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# THE AFRICAN PERSONALITY

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Johan Galtung

It is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

# THE AFRICAN PERSONALITY

Any attempt to discuss "personality" whether European, African, or Asian, is attended by a great deal of controversy depending on whether one seeks to understand it as a political, anthropological, sociological or cultural concept. Some attempts have been made to discuss it on the level of "a way of governing"--which has been brought in by Western systems of economy and politics. Invariably, this approach has tried to show, however subtly, that the only history there is in Africa is that of the Westerners and that, therefore, the African Personality is at best the product of the "civilizing effect" of Western culture on an essentially cultureless people on a "dark continent." Any evidence of an assertive position to counteract this arrogantly stupid way of evaluating Africa has been interpreted by these discoverers or writers, mostly Western, as "pathology," "predicament", or essentially proof of the African's basic inability to learn and comprehend what "is good for him"--that good apparently being Western culture or civilization. A look at a great number of books written about Africa by Westerners will quickly make this point, however clumsily.

Another level--which is not accompanied by much writing--attempts to look at the African as he is, what is happening to him, what makes him "tick." This approach starts off from an acceptance of the fact that Africa has a people with a unique view of themselves and the world, in other words a people with a culture, inhabiting a continent with lots of sunshine and on the whole very little darkness.

This paper takes the position that what defines the African Personality is his "world view," i.e., his own conception of existential reality, his own view

of his collective being or existence. It is this world view which in our view constitutes the primary lens through which he reduces the ineffable world of sense data to described fact. It suggests that one seeks to understand all else in the world to the extent that the rest of the world intersects and impinges upon his anticipation and control-needs, beginning with one's being and existence and then moving towards a universal understanding conditioned by that beginning.

It starts off with a look at the spring from which much of African thought comes. It attempts to show where the African Personality derives its "soul." That spring is African culture and philosophy. It makes allowance for the fact of impingement of other cultures and life styles upon the practical manifestations of this philosophical situation. It poses some problems resultant upon this impingement by other cultures on the so-called African way of life. It suggests that there have been many casualties along the way to a new selfhood, but that a strong resistance to a complete capitulation to those forces aimed at the destruction of this way of life is in evidence. This resistance draws its strength from the African philosophical roots or sociology of knowledge which I believe is the correct route to take on the way to discovering the African Personality.

This paper will not pretend to provide the answers to the many problems facing the African in his attempts to be and remain himself. It will, however, allude to the general direction that is necessary to maintain the African Personality which, I believe, is a viable concept and is not, as some people think or wish, in decay. Endangered it may be, but dying it is not, because it is grown and rooted in rich philosophical soil.

We will hopefully develop a clearer understanding of the African Personality if we start from the beginning and deal with some description of key properties of African philosophy which have relevance to the subject: African Culture and the Concept of Man.

## Culture

The generally accepted meaning of culture is that it is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of people or human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. It includes, according to Sekou Toure

> . . . all the material and immaterial works of art and science, plus knowledge, manners, education, mode of thought, behavior and attitudes accumulated by the people both through and by virtue of their struggle for freedom from the hold and dominion of nature. We also include the result of their efforts to destroy the deviationist politics, social systems of domination and exploitation through the productive process of social life.[1]

It is wise to caution right at the beginning that human cultures resemble one another up to a point. Different cultures only value their common elements differently insofar as one puts the accent here and the other there. It is the ordering of the elements to one another via philosophical theories that determine the differences between cultures. Only the sum total of the particular ways of doing things, any one of which may also occur in other cultures, produces what can be called the "uniqueness" which differentiates one people from another. The aggregate ordered by a particular philosophical conception constitutes the unique character of a culture.

When people choose a way of life, they also choose assumptions about "man" that are consistent with that way of life. To the extent that there are differences in these assumptions on the nature of man, to that extent are there differences in cultures. In other words, societies have different cultures (personalities) to the extent that they have different assumptions or theories of human nature.

Concepts of man often differ fundamentally from society to society with resulting implications for political institutions and social control. What differentiates African culture from other cultures is the way in which the African views man and his position with society.

If, for example, we contrast the African view of man with that represented by one culture such as the Western liberal democratic culture coupled with the other type of Western culture represented by the Marxian view, we will hopefully help the reader to appreciate how the African perception of the role of man and state varies in some aspects so completely from these two. The two are chosen because of their relative influence over traditional African culture from the time of their first known contact with Africa to date.

It is because of the influence of these two cultures that the question about the validity or viability of the concept of "African Personality" has arisen, with some people claiming that as Africa becomes more and more industrialized, it will also become Westernized, that is, deculturalized to an extent that to speak of an African personality will be "romantic nonsense" at worst and misleading at best.

