Africa Insight |CALL FOR PAPERS
Special Issue: **Building Africa through Arts, Culture and Heritage**

This planned Special Issue of *Africa Insight* builds on the theme chosen by the African Union (AU) for 2021 – Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want. The theme was suggested by the former President of Mali H.E. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and launched during the 34th AU Assembly under the leadership of the current Chairperson of the AU H.E. President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi, the President of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In his acceptance speech (Tshisekedi Tshilombo 2021), President Tshisekedi described arts, culture and heritage as 'the heart of the African Renaissance', and deemed the theme for 2021 as 'an opportunity to return to our roots'. Quoting Léopold Sédar Senghor, he called culture 'the beginning and the end of all things'.

Colonialists claimed their culture and values were universal. They constructed African indigenous identities as homogenous, unchanging, their cultures fixed and ahistorical. For the West, the 'Other' – stuck in the past and racially stereotyped – was regarded as being in need of 'saving' from primitiveness by the 'modern' European human. African societies, colonized, have had their economic and political systems reconfigured to exploit people and accumulate capital for the benefit of the West. Their cultures, denigrated and deemed useless, were mostly left out, negated, excluded, which in the end 'allowed them to survive in silence, in the shadows, simultaneously scorned by their own modernized and westernized elites' (Dussel 2012: 42). These cultures, with their diverse economic and political models, scientific and technological innovations, and military conditions, represent an alterity with respect to European modernity, with which they have coexisted and have learned to respond in their own way to its challenges. Today, the forces of globalisation and capitalist development threaten to further erode African cultures, as elements of local cultures mix with ideas and solutions adopted from the 'global' culture. Cultural hybridities that develop as a result (Bhabha 1994) reveal underlying power relations, which direct the way the cultural interaction between the local and the global leads to the process of cultural transformation.

The 2021 theme draws inspiration directly from the AU Agenda 2063, which, through aspiration 5, puts culture in the centre of building a peaceful, prosperous, just and united Africa – in brief, the 'Africa We Want'. Nonetheless, before this shared strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development was adopted in 2015, the AU has long recognised the role that arts, culture and heritage play as the soul of Africa and has called on its State Parties to see in culture, arts and heritage catalysts for the socio-economic development and integration of the continent. The AU theme for 2021 is thus a continuation of the efforts of the continent towards a better Africa that recognises and values its culture-specific knowledges, cultural codes and ethics in the face of globalisation.

Aim of the Special Issue

The theme adopted by the AU for 2021 is aimed at 'promoting the arts, culture and heritage sector and building a resilient Africa which provides primary health care and social services to all in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and uses the creative economy as a tool to achieve that objective'. In line with this call, the aim of this Special Issue is to contribute intellectually, both as discipline-based scholarship and contribution to practice, to the 2021 Theme and the AU Roadmap, which stipulates the following areas as the basis of interventions (activities and programmes) within its objective:

- ✓ *Arts & Culture*
- ✓ *Health, Wellness and Post COVID-19 Response*
- ✓ *Languages*
- ✓ *History and Oral Traditions*
- ✓ *Heritage*

Accordingly, the authors are invited to write on a topic of their choice within the indicated key areas and the conceptual framework outlined below, and particularly addressing one of the following critical issues:

- role of arts and culture in the current challenges facing the African continent, including Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, sustainable security in Africa;
- arts education as the cornerstone for the development of the creative economy on the continent;
- intellectual property rights and the status of artists and cultural workers in Africa;
- the role of arts and culture in providing inclusive health care and strengthening wellbeing of African people;
- politics of language and the promotion of African languages;
- strengthening African unity through the promotion of regional languages;
- cultural independence and development of African States through the use of African languages;
- strengthening the links between education and culture;
- subverting cultural imperialism;
- oral history and traditions as tools for building communities and strengthening well-being of African people,
- culture as a catalyst for nation-building;
- culture and the quest for freedom;
- culture, heritage and the land issue;
- restitution of cultural property and heritage in Africa;
- balancing heritage conservation and development in the African context;
- heritage and conflict, heritage for peace.

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words by 31 October 2021 to Dr Olga Bialostocka (obialostocka@hsrc.ac.za), the guest editor of this issue.

Timelines:
31 October 2021 – abstract submission deadline
30 November 2021 – deadline for the review of abstracts
31 January 2022 – paper submission deadline
February 2022 – papers sent for double blind peer review
30 June 2022 – the manuscript submitted to the HSRC Press for production

Context

While culture in Agenda 2063 is directly referred to only in aspiration 5, which calls for 'an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics', it is quite clear that the framework mainstreams culture at all levels of development. Culture transpires through all of the seven goals that constitute the vision for Africa and its people described in the continental Agenda. After all, sustainable development cannot be achieved without considering culture that represents context and gives meaning to everything people do (aspiration 1). Ideals of Pan-Africanism and Africa's Renaissance have culture at their heart (aspiration 2). Human rights need to account for cultural rights of people within the plurality of cultures on the continent to be considered inclusive (aspiration 3). Culture further plays a leading role in sustainable peace as it defines the fair social conditions that need to be in place for positive peace to prevail (aspiration 4). If the continent wants to see people-driven development (aspiration 6), it cannot reduce individuals to their social roles but needs to acknowledge their cultural identities as well. Finally, to truly become a strong global player (aspiration 7), the continent must reassert its cultural identity to see in it an asset, not a liability for development.

