

*Introduction: The Performance of Pan-African Identities
at Black and African Cultural Festivals*

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In April 1966, thousands of artists, musicians, performers and writers from across Africa and its diaspora gathered in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, to take part in the First World Festival of Black and African Culture (*Premier Festival Mondial des arts nègres*). The festival constituted a highly symbolic moment both in the era of decolonization and the push for civil rights for African Americans in the United States. In essence, the festival sought to perform an emerging Pan-African culture, to give concrete cultural expression to the ties that would bind the African ‘homeland’ to black people in the diaspora. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1966 event, the editors of this special issue held a conference at Florida State University that sought to examine the festival and its multiple legacies, with the aim of promoting a better understanding of both the utopianism of the period following the Second World and the ‘festivalization’ of Africa that has occurred in recent decades. The conference was also interested in exploring the role of colonial exhibitions and world’s fairs in establishing a set of representational frameworks that would later be contested but also sometimes (unwittingly) adopted by black/African groups in the era of decolonization and civil rights activism.

The Dakar festival was the first, and one of the most significant, attempts to perform and translate African culture in the era of decolonization, forging in the space of the *festivalscape* a rich, multifaceted, ephemeral, unstable but highly charged sense of a shared Pan-African culture.¹ The FSU conference was interested in exploring whether cultural Pan-Africanism as posited in postcolonial festivals acted as a complete rejection of the representations of blackness in colonial exhibitions or whether it sometimes in fact continued such tropes, and if so, how?²

The 1966 event was organized in the middle of a period extending from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s during which a wide range of cultural, sporting and political organizations were created, and major events were held, all of which were informed by Pan-Africanist ideals. Dakar 1966 was followed by hugely ambitious Pan-African cultural festivals in Algiers (Algeria) in 1969 and Lagos (Nigeria) in 1977. From an early twenty-first century perspective, the Pan-African ethos of the period appears strikingly utopian. Nonetheless, the Pan-African ideal has endured, in particular in the domain of culture. Indeed, it might be argued that it was the series of cultural festivals organized in the aftermath of decolonization that marked the most meaningful articulations of Pan-Africanism. As stated above, these

festivals witnessed the ‘performance’ of a Pan-African culture, and they facilitated concrete encounters between Africans and members of the diaspora that forged a new and profound sense of cultural affiliation. For instance, in his autobiography, *Music is my Mistress*, the great US jazz musician Duke Ellington wrote of his performance in Dakar in 1966: ‘the cats in the bleachers really dig it. [...] It is acceptance of the highest level and it gives us a once-in-a-lifetime feeling of having broken through to our brothers’ (1973: 338).

If Pan-African cultural festivals of the 1960s and 1970s were marked by a profound utopianism, we have witnessed, over the past five decades, a growing festivalization of culture across the world from which Africa has not been exempt. There are now literally thousands of festivals held across the continent each year and, in such a context, it is intriguing to assess whether any of the idealism of the past has survived. In 2010, a Third World Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture (widely known as FESMAN) was held in Dakar. For Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, organizing FESMAN was a process of looking to the future but also of reconnecting with an idealistic, utopian Pan-Africanist past, which was primarily articulated through evocations of the 1966 Dakar festival, indicating that processes of recuperation, nostalgia and amnesia play a major role when we engage today with landmark but ephemeral cultural events from the past.

The essays gathered in this special issue explore the significance of cultural festivals and the construction of black and Pan-African identities in a range of contexts, divided into three groups. The first two essays engage with the 1966 Dakar festival. Tobias Wofford begins with an exploration of the festival’s position within the dawning era of the jet age, which was finally making Africa readily accessible to members of the diaspora. He also highlights the centrality of air travel to the imagery of William Greaves’ celebrated documentary film on the festival: the arrival of the jet age is shown to symbolise the modernity of the emerging postcolonial world. Saliou Ndour and Estrella Sendra then provide a comparative study of the 1966 and 2010 Dakar festivals, examining the extent to which these events managed to involve popular audiences. They argue that the 1966 festival might be seen as a ‘festival of affirmation’ (of black identity). In contrast, the 2010 festival can be seen as a ‘festival of mimicry and popularisation’.