## The Western liberal concept of man

An examination of all advocates of liberal democratic individualism reveals a consensus about man's dominant traits existing independently of any social context. The dominant notion in this conception being that individuals are ". . . abstractly given, with given interests, wants, purposes and needs. . . . While society and the state are pictured as sets of actual or possible social arrangements which respond more or less adequately to those individual requirements."[2] What is suggested by this notion is that individuals possess a realm of consciousness, beliefs or thought that does not affect others and that should

remain immune from interference by external agents. In other words, the human personality has two realms--a social and a private realm and society should have no control over the latter. One component of the "private realm" is the "inward domain of consciousness" which demands liberty of conscience which leads to the contention that matters of belief usually do not affect other people; therefore, beliefs should remain the sole concern of the believer and should be free from manipulation; an ideal which suggests that natural man (apart from society) is born with "rights" which impose limitations on any societal restrictions to their pursuit.

People, according to this philosophical position popularized by European philosophers of the 18th Century, have certain needs, interests and goals because they are the kind of creatures they are. Being rational, people discover that other people have the same needs and interests, and they learn God's rules whereby all can satisfy these interests. Learning God's rules, they are led to an understanding of rights. Each person has the right to require others to observe the rules in interacting with them. The "rights" exist in the "state of nature" before human beings form societies.

According to John Locke, people enter this world with an interest in "life, liberty and property"; and according to Thomas Jefferson, with "life, liberty and happiness." Life in this context refers to self-preservation. Liberty refers to the absence of restrictions on belief or expression of them--a right which is paramount in historical European democratic thought.

Big play is made by J. S. Mill of the concept of "inner forces" in man which include the ". . . innate capacities and talents unique to each individual that can develop when not interfered with by outsiders."[3] The ideal state of man then is associated with this psychological claim about capacities that are not socially induced. The development of these "inner forces" is intrinsically

desirable and also instrumentally useful as a means of achieving social progress. Therefore, according to this view, society should not interfere with their realization. They belong to man's individuality. Privacy as a value is closely related to the individual being left alone by other people to the extent that he can lead a life in a style and with satisfactions that give realization to the inner forces. Associated with this "private self" is a third trait and value which assumes that people are capable of self-direction. Though not immune to social influences, they are nevertheless capable of reviewing their beliefs about values and norms that they and others have formed under that influence, critically evaluating them, and as independent individuals selecting or rejecting them and making choices for action on the basis of that review.

As Munro points out,

> This claim about the sanctity of the private realm is . . . construed from the concept of the dignity of man that is based on each person possessing a soul in the likeness of God. State policies that some people regard as violations of autonomy through the manipulation of beliefs and choices are also viewed as violations of human dignity. This is because they seem to treat people as a means to state goals rather than as ends in themselves."[4]

The other Western view

Marxist theory claims that man's essential nature is social and that "natural man" apart from social relations is nonsense. Marx makes an implicit distinction between "man's social and biological natures," which assumes that when one talks about important aspects of man, one is talking about his social nature. He repudiates the existence of any innate drives to sympathetic conduct in man. In his Sixth Thesis on Feurbach, he talks of the human essence being ". . . no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations." These social relations he views as ". . . .legally defined links in cooperative production (of goods other than those needed for biological survival) that exist between the dominant groups in any historical period: slave-

master, serf-lord, employee-employer." Thus repudiating the notion that man's social nature is a static substance; rather suggesting that it is something that changes as the relations change.[5]

An important point which Marx makes is that man is the only creature for whom social relationships take on a class form, and that man uniquely fulfils his social essence or becomes a social being through labor--a position that echoes a point of Hegel. Other animals may get goods needed to survive from what is around them, but man, through his productive labor creates these goals. His singular social and economic activity satisfies his needs and realizes his potentialities. In sum, Marx and Engels' account of human nature is that it is determined by both what men produce and how they produce it. New developments in technology occur continually, which means that how men produce is always evolving. Thus, gradual changes in human nature are inevitable.

The African concept of man

The African view of the world is one of harmony. This harmony which demands mutual compatibility among all the disciplines considered as a system constitutes the main basis of African thinking. Manifest in the most rudimentary elements of nature is God. Philosophy, theology, politics, social theory, land law, medicine, birth, burial--all find themselves concentrated in a system so tight that to exclude one item from the whole is to paralyze the structure as a whole.

