

Pan-Africanism and the Black Festivals of Arts and Culture: Today's Realities and Expectations

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Abstract: *The first two editions of the Festivals of Blacks arts and culture which owed much to the ideologies of the Pan-Africanism and Negritude that preceded them, no doubt laid legacies that have continued to serve as strong reference points in the discussion of Africans and African descent relationship. Apart from providing an unusual forum that brought to light the diverse contributions of Blacks and African peoples to the universal currents of thought and arts, both editions drew attentions to the expected relationship between the continental Africans and their offspring in the Diaspora. The events reassert the African identity thus creating the platform for continental Africa and the Diaspora to move through the borders of nation state and the psychosocial borders of racism which is central to all Pan-Africanist freedom movements. It is however worrisome that forty eight years after the maiden edition of the festival (FESMAN) and thirty seven years after the second (FESTAC), the achieved cultural integration is yet to translate into much expected economical, political, educational, philosophical and technological advancements of African nations and that of the Diaspora. This paper therefore attempts a review of the Black Festivals of Arts with a view to highlighting how the achieved cultural integration through the arts could be further explored for today's realities and expectations.*

Keywords: *Pan Africanism, Black, Festival, Art, Culture.*

I. Introduction

I shared a feeling with my people.
I looked into their faces and saw mine.
Our smiles and laughter needed not
a common Language to be understood.
To be appreciated.
Welcome brother they said to me.
Welcome Home!
- Lidge Daily (Enohoro 1977)

For convenience and our purpose in this paper, the name Africa shall describe three categories of peoples: First, the people in Africa, those residents within the continent, from Cape to Cairo, Senegal to Somalia, not leaving out Madagascar and the islands. The second are the forcefully migrated through slavery. Of particular reference is the migration through the "middle passage" which has added another perspective to the description of the phenomenon called Africa thus yielding the name Diaspora or Black/African descents. They are scattered all over Americas and Europe, they are found in Caribbean Island, Cuba, Jamaica and attract such name as Afro/Negro in their present place of abode (Bangura, 2012). The third comprise the willingly migrated who left on "account of persistent conflicts, political instability, bad governance, autocratic rule and dictatorial regimes" (Babawale, 2008) and those who left in search of 'greener pasture' described by Mbuyamba (2011) as the Explorers, they are often referred to as 'African immigrants'. It is in line with the above stated that the African people shall refer to all African/Black descents irrespective of the colour of their skin, period or place and circumstances of their birth or residence, and the name Africa shall be seen not just as a continent but in Karenga's (1997) word, "a world community of Africans" made up of the continental Africans and Africans in the Diaspora as well as the so called "African immigrants" as distinguished from the Diaspora (the Deportees), all generally referred to as Black people.

From Trans-Atlantic slavery to scramble for the continent and colonialism, the people of Africa around the globe have experienced various degrees of oppression, discrimination, segregation and their religion, values, languages, cultural practices and philosophies are debased and destroyed. These numerous humiliations and limiting the opportunities for African social advancement actually provoked and awake in the Blacks the consciousness of the ethnic identity, fuelled their reaction and resistance to racial segregation and in turn

powered the rise of various ideological and political Pan-Africanist and nationalist movements, all in defence of Blacks being labelled inferior, primitive, backward and savage; an evaluation of their African origin.

For our convenience, Pan Africanism is here perceived as ideologies centred on Africanity and Africans be it within the continent or as found in other continents. It deals with the questions of African dignity, African identity, and African renaissance, and cannot be divulged from its (racial) equality content, and in colonialism, independence and power structure. It is a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny.

