

SOC. 42. 105. 4. (nos. 8, 9, 10)

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**PRESENCE
AFRICAIN**

**The 1st International Conference
of
Negro Writers and Artists**

(PARIS — SORBONNE — 19TH-22ND SEPTEMBER 1956)

FULL ACCOUNT

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Tél. : ODEon 57-69
C.C.P. PARIS 59.36.25

New subscription rates :

England £2
Overseas £2 5s.
U.S.A. (surface mail) \$6
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PRESENCE AFRICAINE

CULTURAL JOURNAL OF THE NEGRO WORLD

THE NEW BIMONTHLY SERIES

N^{os} 8-9-10 JUNE-NOVEMBER 1956

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the African Christianity of to-morrow, since it remains dependent on culture. But neither will anyone be able to guess what the African culture of to-morrow will be : we cannot do better than cultivate ourselves, as far as we can, so that the universal cultural patrimony ceases to be for us "alms given to the poor".

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion will be brief. Everyone can, in any event, draw his own, if we have at least succeeded in furnishing a few elements of appreciation.

In his book „History and Truth”, Professor Ricoeur writes : “...as an auditor of Christian preaching, I believe that the word can change the “heart” that is the source and centre of our preferences and of the positions we take up”. Taking note of Professor Ricoeur’s declaration, we think that, so far as it is a spirit, a properly understood and assimilated Christianity can do nothing but help the blossoming of a culture. In fact, the task which faces us, the intellectual and Christian élite of Africa, consists in discovering the true spirit of the Gospel through the cultures by which it has been conveyed, before reaching us. In our view, this is the primordial condition for “building up” a Christianity which, far from hampering us, will rather find its place in the very heart of our revolution, all the more so, since the Gospel itself, in its origins, presented itself as a Revolution.

Faithful to the biblical tradition as we would wish to be, it seems to us erroneous to make “Negroness” the foundation of Christianity, since authentic Christianity cannot suffer any foundation, except its own spirit. In consequence our ultimate task cannot be anything else except an effort at an African formulation of Christianity, which, without falsifying it, would be able to present JESUS CHRIST at the defender of the disinherited of this world, the SAVIOUR.

Thomas EKOLLO

To be published by Presence Africaine :

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE CULTURAL
REVOLUTION OF NEGRO AFRICA.

Aime Cesaire.

Culture and colonisation

For the past few days we have been greatly exercised as regards the significance of this Congress.

More particularly, we have wondered what is the common denominator of an assembly that can unite men as different as Africans of native Africa, and North Americans, as men from the West Indies and from Madagascar.

To my way of thinking the answer is obvious and may be briefly stated in the words : colonial situation.

It is a fact that most native countries live under the colonial system. Even an independent country like Haiti is, in fact, in many respects a semi-colonial country. And our American brothers themselves, thanks to racial discrimination, occupy within a great modern nation an artificial position that can only be understood within the context of a colonialism that has certainly been abolished but whose after-effects still persist down to the present day.

What does this mean? It means that in spite of our desire to maintain a note of calm in the discussions of the Congress we cannot, if we are to come to grips with the situation, avoid raising the problem that has the greatest influence upon the development of native cultures, namely, the colonial situation. In other words, whether we like it or not, we cannot pose the problem of native culture without at the same time posing the problem of colonialism, for all native cultures are to-day developing under the peculiar influence of the colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial situation.

* * *

But what, you may ask, is culture? It is desirable that this should be defined in order to dissipate certain misunderstandings and reply very precisely to certain anxieties that have been expressed by some of our enemies, and even by some of our friends.

The legitimacy of this Congress has, for example, been questioned. It has been said that if culture must be national, surely, to speak of negro-African culture is to speak of an abstraction.

Is it not obvious that the best way to avoid such difficulties is to choose our terms carefully?

I think it is very true that culture must be national. It is, however, self-evident that national cultures, however differentiated they may be, are grouped by affinities. Moreover, these great cultural relationships, these great cultural families, have a name: they are called *civilisations*. In other words, if it is an undoubted fact that there is a French national culture, an Italian, English, Spanish, German, Russian, etc., national culture, it is no less evident that all these cultures, alongside genuine differences, show a certain number of striking similarities so that, though we can speak of national cultures peculiar to each of the countries mentioned above, we can equally well speak of a European civilisation.

