

.
 g 1 1
 7: t a . : Q 3
 Miticrsjgand Working Class Culture: A Response
 ' K61Wyh-Sole
 ; . 11'! their raspouae to a previous urtic! e of mine (1) the
 4 Naluli mum Unit argue against my "wpulist"deflnitim
 of both Black Consciousness and "prugwssive" li terature in
 the .ast decade and a haif.'1"ney say:
 0 Cur aim, as cultura: workers 11:. 1.1 bl1111! the (111mm 11f .
 resistance of the 1x91113111 112C ?authcxn Africa. Throughout B
 Southern Africa. . yemv 11! C91 mialist oppression and
 ' 18mm A;.rican aggresr 1 111 11nd r9111 1:;1lon have shaped our :
 , lwlture; #8 know tha RWStH-we 2
 - ,1 - . talk about building a '1 gummon 0111- 111 ,1 1
 "W1 and'the "people' s struggle'v'f
 m1 Mom'nmque and Angola we look to the resistance tradin-
 1 1 " /t10na and expressions of the p(asantry, of the ((111011
 1, mm 01 the guerilla st ruggle of MPLA and FAPIA; Imm
 .1199 1 .' those traditions we can talk 3? developing a new smiecy
 used on- the as yet infant working 0 lass.
 and they go on to descrIBE the cultural initiatives Medu Art ,
 Ensenble (to which Naledi bblcngs) is taking and to 6.151116:
 their position on the mlationshl'p of working class 11111111116
 to the "culture of resistance" they ruivcxmntn.
 . Dimassing the approach which lorlks at all cultural 1101.11111-
 111 by the working. class at. that of "Western soc
 ' j I"; Naledi argues for a determinedly 119.111.1234
 . . to working class culture. Workers,
 often corrupted in their behaviour by the. hour
 \$111196 they have picked up from newspapers, the ednczr
 ?- tied! mien; television,mdl0 and so on but 'pmgressiw;
 7 cultural mm have distinguished between imposed culture
 forbid" upon the working class by the bourgeoisie. . .und the
 WIN strands of "mung class C.ultllre",those ()xbresw
 ;_ m michictively promote the workers' consciousness: of
 M 006' objective conditions of existance". Therefore the
 ' ' tiht W can best be deiined as thug:
 0' " Eictivities that bui ld and direct the workms- 111.141wa
 W-the best interests of the working class.They 1 1x11111111
 mused 10r- purposeful cultural activggm in order to
 , ii"
 lN-1.1. . .
 s '7
 F