The African's conception of man sees biological life and spiritual life meeting in the human being and neither the one nor the other being present alone. The essence of human life is the unity of both principles. Man shares biological life (natural life) with the animal, but spiritual life divides him from the animal and gives him his "Personality."

So, it is fair to say that the African view of the universe and of man within that universe is profoundly religious. They see it as religious and treat it as such; and, while there are many different accounts of the creation of the universe among African people, we can generalize that all put man in the center of this universe. As it is often said ". . . Man . . . who lives on earth, is the centre of the universe. He is also like the priest of the universe, linking the universe with God, its Creator; Man awakens the universe, he speaks to it, he listens to it, he tries to create a harmony with the universe. It is man who turns parts of the universe into sacred objects, and who uses other things for sacrifices and offerings. These are constant reminders to people that they regard it as a religious universe."[6]

A look at one cultural institution in African society will make the point --the institution of marriage. Man, according to African thinking is constructed for reproduction. To leave no living heirs behind him is the worst evil that can befall a man and there is no curse more terrible than to wish an African man or woman to die childless.

For this reason, in African society, bearing children is an obligation, and that obligation is fulfilled through marriage. Failure to get married is like committing a crime against traditional beliefs and practices, a point which is often missed by Westerners when they import into Africa their concept of family planning.

Marriage is the uniting link in the rhythm of life. All generations are bound together in the act of marriage--past, present and future generations. "The past generations are many but they are represented in one's parents; the present generation is represented in one's own life, and future generations begin to come on the stage through childbearing."[7] Since the supreme purpose of marriage, according to African people, is to bear children, to extend life, a

marriage becomes fully so when one or more children have been born.

Marriage also provides for new social relationships to be established between the families and relatives involved. It extends in other words the web of kinship socially. Marriage is above all intimately linked up with the religious beliefs about the continuation of life beyond death. Through marriage, the departed are in effect "reborn" not in their total being but by having some of their physical features and characteristics or personality traits reborn in the children of the family.

Marriage gives a person--according to African thinking--"completeness." It is part of the definition of who a person is according to African views about man.

Children, it follows, are greatly valued in African life, for they are the seal of marriage; it does not matter whether one is talking about traditional or so-called "modern Africa." Children are believed to prolong the life of their parents and through them the name of the family is perpetuated. Therefore, the more a person has, the bigger is his glory.

Children add to the social stature of the family, and both girls and boys have their social usefulness in the eyes of their families. At home, there are duties which the children are expected to do as their share in the life of the family. They are taught obedience and respect towards their parents and other older people. They help in the work around the house and in the fields. As they grow older, they gradually acquire a different social status and their responsibilities increase.

When the parents become old and weak, it is the duty of the children, especially the heirs or sons, to look after the parents and the affairs of the family.

For African people, the family includes children, parents, grandparents and other relatives such as brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, etc. All relatives have duties and responsibilities towards one another. Everyone knows how he is related to other people in the clan and in the neighborhood. This idea of family extends to include the departed as well as those still to be born. John Mbiti makes this point strongly when he says:

> In African life, we cannot speak of marriage alone, it is always in terms of marriage and family life. One gets married within the context of family life and one gets married in order to enlarge that family life. One stands on the roots of family life; and one puts out branches of family life. This idea of the individual in relation to marriage and family life is deeply rooted in African thinking.[8]

Human conduct: An African view

It is, perhaps, in this area that there are important distinguishing differences between the African and the Western man and we will do well to spend some time to examine it, as it has important implications for social, political, economic differences between these societies. Morals in all cultures are central to human conduct, as they deal with the question of what is right and good and what is evil and wrong in human conduct.

It is the moral sense of a people that produces customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society. African societies believe that their morals were given to them by God. This view provides an unchallenged authority for morals. It is also thought that some of the departed keep watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws and are punished when they break them.

Human conduct has two dimensions in African life. There is personal conduct, which has to do specifically with the life of the individual, e.g., whether one should help in the field; or whether he should buy clothes for himself

and his family. The greater number of morals has to do with social conduct, i.e., the life of society at large, the conduct of the individual within the group or community or nation. African morals lay a great stress on social conduct, since a basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist. Moral laws help people do their duties to society and enjoy certain rights from society. Morals are what have produced the virtues that society appreciates and endeavors to preserve, such as friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, etc. On the other hand, morals also sharpen people's dislike and avoidance of vices like theft, cheating, selfishness, greed, etc.

Many morals have become rooted in the life of the peoples concerned, in Africa, no less than in other cultures.

