

## **Report on the African Potentials Symposium 27<sup>th</sup> January 2019 Held in Kyoto**

Ian Karusigarira (PhD Candidate TUFS)

### **My experience**

With funding from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Africa Study Center TUFS (ASC), I got the opportunity to interface with a cutting-edge and multi-diverse theme dubbed the “African Potentials”. The first internalization of the theme “African Potentials” introduced me to the notion of the concomitant taken-for-granted-ness of African intellectuality involving knowledge appropriation, treatment as study objects and subjects (rather than the sources of knowledge itself or put differently potentiality) of African scholarship and intentional exclusivity by the western or eastern academic discourses. It clicked deeply clear that, the people behind the crafting of African Potentials were, but concerned about the problematic notions surrounding this epistemological discourse deserving definition and relocation. Seemingly, I was not very far from the point as I sat through the presentations of the day.

It remained to be known that, the concept African Potential had challenges of boundary. What do we define as “African”? Is it a contestation between African potential and other potentials? Does it include African and Non-African scholars? Who is supposed to be the audience of this “African Potential”? What aspects of African potential should be regarded negative? which should be regarded positive and by who?

In search of basic answers to such difficult questions and questions related to colonization decolonization, and hybridization of African intelligibility, many researchers have engaged in the unending arm-twists with a big strand of scholars friendly to Samuel Huntington of modernization and western discourse on one hand, the “so-called Pan-Africanists mainly “friends of Africa” and African scholars on the other. Yet another group seeming to gain acceptance while hybridizing the western and the African-centered academic ideology and pedagogy (and I would like to guess that the (Kyoto African Potential bonanza lies in the notion of hybridity). If my guess is correct, caution follows; that the questions mentioned above must receive attention (hopefully there are already measure to address them). Some of those questions are very methodological, political, cultural and embedded in systems leading to the disposition of knowledge.

### **Interesting issues that caught my eye during the symposium**

The ontology and epistemology of African representation. First, the representation of African realities has been seen (by many African inclined scholars) as negative African potential equated to washing the African “dirty linen in public”. Then, questions that remain unclear are; what set(s) of knowledge is admissible to African scholarship? Who is the authentic teller of the African story or narrative? This Kyoto dilemma connects to the puzzle I encountered during the July 16~20<sup>th</sup> 2018 IUAES world summit in Brazil. I was requested by an Africanist scholar to have an interview intended to establish my presentation at the summit and its addition to “African academic image”. However, while we engage in the discovery of African potentials and the convivial complementarity of different disciplines involving Africa, we ought to remain imaginative and rigorous in the journey of explanation, description and exploration with disregard to blinding emotional restrictions. That said, would I then get inspired to develop a theme like: “African potentials and politics of epistemological representation”? Only time will tell.

Interesting also was the concept of conviviality. While we engage concepts like these, their integration in the African academic system may be rather contentious. Just like other blunders of universally crafted terminologies, conviviality may work in one context yet very problematic in other contexts, space and time. For example, for Uganda, Universal primary education and Universal Secondary Education has been (seen by many to be) used as a political bet. In a sense, the free education by government has been considered by many as the regimes disguised providence. Implying that, one would be doing themselves harm to accepted to spend their hard-

earned income on supporting a school used as an electoral bet for political dominance. This view might be welcome to some scholars and lay people yet, very divisive for those comfortable with the political status quo or those not comfortable with the political ordering of things but muted and basking in the parochial state. Therefore, the concept of conviviality can be used but with knowledge of the dynamics inherent in a selected social system.

The other insight was that as we undertake a responsibility to pursue “African Potentials” we ought to be dogmatic in approach. In a sense themes like these ask as to team around the knowledge and resource acquisition with an “already set agenda”. Here I insinuate that the term “African potentials” should be flexible enough to incorporate the different actors and categorizations considered “non-African potentials” such as the Western and Eastern studies. For example, African potential clustered around the Chinese exploratory/feasibility study of a case in Africa (like the Inter-Basin Water Transfer from Congo basin to Lake Chad) may have different conception of African Potentials from an Environmentalist studying the environmental adaptation strategies in the Congo Basin. Also, the Hegemonic West may define African potentials differently from Chinese expansionists in pursuit of opposing economic and political interests on the continent. In this case African potential can be the economic, hegemonic and diplomatic potential in Africa for non-African economies. While, Kyoto Symposium could emphasize the invigoration of African Potential in its own original sense.

This introduces us to yet another powerful idea of academic collaborations between Africa and non-Africa. For long since the end of direct colonialism in 1960s, the academic collaboration has been the extension of the western dominant paradigm. Mabutho Shangase of University of Pretoria Faculty of Humanities and a research fellow at Africa Study Center Tokyo University of Foreign studies (TUF- ASC), introduces us to this collaboration in his “Introduction to Temporal Exponentiality” where he argues that the macro level structures made possible by the apartheid regime in South Africa opened educational collaboration whose pedagogy is to restrain the decolonization mindset, control public and private actions of politicians and academicians. My observation is that, the Japan African collaboration on the other hand has presented a “new wave of academic conscientization of African muted voices”- an approach am considering “activist spirit”

Lastly, the richness in the research diversities is proving to reduce the conventional knowledge segmentation in the making of Social Sciences. The stiff dichotomies between “science-ness” and “unscience-ness”, between descriptive and explanatory, between theory and practice, are coming to a convergence. The portrayal of African potential traverses blurred boundaries and increases convergences rather than divergent segmentations. Needed imagination in the contemporary African studies is the potential to integrate knowledge. The convergence existed of methodologically and ontologically differing disciplines towards the common good of understanding of social reality. Ranging from the eyes on the street and the raise of Civilian Joint Task Force in the Fight Against the Boko Haram in Nigeria by Daniel Agbibo, to Norms and Measures Regarding Arms Transfers to Non-state Actors by Tamara Enomoto, to the Wage Structure During the 1942 Strike in Rural Western Cape, to Using Traditional Cultural Framework of an African Society to Conceptualize Modern Governance by Teshome Emana, to Patterns of Coexistence and Conflict Resolution Between Fishermen in Cameroon, Benin and Nigeria by Antoine Socpa, Misrepresentation and appropriation of culture by neoliberal conservation alliance by Toshio Meguro, to the Militarization of Conservation in Africa by Frank Matose, to the House girl by Choice or Circumstances in Kenya and Uganda by Wakana Shiino, to Defining and Confining Symbols of the Past, to African Prurilingual Tradition and Conviviality, to Local Recognition Alienated from Global Discourse: Changes in Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in a Kenyan pastoral community by Kyoko Nakamura, and to the analytical framework of conviviality Citing the Collective Participation in Ghana by Kazuro Shibuya. This whole range of topical issues were very enriching for me.

Thanks to TUFs ASC for availing this opportunity. I am also particularly grateful to the organizers and participants of “African Potentials Symposium”



**PROF. TAKEUCHI AND PCS STUDENTS AT AFRICAN POTENTIALS SYMPOSIUM, JANUARY 2019 IN KYOTO**