African Potentials
Preface to the Volume 1

Cultural Creativity for Conflict Resolution and Coexistence: African Potentials as Practice of Incompleteness and Bricolage

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1. Problematizing "African Potentials"

Thought and institutions of European origin that have continued to dominate our world, in so far as they represent the foundations of today's modern civil society, have come to represent the standard for "universal justice" in the contemporary world. It follows that systems of thought and institutions that are born elsewhere (for example in Africa) have come to be defined as local and subaltern by comparison. When we turn to look at systems and methods of conflict resolution, for example, this fact appears self-evident. Methods of restoring justice by trying and punishing perpetrators in accordance with modern laws have come to be seen as more "civilized" and "correct" than solutions taken in accordance with African custom, such as for example methods by which rather than punishing offenders, final settlement is achieved through payments of cash or livestock by offenders (or their related factions) to victims (or groups to which they belong).

The aim of the African Potentials Series, and of this volume, is to re-assess as "African potentials" the institutions and wisdom for conflict resolution and coexistence that have been produced by African societies distorted over the past five hundred years by these European standards, to discover the possibilities inherent within these "African potentials," and to create a foundation on which to leverage these as a common heritage for humanity in the twenty-first century.

With our focus on African potentials, we have attempted to consider ways of addressing challenges in a different dimension from that of the methods of modern Western civil society, which has been the instigator of untold damage to African society for hundreds of years. As a result, our attention has been drawn to experiments in post-conflict recovery and reconciliation that rely on two "Africa-specific" principles. Such experiments are conducted in parallel with remedies through "laws and tribunals" as exemplified by the prosecution and punishment of responsible parties by special tribunals in domestic contexts or the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the global level, but grounded in concepts that are distinct from those underpinning the aforementioned remedies. The first of these is an emphasis on "healing and coexistence" that prioritizes the social rehabilitation of perpetrators rather than their punishment. This has involved considerable ingenuity and creativity in developing social techniques for reintegrating criminals and perpetrators into the community without holding them responsible as individuals. The second principle is that of "truth pluralism," which prioritizes the pursuit of reconciliation over singular truths supported by evidence. As distinct from rational decisions based in singular and absolute

truths backed up by physical evidence, this principle accentuates collective decisions based in truths that metamorphose through *Rashomon*-style processes of negotiation and consultation.

Of course, this is not to contend that remedies based in this concept are universally applicable, nor conversely to reject remedies based in a "laws and tribunals" model outright. These latter also metamorphose according to their political, social, and cultural context, and also demonstrate diverse possibilities in the context of their historical configuration. The nature of laws, and of justice itself, is neither solitary nor uniform. Nevertheless, we have focused on the enormous human effort that has been devoted to localizing and resolving conflicts and exploring models for subsequent coexistence in a different direction than that of the institutionalizing vectors of laws and tribunals. This stems from our recognition that acquiring innovative approaches to perceiving and resolving conflict that are distinct from those of the past has become an urgent issue for twenty-first century society. We have situated "African potentials" as one of the options that show the greatest promise of contributing to this challenge.

From such a position, the present volume contemplates concrete presentations of the inherent possibilities of African potentials relating to resolving conflict and achieving coexistence, all the while focusing on the productive and applied capacities of the creative societies and cultures that have been nurtured by the African experience. In other words, we are seeking to examine possibilities for cultural approaches to conflict resolution and the attainment of coexistence as "African potentials."[1]

Part 1 reveals how African potentials are activated to resolve conflicts and enable reconciliation and coexistence in the context of people's traditional and customary practices in Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, and Ethiopia. Part 2 offers a portrayal of how African potentials can be wielded to stabilize situations and foster coexistence in societies that have experienced or continue to experience conflict, namely in the Congo, Northern Kenya, and Zimbabwe by taking full advantage of concepts that are foreign to modern Western institutions. The final section, Part 3, highlights the conflict avoidance and prevention functions of African potentials, with reference to specific cases from Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as an intellectual historical consideration relating to African human values. This section clarifies the processes by which African societies have avoided conflict and realized coexistence while engaged in close interactions with the outside world and the global historical flows of colonial rule, modernization, and globalization. It is from these processes that the concept of African potentials emerges.

In this way, the ultimate goal of this volume is to throw the concept of African potentials into clear relief from the micro-level of people's social and cultural lives, and while revealing the diversity and development of the concept with reference to concrete empirical examples, in so doing to ascertain the practical efficacy and ideological creativity of the African potentials paradigm.

2. The various stages of conflict

In Africa, as in any society worldwide, the evolution of conflict as a social phenomenon passes through similar stages. First, latent tensions arise in society that will lead to clashes and conflicts owing to a variety of factors. In some cases, these might be collective memories of historical victimization and abuse, in others a sense of discrimination or an exclusionist mentality embedded and infused into society through processes of dominion and governance. Alternatively, we may also imagine cases of blatant disparities in the redistribution of wealth, or the acceptance of ideologies and beliefs that posit absolute distinctions between selves and others. Such a state, in the sense that the occurrence of some accidental and private dispute could erupt into structural conflict and mutual hatred between large groups, can be described as a pre-conflict stage. The second stage is the outbreak of a specific conflict. This may be due to some trivial slight or misunderstanding, and cases of violence (or attacks) resulting from private circumstances or motivations are not uncommon. The third stage corresponds to the period when conflict, confrontation, and hatred intensify and proliferate. Those who are attuned to latent tensions will rapidly make hard distinctions between enemies (strangers) and allies (fellow group members), and fall to building structurally hostile relationships between absolute selves and absolute others that would seem to preclude reconciliation. When this happens, the eradication of total strangers who, although one bears them any particular grudge, are nevertheless seen as bitter enemies, is bound to become valorized as "correct" action in the context of one's own milieu. The fourth stage occurs when conflict begins to die down. It may conclude in a short period of time or over several of decades, but conflict cannot last forever. Sometimes conflict will taper off automatically as societies and groups on either side exhaust themselves, or it may result from arbitration by a third party. Finally, in the fifth stage, the once-discordant relationship of mutual hatred is repaired, leading to a new relationship of coexistence.

