

# Legends of Our Common Heritage 5

## The Reawakening of Mankon

### Who Has Seen The Wind?

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling,  
The wind is passing through!*

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads,  
The wind is passing by.*

Christina Georgina Rossetti

There comes a time in the live of every community when its people rise up like one man to redefine their future. Such a collective behavior can either be provoked by a concrete manifestation such as a new leadership or an invisible force generated in the subconscious mind of the community itself. Some times it doesn't matter how it started. What matters is that the people decide that they have got enough of the back seat. It is time for them to assert themselves among the great communities of the world. This collective desire for greatness is even stronger if the people had once enjoyed it earlier in their history. The Mankon people are currently experiencing this revival as attested by events that have taken place within this year in their communities both at home and abroad. The events by themselves may not have made headlines. But because a lot of things happened for the first time during these occasions, they have distinguished themselves as the turning point in the history of the Mankon people.

### IN YAOUNDE: FROM DARK ALLEY HALLS TO A PRESTIGIOUS ESPLANADE

The esplanade of the Yaounde City Council is arguably the most prestigious open-air venue for public events in the capital. Unfortunately, never before had it played host to an event of the Mankon people, for the Mankon people and by the Mankon people. However, that stigma was lifted this year by the

Nkah Nukwi women of Yaounde who organized a fund-raiser on the esplanade and used the opportunity to show-case the rich Mankon culture to the dignitaries and public in attendance. Imagine the pride in the hearts of Mankon people, especially those abroad, when they saw the captivating photos of the occasion on the internet! That unique event, which came on the hills of the MACUDA Convention in Minnesota, was a signal that the lion had awakened from slumber.

## IN MINNESOTA, USA: THE AUGUST '06 MACUDA CONVENTION

Dubbed "The Mother of all Conventions," the 2006 MACUDA Convention in Minnesota was so successful that it will take a long time for its reverberations to die out. Anyone who wants to give a complete and detailed account of the convention will have to write a book. Since this is just an article, only the unprecedented features of the convention will be reported. And truly, this was a convention of "firsts."

- ### THE TURN-OUT

Conventioneers came from all over the United States, Canada and Europe. In the U.S particularly, a delegation drove for two days from D.C to Minnesota bringing traditional dance instruments for Mbaghlum and the "Juju" dance. Another powerful delegation mostly comprised of ladies came from Boston to spice things up. These delegations and others converged in a Minnesota fully mobilized and ready for the occasion. The word on every lip was "Mankon." The hugs, laughter and the chats showed that in every heart was emblazoned the old slogan, "How Nice It Is To Meet Our Brothers." This time with no malicious undertones. From Friday's cultural night through Saturday's general meeting, football match and gala night, to the BBQ and departure of delegates on Sunday and Monday, it was clear that the Mankon convention was the most heavily attended convention ever witnessed in Minnesota.

### LOCAL HOSPITALITY

Most of the delegates for the convention were lodged in private homes where they were treated to love and care. Guests who chose to lodge in hotels did so out of choice and not because of a shortage of free and warm

shelters. It is worthy to be noted that as late as Friday, host members were still making phone calls requesting more people in their homes.

There was also more than enough to drink and eat. For the first time in Minnesota, there was so much food left after the cultural night that organizers literally begged guests to take the food home. Despite the pleas, some of the food was still trashed away because MACUDA MN had prepared just too much of it. Echos of our generosity spread so fast that by Saturday night, every right-thinking mind wanted to be part of the gala.

- INDELIBLE CULTURAL SIGNATURE

It is rare to be treated to a masquerade performance in the land of Uncle Sam. It is even rarer when the performance is from a kingdom called Mankon. The entire hall was transfixed by the tantalizing display of the "Mankon Royal Juju Dance." Their "juju" gowns were colorful, their masks sat on their heads like crowns of totem, and they all danced in unison to music drummed out by the itchy fingers of the instrumentalists. A white couple in the audience craned their necks all the while in other not to miss any bit of this exotic performance. By the time the "akama mukom," (Captain of the masqueraders) stylistically ended the dance, it was clear that Mankon will be the defining force for the promotion of African culture. This feeling was made stronger by the preceding display of MACUDA Boston who, accompanied by thier children, oncemore proved that they are the true "Torch of Progress" in Mankon.

