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# THE LENS

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## THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ARTICLE:

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*Celebrating Africa Day 25 May 2022*

- *By Shanél Johannes*

## CELEBRATING AFRICA DAY 25 MAY 2022

### **Introduction: Why do we celebrate Africa Day?**

Africa Day is observed annually to commemorate the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which was created on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The African Union (AU) was launched in Durban, South Africa on 9 July 2002. There are 54 countries in Africa of which 53 are member states of the AU, Morocco is not an AU member state.

The AU has brought together African member states to address challenges such as armed conflict, climate change, and poverty. Importantly, Africa Day is a celebration of Africa, its people, and unity. Africa Day will be celebrated for the 59th time this year. It has become a day of celebration for Africans and people of African descent all over the world, celebrations also extended into Africa Month – throughout the month of May.

We are granted opportunities to celebrate the socio-economic achievements as well as voice our continued quests for unity across the continent. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) celebrated Africa Day on 25 May 2022, with great consciousness and critical reflections on Africa as well as ingraining the call for a needed Pan-African unity. Creative activities celebrated the diversity of Africa's culture and heritage embedded in individual and collective reflections on what being African truly means and how dynamic the continent is. Furthermore, we creatively engaged in how our shared values are enshrined in the spirit of Pan-Africanism in relation to hopes and aspirations for the continent. Lastly, we expressed personal commitments to Africa.

## **Reflections on Africa and Pan-African Unity**

IJR kickstarted its Africa Day celebrations with deep critical reflections on Africa and unpacked the prevailing call for Pan-African unity. The panellists included: Prof. Cheryl Hendricks (Executive Director at IJR), Prof. Tim Murithi (IJR), Dr. Simphiwe Sesanti (UWC), Dr. Palesa Sekhejane (HSRC), Dr. Sanya Osha (UCT), and Prof. Chux Iwu (UWC). Prof. Tim Murithi invited the guests to activate collective consciousness on Pan-Africanism and critically asked how do we revive the spirit of Pan-Africanism? Importantly, the aim of Pan-Africanism was established in the vision of the OAU to end racism, xenophobia, ethnic nationalism, gender-based violence, structural violence, corrupt leadership, and various forms of discrimination. The AU emphasised the need to protect the rights of Africans to take control of our socio-economic-political life. Unfortunately, in South Africa for example, hate and discrimination are ongoing challenges of xenophobia – operation dudula. This is highly regressive and unveils the contemporary sense of loss and disembodiment of African unity.

Thus, there is a great need to decolonise the minds from existing neocolonialism that is present across the continent, to attain unity across Africa. We need a different strategy that entrenches solidarity, our diverse collective heritage needs to be celebrated, and we must embrace a radical political project to end ongoing structural violence.

African countries should not harvest a culture of dependency, and prevailing exploitation which cripples countries need to be eradicated. Hence, the call is for Africans to become self-reliant, become empowered to disrupt existing systems that do not work for us, and courageously strive for peace, security, and justice for the betterment of livelihoods. As Africans, we need to recommit to the mission of African unity, but first one needs to activate one's Pan-African consciousness to attain the Africa we collectively envision and claim our space.

**"WITH REGARDS TO THE COMMEMORATION OF AFRICA DAY,  
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IMMENSE ROLES AS INTELLECTUAL LIBERATORS OF MENTAL  
COLONISATION AND MASS LIBERATION."**

Dr. Simphiwe Sesanti opened his reflection with the importance of deep spirituality whereby the presence of ancestors was welcomed. He started his address sending libations to his ancestors in his mother tongue isiXhosa calling on the spirit of those who came before him, Sithi "Camagu". On the one hand, the speaker noted that where we went wrong with Pan-Africanism was a result of the emphasis of Pan-Africanism of governments, instead of the need for Pan-Africanism of the people.

On the other hand, critically, often stressed are the failures of the continent and this results in entrenched disillusionment. There is a need to affirm more language of inspiration and to celebrate our collective achievements on the continent. We need to celebrate our leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah the Ghanaian politician, political theorist, and revolutionary who led his country to independence from Britain in 1957; Julius Nyerere who helped form TANU in 1954, through which he campaigned for Tanganyikan independence from the British Empire and was also outspoken about the dilemmas of Pan-African leaders. Furthermore, Dr. Simphiwe Sesanti provided his critique of the term 'xenophobia' and why it is not an ideal term to use – 'xenophobia' speaks to the African individual as being a 'foreigner'.