All societies possess a stock of knowledge and practices for handling each of these various stages of conflict. Any given society will have its own options in terms of knowledge and practices of *prevention* for relaxing relationships of tension and suppressing outbreaks in the first and second stages. It will have built up a store of accumulated wisdom and mechanisms of *control* for suppressing conflicts and the exercise of violence in the third stage, of *peace-making* for de-escalating conflict in the fourth stage, and of *reconciliation* for restoring frayed relationships and achieving coexistence.

In the context of the contemporary world, however, the store of wisdom and mechanisms that each society has built up through interactions and exchanges with the methods of other societies have normally tended to undergo unification and homogenization. This is simply to say that the methods of those societies that have established hegemony over the modern world have come to be regarded as "civilized and correct," that those of other societies have been rejected, and that in every society these methods have been imposed from above. In terms of *prevention*, for example, enlightenment activities and monitoring by police and other forces; in terms of *control*, suppression by the more

powerful physical force of multinational coalitions and peacekeeping forces (PKF); in terms of *peace-making*, documents and agreements by international organizations such as the United Nations or the African Union, or by international mediators such as former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan or former U.S. President Jimmy Carter; and in terms of *reconciliation* the attainment of universal justice through the punishment of perpetrators. All of these are examples of methods that have gained recognition in the international community as meeting global standards of "correctness."

As an example, let us try applying these "correct" methods for addressing and resolving conflict to conflicts in the African case. Firstly, *prevention* – in fact, for mutual ethnic hatreds that have been given excessive significance under colonial rule as a tool of divisive governance to be alleviated through "enlightenment" activities, or for their violence to be prevented by monitoring or deterrence by police forces is likely to be impossible. Without leveraging measures to reform the very mechanisms already embedded in society, these challenges cannot be addressed with the tools currently available. Next, with regard to *control* and *peace-making*, as well, we find that, considering that attempts to achieve these ends have taken place against a backdrop of sufficient physical force to overcome the level of hostile violence, the methods provided thus far may be regarded as extremely rigid and technical (in the sense that they have not been informed by values and other cultural concepts). Finally, in terms of *reconciliation*, the "justice" achieved through the punishment and isolation of perpetrators cannot ensure healing and coexistence for society as a whole, which must necessarily include both victims and perpetrators. Solutions for a society that has faith in supreme justice through a "laws and tribunals" approach are not the sole solution for a society that has routes to other forms of justice.

Seen in this way, the measures that the contemporary world accepts and employs as "correct" remedies in the context of these various stages of conflict are fixed and unitary, in that they are unable to envision (or intentionally elide) alternate possibilities. In their rejection and denial of these other remedies, they could be said to have a closed character, and to be of pure and intolerant types. We can find remedies that contrast starkly with these types in various African contexts – solutions that are flexible and pluralistic as opposed to fixed and unitary, motley and accommodating rather than pure and intolerant. Such solutions, in the sense that they prescribe people's thoughts and practices at a deep level, can also be described as "cultural remedies." At each stage of conflict, these cultural remedies will be profoundly associated with people's thoughts, behaviors, value judgements, and meaning-making processes. Not only in Africa, but in every society, it is through the production and real-world application of these cultural remedies that resolution of conflict and the attainment of coexistence are achieved.

3. Cultures coping with conflict

So, what sorts of cultural remedies have arisen in African societies for each of these stages of conflicts?

To begin, let us look at the day-to-day disputes that are in closest contact with the lifeworld. The term "day-to-day disputes" can be understood to refer to incidents arising inside communities – occurrences like acts of violence, theft and land disputes, or perhaps suspicions of witchcraft associated with unhappy incidents for which there is no clear cause. Firstly, in terms of prevention, we find that there are everywhere cultural mechanisms in place to allow for the proactive avoidance of people with whom one may be in a relationship of latent tension. For example, the existence of a custom in which two people in a structurally tense relationship, such as a husband and his wife's mother, will both check to see if the other is coming down the road so as to avoid encountering one another by mutually changing direction or going down a side-path has been widely reported. If contact never happens in the first place, then there is no reason for trouble to arise. Next, with regard to control and peace-making, we will find that in many cases the family networks of these two will have been brought to bear on the situation. There can be no cultural option to ignore the advice of clan elders to whom both are obliged to serve and pay homage, and it is not uncommon for some mutual connection to be found by tracing back the family and marital relationships of each party. In such cases the "cultural manual' of how to interact with kin or affines will take priority over any personal grudge or conflict. In terms of reconciliation and the restoration of justice, as well, separate from their realization through a "laws and tribunals" approach, there is surely an important role to play by village tribunals regularly presided over by village elders, held in open outdoor spaces where passers-by and non-villagers alike are free to take part and express opinions. Hence, instead of in a ruling by a judge, prosecutor, lawyer or other professional jurist, the question of whose suit is correct would be determined on a case-by-case basis through dialogue and negotiations that accord with local lifeways and the defeated party would atone through payments that might include labor, cash, or livestock. In such cases there would be neither human isolation (such as by detention or imprisonment) nor violence by overarching institutions such as the state.