and literacy clr61 :-
- debite-
achieve this goal: '
ential that we , :
will reinforce andj: . o
ure". In addition, 5 . ,
will forge a unity; ;
cone to "reumber 1
songs and sing - t
V, class" 1
A _ t '
\$341, 3 y
. . . t in .I , i? "f" Luz, w
Tghrmtiy further mat huestion of
, a Hy response will notonlystry to ans-
war Naledi's ideas, hit will extend the demte by- bringing up
points which I thi t ,are essential to consider further. Thus,
not all of the following are 3.1an at Medu or Phledi . Neither
are any corments nude in the course of my argument an attempt
to belittle or deny the considerable achievements that organ-
imtion has trade in the cultural sphere in the last eight
years: rather. what is meant is a free and open discussion.
Furthermore. in the process of discussion I will confine rm
remarks to South Africa.,;This is because my knowledge of Lhc
culture of other Southern African oountrioe is extremely 111?
Ned, and because South Africa has its own political. socio-
economic and cultural Specifics - such as a much larger and
better established working class, and the virtual absence of
any sort of independent peasantry. (2)
I would like here
working clues cul
1
Tbs (13:821.: 2 W.__P._ul_i_m.-
Despite their political dxfferences, the two rmst important
contemxmry opposition rmverrents inside the country (the LDE
and National Forum) are stmctured at this point in time as
popular fronts; of varmus organisations. These popular fronts
mmprjse a coalitiun uf ili'ferent classes united in then
opposition to apartheid. Therefore, when I describe them as
populist. it. IS meant as a widely descriptive term of the
Language in which both movements tend to mbilise and speak
about ideological struggle. (.3) When speaking about culture,
both often use terms which do not eler specifically to class.
When Naledi says, for example, "we talk about building a "cul-
ture of liberation" out of the "culture of the oppressed" and
the "people's struggle", it seems to BB indisputable that they
are using a cultural definj tion based on populist 13am.
Hausever, both me UDP' and the NF state that in their poplluf
44.
WWWWWMQ v. . .
V hayeh signifi
The "conscience" g! the m1:
fronts :he working class nae: cm mm
although it ls arguahle that theIM
is at the wt '81le mmwtm
But their use of'pqniib'tdxm ennui?!
guise) several email gm ; :djsumttw' .k
ure, which have n'mmmiltunl act! V
tions deserve m'rbeWtd :8 tray m
tions of leaderanp WWW. __-
There is a similar attribute to be lm in am deal of
the work of both Black Consciousness and mm cultural.
activists) - the desire to act as the "conscience" and '_'spokes
people" of all those oppressed (with increasing wentlon he--
ing paid to the working class). This belief is (very clear ln
writers of a Black Consciousness bent. The poet mvpodl hap-
alakanye, for instance, aye: -;
We, the writers/artists and educationists, are the people
who must play a m_jor role in the liberation of our
people's minds. (4)
writers with replrd to those people who still live in rural

South Africa. Here, rural' be seen as the mere i timl exhortatt ne plied 2y black writers: which vl.11 then enable these lower class people to act as a kind of- "protest fodder" for already decided political ends. Risinnti J'Iathmsi, connentlm; ch. the indigenous/english langmge question, says for ewunpw. Let those who write in foreign languages do so; but may should not scorn their brothers who are battling to brim; the peasants abreast with what is going on. By'so doing the nsses can contribute. (5) It seam to m that Naledi Writers' Unit would probably stress a note " l l between cultural art and lower class Reggie activists have as ' . .- 130 in web a. relationship. Nevertheless, their reply is not mtirely free of the above type of farmlatioo, although I an m tthey would disagree with its elitist tone. For in.- m. they Inks statermmts like, "cultural work should be