In the same way we can speak of a large family of African cultures which collectively deserve the name of negro-African culture and which individually reveal the different cultures proper to each country of Africa. And we know that the hazards of history have caused the domain of this civilisation, the locus of this civilisation to exceed widely the boundaries of Africa. It is in this sense, therefore, that we may say that there are, if not centres, at least fringes of this negro-African civilisation in Brazil and in the West Indies, in Haiti and the French Antilles and even in the United States.

This is not just a theory invented for the purposes of the present argument; it is one that is, in my view, implied in a sociological and scientific approach to the problem.

The French sociologist Mauss defined civilisation as "a group of sufficiently numerous and sufficiently important phenomena spread over a sufficiently large number of territories". It may be inferred from this that civilisation tends towards universality and culture towards particularism; that culture is civilisation regarded as peculiar to one people or nation, not shared by any other, and that it indelibly bears the mark of that people or nation. To describe it from the outside, one might say that it is the whole corpus of material and spiritual values created by a society in the course of its history, and by values we mean, naturally, elements as diverse as technics and political institutions, things as fundamental as language or as fleeting as fashion, the arts as well as science or religion.

If, on the other hand, one were to define it in terms of purpose, revealing its dynamism, one would say that culture is the effort of any human collectivity to endow itself with the wealth of a personality.

This is tantamount to saying that civilisation and culture define two aspects of the same thing; civilisation defining the widest outskirts of culture, its most external and most general aspects, while culture represents an internal irradiant cell that is the most unique aspect of a civilisation.

It is known that Mauss, in his efforts to find reasons for the compartmentation of the world into clearly defined "civilisation areas", found them in a profound quality that was in his view common to all the social phenomena and which he defined by the term *arbitrary element*. "All social phenomena", he declared, "are to some

extent the *work of the collective will*, and when we speak of human will, we infer a *choice* between different possibilities... It follows from this characteristic of representational collective practices that the area over which they spread, as long as humanity does not constitute a single society, is necessarily finite and relatively fixed".

Thus, all culture is specific. Specific in that it is the work of a single particular will, choosing between different possibilities.

We see where this idea leads.

To take a concrete example; it is indeed true to say that there is a feudal civilisation, a capitalist civilisation, a Socialist civilisation. But it is obvious that on the compost of the same economic pattern, life, the life passion, the *élan vital* of any people gives rise to very different cultures. This does not mean that there is no determinism running from base to superstructure. It means that the relation between base and superstructure is never simple and should never be simplified. In this respect we have the dictum of Marx himself who writes (*Das Kapital*, Vol. III, p. 841 *et seq.*)

"It is always in the immediate relations between the masters of the means of production and the direct producers that we discover the intimate secret, the hidden foundation of the whole social structure. This does not mean that the same economic basis—the same, that is, as regards the main conditions—may not by reason of innumerable distinct empirical conditions, e.g. natural and racial factors, historical influences acting from without, etc., manifest itself in an infinity of variations and graduations that may only be discovered by an analysis of the empirical circumstances concerned".

No better way could be found to say that civilisation is never so special that it does not pre-suppose, to breathe life into it, a whole constellation of ideational resources, traditions, beliefs, ways of thought, values, a whole intellectual equipment, a whole emotional complex, a fund of wisdom that precisely we call culture.

This, I submit, is what legitimises our present meeting. All who have met here are united by a double solidarity; on the one hand, a *horizontal solidarity*, that is, a solidarity created for us by the colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial situation imposed upon us from without; and on the other, a vertical solidarity, a *solidarity in time*, due to the fact that we started from an original unity, the unity of African civilisation, which has become diversified into a whole series of cultures all of which, in varying degrees, owe something to that civilisation.

We may accordingly consider this Congress from two points of view, both of them equally valid, namely, that this Congress is a return to the sources, a phenomenon characteristic of all communities in times of crisis, while, it is at the same time an assembly of men who must get to grips with the same harsh reality, hence of men fighting the same fight and sustained by the same hope.

For my part, I can see no incompatibility between the two things. On the contrary, I believe the two aspects to be complementary and that our bearing, which may seem to indicate hesi-

tation and embarrassment between the past and the future, is in fact only natural, seeing that it is inspired by the idea that the shortest way to the future is always one that involves a deep understanding of the past.

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I now come to my main theme, namely, the concrete conditions underlying the problem of native cultures at the present day.