The *Mbaghlum* dance was a unifying factor as it attracted every body to the dance floor. The climax of the night was reached when Rick Nguti, the first bottle dance musician ever to stage live in Minnesota, took the stage. Even though the host branch had rocked the floor earlier with a Fox Trot performance, Ngia Richard made even novists to try their steps on the floor. At the end of the cultural night, the concensus was that only the Mankon people had succeeded in putting together in a single night such a diverse repertoire of culture. A music savvy was overheard saying that the basic rythm of most of our songs bore signs of an ancestral connection to Soul and Jazz. For the first time, guests really enjoyed a cultural night.

- THE GENERAL MEETING: WHERE ACTION SPOKE LOUDER THAN WORDS

Mankon people have always been said to speak much and do little. Saturday morning's general meeting ushered in a new era. It started with strong messages. Tata Awasom Afuh-Ntaw, MACUDA-Minnesota President, proclaimed the new era of the Mankon people in his welcome address. He was followed by Rev. Dr. Tabufor who emphasized the importance of unity among his brethren and Tata Tawah, who, while praising Mankon women for their hard work, urged everybody to embark on self-empowerment projects. Then came the turn of the keynote speaker, Dr. Anye Ngu. He enlightened the audience about the importance of an endowment fund not only for MACUDA, but also for other Mankon groups and even individuals. He was so convincing that the last speaker for the day, Rev Dr. Awasum Asandom, after eloquently xraying the importance of marriage in our society and the necessity for Mankon people to support one another, took everybody by surprise with a two thousand dollar donation to jump start the Mankon endowment fund. This first-of-its-kind magnanimity was followed by a thunderous and spontaneous applause from the audience as thr right Reverend left the hall to attend to other exigencies. Little did he know that his donation had touched the most tender fibre in the fabric of The Mankon people's collective consciousness!

- **WHEN YOUTHS AND ELDERS BLEND**

A serious bane that has stifled the Mankon people for a long time is that of, "O la wa?" (who are you to talk when I am talking?) This spirit kept the youths away from the elders because the former accused the latter of pretending to have a monopoly of knowledge. Luckily, a new and positive spirit was born during the general meeting of the convention. After Tata Asandom made his donation, nobody saw it as an opportunity worth following-up. Did I say nobody? No. There was a senior diplomat in the hall, Tata Tawah, who discretely called on the younger moderator, Elijah Che Munyong-Abieri, and whispered to him that everyone should be called up at that moment to support Tata Asandom's donation. He beefed up his words with a huge donation and before long, everybody in the hall was clamouring to donate. At the end of the exercise, more than ten thousand dollars (Five million frs CFA) was donated. On a rare occasion, Mankon elders and youths put their heads together and the result was astounding. In fact, one fo the guests of the occasion, an insurance broker from the Bakweri land, confided that in the numerous meetings attended, he had never seen such a spontaneous spirit of generosity for the motherland like he saw with

the Mankon people. This generosity, it should be noted, would have been incomplete without our spirit of inclusion.