So what kind of cultural remedies can have been at work with regard to clashes that may sometimes involve the use of automatic weapons like the Kalashnikov (AK-47s)? To begin, let us assume two neighboring ethnic groups involved in a mutual relationship of structural tension. "Raiding" cultures, for example, in which neighboring pastoralists raid each other's cattle, are known to be widely entrenched in northern Kenya.[2] Because these arid and semi-arid regions have limited resources in terms of the pasture and water required for livestock, it is fair to say that relations between groups are always in a state of structural tension over livestock raids and questions of the prioritized use of resources. In order to ease this tension and prevent conflict, these groups have devised and implemented a variety of cultural remedies. For example, this is a culture in which the same clans are created in multiple ethnic groups, and where clan alliances forged across ethnic lines are identified. Since the same clans enjoy a mutual fraternal relationship and share common

ancestors, it is not acceptable for their members to kill each other. And since the members of allied clans do not attack each other, total conflict in which an entire ethnic group is mobilized against another will necessarily be avoided.[3]

Systems whereby ethnicity is cross-cut by the selfsame clans and clan alliances will also be effective in cases where peace-making efforts must be brought in to control the spread of conflict. Moreover, cultural practices like "dual membership" (such as among people who live in boundary areas between rival ethnic groups involved in a relationship of structural tension and who may identify themselves as members of both ethnic groups simultaneously) or "roving cultures" and "ethnic transformation" (whereby individuals or small groups belonging to one ethnicity will freely settle in a community in a region inhabited by another ethnic group, and then switch their own ethnic identification to that of the indigenous majority) have also contributed significantly to the promotion of peace-making and controlling the spread of conflict. The existence of people who claim dual membership is a cultural tool for preventing generalized conflict between two ethnic groups, while the fact that the members of one's own group may be present in a rival ethnic group in cases of "roving" and "ethnic transformation" can put the brakes to the expansion of attacks on those groups and facilitate peace-making and negotiation through fellow members of the same clans. With regard to reconciliation, as well, cultural rituals for realizing an end to strife between different ethnicities, settling each other's damages, and reverting to an original status quo are widely accepted across ethnic boundaries. In these cases, too, measures to restore justice through the identification and isolation or punishment of perpetrators are avoided, and the damage done to each other is settled through compensation between groups and the enactment of rituals. In this way, at each stage – where inter-group conflict has been prevented, the escalation of violence controlled and halted, and reconciliation achieved – conflict has been handled using cultural prescriptions created by African society.

4. The experience of the African Forum

Having noticed the significance of these cultural prescriptions for conflict resolution that have been generated in African societies, it behooved us to situate their significance in a wider context through a deeper examination of their specific content. The discussions that took place in the African Potentials Forum (hereinafter abbreviated as the "African Forum") played a key role in this regard. The goal of our grand project has been the attempt to uncover the potentials originally generated in African societies for resolving conflict and attaining coexistence and evaluate these as a common heritage for humanity in the twenty-first century. To this end, annual meetings of the African Forum have been held all over the continent, with a particular focus on NGO officials active in the field and African researchers in a spectrum of disciplines with involvement in the issues of conflict and coexistence in African settings, as well as government officials responsible for policy-making and enforcement. Through the various discussions exchanged at the Forum and the pluralistic networks that are generated as a result, the initially elusive concept of African potentials has been further refined to evolve into a workable intellectual concept. The African

Forum has also been an invaluable opportunity for those of us seeking to grasp African potentials from a social and cultural standpoint and to re-orient it relative to a broader context.

The first African Forum was held in Nairobi, where participating researchers and activists from countries across East Africa reviewed the merits and significance of African potentials as an innovative concept. Specific examples of such potentials proposed at the Nairobi Forum, where interethnic conflict was a principal theme, related to the aspect of the effective operation of customary systems for coping with conflict that exist in traditional African societies. African methods and ideas for coping with conflict that had previously been disparaged by Western conventional wisdom were instead evaluated positively with a view to demonstrating their effectiveness and versatility using specific examples. In this context, the theme of African potentials became synonymous with traditional and customary methods of conflict resolution that were indigenous to Africa. However, the Nairobi Forum also contested the fundamental validity of our initial discussions. Namely, it was recognized that finding and unconditionally appreciating putative African potentials amidst African traditions and customs, just as with the blanket rejection of modern Western methods of coping with conflict, amounted to little more than a socially constructed romantic fantasy. It was emphasized that the concept of African potentials, rather than simply an assemblage of indigenous customs specific to Africa, was in fact a dynamic entity produced through contact, negotiation, and compromise with state and global political mechanisms in the context of the contemporary world.

The second forum was convened in Harare, Zimbabwe, bringing together practitioners and commentators from various countries across southern Africa. The focus of the Harare Forum, as opposed to the interethnic conflicts discussed in Nairobi, was placed on conflicts as opposition and resistance movements opposed to systems of governance structured by centuries of colonial rule and racist polices as well as the realization of state formations that inherited such systems. Examples here included the struggles of African peasants over land, movements invoking the rights of veterans of wars of liberation, as well as social experiments to overcome the racism and xenophobia that persisted even after the repeal of apartheid. In this context, the concept of African potentials represented a force that opposed mechanisms leading to global inequality and oppression. It was open to diverse people of heterogeneous backgrounds and facilitated the process of inclusive interaction among such people. In this sense, perspectives that discussed traditional culture as something fixed were strongly criticized for being so out of touch with this inherent dynamism. As an example, rituals of reconciliation organized by governments and global NGOs as symbolic observances leading to the mediation of interethnic conflict, the settling of issues, and subsequent reconciliation, even if these were to produce scenes of African-style reconciliation, would amount to little more than simple cultural appropriation, with no connection to the practices and wisdom of African societies (the South African academic Michael Neocosmos, who took part in the Harare forum, has termed these processes “compartmentalization” and “technologization”).

