

## Traces culturelles de science et de technologie et la question de l'innovation technologique en Afrique

### Viewing cultural traces of science and technology and the question of technology innovation capacity in Africa

First draft of the program of the STS-Africa conference to be held in 2016 at Cotonou, Benin  
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**Host:** SEGLA Dafon Beloved - Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Centre Universitaire d'APLAHOUE Republic of Benin (West Africa)

The Conference "*Mapping Science and Technology in Africa: Travelling technologies and global dis\orders*" which took place in Johannesburg on February 2014 allowed, after fruitful analysis and debates, to bring forward several key points concerning STS-Africa. One of the points highlighted was the need to pay more attention to the African heritage in matters of science and technology for the continent's present and future developments. Speaking of the African heritage, however, is not about a distinction between homegrown and imported but rather about the amalgamation of circulating ideas and technologies throughout history. The conference in Johannesburg concluded that examining possible specificities of African processes of amalgamation, inquiring about particular regimes of translation, deserves to become the leading research question for the next STS-Africa conference.

The papers presented at Johannesburg were of high quality and came mostly from a social science perspective. The recommendation for the 2016 meeting in Cotonou was to start from more concrete realities of techno-scientific apparatuses and make use of multidisciplinary approaches. The questions addressed at the 2016 Cotonou meeting will hence deal with both the value of cultural traces of inherited hybrid knowledge systems existing throughout Africa as well as the future-oriented practices, products, visions and designs of communities and their relations to globally circulating ideas, infrastructures and power relations.

Under the framework of imperialism during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Western sciences were deployed in the new colonies and designed to serve the economy and interests of imperialistic regimes. Western sciences were considered to be rational, while the practices of colonized peoples were, in the eyes of the colonial administration, irrational and therefore uninteresting scientifically. Thus, the role and place of so-called native knowledge – for example, biomedical indigenous knowledge in the fight against epidemics throughout the long colonial period - was not clearly identified and differentiated.

To pose these old questions once again at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century aims contributing to current debates about the role of techno-scientific developments and infrastructures for the future of African polities. The questions are:

- 1- Paying close attention to the socio-linguistics, the onto-epistemologies, the geographies, the pre-colonial and colonial histories, and the colonial archive of technologies and sciences in Africa, how can the traces and paths of inherited knowledge be outlined without an unacceptably simple distinction between "Western" and "African"?
- 2- Through lessons from African philosophy, how can the modern concept of progress be renewed? How can these lessons be learned without evoking a radical difference between African and other modes of knowing? The opportunity to revisit the genealogy of theories can help to suggest new approaches to the democratization of knowledge and the possibility to develop a theory of knowledge that transcend false dichotomies.



- 3- How does science tackle the unexpected, the unformulated, the paranormal, the implicit, and the tacit within African societies today? And the other way round: how do people with expertise in different ontologies deal with techno-scientific offers and evidentiary practices? This set of urging and diverse questions African societies pose can help to (re)think the localized character of scientific knowledge.

Based on these considerations, the 2016 conference in Cotonou will be a first step in working on an encyclopedia of the potential technological innovations emerging from the cultural traces of inherited knowledge in Africa. This is an urgent matter and the Cotonou conference can be used to roadmap the milestones for its realization.

In addition, the conference in Cotonou will be curated in such a way that the ivory tower of academic scientists becomes challenged.

1. How to effectively transform the results from techno-scientific research within universities to the production of things that meet the needs of local people?
2. How can the popularization of science and technology contribute to the improvement of living standards throughout African societies?
3. How to bridge the gap between researchers and industry pioneers?
4. How to create civil societies connected to science and technology developments, capable of questioning and engaging with industrialization?
5. How to support and give value to lay innovators?

To achieve these goals, the STS-Africa meeting in Cotonou will be preceded by two days of open house (exhibitions) with a Grand Public Opening Conference where scholars will meet the lay and anonymous innovators (traditional doctors, DIY technicians, independent researchers, unknown inventors, etc.). This is an opportunity to bridge different knowledge communities, and can lead to new collaborations and an opportunity for academia to leave the ivory tower and have a concrete impact on contemporary African society.

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### Invited Participants include:

Prof Keith Breckenridge (University of Witwatersrand (WISER), South Africa)  
 Prof Richard Rottenburg (University of Halle, Germany)  
 Prof Mbembé Achille (University of Witwatersrand (WISER), South Africa)  
 Prof Pinch Trevor (Cornell University, USA)  
 Prof Hountondji Paulin (University of Abomey-Calavi, Bénin)  
 Prof Wiredu Kuassi (University of Legon, Accra Ghana)  
 Prof Yai O. B. (University of Abomey-Calavi, Bénin)  
 Prof Capo Hounkpati (University of Abomey-Calavi, Bénin)  
 Prof Sègla Dafon Aimé (University of Abomey-Calavi, Bénin)  
 Prof Gabrielle Hecht (University of Michigan, USA)  
 Prof James Smith (University of Edinburgh, UK)  
 Prof Mudimbé Valentin-Yves (Duke University, USA)  
 Prof Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga (MIT, USA)  
 Dr Patrice Okouma (UCT University of Cape-Town, South Africa)  
 Prof Rock Mongbo (University of Abomey-Calavi Bénin)  
 Prof Honorat Aguessy (University of Abomey-Calavi Bénin)  
 Dr Agon Valentin (API Bénin)

