

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL WORKERS IN THE DEMOCRATISATION OF CULTURE

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The democratisation of culture and how we advance the struggle for cultural rights are crucial to the development of culture and the forging of a South African identity and nationhood. What do we mean by the term the democratisation of culture? or for that matter, What is culture? Both these concepts democratisation and culture are not easy terms to define.

The UNESCO 1976 Nairobi conference on culture understood culture as "not limited to access to works of art and the humanities, but is at one and the same time the acquisitions of knowledge, the demand for a way of life, and the need to communicate" Culture is also the sum total of society's achievements and is fundamental to the notion of human progress and as such the production, distribution, preservation and enjoyment of culture is seen as a Human Right to be enjoyed by all.

Article 27 of the United Nations declaration of Human Rights states "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" If we accept that culture is a Human right then society and in particular the state has an obligation to "ensure the constant growth of society's spiritual potential, based on the full, harmonious development of all its members and the free play of their creative faculties" (UNESCO)

But what then is the role and obligations, if any, that the artists have in ensuring that these rights are granted by the government of the day? In my view the artists cultural worker is a member of society and has the same obligations as other citizens to ensure that human rights are a corner stones of any society. Those cultural workers especially in this period of transition that we are undergoing have an important role in propagating a culture of rights. To put it in more simple terms: we must not only defend democracy by make it central to our organisational work but reflect those values in our art.

let me briefly look at some of the other recommendations contained in the 1976 UNESCO Nairobi document. This document defines cultural rights to also include the right of people, minority groups in particular to practise their own cultural and to have access to their own and the culture heritage of others. It is important that we understand the relationship between ethnicity, culture and rights because it is a central issue in the negotiation for a new constitution and as cultural organisations we need to articulate these

concepts amongst our people.

But as we know the right to practice one's culture and to have access to facilities, training and to enjoy the fruits of artistic endeavors is dependent not only on whether these rights are entrenched in a constitution but people are unable to enjoy or participate in exercising these rights. Whether they are unable to read, or have leisure time, facilities and most important of all money to participate in the cultural life of a community.

The democratisation of culture is dependent on whether society is able to remove those practices that impinge on the realization of these rights. The democratisation of culture is ultimately dependent on who wields the power in any society and to what purpose this power is used?

CULTURAL DOMINATION

In South African power lies in the hands of a small racial minority who have used it to impose a racist ideology through an elaborate network of cultural and educational institutions. White South Africans have systematically set out to deny the legitimacy of the black people's cultural practices, traditions, religion and cultural practices. The Afrikaner nationalist government went so far as to deny Black people the right to put forward an alternative vision of society. It charged the Congress leadership for treason for advocating a system of government based on the Freedom Charter.

CULTURE OF RESISTANCE

While we acknowledge that national oppression was expressed as racial and cultural domination the ruling class was never able to totally suppress the cultural practices and beliefs of black South Africans.

The Malay slaves in the Western Cape like other black people were able in the face of white religious and cultural domination to adapt and preserve their customs and religious beliefs.

The Indian indentured laborers and the indigenous Pedi, Xhosa, Zulu and other migrants workers were able to keep alive their languages and customs in the sugar and gold mining compounds. And throughout the decades, the black urban intellectuals, the artists, writers, musicians, poets and photographers have countered the ideology of baasskap, segregation and apartheid.

In the last two decades South Africa Black workers, the women and youth movements have as part of the national liberation struggle begun to give expression to their

anger, hopes and fears through their traditional songs and poetry. A rich and vibrant cultural movement began to emerge that transcended the traditional cultural boundaries between professional and amateur, between town and country between race and class and enriched the struggle against apartheid by its colourful posters, photographs, films poetry and revolutionary songs. This movement has also allowed people to appreciate that the fact that a new national cultural identity was a real possibility.

Culture in the twentieth century is closely linked to the struggle for democracy, the forging of cultural identities, and the democratisation of society's cultural resources. The extent to which society succeeds in achieving these rights will depend a great deal on the depth of the democratic tradition and the strength of the artistic movement to advance this tradition.

Cultural workers have for decades recognized that they had an important role to play in laying the foundation for a new society and it is therefore important for cultural workers to understand the changes that apartheid institutions are undergoing so that we can begin to define more clearly what it would take to democratise culture in our country.

In South Africa to-day as we move towards the establishment of democracy the task facing cultural workers is amongst others the following ;

1. Build efficiently organisation and ensure that the process included cultural workers from all sectors from discipline based and multi disciplined based urban and rural cultural formations.
2. Formulate a developmental cultural policy that will address not only the legacy of apartheid but put into place policies, institutions and democratic cultural practices so that the democratisation of culture involves our people on the grassroot level and begins to have an impact on the lives of ordinary people.
3. We have to acknowledge that while FOSACO's campaign to draw up a cultural charter, challenge apartheid cultural institutions is an excellent beginning the process of defining our rights has to go hand in hand firstly with ensuring that the alternative cultural institutions and cultural practise we have build continues to grow. Secondly we begin to seriously address the issue of training cultural coordinators who are rooted in our communities and are committed to the democratising of culture.

Drawing up of a charter, defining the role of cultural workers, advocating the idea of the democratisation of culture are goals that cultural workers have begin to grapple with, but unless these issues are take up at grassroot level the cultural movement will not have command the attention of the liberation movements and the new government of the day. Culture is and continues to enjoy very little support in the liberation movements other than a few noises here and there none of the liberation movements have presented us with a blueprint on their policy on culture.

10 August 1991 UWC workshop on the cultural charter.