

# Colonialism, Culture, and Revolution

Mario de Andrade

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Mario de Andrade, renowned Angolan intellectual, in response to the requests of **Tricontinental**, has expressed his point of view regarding the cultural complex of problems of the Portuguese colonies, especially those of his native land, Angola.

Born in 1928 in Golungo Alto, Andrade is an outstanding figure of a generation that has been assigned the task of breaking the cultural yoke of the colonizer and of returning to the sources of the autochthonous civilization in order to improve it qualitatively in the battle against those who try to deny it. From this generation, which has transformed cultural redemption into political redemption, have emerged men such as Amilcar Cabral and Agostinho Neto, the foremost leaders of the revolutionary movements of their peoples against Portuguese colonialism. Andrade himself, who is a member of MPLA, is Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP).

The exposition by Mario de Andrade is a valuable account of colonial penetration in Angola that goes from the first Portuguese invasions to the present time, in which the rejection of Portuguese culture has reached its highest expression with the outbreak and development of the revolutionary armed struggle.

What was the impact of colonialization on the socioeconomic structure of Angola? What problems does culture face in a colonialized country?

Colonialization is a phenomenon of total domination in the political, socioeconomic, and cultural spheres. It is a system which, of necessity, must be destroyed by radical violence. When Portuguese navigators reached the coasts of that region of Africa today known as Angola, its socioeconomic and political structures were already developed to a considerable degree. The Kongo state, with which the Portuguese monarchy maintained diplomatic relations, was, in this respect, an important political reality.

However, the Portuguese were the active agents of historical reaction and of the social destruction of the indigenous communities in this part of Equatorial Africa. Plunder for the sake of commerce, defended by the missionaries in the Kongo kingdom, led to the slave trade which was to last for centuries.

Historians agree that the slave trade was the most humiliating moment in the **negation** of the African man.

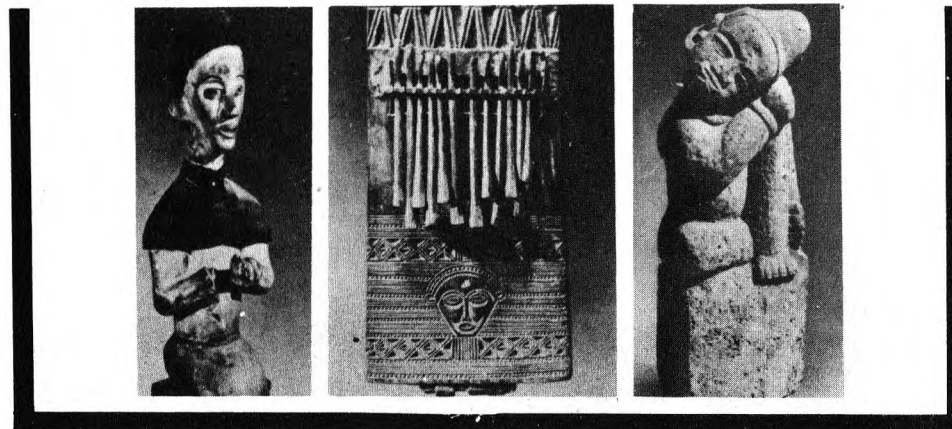
Certainly, the domestic slave was part of the social structure, but he was not an object of **sale** as he later became with the advent of the Portuguese merchants. Letters exchanged between the Kongo-lesse king, Dom Afonso, and the Portuguese king, Dom Manuel, at the beginning of the 16th century strikingly describe the state of social degeneration introduced into this African kingdom.

During the centuries between the arrival of Diogo Cao and the beginning of the administrative occupation around 1920, the socioeconomic structures of Angola were successively shaken by the slave trade, the military conquest, and domestic slavery (forced labor).

The formation of the Angolan people was the result of four centuries of resistance to the Portuguese invader.

It is in the light of these historic facts that we should approach the problem of African culture in a colonial situation.

As in all other parts of Africa, there were cultural manifestations of collective creation. This was expressed in song, dances, popular poetry, sculpture, and art, all integrated in a conception which flowed from the socioeconomic structures. Evidently, these cultural expressions were radically changed by the administrative occupation. In other words, as the colonial system was being established and the foreign administration spread its roots in the country, while the economy was being thrown into an upheaval, while social groups were being disrupted and detribalization was taking place through population exchanges, the bonds of solidarity between different elements of society ceased to exist. Culture, therefore, should be understood as the great bond of solidarity





between social structures. As soon as one element of the structure is affected, cultural expressions also will feel the change.