From the 1893 Chicago conference on Africa (Esedebe 1982) to the Sylvester Williams' London Conference of 1900 and the later series of African Congresses across the globe, one of the major and visible reflections of the Pan-Africanists ideologies and initiatives/engagements, which is the preoccupation of this paper, is the convocation of the Festival of Black Arts. The festivals which had its third debut in 2010 seem the climax of the call for Blacks' convergence and the 'back to the root' campaign. It provided the platform for Blacks at both ends of the divide to converge, display and express what actually make "Africans Africans", also, it brought to light the diverse contributions of Blacks and African peoples to the universal currents of thought and arts. The three editions have no doubt laid legacies that have continued to serve as strong reference points in the discussion of Africans and African descent relationship and have drawn attentions to the expected relationship between the continental Africans and their offspring in the Diaspora reasserting the African identity thus creating the platform for continental Africa and the Diaspora to move through the borders of nation state and the psychosocial borders of racism which is central to all Pan-Africanist freedom movements.

Forty-eight years after the maiden edition of the festival tagged FESMAN and thirty-seven years after the second, popularly known as FESTAC '77, it is imperative to cast a retrospective look at the achievements of the festivals and ask how and why the achieved cultural integration is yet to translate into much expected economical, political, educational, philosophical and technological advancement of African nations and that of the Diaspora and how this, through the arts could be further explored for today's realities and expectations.

Festivals of Black Arts: An Overview

The idea to convoke the Festival of Black Arts was first mentioned at the 1956 Conference of Black Writers in Paris, summoned by the Paris-based Pan African cultural society to discuss the resurgence of the African culture. The idea came up again at the Second African Congress in Rome in 1959 and one of the landmark decisions at that congress was the agreement to convoke the Festival. This however did not materialize until nine years later and by one of the participants, Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906-2001), one of the leading lights of Negritude movement, who was elected president of Senegal in 1960. For Senghor, accepting to host the first World Festival of Black Arts in his country's capital Dakar was an opportunity to bringing to fulfilment a long time dream of a convergence of African and the Diaspora to enact in practical terms the theories of cultural renaissance.

The 1966 first World Festival of Black Arts otherwise known as **World Festival of Negro Art** (1er Festival Mondial des Arts Negres aka FESMAN) held between 1st and 24th April. It was attended by people from thirty-seven countries and hosted many of the greatest Black cultural emissaries, prominent artists and musicians of the day. The festival had in attendance musicians such as Duke Ellington, Arthur Mitchell, Alvin Ailey (American Negro Dance Company), Mestre Pastinha (the great Capoeirista of Bahia), Marion Williams, and the Queen of Samba, Clementina de Jesus and Josephine Baker. The list of guests also included historian Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986), singer Julie Akufo Akoussah and Bella Bellow; writers Langston Hughes, Wole Soyinka, Amiri Baraka and Nelson Mandela. The festival which was planned as Pan-African celebrations was also intended by Senghor as a political lever and a negritude flagship, a doctrine aiming at a fierce independence towards Western countries.

The event which took place at a time many African nations were still struggling for colonial independence, brought together people of different nationalities and generations was aimed at shedding light on the struggle and persistence of Black people in the face of colonization. Its activities ranged in content and featured poetry, sculpture, painting, music, cinema, theatre, fashion, architecture, design and dance from artists and performers from around the African Diaspora. The festival had Alioune Diop (1910-1980) as its artistic director with the assistance of Aime Cesaire (a writer and the Director of the 'Presence Africaine' journal and publisher of African Literature and History books), Jean Gabus, (1908-1992), a Swiss anthropologist and Engelbert Mveng (1930-1995), a Cameroonian Jesuit priest art historian. The festival enjoyed the patronage of UNESCO which funded the opening conference and the building of a new art museum (Musee Dynamique) in Dakar which exhibited art works and ceremonial objects of the participating countries.

In 1977, eleven years after FESMAN, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (aka FESTAC '77) which was acclaimed the most elaborate was held in Lagos, Nigeria. It was to have been held earlier but was postponed by civil war and numerous organizational delays, it finally held from 15th January to 12th February 1977. FESTAC '77 was a great departure from FESMAN in terms of scope and

magnitude; it was quite a larger event with stretch of performances from the south to the northern part of the host country. It embraced all Black and African people from all over the world. It is suffice to note that by the time of the festival, a good number of African countries had gained their independence from the degrading colonial control while African descents particularly in America and Europe, had also recorded some level of success in the struggle to end all shades of segregations. This period also coincided with the peak of the "back to the root" campaign by some Black movements' with great emphasis on "Black Power and Black identity".