I have said that this concrete conditioning may be briefly expressed as the colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial situation in which these cultures are developing.

The question at once arises: What influences can such conditions have upon the development of these cultures? And first of all, can a political status have cultural consequences? This is not immediately obvious. If one believes with Frobenius that culture is born of man's emotion before the cosmos and that it is no more than "παίδευμα" then there can be little or no influence of politics upon culture.

Or again, if one holds with Schubart that the essential factor is a geographical one, if one believes that "it is the spirit of the countryside that forges the soul of a people", there can be little or no influence of politics upon culture.

If, however, one believes, as common sense dictates, that civilisation is first and foremost a social phenomenon and the result of social facts and social forces, then the idea that politics can influence culture becomes crystal clear.

This influence of politics upon culture is expressly recognised by Hegel in the *Lessons from the philosophy of history* when he writes this innocent little phrase which Lenin, however, must have considered less innocent than it appears as he quoted it and underlined it twice in the *Philosophical Notebooks*:

"The importance of nature should be neither over- nor underestimated; certainly the gentle sky of Ionia greatly contributed to the grace of the poems of Homer. Nevertheless, it cannot in isolation produce Homers. *Nor does it always produce them. No bard arises under Turkish domination*".

This can mean only one thing, namely, that a political and social system that suppresses the self-determination of a people thereby kills the creative power of that people.

Or, what amounts to the same thing, wherever colonialism has existed, whole peoples have been deprived of their culture, deprived of all culture.

It is in this sense that the historic meeting in Bandung may be said to have been not only a major political event; it was also a cultural event of the first magnitude in that it was the peaceful rising of peoples athirst not only for justice and human dignity but for what colonialism had chiefly denied them, namely, justice.

The mechanism of the death of culture and of civilisations under the colonial system is beginning to be well known. In order

to flourish, a culture must have a framework, a structure. Nothing can be surer than that the elements that buttress the cultural life of a colonised people disappear or become debased as a result of the colonial system. I am referring naturally in the first place to political organisation. For it must not be forgotten that the political organisation freely evolved by a people is a significant factor in the culture of that people and, moreover, conditions that particular culture.

Furthermore, there is the question of language. Language has been called "psychology petrified". The native language, the language learnt at school, the language of ideas, once it ceases to be the official and administrative language suffers a loss of status that hinders its development and sometimes threatens its very existence.

We must fully grasp this idea. When the English destroy the state organisation of the Ashantis in the Gold Coast, they deal a blow to Ashanti culture.

When the French refuse to recognise as official languages Arabic in Algeria or Malgache in Madagascar, thus preventing them from achieving their full potentiality in the modern world, they deal a blow to Arab culture and Madagascan culture.

Limitation of the colonised civilisation, suppression or debasement of all that it rests on, how in these conditions can we feel surprised at the suppression of one of the characteristics of all live civilisations, namely the faculty of self-renewal?

It is, we know, a commonplace in Europe to disparage nationalist movements in the colonial countries by representing them as obscurantist forces priding themselves on reviving mediæval ways of life and thought. This, however, is to forget that the power to *leave behind the past* is one that belongs to a live civilisation, and that a civilisation is alive when the society in which it finds expression is free. What is happening at present in Africa or in free Asia is, in my view, highly significant in this respect. I shall confine myself to remarking that it is Free Tunisia that has abolished the religious tribunals, not colonial Tunisia, and that it is Free Tunisia that has nationalised Habu properties and abolished polygamy and not the Tunisia of the colonists; that it was the India of the English that maintained the traditional status of the Indian woman, but an India freed from British tutelage that gave the Indian woman equal rights with man.

Let us not delude ourselves! Limited in its action, its dynamism hampered, the civilisation of the colonised society from the first day enters the twilight that is the precursor of the end.

Spengler, in his *Decline of the West*, quotes these lines from Goethe:

"Thus thou must be, no man his face can change.
So saith Apollo, thus the prophet spake
Develop in life the form graven in thee
That neither time, nor king, nor law can break".

The great reproach we may justly level at Europe is that she broke the upsurge of civilisations that had not yet reached full flowering, that she did not permit them to develop and achieve the full richness of the forms graven in them.

It would be superfluous to detail the process by which the death of this whole was accomplished. Suffice it to say that it was stricken at its base. At its base, and thus irretrievably.