m jts, it is nude clear .t
 Id, be directed by politi 3
 5,!)
 that cultural and politi 3 e . . ,
 live role in forging links LWiork place and community
 V ziuggles on the one hand and v national strtgggle on the
 33th in fact, that they o d act as a type of linkinghup
 and unifying mechanism for popular fmnt politics. The lmsic-
 inn Barry Gilder is an example of this when he puts forward
 . magic "as a form of education and mbilieution, as a form of
 uniting different communities and struggles into one irreprw
 Sibll? whole". (6)
 il31119 the attempts of CJEL'Jr'dl activists from other classa
 to reach the working class and incorporate working class ex-
 periences anri issues at the mat nus: be seen ie'Avrelemnt
 and important ' tam: tend-
 .(Q) 3 . r. ca limit-
 . 3 116 they point out
 ' erent perspective on and set
 of assumptions about society, Naledi does not follow through
 the logic of their annumnt. .W
 South Africa do not necessarily have the 3 ' A
 iences: or he .
 ._a_1:2.. This IS tmv even axmng black nervple who are in some m3e
 uniformly oppressw by apartheid laws. Thus, petty bourgeois
 activists nna! m bv careful when they think the); can, thrrugtc:
 2n ac? h '3"; nr (-uirrutmem, easm') 3;x4m for the working
 t ClaSH. The notion ()1 '5731 xv SJiCiUHH is often used to ,juetiij;
 X) this identification wish the working. class by activists in
 \$ Africa: I would argmc- that in itscif :hs: term does
 factorily solve the problem it tries to, as t:.
 r&l " 'rfi(:1;lt.ies invulw-u Ii'ZZJ
 not satise
 re are very
 an act of will 7:1:r
 not easily overcome. This is not tu suggest that 3 omic
 determinism is all that exists, and that human viii plays no.
 bearing on politics and history. But still, "Clu% suicideh'
 often rename at the 1, vol of estum.
 4 b
 x unionist Vuyisile Mini 21
 ail those - of whatever class. V
 heir! (as in Black Conscioum
 in the progressive mvment).
 ' letely
 mldbeamstaketotryamjcam_ ..
 gem wozkkg class culture (or believe eithe.
 9 But it wwld be
 ooupletely isolated from WW)
 (4 t 1"
 mistaken to completely identify the two 3., Naleai occasiona
 h ' e ' use the songs of trade
 ly tends to do. for 111511113, theyle of the worksng cm say
 ture Howe on
 mice within resistance cul . ver, thi y gsismnoe "un-
 "uat the freedom songs used in the culturef o drieloped by the
 u' . .S- lstyleand oms e,
 'l taxenl carry the :ugca . nts
 wiiking (tiass, without electromc equipment and mstmme- .
 u t 1119-
 , t. kcmnts.ml81509ngr
 uslng the structures Of ZoihiCh the uakwagz style in whlc
 ' ' -t the extent t on-
 E; igrgfese songs are perfomed is_ihe resullttoieghebyc ;
 scious reworking of Christian and traditiogzl s y , am
 st others, middle class composers such as uza_ , 'ryamshe
 h v . 7
 and Mohapelo in the early part of thim century () x/V
 ' Leg gmlmgllh form and content have
 it is true that worklng c. instance.
 constantly injected vitality into the culturethAtoiher: forms

It is also important to consider, though,
'rship to further
(ften been used by a W" te Of
132::ribcwn interests. The "African National Culture deba
the w reminds a classic example of this type of appren-
Ham is no objection to m dances, provided they :gew
staged by the enlightened mntu. When they are stigm'se' . .
the W, l: is a sign of retrogression, _
he has no inducemnt to progress. (8)
late a work-
very teal these circunstanoes to 190 ;
izgizlm \$1311; wider popular culture. when looked at
. 1
cul- _ m m generall been a, t d
W 1!. 1'? int! influezoe at work 85 V911 as a W
1,.
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Fm

"debaue

W

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dency for people to be
ing their: lives. mum "t, me: The i "
is an inmediate emmle or this: during his Highnemihsmbeen,
employed in such different Jobs :3 hawker, clerk nightwatdx-
mn, donestic worker and schoolmaster. Nevertheless there
have been class forces at work that nuke lt inpowihle to sim-
piy rennin at the level of popular culture and be accumte
Middle class black people in the 193293, for instance con-h
stantly denimted the mrabi culture of the slumyargis and
extgiled 3e eisteggfords and other form of "civilised' refs
nea 1007 he workers of an earlier era took the anatimi i:
V t . - ti
ef black mission ladies and radically changed these tea part-
1% to suit their own mile, working class needs. Fbpular twr-
es of cultural activity, therefore, are often used differeh'te
ly to suit diffe ' erial circwstances and class needs

gem. m: . .

Working class leadership

Camentators from various political positions seem to gener-
ally agree that the black petty bourgeoisie has had a p011?i-
cal coherence and iuportance in South African historv far hut-
weighing its numerical strength. (9') A great dwl of-blac'rv
political organisation in this countn has historically been
centred around ' list demn , and polin-
eal leadership has often (but not always) been the preroget-
lve of the mre privileged classes. These demands have in
the context 9f the apartheid suite, been mm
the hm but they have seldom been organised
or articulated by these lower ClaSFJS. It mist be renerrberexi
too, that tor i 'nterests go beyond the destruction