- **OUR SPIRIT OF INCLUSION**

Never before had a community manifested such an open-arms policy like it was seen during the MACUDA Convention. In a world rife with conflict and animosity, it was beautiful to see Mankon people and their friends working hand in hand throughout the convention. Before involving our friends, the spirit of inclusion started even among us. For the first time, priority was given to couples in situations which had been monopolized by singles before. In this light, the president and vice president delivered their welcome address together during the cultural night. The MCs for the entire convention were Mr and Mrs, and during the fashion parade, married couples came out on the podium hand in hand. According to Tata Afuh-Ntaw, this was intended to send a clear message that two is the number and one is not. We all recognize that Mankon would not be what it is today without the contribution of people from other tribes. As a corollary, the convention would not have been what it was without the selfless contribution of MACUDA members from other lands who had become an integral part of us. To illustrate this, the MACUDA Minnesota branch executive had two elected officers from other villages. Mr Alfred Fang, from Wum, held the sensitive post of Treasurer while Ms Felicitas Tanue from Mendankwe was the Social Secretary. Their sacrifices for MACUDA so far were priceless. Even floor members did not contribute less. A case in point was seen during the Saturday afternoon general meeting. While everyone was comfortably seated at one point, only two people were left standing, the moderator of the occasion and a lady who was busy arranging the snacks for lunch and serving water to the delegates. Who could have guessed it? But the lady was no other than Ms Prisca Ngang from Mendakwe. Now think about it! This was a Mankon Convention and while Mankon people relaxed in their seats, a MACUDA member from another village was arranging and serving them food and water. What else can demonstrate the benefits we reap from our spirit of inclusion?

- **THE GALA OF ALL GALAS**

The Eritrean Community Center was jammed to breaking point throughout Saturday night. They came, dressed to kill. They danced, as if it was the last dance in their lives. They drank, like real incarnations of Bacchus. And of

course they loved, like Venus never did. The DJ, Tata Edwin Awasom himself, was fantastic. When it was all over, in accordance with local laws and regulations, security had a hard time getting people to leave the premises. Poor guy! He was literally screaming out his lungs in the hall and parking lot trying to convince people that the most heavily attended village gala in Minnesota was finally over. Slowly, reality dawned on everyone and they drove away, vowing to meet again later in the day for the BBQ.

- TEARFUL DEPARTURES

The BBQ at Tata Marius Atanga's residence was an antithesis of a euphoric weekend. It was quiet and cordial as brothers and sisters exchanged and confirmed contact addresses and numbers. At the end of it all, some left directly to the airport while others retired to homes and hotels for the last night. Nevertheless, the expression on every face carried the same message: why could this moment of Mankon reunion not last forever?

- AS IT WAS IN MINNESOTA, SO SHALL IT BE IN DC

The bulk of Mankon people neither attended the Nkah Nikwi festival in Yaounde nor the Convention in Minnesota. They may be unaware of the wind that is currently blowing in our midst. Even those who attended these occasions may be taking them for granted.

However, we don't need a soothsayer to tell us that something unrivalled is happening in our Fondom. Just as in the introductory poem in which the leaves tremble and the trees bow down their heads to signal an invisible wind, so can it be said that when:

- Mankon people start show-casing their culture on the most prestigious esplanade in Cameroon;
- Mankon youths give up their jobs and drive for days to exhibit the Mankon culture in Minnesota;
- When Mankon youths and elders start speaking the same language of understanding;
- When sons and daughters of the "Giant Tail" freely and instantaneously raise more than ten thousand dollars for their common goal; and
- When Mankon people start finding love, comfort, security and confidence in one another,

then it can be said with certainty that the wind of revival of the Mankon cultural greatness *is passing through*. The ball is now in the court of the host of the Mankon Convention of 2007.

Below, you will find a few pictures selected from this author's personal Convention album. The official report and other materials of the convention are being prepared by the rightful authorities for eventual publication. In the meantime, feel free to have a foretaste.

Before I get to the Njalah for today, here is a reminder of the last "Njalah" and the winners:

"I can be pierced, but I can't be perforated." What am I?

The right answer is "water." You know, any sharp object or weapon can go through water but it will never leave a blemish.

Today's "Njalah" is as follows:

"I stand on a hill and beckon to my own death." What am I?  
The winners will be announced in the next legend.

May year spear fetch you the biggest game in the forest.

Tata Munyong-Abieri

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