All the aforementioned set the ambiance for FESTAC '77 which opened its participation to all member states of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU), all Liberation Movements recognized by OAU and all Black communities outside the African continent. This perhaps explained Alex Poinsett's description of the event in his article published in the Ebony Magazine as "the biggest family reunion in human history." With about 17,000 participants from over fifty-seven countries around the globe, made up of thousands of people from Africa and the Diaspora in attendance, the festival remained the largest cultural event ever held on the African continent even to date.

FESTAC '77 which had as one of its cardinal goals "to provide a forum for the discussion of the enormous richness and diversity of African contributions to world culture" also provided the "opportunity for recounting the achievements of their ancestors". It was attended by thousands of artists, musicians and scholars from Africa and the Diaspora. They came from Ghana, Guinea, Togo, Somalia, Algiers, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Zimbabwe; from Australia, Guinea Papau, France, England, Canada, Guyana, United States, Sweden, Cuba, Trinidad, Brazil, Suriname and the Liberation movements of Southern Africa. United States Zone alone sent about 500 delegates, described by Monroe (1999) as the largest group of African American artists ever to return to Africa as a single group. The contingent included the celebrated artists like Stevie Wonder, Sun Ra, and Donald Byrd. FESTAC '77 also had in attendance Bembeya Jazz (Guinea), the Orchestre Afrisa International (Congo), Louis Maholo and Dudu Pukwana (South Africa), Mighty Sparrow (Trinidad), OK Jazz accompanied by Ray Lema, Tabu Ley Rochereau and Gilberto Gil (Brazil), the Cuban National Dance, aboriginal performers from Australia and New Guinea, to name only a few.

The core of the festival, set in its multi-linguistic, multi- coloured framework of traditional dancers, secular plays, exhibitions, films, books, ceremonies, and endless discussions on solidarity, revolution and history, was a two-week long colloquium where more than 200 leading Black scholars presented papers and discussed topics related to everything from arts and languages, philosophy and religion, to science and technology. Termed the "heart of FESTAC '77" by the Grand Patron, Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasabjo (the then military Head of State), it was more appropriately its very essence, an "intellectual awakening" designed to celebrate the Black world's heritage, decolonize the Black scholar's mind once and for all, and articulate FESTAC's goals in a program for future actions as noted by Andrew Apter (1993). The Colloquium established an archive of knowledge expressed in papers by some 700 scholars who sought to work out the problems in language, education, religion, philosophy, technology, and history, problems that prevent the achievement of cultural unity and cultural freedom, and made into ten volumes, which attested to the intellectual integrity and unity of Black civilization.

The massive infrastructure and facilities put in place for FESTAC '77 were indicative of the host country's huge investment in the festival. The material proceeds of FESTAC '77 are today in the custody of Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation (CBAAC) bearing trusteeship responsibilities on behalf of the Nigerian nation for all the 59 nations that participated in the great event. As Babawale (2011) rightly observed, FESTAC '77 was a rare opportunity that significantly marked African's renaissance and capture the aspiration of the Blacks African continent.

The third world and the last (to date) of the Festival of Black Arts, also tagged FESMAN held from 10th to 31st December 2010 (thirty three years after FESTAC '77) in Senegal, the host country of the first event. Although the least successful of the three in terms of organisation and popularity, organised by President Abdoulaye Wade with the theme "African Renaissance", which refers to both domestic and Diaspora Africans, it re-echoed the need for African and Africans in the Diaspora to rethink Africa. It also highlighted the power of the arts to promote development and peace, and incorporated contemporary issues such as HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a UN-backed set of targets to reduce extreme poverty and other global problems by 2015. The festival which cost upwards of £52m was funded by the African Union, the government of Brazil (the festival's guest of honour) and several corporate bodies. Kwei-Armah its artistic director expressed hope that the Festival of World Arts would be a regular event on the calendar and that the next festival will be hosted by Brazil¹. It must also be noted that before the FESMAN 2010, there was an attempt by South Africa to take up the mantle of organising another Black festival of arts through a private initiative headed by M.K.Malifani, the chairman of the organizing committee. According to Duro Oni² (immediate past Director General of CBAAC) the event was scheduled to hold in cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria in December 2002. This however could not hold.