W

of apartheid to the transformation of the W
Wll working class forns'are a '
' ppmpriated in
the cause of the mtional struggle, this does not necessarily
nan that h emony in the nation itself
is assured. ,rfor Nsledi to speak as if working class pol-
itical andmlttmlcbmnds have constantly beento the fore-
front of mngxsu-uggle is too quick 3 Wt. (10)

1. K s ' 'iaairtt'r , - .

In w opinim,the\$nhlmntion activists feel for 710-91! c1353
torus e: cultm'einsnrgietively recept magnum; Consider
the mane caul, nmny-derived cultuial fomw hythe
black W, at present one of theh'roest- and
W 01 the working class is meant

: . as

early 19703, W actiVistssdismissed thesetorls g mere
48. '33

. w. w. my.

.. N7

- debate'

and "caricaturei'. Therefore we get amazing state-
'nde about black cultural lite ln the
19705: "the traditional cultures had long since ceased to be
mpabie of sustaining or developing artistic torus". (11)
Now, ten years later, a working class poetry based on and
transtorming traditional historical and praise poetry is fin-
a y oming visible. (1 :4)
"folklore"

ments like this one.

r the upsurge of trade union activity in
1973, a belief. also mrsissted wrung some black writers that
the working class was 'depoiiticised". In the black litera-
turn that has actually been prrxuiced during th871970\$fone
can see re privi 4 lass verge tiens at work. A great
deal of this literature came-from a radical isie
- and there is very little of it which deals with or uses

W, or everyday working class community
issues of an intermediate nature such as Ignition (WLUS)
And it was this very literature which saw itself as "political"
and tended to regard the black working class as in need
For a long time after
' of political education about their oppression!
While the need for the working class to form political alliances
with other classes at times when it is advantageous
for them to do so cannot be questioned
they must strive to present a democratic social alternative
attractive to sympathetic members of the 'new CI
in order to combat capitalism, it is difficult to see how
these goals will automatically be achieved without making
worker leadership a reality rather than a slogan.
and without the 'new, note of the new class forms of culture.
Not only should institutions and structures be set up to promote
working class culture: they are doing this. Now-
ever to do this task for themselves. It is in the; - :_,
organisations of the 'new working class (trade union-
' associations etc.) where
It is noticeable

- debate -

can political life :today mm m notion of working
class leadership me to- 2

Working class leadership not be seen as an abstract

principle: what is W is the WT

ation and forms of W which will am

this leadership and hegemony to happen. (14) Neither should

the working class be mnticised as having some sort of

ml 311 iorit to other le. Rather, the working class

is important in social transfromtion because it is CH- of

the two or oontendi classes in capitalist society with

access to the weans of production, and the on _,- one structur-

ally in a posi ion toAlter the relations of groductionj

Problems of cultural and pohticai Leadersmp in South Africa

today are not easily solved. It would be Utopian to believe

that the black working Class car.- generate a leadexship and

hegemny spontaneously and without education and organisation.

It would be just as foollsh,lmever, to believe that warm

class hegemony can be guamhteed by individuals and political

organisations in n.lch the working class does not have an act-

ive leading role :15. 21 ':-; 'C nf 1311 of faith" by middlv: class

activists. In the latter appxmch,lt has been obserVud:

Power would dewhc (1)1119 workers' own organisations only

after the workers were fully trained and competent. . .ln

this approach the prol riat ls locked into a son at

nursery school 41" 1151' where, whichever way l: turns,

it is alwlys the Studz- h: "who does not know" of one educ-

ator or another. (151 1

Objective class _13' erests

The view that the p011 tical role of cultural activists is to

inject the. working class with a true l6a. of its obJective

class interests is closely related to the view that workilg

class interestscan beadvaxwedandgmnteed byapoliuml

mrtv thigh ms these interests lt Wt Obviously, thiqm

cam is open to a variety of different hctions and interpret-

ations.8imetlm the pm of middle class activists m:

mg in tin field of working class culture can be fruitfulwegig,

3.11: there is much _tl69 atten found in this type:

of thinkiu that only those cultural .muestations michae-

vanee the gbhjective 2lm intereata" at the working cla' 1 1";

are worth considerng Working cues culture becomes sir ' -

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.IVe-QI..M'Wl% ml wue

l.. um; .wmnn .