The third African Forum was held in the South Sudan capital of Juba a scant three years after

independence was achieved in 2010. In the context of South Sudan, where intermittent civil wars have continued since 1955, spanning more than half a century, the question of how people have suppressed and mitigated these conflicts and moved forward from the cessation of hostilities toward peace and reconciliation generated a mass of discussion on the basis of reports by researchers, local NGOs, as well as government officials (including Cabinet ministers and legislators involved in these processes). The salient conflict for the Juba Forum was the Sudanese civil war, and experimental proposals were presented toward social and cultural models for conflict remedies, reconciliation, and coexistence in the Sudanese context. The concept of African potentials explicitly raised by the Juba Forum was neither the contemporary forms of indigenous methods of conflict resolution like those discussed in Nairobi nor the forces resisting structural domination regulating the world order brought up at Harare. Here, rather, discourses of religious (Christian) reconciliation, global universal human rights thought, the logics of nation-building, practices of ethnic and cultural advocacy, and other themes including a perspective that moved from the local toward regional and global forms of pragmatic politics, were broken down and recombined into hybrid forms based on the standard of effectiveness in real-life contexts. In this sense, African potentials were presented as something neither static and fixed nor exclusive and unitary (i.e., pure).

In 2014, the fourth African Forum was held in Yaounde, Cameroon, with a focus on researchers living in or native to West Africa. Despite the fact that participation on the part of several countries including Sierra Leone could not take place due to that year's outbreak of the Ebola virus, this meeting saw discussions of African potentials deepen even further. One of the defining features of the Yaounde Forum was the attempt to situate the intellectual historical pedigree of African potentials, a question that had not previously received any deep consideration at the other forums. These discussions were stimulated by a keynote address, also included in this volume, by Professor Francis B. Nyamnjoh, a Cameroonian native who teaches at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Drawing on examples from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by the Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola, Nyamnjoh argued that a defining feature of African modes of knowledge, as distinct from the modern Western episteme, has been the quality of "incompleteness." This refers to something imperfect and monstrous, lacking both the complete body of an able-bodied individual and a spirit constructed by reason and language. African knowledge offers a device for temporarily bracketing the world of modern Western knowledge, and the wisdom and practices that are created out of this practice are tied to African potentials. Accordingly, it has become possible to situate African potentials within the broader context of contemporary thought and philosophy.[4]

The fifth African Forum was held in Addis Ababa in October of 2015. Through studies focusing on cases of indigenous knowledge being re-created in the context of national, regional, and global social transformations in fields across Ethiopia, the Forum was unmistakably able to unlock the power to fuse together disparate forms of knowledge and institutions, thought and practices that differed in terms of thought patterns, historical origin, and political and economic foundation. Positing this combinatory power as both a theoretical and empirical feature of African potentials was the largest takeaway from the Addis Ababa Forum. For example, in the case of state policies

mandating the state's ownership of all land, the customary ethnic grievances of local residents seeking to use lands as and when necessary, or further, against those "influential external parties" seeking to accumulate personal wealth through neoliberal market policies, the claims of communities attempting to raise opposition – the strength to skillfully draw on swirling contexts of these matters and, moreover, church discourse, academic (i.e., modern scientific) discourse, the values of kinship organizations, and the logics of civil society, thereby to forge connections and give shape to people's practices was what these meetings succeeded in elaborately portraying as African potentials.

5. African cultural potentials

Over the course of discussions held at these five meetings of the African Forum, frameworks and their features have emerged for thinking about "Africa's cultural potentials" for the resolution of conflict and the attainment of coexistence.

The first matter at hand is that of a "de-romanticization" of African potentials. In discussions at the Nairobi Forum that sought to identify Africa's cultural potentials, while the merits of traditional and customary methods of conflict resolution tended to be excessively glamorized, it was initially denied that this thinking gave blanket praise to a return to Africa-specific traditions as alternatives to modern Western solutions. This was because, in fixing the concept of "Africa-specific potentials" as something static and giving voice to fantastic ideals by ignoring the complexities of the contemporary world, such thinking stemmed from the same root as mentalities that had come to hold African culture in contempt. By romanticizing African traditions as fixed ideals, we disconnect and pull them out from their contexts, risking our own empty self-satisfaction. The fabrication of African-flavored peace events by external producers can be seen in a number of conflict zones. A typical example of such would be the "theater" of traditional dance by performers dressed in ethnic costume, ritually slaughtering a cow in an imitation of a ritual of mediation and reconciliation once observed in the case of interethnic conflicts. We may say that this is the very "technologization" and "compartmentalization" of traditional rituals that was condemned by Professor Neocosmos at the Harare Forum.

Of course, perspectives that have arbitrarily dismissed cultures of conflict resolution as "subaltern," "backward" or "uncivilized" require fundamental critique, and perspectives that re-evaluate cultures that have been abandoned or written off in this way are crucial. However, this does not mean that we should level unconditional praise on a fixed subject. That is, with the advance of globalization, African society is experiencing violent fluctuations occasioned by a heterogeneous welter of ideas, institutions, information and materials. The attempt is to discover African potentials in the fact that in the midst of these conditions of fluidity, African society is generating distinctive cultures of conflict resolution as elements regarded as "traditional" or "indigenous" are reorganized and re-created. In other words, African potentials are referred to as what we at the African potentials project call an "interface" function, meaning the power of interweaving and forging connections within assemblages of values, thought, and practices that belong to disparate

dimensions and different historical phases.

