

**'SUSTAINING THE
NEW WAVE OF
PAN-AFRICANISM'**

Edited by Bankie Forster Bankie and Viola C. Zimunya

SUSTAINING THE NEW WAVE OF PAN-AFRICANISM

A collection of papers that were presented at the Workshop: 'Sustaining a New Wave of Pan-Africanism' at the University of Namibia (Unam) Windhoek, Namibia, December 6-9, 2010.

Sustaining the New Wave of Pan-Africanism
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sustaining the new wave of Pan-Africanism

Papers resulting from a workshop held at the Windhoek Campus of the University of Namibia, December 6-9, 2010

	Page
SECTION I: In the beginning – Opening statements	1
1. Mandela Kapere, Executive Chairperson, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN)	1
2. H.E. (Prince) Adegboyega C. Ariyo, Nigerian High Commissioner to Namibia	2
3. Statement for and on behalf of Freedom Park, South Africa, by Dr Mongane Wally Serote	3
4. Maureen Hinda, Pan-African Centre of Namibia (PACON)	4
5. Statement for and on behalf of the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), by Dr Tony C. Onwumah	6
6. Tendai Wenyika, Secretary General, Pan-African Youth Union (PAYU)	8
7. Advocate Bience Gawanas, Commissioner of Social Affairs, African Union Commission	9
8. KEYNOTE ADDRESS – H.E. Dr Sam Nujoma, Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Father of the Namibian Nation, and Patron of the Pan-African Center of Namibia (PACON)	11
9. 'African Voices' – Panel discussion on the Sahel	16
SECTION II: Namibian perspectives in Pan-Africanism	23
10. Introductory Remarks – Prof. Peter H. Katjavivi, MP	23
11. Sustaining the new wave of Pan-Africanism – Prof. Mburumba Kerina	25
12. The impact of Pan-African ideas on Namibian politics – Dr Zed Ngavirue	32
13. Pan-Africanism in Namibia and the period of liberation struggle – Paul Helmuth (Interview)	35
14. The African condition as I see it – Job Shipululo Amupanda	39
SECTION III: Philosophical rationale	44
15. Pan-Africanism – some reflections on the way forward – H.E. (Prince) Adegboyega C. Ariyo	44
16. The concept of African Unity (Cheikh Anta Diop) – Almaz Haile	47
17. Sisi Kwa sisi – Nsajigwa Isubha-Gwamaka.M	56
18. Pan-Africanism – rethinking key issues – Chinweizu	62
19. Did Nyerere apostate Socialism? – Nsajigwa Isubha-Gwamaka.M	96
20. The Pan-African upwards trajectory – Dr Mongane Wally Serote	99
SECTION IV: Views from the Afro-Arab Borderlands, with particular reference to Sudan	104
21. Mauritania and Sudan, who is better in Arabisation? – Samba Diallo	104

22. The land question: Darfur's peace nemesis – Sabir Ibrahim	129
23. The historical origins of the Sudanese civil wars – John G. Nyuot Yoh	135
24. The Sudan conflict as I know it – Paternus Cleoplace Niyegira	168
25. Sudan and Pan-Africanism – Hagir Sayed Mohamed	172
26. The national question in Sudan seen from a Pan-African perspective as a justification for a united new Sudan – Bankie F. Bankie, Cecil Gutzmore and Jalal Hashim Muhammed	180
27. Left perspectives in African nationalism – Bankie F. Bankie	182

SECTION V: Pan-African issues at home and abroad **192**

28. Reclaiming the values and institutions of Africa's heritage – Paul Tuhafeni Shipale	192
29. Advancing the new wave of the reparation movement in the Western Diaspora – Morgan Moss Jr.	197
30. Industrialisation the way forward to make Africa relevant in the world economic architecture in the 21st century – H.E. (Prince) Adegboyega C. Ariyo	200
31. Africa-China relations: a Pan-Africanist perspective – Himuvi Mbingeneeko	209
32. Imperialist neo-colonialist moves into Africa – Andile Lungisa	215