We recall the pattern worked out by Marx in respect of the societies of India, namely, small communities that break up because the foreign admixture disrupts their economic pattern. This is only too true. And not only for India. Wherever European colonisation has occurred, the introduction of an economy based on money has led to the destruction or weakening of traditional links, the break-up of the social and economic structure of the community as well as the disintegration of the family. When a member of a colonised people makes this kind of remark, European intellectuals tend to reproach him with ingratitude and to remind him complacently of what the world owes to Europe. In France, one can still remember the impressive picture painted by M. Caillois and M. Béguin, the former in a series of articles entitled "*Reversed Illusions*", the latter in his preface to M. Pannikar's book on Asia. Science, history, sociology, ethnography, morals, technics, all are brought in. And what importance, these writers ask, can be attached to a few acts of violence, that were in any case unavoidable, as compared with such a long list of benefits? There is certainly much that is true in this picture. But neither of these gentlemen can persuade world opinion that the great revolution brought about by Europe in the history of humanity is either the introduction of a system based upon respect for human dignity, in spite of all their efforts to make us think so, or the invention of intellectual integrity; this revolution turned upon very different considerations that it would be disloyal not to face, namely, that Europe was the first to have invented and to have introduced everywhere under her sway a social and economic system founded on money and to have mercilessly destroyed everything—I repeat, everything, culture, philosophy, religions,—everything that might prevent or slow down the enrichment of a group of privileged men and peoples. I am well aware that for some time it has been claimed that the evils caused by Europe are not irreparable. It is said that by taking certain precautions, the devastating effects of colonisation could be mitigated. Unesco has been considering the problem and lately (*Unesco Courier*, February 1956), Dr. Luther Evans, the Director General, stated that "in certain conditions technical progress could be introduced into a culture in such a way as to harmonise with it". While a well known ethnographer, Dr. Margaret Mead, declared that if we bear in mind that "every culture forms a logical and coherent whole" and that "the slightest modification of any single element of a culture brings in its train changes in other respects", it should be possible by taking the necessary precautions "to intro-

duce into certain cultures, basic education, new agricultural and industrial methods, new rules of hospital administration, etc., with a minimum of dislocation, or, at least, to make use of the inevitable dislocation for constructive ends".

All this is certainly steeped in good intentions. One must, however, resign oneself to the facts. This is not a case where there might be said to be a bad king of colonisation destroying native civilisations and attacking the "moral health of the colonised people", and another good kind of colonisation, an enlightened colonisation backed by ethnography, which could integrate the cultural elements of the coloniser within the corpus of the native civilisations harmoniously and without risk of the "moral health of the colonised peoples". One must resign oneself to the facts: the tenses of colonisation are never conjugated with the verds of the idyllic.

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We have seen that all colonisation leads in the longer or shorter run to the death of the civilisation of the conquered society. But can it be said, if the native civilisation dies, that the coloniser replaces it with another type of civilisation that is superior to the native kind, that is, by the conqueror's own civilisation?

This illusion, to parody a fashionable expression, I propose to call the Deschamps Illusion, after Governor Deschamps who, at the opening of this Congress yesterday morning, pathetically recalled that Gaul had once been colonised by the Romans, adding that the Gauls had not retained too unhappy memories of that colonisation. The Deschamps Illusion is, moreover, as old as Roman colonisation itself and might just as well be called the Rutilius Namatianus Illusion, as I find among Governor Deschamps' ancestors a man who was not Governor but Palace Chamberlain, which is not indeed without some analogy, who in the 5th century A.D. expressed in Latin verse a thought rather similar to that expressed by Monsieur Deschamps yesterday morning in French prose. Naturally such a comparison raises certain problems. One may in particular wonder if the comparison is valid for such widely differing historical situations; if, for example, one can compare, on the grounds of colonisation, a pre-capitalist colonisation with a capitalist colonisation. Nor does this absolve us from wondering incidentally whether the position of Governor, or Palace Chamberlain, is one that best qualifies a man to pass impartial judgment on colonialism. However that may be, let us hear what Rutilius Namatianus has to say:

"Fecisti patriam diversis gentibus unam;
Profuit injustis te dominante capi
Dumque offers victis proprii consortia juris
Urbem fecisti quod orbis erat".