Gains of the Festivals of Black Arts

That the three celebrations of World Festival of Black Arts, to borrow Babawale's (2011) word, have "largely re-enacted the sovereign determination of Black people to organise themselves, reach out to others and enthrone a worthy historical and cultural position" is of no doubt. In between the FESMAN '66, FESTAC '77 and FESMAN 2010 there have been several other regional Pan African cultural events to prove this. We have had the Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) of Ouagadougou, the Historical Theatre Project now known as PANAFEST of Ghana and Pan-African Music Festival (FESPAM), all attesting to sovereign determination and capability of Africa. Reference must also be made of the OAU/AU' efforts at raising the people's consciousness towards African renaissance through the 1969 Colloquium in Algiers, 1975 AFRICULT in Accra, adoption in 1976 of the Cultural Chart of Africa in Port Louis and the adoption of its revised version of The Charter of African Cultural Renaissance in Khartoum in 2006.

The Festivals since its maiden edition in 1966 has also opened up the avenue for continental African and the Diaspora interactions. The CBAAC innovative yearly conference in collaboration with some research groups and governments, and the annual celebration of Black History day and many others of such, needed be commended for building bridges and raising Blacks consciousness. Most of these organized events and activities are more or less focussed at raising the elite consciousness and not broad enough nor have the capacity of the Festival of arts they derived from.

It is here opined that the greatest achievement of the Festival of Black Arts (be it FESMAN or FESTAC) is the removal of the barrier (of academicism and elitism) which had limited the discussion and appreciation of the ideals of Pan-Africanism to few intellectuals. The festival brought to the television screens of the uneducated masses which forms the larger percentage of the people who could not understand the 'grammar of ideologies' and on a large scale too, cultures of other peoples in Africa and in the Diaspora thus providing an avenue for them to compare, understand and appreciate other Africans' cultures and tradition. The festival enabled them the opportunity to discern and appreciate the need for cultural integration and African unity. The larger population who had never heard about Pan Africanism or Negritude were provided the avenues for cultivating feelings of racial solidarity. Above all, the festival of Black Arts brought to the consciousness of a larger population of the continental Africans the information about the existence of their other "brothers" and "sisters" in the Diaspora as they found in them vestiges of traditional African art and religious practices. The Diaspora African on the other hand had the privilege to interact with the people they have always desired to meet. As a FESTAC participant, Lenardo Dedman of the Troy Robin-son Youth Orchestra puts it.

... When I return to America I will incorporate into my lifestyle a new feeling of closeness that I have with black men, and use the music and ideas I've learned to create more music. For my five children I am bringing many pictures, I will tell them of their black ancestors and of the African instruments I have seen and I will tell them how nice the people are. (Enohoro 1977)

A FESMAN 2010 participant³ also reflects this while commenting on the benefit of the festival saying:

... Being able to take part in this festival was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. ... I enjoyed immensely the amazing music and art that was presented. At the same time, I also appreciated the way it made me think deeply about the complexities of bringing real tangible social change, prosperity, and recognition to a continent and Diaspora of people who have added so much to global creativity. Music and art is clearly of core importance to the movement that many have dubbed the "African Renaissance". Despite the complicated intricacies involved, one can't help but be optimistic for the future.

David Murphy, a professor of Senegalese art at the University of Stirling in Scotland, commenting on FESMAN 2010 observed that the festival offers more than a parade of singers, slam poets, filmmakers, and novelists. It is also a chance for this diverse continent to create an African art canon with a common narrative of the continent's moment in the world. There is no doubt and as rightly echoed by Babawale (2011) in his discussion of FESTAC 77, that beyond the festivity, the festival presents a platform upon which the significance of blackness and its robust value will continue to be celebrated.