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- debut

have betl er things to do spend considerable: time we energy

agor15lng nhether forms like are suitable or not

(36 3 Furthermore, an mum ion is made that writers and per:

. :1: st be exemplary ll their political conduct and all

as 0th: rs look up to them and might follow their

Y :1 stakes. (17) (Such a point is arguable: I would

v -. that it overenmhases the immediate and direct polit-

Azt- lavanze of mm forms of culture.) The obvious quest- f

:uns tn ask in l t l

mass: 17:11 rests" of the working class 21112 at alny p0 n in a

can an C ratelv declde beforehand what is politicali

2lnd 32111117111, expedient to achieve these interests?

Th; "e is uossibly l distinc lrm that should be nude when one

iunys a: this type of middle Class cultural actiyism. There

s a difference it seems to . 2 between injecting polltlcal

-. lass and giving shape and

ldcas wholesale into the working C

direction to the working class perceptions that are found. (18)

The idea of "ob'e ' ve class nterests" enbodies a behef

that socialism is the esstntial ideology of the working class

- therefore,lf the cultural expressions of working class

people do not conform to this standard, they are a form oi

'false consciousness". It presents a curiouslyllnear te e0-

ldgica new 0 the my working people think and act. Its
failure is "the assumption that everybody knows exactly what
to get it"
lism is, knows that they want it and knows how
????a'rhe general idea seems to be that certain activists and
xl4
' long an
" vanced' workers lead and prod the rest in stages a
afready full determined political path Iii? education and org-
u the outside, until true socialist conscious-
Butvt 'msneesisLota
WW
response are. who decides what the "objective' _/..

/

the way they pmw the mid. Mle black mkers share
90m 01 their Mt, Vith their mime clam counterparts.
they 01m: hwdiffermt M m- Waive experiences of
life. In the ssit-idelfdtiee at the migrant workers of Vos-
lorus Hostel on the East Band for maple, "Zqu and race
metaphors, the land question and Christianity, but also a
working class position are all enmeshed." (20)" national-
ist and and traditions that nuke ' of

en in workers at ' o

' l ends in the eventual olitjcal

ts of ' g class (the fate of white workers in

South Africa is an immediate quer of the ahbiguity of mu.

itant nationalism directed from above). Fmtnenmre, these
identities will of course persist in (one hopes) a transfonrr
ed manner once "socialist consciousness" has been achieved:
the recent war between China and Vietnam should be a reminder
that the advent of socialism doesn' t mean the withering away
of nationalism. (21) 1' .317";

1:.

Cultural activists and intellectuals can have some effect on
the rearrangement as f use of such symbols and identities for
progress lve vnds 1 Di 1 an acceptance of socialism cannot be
ensured once and for all by such vanguardlst mus. I would
suggest. then, the following definition of working class cult-
ure as being mre useful than the one Naledi offers:

By proletarian culture we understand those ways in which
the workine class actively and consciously seeks to shape
its mm social. identity as a class and, by so doing, diff-
erenuates uself from the values and princples of the
dominant x, 'i'4ss.____/T2)

Such a definition allows us to recognise forms which are not
so obviouslx "political"-' as working class culture. Moreover,
while in South Africa su'oh a definition would neai to take in-
ets' consciousness, it does not blur these ident J!

sly with, say, similar fomlatm adopted by - I -

bleak petty bourgeoisie within the context of a . aw _ H

Me. It recOgnises the self-definitiou of WW

class when faced with other chases, and highli

scious activity of the 1:: class ltself.H--

its misblens is that it not nuke clear eu - .

mg class culture cannot exist in isolation in .-

sdciety.

52';

.. myths.wa

1. _ .nw..-...m....

