

# Culture

and

# Society



**Bongani Matwa**

As people fighting for national and social liberation from the system of apartheid and colonialism in South Africa, it becomes necessary to understand that we are also fighting to liberate ourselves culturally.

Culture has become our battleground, our resistance to oppression and exploitation. How then do we view culture and what does it encompass? Culture encompasses the material and spiritual values and the means of creating, and passing them on, created by society in the course of history. On this basis we distinguish between material culture, that is, machinery, experience in the field of production and other material wealth, and spiritual culture consisting of science, art, literature, philosophy, education, religion, customs and traditions etc.

Every society has its culture which is erected upon its economic base. This therefore shows that culture is social and at the same time political. In exploitative and oppressive societies, there exist the culture of the exploiter and oppressor and on the other hand that of the exploited and oppressed. The exploiter and oppressor's culture is the one that dominates and it is they that determine the cultural development of society.

# INHERITANCE

Cultural development shows that society passes its created ideals and material values to the new society which is brought to the fore, through education and narratives etc. In this way one generation learns, shares and inherits the previous generation's culture. The pattern of inheritance of culture is intergrated and includes various uses of environmental backgrounds implements, attitudes, inter personal relations, religious beliefs and practices and moral values. When society passes from one phase of culture to another, it must be pictured as establishing each new level of achievement on the foundation of older ones rather than starting afresh each time. In class divided society a clash of cultures continues between the oppressor and the oppressed, with the former through its machinery of mass propaganda and system of education always aiming to idolise its system of oppression and exploitation. Truth is distorted and the people's minds is manipulated so as to support the rotten system of oppression. These oppressors of the people usurp culture for themselves in order to serve their selfish interests. Science is used to make weapons of mass destruction while hundreds starve to death. People need electricity while the oppressor uses atomic energy for destruction purposes.

## DEPRIVATIONS

Taking culture and society in our country, South Africa, the above is clearly seen. The oppressed people themselves are resisting their cultural deprivations. For centuries now, our people have resisted imperialism and its apartheid monster and clearly see that only with the destruction of imperialism can the obstacles to the progress of culture be removed. In the beginning these oppressors tried to eliminate these traditional values and preserve that which furthers their interests. They tried to turn art from its social and economic base through such empty slogans like, "Art for art's sake" and "Pure art" and so forth. They have tried to make art as apolitical as ever, with the US imperialists flooding the cultural scene with rotten and escapist so-called "Western Cultural Values" and the American way of life. Their films glorify rape, murder and the killing of oppressed Black Americans. Our people have stood up to all these machinations. The racists failed with their Muldergate affair to splash a coat of glamorous paint over that rotten society. Some of its paid agents in sport, drama and music have failed dismally to

hoodwink the international community.

Our oppressed masses led by the African National Congress are daily scoring victories. People's Patriotic culture is taking shape, assimilating our traditional values and international world culture, its aim being to seek the truth and, expose the enemy. It is connected with the objective reality and our people's daily life struggle. It has become more and more scientific. Our cultural fighters have grasped that culture has tendencies; it either supports the oppressor or the oppressed. In great numbers they have adopted the stand of the revolution and opposed every form of reactionary, decadent and obscurantist racist culture.

Our culture is made more and more national, scientific and popular. Folk culture has been revitalised with our songs depicting not only our suffering but a bright future.

Today a great wave against illiteracy has been initiated. Our people know that the aim of culture is to boost their morale, unity and also highlight their great achievements for the whole world to know.

## **RESTORATION OF WEALTH**

In the words of the Freedom Charter we maintain that, with the restoration of the wealth of the country to the people, we will be able to open all doors of learning and culture to the people. Our people's culture is guided by objective trends of the historical process of social development depicting their struggle and dreams of a bright future. In the words of Amilcar Cabral, we say: "In the beginning it is culture and in the end it is Culture". Like in the old days our young people are being told tales of the old days. Among those tales related are those of wars fought by our ancestors in defence of our country. Names of heroes are being praised as the glory of the entire nation.

Our Umkhonto combatants have also realised the importance of carrying out research and holding discussions on these wars of resistance. This is an important milestone on the road to the complete restoration of cultural pride and self-assertiveness. Identification with this heritage becomes a valuable factor in the moulding of committed patriots capable of performing feats.

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**THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND OF  
CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED TO ALL**