Africa: The Dream, The Reality: Re-assessments of African Independence
Published on Pambazuka News (https://www.pambazuka.org)

Contributor [1]
Friday, May 28, 2010 - 03:00

CODESRIA - University of Ghana
International Symposium

THE DREAM, THE REALITY: REASSESSMENTS OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE
Venue: Accra, Ghana
Date: September 27-29, 2010

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the University of Ghana are pleased to announce the international symposium “The Dream, The Reality: Re-assessments of African Independence”, to be held in Accra, Ghana, from 27th to 29th of September 2010. The symposium constitutes the central event in the inaugural issue of the Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual & Cultural Festival Week, a bi-annual event to be held under the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies. The Chair was recently established at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, in honour of Nkrumah's dedication to a tradition of vigorous and liberating Africa-centred intellectual and cultural activity. He outlined his vision in the major address he gave on the occasion of the formal opening in 1963 of the Institute of African Studies. The coming symposium and the entire festival are being organised under the auspices of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies as a major collaboration between CODESRIA, the Institute of African Studies-Legon, and the African Humanities Institute Programme, which is a CODESRIA institute based at the University of Ghana-Legon.

The symposium aims at achieving the triple objective of commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Year of African Independence (1960-2010) while celebrating the Centenary Anniversary of the birth of Kwame Nkrumah (1909-2010); promoting an ongoing critical study of the contemporary condition of Africa; nurturing reflections on the future development of the continent.

It has become customary for some time now, especially for a generation too young to have been personally touched by the events of that great moment in African and world history, to dismiss African independence as a fluke, a mirage. Independence as a movement certainly has suffered serious setbacks, but its general import must not be dismissed so lightly. As CLR James observed in 1969:

The dozen years that have unfolded since the winning of independence by the Gold Coast in 1957 are some of the most far-reaching and politically intense that history has known. African state after state has gained political independence with a tumultuous rush that was not envisaged, even by the most sanguine of the early advocates of independence .... The British Government, as did the French and Belgian, found that despite their soldiers, their guns and planes, they could not rule. The colonial mentality having been broken, the only way to restore some sort of order ... the only way to have a viable society was to transfer the man in jail to be the head of state.

What we may call the African independence imperative constitutes one of the most rapid and most hopeful, even if short-lived moments in world history. Thirty African countries gained their political independence from reluctant but somewhat helpless European powers within five years of Ghana's historic moment on March 6, 1957, more than half that number gaining their independence in one year—1960, 'the Year of African Independence'. A large part of the credit must go to such visionary leaders as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Azikiwe, Kenyatta, even Banda, despite how each of them later turned out. But we cannot overlook the role played by the ordinary citizenry. Without their support, without the sacrifices they were prepared to make, in some cases, sacrifice that took the form of armed struggle against the best armed militaries in Europe, often aided by African collaborators, the lofty ideals of even the most revolutionary, most visionary leader was bound to amount to nothing but a dream. Perhaps this was the one thing that each of these leaders eventually seemed to have lost sight of -- that an enduring spirit of freedom resides in the collective will and struggle of a people, not in the lofty ideals of one leader, however gifted, however progressive. Any disconnect between the vision of a leader and the will and spirit of the people can only lead to one result—the collapse of the independence dream itself, a tragedy for leader and the people alike.
Since the era of independence, the African continent has undergone profound socio-economic, political, and cultural changes. Backed by different ideologies, most of them inspired by foreign paradigms, African states have experimented with various socio-economic development models, with varying degrees of success and failure. The continent is still struggling to overcome violent conflicts that have characterised the political and social development of the continent for decades. Many African states are now moving into the early years of a new wave of independence in which they are actively striving to rid the continent of negative stereotypical crises, including war, famine and disease, by developing vibrant economies, investing in infrastructure and working with partners on the continent and beyond to build prosperous societies.