, v a ,Mwmw'... u-u-

szmercml culture

Naledi is possibly too dismissive or the potential that lies
within sane cultural toms of a unre oomercial nature. They

zzrgue that qgsune: culture and the Ware tain-

-rrl past saving by bourgeois ideology. True, much of this cul-

lm l's controlled by huge corporations and mgnzine and newer

paper syz'zdicates (SABCTV, tiasionale Pens, SteP-Kinekor, Egoli

lm, the Argus group etc.) with enemms power and obvious

pieological interests. But it is still mibly Imre product-

to see some of these commercial cultural fonts as areas

Contest, rather than just give up. '(23)

Hacks and whites alike are treated by commercial culture as

wmsumers. Nevertheless, it is the one area where some sort

4:" "non-racial" identity of any dimension seems to be emerge

hg within South Africa itself. Music and sport. for example,

are no longer areas of absolute racial separation (witness

'; . recent pop concert at Ellis Park attended by 110,(XX), and

:he popularity of bands such as Juluka, Hotline and Brenda 8;

:he Big Dudes among black and white audiences alike).

puts forward the W

faledi strongly

ture, and puts rather too little enptmsis on transforming the

existing types of culture These are written off as mssive,

negative forms 0lc..ontml However it seems to me that the sin-

gle met negative feature of ial
cent of le as ssive recei . Surely it is to the'point
to use cultural form people are shady interested in, and to
get them actively involved ln the prowss of creating, culture?
This would obviously be a pmm one could have few
priorgguidelines which are cor : . Aand for all Indeed,
the debate on working class cul , to flhatuate between
two e reme positions, both visi
Revel" tion. m the one hand, the
mll group of
: 3.13 .192) the

mm m) The. runlution 01 this crucial dehwh as 1111-"
 l twang. cut short w the Bolsheviks when 11.1mm forc-
 ed dB .Memult W W. (25)
 _m_e 92111112; 91 criticism
 (he cannot separate culture from Ileitics: cultmrv. 15 r101. 21
 separately determined force, but one which is nonmitgs 11111:"
 sent in people' 5 corumiousness curing politirai 541113395
 Neither can it be denied that the struggle t; a a lrm
 democratic society "opens up new avenues, helps hid. :17:
 and culture, and ln the course 1lf the..strlgbl e ginak aw
 form of expression" (26) There are never the 11. .n3' wag:
 in which political concerns can be culturally eazxpressd. At
 the nomant a lot of ertphasis in both the trade 5 and lh?
 national movemnts seem to be on forging unit; 1 feeling
 of solidarity. Naturally this unity and the U17; put for-
 uurd ultural x denigrated by racism and 1 alism ane-
 lrrxlrlrtant. But this could, in sort: circunstanc'; .ead Iv 21.1.-
 rwprstressing Of the need for a unified cultun'
 and an understressing of the sirmltaneous neeu :_
 41.1 112111191130 flourish, and for critical comm:
 1(1 discussion. A political art and culture is .1
 mnc- which deniw contradiction and exhorts pee;
 d d aromat-
 .eceb. 351111113
 :0 stick to
 :1. political line: it is one which makes availat- - to people
 the means to critical ly examine their own lives; ,nd take cor
 trol of their own futures.ln fiction, the Aug 1:- novel,
 5L1lcx7lbepseeim: to 1:2 an exzmp1e 1lf :1 work of 011331011 liter-
 v 1 re which encourages debate (27) Sources of c yltural con-
 flict and political argwmnr. (Inst be squarely (:1 11?.ronted
 z'mly in this way can a damcratic, dynamic L 11ld 11rticipatou
 culture beneveloped in South Africa.
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 The crisis in South Africa, New 1:
 :5 m1mm eiseq.
 tion 13 1W'wllst,
 any notion of class dfference al
 1 . 21...?- .m.
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 '17Seetherelmrksof;
 - debate? 1-
 ltics and the explanatory weight given to "the people" as
 the point of reference when mbilising.
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A

- debate '-
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