However, that the 'significance of blackness' and 'its robust value' as well as the acclaimed 'achieved cultural integration' are yet to translate into much expected economical, political, educational, philosophical and technological advancement of African nations and that of the Diaspora, is worrisome. The FESTAC '77 which seems the most well documented of the three yielded volumes of articulated thoughts of intellectuals on every aspect of African life with projections into the future. The volumes of the published colloquium proceedings contain varied suggestions and recommendations that could be interpreted to be viable templates for the overall restructuring of African society and meant to serve as basis for cultural integration of African nations and that of the Diaspora. It is obvious and sad that no mechanism was fashioned to ensure that the great efforts of contributors were not rubbished. There was no supervisory body or strategy put in place for the implementations of the festival's various recommendations. The inability of the festival to grow beyond FESTAC, and its not being regular, failed to sustain the steam.

Expectations unmet / Promises un-kept

Every of the participants at the three editions of the Black Festival of Arts have often agreed that Pan African festival is a strong tool in rediscovering Africana renaissance. Senghor's acceptance to host the first World Festival of Black Arts in his country's capital Dakar was to enact in practical terms the theories of cultural renaissance.

We may at this juncture be reminded of the response to some questions of one of the FESTAC 77's participants, Nontsizi Cayou, the creator and director of "Wajumbe,"⁴ on the festival in Ife Enohoro (1977), she observed that:

"... We must get out the word of the significance of FESTAC, that it is continuous and that it must grow and develop. Generally, FESTAC should be an independent black venture. The festival should be seen as a collective black festival, rather than a hosted festival; this way all the countries contribute skills and finances to help solve basic problems. ... "A special day could be added to the festival format so that people could get together in areas of their interest. Dance ensembles of all countries come together to find ways of organization and communication for the next festival. "We can translate the spirit here by institution building. By teaching-instilling African values; then the atmosphere will recreate the spirit of FESTAC. Touch the latent Africanism which will lead to another development, another commitment to work."

For the Blacks in the Diaspora, specifically her America group, she noted

For the success of future festivals it is necessary to intensify the interest of the regions here in America. ... "It would be extremely beneficial if future United States participants were oriented to the realities of the motherland and the importance of their roles as cultural representatives of a group and of all blacks.

We perhaps may then ask in Robinson (2009) words 'why African stopped celebrating itself'. That Black festivals have only been celebrated three times in forty-eight (48) years seems inadequate and not in conformity with the ideas of its initiators in the first instance. Why has continental Africa not as eager as before in embracing its various peoples all over the world?

Beyond the radiance of the successful hosting of the three editions of the festivals and the prided achievements of being able to accomplish cultural integration through the arts, the question that begs for answer is how have we been able to situate the achievements of the festival of Blacks Arts within today's realities so much that they could be further explored for global linkages and transitional network? This is indeed a big question that requires a good assessment and deep reflection. Perhaps considering where we started might prove helpful in answering these questions:

- Can it really be said that those unique problems and troubling emblems that necessitated the emergence of the numerous revolutionary movements no longer exist?
- Can it be said that we are no longer considered as been at the bottom of the totem pole by the vast majority of the world. Are we not still being seen as the immigrants who mess things up upon arrival In America, Europe, Asia and even Russia?
- Can we say that the war of white supremacy and Black inferiority was over?
- While we take pride in the Blackman as the number one citizen of the world today, does that give an indication of victory over racial segregation?
- Can it be said that African nations are truly and really free from the shackles of their colonial masters?