We may note in passing that no poet has ever yet been inspired by the modern colonial system; never has one hym of gratitude re-

sounded in the ears of modern colonialists. And that in itself is a sufficient condemnation of the colonial system... But no matter. Let us come to the heart of the illusion, namely, that just as in Gaul a Latin culture was substituted for a native culture, so there will occur throughout the world off-shoots of French, English or Spanish civilisations as a result of colonisation. But this, I repeat, is an illusion.

Moreover, the spread of this misunderstanding is not always unconscious or disinterested. In this respect we shall confine ourselves to recalling that in 1930, when a politician like Monsieur Doumer interrupted the historian Berr or the ethnographer Mauss at a meeting of philosophers and historians to define the word civilisation, it was to point out to them the political dangers of their cultural relativism and to insist that the idea that France had a mission to spread "civilisation"—by which he meant French civilisation—to her colonies must not be upset. An illusion, I say, for we must be quite convinced of the opposite, namely, that no colonising country can give its civilisation to any colonised country, that there is not, there has never been and there never will be scattered throughout the world, as was thought in the early days of colonisation, a "New France", a "New England, or a "New Spain". This is worth emphasising: a civilisation is a co-ordinated group of social functions. There are technical functions, intellectual functions, and functions of organisation and coordination.

To say that the coloniser substitutes his civilisation for the native civilisation could mean only one thing, namely, that the colonising nation ensures to the colonised, that is to the natives in their own country, the fullest mastery over these different functions.

What, however, does the history of colonisation teach us in this respect? That techniques in colonial countries always develop alongside the native society without the colonised ever being given the chance to master them. (The great misfortune of technical education in all colonial countries is the attempt by the colonists to bar the way to technical qualifications for native workmen; the attempt that finds its most odious and most radical expression in South Africa is, in this respect, highly significant.) That as regards intellectual functions there is no colonial country of which the main characteristic is not illiteracy and the low level of public education. That in all colonies, as regards the functions of organisation and coordination, the political power belongs to the colonial authorities and is directly exercised by the governor or resident-general, or is at least controlled by him.

(This, incidentally, explains the vanity and hypocrisy of all colonial policies based upon integration or assimilation—policies clearly recognised by the native peoples for the snares and booby-traps they are.)

You see the extent of the requirements. I shall sum them up by saying that, for the coloniser, exporting his civilisation to the colonial country would mean nothing less than a deliberate attempt

to establish native capitalism, a native capitalist society in the image of and also as a competitor of metropolitan capitalism.

One has only to glance at the facts to realize that nowhere has metropolitan capitalism given birth to native capitalism. Moreover if a native capitalism has not arisen in any colonial country (I do not mean the capitalism of the colonists themselves that is directly connected with metropolitan capitalism), the reasons must not be sought in the laziness of the natives but in the very nature and logic of colonial capitalism.

Malinowski, who is certainly open to criticism from other angles, once had the merit of drawing attention to the phenomenon that he called the "selective gift".

"The whole conception of European culture as a cornucopia from which all blessings flow freely is fallacious. There is no need to be a specialist in anthropology to see that the "European gift" is always highly selective. We never give, and we never shall give native people living under our domination—as it would be complete madness from the point of view of political realism to do so—the four following elements of our culture:

1. — The instruments of physical power—firearms, bombers, etc. or anything that makes defence effective or aggression possible.

2. — Our instruments of political mastery. Sovereignty always remains the prerogative of the "British Crown", or the "Belgian Crown" or the French Republic. Even when we practice indirect rule such rule is always exercised under our control.

3. — We do not share the main part of our wealth and our economic advantages with the natives. The metal that comes from the African gold and copper mines never flows along African channels, apart from wages that are in any case always inadequate. Even under a system of indirect economic exploitation such as we practice in Western Africa or in Uganda when we leave a proportion of the profit to the natives, the entire control of economic organisation always remains in the hands of the western enterprise.

Nowhere is full political equality granted. Nor full social equality. Nor even full religious equality. In fact, when we consider all the points just mentioned, it is easy to see that there is no question of "giving", nor of offering "generously", but rather of "taking". We have taken from the Africans their lands and, generally speaking, it is the most fertile lands we have taken. We have bereft tribes of their sovereignty and of the right to make war. We oblige the natives to pay taxes but they do not control, or at least never entirely, the administration of these funds. Finally, the work they do is never voluntary except in name".

(*Introductory essay on the anthropology of changing African cultures*, 1938).