The second and largest group of essays deals with a number of cultural festivals across the post-independence period. Ramaesh Bhagarat-Rivera investigates Afro-Creole Nationalism in the 1972 Caribbean Festival of the Arts (CARIFESTA). The author argues that CARIFESTA offered an unprecedented platform for Caribbean artists and intellectuals to articulate and celebrate a shared Pan-African cultural heritage. As he explains, however, the

project's utopianism was compromised to some extent by the local realities of racial tensions in Guyana, and the Pan-Africanist ideal translated imperfectly into multi-ethnic Caribbean countries. This is followed by two essays that emerge from a European Research Council-funded project on the role of South African artists in black cultural gatherings across Africa and the diaspora. Ron Levi considers South African jazz trumpeter, Hugh Masekela's pivotal role in organizing the Zaire '74 three-day concert. Originally planned to coincide with the boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali, the Rumble in the Jungle, the concert is a significant counterpoint to the large state-sponsored festivals of Dakar (1966), Algiers (1969) and Lagos (1977) because while it also reflected the strong arm of the state, in the person of Mobutu Sese Seko, his agenda was far more oriented towards a nationalist project in the midst of his 'Zairianisation' process. This meant that Masekela's goal of using the music festival to showcase African popular musicians from across the continent in a Pan-African version of his own experiences at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 was frustrated by Mobutu's insistence that Zairean musicians sympathetic to his government be featured. Yair Hashachar shifts the focus to Masekela's compatriot, the internationally renowned singer, Miriam Makeba, examining her position within the nationalist and Pan-Africanist politics of Sékou Touré's Guinea. His essay explores how Pan-Africanism and nationalism are deployed in two very different contexts, the 1969 Pan-African Festival in Algiers and the annual *Quinzaine artistique et culturelle nationale* in Guinea. Essentially, Hashachar's research identifies state-activated forms of Pan-African cultural citizenship that serve the Guinean state in imagining itself as directed towards the broader political horizons of Africa. At the same time, the essay suggests that, under the nation-state, Pan-Africanism was entangled with the nation-building project and national patriotism.

The final two essays shift the focus to the present day. Brahim El Guabli considers how Morocco and Algeria have used the model of Pan-African festivals to serve competing agendas as neighbouring nations vying for influence. In the festivals that El Guabli discusses, spiritual links take precedence over racial solidarity and explicit political agendas. In a global context, these festivals celebrate Sufism as an alternative to the more militant forms of Islam, and Algeria has seen these events as a way to display leadership in the wake of anxieties over extremist groups in the Sahel. In the final essay, Fanny Roblès explores the concept of 'reverse ethnography', coined in the 1990s by Cuban-American artist Coco Fusco to describe a series of performances in which she and her husband re-staged the colonial-style exhibition of so-called 'primitive peoples' with the aim of subverting Western concepts of an exoticised, primitive Other. Roblès examines what she terms the 're-enactment' of colonial shows in

today's France', focusing on the 'reverse ethnography' of *Exhibit B*, the controversial performance piece by South African artist, Brett Bailey.

The seven essays gathered together in this special issue highlight the richness of current research in the emerging field of black and African cultural festivals. Our authors show that the festivals discussed in their research constitute pivotal moments in the ever-evolving construction of black and Pan-African identities. These highly significant cultural events have largely slipped through the cracks of academic research, however. If on the one hand postcolonial studies has generally prioritised published texts, African cultural studies has overlooked these festivals as elite events beyond their purview. This is an omission that deserves to be addressed and we hope that this special issue will contribute to a renewed interest in the significance of festivals and other ephemeral cultural events that have played key roles in the postcolonial era.

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¹ The notion of the 'festivalscape' has clear echoes of Arjun Appadurai's work and its growing use illustrates the importance of anthropological approaches to the emerging field of festival studies.. For an example of the ways in which the notion of the 'festivalscape' has informed festival studies, see Falconi (2011).

² In recent years, there has been a renewed critical interest in the concept and practice of Pan-Africanism: see Jaji (2014). This has been accompanied by a growing body of research on Africa and cultural festivals: see Dovey (2015) and Murphy (2016).