

CLASS, CULTURE AND
IMAGINING
NATIONALISM IN THE
HOME
AFRICAN DIASPORA



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& ROBIN D G KELLEY**

Appendix A

**The Seventh Pan-African
Congress: Notes from
North American Delegates**

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and Marian Kramer*

As we attempt to summarize our experiences at the Seventh Pan-African Congress (PAC), we wish our readers to know that our thoughts are as personal and emotional as they are political and intellectual. Having experienced the 'roots' phenomenon and visited Africa, we believe it impossible for Black Americans to travel to the motherland without being filled with a certain sense of longing, curiosity and fulfillment. It is much the feeling of a lost people returning home.

Departing from Chicago, we quickly became acquainted with other North American delegates. We were a collection of representatives from mass movements, unions, community organizations and the academy, but all were activists committed to fundamental social change, and with extensive credentials in the movement. In our midst was a most remarkable woman, Kay Struthers, a lifelong veteran of the revolutionary movement, who was making her first trip to the motherland. Kay would prove to be a most energetic and valuable asset to the North American delegation.

Although one of us had spent an extended time in Nigeria in 1983, this would be our first visit to the eastern part of the continent. Anyone listening to the American news media immediately associates East Africa with the curses of starvation, rampant AIDS and political instability. In spite of this conditioning, we were on our way to Africa, and we could hardly contain our eagerness to deplane. But first there would be an eternity of travel. The flights seemed endless. A seven-hour layover at London's Heathrow Airport prompted the inevitable bid whist game, along with the requisite signifying. Another ten to twelve hours to Nairobi followed, during which we seized the opportunity to review and reflect on the back-

ground of the Pan-African Congress. We knew the history of the six preceding congresses, of course, but we wanted to refresh our memories, and took this opportunity to review our 'Handbook of Struggle', prepared by the Seventh PAC North American coordinator, Abdul Alkalimat.

The handbook reminded delegates that the First Pan-African Congress convened in London in 1900. Among its leaders were W.E.B. Du Bois, H. Sylvester Williams, Henry P. Brown and Bishop Alexander Walters, all of whom wanted an assemblage of 'men and women of African blood, to deliberate solemnly upon the present situation and the outlook for the darker races of mankind.'¹ The historic resolution of the first congress called for racial progress, 'raising nine millions of human beings from slavery to manhood';² international respect for Africa and an end to the 'unrighteous oppression toward the American Negro'.³

The Second Pan-African Congress, held in Paris in 1919, called upon the League of Nations and the Western powers to deal with Africa and her people fairly. Resolutions asked that natural resources be 'held in trust for the natives';⁴ that forced labor be abolished, that education be expanded, and that fundamental principles of citizenship and consent be honored.

In 1921, the Third Pan-African Congress's London Manifesto reiterated the themes of self-government, political freedom and restrained European expropriation of African wealth. In addition, this manifesto called for the 'absolute equality of races';⁵ the advancement of all civilization, world peace, an end to economic and cultural oppression and to the 'worst abuses' of colonialism. Most important, this document pointed to the problems of capital enslaving labor, thus creating an egregious maldistribution of wealth caused by the tyranny of monopoly.

The Pan-African movement increased in importance as World War II ushered in a shift in the world balance of power. The Fifth Pan-African Congress convened in Manchester, England in 1945. Reflecting the increasingly assertive voice of oppressed peoples, this gathering was characterized by intensified demands and more radical resolutions, and it is generally agreed that the Fifth Pan-African Congress was a watershed event, playing a significant role in stimulating the anti-colonial struggles and wars of liberation of the 1950s and early 1960s. Its 'Declaration to the Colonial Peoples' still resonates:

We affirm the right of all colonial peoples to control their own destiny. All colonies must be free from foreign imperialist control, whether political or economic.

The peoples of the colonies must have the right to elect their own Governments, without restrictions from foreign Powers. We say to the peoples of the colonies that they must fight for these ends by all means at their disposal.

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The object of imperialist Powers is to exploit. By granting the right to colonial peoples to govern themselves that object is defeated. Therefore, the struggle for political power by colonial and subject peoples is the first step towards, and the necessary prerequisite to, complete social, economic and political emancipation. The Fifth Pan-African Congress therefore calls on the workers and farmers of the Colonies to organise effectively. Colonial workers must be in front of the battle against imperialism. Your weapons – the strike and the boycott – are invincible.