Several years later Malinowski drew the following conclusions in *The dynamics of culture*:

"It is the selective gift which, of all the elements of the colonial situation, has perhaps the greatest influence on the process of cul-

tural exchange. What the Europeans refrain from giving is both significant and clearly determined. It is a refusal which tends to nothing less than a withdrawal from the process of cultural contact of all the economic, political and juridical benefits of the superior culture. If power, wealth, and social advantages were given to the natives the cultural change-over would be relatively easy. It is the absence of these factors, our "selective gift", that renders the cultural change so difficult and so complicated".

As we see, there is never any question of the gift being offered in its entirety, hence if there is never any question of a civilisation being offered to others, there can be no question of a transfer of civilisation. Toynbee in *The World and the West* propounds a most ingenious theory of the psychology of the impact of civilisation. He explains that when the ray of civilisation strikes a foreign body "the resistance of the foreign body refracts the cultural ray by decomposing it in the same way as the prism decomposes light rays to produce the colours of the spectrum". He holds that it is, moreover, the resistance of the foreign social body that impedes the total diffusion of one culture in another, causing a kind of purely physical selection by which only the least important and most harmful elements are retained.

The truth is very different; Malinowski is right and Toynbee wrong. The selection of cultural elements offered to the colonised is not the result of a physical law. It is the result of a political decision, the result of a policy deliberately chosen by the colonist, a policy that may be summed up as the import-export of capitalism itself, by which I mean its foundations, its virtues and its power.

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But, it may be said, there is still another possibility, namely, the elaboration of a new civilisation, a civilisation that will owe something both to Europe and to the native civilisation. If we discard the two solutions represented, on the one hand, by the preservation of the native civilisation and, on the other, by the export overseas of the colonists' civilisation, might it not be possible to conceive of a process that would elaborate a new civilisation owing full allegiance to neither of its component parts?

This is an illusion cherished by many Europeans who imagine they are witnessing in countries of British or French colonisation the birth of an Anglo- or Franco-African or an Anglo- or Franco-Asiatic civilisation.

In support of it they rely on the notion that all civilisations live by borrowing, and infer that when two different civilisations have been brought into contact through colonisation, the native civilisation will borrow cultural elements from the colonists' civilisation and that from this marriage will spring a new civilisation, a mixed civilisation.

The error inherent in such a theory is that it reposes on the

illusion that colonisation is a contact with civilisation like any other and that all borrowings are equally good.

The truth is quite otherwise and the borrowing is only valid when it is counter-balanced by an interior state of mind that *calls* for it and integrates it within the body which then assimilates it so that both become one—what was external becoming internal. Hegel's view applies here. When a society borrows, it takes possession. It acts, it does not suffer action. "In taking possession of the object, the mechanical process becomes an interior process by which the individual *takes possession* of the object in such a way as to strip it of its separate identity, transform it into a means and impart to it the substance of his own personality". (Hegel, *Logic* Vol. II, p. 482).

Colonisation is a different case. Here there is no borrowing arising out of need, no cultural elements being spontaneously integrated within the subject's world. And Malinowski and his school are right to insist that the process of cultural contact must be regarded mainly as a continuous process of interaction between groups having different cultures.

What does this mean if not that the colonial situation, that sets the colonist and the colonised in opposing camps, is in the last resort the determining element?

And what is the result?

The result of this lack of integration by the dialectic of need is the existence in all colonial countries of what can only be termed a cultural mosaic. By this I mean that in all colonial countries the cultural features are juxtaposed but not harmonised.

What, however, is civilisation if not a harmony and an integration? It is because culture is not just a simple juxtaposition of cultural features that there cannot be a mixed culture. I do not mean that people who are biologically of mixed blood cannot found a civilisation. I mean that the civilisation they found will be a civilisation only if it is not mixed. It is for this reason too that one of the characteristics of culture is its style, that mark peculiar to a people and a period and which is to be found in all fields in which the activity of a people is manifested at a given period. I feel that Nietzsche's remarks in this respect are worth considering; "Culture is above all a unity of artistic style in all the vital manifestations of a people. To know many things and to have learnt much are neither an essential step towards culture nor a sign of culture and could indeed go hand in hand with the opposite of culture, namely, barbarism, *which implies a lack of style or a chaotic mixture of all styles*".

