

### 4.3. Summary and Comment

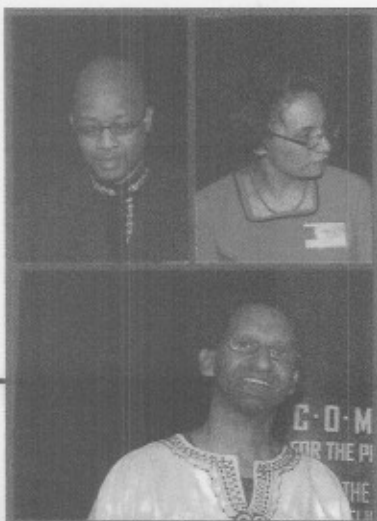
That Mohlabane's presentation was the first of the panel was fortuitous as his was the only presentation that paid attention to the aims and objectives of the Cultural Charter. Thus, from the start, the Charter provided the context for the panel's deliberations. Specifically, Mohlabane drew attention to articles 1(f) and 2(e) that call for international co-operation to exchange and disseminate information as well as identify cultural decolonisation as a fundamental objective of the Charter. Mohlabane also drew attention to Chapter 2 of the Charter calling for ready access to cultural resources and condemning elitism in cultural conservation and promotion. These provisions of the Charter form the basis for Mohlabane's argument that the transformation of the OAU into the AU has seen a shift from government-driven development to a vision of development that is focussed on the agency of people. This shift, Mohlabane suggests, demonstrates an appreciation on the part of the AU of the strategic benefits of pursuing development in a manner that works with cultural diversity rather than around it.

Mohlabane's assessment of progress in implementing the Cultural Charter focuses on the AU and therefore by default is particularly concerned with government actors and state agency, even if it is to argue that these actors have expanded the range of partners they will seek to work with. For Mohlabane this suggests progress at a fundamental and profound level because it suggests a new methodology that is more likely to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in chapters 1 and 2 of the Charter than the government-centred approach of the OAU.

However, if Mohlabane's presentation presents an assessment of the picture from the top down, Boezak presents the picture from the bottom up, and one equally optimistic, though arguably more realistic in its appraisal. Boezak's paper presents the perspective of one community that has actively pursued a recovery of its heritage and reconstruction of its cultural identity by asserting claims, engaging in dialogue, and forging alliances that strategically link it with national and supra-national actors. Drawing attention to the Khoi-San community's appreciation of the strategic possibilities of globalising forces and processes, Dr. Boezak presents a case study of how cultural communities can exercise their agency to pursue their interests at various levels simultaneously, from local and regional, through national, to advocacy at an international forum such as the UN.

Having heard two perspectives on the vertical relation between communities, government actors, and regional and continental alliances, Aristide's presentation reoriented the discussion from a focus on vertical relations toward a perspective that examines the horizontal relations between cultural communities on a global scale, Africans in the Diaspora and Africans living on the continent. Her argument, that the political culture of the OAU and now the AU owes as much to political and cultural consciousness-raising movements in the Diaspora as anti-colonial movements on the continent, encouraged a different perspective of globalisation, one that is grounded in the historical continuum of the exploitation of Africa and oppression of Africans as well as the agency of Africans as they affirm their transatlantic and Diasporic ties, mobilise to recover and assert their African cultural identities, and deploy these identities and affirmations against colonisation and marginalisation in the post-colony.

Aristide's presentation drew attention to the fact that the Diaspora is often forgotten when considering culture, diversity and identity in Africa. Furthermore, her presentation drew attention to the significance Diasporic communities attach to identifying with Africa. Aristide's presentation that focuses on efforts to bridge the gap between communities on the continent and communities in the Diaspora is both an affirmation and endorsement of the progress made in implementing the African Charter as well as a plea to continue and intensify this effort.



#### 4.4. Panel 2: Promoting Cultural Diversity in Africa (Giving Effect to the Cultural Charter for Africa)

The panel consisted of Major-General Gert Opperman of the Voortrekker Monument, Dr. Mulalo Nemavhandu of the Kara Heritage Institute, and Prof. André Mbata Mangu of the University of South Africa. The session was chaired by Commissioners Dr. Willa Boezak and Dr. Thenji Magwaza.