Fifty years down the line, what assessments can we make from that historic moment when close to twenty African countries gained independence in one year (1960), an event so vividly celebrated around the world? What have we done with the hopes raised by independence? New developments in international relations give rise to urgent questions about the role and place of Africa in the new international order. What responses can and should African states adopt to face the rise of new players in the new emerging international order? How should African States position themselves with these new emerging powers that are turning to the continent in the quest for new sources of raw materials to feed their economic growth, attracted by Africa’s rich natural and human resources? What are the challenges facing the African continent, for example in terms of integrating its economies?

CODESRIA, the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies, the Institute of African Studies, and the African Humanities Institute Programme of CODESRIA at Legon, invite social science and humanities scholars, artists, cultural and political activists to produce carefully thought-out papers for open discussion and debate in an international forum intended to be as critical and innovative as possible. It is proposed that a small number of invited papers will serve as lead presentations around which panels can address clearly defined issues of special historical significance and contemporary relevance.

This symposium is aimed at ‘taking stock’ of our growing knowledge base with respect to social, political, and cultural developments in African countries, directing a special focus on the place and role of African countries in the international arena. As several countries celebrate their 50th anniversary, it is important that the social sciences and the humanities re-examine where we are with our scientific knowledge and creative vision of African societies, as well as how influential this knowledge and vision could be for the future development of the continent. The symposium offers a forum where research and creative work in various fields can be presented, discussed and further developed to fill critical knowledge gaps with respect to African development in all its aspects. Symposium organisers are particularly interested in creative thinkers, researchers, research groups and networks studying African societies through comparative perspectives and from different theoretical and creative angles. The symposium is organised around six focal areas:

a) Social Transformation and Prospects of African Development
b) Democratic Governance, Peace Building and Social Justice
c) Economic Growth, Social Policy and Issues of Equity
d) Education, Culture and Identity
e) Citizenship, Gender and Social Inclusion/Exclusion
f) Africa in the Global Economy and the Global Economy in Africa.

In developing their abstracts and papers, potential conference participants are encouraged to focus on, but not limit themselves to any of the following sub-themes:

1. The Liberation Struggle: Contending Ideologies, Strategies & Programmes
   - e.g. Individual Nationhood vrs. The Pan-African Project
3. The Challenge of New Nationhood:
   - Building Independent Economies
   - Internal Factors & The Global Environment
4. Pioneer Figures and Movements of African Liberation Struggle
5. Lessons from the African Diaspora
6. Beyond Leadership – The Role of the Elite, the Masses, the Women, the Youth
7. The Military & the Police: Their Role in African Independence and After
8. The Role of the Press in Independence Struggle and After
   - Creative Visions & Voices of the Liberation Struggle
   - Historical and Cultural Models of Resistance
   - Language and the Destiny of the New Nation States
11. Conflict and Conflict Management in Post-Independence African States
12. Models for a Union of African States

Abstracts of 200-250 words should be submitted by 30th June, 2010. Authors of abstracts that are deemed suitable for development into full papers will be notified by 10th July, 2010. Full papers from those whose abstracts are selected must be received by 20th August, 2010. Those whose papers are accepted for presentation will be notified by 31st August, 2010. Participation costs of those whose papers are accepted for presentation will be covered fully or partially by CODESRIA.

All abstracts and papers should be sent, preferably by email, to the two addresses below:

CODESRIA
BP 3304, Dakar CP 18524, Senegal
Tel.: +221-33 825 9822/23
Fax: +221-33 824 1289
E-mail: [mailto]humanities.programme@codesria.sn
Website: http://www.codesria.org

and

KWAME NKRUMAH CHAIR IN AFRICAN STUDIES
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
LEGON - ACCRA, GHANA.
E-mail:

Categories: Courses, seminars, & workshops
Issue Number: 483

Article-Summary:
The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the University of Ghana are pleased to announce the international symposium “The Dream, The Reality: Re-assessments of African Independence”, to be held in Accra, Ghana, from 27th to 29th of September 2010. The symposium constitutes the central event in the inaugural issue of the Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual & Cultural Festival Week, a bi-annual event to be held under the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in A...read more