He greatly emphasised that Pan-African revolution is unstoppable. Thus, we need to go back to embracing heritage, spirituality, and the need for oneness. We need to look at the type of leadership we had in the past and look forward to the leadership that we can have in the future.

In her talk, Dr. Palesa Sekhejane focussed on the state of Africans, both locally and globally. She viewed African Day as a commemorative day that captures what is possible, as well as the ongoing struggles as result of the aftermath of colonialism – conflicts in the region and migration challenges. In addition, the continent experienced the impacts of both contemporary and past pandemics, stagnant economic opportunity and growth, unemployment, as well as the deepening humanitarian and food crisis. For example, the Russia-Ukraine war is a contemporary global crisis that majorly impacted negatively on African countries who are experiencing the shortages of wheat in an already heightened crisis of food insecurity.

Also, this contemporary food crisis and need of food aid, conflicts in Africa, and the visions for Africa, does not make news headlines and is often marginalised in global media. There is a need for an integrated Africa to combat these contemporary crises and a need for cooperation policies to be harmonised. Dr. Palesa Sekhejane elaborated on the need for realist frameworks to be integrated into nationalist diplomacy styles as well as the need for scientific socialism and radical ideologies by Kwame Nkrumah, to be understood.

As a result of ongoing internal conflict, Agenda 2063 is at risk of collapse, and we need to prevent such threat of collapse by rethinking Africa's development. We need to ensure that African instruments and frameworks are matching African ideologies.

Dr. Sanya Osha noted that Pan-Africanism was established by African diaspora, and not established on the continent. With regards to the commemoration of Africa Day, there is a need to celebrate leaders who played immense roles as intellectual liberators of mental colonisation and mass liberation.

For example, Robert Sobukwe who was the founder of PAC, a father, leader, politician, and humanist, understood the concept of Ubuntu and the need for the masses to be liberated from colonial and apartheid mental shackles. Hence, it is of great importance to continue to celebrate leaders who pursued projects for mental liberation; contributed to the development and progress of society; who were passionate about morality, democracy, and truth, and how these Western concepts made sense in Africa; who advocated for decolonisation; and those who were committed to the recovery of indigenous knowledge systems that were suppressed by Western knowledge systems.

Prof. Chux Iwu stated that not all African migrants are entrepreneurial, not all studied the field of commerce, nor are all African entrepreneurs known. The question of why African migrants are entrepreneurial, is rooted in the understanding of the human need to survive and what drives the individual when finding themselves in a community that is not theirs. Many migrant workers find South Africa as a haven and the reason why people leave their own countries, is a direct result of very bad governance systems that exist.

Therefore, the African migrant becomes entrepreneurial because of the need to survive and support their families. It is important to note that they need to be accommodated in South Africa.

Bonnie Berkowitz facilitated the Africa through Art creative session. Guests were divided into four groups and answered the following questions creatively: What does it mean to be an African? Why is Africa a dynamic place to live in? What are your hopes and aspirations for Africa? What is your personal commitment to Africa? The creative session then screened Koleka Putuma's poem titled "Dear Africa Poem". Following the screening, we had a guest performance by Kathlego Sepotokele who delivered a poem and emphasised on homophobia and transphobia issues that exist on the continent – "Who is African and who is not?".

A poem titled “Another Loss, Another Woman” was delivered by Shanél Johannes. The poem focussed on the ongoing struggles of gender-based violence and the murder of women. IJR’s Africa Day celebrations then ended in a hearty lunch, great socialising, and amazing music that celebrated Africa and all her diverse beauty.

In conclusion, Africa Day is the acknowledgement of the progress that Africans have made and a reflection on the common challenges we face in a global context. There are prevailing calls for socio-economic integration of the continent, aiming at greater unity and solidarity among the countries and the people of Africa. Thus, the vision of the African Union is for “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”.