For example, art: although sculpture in some regions — among the Kiokos, for example — was the highest artistic expression of the community's social and religious concepts, it underwent a degeneration of style with the arrival of colonialization

Whenever colonial domination acted on the social structure, the cultural manifestations were disrupted and lost their aesthetic value. Naturally, the changes in content and form also reflect the community's social imbalance.

If we examine the cultural panorama in Angola at that stage of history, we can clearly see an important phenomenon — that of **cultural duality**, a phenomenon typical of colonialism.

In other words, when large communities, especially at the village level, undergo administrative occupation, are affected by the social and economic system imposed by colonialization, and begin to supply, as individuals, their labor force to a market economy, we see in the cities the emergence of social sectors integrated into the system of assimilation.

The phenomenon of cultural duality is marked by a gulf between the Angolans of the village communities who preserve intact special traits of the national culture and the Angolans whom the colonizer tries to assimilate, as individuals **brainwashed** by Portuguese culture.

But what is assimilation? The colonizer sought assimilation in his attempt to attract a certain number of natives to his, the colonizer's, point of view. This was because the colonizer found it impossible to exercise his domination exclusively through people from his own community, so he brought into his community a privileged sector of the colonized. In other words, the objective of assimilation is to create **auxiliaries for colonialization**. Although Portuguese assimilation on the formal plane, on the plane of principles, is a generous idea, it can never be accomplished in practice. That is, the colonizer preaches assimilation inasmuch as he knows that it can never be completely attained. Thus, the assimilation effort in the Portuguese colonies, in regard to the population, was negligible until the beginning of our war in February 1961.

The number of assimilated people never exceeded 1% of the total population in Angola; this was also the case in Guinea and Mozambique.

To return to cultural duality in this context, we can see resistance against the colonizer's culture emerge within the assimilated sector. From the very moment that a group of individuals, a privileged class, arrives at an understanding of colonialism, there emerge men who will organize resistance to the culture of the colonizer. In spite of their slight contact with the village communities, in spite of the fact that they do not completely share their **modes of existence and of thought**, they become the political aspirations of these communities. This is why we can say that in Angola

(perhaps Angola is the Portuguese colony where we can most clearly follow this phenomenon of cultural duality) there has been a cultural movement of resistance against colonialization since the end of the last century. This movement was led by a group of journalists.

As a reaction against the impunity of the system of domination maintained, among other ways, by forms of human exploitation such as forced labor, these intellectuals through their writings created an anticolonial consciousness among the **assimilated**, breaking with the colonial models. In other words, the assimilated group assumed its privileged condition only to use it as an instrument of defense for the whole Angolan community, for the village community and for all Angolans, against colonial domination. When the colonizer tried to include the mentality of the assimilated individual within his own scheme of things, the individual rebelled and assumed what we could call a native condition.

From the time that Salazar took power, when fascism was rearing its head in the 1930s — from that moment on up to the end of the war, there was a transitional phase during which cultural manifestations had very little importance in Angola. Fascism was spreading, and there was no open or legal way for culture to be manifested. Freedom of the press had ceased to exist, and journalism was declining. It became necessary to wait until after the war for a new generation to emerge and continue the cultural battle of the generations of the previous century, the generation of those journalists who had published *A voz de Angola clamando no deserto* (**The Voice of Angola Crying Out in the Desert**). Only then can we observe a **qualitative** leap forward in the affirmation of culture. The groups which appeared as soon as the war was over, the assimilated groups which then reaffirmed themselves as such while taking up the previous message, carried their cultural demands and consciousness much further. Consciousness in this case was linked to politics, thanks to the prevailing ideas, to the victory of the allied forces over Nazism, and to the circulation of political propaganda from Brazil. This opening of the door to modernity profoundly influenced the new generation which was in its 20s when the war ended. This is the generation that created modern nationalism. Here again, culture was an important factor in acquiring consciousness, and the foreign cultural trend which exercised the most important influence came to us from Brazil. Brazil was the source not only of political propaganda but also of a whole literature with which our generation identified itself. Not to mention the fact that Brazilian culture had among its components an important Bantu element that came from Angola's coasts.

When we read Jorge Amado's novels we found in the language of Baía not only words coming from Kimbundu but also a whole structure of syntax coming from our own language. When we danced to the rhythm of a samba, we were living an element of our culture born across the Atlantic. This cultural expression which

came to us from Brazil in the form of music and literature stimulated and inspired us to an awareness of the values of our own culture.