We also call upon the intellectuals and professional classes of the colonies to awaken to their responsibilities. By fighting for trade union rights, the right to form co-operatives, freedom of the Press, assembly, demonstration and strike, freedom to print and read the literature which is necessary for the education of the masses, you will be using the only means by which your liberties will be won and maintained. Today there is only one road to effective action – the organisation of the masses. And in that organisation the educated colonials must join. Colonial and subject peoples of the world, unite!⁶

The Sixth Pan-African Congress, held in 1974 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, offered an examination of the historical development of Pan-Africanism and the current situation. It noted that the Pan-African movement was inextricably linked to the worldwide struggles of oppressed peoples. It called upon workers, peasants and intellectuals of the world's oppressed territories to unite for independence and self-determination.

Of great importance, the Sixth PAC recognized the revolutionary potential of Pan-Africanism: Pan-Africanism must be a dynamic force for liberation 'within the context of the class struggle',⁷ and must help bring solidarity to the oppressed of the world.⁸ The charge of revolutionary Pan-Africanism would be to help end foreign domination.

The Women's Conference

At last we reached the motherland—only to wait another eight hours in the Nairobi airport. With videocams rolling and flashbulbs popping, we were in the land of our ancestors. Transferring from British Airways to Uganda's national airline emphasized that we were in a different place. The ninety-minute flight from Nairobi to Kampala, Uganda found our collective anxiety escalating. For weary travelers, the bus ride from Entebbe Airport to Kampala was like a jolt of caffeine. Most of the delegates were on African soil for the first time. We were transfixed as we rode through villages and saw African people in an African context. The sight of lush land, children playing, and people going about their everyday lives hypnotized us all.

When we arrived at Mackerere, the prestigious university built by the British, our busy schedule had just begun. With time only to drop our bags, we were immediately escorted uphill to the women's pre-conference meeting that we had so eagerly anticipated. Long before departing, North American delegates had been informed that for the first time a Pan-African Congress would be accompanied by a women's pre-conference gathering. One could sense the enthusiasm generated by the prospect of such a meeting. Not only were the North American women excited, but the politically conscious men understood how divisive the 'woman question' had been, not only in Africa, but throughout the Third World – or, indeed, in the US. History and justice demanded that the complex problems facing women in the motherland be addressed.

During our long layover at Nairobi, the North American women had convened a spirited caucus at breakfast. Those who had been assigned responsibilities to conduct workshops or present papers reviewed their tasks. All resolved to be aggressive, assertive and vocal in support of African women and the struggles of women everywhere. It had been falsely rumored that men might not be able to attend the women's meeting, but in any case, all workshops would be conducted by women. The male delegates understood, and similarly resolved to be assertive in supporting women's struggles.

Arriving at Mackerere's assembly hall, we were thrust immediately into sessions in progress. The two-day gathering would convene six workshops: The Effects of Structural Adjustment on African Women; The African Woman and Her Environment; The Position and Status of the African Woman, African Women and the Law; Towards Increasing Survival of the African Woman and Child; and The Role of Women in Cultural Development.⁹ Having previously selected our workshops, we moved quickly to our places – and the arrival of the boisterous North American delegates was noted by all.

To satisfy our curiosity about the rest of the pre-conference, some of us left our workshops to visit the other five. The women's meeting was truly in full force: some of the sessions were hot to the touch. Millennia of grievances and oppression were bubbling to the surface. The Bible says, sow the wind, reap the whirlwind. In every workshop we saw African women holding forth. Reluctantly, the controversial issue of female genital mutilation was brought to the attention of the delegates. As predicted, this was a time for the women of Africa to speak their *pièce*, not peace.

The plenary sessions of the women's conference marked the high point, however. Because most of us were reared in the Black church, we had experienced hundreds of emotionally charged services and meetings – and this one ranked up there with the best. As we entered the large, church-like

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room, filled mostly with women, we knew we were in for a special experience. Taking our seats, we noted that we were sitting directly behind Dr Betty Shabazz, widow of our 'prince', Malcolm X.