##### Commissioners Dr. Willa Boezak and Dr. Thenji Magwaza



Major-General Opperman presented his reflections on how Afrikaners have experienced the social transformation of South Africa over the past 15 years and how he perceives it to have affected their sense of cultural identity and belonging. Opperman recalls that many Afrikaners expected reprisals with the advent of the ANC-led Government of National Unity in 1994. As the decade wore on, the loss of power, revelations of the TRC Commission, reduced role of Afrikaner institutions and organisations, and growing apathy amongst Afrikaner youth combined to exacerbate the Afrikaner's sense of a dissipating cultural identity. However, Opperman suggests that in the late 1990s Afrikaners began to appreciate that only Afrikaners could assume responsibility for their cultural heritage, by which he means that if Afrikaners didn't rise to the challenge, no-one else would. This set the stage for a renewed effort on the part of the Afrikaner community since the beginning of the new decade to make a positive contribution and assume a more active role in South Africa's cultural life. Toward this effort, Opperman noted the deliberate effort to re-orientate the Voortrekker Monument away from cultural isolation and toward the national and international cultural arena. In a tandem movement, the Heritage Foundation was established to promote Afrikaner heritage and cultural conservation. The Foundation maintains and expands its archives, library and other research and teaching resources as well as pursues ties with organisations with similar interests, including the statutory South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). This effort, Opperman argues, has led to a spontaneous increase in Afrikaner tangible and intangible heritage.

##### Major-General Gert Opperman, Voortrekker Monument




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That said, Opperman balances his positive appraisal of these efforts to break with a self-imposed isolation by citing factors that he argues contribute to a growing perception among some Afrikaner groups that their language and culture are being deliberately undermined. Among these are discontent with the government's policy in mother tongue education, difficulty in accessing funding and a concomitant frustration with Afrikaner private sector corporations who have failed to contribute, as well as the removal, neglect and vandalism of monuments and statues and change of place names of historical importance to Afrikaners.

Opperman concluded his presentation by emphasising the advances that Afrikaners have achieved in forging a cultural identity that is continuous with its heritage and traditions at the same time that it negotiates a new sense of belonging in a post-apartheid South Africa.



Dr. Nemavhandu's presentation issued a compelling challenge to the seminar, the CRL Commission and Africa. Noting that the belief in an Africa that will rise and take its position as an equal partner in world affairs is as old as colonialism, Nemavhandu argued that the only way to make this a meaningful actuality rather than the empty rhetoric of a patronising colonial discourse is to rise to the challenge to rewrite African history. Citing the work of historian and archaeologist Victor Ralushai who presents evidence that southern Africans had knowledge of mining and smelting nearly three millennia ago, Nemavhandu disputed the received history of Africa as tailing the march of civilisation led by Europe.

This leads Nemavhandu to ask pertinent questions regarding Africa Day and the effort in which the seminar was engaged. He asked what exactly Africa Day celebrates: is it a celebration of recent history and the triumph over colonialism, in other words, is it a celebration of freedom? Or does Africa Day signify a celebration of Africa's greater contribution to the world, in other words, a celebration of Africa's unique civilisation? The tone and argument of his presentation suggested that he is critical of the former insofar as it displaces the latter, which for him is the true object of Africa Day.

