




INTRODUCTION

What's humanities got to do with it? Locating the node between humanities and democracy in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is premised upon the objective of bringing together papers within the broad area of humanities and to illustrate the interconnections of humanities and democracy in Africa. Contemporary knowledge making systems in Africa, and indeed across the globe, are predominantly branded by a relentless pushback against humanities studies. This pushback emanates from assumptions about the lack of relevance of humanities research and learning in the political development of African nations (Omonzejie, 2017). So, when faced with the waning value of humanities, scholars, researchers, activists and practitioners have to continually defend their value and applicability to the improvement of nations and societies. One of the most abiding themes in African political practices is that there is ample room to improve on existing good governance and democratic practices for the overall development of African nations, yet still, the relevance of humanities in theorising and practicing democracy in Africa is highly disputed. It is therefore, this volume's purpose to re-center the humanities by illustrating how humanities are indispensable for democracy in Africa and showing the particular ways in which humanities conceptually and methodologically motivate democratic practices. The volume theme is dictated by a firm belief in the significance of the humanities' ability to achieve sustainable democracy projects in Africa. This significance is particularly located in the ways in which the humanities are closely related to societal concerns and how they seamlessly intermesh the personal and the political. The volume takes a cue from the emancipatory potential of humanities by bringing together papers which theoretically and practically tap into this emancipatory potential. Human voice,

self-expression and dialogue are values that are at the core of humanities and the same values are equally integral to the achievement of democracy. The volume, thus, emphasizes the importance of intracontinental and transnational conversations through a collection of interlocked contributions by African scholars, cultural activists and practitioners whose work illustrates the symbiotic relationship between humanities and democracy in Africa and develop innovative practices which invigorate an agenda for the future of the humanities and democracy in Africa.

MAKING SENSE OF HUMANITIES

It is Nzimakwe (2014) who emphasises that the quest for those things which are good, valuable, and majestic lies at the heart of humanities. For Nzimakwe, humanities represent the most vibrant human culture which aims at making rulers accountable and to make society open. Humanities research, therefore, focuses on what it signifies to be not just a whole human being, but collective beings. The study of human interaction, experiences, and transformation at the individual and social level is what comes under the umbrella of humanities. Humanities research and practice affords human beings the chance to confer their experiences and situations through subjects such as philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language (Isiramen et. al, 2016). The issue of BEING is central to humanities and in many ways, humanities teach us not just about who we used to be and who we currently are, but also who we can be based on our imaginations and from our aspirations. Humanities have a huge impact on how people see the world and how

they interact with others by utilising a variety of concepts and methods which are derived from human lived experiences. There is an implicit element built into much humanities research and practice, which is both a symptom and cause of an undertaking to view human life in processional rather than static terms. This is because the human experience is dynamic and aspects of human culture transmute as they are passed down from one generation to the next. Humanities are flexible enough to adequately capture the fluidity of human culture across space and time. They achieve this by posing questions about common assumptions, uncovering new meanings and finding new ways to understand cultural interactions, existential problems and challenges. One of the most common of these assumptions is that the relevance of humanities in theorising and practicing democracy is highly doubtful.

In different ways, the chapters in this volume broadly dispute this assumption and use different African contexts as case studies for how humanities are indispensable for democracy in Africa. The nexus between humanities and democracy in Africa is carefully highlighted through a diverse range of theories and methods which apply well to the study of language, literature, culture, popular arts gender and the media. Contributions to this volume support the argument that humanities involve concepts and methods which have a huge potential of advancing the way we make sense of African cultural realities and their entanglements with democratic governance issues.

HUMANITIES AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: A SNAPSHOT VIEW FROM THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

The humanities democracy node influences the theoretical and methodological structure and manner in which this volume's contributors interpretively and empirically discuss the overt and covert ways in which African values and norms play a deterministic role in democratic governance issues. It is Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro who, in the first chapter considers the interactions between African feminist activism and democracy by problematising social media publics and the online activities of Zimbabwean women in politics. Chikafa-Chipiro locates social media as a provenance for Zimbabwean feminist activist transformations and democracy initiatives. She theoretically posits that the contentions around Zimbabwean women's political participation and violations against women in politics not only reflect the complexities within African feminism but also the coloniality of gender and how these, together with theories of the public sphere can further feminist activism. To support her arguments, Chikafa-Chipiro expertly uses online ethnography of purposively selected Facebook posts and Tweets by Zimbabwean women in politics, feminist activists and/or gender organisations. She concludes her study by insisting that Zimbabwean women politicians across the political divide should brave online publics and represent themselves and their causes without fear of intimidation by inventing online and offline strategies that protect them in their private and public lives and inspire local and transnational feminism.