As the meeting unfolded, one dynamic woman after another seized the floor and began to speak her mind. Among the many women, and men, who spoke of their struggles, the high point came when sister Brenda Matthews of Chicago, a member of our little delegation, rose to speak. Though we had flown to Africa with her, we couldn't possibly have been prepared for what we were about to hear. Brenda, a working-class woman from Chicago's West Side, set forth a dissertation on struggle the likes of which we had seldom heard. She effectively challenged every bastion of patriarchy, capitalism and reaction. Arms flailing and invectives flying, this was a woman to be reckoned with. Brenda, and the other women, made their point. The old days were gone forever! Women will never be the same, Africa will never be the same – and we had better know it.

Sessions, Ceremonies and More Sessions

In preparation for the congress, all conference delegates were to caucus with other delegates from their own region. Our group from Chicago met many other delegates from across the US, electing Leona Smith, president of the National Union of the Homeless, to the Congress Presidium representing North America, and Prof. William Watkins as political representative for the delegation. Repeated disagreements during the caucus discussion made it clear that many North American delegates had come to engage in the kind of 'ideological struggle' that had hampered the Sixth PAC. Our approach, by contrast, was to advance the 'political struggle' on the concrete issues facing the victims of poverty and the police state. We had thought that by now everyone understood that the only ideological struggle of nineties is how to get some biscuits on the table, get a job, find some healthcare, and pay the rent. But clearly the word hadn't trickled down to everyone.

Delegates from North America were representing organizations, and therefore conference voting procedures did not require a consensus. By the third day, several factions had formed and were pursuing their different interests. People found their counterparts and the activists from the Chicago delegation began to connect with grassroots practical leaders of the African revolution.

Like many large gatherings, this congress was organized into workshops and plenums.¹⁰ Having concluded our regional meeting, the second half of the first day was occupied with the opening plenary session, where we got a feel for the congress as a whole. Panning across the conference center

was a stimulating and heartwarming experience. With cameras clicking, people were settling in as we marveled at the diverse African people from both sides of the Atlantic. Delegates wearing indigenous dress and speaking many languages had come together in a grand gathering. Although we were aware of the differing political and organizational positions represented in the room, we all had a sense of unity and purpose.

The first and second days' plenums were taken up with an array of introductions, opening statements from dignitaries, solidarity statements from the world over, and an ill-fated attempt to receive a closed-circuit satellite message from Libya's Colonel Kaddafi. Among the highlights were addresses by Colonel Kahinda Otahire, the chair and convener of the conference; the keynote address by H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of Uganda; and North American professor Abdul Alkalimat of the International Preparatory Committee. Together, these presentations set the tone and framed many issues for the delegates to consider.

After Tuesday morning's plenary, delegates went on to their various workshops: Pan-African Strategies to Consolidate African Trading Blocks; From Debt Crises to Recolonization; Economic Cooperation; Liberating Education and Culture; and Regaining Control of Our Environment. All were chaired by notables in their field.

Wednesday's eight workshops included Pan-Africanism and Liberation; How Can We Interpret the Unfolding Gender, Class and Mass Struggle?; The Crusade for Reparations; Democracy, Human and People's Rights; The Military, Civil Wars and Conflict Resolution; Information and Communication Strategy for Development: Pan-African Agenda; Youth and the Future of Pan-Africanism; African Perspectives on Gender; and The Boundaries of Africa, the OAU and the Future. A proposal from two US delegates, Ashaki Binta of the Black Workers for Justice and General Baker of the National Organizing Committee, led to a special workshop on trade union activism.

Each workshop developed its own character, depending on the subject, chair, presentations, and composition. Although it's always difficult to iron out complex positions in short sessions with disparate groups of people, the workshops we observed were characterized by enthusiastic participation and a desire to find solutions, although political and ideological differences periodically emerged. However, in one or two workshops where the prospect of factional dispute was real, the voice of consensus and 'conflict resolution' prevailed.

After hearing presentations and engaging in discussion, each workshop composed a summary report, and this task naturally elicited the most spirited dialogue. Inevitably, these reports represented the political spectrum of those present, and perhaps of the Pan-African movement generally, from

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liberals and reformers to radicals. The hope is that all engage in a broadly based unity of action supporting the just struggles of African peoples against colonialism, barbarism and international exploitation.

