

Comment

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Comment

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Thank you very much. I am an anthropologist, studying cultures of Oceania, especially on PNG, or Papua New Guinea.

My comment will be rather short, then I'd like to talk about how art is used in Papua New Guinea for nation building, as Mr. Richards also talked about.

African art is now, it is said, establishing universality and being accepted as a "universal art." But if they produce something "African," what does that mean? What would the definition of African art be? What is the contextual meaning of African art on the African continent? What is the contextual meaning of African art in colonial and post-colonial Africa?

This morning Mr. Ikwemesi said there is a difference between tribal art and African art. Are you going to lose tribal art? When African people engage in artistic activity on the continent, do they produce something different simply because it's done on that continent?

The question is not limited to the case of African continent. For artwork produced on other continents, does it have a specific meaning in a regional context? This is my general comment. Now I'd like to come back to my topic, speaking about Papua New Guinea, my specialized field of study.

In Papua New Guinea, art is being used in nation building. This country, made up of several hundred ethnic groups, is only 25 years "young." So in this respect probably, it can be said to be similar to some countries in Africa.

Not only before but also after its independence, due to having 800 language groups, people could not form any identity as citizens of a nation state. In some regions, you can see movements for secession still today. Therefore the Papua New Guinea government, urged to solve this problem of national identity, is making a great effort to promote awareness of the national identity among the people by all means. It is in this context that art was spotlighted as one of the most useful and helpful means in political terms.

For instance, the building of the Parliament is one of several examples of how art was utilized by the government for nation building. Though this building itself was designed by an Australian architect, its mural decoration was done by students. And they borrowed its motifs from traditional ones.

What should be noted here is the fact that the motifs were generalized and made neutral in order to avoid representing any particular language or tribal group. This building is supposed to represent Pan-Papua New Guinea in general.

Almost the same situation can be observed in the performing arts. Sometimes different language groups are invited from different regions as dancers to perform cultural shows for tourists, national and international. In this case too, the identity of the language groups is quite clear. However, they are represented as one of the examples of Papua New Guinean culture.

Art is very useful and sometimes even powerful as a political tool when used by a nation state, as we see here, and I wonder if African nations can put this to good use.