SECTION VI: The Pan-African Congresses and FESTAC 77 **220**

33. Early formations of the Pan-African movement – Bankie F. Bankie	220
34. The Fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945 – Bankie F. Bankie	224
35. Much Ado about What? A critique of the 6th and 7th Pan-African Congresses – Sabelo Sibanda	227
36. FESTAC 77 as a watershed in the Pan-Africanist struggle – Dr Tony C. Onwumah	232

SECTION VII: Reports **238**

37. Communiqué issued at the end of the workshop on: Sustaining the Wave of Pan-Africanism, Windhoek, Namibia, December 6-9, 2010	238
38. Rapporteur's Workshop Report with focus on education: by C. Ijahnya	241
39. Workshop attendance register	243

36. FESTAC 77 as a watershed in the Pan-Africanist struggle

Dr Tony C. Onwumah

Introduction

The Second World Black and African Festival of Art and Culture, popularly referred to as FESTAC 77, has a long and interesting history behind it. It is a history that is linked to some of the epochal events in the history of Black and African peoples. These are slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. It would be recalled that, by the instrumentality of slavery, Africans from all parts of the continent were shipped to all the nooks and crannies of the globe where they were essentially hewers of wood and drawers of water. The misery, torture and agony of slavery are well known to historians and other chroniclers. Yet, the unsalutary consequences of slavery have not received sufficient scholarly attention. Slavery did not only entail the forcible use of Africans as farm hands and domestics. More fundamentally, it also targeted African cultures and world views which were pejoratively portrayed as inferior to the cultures of other races.

That slavery ended was not because the slave masters suddenly realized that the slaves were after all humans. The end of slavery and slave trade was not a mark of benevolence on the part of the enslavers. Rather, it was a response to a new logic created by the industrial revolution. It was a logic which rendered slavery as both anachronistic and unprofitable.

The collapse of slavery gave rise to colonialism. While under slavery, Africans were carried away to foreign lands where they were dehumanized and treated like any other domestic property of their owners, the story under colonial rule was different altogether. The colonial setting was such that Africans were dominated politically, economically, socially and culturally right on their own soil. Perhaps, the difference between slavery and colonialism stems from the fact that under the latter, Africans were not articles of trade that could be sold and bought by the highest bidder.

However, it is pertinent to note that Africans were not just helpless recipients of their fate as dictated by their enslavers and colonial masters. For instance, in Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean, there were many instances of slave revolts. On the continent, the likes of Ovoramen, Nana of Itsekiri, Ashantihene of Ghana, and Shaka the Zulu in southern Africa did not only resist foreign incursion and domination, but they also fought relentlessly to safeguard their cultures and all attempts to desecrate them.

Pan-African Congresses

From the above, there is demonstrable evidence that in many instances Africans fought hard to defend their cultures and territorial integrity. The series of activities that were geared towards projecting the image and dignity of Africans culminated in the hosting of the first Pan-African Conference in 1900. This served as an impetus to and triggered off a number of activities which had one purpose as goal, namely the emancipation of Africa from the shackles of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. Though not much has been written and said about it, the meeting of Black and African writers in Rome in 1956

was of special importance.

Realizing the need for a cultural dimension to the Pan-Africanist struggle, the 1956 meeting in Rome resolved that a black and African festival of arts and culture would be desirable. It was against this background that the first Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture was held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966. The Dakar festival was successful and the organizers agreed that another version of the same festival be held in Nigeria 10 years later, in 1976. Due to some internal political problems in Nigeria, the festival could not be held as scheduled in 1976. However, it eventually was held in Nigeria in 1977 from January 5 to February 12. It is pertinent to state that the choice of Nigeria as host of the second edition of FESTAC was because she emerged as the star country at the 1966 festival in Dakar, Senegal. Indeed, the organizers were working towards establishing a tradition by which star countries hosted the next edition of the festival.

The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture was a significant improvement on the Dakar festival and could be rightly described as an unqualified success story. But first, it is necessary to understand the long title of the festival: Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture. The view has been expressed that the second African Festival of Arts and Culture or the Second Black Festival of Arts and Culture would have sufficed. The lengthy theme was adopted to accommodate peoples in Africa who acknowledge that they are Africans, but not blacks and black people in other continents who are not Africans.