Nyamnjoh points out that it is this function itself that represents the nexus point where Africa diverges from the intellectual history of Western modernity. In the encounter with alterity (in the broad sense of 'the other' not only among human beings, but including the ideological, institutional, material, animal, and spiritual dimensions), to privilege the standards of the self and impose these through the exercise of physical force – this has been the epistemology of Western modernity that subjected Africa to colonial rule. Nyamnjoh concludes that underlying this is a mentality that defines itself as "sufficient and complete." Once we begin to believe in our own completeness, intolerance toward and attacks on "other" things are legitimized as justice "for the salvation of the benighted." In contrast, African society understands the self as "something incomplete" and has the potential power to create a symbiotic order of interdependence free from the mutual exclusion of others, who are similarly incomplete. He points to this "convivial" power to link, combine, and complement dissimilar things as the kernel of Africa's cultural potential. This conviviality is what we call an *interface function*.

Specific instances of practices based on this interface function have been presented at meetings of the African Forum to date. One such example, reported at the Juba Forum by a Nuer pastor who also directs a non-governmental peace organization, can be found in the power to facilitate social approval for peace processes by interweaving traditional Nuer concepts of mediation with Christian forgiveness and the universal human rights discourse of global NGOs. Another example, presented at the Nairobi Forum, is to be found in the practices by which checks have been applied to the expanding chains of violence in Kenya's coastal region. There, by gathering together under a single roof Christian and Islamic religious leaders preaching peace according to their respective religious beliefs, NGO activists advocating modern civil rights, and local community elders emphasizing folk practices of hospitality toward strangers, a patchwork was stitched together from each of these claims to build a forum for suppressing violence. This power represents the interface function of African potentials. The "Palaver" Forum of South Africa mentioned at the Harare Forum had something of a similar quality. "Palaver," as free and rambling chatter derided as meaningless babble during the era of apartheid, became the driving force behind the creation of a cooperative forum that freely transcended ethnicity, generation, gender and race. For example, this idea guided the emergence of Durban's Abahlali community movement, which was organized in an instance of direct action "from below" with the aim of securing public housing. Such practices, in the sense that they are leveraged in the context of contemporary society by creating new forces that blend a variety of pluralistic elements, are a good illustration of the possibilities of the interface function inherent in Africa's cultural potential.[5] The power to unite diverse elements from heterogeneous dimensions indicated to have been at the core of the Addis Ababa Forum might also be said to be an expression of this same interface function.

From what we have seen thus far, the features of Africa's cultural potential could be summarized as follows. First of all, it is an always dynamic and fluid process rather than any static or fixed

assemblage. To grasp Africa's past and traditions as something fixed, is to risk falling afoul of a modernist attitude that disdain Africa as "barbarous" or "undeveloped" and regard Africa-born knowledge and practices as subaltern and irrational, or a diametrically opposed revivalist attitude that unconditionally glamorizes traditions and imbues them with exaggerated significance. A second feature is that Africa's cultural potential aspires to pluralism rather than unity. For example, as methods of conflict resolution measures, it is the accepted wisdom of our own society that measures privileging a "laws and tribunals" approach are a basic principle of modern civil society. All other alternative or divergent solutions are by their very nature "incorrect." This is an aspiration towards unity. With regard to the implementation of justice, there is but a single approach, a single school of thought; all others are condemned as peripheral, informal, or inferior. However, following the view of African cultural potential, we do not believe that a single approach to be absolute, nor that others should be rejected as mistaken. Herein we can ascertain an aspiration to pluralism that embraces both approaches based in laws and tribunals as well as extrajudicial solutions.

An aspiration to *unity*, reduced to the level of dogma, finds eventual culmination in a faith in *purity*. In other words, one's own thoughts, values, and approaches are regarded as an absolute good, while the admixture of any other (and therefore impure) thing is stringently denounced as "incorrect action" that compromises purity and perfection. African cultural potentials, in contrast, acknowledge the hybrid and mixed property of their various elements, and attach value to this character of incompleteness. This signifies a more open and tolerant attitude to thoughts and values that differ from those of one's own worldview. For instance, let us consider the case where a certain ethnic group observes male circumcision as a rite of passage into adulthood. For this people, the act of circumcision preserves ethnic identity. However, African society is normally characterized by ethnic boundaries that are flexible and fluid. When a group that has no such practice roves in to stay or settle in the territory of a group that does practice circumcision culture, the former group will discard some parts of its pre-migration cultural practices while retaining others. Some individuals might embrace circumcision culture, whereas others might reject the practice unto death. Tolerance for these differing cultural practices was a major feature of African society. It was not uncommon that those who roved in to settle in the territory of a given ethnic group, at times, began to migrate once more, only to re-settle in the territory of yet another group, where they adjusted their ethnic identity once again to that of this new group. In western Kenya, we can find instances of such actions as late as the 1940s. The disappearance of such conduct is due to the forcible crackdown on such itinerancy and ethnic transformations by the British colonial government on a basis of unity and purity (as well as closure and intolerance. In this way, Africa's cultural potential flourished on a soil of openness and tolerance.[6]

As we have seen so far, African cultural potentials are endowed with characteristics such as dynamism, flexibility, pluralism, heterogeneity, tolerance, and openness. Such features constitute the antithesis of a mode of thought characterized by a complete, pure, and solitary truth that seeks to occupy the position of absolute victor by opposing, casting aside, and dominating all other possibilities in a hostile manner that precludes reconciliation. In that sense, as Professor Nyamnjoh

considers in detail in this collection from his unique perspective, it the very quality of *incompleteness* itself that will be the ideological core of African potentials.

