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Remarks on the Presentation of the Award

by

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Thank you so much for the very kind introduction. I am deeply honored and humbled to have been selected to receive this award and to be counted in the company of such distinguished prior honorees. I thank NYASA for the award and for thinking of me as worthy of this honor. As I listened to the introduction I was reminded how lucky those of us in academia are. We have the opportunity to share knowledge, influence policy in ways that are sometimes unimaginable and help to solve problems that afflict mankind. NYASA's theme for this year's conference is an excellent one, *Africans in the Americas and African Americans in Africa: The Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in the 21st Century*. It emphasizes the incontrovertible truth that the lives of Africans and African Americans are intertwined. Working together we can achieve great things for all our people wherever they reside, whether in the Diaspora or Africa.

In my remarks I would like to focus on the generation of knowledge and how it affects Africa, how knowledge influences policies, and how it shapes perceptions about phenomenon in the world. I would also like to look at what role we as scholars can play in the generation of such knowledge.

The first step is the definition of knowledge: *Knowledge is the awareness and understanding of facts, truths or information gained in the form of experience or learning or through introspection. Knowledge is organized or contextualized information which can be used to produce new meanings and generate new data.* Pachatantra observed that: *"knowledge is the true organ of sight, not the eyes."* In a recent speech at the University of

Stellenbosh in South Africa the former President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki observed that for “ *Centuries the struggle to define Africa has in addition to the deadly dialogues of arms has been a contest among different schools of thought and therefore a clash of ideas.*” I would also like to add that it has also been a bitter struggle on knowledge and the creation of knowledge on Africa. The control of what we know and what we think we know about Africa and the African diaspora has been central to many debates. Chinua Achebe in his book The Education of the British Protected Child wrote “ *To answer oppression with appropriate resistance requires knowledge of two kinds: in the first place, self-knowledge by the victim, which means awareness that oppression exists, an awareness that the victim has fallen from a great height of glory or promise into the present depths; secondly, the victim must know who the enemy is. He must know his oppressor's real name, not an alias.*” Socrates observed that “ *there is only one good, knowledge and only evil is ignorance.*” Or indeed as Francis Bacon observed: “ *knowledge is power*”

The world is truly a peculiar place right now. Through knowledge and perceptions we have the phenomenal capacity to solve problems and ironically the phenomenal capacity to really mess things up and create problems. Unfortunately, the great advances in technology have come with the greater capacity to produce and control knowledge formation and distribute it rapidly especially by those who control the technology. For example, those who induced the US to war in Iraq deployed knowledge like a weapon. With lengthy pre staging, a narrative emerged that made it appear plausible-even desirable and necessary-to invade Iraq in response to the provocation of 9/11. In retrospect we know that the knowledge on which the US relied was false and for the most part deliberately falsified. Recently the invasion of Libya and destruction of its infrastructure was justified on the information of alleging mass killings of civilians by the Kaddafi forces. As events have developed some of these facts have been contested. For us we know how in past centuries slavery and colonialism were justified by the supposed inferiority of the black race. Studies and writing were generated to back up the theory that blacks were inferior, had no history or culture

worthy of respect. In his speech at Stellenbosh University Mbeki stated that it is self-evident that “knowledge:” regardless of the philosophical debates about its meaning, and indeed because of this has established itself as a critical driver with regard to the human objective and one may add policy making. Mbeki asks the following questions:

- Is there an objective social existence described as “objective reality”, which exists independent of and outside individual human consciousness and cognition, and is therefore, in principle freely assessable to all who seek to access “knowledge”;
- In reality, does everybody have the freedom to access this knowledge about this supposed objective reality; and
- Does the possibility not exist that some in society could have such control over the ways and means and possibility to access this “knowledge” so that they determine both who knows what, and what society in general knows, which it would believe constitutes an accurate appreciation of the “objective reality” .