African family morals

Each person in African traditional life lives in or as part of a family. Kinship is very important in all aspects of African life. The family is the most basic unit of life which represents, in miniature, the life of an entire people. In the family, individuals are closely bound to each other, both because of blood or marriage and because of living together.

In all African families, there is a hierarchy based on age and degree of kinship. The oldest members have a higher status than the youngest. Within that hierarchy there are duties, obligations, right and privileges dictated by the moral sense of society. Parents have distinct duties towards their children such as the duty to bear the children, protect them, educate them, discipline them and bring them up to be well behaved. The children on the other hand have clear duties towards their parents such as obeying their parents, doing as they are told, assisting with family chores, respecting those who are older, being

humble in the presence of their parents and other older people and of course much later when they are older to take care of their parents when they are old and sick.

If parents fail in their duties towards their children, the wider community may punish them. If the child fails in his/her duties, he will be punished. At home, it is expected that children will learn to tell the truth, to help others, to be honest, generous, considerate, hardworking, etc.

There are also morals concerned with hospitality to relatives, friends and strangers. It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger. When people travel, they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead.

Other family morals concern property, the care of the home, the fields, the animals.

Community morals

What strengthens the life of the community is held to be good and right. What weakens it, it follows, is held to be evil and wrong.

There are morals concerning the social economic and political life of the people as a whole. These cover aspects like mutual help in time of need, maintaining social institutions like marriage and the family, defending the land in time of invasion or aggression. Many other things are held to be morally wrong such as robbery, murder, rape, lying, stealing, showing disrespect, interfering with public rights, breaking promises and so on. All these and many others are moral vices in the eyes of the community.

There are also many things that are considered to be morally right and good such as politeness, kindness, showing respect, being reliable.

The foregoing can and is often challenged as being inadequate to describe the modern African, who it is argued, has undergone tremendous change as a result of the impact of other religions and cultures in Africa. Also it is often pointed out that the diversity of African people defies any attempt by anybody to profile an "African Personality."

Impact of other religions and cultures

Yes, the foregoing attempted only to give a backdrop to the African personality because it is important to understand where the so-called "modern African" comes from. It would not be possible to understand him if we did not understand this background which springs from traditional African culture. We now turn to the African after the arrival of other religions and culture in Africa.

First, we will deal with the arrival and the impact of Islam on Africa and consider later the arrival and impact of Christianity on the scene. From there we shall attempt to figure out how the African personality has been affected by these tremendously important events in the history of the continent.

Islam and Africa

If the peoples of North Africa are included, more than 100 million Africans embrace Islam today; some claim that the numbers are increasing rapidly. They are more numerous than the followers of any other organized religion in Africa. Why has it proved so attractive, comparatively, even though ". . . they came to conquer not by the doctrine of love which Christianity at its best teaches, or by persuasion, but by the sword."?[9] Some people suggest that Islam is "relatively tolerant of non-believers . . . it puts greater stress on the brotherhood of man than on the need for all men to worship alike." Some are not so sure. Generally

speaking, it is suggested that the Muslims aroused less resentment among Africans than did the Christian missionaries, many of whom taught that the Christian way of life was the only acceptable one for all human beings, nor were Muslims, it is suggested, as concerned about race as many Christians seemed to be. The long contact of Arab and Berber merchants with African peoples was also a significant factor in reducing feelings of "differentness" between the two races, some suggest.

## Christianity

There is also evidence that African peoples are responding to Christianity in spite of its having been associated with colonial rulers. Estimates indicate that there were about 165 million in Africa in 1974, and according to Mbiti their numbers were increasing at the rate of 5% every year. If that rate is maintained, it is estimated by some that by the year 2000 AD there will be roughly 400 million Christians in Africa.

Christianity has had a major impact on the lives of African peoples. It has built schools and hospitals at which the majority of African leaders of today were educated. "It is also by the ideals of justice, human dignity, love and brotherhood that African leaders were inspired to fight against colonialism and foreign domination."[10]

The biggest obstacle to the spread (further spread) of Christianity is that in many people's minds it is still associated with the arrival of colonialism in Africa and all that is associated with it--a matter we shall visit later.

## The so-called modern Africa

Since the advent of European culture, through the colonialization of the African continent, there has been an attempt to bring about a disassociation in

African life between a way of life and a way of governing.

We must now return to the main purpose for our discussion, which is to reflect on the African personality in the midst of the great confusion which has brought about debates around questions like "Is there such a thing as an African Personality?" In considering the question of the African personality, we have of necessity to consider the impact on African culture of Islam and Christianity. The extent to which Africans have embraced both Christianity and Islam makes some wonder whether there is enough of an "African Personality" left to justify our speaking of it in terms of an autonomous "self." Great debates on this subject have been heard from Nkrumah to Nyerere--perhaps more so in the context of "Pan African" debates which received general attention in the years following the independence of Ghana in 1957, reaching a peak in the 1960s when most of Africa gained political independence.