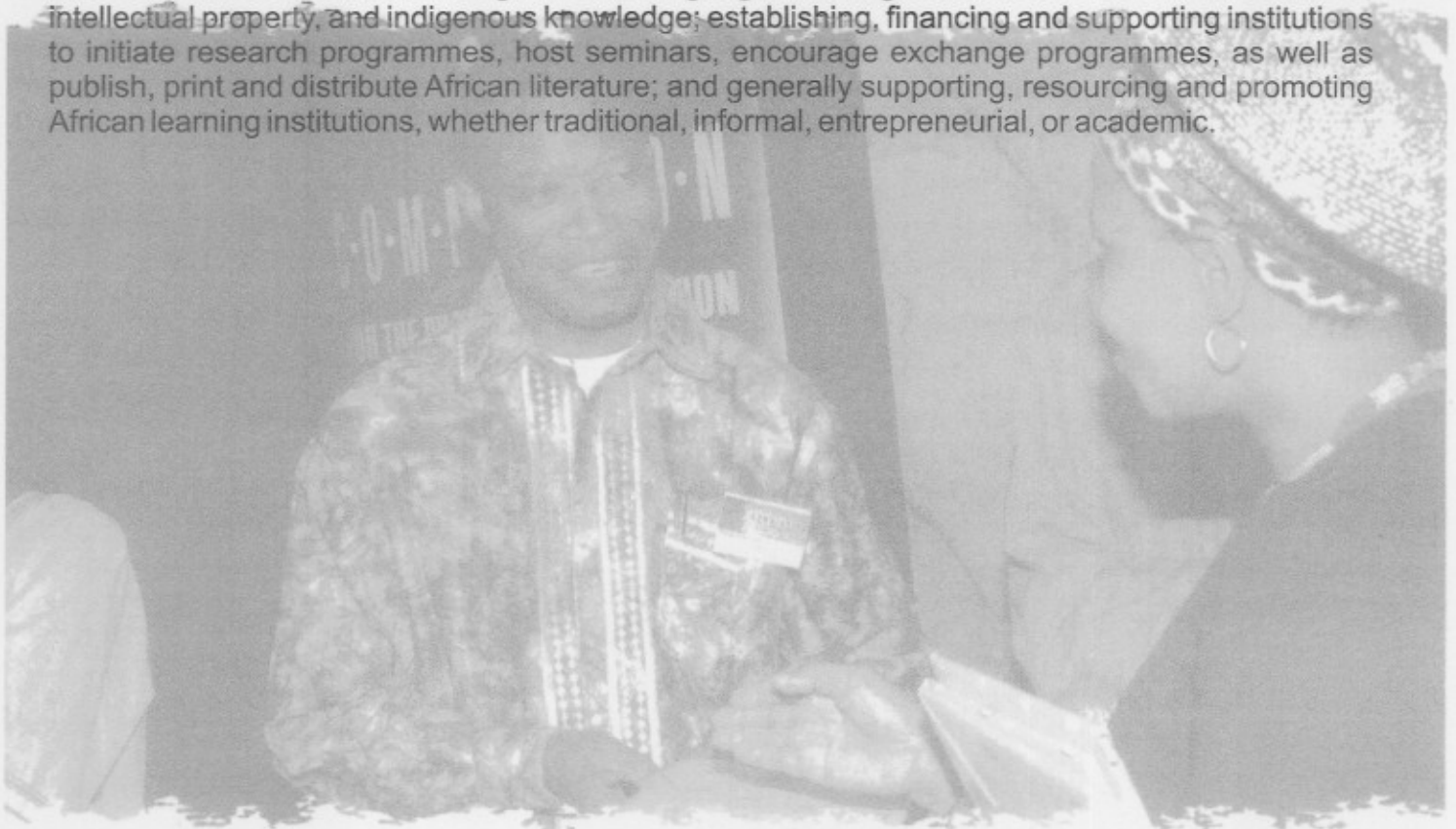
However, it is with a recovery of an Afrocentric perspective on world history that Nemavhandu identifies the significance of Africa Day. To this end, he encouraged the CRL Commission to play a leading role by establishing research projects that will pursue a research agenda that foregrounds African history, culture, language, and religion with an emphasis on Africa's contribution to the global human heritage. In effect, Nemavhandu called on the CRL Commission to make its contribution to the African Renaissance.