No truer description could be given of the cultural situation common to all colonised countries. In every colonised country we note that the harmonious synthesis of the old native culture has been destroyed and has been replaced by a heterogeneous mixture of features taken from different cultures, jostling one another but

not harmonising. This is not necessarily barbarism through lack of culture. *It is barbarism through cultural anarchy.*

You may be startled by the word barbarism. But this would be to forget that the great creative periods have always been periods of great psychological unity, periods of *communion*, and that culture does not live intensely or develop except in the presence of a system of common values. Where, on the other hand, society is in dissolution, forms splinter groups and is criss-crossed by a medley of values that are not recognised by the community as a whole, there is room only for a debased style and, in the last resort, for sterility. A further objection is that any culture, no matter how great, or rather the greater it is, is a mixture of extremely heterogeneous elements. We recall the case of Greek culture, consisting of Greek elements to which were added Cretan, Egyptian and Asiatic elements. We may even go further and state that in the realm of culture the composite is the rule and the uniform the harlequin's dress. This is a view of which the American anthropologist Kroeber has become the interpreter (*Anthropology*, New York, 1948) :

"It is", he writes, "as though a rabbit could be grafted with the digestive organs of a sheep, the respiratory gills of a fish, the claws and teeth of a cat, a few tentacles of an octopus, a further assortment of foreign organs borrowed from other representatives of the animal kingdom, and could not only survive but reproduce itself and prosper. Organically, this is obviously an impossibility, but in the realm of culture it is a very close approximation to what actually takes place".

It is no doubt true that the rule here is heterogeneity. We must, however beware; this heterogeneity is not lived as such. In a live civilisation this heterogeneity is lived internally as homogeneity. Analysis may reveal the heterogeneity, but the elements however heterogeneous are lived in the consciousness of the community as *theirs* in the same way as the most typically native elements. The civilisation does not feel the foreign body, for it is no longer foreign. Scientists may prove the foreign origin of a word or a technique, nevertheless the community feels that the word or the technique is its own. A process of naturalisation, ascribable to the dialectic of *having*, has taken place. Foreign elements have become mine, have passed into my being because I can dispose of them, because I can organise them within my universe, because I can bend them to my uses; because they are at my disposal, not I at theirs. It is precisely the operation of this dialectic that is denied to the colonised people. Foreign elements are dumped on its soil, but remain foreign. White man's things! White man's manners! Things existing alongside the native but over which the native has no power.

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But, it may be asked, once the original unity is broken, is it not possible that the colonised people can reconstitute it and integrate

its new experiences, hence its new wealth, with the framework of a new unity, a unity that will not, of course, be the old unity, but a unity nevertheless?

Agreed. But is must be realized that such a solution is impossible under the colonial system because such a mingling, such a commingling, cannot be expected from a people unless that people retains the *historic initiative*, in other terms, unless that people is free. Which is incompatible with colonialism.

Referring back to the previous statement on the dialectic of need, Japan has been able to commingle the traditional elements with those borrowed from Europe and melt them down into a new culture that nevertheless remains Japanese. Japan, however, is free and acknowledges no law but that of her own needs. It should, moreover, be added that such a commingling postulates a psychological condition, namely, historic boldness, self-confidence. This however, is precisely what the coloniser has endeavoured, right from the start, in one thousand and one ways to take away from the colonised.

And here it must be clearly understood that the famous inferiority complex that they are pleased to find in the colonised is not just a matter of chance. It has been deliberately created by the coloniser.

Colonisation is a phenomenon that, among other disastrous psychological consequences, involves the following : it raises doubts regarding the concepts on which the colonised could build or rebuild their world. To quote Nietzsche : "Just as earthquakes devastate and ravage towns so that men build their dwellings on volcanic soil with misgivings, so life itself collapses, grows weaker, loses courage when then overthrow of his beliefs robs man of the basis of his security, his peace of mind, his faith in what is enduring and eternal".

This lack of courage to live, this vacillation of the will to live, is a phenomenon often remarked among colonial peoples, the best-known case being that of the people of Tahiti, analysed by Victor Segalen in "*Les Immémoriaux*".

Thus the cultural position in colonial countries is tragic. Whenever colonisation occurs, native culture begins to wither. And among the ruins there springs up, not a culture, but a kind of sub-culture, a sub-culture that, because it is condemned to remain marginal as regards the European culture and to be the province of a small group, an "élite", living in artificial conditions and deprived of life-giving contact with the masses and with popular culture, is thus prevented from blossoming into a true culture.