I would like to tackle the third question Mbeki raises because of its implications for the development of Africa, the image of Africa, and what people know about Africa. What we know about Africa and how we know it is very important for Africa. Africa has faced many developmental challenges and without doubt it is the most stereotyped and maligned continent and its people the most misrepresented. But now it is important to note that Africa’s fortunes are now looking up. 10 years ago the *Economist* magazine had a cover story: “Africa the Hopeless Continent” and late last year: the *Economist* had a completely different title: “Rising Africa”. In fact in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of January 2012, The Senegalese economist Sanou Mbaye wrote that between 20 11 and 2015, beside China, India and Vietnam, seven of the ten countries positioned to show the highest growth rate in the world (around 7%) are in sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia, Nigeria. These predictions are confirmed by the World Bank which states that six of these countries will in the next six years be no longer considered to be developing countries and will

graduate to middle income countries. It is important for us to consolidate these gains and deal with any possible threats to this progress.

One of the issues that better exposes more than any other the misuse of knowledge is the reporting of the China/ Africa relationship. There is probably no greater example of the dilemma of what we know and what we think we know and how knowledge is manipulated by those that control its production. The China/ Africa issue is also a case that can be used to illustrate the dangers that the possibility exists that some in our society have control over the means of and possibility to access this “knowledge” so that they determine both who knows what, and what society in general knows, which it would believe constitute an accurate appreciation of the objective reality to the situation. The myths that have been stated about China and Africa include the following: China is a new donor/colonizer in Africa. This is notwithstanding the fact that in 1975 China had aid programs in more African countries than USAID; Chinese aid is huge. Other perceptions are that China uses aid to gain access to natural resources. This is despite the fact that China built the 1800 mile Zambia/Tanzania rail way in the 1970s without any conditions. China under pays workers and China is recolonizing Africa. There seems to be a constant attempt to present China’s expansion as a “threat” to the global economy as if China is a parasitic influence on its trading partners.

The reality is that Chinese investments in Africa can be broken into three types: (a) *investments aimed at supplying China with raw materials-oil, minerals;* (b) *investments aimed at African markets;* and (c) *investments that aim at supplying the international markets such as the EU and US markets motivated by low labor costs plus favorable trade access given to African countries in those markets.* To me these objectives are not different from the western investors. There are two problems about “knowledge” and the China/ Africa debate. There is the problem of not framing these developments in a comparative manner and there is the problem of the manipulation of knowledge to determine what people should know about the China/ Africa issue. What are the facts: Certainly (a)

Chinese/Africa links are growing; (b) China investment and trade with Africa is on the rise; (c) Chinese immigration to Africa is on the rise, and;(d) Chinese goods are flooding the Africa market as they are doing in the rest of the world.

The history of China/Africa cooperation has been well documented by Richard Dowden in his book: Africa dates Africa/ China relations to 1414 when Zheng He the Grand Eunuch of the three treasures made the first of seven voyages westwards to Africa, he brought with him 30,000 soldiers. In the 1960's and 1970 Chinese/Africa relations revolved around ideology and liberation struggles. We are told for instance that China's total trade with Africa has risen considerably since 2008 and now hovers around \$120 billion. However that figure does not tell us much unless we compare it with the total amount of African trade with other developed countries, for it ought to be noted that China-Africa trade only amounts to 2% of African trade in total. Broadman has pointed out that most observers believe Chinese firms dominate African economies. The presumption does not fit the facts. About 90% of the stock of FDI in Africa still originates from Western European companies, especially those in the EU and the USA. No one ever produces comparative figures in terms of what China is investing in Latin America, Asia and Australia. Wisdom also has it that the Chinese investment is predominantly into natural resources. But Chinese firms are increasing their investments into other sectors such as telecommunications, financial services, food processing, farming and manufacturing. For example, one of China's biggest stakes is actually in the South African Bank Standard Chartered Bank where in 2007 China bought 20% stake at \$5.5 billion. Another fact never stated is that not all Chinese activity in Africa is investment. As a member of the World Bank and Africa Development Bank, China has won numerous tenders in competitive bidding in World Bank funded projects. China has also participated in privately funded construction. It may be true that 26% of China's oil requirements are supplied by Africa at the moment (and this is bound to grow in time), but we need to remember that sub-Saharan African

oil exports to China amount to only 9% of total sub-Saharan oil exports worldwide. 37% of African oil still goes to the US and this is not an issue.