Be that as it may, FESTAC 77 was unique in many ways. It not only brought together Africans from all over the world in hitherto unimagined numbers, the scope of the festival was also broader than the previous one. It embraced dance, drama, cultural presentation, boat regatta, durbar and very significantly, a colloquium. All the events took place in Lagos from where they were beamed to the world by satellite. It was only the durbar that took place in Kaduna. In all, 59 black and African countries and communities participated in the festival.

The FESTAC colloquium, under the theme: *The Arts and Civilization of Black and African Peoples*, requires some explanation. It introduced an intellectual dimension to the Pan-Africanist struggle. More importantly, it highlighted the contributions which Africans made and continue to make to the pool and extension of global knowledge. The colloquium interrogated and to a large extent corrected the erroneous impression that development in ancient Africa was externally inspired. Put otherwise, it challenged the impression that Africa was merely a recipient of the development efforts of other races and made little or no contributions at all to global growth and development.

The colloquium covered a broad spectrum of knowledge as represented in the following sub-themes:

1. Black Civilization and the Arts
2. Black Civilization and Philosophy
3. Black Civilization and Literature
4. Black Civilization and African Languages
5. Black Civilization and Historical Awareness

6. Black Civilization and Pedagogy
7. Black Civilization and Religion
8. Black Civilization and Science and Technology
9. Black Civilization and African Government
10. Black Civilization and the Mass Media

It is important to stress that the papers from the colloquium have been edited and published in 10 volumes under the title: *The Arts and Civilization of Black and African Peoples*.

The significance of FESTAC 77 is that, for the period it lasted it drew world attention to Africa. It created a platform where the rich and resilient culture of Africa was showcased in an unprecedented manner. It was also a unifying event for both continental and diaspora Africans who came together as one in the demonstration of the beauty of their culture. Of note is that it was a wake-up call, that Africans wherever they are found share a common destiny and heritage. A destiny and heritage shaped by a common experience of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Of vital importance is that FESTAC 77 aroused a consciousness that the common challenges of Africa and her peoples worldwide require a united front. It also demonstrated that the contributions of Africa to world civilization are not just an expression of patriotism, but a verifiable reality.

Therefore, at the end of the festival, the organizers were faced with the resolution of an important poser. That is, to either make the gains of the festival ephemeral or to build on it and use it as a platform for the sustainable crusade and execution of the Pan-Africanist agenda. In their collective wisdom, it was resolved that the gains of the momentous festival should be built upon and reinforced. This resolution influenced the decision of the countries and communities that participated in FESTAC 77 to hand over all the materials that were used at the festival to the government of Nigeria. Some of the materials that were handed over include, but are not limited to, paintings, drawings, artifacts, artworks, books and publications, pictorial representation of Africa and the origin of man, the chain of African unity, specimen of African architectural technology video and audio tapes among many others.

To justify the confidence reposed in her, the then military government of Nigeria decided to create a centre to house the materials from which the objectives of FESTAC 77 would be pursued. As a result, by decree 69 of 1979 the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) was established and charged with the underlisted functions.

Functions of the Centre

- The Centre shall be a multi-dimensional institution and shall, subject to this Decree, have responsibility for the promotion of public interest in Black and African Arts and Civilization and for the preservation of such creative work of value of:
- each participating country during the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Cultures 1977 (hereinafter in this Decree referred to as "the 1977 festival") or similar cultural manifestations; or
- Of any other country or individual where such creative work has emanated from or pertains to the 1977 Festival or similar cultural manifestations, donated to the Centre either directly or through the International Festival Committee of the 1977 Festival or

hereafter donated to the Centre by any person or organization.

- In pursuance of sub-section (1) of this section, it shall be the duty of the Centre:
- To locate, identify and assemble for better preservation all recorded matter, published materials and museum artifacts relating to the 1977 Festival and to prepare an inventory of these works;
- To promote understanding and appreciation of Black and African arts and culture by involving the general public in its activities through lectures, discussions, symposia, exhibitions, performance and demonstrations of arts and crafts.
- To acquire from the zonal secretariat of the 1977 Festival/and any other source, creative records relating to past and future world, regional or national festivals of arts and culture of relevance to Black and African arts and civilization.
- To produce guides, catalogues, bibliographies, abstracts and indices to facilitate the use of the materials preserved at the Centre;
- To make the facilities of the Centre available to members of the public on such terms as the Board may, with the approval of the commissioner, determine:
- To organize exhibitions, displays and such other manifestations as are calculated to achieve the objectives of the Centre;
- To make appropriate arrangements for exchange, either by way of lending or by way of the gift of materials held at the Centre.
- To supplement the materials held at the Centre by acquiring copies of materials relating to the past and future, world, regional or national festivals of arts and cultures of relevance to Black and African arts and civilization.
- To safeguard the property of the Centre; and
- To provide such services as are usually provided by cultural resource centres.

