

Evading Genetic Modifications through African Potentials? Whither the Afro-pessimism Thesis

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While some scholars have argued that African potentials are premised on Africanity and the attendant African essence, the contemporary discourses around infusions with genetic modification and enhancements could run parallel to such Africanity and African essence. To the extent that materials for genetic modifications and enhancements can be from sources other than African, I argue here that there is need to interrogate the interface between the modifications and enhancements with the notions of Africanity, African essence and African potentials. While the notions of African essence and African essentialism are often summarily dismissed as relics of the [“unworthy”] past, careful attention to the notion of African potentials suggests that at its base there is the *sine qua non* of African essence. Situating the notions of African essence and African potential within the context of organic farming within Namibia which is largely desert and semi desert, this paper asks deep questions including how African potentials and African essence can play out with mutual accommodation and inclusivity that are at the core of universalism. The paper traces the potentials that African farmers in Namibia possess and deploy in order to exceed the limitations of the desert and semi desert environment and produce organic food in areas and projects which are hardly supported by government and NonGovernmental organisations. I trace how the farmers have started the organic farming project, how the project is faring and the potential it has to address hunger as well as challenges of African dependency on external assistance. In other words, the paper examines the potential that the organic farming project has in addressing regional challenges of dependency on external food aid. It examines how the project addresses local needs for food as well as how it speaks to universal matters of human rights to food and sustenance. It traces the modes of knowledge, philosophies and epistemologies that inform the farming project. In short, the paper questions the veracity and validity of the thesis on Afro-pessimism. While the Afro-pessimism thesis holds that Africa as a region is so riddled with debilitating problems that there is impossibility of sustainable development, this paper holds that there is African potential on the continent. While Afro-pessimism thesis holds that Black existence is marked as an ontological absence in the world, posited as object and devoid of liveliness and agency, this paper shows that African farmers have agency, liveliness, and subjecthood. The paper argues that the African farmers’ project can be understood as demonstration of Africa potential and African essence in the sense of them being informed by quests for African authenticity, African cultural originality and African identities. While genetic modifications and enhancements would advocate for hybridisation and attendant dissolution of African essence and identities, projects for organic farming can be understood to promote authenticity, essence, identity, originality, grassroots initiatives and African historicity. In other words, this paper argues that without African essence and identity there is no African potential.

Session 2: Knowledge 2-2

The Medium of Instruction in North-Central Namibia in Colonial Times

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In 1990, Namibia gained independence from the Republic of South Africa. Due to the 'Bantu education' policy under the Apartheid regime in Namibia (called South West Africa at that time), most non-white people were able to receive only a minimal education. Therefore, after independence, many individuals showed great interest in reforming the educational system in Namibia. Similar to the situation in South Africa, Bantu education in South West Africa included the requirement that Afrikaans serve as the medium of instruction. However, in South West Africa, particularly in the north-central part of the country (called Owamboland at that time), the social context of this educational policy differed considerably from that in South Africa.

Christian missionaries have had a significant effect on the regional society of the former Owamboland since the late 19th century. Missionary activity in this area began when the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) started literacy education in 1870. A reflection of the nationalist movement that was occurring at home, FMS activities clearly differed from the imperialistic and racial policies that were then dominant in southern Africa. The FMS pursued 'genuine conversion' while emphasizing the training of local leaders. Their efforts gave rise to the establishment of the indigenous church, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo/Kavango Church (ELOC), in 1954. The ELOC also enthusiastically promoted the education of local leaders.

In contrast to missionary organizations, such as the FMS and ELOC, the colonial governments were initially uncooperative with the educational reforms in Owamboland. Indeed, the German colonial government did not participate at all in the efforts to reform the educational system in Owamboland, and the Union of South Africa did not supervise the education provided by the FMS for many years. Although most Finnish teachers adopted English as the medium of instruction, the South African Government encouraged the use of Afrikaans, which strengthened the influence of the white population in South Africa. However, following repetitive requests from the FMS and ELOC, the Union of South Africa gradually increased its financial support of educational activities in the area. They finally agreed to assume management of the schools in this area in 1959. Nevertheless, the Republic of South Africa, which was established in 1961, introduced the 'Bantu education' framework in the schools in Owamboland, and this policy remained largely intact until the government of independent Namibia adopted English as the medium of instruction.

In this presentation, I will examine negotiations between the colonial governments, missionaries, and various local residents about the medium of instruction. In so doing, I will elucidate the role of education in colonial domination, which failed in the end, and led to the pursuit of 'African potentials'. It is well known that a number of the Owambo individuals with central roles in the liberation movement lived in the former Owamboland. What is less known is that a significant number of San, who are considered the indigenous people in southern Africa, also lived in this area. The history of the educational policy applied to the San people in Owamboland differed considerably to that applied to the Owambo people and, thus, merits particular attention.

Teaching African Potentials: Incompleteness and the Pedagogy of African Potentials

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Apart from simply being celebrated as one of Africa's more stable democracies, what can Botswana contribute towards addressing global and regional challenges? Contexts such as Botswana that are not associated with a history of, or presence of on-going violent conflict, may seem to be out of the scope of the African Potentials project. However, Botswana has a long and successful history of being a player in regional and continental peace efforts and missions. Much attention to Botswana indigenous norms and institutions of the Tswana traditional culture has been given to the *kgotla*, followed in close tow by *botho* – the local term for *ubuntu*. Here we propose that, what makes the *kgotla culture* of open debate sustainable overtime is not just because it is a traditional concept, but specifically because of its lesser known but critical to its success mobilising power – *morero*, which loosely translates to 'consensus building', through skilful negotiation and observance of both protocol and possible sources of tensions and harmony. By looking at the role of the presidencies in Botswana in regional and continental conflict resolution, this presentation explores that actual practical mobilization of Tswana-centric approaches to conflict and why they succeeded over our actors who participated in the same conflict. In this paper, I argue that, of all Botswana's four presidents, Sir Ketumile Masire was able to better mobilise *morero* and set Botswana on a good course that could allow for more effective use of the *kgotla* and *botho*. During his leadership, Botswana came to be associated with peace brokering and what came to be known as silent diplomacy. The importance of this project for me, is how we can tap into the African Potentials, not just to 'discover' 'hidden' African modes of knowledge production but how to draw a pedagogy that better captures the *incompleteness* of the project of African Thought. It has come very clear in my teaching of African Social Thought that many tried and tested approaches that have worked in Africa have been abandoned the penchant to provide 'alternative', 'revolutionary', 'transformative' and 'new' modes of knowing. Secondly, there seems to have been a moratorium on African traditional modes of knowing that they must succeed at all times or perish. Many local African attempts at alternative modes of thinking such as Nyerere's *Ujamaa* were very quickly declared failed and buried. Second chances do not exist for local modes; they must do or die in the first instance. This is clearly unfair. Sylvia Tamale makes the point that, this is often because African 'cultures' is often unfavourably pitted against western human 'rights' or modes of knowing. *Morero* is never cast in stone. *Morero* is reiterative. *Morero* is never certain of outcomes. *Morero* is fluid but sure footed.