Receptions and cultural activities accompanied the workshops and plenaries. The highlights for us included a marvelous musical play entitled 'The African Guest of Honour', written by Alex Mukulu and performed by an international cast at Uganda's national theater. In addition, there were a reception hosted by His Royal Highness, Ronald Muwenda Mutebe II of Buganda at the Bulange Gardens and several other receptions at the Nile Hotel Gardens. These events allowed the delegates an opportunity to interact with a wide range of people from different corners of the globe.

The General Declaration

The crowning achievement of any conference is its final statement. In this case, the General Declaration of each Pan-African Congress summarizes not only intent, but a collective political analysis of the world and world events, particularly with respect to the African continent and African people. The draft declaration was submitted by Abdul Alkalimat to the entire body: as amended and approved by the delegates, the final declaration articulates the collective sentiments of the Seventh Pan-African Congress.

The declaration begins with an overview, noting that changes in the world political and economic structure pose threats to Africa and to African people scattered across the planet. Africa and her peoples are as a result confronted with new levels of violence, fascism and recolonization. Pan-Africanism has evolved and must continue to evolve as a movement for liberation and unity in these perilous times.

The statement moves on to describe the political and historical development of colonialism throughout the twentieth century. Dramatic advances in science and technology have forever altered industrial production and the social and political system built upon such production. Massive displacements and changes in the processes of commodity production have accompanied by international realignments, the end of the Cold War, and increased state repression.

Long plagued by foreign debt, Africa suffers from these new arrangements. World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies assure that cash-starved African countries remain dependent. Thus 'structural adjustment' policies guarantee the continuation of high unemployment, food and housing shortages, poor healthcare, and social decay. Africa is left open to unchecked diseases, chemical genocide, and mass poverty. Estimates of Africa's outflow of value as a result of loans and resource looting come to

\$150 million per day.¹¹ The 'new world order' offers little to Africa in terms of development and progress.

The declaration concludes with a revolutionary program for the twenty-first century. The program for the emancipation of Africa and the diaspora calls for increased resistance and mass action. The strategy for liberation includes concrete programs of action. Among them is extrication from the stranglehold of imperialist debt. Africa's debt, now exceeding \$500 billion, can be reversed by a combination of renegotiations, reparations, and democratic self-determination or refusal to pay. Africa must develop its own energy and communications systems and other infrastructure. Another theme is that of popular democracy. Popular fronts must oppose foreign domination, industrial exploitation and gender bias, and support the struggles of youth and trade unions and foster political democracy.

Finally, the declaration firmly upholds the revolutionary character of Pan-Africanism in a time of international crises. Pan-Africanism stands for the unity of African people, both on the continent and in the diaspora. Pan-Africanism and the Pan-African Congress pledge to continue the struggle against the oppression and exploitation of African people.

Some Final Reflections

After the ideological struggles and divisions of the Sixth Pan-Africanist Congress, that the Seventh PAC actually convened was a minor miracle. Beyond the Pan-Africanist movement itself, the differences between 'liberation' movements, as well as long-standing tribal and ethnic differences make holding such a gathering difficult. The coming together of the Seventh Pan-Africanist Congress despite such problems is perhaps most indicative of the rapidly changing world political economy.

The electronic-technological revolution in the industrial countries has contributed to massive unemployment, dramatic human displacement and an even narrower concentration of wealth. African people on the continent and in the diaspora, along with other oppressed and exploited people, face not only relative poverty, but *absolute* poverty.

In these rapidly changing times, policies change and new forces emerge: new conditions for struggle are inevitably created. A wave of militant protest can be observed among the world's dispossessed, homeless, hungry, unemployed, underemployed, ill-clothed, and forgotten. Even in the wealthy United States, a new study reveals that one in five full-time employees earns wages below the poverty level.¹² Established corporations are filing bankruptcy, 'retrenching', 'regrouping', and 'downsizing'. Jobs are vanishing, never to return. Something profound is happening! We must

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situate the Seventh Pan-Africanist Congress in this historical context.

The congress called our attention to several issues likely to grow in importance and shape the coming period. The politics of recolonization, South African liberation, state violence, the transformative role of the women's movement, and the call for a new unity of struggle were among those themes. The political economy of colonialism is well known to all. Western industrial nations built their empires on Africa, Africa's resources, and on the backs of Africa's people and their labor. Recolonization represents a continuation of the politics of colonialism and neocolonialism practiced over the past several centuries. Modern-day recolonization is marked by deepening client-state indebtedness, economic embargoes, the continued extraction of raw materials, labor expropriation, dumping of hazardous wastes, and chemical warfare. Africa's ultimate hope is to free itself from the grip of foreign domination, subordination and the abyss of debt.

