

Dignity Derives from the Culture of the Masses in Revolt



☒ Listen to Lumumba (1970) - Miriam Makeba

For your listening pleasure, while you read this bulletin, here is *Lumumba* (1970) by legendary South African singer Miriam Makeba.



Jardy Ndombasi Mayindo of the artists' collective of the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin and videographer André Ndambi at an exhibition for African Liberation Day at the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin (Andrée Blouin Cultural Centre), 25 May 2024.

'The masses are the torch-bearers of culture,' Amílcar Cabral declared in his speech, *The Role of Culture in the Struggle for Independence* at a UNESCO meeting in Paris in July 1972. 'They are the source of culture and, at the same time, the one entity truly capable of creating and preserving it, of making history.' While Cabral is most well known as the leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), as a pan-Africanist, and an agronomist, he was also a revolutionary poet. From the trenches, he theorised the role of militant cultural work in the anti-colonial struggle. For Cabral, culture was one of the four core pillars of resistance, alongside political, economic, and armed resistance. He described it as fundamental to 'the reconquest of the rights of the people it represents – the right to make its own history and the right to dispose freely of its own productive resources.' Just over six months after this speech, Cabral was assassinated, not living to see his country expel the Portuguese colonialists shortly thereafter.

Amílcar Cabral and Patrice Lumumba were both attendees of the All-African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana in December 1958, hosted by Ghanaian Prime Minister **Kwame Nkrumah**. Revolutionaries across Africa came together to share strategies for national liberation, economic freedom from the colonial powers, and African unity. Nearly two years later, on 30 June 1960, Patrice Lumumba, who would become the

Democratic Republic of Congo's first prime minister, gave a speech critical of colonial rule in front of Belgian royalty at the country's official independence ceremony. Less than six months later, Lumumba, too, was murdered.

The right of the African people to make their history and dispose freely of their own productive resources was precisely what the colonising nations from France to Belgium, from Portugal to England, were not – and perhaps are still not – ready to allow, even after ceding formal independence. However, as Cabral said while addressing a crowd at Lincoln University in the US, 'the people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive... and because they continue to resist culturally even when their politico-military resistance is destroyed.' Cultural resistance, therefore, not only carries the struggle forward in times of great repression. It is from the 'culture of the masses in revolt' that the people derive and preserve their dignity, that lives on long after the assassination of any single leader.



The artists' collective of the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin at work.

This commitment to the culture of the masses in revolt lives on in young Congolese activists today. Mass Congolese resistance stretching across centuries forms the central theme of our June 2024 dossier, *The Congolese Fight For Their Own Wealth*, jointly produced by us, the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin, the Centre for Research on the Congo-Kinshasa (CERECK), and Likambo Ya Mabele (Land Sovereignty

Movement).

In this dossier, launched in the month of the DRC's independence, culture is one of the eight areas that young Congolese activists have named as key to building a path to freedom. In addition to demanding rights to land and economic autonomy, they have called for the production and dissemination of Congolese patriotic culture. They write,

We must illustrate the vision of the Congo and the world we want to live in through the arts, culture, sports, and all the activities in which we engage, which must be made available in our local languages. Through collective leadership, we must develop common values based on inclusive decision-making to reform our culture.

To make this vision a reality and uplift the enduring Congolese struggles for national sovereignty, our art department collaborated with the artists' collective of the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin in Kinshasa to create original illustrations. Drawing from historical and contemporary photographs that were collectively researched, the images created centre the Congolese people as protagonists, rather than victims, of history. We spoke with some of the artists about their collectively managed creative process.



Monsembula Nzaaba Richard (Monzari), *L'Aube de la résistance Congolaise* ('Dawn of the Congolese Resistance'), 2024.

Monsembula Nzaaba Richard, who also goes by the name Monzari, is lawyer by training and a self-taught artist who created the cover artwork for our seventy-seventh dossier. Monzari wanted to bear witness to the resilience of the Congolese against oppression and exploitation by depicting the mineworkers' revolt in Katanga in 1941. The strike was supported by peasant families, later spreading to a soldier's mutiny against the *Force Publique*, or the colonial military. At the time, only white people were able to own cars and Congolese workers were relegated to mining the very tin that produced those cars. In this moment of rupture, the workers demanded the right to own automobiles, produced from the very tin they mined. In other words,

they demanded ownership of the fruits of their labour.