Among other objectives, the new generation tried to give new life to the most authentic Angolan manifestations. Thus, the first cultural expression of this generation was to take in its hands its own heritage — that is, to resolve the contradictions which had arisen from cultural duality. While the preceding generation wrote in Portuguese with political content and rejected assimilation, our generation, linking its destiny with that of the village community, went much further in its cultural search.

**During this stage, what was the role of the Catholic Church missions?**

The Catholic Church played a negative role throughout the course of Portuguese colonialization. It was, and in large measure still is, the auxiliary of colonialization. In modern times, during the active phase of colonialization, the missionaries were the spiritual counterparts of the governor, the administrator, the local authorities. . . . Not only did they impose Christianity on us — a religion whose beliefs and values are very different from our own traditional religious beliefs and values — but they also mystified the evangelical message itself. The gospel interpreted by the Portuguese missionaries was not Christ's message. This is an important problem, worth a lengthy treatment if we want to go into the matter in depth. But I simply want to say that the establishment of mission schools was an important work of colonialization and assimilation. Thanks to the **missionary agreement** signed between the Holy See and Portugal, the Church was given the responsibility of teaching the natives. Missionary work was once again made part of the Portuguese colonialization process. The missionaries opened up a whole field for the application of assimilation and consciously played the role of mental colonizers of the natives. On the other hand, the mission school imparted instruction at a reduced rate, since the children of the village communities received only a rudimentary education. In short, these missionary schools — which, of course, were not very numerous — prepared docile servants for the colonizers. It was even said that the assimilated persons who had attended the missionary schools were, because of their mentality, less likely to resist colonialism. This means that the Church, through this kind of teaching, linking its message to colonialization, preaching patience and fidelity to the colonial system, prepared traitors to the national cause. This is why many Angolans who went to missionary schools were, at times, because of their mentality, less able to resist colonialization, because the Church as a whole taught obedience to the established order. Nevertheless, the tables were often turned, and many seminaries where racial discrimination was the order of the day became the framework of resistance: in them were priests who had been won over to nationalist ideas. And I speak from firsthand knowledge of the matter.

What were the main stages the new generation went through in order to attain cultural and political consciousness?

I have already described how our generation viewed the role of culture. The awakening of a cultural consciousness necessarily led to a political consciousness because of a historical necessity. From 1948 on, these men of letters became the prime movers of this new awakening. The good poet became at the same time a good editor of political tracts; the one who wrote committed poetry, militant poetry, became a writer of political propaganda. Since he knew how to write, to create, to reflect popular sentiment in literature, he also had to reflect the people's aspiration to independence through the tract and the political manifesto. And the poet called upon the people to struggle for national liberation.

There is a very important relationship between the Angolans and other nationalists from Portuguese colonies. At the same time that this cultural consciousness was becoming more profound in Angola and Mozambique, in Lisbon, too — the very center of fascism, in the heart of the colonial metropolis — a small group from the privileged class met to hear about events that had taken place in different countries and, together, to reflect on cultural problems. This is how the Center for African Studies was formed in the 1950s, as the basic modern expression of the **re-Africanization** of our spirits, always in relation to the struggle against assimilation. Through this awakening of cultural consciousness we confronted ourselves with the image of our countries being dominated by colonialism. Then came the necessity to form political movements. Thus, the logical culmination of the activities of the Center for African Studies was the creation of the Anti-Colonialist Movement (MAC) immediately after the Meeting for the Consultation and Study of the Portuguese Colonies held in Paris in 1957. The re-Africanization of our spirits, converted into a struggle against assimilation, culminated in the postwar years in the formation of nationalist organizations. We entered the age of combined movements; we know what they have become and how they were diversified. The intellectuals who had been the organizers of the Center for African Studies, were the same ones who would later head the political movements in Angola, Guinea, and Mozambique. Caught in the web of colonial repression, some Angolan intellectuals of this generation, together with younger men, are still serving long prison terms in penitentiaries in the Cape Verde Islands. This is what happened to Liceu Vieira Dias, Antonio Jacinto, and Luandino Vieira. Liceu Vieira Dias undertook the task of reinterpreting African music. In the process, the main lines of which I have traced, Liceu wanted to integrate the message of traditional African music in a modern world. His group, the famous N'gola Ritmo, was precisely the instrument of this attempt to elaborate Angolan music inscribed in modernity where the melody is a synthesis of the old and the new.