All must understand that the 'new world order' and the so-called 'end of communism' signal a new ferociousness and aggressiveness in imperialist foreign policy. The imperialists brazenly interfere in the internal politics of Somalia, Haiti, Panama, Mexico, North Korea and a host of other countries throughout Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. The international front against imperialist aggression must be supported.

People the world over celebrated the victory of the African National Congress and its leader Nelson Mandela in the April 1994 elections. As we cheer the end of the brutal apartheid regime, we also recognize that this was a negotiated settlement. As such, the struggle to redistribute land and wealth is only beginning. Thirteen percent of the population still controls more than 85 percent of the land.¹³ Unemployment for Blacks is intolerably high, and most of the profits from industrial commodity production are repatriated to Western countries. This electoral victory signals a new stage of struggle, not final victory. The Pan-African Congress must be a reminder that the unity of African peoples everywhere must continue. We must not waver in our commitment to the people of South Africa in the difficult period ahead.

Regarding violence, one need not look very far to find an escalation of police violence against peoples of color and especially those of African descent, who continue to be scapegoated for the economic and political crises paralyzing many nations. Repressive regimes are desperately trying to beat back the growing upsurge of suffering people. From Zaire to Mexico City to South Central Los Angeles to London to New York City, the story is the same. Police, the military, and often paramilitary organizations have become hit squads. Pan-Africanists are reminded that fascism means that the rule of force replaces the rule of law. Fascism and imperialism have been and continue to be companions in the scheme of reaction and domination.

Imagining Home

An old adage suggests that the progress of a society can be measured by the progress of its women. Likewise, revolutionary movements have long understood that the struggle for women's full equality and liberation is at the heart of political and social change. As mentioned, the women's pre-conference meeting at the Seventh Pan-African Congress was a milestone. Far from being imposed from the outside, it was an outgrowth of the inevitable historical and political movement for democracy, equality and socialism in Africa. Africa's women are among the most socially abused. Their struggles are our struggles. Comrade Winnie Mandela and the sisters of the struggles for African liberation will continue to stand as beacons.

Finally, if Pan-Africanism means anything, it means unity. As African people in every country are now irreparably divided by economic and social class, ideology and privilege, the Pan-African movement becomes even more important. Pan-Africanism and the Pan-African Congresses must support the broad front of struggle necessary to challenge the international forces of national oppression, exploitation, and reaction. If Africa and Latin America represent the barometers of international capitalism's exploitation, then the Pan-African movement must articulate the vision for freedom and liberation in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. *Address to the Nations of the World by the Pan-African Congress*, London, 1900, printed in J. Ayodele Langley, ed., *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa*, London 1979, p. 738.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 739.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 740.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 749.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 760.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 760-61.
8. *Resolutions and Selected Speeches from the 6th Pan-African Congress*, Dar es Salaam 1976, p. 89.
9. An interesting and analytical discussion of the Sixth Pan-African Congress is Walter Rodney's 'Towards the Sixth Pan-African Congress: Aspects of the International Class Struggle in Africa, the Caribbean and America', in *Resolutions and Selected Speeches from the Sixth Pan-African Congress*, pp. 18-41.
10. All workshop information is published in *Pan-African Congress: Programme*, p. 9.
11. A complete transcription of all plenums can be found in *Pan-African Congress: Programme*.
12. The entire declaration is entitled *Kampala Declaration: Resist Recolonisation*.
13. Abdul Alkalimat, 'Declaration of the Seventh Pan-African Congress, Draft of the Final Statement', issued by the Congress, 3-8 April 1994.
14. The study, entitled *The Earnings Ladder*, was issued by the Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce.
15. Abdul Alkalimat, 'South African Election: Prelude to Revolutionary Upsurge', *People's Tribune*, 16 May 1994, vol. 21, no. 20, p. 6.
16. Further information and documents of the Seventh Pan-African Congress can be obtained from Black Liberation Committee, c/o National Organizing Committee, P.O. Box 47711, Chicago, IL 60647, USA.

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