No one would deny that the literal bombardment of African people with the cultural arrogance, particularly of the Western colonizers--coming often in other guises such as "scholars," anthropologists, missionaries, historians, etc.--have indeed left large footprints of ruins and scars all over the continent. These are scars which do not heal very quickly mainly because they are deeply imprinted in the brains of the victims.

Yet, we see evidence of a slow recovery from this "assault." This recovery is manifested by evidence of the continuing survival of traditional traits in African society. The sense of community, the rituals surrounding birth, marriage, death, the theatre that surround African life in general are all traits that have defeated any possible bourgeois desire to be left alone. More importantly, there is evidence that these remaining traits are being forcefully translated into the formation of political and educational institutions as well as

economic programs that show that the African Personality is alive and on its way to recovery.

Westerners still get surprised when they observe Africans relating to each other in the course of normal intercourse--the laughter, the spontaneity, the apparent no end to talk, whether in formal or informal meetings. To Africans, the mere being together seems sufficient reason to engage in exchange. They do not wait until introduced to each other as one often sees in Western culture where one has to be introduced before he can engage another person in conversation. The deafening silence which one observes when travelling anywhere in the western world is not only confusing to Africans but is also very strange.

To the African, every gathering of people is simply an extension of the family and thus demands no inhibitions of behavior that one would have displayed in a smaller group.

Similarly, with home visiting, no reason is necessary for an African to "drop by" and engage in conversation. Contrast this with the Westerner's way of life where a visitor to someone's door is met with something like "Can I help you?"--suggesting that unless you have a "good reason" for stopping by, "you had better get going and leave me in peace." In Western society, it seems any social visit must be by "appointment," otherwise it constitutes discourtesy and a violation of the "personal rights" of the other person. It must have been anger and surprise at this type of behavior on the part of the Westerner which prompted Mphahlele to write recently:

> . . . I have not yet seen an African explore territory or climb mountains for mere conquest; I have not yet seen him sit on a lonely rock or river-bank or lake fishing; I have not yet seen him develop game parks except what he inherited from colonialism. It is a silly Western idea to conserve wild life for the entertainment of foreign tourists. Yes, it brings in revenue, but, left to ourselves, we would rather use the land to provide food for us . . . . I have no sympathy with white people who weep over the disappearance of a species of lion or elephant or leopard; because this

> Western attachment to animals, wild and domestic, that goes beyond basic utility disgusts me, it does most other Africans. . . . I have not yet seen an African go out to lonely places for a vacation, just for the scenery. We go to other people."[11]

Only a person who enjoys talking to other people would "go to other people." Talking, or discussing, is one thing which the African can do--whether at work, at school, in government or in church. "It is a rather clumsy way of conducting affairs, especially in a world as impatient for results as this of the Twentieth Century but discussion is one essential factor of any democracy; and the African is expert at it,"[12] Nyerere commented once. Would we then trade this "clumsy way" of discussing for the so-called "civilized, efficient way represented by Western liberal democracy?" The answer would be: no need; democracy is not anything new to Africa, we need no new type. In fact, Nyerere refers to this idea when he says

> . . . these three . . . I consider to be essential to democratic government: discussion, equality and freedom--the last being implied by the other two. . . . The traditional African society . . . was a society of equals and it conducted its business through discussion--'they talk till they agree' so the saying goes--That gives you the very essence of traditional African democracy.[13]

There is another reason why the kind of "democracy" which Westerners believe we should rather be following is unacceptable to us. It is because of the contradictions in it which to us at any rate abound. When we read a massive array of literature on Western democracy, we are amazed by these contradictions. The very founders of Western democracy--the Greeks--could talk of "democracy" even while more than half of their population had no say in the conduct of the affairs of state. The founders of the American (USA) nation could talk about the"unalienable rights" of man even though they believed in exceptions. Their most illustrious leader, Abraham Lincoln, could bequeath to us a perfect definition of democracy although he spoke in a slave-owing society. The British could brag about "democracy" and still build a great empire for the glory of Britons. These nations believed in government by discussion, by equals, but lived in a

world which excluded masses of human beings from their idea of "equality" and felt no scruples about it.

