the school books must take into account our national realities, and the necessity of reinforcing our unity and solidarity by a greater degree of mutual understanding. 14. To translate into our languages the scientific, philosophical, historical and literary works which constitute the common heritage of mankind; to encourage the translation of African literary works into foreign languages. 15. To encourage and develop in the African continent handicrafts free from commercial speculation. 16. To associate the women and youth of African more actively and massively in the transmission and the full flowering of our cultural heritage. 17. To establish prizes to recompense the more genuine and useful works of the African artists and writers. 18. To give firmer support to the African national liberation movements to promote an artistic, political and ideological renewal; 19. To arrive at a full understanding, and to make the masses and international opinion aware of the value and the impact of the struggle for national liberation. 20. To expose the real facts of the liberation struggles and publicize them widely by every means of communication available to the African States. 21. To enable the African liberation movements to participate actively in unified cultural action, within the framework of African cultural institutions. 22. To enable African experiences in cultural decolonization in every field--history language, education, etc.--to be studied and made known in the different African countries. 23. To give Africa and her history pride of place in research, in meetings of experts and African men of science, and in school and university programs. 24. To judge African arts according to the standards of the African continent and in accordance with the requirements of unity and the liberation struggle; to create appropriate cultural institutions in Africa for this purpose. 25. To encourage African artists in their mission of reflecting the concerns of the people so as to bridge the gap created and maintained by colonial alienation between the intellectual elite and the masses. 26. To enable African artists and intellectuals to re-establish the historical truth, while participating in the combat of our people and also to help the liberation struggles by making people aware of them, both inside and outside Africa. 27. To bring about participation of the people in the decisions, the organization and management of economic, social and cultural matters. 28. To define the methods by which the people can recover all natural resources and essential means of production. 29. To transpose Africanity into: (a) a unified African Trade Union movement (b) the development of mass organizations (youth organizations, women's organizations, etc.) 30. To promote a programme of a technical co-operation between the African countries, especially to offset the ravages due to the 'braindrain'. 31. To provide primary education to all children regardless of sex, race or religion. 32. To mount a massive campaign for functional adult literacy. 33. To develop those cultural media which are the most directly accessible to the people (cinemas, theatres, radio and television). 34. To establish cultural units in the countryside and in business organizations, capable of: (a) spreading elementary scientific knowledge (b) spreading a knowledge of works of art in both African and other traditions (c) stimulating cultural activities in the rural areas through the use of mass media; and building museums to enrich the mind of peoples living in the less developed areas. 35. To make a survey of African folklore and popularising it among the masses.

36. To promote the Panafricanisation and regionalization of the universities and the technical institutes which are the meeting point of youth; these cultural centres must give the opportunity to all African students to pursue their studies in the best conditions. 37. To set up a system of exchange of documents and experience in mass education between the member countries of the OAU. 38. To exchange programmes of economic, social and cultural nature between the African radio, TV stations and film libraries, particularly through the medium of the URTNA. 39. To hold inter-regional cultural seminars and of painting and handicraft exhibitions with a view to fostering the economic and social development of the continent. 40. Contribution to UNESCO project on African History.