**Dr. Mulalo Nemavhandu, Kara Heritage Institute**

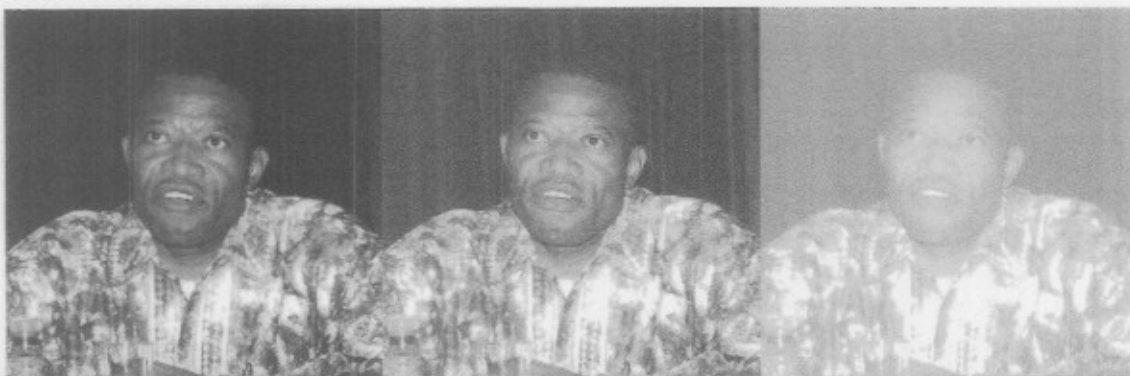


Prof. Mangu addressed his presentation to the topic of states' responsibility to promote cultural rights. He began by noting that the history and context in which culture in Africa is spoken about is inextricably linked with the persistent denial of African civilisation. This persistence is in turn a consequence of the conquest of Africa as well as an indication of the endurance of that conquest. It is for these reasons that Mangu stressed the importance of rights in relation to culture. For him, cultural rights are human rights and he noted that the Cultural Charter was adopted before the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, an order of events that he suggested shows the importance of cultural rights and their ethical priorness to human rights. Thus Mangu called for an African Cultural Bill of Rights that would include in its ambit the protection and promotion of religions and languages. The Bill would not only offer recourse to individuals, but would protect and promote people's rights too. Recalling his introductory remarks that established the framework for his presentation, Mangu linked the promotion of cultural rights with efforts to initiate a renaissance in Africa.

The second part of Mangu's presentation examined states' responsibility to promote cultural rights. Among states' duties, Mangu listed without elaborating: developing a range of policies at national and continental level addressing culture, language, training, information and communication, intellectual property, and indigenous knowledge; establishing, financing and supporting institutions to initiate research programmes, host seminars, encourage exchange programmes, as well as publish, print and distribute African literature; and generally supporting, resourcing and promoting African learning institutions, whether traditional, informal, entrepreneurial, or academic.



**Prof. André Mbata Mangu, University of South Africa**



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The presentations of the second panel were more distinct from one another than in the first panel where linkages between the different presentations and the general cohesiveness of the session were more apparent. Noticeable in the 2nd panel's presentations was the absence of case study material. Opperman's was the only presentation that spoke of a specific community's experience in first withdrawing itself and then attempting to transcend its self-imposed isolation to engage with and participate in the region's and the continent's cultural diversity, to find a sense of belonging, as he put it. In counterpoint to Opperman's presentation on a particular community's experience, the similar concerns and premises of first Nemavhandu's and then Mangu's presentations focussed the second part of the session on theoretical methodological questions about how to approach the question of promoting cultural diversity in Africa. If Nemavhandu's presentation outlined the problematic at the heart of the matter, Mangu's presentation outlined a solution, first by linking culture with rights, and then detailing concrete actions to be undertaken by state actors. The difficulty is that while their analysis of the problematic at the base of efforts to recover and promote African culture is accurate in recalling the enduring history of Africa's conquest and colonisation, the solutions puts forward, particularly by Mangu, largely reiterate what is already contained in the Cultural Charter.