Developments in African countries are a clear indication that Africans have grave doubts about the suitability for Africa of the Anglo-Saxon form of democracy. In his own traditional society, the African has always been a free individual, very much a member of his community, but seeing no conflict between his own interests and those of his community. This is because, as we have mentioned earlier, the structure of his society was a direct extension of the family. First, there was the small family unit; this merged into a larger "blood family" which in turn merged into a tribe. The affairs of the community were conducted by free and equal discussion, but nevertheless, the African's mental conception of government was personal--not institutional.

Yet, Africa still has problems which prompt some people to say that an African personality is a myth and that sooner or later Africans will come to realize that progress can only come to them and their countries when they forget about the "sentimental talk" and acquire Western ways of doing things. "Either Africa adopts the Soviet way of doing things or it adopts the Western way of doing things or it sinks" seems to be the constant suggestion from priest to politicians of the West and East. According to these people Africa must choose between the horns of a dilemma.

Although part of the problem has been that this kind of propaganda has found some support in some African circles, it has also worried many other thinking people and has consequently come close to developing a predictable kind of "disease" which Mazrui calls "cultural schizophrenia"[14] found in the growing class of so-called educated elites, which must constitute the most difficult of all problems as it strikes at the root of the question of relevance.

It is worth repeating that the colonization of Africa was not only a political experience, it was much more a cultural experience. The values of the African that we talked about earlier were seriously disturbed by this experience.

To understand how this acculturation problem came about, it is important to examine the role of "education" as brought in by the colonizer. The inherited colonial education had as its principal objective the de-Africanization of African nationals. It was discriminatory, mediocre and based on verbalism. It could not and (as it is increasingly being realized by African leaders) cannot contribute to national construction or reconstruction because it was never intended to achieve that purpose. Divorced as it was from the reality of the people, it was for that reason a schooling for a minority and consequently against the majority. It selected only those few who had access to it, excluded most of them after a few years and due to continued selective filtering, the number rejected constantly increased. A cursory look at the trends in African education in all countries that were colonized will show this. Just one example would be that of the "Belgian Congo"--now Zaire. When that country attained independence in 1960, there were less than 20 African people with a university education after a period of over 100 years of Belgian colonization. Other examples, not quite as bad as this one but still frightening are found all over Africa. A sense of inferiority and of inadequacy was fostered by this "failure." This kind of education in other words spread a "culture of failure"; to miseducate, if you like.

This was in line with the colonizers' conception of the people of the continent as inferior people, and so, the system produced in African children the profile that colonial ideology itself had created for them, namely, that of

inferior beings, lacking in all ability. In this way, the continued presence and domination of the colonizer over the colonized was justified. Lacking this ability, the system suggested to Africans that the only way to acquire the "ability" was to become "white" or "Western." This system of education was not concerned with anything closely related to the nationals; worse than the lack of concern, however, was the actual negation of every authentic representation of national peoples--their history, their culture, their language. The history of those colonized was thought to have begun with the colonizing presence of the colonizers. The culture of the colonized was a reflection of their "barbaric" way of seeing the world. Culture belonged only to the colonizers.

The paradoxical thing, though, is that while the education given by the colonizer was intended to consolidate colonial control, it also contributed to the arrival of African nationalism, expressed by the clear African rejection of this obvious attempt to poison the minds of the people of Africa. These Africans rightly decided to assume their own history, inserting themselves into a process of "decolonization of their mentality." This process resulted in the political decolonization which gathered momentum in the 1960s, setting off in the process a general reawakening of black people in other parts of the world, notably the USA.

Political decolonization became the first manifestation of what came to be referred to as the African Personality. In more recent times, it has taken the form of an assertive position of radically transforming, amongst other things, the educational systems inherited from the colonizer. It has assumed political decisions coherent with the plan for the society to be created or recreated and is based on certain material considerations that offer incentives for change. It demands additionally, increased production; at the same time, it requires

a reorientation of production through a new concept of distribution. It says that a high degree of political clarity must undergird any discussion of what to produce, how to produce it, for what and for whom, in the spirit of African culture.

What gives birth to and nurtures a personality is the socialization process or education. Therefore, the act of educating, its possibilities, its legitimacy, its objectives and ends, its agents, its methods and its content address the primary factors involved in the development and presentation of a culture. Consequently, when we talk about what should be known, we also must involve the question of why it needs to be known, how and for whose benefit and in whose interests.

Julius Nyerere in his book Education for Self-Reliance makes this point when he talks about education being "preparation for life" which consists of a critical understanding of the life actually lived; for only in this way is it possible to create new ways of living. His thought, which is both pedagogical and political, is nourished by what is real, concrete and based on experience, the transformation of which is the central educational activity.