The AU has not only included culture in all major development blue prints (such as the Lagos Plan of Action 1980-2000 or Agenda 2063), but it has also adopted various instruments pertaining to culture, including the Cultural Charter for Africa (1978), the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance (2006), the Revised African Union Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries (2008), the Model Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Heritage (2018), and the Statute of the African Audio-Visual and Cinema Commission (2019), among others. The AU Roadmap for 2021 as the Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage is therefore another step taken to reconfirm Africa's commitment to build the continent that treasures its own ethics and beliefs as critical factors for the continent's emergence on the global stage, and seeks to adopt policies that reflect Africa's socio-cultural values.

The theme may seem 'light-hearted', considering the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, with its multiple social and economic repercussions for millions of Africans, political conflicts continuously threatening peace and security in many parts of the continent, or the more and more visible effects of the climate change. Yet, the declaration of 2021 as the year of African cultures, heritages and arts is also a way of highlighting the toll of the pandemic on the sector. In fact, next to tourism, the cultural and creative industries have been economically the hardest affected by lockdowns resulting from Covid-19.

If we are to make arts, culture and heritage the levers of any kind of advancement, considerable effort and resources will be required to resuscitate the sector. Meanwhile, there are barely any financial provisions made for it in the national budgets of African states. The AU Summit has called on Member States to allocate at least 1% of their national budget to the arts, culture and heritage sector by 2030 (Assembly/AU/Dec. 772(XXXIII)), which clearly indicates how meagre current provisions are. Investments are necessary if Africa wants to take pride in and draw benefits from its rich cultures.

Conceptual framework

The concept note for the AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage sees arts and culture as 'two sides of the same coin. The former constitutes the artistic and collective production reflecting cultural reality of a society whereas the latter constitutes the basis on which social and heritage capital is formed. Together arts and culture are part and parcel of a heritage of a country – though culture may be in turn regarded as a depository and vehicle of heritage'.

Culture, however we define it – as a way of life; meaning embedded in human interactions; set of tools that inform human behaviour; or as a system of norms and values that organise a society, is intrinsically linked to art and heritage. The term 'art', used in reference to a cultural system or as a representation of a people or a culture, is usually rooted in history. Simultaneously, it is being future-oriented as it acts as a catalyst for cultural change. Connecting people of a culture to their past, art can become their heritage. But heritage is so much more than that. It tends to be perceived as tangible (monuments, groups of buildings, and sites) and intangible (practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith) vestiges of one's culture, in line with the definitions used by UNESCO (UNESCO 1972; 2003). Yet, the term may refer also to meanings attached in the present to the past or a knowledge defined within social, political and cultural contexts (Graham 2002). A more broad and holistic definition pertains to the heritage of indigenous peoples for whom 'heritage includes all expressions of the relationship between the people, their land and the other living beings and spirits which share the land, and is the basis for maintaining social, economic and diplomatic relationships – through sharing – with other peoples. All of these aspects of heritage are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territory of the people concerned' (Smith & Jackson 2005: 357).

Culture, together with its counterparts – art and heritage, has a bearing on all areas of human activity. It shows strong links to both the economic and social dimensions of poverty and inequality. It plays a key role in enhancing the quality of education and making it more inclusive. It assigns meaning to places and a sense of belonging that is born through that process. Accordingly, culture is critical for sustainable planning and functioning of human settlements, particularly in view of building peaceful communities. Culture's intrinsic connection to nature in matters of environmental sustainability cannot be overlooked either. Thus, the expertise of traditionally living communities should pave the way for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and other natural assets. Created and tested through the centuries, the local knowledge systems carry a great capacity to adapt to the changing local ecosystems in line with the existing societal patterns.

The 'Africa We Want' Agenda 2063 has acknowledged the importance of integrating cultural pluralism into developmental strategies aimed at ensuring people's wellbeing. It recognises that development as a process of change is shaped by culture and resides in the particular understanding of reality and the cosmovisions, which differ strongly depending on a cultural horizon. While seeking to improve people's conditions of living, one must therefore recognise as a basic human right the freedom of everyone to choose a way of life that speaks to one's system of beliefs and values.

Accordingly, considering the inherent power inequalities within the international context of the modern colonial world system, this Special Issue of *Africa Insight* seeks to employ a decolonial stance guided by Escobar's interdisciplinary 'political ecology of difference' framework (Escobar 2008). This framework deals with the economical, ecological and cultural distribution conflicts that arise over access to and control of a resource (be it wealth, asset or natural resources) or power assigned to knowledges and cultural practices, at the intersections of the social, the economical and the political. It asserts that 'economic crises are ecological crises are cultural crises' (Escobar 2008: 14). The framework is further not a universal approach but a contextualised theory of difference contingent on historical processes. It highlights the incommensurability of modern economy and pluri-culturality, calling for re-embeddedness of economy in society, ecosystems and culture. It is a decolonial project that addresses pervasive binarisms of Euro-modernity and acknowledges complexity of the ecological-economical-cultural relations. It postulates the possibility of constructing alternative worlds by recognising epistemic differences and advancing political autonomy and counter hegemony. This decolonial perspective acknowledges different developmental paths of people based on their cultural differences, and recognises the importance of the politics of place.

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