The result is the creation of vast stretches of cultural wastelands or, what amounts to the same thing, of cultural perversion or cultural by-products.

This is the situation which we black men of culture must have the courage to face squarely.

The question then arises : in such a situation, what ought we, what can we, do? Clearly our responsibilities are grave. What can

we do? The problem is often summarised as a choice to be made. A choice between native tradition and European civilisation. Either to reject native civilisation as puerile, inadequate, outdated by history, or else, in order to preserve our native cultural heritage, to barricade ourselves against European civilisation and reject it.

In other terms, we are called upon to choose: "Choose between fidelity and backwardness, or progress and renunciation".

What is our reply?

Our reply is that things are not as simple as they seem and that the choice offered is not a valid one. Life (I say life and not abstract thought) does not recognise, does not accept these alternatives. Or rather if these alternatives are offered, life itself will transcend them.

We say that the question does not arise in native society alone, that in every society there is always a state of equilibrium between old and new, that it is always precarious, that is it in a constant state of readjustment and that it has in practice to be rediscovered by every generation.

Our societies, our civilisations, our native cultures are not exempt from this law.

For our part, and as regards our particular societies, we believe that in the African culture yet to be born, or in the para-African culture yet to be born, there will be many new elements, modern elements, elements, let us face it, borrowed from Europe. But we also believe that many traditional elements will persist in these cultures. We refuse to yield to the temptation of the *tabula rasa*. I refuse to believe that the future African culture can totally and brutally reject the former African culture. To illustrate what I have just said, let me use a parable. Anthropologists have often described what one of them proposes to call cultural fatigue. The example they quote deserves to be recalled as it is profoundly symbolic. The story, which takes place in the Hawaiian Islands, is as follows: A few years after the discovery of these islands by Captain James Cook, the king died and was succeeded by a young man, Prince Kamehamela II. On being converted to European ideas the young prince decided to abolish the ancestral religion. It was agreed between the new king and the high priest that a great festival should be organised and that during the festival the taboo should be solemnly broken and the ancestral gods repudiated. On the appointed day, at a sign from the king, the high priest hurled himself upon the statues of the god, trampled them underfoot and broke them, while a great cry went up: "The taboo is broken!" Naturally, some years later the people of Hawaii welcomed the Christian missionaries with open arms. The rest of the story is well known, it has passed into history. This is the simplest and clearest example we know of a cultural subversion preparing the way for the enslavement of a people. And I ask, is this renunciation of its past and its culture by a people, is this what is expected of us?

I say distinctly, there will be no Kamehamela II among us!
I believe that the civilisation that has given negro sculpture

to the world of art; that the civilisation that has given to the political and social world the original communal institutions such as village democracy, or fraternal age-groups, or family property, which is a negation of capitalism, or so many institutions bearing the imprint of the spirit of solidarity; that this civilisation that, on another plane, has given to the moral world an original philosophy based on respect for life and integration within the cosmos; I refuse to believe that this civilisation, imperfect though it may be, must be annihilated or denied as a pre-condition of the renaissance of the native peoples.

I believe that, once the external obstacles have been overcome, our particular cultures contain within them enough strength, enough vitality, enough regenerative powers to adapt themselves to the conditions of the modern world and that they will prove able to provide for all political, social, economic or cultural problems, valid and original solutions, that will be *valid because they are original*.

In the culture that is yet to be born, there will be without any doubt both old and new. Which new elements? Which old? Here alone our ignorance begins. And in truth it is not for the individual to reply. Only the community can give the answer. We may, however, affirm here and now that *it will be given* and not verbally but by facts and by action.

And this is what finally enables us to define our role as black men of culture. Our role is not to prepare *a priori* the plan of future native culture, to predict which elements will be integrated and which rejected. Our role, an infinitely more humble one, is to proclaim the coming and prepare the way for those who hold the answer—the people, our peoples, freed from their shackles, our peoples with their creative genius finally freed from all that impedes them and renders them sterile.

To-day we are in a cultural chaos. Our part is to say: "Free the demiurge that alone can organise this chaos into a new synthesis, a synthesis that will deserve the name of culture, a synthesis that will be a reconciliation and an overstepping of both old and new". We are here to ask, nay to demand: "Let the peoples speak! Let the black peoples take their place upon the great stage of history!"

Aimé CESAIRE