

CULTURE AS PART OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE. AFRICA CENTRE1) COSAW - NAT. CULTURAL UNIT IN COSATU

2 important developments 1st yr - Mi Hlatshwayo. Quote.

This is: a) recognition of importance of culture in liberation struggle
 b) Recognition of responsibility of individual creative worker
 in struggle to voice aspirations of community.

2) THE WRITER/ARTIST'S RESPONSIBILITY.

People with creative abilities may believe their only responsibility is to personal & private impulse that makes them write or paint - i.e., to their personal inspiration.

But what is individual & personal act is in fact means by which artists enter communality of society. Their 'essential gesture' as a human being. Artists in countries such as ours become, whether intended or not, spokesmen for the oppressed.

Can you imagine, eg, any novelist of distinction writing about SA (inside or out) - no matter what theme - without that over-riding issue of Apartheid entering their book? (personal relations, work, children - even historical novels) Writers must be 'more than writers' Camus: "It is from that moment when I shall no longer be more than a writer that I shall cease to write." Artists from countries like SA must accept the demands made of them, by an over-riding situation: that they have a greater responsibility to their society, people, than to their art.

This difference - between the individual & personal act of writing or painting & the responsibility to public (readers, viewers) presents difficulties & contradictions.

3) CONTRADICTORY DEMANDS

Political forces are not only demands made of artists.

Your work is influenced by purely commercial forces, by the market. You write to be published, paint to be seen. Once work leaves confines of desk or studio, no longer 'yours'. It now belongs to publisher or gallery owner - must do; if it doesn't, it's not visible.

It becomes a product to be marketed, to find a market, & to do so you must make concessions. Painting flows (they sell); current fashions in literature. Your creative integrity is compromised. Felt like that about film of Death - interpretation in other hands, did not bring out what I wanted to say. But preferred that to it not being shown at all.

Social respons. makes othr demnds - if u are an artist i exile, u are nr writng/paintg fr yr own people (bannd) bt largely fr t developd wrld - cap, Western.

Their sophisticatd & oftn decayng culture demands ambiguity, novls mst hve full, rounded charactrs, b open to a variety o interpretations.

By contrast t rev. impulse demands strong, simple statemnts, heroes without hesitations & doubts, a freedm struggle without shadowy areas: Viz, critic on Siphon. Rev impulse wnts to ignore wht is complex & contradictory i t history & nature o events.

4) THE LINE BTWEEN ART & PROPAGANDA.

Ths, particularly visually, bt also i poetry, fiction, cn entrap artist. Line is there - tho it shifts, tho sometimes diff to judge. Prop, eg, cn b art - as i some postrs (nt all)

Bt the correct impulse, expression o t right emotion of rev. struggle doesnt necessarily make yr wk art:

Prop is a simple interpretation o reality, designd to move people to action. U hve to create an art tt moves, bt nt simplfy

~~Quote Gordimer, 147.~~

Two other points; i) Need fr excellence, fr mastery o tecniques.

Rev ardour is nt enough. Poetry one-liners, clenched fists, guns, crude drawngs - these are insults to t people thmselves to think t cretion o poetry, prose, paintgs doesnt hve to b studied & mastered. %Producg shld involve as mch struggle, sheer hard wk, discipline & skill as we dmand o t people within their orgs. Struggle o artist shld nt b an easy one.

ii) By wht right does artist speka, paint, create, on behalf o t people? Evn if u accept t responsibility o potrayng or interpretng their lives & struggles - who gives u tt right?

Askd particularly of someone like myself - as a white wmn, wht right hve u to bcome spokesperson fr blk struggle fr lib?

Answer is simple; My claim to speak comes frm my ability to do so, and more thn tt, frm t fact tt I do it. Example o Wmns bk. My claim to speak fr t humn predicament imposd by Ap is simply tt. & it is act o creation tt unites creative persn wth sufferng & resistance o people i t townshps, frm which we are physically separated.

5) ART IS ALWAYS REVOLUTIONARY.

Bt t true upsurge o culturl activity is takng place inside SA & t greatest creative wk wll come frm t heart o t struggle. It is t few blk writrs o t past - Plaatje, Dhlomo, Mofolo - who brought to life & preservd events unrecorded by white writrs & historians.

& t impetus of a new cultural consciousnessnss begn i 76 wth t revolt o t yth who knew instinctively tt art is part o t humn spirit, & if tt spirit is strivng fr freedm, thn art is revolutionary, it is on t side o t oppressd.

"It is an illusion (Read) tt truth need nt b disturbng . . Art on t othr hand is eternally disturbng, permanently revolutionry, bcos t artist akways confronts t unknown, bringg a new vision o life " they are nt there to voice receivd opinions - artists are upsetters of t establishd ordr. ~~Gordimer 147.~~

Culture is nt an 'addition' to t lib struggle, nt simply an integral part of it. It is essential to its developmnt, to understandg, to t revelation of a better future, to the identification on individuals wth humankind.

So: - importance o 'makg space' fr t cultural wkrs; being a writr or an artist doesnt absolve u frm havng to undertake wht everyone else mst do - bt u do need a certain amount o space - eg, bakng cakes.

Gordimer, 147.

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