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Ethno-development and Ethnocide in Africa

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Extracts from a Study on
Ethno-development and Ethnocide in Africa

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PART TWO

TOWARDS AN ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A certain number of proposals must be made in seeking solutions to the problem of ethno-development. Those we set out here cannot pretend to solve the whole range of extremely complex problems involved; they are, however, designed to contribute to a broad process of reflection which calls for further studies and discussions.

We shall consider first of all ethno-development as a means of countering ethnocide, followed by a study of its real impact in this struggle.

SECTION I - ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT AS A MEANS OF COUNTERING ETHNOCIDE

We shall examine two fundamental aspects:

the basic principles of ethno-development;

the methods of putting an ethno-development policy into practice.

1. Basic principles of ethno-development

If we adopt the definition of ethno-development proposed by those responsible for this project, to the effect that it is a means of countering ethnocide by enabling ethnic, minority and/or exploited groups to revive the fundamental values of their specific culture with a view to strengthening their ability to resist exploitation and oppression and in particular, their independent decision-making power through the more effective control of the political, economic, social and cultural processes affecting their development, then we can safely affirm that the golden rule by which any ethno-development policy ought to abide, should be to ensure that all citizens of African countries, irrespective of their ethnic origin, enjoy the fundamental freedom to live their distinctive cultural lives. This is what we may term the principle of cultural democracy and the right to be different.

Two general approaches may guide this policy:

to begin with, suitable procedures should be devised for determining the part assigned to culture in the vast undertaking aimed at ensuring the overall development of peoples;

secondly, consideration should be given to the establishment of original cultural spaces in the light of our knowledge of the cultural heritage in question and the need to protect it; this is the essential foundation for a creative process free from the shackles of centralizing and standardizing ideology.

These proposals show that a political and a cultural identity are essential to the young African nations.

Many observers are of the opinion that the future of the black continent is more closely linked to that of its culture than to its economy.

Great importance was attached to cultural demands as far back as the 1940-1960 period, the time of nationalist struggles which preceded the achievement of independence. Organizations such as 'Présence Africaine',* founded in 1947, played a decisive part in the growth of political awareness among African peoples, simply by instilling into the élite a profound feeling that the substance of political identity is cultural identity.

It can, then, be said that cultural awareness and the assertion of cultural differences were, at that time, the primary concern of African intellectuals.

It was during this same period that artistic circles were established, followed by analysis and research groups organized by students or by young African executives. The International Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, the 1st and 2nd Congress of Black Writers and Artists convened in Paris and then Rome, the Pan-African Cultural Festival organized in July-August 1969 in Algiers by the Member States of the OAU were all forums where Western culture was seriously called into question and African culture received rousing acclaim.

Over and above this assertion of cultural identity throughout Africa vis-à-vis imported cultural values, there is another vital task incumbent upon the young African states for they must determine the cultural spheres in which minority groups can find their place. It is within this context that the importance of ethno-development, which can be achieved only if certain methods are respected, is to be measured.

2. Methods of putting an ethno-development policy into practice

The methods of putting an ethno-development policy into practice should include a number of elements, of which the following three are essential:

- (a) the assignment of priority objectives designed to ensure effective conditions for the expression, promotion and recognition of specific cultural identities, rather than the fostering of a common culture;
- (b) an inventory, in respect of each cultural space, of potentialities and achievements in order to assess its creative force and thus be in a position to ensure its development;
- (c) the adoption of measures to ensure that the possibilities of each cultural space are co-ordinated with the overall development endeavour of the country concerned.

One should bear in mind, needless to say, that the state is the major instrument in the promotion of ethno-development policies. Indeed, it has a duty not only to recognize but also to safeguard the cultural diversity of the peoples it governs, as well as their specific customs and life-styles.

This means that African states must reject the spiritless logic of distrust of cultural minorities which are often regarded as dangerous counter-forces to the central government's policy of standardization.

* This can also be said of the Society of African Culture which is one of the offshoots of 'Présence Africaine'.

In accordance with our previous remarks, the state should take stock of the major elements that give expression to the cultural minorities' life-styles. This calls for the urgent holding of cultural assemblies at a regional level in every African country.

These should be followed by the organization of 'States general' of culture at a national level in the countries in question.

Finally, given the regional dimension of many cultures shared by transnational ethnic groups, these measures could be complemented by one or more African meetings of regional cultures.

It will be clearly seen that the region is considered here as the geographical foundation on which ethno-development policies are built. Indeed, the region is, for us, the fundamental unit and expression of the notion of cultural space already mentioned. Thus, the cultural assemblies referred to above would be mainly concerned with regional cultures and their field of inquiry could be established on the basis of thematic subdivisions corresponding to different cultural activities (the term culture understood here in its broad sense, covering music, art, specific forms of economic activity etc.).

Nevertheless, although this may be the easiest solution to put into practice, there is a danger that it may lead to a catalogue of demands of a sectoral or even professional kind. For this reason, we consider that the following themes provide a more realistic and effective basis for consideration:

the elements that go to make up the cultural identity of a region and the cultural minorities involved;

cultural facilities which already exist or are to be set up in the region with a view to promoting the specific features of the cultural space referred to. Audio-visual techniques could play an important part in regions equipped with television services;

culture and the regional economic and social development strategy;

different spheres of cultural communication: intraregional, interregional and international.

It is, again, because we place great hopes in the region as a basis for the effective implementation of an ethno-development policy that we advocate the creation of a cultural council in each region. Councils of this kind would make it possible to:

satisfy a crucial need for co-operation between decision-makers and the most active members of the cultural minorities who are directly concerned with their future development and, hence, with the control of political, economic, social and cultural processes on which this process depends;

introduce a broadly-based democratic debate into development policy.