Echoing French artist Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), Monzari describes the work: ‘At the centre, a fearless woman, wearing a symbolic scarf, proudly holds the DRC flag in one hand and a pickaxe in the other, symbolising the strength and determination of the workers. Beside her, two vigorous men stand guard, ready to defend the revolt’s cause.’ The woman worker is leading the revolt, as miners emerge from the silhouetted background – a mineshaft in the shape of the DRC. For Monzari, the artists’ collective aims to promote African art and culture and support emerging artists as they firmly believe ‘that art is a powerful tool for educating, inspiring, and uniting communities.’



The artists’ collective of the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin at work.

‘We spent a lot of time as a group discussing the themes and messages we wanted to convey through our artworks,’ shares Julienne Masaka Mayangi, another member of the collective, who described how collective study and lively debates were a central part of their collaboration. She elaborated further,

One of the most important aspects of our collaboration was the exchange of ideas and the collective search for strong symbols to represent our history and aspirations. We extensively

discussed the importance of history and collective memory, and how these elements can inspire youth to stand up and defend their rights.

This recovery of historical memory is central to the battle of ideas and the battle over the hearts and minds of Congolese youth today, now over six decades removed from the days of Lumumba and the national liberation struggle. We discussed this struggle over memory with Lubangi Muniania's, an African art historian specialising in visual and performing arts, and former director of the education department for the Museum for African Art in New York. Muniania, a longtime advisor to the artists' collective at the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin said,

History is usually taken from a pool of memories to draw a well-coordinated line to elevate a people and their nation. However, DRC youth make up the majority of the population who don't know much about the positive aspects of our country's history. They also don't know how to use historical knowledge for their benefit. The old colonial mentality seems to come back because of a lack of positive historical knowledge.

According to Muniania, as a result of this lack of cultural rooting, youth are drawn to 'bling-bling culture', which through 'movies, music videos, and social media [maintains] a strong hold. So, little incentive is out there to make them proud of their creativity, and identity. For instance, our nation's collective self-image has been destroyed by the propaganda machine of Western media. People have believed it, leaving them confused and with no answers.'



Monsembula Nzaaba Richard and André Ndambi, Centre Culturel Andree Blouin, 25 May 2024.

For Muniana, mineral exploitation as a continuation of colonialism has consequences not only for the land and national sovereignty but leaves damaging imprints on the Congolese psyche and culture. ‘Colonialism destroyed much of Congolese traditions, it imposed forced labour, promoted some ethnic groups and skin colours over others, and privileged certain races. It promoted foreign religions and languages over and over so that even today, the worldview of the Congolese psyche is still European. It seems like the mineral war... reinforces Congolese inferiority.’

However, he added, ‘Congolese people are very resilient, they feel and know when they are pushed over the limit.’ Throughout this process of guiding the artists in the production of the artworks for the dossier, one word that stood out to him – ‘resistance’, a concept and an act that has defined the Congolese people. For more about the artworks, you can watch a mini-documentary by André Ndambi [here](#)

In Other News...



In case you missed it, you can see some of our art department’s artwork featured in the *Poster Gallery in Solidarity with Palestinian Women*, as the cover art of *Izimpabanga Zomhlaba*, the first isiZulu translation of Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* by Inkani Books, and at the *Rosa: Revolution or Barbarism* exhibition in Mexico City.



Gabriela Barraza (Argentina), *Ni calco ni copia* ('Neither imitation nor copy'), 2024.

As part of our monthly celebrations of Red Books Day on the twenty-first, we were delighted to share Gabriela Barraza's creation inspired by the book, *Defensa del marxismo* ('Defense of Marxism'), by Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930). Barraza is affiliated with the Escuela José Carlos Mariátegui ('José Carlos Mariátegui school'). This landmark book was one of the first to introduce a materialist conception of history from an indigenous perspective in the Americas. For Mariátegui, turning Marxism into a revolutionary theory in Peru and the Americas could be 'neither imitation nor copy, but a heroic creation.' Likewise, the Congolese people's struggle over their own wealth and destinies continues to be a heroic creation, constantly reviving and generating cultures of the masses in revolt.

Warmly,

Tings Chak

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