In the 1960s we find another endeavor to create a new language.

Portuguese (with its classic structure) no longer serves to convey the sentiments of the Angolan, and a new, dynamic language emerges to incorporate the linguistic patrimony of the country — Kimbundu. In the stories and novels of Luandino Vieira — who is, by the way, an Angolan writer of Portuguese parentage, a son of the European community but integrated into the Angolan community — we find perhaps the best attempt at a new language. The **muceques** (slum districts on the outskirts of Luanda) make their first appearance in modern literature.

This alteration of Portuguese takes place not only at the level of words but also at the level of the very structure of Portuguese syntax. This is a phenomenon similar to the evolution of Portuguese in Brazil.

To what extent has this process taken place in urban areas? To what extent have the rural zones and villages felt its impact? Have they benefited from it?

Generally, the national language preserves its purity of structure in the rural regions, since Portuguese is barely spoken in those areas. Human contact between the colonial society and the colonized society is nearly always limited to relations of exploitation; therefore, the linguistic osmosis typical of urban centers hardly ever takes place.

Has the development of armed struggle caused cultural changes?

Armed struggle of the modern type is a relatively recent phenomenon in our societies. The national liberation war began in Angola on February 4, 1961, and later in Guinea and Mozambique. The problem of culture still remains to be solved. The assimilated groups have created a literature written in Portuguese, but we can already discern the appearance of some new factors in the cultural camp. Armed struggle has liberated many regions from colonial rule, and the guerrilla is becoming a familiar figure in the village communities.

Although the communities in the liberated zones of Angola, Guinea, and Mozambique are in different cultural stages, they all show the signs of disruption provoked by colonialization.

They are beginning a new life, and we can already speak of the revolutionary content of some of their cultural expressions. Music, dance, song, and art are the main areas of expression for this new culture. For example, the songs of the people in southeastern Angola and the songs of the Balantas in Guinea give us an idea of these changes. During the long night of colonialism these songs exalted the virtues of the community and allusively referred to resistance against the oppressor. Submerged in **tribal clandestinity**, resistance in the cultural field was of a **hidden nature**. This is no longer true today. Songs exalting the liberation struggle are today sung openly, in a rhythm not too far removed from tradition.

Parallel to this creative collection, a new poetry written in Portuguese is emerging from the very heart of the guerrilla struggle. This is the **militant** poetry of the guerrilla which represents the

popular sentiment.

Mother,

How beautiful to fight for liberty!

There is a message of justice in each bullet I shoot,

Old dreams that take wing like birds.

sings Jorge Rebelo of Mozambique.

How will the new culture develop? Only time will tell. One fact is certain: we have not completely lost the ancient thread of our authentic culture; the cultures of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea are not dead. We still have a heritage. In spite of the slave trade, military conquest, and administrative occupation, in spite of forced labor and detribalization, the village communities have preserved in differing states of alteration their traditional culture.

Isn't it true that the new culture born in the heat of battle will be a process of confirmation of the nations of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and Cape Verde?

Certainly, since **cultural community** — together with **language, territory, and economic life** — is the fourth aspect of nationhood. This schema defined by Stalin continues to guide our investigations and today makes us view the national community as a **relative** linguistic, politico-economic, and cultural unit. We know the process by which Portuguese colonialization prevented our different countries from attaining a national existence. The most common result of colonialization is the break in the historical continuity of the old bonds between men, from both a family and an ethnic viewpoint.

The **colonial status** which unites men in a market economy at the lowest level, which depersonalizes them culturally, **negates** nationhood.

Now, then, armed struggle allows these communities to reenter history. When this struggle unites all ethnic groups under the banner of nationalism, it becomes a factor which accelerates the process of nationhood. Armed struggle, in order to use a concept developed by Frantz Fanon, is the **cultural fact par excellence**.

Returning to the role of the intellectual, it remains to say that the intellectuals in our countries have been the driving force behind the awakening of political consciousness and continue to be one of the components of the revolutionary leadership of our liberation struggles. The nature of Portuguese colonialization throughout the centuries has been no stranger to the type of compromise made by the assimilated. In effect, it is the assimilated who kill the colonial culture in order to live within the values of the "indigenous" civilization. With some differences in detail, this process of **integration** of the intellectuals with the revolution followed an identical pattern in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and the archipelagos of Saint Thomas and Cape Verde. We have, therefore, one common destiny: to forge rational arms for the awakening of the people's consciousness and to break the chains of cultural duality by participating in revolution.