A story in the Frankfurter Rundschau stated that “Chinese investments in Ethiopia were focused on farming for export which he said can lead to major social conflicts in Africa when small farmers have their land and thus their livelihoods taken away.” Yes land grabs are bad. But does China even have agricultural investments in Ethiopia? Not according to the newly released “land” grab studies by the progressive California -based Oakland Institute. Their June 2011 report on Ethiopia has this finding: “while China is active in mining and infrastructure development sectors, they were surprisingly absent from land investments deals.” One more story: In a June 28 2011 article titled: “China supports Global Pariahs, Gets Resources and Criticism in Return”, the United States official broadcasting system Voice of America (VOA) continued a series on China’s overseas engagement. Here are some of the balanced analysts that are quoted: Greg Autry, co-author with Peter Navarro of the book Death by China and Economics professor at University of California Irvine, and Peter Navarro, author of the polemic The Coming China Wars. Here is a sample of the analysis: Zimbabwe has everything from diamonds to tobacco and farm land, “says Peter Navarro, an economics professor at the University of California, Irvine. “ China has gone in there and there are a lot of Chinese farmers there now tilling Zimbabwean soil growing crops that are sent back to China while the people of Zimbabwe starve.” As Deborah Brautigam commenting on this story observed: “There is a lot to be critical of China’s engagement with Mugabe, but sending a lot of Chinese farmers to till the soil is not one of them.”

I am not at all suggesting that China’s involvement in Africa is not without problems. I attempting to show how what we know about Africa/China relations might very well be because powerful interests are determining what we know. There are issues about employment practices, health standards, etc. It is also true that China has a policy of non-interference which can result in being indifferent to human rights

violations. But to suggest that African dictators exist because of China is being disingenuous. Africa has governance challenges which it must tackle if sustainable development is to be achieved. Some of the dictators have been in power long before China emerged as a major investor on the continent. Mugabe has been in power since 1980. Availability of capital in Africa is a major constraint to economic development. Economic development is achieved through the productive employment of labor and full utilization of natural resources. China's strong growth and its hunger for raw materials have provided the foundation for sharp rises in commodities prices over the past decade. What we should be concerned with is that African states do not squander these earnings through corruption but instead see these earnings as an opportunity to diversify African economies. Investors from anywhere in the world are likely to behave in the same way. They seek the maximization of profits and they are not philanthropists. The Chinese are no exception. The focus on China's enterprises to the exclusion of other nation's investors raises serious questions of about knowledge in the context of the China/ Africa issue.

In conclusion, I must return to the theme of knowledge and, its implications for African development and the important role we as scholars of Africa can play in the generation of this knowledge which is crucial in world governance. By telling the story of the China/ Africa relations I have endeavored to show that we as African scholars from both Africa and the Diaspora need to understand the critical importance of knowledge to the development of Africa and our own well-being. We need to be concerned about the following: How do we promote the democratization of knowledge? How do we contribute to the production of knowledge that contributes to the establishment of the objective truth about Africa and the Diaspora? Universities and research institutions to which most of us here belong are important and have a critical role to play in the creation of knowledge. NYASA should seek to develop a knowledge management system. It should seek to share knowledge, skills, experiences, reflections, conceptual frameworks and publications among others. It should provide a platform

for sharing knowledge and should bring the capacity of Diaspora communities within reach of Africa through knowledge networks. This process should involve the building, utilization, retention and nurturing of human skills, institutions and knowledge.

With such a vision let us all rededicate ourselves to the building of a prosperous Africa in link with its Diaspora. I would like to end by once again expressing my gratitude for having received this award.