The Centre achieves its set goals and objectives through research, publications, conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops and exhibitions.

Some of the programmes hosted by the Centre in recent times include the following: 2009 edition of its annual International Conference series with the theme: "Teaching and Propagation of African History to the Diaspora and Diaspora history to Africa" in Brasilia, Brazil, at the instance of the Brazilian Government through Brazil's Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Policies on racial Equality (SEPPIR), in the office of the Presidency, Brazil.

The Centre hosted the third edition of its International Conference series at Casa del Papa Hotel Ouidah, Republic of Benin, November 4 -8, 2007. The theme of the conference was: "Global African Spirituality, Social Capital and Self Reliance in Africa".

The Centre in collaboration with the Pan-African Strategic and Policy Research Group (PANAFTRAG) hosted the International Conference on "Advancing and Integrating Research and Studies in the Interest of Africa and the African Diaspora" held at the University of West Indies, Saint Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago from November 7 to 11, 2006.

In line with its responsibility of spearheading research findings on African heritage, the Centre featured and participated actively at the second phase of the Rock Art Workshop project held on January 20-23, 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya.

In the same vein, the Centre hosted the Meeting of African Agencies and Organizations involved in the management and promotion of African Arts and Culture in Lagos, August 21-23, 2007. The summit attracted participants from the Regional Centre for Research and Documentation on Oral Traditions and Development of African Languages (CER-DOTOLA).

In collaboration with the African Union Centre for Oral Tradition and History AU-(CELTHO), Trust for African Rock Art (TARA), Pan-African Strategic and Policy Research Group (PANAFTRAG) the Centre hosted a Methodology Workshop on African Rock Art in Niamey, Niger Republic, March 11-14, 2008.

Similarly, the Centre hosted a National Workshop on: "Cultural Rejuvenation for National Integration and Sustainable Development" from April 17 to 18, 2008 at the Peninsula Resort, Ajah, Lagos.

To effectively discharge its mandate, the Centre has collaborative relations with the underlisted institutions and agencies:

- International Federation of Library Association (IFLA)
- International Council on Archives (ICA)
- West African Museum Project (WAMP)
- International Commission for the Conservation and Preservation of Cultural Properties/Monuments (ICCROM)
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- International Institute for Bantu Civilization (CICIBA)
- Group for Children in African Museums (GCAM)
- French Cultural Centre
- Goethe Institute
- Smithsonian Institute
- International Council of Museums (ICOM)
- Regional Centre for Research and Documentation on Oral Traditions and Development of African Languages (CERTODOLA)
- Globalization, Identity Politics and Social Conflicts Project (GIPSC)
- Pan African Strategic and Policy Research Group (PANAFTRAG)
- Kent State University, USA
- World Garifuna Organization, South America
- Book Aid International (BAI)
- British Council
- The Ford Foundation
- UNICEF
- Trust for African Rock Art (TARA)
- l'Institutet de Development et de'Echanges Endogenes (IDEE), at IDEE, Ouidah, Benin Republic
- National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP)
- Centre for African Theatre Arts and Film Production

- The Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST)
- Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Policies on Racial Equality (SEPPIR), the Presidency, Brazil.
- Institute for Afro-Brazilian Studies (IPEAFRO). Palmeris Cultural Foundation, Brazil.

In addition, the Centre has 70 titles as its published work. It is also heart-warming that at the last summit of African Union (AU) Ministers of Culture, the Centre was recognized as a Pan-African Centre for the promotion and propagation of African culture and heritage. Finally, there is no gainsaying the fact that CBAAC is the greatest and most enduring legacy of FESTAC 77. It has showcased Black and African Cultures and could do more subject to the availability of funds and support from sister African countries.

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