6. Organization of this volume: a tripartite flow

This collection is composed of the following three parts. Part 1 involves the re-creation of traditional customs and the concept of African potentials, while Part 2 describes the ideas and practices that are specific to African potentials. The final section, Part 3, discusses the wisdom used for preventing conflict and the concept of African potentials.

In Part 1, we adopt a micro-perspective to carry out a close reading of practices involved in the resolution of local conflicts and the attainment of coexistence that are created, maintained and continue to function in Africa even today. In Africa, the wisdom and institutions for resolving day-to-day conflicts are created and maintained inside communities. These local mechanisms and institutions, in turn, are leveraged not in their original form, but after being altered and reconfigured in the context of the political, economic, and social transformations to which Africa has been exposed. In Part 1, we discuss these kinds of "traditional" wisdom, mechanisms, and institutions as African potentials.

So how have such African potentials, with their relationship to "traditional" culture, changed up to the present day? And how do they function currently? Attempts to discover answers to these questions are reported in discussions concerning three cases dealing respectively with the Igbo culture of Nigeria, the Bamileke in Cameroon, and the Igembe in Kenya.

Firstly, the article by Hisashi Matsumoto in Chapter 1, focusing on the position of titular chief in Igbo society in Nigeria, reveals how a variety of contemporary meanings are being created for this position in the context of the high mobility that has accompanied globalization. While African institutions of chieftainship might seem to refer to a traditional and premodern political institution, chieftainship in Igbo society did not originally exist as a political institution, but was rather "invented" in the modern era. In the context of Nigerian society, which demonstrates the highest rate of overseas migration for the entire African continent, this title of traditional authority has helped build stable communities among immigrants in host societies and has been more than sufficiently leveraged as collateral for ties to the homeland and contributions to the homeland. But this process has also involved an ingenious and creative artistry, and it is by virtue of this quality of re-creation that local traditional authority has been fused with global dynamics. Next, Chapter 2 engages in a discussion of continuity and change in traditional authority as a strategy for conflict resolution among the Bamileke chiefdoms of Cameroon. Today, the mechanisms of traditional authority have been subsumed within and function inside structures of regional and national political power. However, the reality of this configuration is even more complex; through the enhancement of chiefly authority by urban elites and the reconfiguration of traditional authority by natives in host societies to endow it with eminence in arenas of mediation and arbitration, chieftainship has come to be activated as a contemporary apparatus of conflict resolution. Conflict

resolution through traditional authority, quite apart from the ostensibly pastoral representations apparent in this way, are in postcolonial situations being politicized to an extremely high degree.

Chapter 3, by Shin-ichiro Ishida, takes up traditional methods of conflict resolution among the Igembe, who are based in central Kenya. These are cultural customs that seek to secure a sincere attitude as a cultural solution in every dispute through the vows that accompany self-sorcery and the fear of the latent power of one's opponents. In any society, getting the parties involved in conflict to enter into mutual discussion and arrive at consensus is a nigh on impossible task. In the context of civil society laws and tribunals are dedicated to this task, and professional judges are tasked with issuing decisions that consider the suits of both parties. In the case of two societies in West Africa (the Igbo and Bamileke), traditional authorities will intervene to carry out these rulings by imbuing them with a higher level of sanction to ensure their social and cultural validity. In contrast, among the Igembe, however, who have no traditional chieftains, people govern themselves against the overall backdrop of an impersonal culture. In other words, a belief that false statements bring calamities on oneself and one's family acts powerfully through customs of ritual oath-taking that accompany self-sorcery and an obligation for mutual good faith.

It is by such traditional customs and cultures that the day-to-day disputes of contemporary African society are dealt with, and order restored after temporary ruptures. Certainly, the practices of differing groups in East and West Africa, whose experience of culture and history is completely difference, would at a glance appear to vary fundamentally. Seen closely, however, some mutual commonalities are apparent. Namely, these three regions have for many years been (and continue to be) exposed to a great deal of change, in the midst of which they have managed to continue to protect their own lifeworlds even as they have altered their own carefully cultivated mechanisms and norms. And the "surviving" subject that has weathered such changes is not any one individual but the entire community. In each of the three societies described above, people have found solutions to everyday conflicts that threaten to lead to the destruction of their communities by making use of mechanisms and norms that they have cultivated themselves, not only safeguarding their own communities but also stimulating their development through new acts of creation.

The African potentials described in Part 1 are not perfect solutions whose mere existence should result in the immediate resolution of any conflict that arises. There are limits and constraints. It is for this very reason that people are everyday involved in practices and adjustments to ascertain the effects of this potential. From the everyday cases from around Africa in Part 1, we should have no problem comprehending the dynamic aspects of African potentials.

Next, in Part 2, which brings together attempts to discern the instantiation of African potentials, we focus on the originality and ingenuity devised by small-scale African societies in order to forge community consensus and deal with crisis amidst the changes that have accompanied modernization and the pressures of international politics and regional political dynamics. In the normal case, conflict will arise between two opposing groups or interests. It follows that processes

of conflict resolution can be promoted through institutional intervention by third parties who can coordinate the interests or claims of these opposing parties. Institutions such as the courtrooms of modern civil society, as well as the forms of *personal traditional authority* and *impersonal cultural authority* examined in Part 1 are one example of such third-party actors. However, in African societies, in terms of perceptions of conflict in its own right, ideas can take shape and be put to use among people that are of a completely different nature than the modes of thought characteristic of modern civil society. In Part 2, we will see how these heterogeneous ideas recognize conflict and how these consequently inform attempts at different kinds of practices.