As advisory bodies, these regional councils could perform at least three tasks annually:

preparation of a detailed report on the state of culture in the region;

drawing up of an annual report on the major lines of emphasis of cultural development policy in the region;

submission of its views concerning major projects which the central government has decided to carry out in each sector of regional development activities.

It is clear from our previous remarks that ethno-development provides a positive way forward in solving the problem of ethnocide, but the fact that there is a close link between 'ethno-development' and 'overall development' in Africa must be taken into account.

We should, then, assess the impact of ethno-development in the struggle against ethnocide in the light of certain economic considerations.

SECTION II- THE REAL IMPACT OF ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ETHNOCIDE

Although we can say that ethno-development is one of the means--not the essential means--of countering ethnocide, it is also true that its effectiveness depends on the redefining of 'overall development' on the basis of new factors.

We shall focus on two main points:

obstacles to ethno-development policies due to the classification conception of overall development;

the need for a new approach to 'development' in the light of new factors.

1. The effectiveness of ethno-development jeopardized by the classical conception of 'development'

Through study of some elements of the classical conception of development we can identify the obstacles in the way of the effective application of an ethno-development policy.

Taking as its reference the way in which the international economic system functioned, classical theory linked a liberal foreign trade policy with the level of economic growth during the corresponding period, establishing correlation curves. This theory was, in fact, applied only in the developed countries, namely Europe and North America, and disregarded in the rest of the world. However, the degree of complexity of modern economies was to lead to a dynamic movement of trade expansion, particularly in the light of specialization in the industrial field, technological exchanges, price differentials within each industrial sector, problems relative to market outlets etc.

As a result of all these complex developments, trade relations expanded with consequences of a political, economic and cultural nature. Industrialization disrupted local stability on a nationwide basis and ushered in 'production for production's sake'. This attitude to production gave rise more especially to certain consumption models and forms of development running counter to consumption and development patterns in African and other Third World countries.

We can see, therefore, that African economies have been drawn into various international trade systems for historical reasons linked with the colonial systems and its after-effects. Consequently, these countries find themselves in a relationship of dependence and domination.

From the standpoint of both types of production and consumption the economies of the African countries have been modelled upon the Western pattern. This brings us to the fundamental question concerning the introduction of an original type of development geared to the real needs of African countries, given the stage of their economic development.

Moreover, it should be borne in mind that this pattern of economic imitation is established essentially within the framework of international capitalism.

Present efforts in many Third World countries in general, and Africa in particular, are directed towards finding ways and means of avoiding situations of dependency and domination.

In this respect, the theory of the new international economic order is grounded in the need to seek new development models and to challenge the system of dependency.

From the point of view of overall development, the aim is that African countries should achieve a self-sustained economy and collective self-reliance.

It is, in fact, within this very framework of overall development that an ethno-development policy can prove itself to be effective, for such a policy calls for a new dimension in development--a cultural dimension which cannot be achieved unless accompanied by a new dimension of an economic kind.

Authentic cultural independence cannot exist in the absence of genuine economic independence.

2. The need to redefine development in the light of new factors

The redefining of the concept of development is seen to be a vital aim which the international community must ultimately achieve. There are, indeed, many economic, cultural and political factors that call for a transformation in relationships between peoples.

And so, going beyond the exclusively economic view of development, we have come to realize the importance of the cultural dimension of this concept. In the case of human rights, for example, African states denounce the fact that these rights, as formulated under the influence of a Western philosophy, are ill-adapted to the economic and social conditions arising from underdevelopment and, what is more, are incompatible with the cultural identities of African countries, particularly those of Islamic obedience.

In this respect, it is clear that the notion of human rights, which itself has two aspects, must also be redefined.*

To begin with, an order of priorities is established which favours self-determination at the expense of human rights properly speaking, and promotes economic and social rights at the expense of individual freedoms.

Moreover, new rights must be incorporated in human rights, which implies the broadening of the scope of this concept. Third generation rights and, in particular, the right of mankind's common heritage and the right to development should therefore be added to the definition of individual freedoms and social rights.

* Cf. Hubert Thierry. Paper presented on 11 March 1980 on the occasion of the one-day seminar of the Société Française de Droit International.

It is, in fact, within the context of this right to development, whose principles should be in keeping with the political, economic and cultural realities of every African state, that an ethno-development policy will be really effective in the struggle against ethnocide.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Throughout our study of ethnocide and ethno-development we have sought to put forward a number of considerations which are, perhaps, less conclusive than we might have hoped.

Nevertheless, the main concern of this study is to draw attention to some of the problems encountered in studying the question of ethnocide and the means of putting an end to it.

It therefore seems to us that any imbalance between the first and second part of our study is justified by the fact that we have been concerned more with the causes of ethnocide than with the means of fighting against this phenomenon. This is all the more true since our intention was not to propose a remedy for this ill, but to make our contribution to a vast process of reflection.

For this reason, Part Two, which deals with ethno-development policy as a means of countering ethnocide has sought only to indicate main lines of research which need to be complemented by further studies.

We have seen, then, the overall development of African societies must proceed by way of an effective and constructive ethno-development policy. Indeed, it must be constantly borne in mind that economic growth adapted to the needs of those involved must necessarily be subordinated to cultural considerations if what is termed 'mal-development' is to be averted. Culture must be recognized as a source of development and of progress.

To eradicate the poverty and exploitation of African societies, it is not sufficient to attack economic problems. Sociological and, hence, cultural problems have an equally important place.