



**TOWARDS RE-AFRICANIZATION:
KAWAIDA, CULTURE, REVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE**

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Culture, we said in the Sixties, is the first and fundamental ground of resistance; cultural revolution precedes and makes possible and sustains the political struggle, and revolution and resistance are acts of culture themselves. These are Kawaida conclusions derived from a disciplined, depthful and rightful reading of the works of African revolutionaries such as Sekou Toure, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X and Amilcar Cabral. But no work was more crucial and influential in shaping my initial and ongoing development of Kawaida as a philosophy of cultural revolution and revolutionary cultural nationalism in the 1960s than Sekou Toure's *Toward Full ReAfricanization*.

In the context of celebrating this September, the 45th anniversary of the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), Us and Kawaida philosophy, out of which these principles and Kwanzaa emerged, I thought about the continuing relevance of this stress on culture on the liberating views and values and the practices that come from them. For we of Us are still convinced that without reaffirming and rebuilding our culture of struggle and the social justice tradition that once defined the way we understood and asserted ourselves in the world, there is little hope for a good and worthy future.

Sekou Toure was one of the great leaders of African independence in the 60s, the first president of Guinea, and won admiration and praise from around the world for his defiant self-determination, his support of African liberation movements and his classic statement, "We prefer independence in poverty to riches in slavery."

Although Toure wrote numerous articles and books on culture and cultural revolution, it is from *Toward Full Re-Africanization* that I first drew some essential ideas and wove them carefully into the conceptual fabric of an emerging Kawaida philosophy. Toure, like

Fanon, Malcolm And Cabral starts with the fundamental understanding that the oppression of a people is not only political and economic, but also cultural. It is not only about physical violence, political domination and economic exploitation, but about altering and emptying minds and killing memory, erasing and revising histories, instilling fear and self-hate, and cultivating submission, servitude and self-mutilation as virtues of the oppressed. In a word, it's about cultural suppression, deformation and destruction.

Toure calls this process "deAfricanization," an essential aspect of colonization of Guinea and Africa as a whole. Thus, his conception of independence and liberation is larger than assuming the political and economic control of the country. He is concerned with the people, self-consciously and freely resuming control of their minds and practices, their ways of being African and human in the world, given the traumatic experience of domination and systematic degradation.

Thus, he calls for a re-Africanization of persons, practices and institutions. It is what we called "Back to Black" in our own ebonics way, but clearly embraced and built on his concept. For there is no Blackness in the abstract, no Blackness that is not culturally rooted, i.e., rooted in the culture of African people – continental and diasporan, ancient and modern. That is what is meant when we said Black is not simply a color, it is also culture and consciousness, i.e., a self-conscious commitment to a liberating culture and a liberated people.

For Toure re-Africanization calls for *agency*, a self-conscious will of each person to "decolonize" his and her heart and mind and "return to Africa" in the most cultural, ethical and expansive ways. "Since each of us carries within himself (herself) a part of the education given by the colonial regime and for this very reason, a certain 'complex' inherited from this

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regime, we must set ourselves the task of effecting our own complete rehabilitation.” And this requires us “to destroy the habits, concepts and ways of conduct” of our oppression and “to replace them with forms that are (African) forms, conceived by the people . . . adopted to the means (and) the aspirations of the people.”

Toure uses concepts of rehabilitation and reconversion to discuss re-Africanization, stressing the revolutionary tasks of repairing, reconceiving, rebuilding and renewing ourselves and the world in the interests of African and human good. And to do this, we must draw upon the best ideas and practices of our culture and people. He says, “to return to Africa is not only in the political meaning of the word, but also in the cultural meaning, in the moral meaning, (and) in the democratic meaning.” Thus, “each one must go back to the African *cultural* and *moral* sources, recover his own consciousness, reconvert himself in his thoughts and his actions to the values of the conditions and to the interests of Africa” and African people.

Secondly, the stress on agency involves *collective work and responsibility (ujima)*. For there is no separate or single salvation of a person, only the inclusive and collective liberation of a whole people. Thus, he says, “since the result we expect directly depends upon the sum of our collective efforts, each one must help his neighbor to refortify himself, to enrich himself to progress.”

Thirdly, to begin down the path of re-Africanization and revolutionary transformation, Toure tells us we must *value and love our people*, not in the abstract, but in the context of our culture, in profound appreciation of the distinct, particular and equally valid and valuable way of being African and human in the world. It, therefore, of necessity, requires a righteous rejection of the established order’s drive to de-Africanize us, to erase or dilate our

Blackness and to blame our oppression on our failure to conform, to cooperate in our own degradation and self-disguising as a people. Thus, Toure poses the revolutionary requirement of “confidence in the people, love of the people (and) possession of a consciousness aware of the preeminent role of the people in every movement of progress.”

Clearly, re-Africanization, Toure stated, requires the liberation, equality and shared responsibility of women. We must, he says, reach back to ancient models and moral teachings of the equality of women and act accordingly and recognize and correct the contradiction of claiming to fight against exploitation and inequality and yet practicing them. He told men, “We have no right to underestimate the capabilities of the African women and to preserve for her a priori particular spheres of action,” social justice, respect for need of freedom for “the human personality to ‘liberate’ itself and the demands of the struggle require her equality and shared responsibility in every area of life.” These lessons we would accept late in the 60s after internal debates and reassessment led by the women of Us, the changing context and conversations in the Movement and the emergence of women in major leadership roles in Us during the period of massive Cointelpro suppression leading to political imprisonment, underground disappearance, and exile of many men.

Toure taught too, the need for leadership “to return to its normal role of servant (and) social instrument to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the people. Indeed, he says, “it is the people that determines and commands our thoughts and our actions whatever the material situation of the people may be. We are at its service and we shall fulfill our political and social mission only in proportion to our concrete participation in building up the happiness of the whole (people).”