Firstly, the essay by Itaru Ohta in Chapter 4 offers a vignette that shows how two parties to a conflict somehow arrive at a consensus in the face of mutual claims with no seeming common ground at all. Consensus, in the majority of cases, will be achieved without any direct recourse to the power of a third party who is not party to the dispute in question. But how? The answer is through mutual conversation (discussions) rather than the authority or power of the third party. Of what kind? Rather than communication based on logical reason such as that emphasized in the work of Jürgen Habermas, by a method in which "actors speak enthusiastically with others, listen to their words, and arrive at consensus through mutual negotiation." Ohta defines such instances of conflict resolution through the power of conversation as "palaver", and abstracts the possibility of "seeking consensus while taking full advantage of the powers of speech and listening to create eventual forms of coexistence" as an African potential from cases in societies that include Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This is followed in Chapter 5, in which Jon Holtzman presents a rather interesting report from Samburu society in Kenya. Conflict is usually induced by instances of opposition over interests or earnings, or else by attacks on one's own group. Here we find a dichotomous worldview of enemies and allies. However, Holtzman's essay reveals that, instead of this simple dichotomous worldview, Samburu society shares rather the possession of a more intricate framework of awareness that is deeply rooted in social morals and human values. Allies (i.e., friends) include both institutional friendships sanctioned by society as well as friendships based purely on affinity. Enemies (i.e., those who lack morality) include those of a miserly, ruthless, and selfish type as well as those of a greedy, gluttonous, but nevertheless laid-back type. If we were to follow the simple dichotomy of enemies and allies, then the Pokot, who live on the Samburu's western frontier would be considered institutional friends, while the Turkana to the north would be institutional enemies. And while this is consistent with what would be apparent on a conflict map of ethnic relations in northern Kenya, the reality is more complex; even if the Pokot are allies, they are stingy and selfish and make for poor friends, while the Turkana, although enemies, are quite laissez-faire, and so make good enemies. Since real conflicts (and the resolution of these conflicts) take place in the mist of this intricate cultural awareness, solutions from which this scheme is disconnected would not be rooted in the deeper layers of their worldview, and as result fail to constitute a sustainable solution.

The essay by Daiji Kimura in Chapter 6 takes up the social experience of the Bongando, who

practice swidden agriculture in northern Cameroon to consider African potentials through the thought and practices of nature management that have attracted interest amidst the confusion of regional political dynamics. One approach to the protection of valuable natural resources is of course to surround a region containing such resources in order to cut it off from outside intervention, and this is considered to be a reasonable solution. Kimura defines this approach as a "logic of demarcation" underpinned by modern Western scientific knowledge, and points out that the Bongando have in the past practiced a very different approach. While the mentality that makes this possible is described as a "logic of gradation," it is characterized by a progressive, gradual, and ambiguous transition that is opposed to the stark dichotomies by which the logic of demarcation bisects the world. Kimura's essay posits the critique that the logic of demarcation is always implicated in the desire to apprehend its object comprehensively from above and then to rule through the erasure of difference (homogenization), and points out the possibility of an African potential in the logic of gradation.

Finally, the theme taken up in Part 3 is that of cultural measures for the prevention of conflict based in our concept of African potentials. While African civil wars and conflicts have on one hand attracted world's attention, there exist a far greater number of African societies that have been able to avoid and prevent conflict even while facing internal contradictions and chaos. What has made this possible is the fact that African societies are endowed with stores of wisdom relating to conflict avoidance and prevention. By rethinking these stores of wisdom in the terms of African potentials, the role of Part 3 is to generate new perspectives while simultaneously drawing a bead on those African views of society and human values that constitute the font of this wisdom (despite having been relegated to inferior positions, ignored, and rejected since the encounter with the West).

The essay by Motoji Matsuda in Chapter 7 concerns contemporary Kenyan society. The chapter discusses post-election violence (PEV), particularly the outbreak from late 2007 to early 2008 that temporarily plunged Kenya into anarchy (civil confusion) and undertakes an analysis of community policing activities by Nairobi slum dwellers that were observed during this period of violent confusion. Confronted with physical and social crisis, the inhabitants of Nairobi's slums spontaneously organized policing activities in the midst of raging violence, activities that represented an attempt to protect the lives and property of fellow slum dwellers. However, such vigilante movements tend to be easily leveraged as violent apparatus for the peripheral extension of state power and to devolve into private gang organizations rooted in xenophobic tribalism. Despite such risks, this period also saw the birth of unstable and irregular practices based on expediency and the contingent demands of people's lifeworlds. In these slum environments so fraught with the potential threat of imminent violence, these practices came to be wielded and deployed as a force of restraint. Matsuda's paper shows that the concept of African potentials points not only to the wisdom of ages, but may also be produced in new settings such as urban slums.

In Chapter 8, Morie Kaneko and Masayoshi Shigeta discuss Ari society in southern Ethiopia. In many cases, conflict is caused by the arrival of heterogeneous populations into already inhabited areas where they encroach on the rights and plunder the wealth of the indigenous population. Although there are many groups in African societies with a cultural basis that originally lay in migration or roving, incidents such as violent domination or conquest, unilateral exploitation or appropriation, and cultural genocide or social restructuring under the disguise of good intentions will occasionally arise. In such cases relationships of tension, conflict, and hatred will be created and strengthened between indigenes and outsiders. Ari society, discussed here by Kaneko and Shigeta, has also been taking in vast numbers of outsiders from the latter half of the nineteenth century up to the present day, as well as absorbing the accompanying institutions, knowledge, and objects. While the Ari have certainly experienced pressures and impositions as a part of these processes, they have taken an attitude not of resistance to incorporating the cultures, languages, institutions, and wisdom of these oppressors, adopting instead the stance of learning from them. Rather than confronting the oppression of outsiders with violence, this has demonstrated an attitude to see it as an opportunity to learn. In this, Kaneko and Shigeta's essay points out an epistemological outlook that apprehends ignorance (and those who display it) as immature and shameful. Such an epistemological outlook is itself a manifestation of an African potential to guide people to a better life.