This is not to say that the panel was divided, for there were differences between Nemavhandu's and Mangu's respective presentations as well as similarities between all three presentations. Firstly, on differences, if Mangu's presentation forcefully concludes with a list of concrete suggestions on how to begin giving effect to the Cultural Charter, Nemavhandu's presentation shirked this question to focus on the premises that ought to underlie such efforts. In other words, rather than how to begin giving effect to the Cultural Charter, Nemavhandu is more concerned with where to begin. From the perspective of maintaining continuity between the two presentations, it was therefore fortuitous that Mangu's should follow Nemavhandu's. On the second point about similarities between the three presentations, all the panellists were unanimous in their position that it is up to cultural communities to participate in the promotion and protection of their cultural heritage and resources and lobby for support where this is lacking. On this point, the second panel agreed with a vital issue first identified in the opening speech of the Chairperson of the CRL Commission and debated in the first session about the responsibility to exercise one's agency to shape the kind of world we want to live in.





## 5. Discussion and Issues Raised

Summaries of each panel and the main linkages between their respective presentations have been sketched above. The purpose of this part of the report is to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the discussions and identify themes as well as shortfalls that may be translated into recommendations for further work.

Such a discussion must begin by addressing itself to the question: did the presentations engage with the questions they were tasked to address. The first session deliberated on the topic Status and Challenges for the Promotion of Cultural Diversity in the African Continent and its panellists were directed to present papers examining progress in the implementation of the Cultural Charter for Africa. The second session was devoted to Promoting Cultural Diversity in Africa and its panel directed to reflect on giving effect to the Cultural Charter for Africa.

The short answer is yes, the guiding question of each session did establish a framework in which the discussions could be situated and each presentation did in some way engage the session's topic, though with varying degrees of diligence. However, where the seminar strayed from addressing itself to the topic is in terms of the coherence through which all six presentations could be seen to be addressing the overarching question of "promoting unity in cultural diversity and expression of a single African identity". Perhaps more an organising theme for the day than a question to be addressed, it nevertheless could have provided a useful centre around which to organise some reflections and comments by way of concluding the proceedings.

A concluding discussion might have picked up on some of the major themes that this report has sought to distil from the sessions, including agency, globalisation, identity and diversity, as well as the goal-oriented actions they imply. A statement describing the thrust of the discussions and conveying something of the intersection of these themes might be along the lines that:

*Deliberations focussed on the recovery of culture under globalising conditions and sought to link this expression of agency with authoring identity that reflects as well as mobilises diversity.*

Though deliberations were often very forthright and candid in their explicit engagement with these themes, conspicuous in its absence was a thematic concern with, or even a critical discussion of, the linkages between identity and African unity. Given that these key terms were crucial to the phrasing of the seminar topic, "promoting unity in cultural diversity and expression of a single African identity," it might have been assumed that this kind of critical engagement was implicit in everything that was said. However, this perspective is not convincing as it leaves too much unquestioned. For example, it would have benefited the seminar to engage in an open discussion of just what a single identity means. If identity is multifaceted and multidimensional, as the notion of diversity suggests it is and the promotion of diversity advocates it should be, then what is the locus of unity around which this single identity must cohere? Adv. Aristide intimated something of an answer in her recognition of a kind of binding reciprocity between the continent and the Diaspora; that key liberation struggles in the Diaspora have always centred on Africa, and liberation struggles in Africa have been nurtured by the Diaspora. However, the notion that a single African identity,



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multifaceted and diverse though it is, can cohere around the common experience of being the object of oppression (significantly, not the common experience of being oppressed, as that experience is as diverse as there are oppressed subjects) is an insufficient basis for such a unity. Recalling the critique advanced by Dr. Nemaivhandu during the second session, in such a scenario the celebration of a single African identity amounts merely to a celebration of freedom from colonial oppression, not a celebration of Africa's unique civilisation.

Had there been more time, perhaps some of these debates might have surfaced more directly than they did. Although commendable that the conference organisers managed to catch up lost time and end the event on schedule, it is unfortunate that time for questions and discussion had to be sacrificed in order for this to be achieved. That said, it is perhaps inevitable at an event as widely attended as this seminar that not everyone will have the opportunity to pose their question. However, a few important questions were posed and raised issues that merit careful attention in the further work of the Commission.