In the second chapter, Tsiidzai Matsika conceptually and methodologically draws her analysis on a fundamental humanities research tool, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to debunk the political personalisation of democracy and the ways in which Zimbabwean political parties insert their parties in the narrative of the modern manifestations, conceptions and practices of democracy. Matsika insists that democracy is not one dimensional, but, it incorporates multiple layers of meaning and practices. The author places laser focus on how Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) narratives and stylistic designs are incorporated into their agenda-setting strategies, identity construction and discursive legitimation. Her analysis of the theory and discourse of democracy illuminates the conventions, logics and dictates of language, knowledge and meaning. She exposes the inherent politics, nuances and paradoxes of democracy and through CDA, and manages to show how democracy works as a political strategy that on the one hand contests power but on the other hand gestures to a political alternative and a sustainable development plan. Matsika proficiently considers CDA as a qualitative and narrative analysis method which she focuses on generic features of whole political texts rather than isolated features of the text. By doing so, the chapter critically illuminates into the politics of democracy discourse and its relationship to Zimbabwean politics in the context of broader narratives of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political crisis. Matsika interpretively reads selected political party manifestoes so as to dissect these discourses and the power contestations characterising contemporary Zimbabwean politics. She conclusively contends that normative representations in political discourses are entrenched in specific cultures

and these cultures denote institutionalised practices of decision-making and means of legitimation.

In the third chapter, Aaron Mukandabvute draws on the work being done by various Kiswahili associations to make a case for how language can be used as a bridge towards the attainment of inclusive societies. Mukandabvute shows how a good number of African cultures and academic associations exist through Kiswahili language which becomes not just a communal construct but also an individual construct which is in fostering numerous categories of inclusion. The author achieves his study objectives by situating his argument within humanities which he deliberately conceptualises as the study of human interactions, experiences and human transformations which occur at both the individual and collective levels. He argues that at the center of diverse human interactions, lies a fundamental device, which is language. The author further posits that language plays an important role of bridging the communicative gaps which occur across multifarious communities. In his attempt to make sense of the intimate correlation between humanities and democracy in Africa, Mukandabvute makes a case for a critical inquiry into the specific role played by Kiswahili academic associations to foster democratic features of inclusivity and diversity. Mukandabvute illustrates how Kiswahili language, which is the glue that binds these academic associations, connects individuals, academics, communities, cultures, nations and cultivates a sense of inclusivity. As the most widely spoken and studied language in Africa, Mukandabvute shares the conviction that Kiswahili is a strategic instrument for creating inclusive African societies. The author uses Therbon's framework of inclusivity and the

Social Role Valorisation theory as its guiding conceptual frameworks for illuminating into various dimensions of inclusion and exclusion in Kiswahili academic associations as well as the underlying intricacies of inclusion and exclusion. Mukandabvute however, does not fall into the trap of romanticising the role played by Kiswahili to promote inclusive societies, he also shows the existing barriers to inclusion as a result of complex socio-cultural and political dynamics. Nevertheless, Mukandabvute maintains his main convictions on the significant role played by Kiswahili as a strategic language of inclusion for African citizenry which bridges communication barriers by connecting individuals of diverse cultures, religions, ideologies and languages.

In chapter four, Kudakwashe Bandama compels us to think beyond the formality of politics and to consider informal politics, that is, culture, in African democratic governance processes. Bandama explores the intricate connection between culture and social norms, which together mold the framework for all democratic practices. Bandama defines culture as that which encompasses a rich array of customs, rituals, religious beliefs, traditions, music and enterprise. The author insists that culture exerts significant influence in shaping human conduct and, by extension, democratic norms. Bandama shows how, through its pervasive impact, culture intricately weaves together the social and political realms unveiling the nuanced effects of norms and practices on accountability, inclusivity, tolerance and transparency within democratic systems. Bandama draws specific examples from The Gambia to evaluate the distinct campaign and voting processes in this country, and provides an analysis which is aimed at affirming the practical significance culture has on democracy. Bandama's exploration of the interplay between

cultural norms and democratic processes is used to emphasise their sway over civic participation, pluralism and the core tenets of democracy. Bandama further highlights how culture, as a formative force, shapes individual outlooks toward political engagement, spotlighting the substantial influence of factors like religion, tradition and socialisation. Bandama's analysis successfully elucidates on this relationship by underscoring the fundamental association between humanities and culture. He explains that humanities serve as the cornerstone upon which various aspects of culture, particularly modes being, are constructed. The chapter decisively emphasises that culture yields substantial guidance on democratic practices, by acting as the foundation upon which societal norms and political behaviours are constructed. For Bandama, making sense of the ways in which culture molds democratic involvement allows policymakers, cultural activists and scholars to develop strategies for harnessing cultural strengths.

The fifth and final chapter brings the volume full circle by foregrounding the important but often overlooked connection between creative arts and social engagement. With specific reference to contemporary Kenya, Brian Otieno illustrates the ways in which selected Kenyan creative arts nurture the kind of wisdom and social engagement that is required of individuals and communities within a democratic nation. Otieno positions Kenyan creative culture and art as democratic philosophy which is central to ensuring that people freely engage with issues of the day thereby promoting democratic practices. Specifically, Otieno selects digital narratives, popular music and participatory theatre and considers the social role that they play in observing, evaluating and developing artistic

models for addressing social problems and to create collective forms of social engagement.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the contributions in this volume indeed answer the question “What’s humanities got to do with it?” The epistemic knot which ties the five contributions in this volume is the way in which they demonstrate how humanities concepts and methods are not neutral to democratic governance issues as

commonly assumed. The authors’ interventions unanimously show the diverse ways in which humanities question the link between knowing democracy and being democratic and possessing democratic values in different African contexts. Ultimately, the chapters all set an invigorating African political studies agenda by way of re-asserting the significance of humanities subjects and presenting humanities that are democratically affirming and aspirational and not just about disappointment.

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