Chapter 9 is a text by F. B. Nyamnjoh containing an ideological and philosophical argument for African potentials, excerpted from a keynote address delivered to the 4th African Forum held in Cameroon (the Yaounde Forum). In this text, Nyamnjoh likens the products of Western modernity (institutions, value systems, human values, etc.) that have been directly transplanted to Africa since the period of colonial rule to "babies." Rather than denying or rejecting these, he points out that by adopting and "taming" these concepts, African societies will be able to enrich African life. In addition, in contrast to a "completeness" by which Western modernity has sought to refute and overcome others by force, he claims that by entering into dialogue and conversation with others, dissolving the boundary between others and the self, and establishing "incompleteness" as a normal state, Africa will be able to provide a world that exists in a different dimension to the conflict and opposition in the modern Western sense. Nyamnjoh's paper, which argues expansively and creatively for an African world utterly unlike the humanism and rationalism of the modern West based on *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by the Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola, might better be described as a piece of the essence of the claims advanced not only in this collection, but in our entire series.

Although this collection is thus composed of nine papers divided into three Parts bookended by an introduction and conclusion, two additional columns have been included by research collaborators from Africa. As a joint research team exploring challenges within the framework of African potentials particularly with regard to social and cultural potentials, we have communicated our findings by participating in panels at various international conferences. Among these, we welcomed two extremely interesting reports relating to African potentials with the participation of

research collaborators from Ethiopia and Zimbabwe as part of a panel on African potentials organized for the May 2014 meeting of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held in Chiba, Japan. We asked for these scholars to contribute the essence of their papers in a column format, resulting in the two columns included in this collection. Included in the discussion of traditional customs and African potentials in Part 1 is the report by Mamo Hebo Wabe on the example of the Arsi-Oromo society of southern Ethiopia. Among the Arsi-Oromo, a culture of customary avoidance behavior referred to as *hamumeen'na* continues to play a major role even today. In this village, in the case that some problem should arise between two people who are closely related, they will take steps to avoid each other. This avoidance behavior becomes an incentive to repair the relationship at an early stage without exacerbating the conflict. The avoided party attempts to return to life as normal by showing remorse and repairing the relationship. As long as this wisdom is reproduced, social confrontations will be unlikely to lead to serious conflict. The column by Wilbert Sadomba carried in Part 2 depicts the African potentials evident in the urban informal sector set in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Its main characters are veterans who devoted their lives to fighting in the Second Chimurenga or the Zimbabwe War of Liberation. Sadomba himself took part in the war of liberation at the age of fifteen, and although an activist and researcher taking part in the movement to occupy lands settled by white farmers, in this column he discusses ways in which people can draw on ingenuity and creativity to respond to the harsh conditions of globalization and international economic sanctions imposed by former colonial powers after the War of Liberation.

Each of these discussions, including the columns represents a clear demonstration from the field of the core of the social and cultural possibilities that African potentials hold for the contemporary world. As an international and interdisciplinary collaborative research project composed primarily of researchers from Japan and Africa, it may be said that we are gradually opening up a new territory to bring to the attention of the rest of the world.

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Notes

[1] For the conceptualization of "African potentials, see Matsuda (2013) for an overview of the intellectual background of the "African potentials" concept; for the formulation of the overall concept, see Matsuda (2014).

[2] While anthropologists since Melville J. Herskovits have characterized the conditions governing social relations in East African pastoral societies, where cattle constitute the core of a worldview in not only socioeconomic, but also cultural and spiritual terms, as the "East African cattle complex" (Herskovits 1926), the cattle raids that take place in these societies have also been regarded as social and cultural as well as economic activity. While their forms have evolved, these conditions continue to exist even today (Fukui 1984; Sagawa 2011).

[3] East Africa's pastoralist society is one in which a given clan spanning multiple ethnic groups and alliances between fellow clan members belonging to differing ethnic groups work as a mechanism that prevents generalized interethnic conflict. A noted tendency within this society is that of "identities on the move" among these ethnic groups, which differ qualitatively from any singular sense of belonging (Schlee 1989). Nakamura and Naito have carried out extraordinarily interesting work with regard to dual identities among both the Samburu and Rendille pastoralists of northern Kenya (Nakamura and Naito 2009).

[4] Nyamnjoh formulates the personhood and agency cultivated by African society as *Ubuntu*. This concept seeks to derive an alternative humanist, social, and historical awareness to that of Western modernity, which Nyamnjoh expresses as being characterized by "incompleteness" (Nyamnjoh 2015a, 2015b).

[5] The community movement known as Abahlali baseMjondolo ("those who live in shacks") is a joint forum for disenfranchised urban residents in Durban, South Africa open to people of all races and background. In that Abahlali represents the deployment of a potential that is distinct from Western modernist civic movements, some scholars have understood it to be a modern incarnation of the thought of Frantz Fanon (e.g., Gibson 2014). For a discussion of the inner workings of this forum drawing on an experience of direct participation, see Neocosmos (2007).

[6] Ethnic migration by *abamenya* in western Kenyan society at the beginning of the twentieth century (wherein small patrilineal descent groups of no more than two dozen members frequently travelled seeking land and stable livelihoods) was pointed out with great surprise in a study by Gunter Wagner carried out in the 1930s (Wagner 1970 [1940]). Based on the case of the Maragoli, I reported some discussions of these movements and ethnic transformations that lasted into the 1940s (Matsuda 1998, Matsuda 2003).

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