What this says is that defining what to know demands political clarity of everyone involved because this clarity, as Paulo Freire points out "is essential to the answering of all other questions that follow, such as, For what reason? And for whose interests do the policies themselves serve?"[15]

The knowledge of how to define what needs to be known cannot be separated from the why of knowing. For this reason, I agree with Freire that ". . . there are no neutral specialists, there are no neutral methodologists who can teach how to teach history, geography, language or mathematics neutrally."[16] This is illustrated by this example of a British history professor who is said to have

replied thus to a student who demanded more content on African history in his class:

> . . . Perhaps, in the future there will be African history to teach; but at present there is none; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness . . . and darkness is not a subject of history.[17]

If we accept the statement made by this "historian," then we do not need to discuss the matter any further, for we should simply conclude that there is no such thing as African history, African culture and therefore by implication no such thing as an African personality.

But, of course, I don't accept this arrogant statement and neither do most Africans. Despite the fact that in the process of development, African countries have taken the risk of accepting certain Western models in their attempt to deal with the problems of reconstruction, among which was an educational system produced in a class society, there are African leaders now who are increasingly discovering that it is not possible to develop national leaders to undertake the enormous task of national reconstruction with only middle-school and university degrees obtained in the Western model, and consequently attempts are now being made to find the correct route to combatting the anti-popular leadership style that surrenders to the interests of foreign imperial culture.

Admitting that the colonizer offered some opportunity for persons to gain university qualification, this action was nevertheless taken by the colonial power in its own interest. What was offered was selective and narrow, like the type of education that evolved in the urban schools of the colonial school era. Reaching only a small segment of the population, this university training reinforced the ranks of urban intellectuals in the service of the colonizer--creating this serious problem of split personality (schizophrenia) or elitism.

When African leaders like Nyerere and the late Amilcar Cabral and others call for the need for such "intellectuals" to "commit suicide" and be "born again" as leaders entirely identified with the most profound aspirations of their people, they imply the re-Africanization of these intellectuals.

It so happens, however, that committing suicide is not pleasant and it has not been easy for these "intellectuals" to accept this "necessary death" as evidenced by the migration of elites from those countries which make demands on the educated elites to bring their conduct more in line with the aspirations of the people. This is because the intellectual training of the middle-class reinforces the class position of individuals and tends to make them absolutize the validity of their own activity, which they consider superior to that of those without the same opportunity.

It becomes a tragedy in my view when an African country fails to revolutionize the content and structure of education, when it fails to institutionalize culture to help re-educate the elite that already exists, for surely the challenge for such a society is not to continue creating elitist intellectuals so that they can commit the kind of suicide that is called for, but rather to prevent their formation in the first place. The re-orientation of the educational system is the only way by which Africa can totally overcome the colonial inheritance. It demands different objectives, different content, different practice and a different conception of education. To discuss education is to think of the overall plan for society itself including an economic system.

## Africian Socialism

If, therefore, African society seeks to remake itself, move forward towards a satisfactory care of its inhabitants, it needs on the one hand to organize

its methods of production with this objective in mind and on the other to structure its education in close relation to production, both from the point of view of the understanding of the productive process and also the technical training of its people.

Tom Mboya is not the only one who talked about a strong belief that in "economic relations we can similarly be guided by the traditional presence of socialist ideas and attitudes in the African mental make-up."[18] It was left to Nyerere of Tanzania, however, to boldly espouse this concept further and have the courage to make it the cornerstone of his political policy.

When reference is made to socialism, there is always an immediate response from those Westerners or Western-educated Africans who think of socialism of the Western type, e.g., that of Britain or Sweden. Others will also think of the Marxian brand of socialism. The kind of socialism we talk about here is African socialism, which refers to those codes "of conduct in the African societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life. I refer to universal charity which characterized our societies and I refer to the African's thought processes and cosmological ideas which regard man, not as a social means but as an end and entity in the society."[19]

Both Tom Mboya and Nyerere make the important point about the socialism we talk about and this is that the basic tenets of socialism are universal; socialism did not start with Marx: he did contribute a great deal to social thought; he did not, however, invent socialism. In Western socialist tradition, for example, this "mental attitude" began with Aristotle's dictum that man is a social animal which has no potency and no life outside the society. From this has arisen a host of economic, social and political thought amongst which was capitalism.