The festivals, forty-eight years after the maiden edition of the festival and thirty-seven years after the FESTAC '77 have yielded great volumes of well thought out recommendations put together by the best of the intellectuals Africa had as at then. These volumes/data could be interpreted to be viable templates ever to be produced as antidotes to the above queries and for the overall restructuring of African society and peoples all over the world. These templates are meant to serve as basis for the economical, political, educational, philosophical and technological advancement of African nations and that of the Diaspora, a blue print that was expected to consolidate the achieved cultural integration. The question here is why have we not been able to translate these templates into today's realities and expectation? There are two possible answers to this – it is either the contributions were not as well thought out as generally made to believe – which seem questionable or that our leaders are only interested in festivities and not real development. The today's realities is that continental African and African in the Diaspora have not positively access and annex the gains of the Pan-Africanist struggles as made manifested in the Festival of Blacks Arts. We have actually allowed the steam go off.

What could and should be done

While commending the rebranding of Organisation of African Unity as a way of "reviving the Pan African spirit ... to allowing the wildest dream of Pan African pioneers ... to come to pass" (Gassama, 2013) and the choice of the eleven year old branded African Union (AU) for making Pan-Africanism and African

Renaissance central to its agenda, we also laud the pronouncement of African Diaspora as constituting its 6th region, knowing fully-well that African peoples, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but common destiny. However, for meaningful solidarity and fraternity, strategies should be devised to ensure that the 6th region is allowed strategic participation and involvement in Pan-African matters such as the festival of Black Arts.

While it is also good to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of the regional Pan African organised cultural events, this paper advocates an all embracing Pan African festival that is neither restricted to Ghana (PANAFEST) nor Burkina Faso (FESPACO) nor merely rotated festival among African nations that could afford to host but truly Pan African in design, planning and hosting. If we must keep the spirit of Pan Africanism alive, AU should create avenues within its Charter for African Cultural Renaissance and expand its 'Creative African' priority programme by actually involving members of its "6th region" the "African Diaspora" in the planning and hosting of the Festival of Blacks Arts thus giving it a real Pan African outlook that can be compared to no other event but Olympics.

This could be made possible by (AU) entering into strong collaboration with organised experts and institutional and corporate bodies in ensuring regular enactment of the Festival. The festival should not only be made regular, probably at four to five years interval but also incorporate a regular Pan African Congress/Colloquium) that involves all participating nations and groups. The Festival should be managed by a standing body/committee just like African Cup of Nations, the football championship of Africa being managed by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) or All African Games, the multi-sport event held every four years being managed by the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa and Association of National Olympic Committee of Africa (ANOCA). The organising body/committee should however comprise representation of the 6th region, 'the Diaspora'.

If properly articulated, this will strengthen the links between the Diaspora and the mother Africa and open avenue for greater understanding and development. More so, it will as observed by Mbuyamba (2011) help build bridges through a well organised tourism system. Perhaps there is the need to revisit Nontsizi Cayou's comment earlier referenced and the inquisition of Robinson (2009) who also sees the Festival of Black arts as the needed avenue for 'collective healthy and regular doses of self esteem'. To Cayou and Robinson, there is the need to continuously re-introduce ourselves to each other not only to fill the gap, but for 'our children, to be able to understand their past and give them the tools required to change their tomorrow. As leaders of tomorrow, they will be the ones saddled with the responsibility to lift us off the bottom of that totem pole and keep us moving up.

It must be realised that the Festival of Black Arts and Culture, if made regular and truly Pan African, is a viable tool for re-developing and re-establishing the relationships between the continental Africans and Africans in the Diaspora. The argument in this paper is that it takes the magnitude of FESMAN or FESTAC to actually establish and maintain the bridge between the continental African and the Diaspora, and that sustaining the steam of relationship and translating benefits into real human development, requires regular enactment/celebration. It is therefore opined that AU as a matter of fact should consider the festival as one of its cardinal programmes and Pan African Congress/Colloquiums should be made a major agenda of the festival to create the platform for regular evaluation of recommendations and facilitate the implementations of developmental ideas generated. It is also here suggested that hosting of the festival be rotated, not only among the nations of the continent but also among nations and communities of Black descents that constitute the 6th region. This perhaps is the one sure way to ensuring that the significance of blackness and its robust value will continue to be celebrated.

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