Important among these is consultation with and inclusion of the Deaf community in South Africa in the work of the Commission. It is often thought that the greatest challenge facing people with hearing impairments in South Africa is one of language and literacy. However, a number of contributors to a new book on disability and social change in South Africa (HSRC, forthcoming) demonstrate that the challenge is considerably more complex than merely language. In fact, many deaf people argue forcefully, and it is a perspective increasingly adopted by policy researchers and others, that deaf people are not disabled by their impairment, but by a society that fails to recognise the legitimacy of their language and culture. Advocates of this view usually designate the community of deaf people in South African by using the uppercase. The question of the Deaf community's involvement with the work of the CRL Commission in a broader sense than merely language rights, though that too, was raised at the National Consultative Conference (NCC) at Durban in December 2004 and again at the seminar. Given that the Strategic Plan for 2005 lists consulting with cultural, religious and linguistic communities and seeking to include such communities in nation building, it will be damaging to the CRL Commission if it does not seek to include this specific community. At the same time, given the extent of organisation within the community and the extensive and lively discourse around the experiences of this community, it would be of immense strategic advantage to realising the objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan if the CRL Commission were to seek out and form partnerships with organisations and agencies representing the Deaf community.

Another issue raised at the seminar was consultation and partnership with youth groups and the organisations and agencies representing them. A question from the floor during the second session of the seminar echoed the perception among youth delegates at the NCC meeting in Durban that youth participation was not taken seriously or sincerely sought by the CRL Commission. In contrast to complaints by the youth sector that their participation in the work of the Commission was not seriously sought, earlier in that session Maj.-Gen. Opperman's presentation noted the apathy of youth towards issues of





culture and heritage. This is the difficult divide that the CRL Commission must negotiate and bridge. On the one hand, the Commission must identify, form and strengthen alliances with strategic partners in the youth sector. On the other hand, and at the same time, the Commission must reach out to apathetic youth and bring them into the work of the Commission, as partners and allies. These two imperatives are not incompatible. Indeed, neither can be achieved without the other and the Commission is clearly sensitive to this imperative, given its vision for a Public Education and Advocacy Programme outlined in the Commission's Strategic Plan. However, that the issue of youth involvement has surfaced forcefully at both of the conferences organised and hosted by the Commission since its inception highlights the issue's saliency.

Another question raised is the issue of traditional leaders. The delegate asked why traditional leaders, who the delegate argued are the custodians of culture, are absent from the seminar. Furthermore, the delegate wanted to know whether the CRL Commission would promote the "esteem of initiation" that the delegate argued has been subverted by "white culture". Though the formulation of the question and the basic premises underpinning it are problematic (for example, the arrogation of culture to a custodian, the vagueness of the descriptor "white culture"), the question does point to the importance of traditional leaders in the debate about cultural identities and rights as well as alludes to the thorniness of negotiating perceptions of marginalisation of cultural custodians, no less than the actual diminishing and undermining of cultural practices, such as initiation rituals, by processes of urbanisation and the hegemonies of other cultural paradigms. Thus there is a complexity of issues at stake with which the Commission will have to grapple.

The last point to make by way of reflection on the seminar has to do with tangible outcomes. The issue of producing tangible or material outcomes is crucial to the work of the Commission because the Commission will have to be able to account for its expenditures and evidence its work by pointing to tangible, material products and things that it has produced. Furthermore, and more importantly, tangible outcomes and material products provide resources with which the Commission may carry on its work and maximise its impact. Conversely, without such resources generated through the on-going work of the Commission, it will become more difficult to establish continuity between the Commission's on-going programme and new initiatives. Recalling a comment by a youth activist at the seminar, a crucial way to get people, including youth, involved with the Commission's work is to produce material outcomes with which they can engage, read, cite, circulate and include in their research and work.

Organising and hosting the seminar was in itself a significant material outcome of the Commission's work. However, the Commission could derive more mileage from an initiative such as this. The question of producing such material products forms the basis for the last section of this report dealing with recommendations.



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