In a capitalist perspective, the various factors in production--means of production on the one hand, workers on the other--combine in the service of capital. Part of the accumulated profits which are not paid to the worker who sells his labor to the capitalist, is used for the capitalist's well-being. Another part is used to buy more labor and more means of production which, together, produce more goods to be sold. The capitalist is interested in the production of goods--not, however, in terms of their usefulness, but rather in their value as a means of exchange, that is, goods that can be sold. What is more, he seeks to produce goods whose value covers and surpasses the sum of the values of his investment in production--the means of production and the labor.

What workers receive as salary for their effort expended in the act of production corresponds only minimally to their effort. What is available for their living is also minimal and, therefore, the wage-earner class reproduces itself.

Deprived of the product of his labor, the worker has no say in the determination of what will be produced. To the degree that significant quantity of what is produced does not correspond with the real needs of individuals, it is necessary to invent needs. Thus, a society becomes totally ambiguous when, in attempting to follow socialism, it allows itself to become fascinated by the myth of consumerism. If it moves in this direction, even though it does not have a capitalist class, its objective will be to produce goods to be sold. Socialism we are talking about is something quite different from a "capitalist society without capitalists."

A capitalist society is a society of consumption. The role of advertising in such a society, with its alienation of the conscience is fundamental to this kind of society. We do not need advertising to convince our people to buy

mealie-meal, rice or yams; but we do need advertising to buy this or that type of perfume or that kind of rice even if the only difference is in the packaging. If production is governed by the well-being of the total society rather than by the capitalist, private or state, then the accumulation of capital--indispensable to development--has a totally different significance and goal. The part of the accumulated capital that is not paid to the worker is not taken from him, but is his quota toward the development of the collectivity. And what is to be produced with this quota are not goods defined as necessarily salable, but goods that are occasionally necessary. For this it is essential that a society reconstruct itself to become a society of workers whose leadership renounces both the tendency to leave everything to chance and the hardening of bureaucracy.

The more a society is capitalist and therefore class conscious, as well as without political consciousness of individuals with regard to the recreation of the society as it moves toward becoming a society of equal people, the more wholeheartedly they give themselves to productive efforts. Their political consciousness is a factor in their attitude toward production.

In a capitalist society, the education of workers has as one of its goals the continuation of a class of wage earners, obliged to sell their labor to the capitalist class. The education required to continue reproducing this class is one that will continuously increase efficiency of the workers in their participation in the work process.

The foundation, then, and the objective of African socialism is the extended family. The true African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies. He does not form an alliance with the brethren for the extermination of the "non-brethren." He rather regards all men as his brethren--as members of his ever-extending family.

The concept of "Ujaama" which speaks of "familyhood" comes closest to describing the socialism that we speak of.

It is opposed to capitalism which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man, and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man. In a society seeking to reconstruct itself along these socialist lines, education should be pre-eminently revealing and critical. Generally the need is to overhaul the whole structure so that what subject is taught or not taught, the order of importance and priority assigned for it if it is taught, its content, will be determined by African national philosophies of education. A government should be able to say: this is our education because this is our culture; these are our national standards; this is how we want to interact with the rest of Africa at one level and the rest of the world at another; from here we can understand what it is we want from societies outside ours.

The African intellectual

Is he consistent with the African personality? Perhaps debatable, but what we do know is that a new generation of Africans is emerging that realizes that the headlong embracing of other people's experiences without first having mastered their own intellectual responsibility is dangerous. This realization is also part of the search for a new way, part of the recognition of the utter bankruptcy of "bourgeois" thought and part of the desire to replace it with something more relevant.

There are Africans today who do intellectual work. This is neither a cause for shame nor celebration. There is a role to play for such intellectuals in the struggle to maintain the continent's self-respect. The task is to identify that role and play it.

The new African intellectual realizes that his opportunity for self-realization as a group can only come through an alliance with his people, that even though one may choose to be an individual scholar, no matter how formidable the mind and overwhelming the productivity, no single individual, regardless of how gifted, can change a social system by himself. Those African intellectuals who have lost their way have done so because they have tended to substitute their reality for the world's and because they have estranged themselves from their people--their only valid frame of reference.

The real problem has finally (even though slowly) been discovered--that much of our past intellectual difficulty has resided in trying to create cultural and political theories divorced from the struggle to re-Africanize Africa fundamentally and irrevocably; that the problem of creating the necessary theory and then integrating it with the struggle for state power can only take place in conjunction with the masses of the people (the African people as they are) and as part of the process of correctly identifying their problems and the solutions to those problems.

We must agree with Franz Fanon when he says ". . . no one can truly wish the spread of African culture if he does not give practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary for the existence of that culture." Fortunately, a breed of Africans is emerging that will demand institutions of culture that represent a real African consciousness--the African Personality.

## Footnotes

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