

# **CULTURAL DIVERSITY, ENDOGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND LEARNING FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT: Multiple Views from the South**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In an effort to explore whether Africa's cultural diversity, endogenous knowledge systems can provide learning opportunities for socio-economic development, two important questions arise. The first deals with how Africa's cultural diversity can survive the cultural erosion brought about the globalization; and the second deals with how endogenous knowledge systems – the ground from which cultures and civilizations spring – can be harnessed for learning in Africa's development process. These questions are the point of departure for the theoretical discussions that follow in this paper and call for the discussion of culture, knowledge and development in the Global South. The analysis starts with a summary of the case studies within the Great Lakes Region in Africa and Western Africa. Then follows a theoretical discussion of the concepts of: 1. Endogeneity within African development explains how endogenous knowledge systems are spring from which culture and civilization; 2. Modernity and disembedding of culture, which is how social relations are lifted out of their local interaction; 3. Politics of cultural knowledge homogenization, a section that raises the question if we

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are witnessing processes of homogenization of cultural knowledge where the West is the main cultural producer and the rest (including Africa) is blindly adopting these cultural practices, knowledge and values; 4. Endogenous Learning for South development, this section emphasizes the need for Africa to harness endogenous knowledge systems in learning for development.

Why is it important to analyze culture, knowledge and development in order to understand economic, political and social processes? Tomlinson (1999) summarizes the argument for the necessity of cultural analysis:

Culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation. If we talking about economic we are concerned with the practices by which humans produce, exchange and consume material goods; if we are discussing the political we mean practices by which the power is concentrated, distributed and deployed in societies, and if we are talking culture, we mean the ways in which people make their lives, individually and collectively, meaningful by communicating with each other (...). But it is not possible to distinguish these spheres from one another, i.e. first you do some economic activity and then some cultural. The interesting then to study then is how globalisation alters the context of meaning construction: how it effects people's sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally suited life (TOMLINSON, 1999, p. 18-20).

Considering the available archeological, paleontological and anthropological findings, which are now corroborated by genetic studies, there is hardly any more doubt that the African continent is the cradle of humanity (MANICA, 2007). Taking this into account, Africa assumes a unique position in the origin and history of the world's knowledge and cultural system. If we are to take Africa as the cradle of humanity, then Africa's endogenous knowledge system can, to some extent, be considered the mother of other endogenous systems, a kind of "archendogenous" or originating endogenous system. Thus the African endogenous knowledge system assumes an important historical and anthropological significance because they provide a foundation on which other systems are built (KANYANDAGO, 2008). Africa is a ground from which cultural diversity, the global knowledge system and the attempt at the promotion of learning for development originates.

Historically, the problem of culture and development is at least as old as the social sciences, which is largely a product of the West. There are two principal traditions that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that it is, idealism and materialism, which in contemporary society feature as liberalism and marxism (MAFEGE, 2008). Liberalism gave birth to the "modernisation theories" with a presumption that in order for Africa and the South to develop, their countries should be carbon copies of the west/north. Much as, marxist theory hardly elaborates culture (WORSELY, 1981 apud MAFEGE, 2008), there was an occasion in which culture received a positive treatment in marxist theory in relation to the right of nations to self-determination or definition of a nation. This, as Lebakeng (2004) points out, is a major intellectual fallacy of our time with a continued assertion that knowledge systems were introduced to the African continent through colonialism. It is believed colonialism introduced western knowledge

systems, a particular form of knowledge, through imposition and systematic attempt to destroy indigenous knowledge systems.

## **ENDOGENIETY AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT**

Considering that Africa is the origin of humanity, with available archeological, paleontological and anthropological findings, showing corroborated genetic studies, thus making the African continent the cradle of humanity (MANICA, 2007), there is a cause to explore further the principle of endogeniety and how it not only contributed to Africa's civilisation, but to world civilisation. Endogenous knowledge systems are the ground from which spring cultures and civilizations, rooted in the principle of endogeniety, which states that each people have got their own knowledge system, which they have evolved and developed over time, taking into account the cultural and physical environment. As Kanyandago (2008) points out, for normal development or growth to take place, one has to respect the principle of endogenity which posits that growth is only possible if it takes place building on what one has. Endogeniety is not compromised by the borrowing provided, given that the one borrowing does it on one's terms. Therefore, endogenous knowledge systems are therefore based on the appropriate integration of both indigenous and exogenous knowledge systems. Endogenous knowledge systems are part of the diverse cultural experiences, institutional experiences, context specific information, values and expert insights (RWABYOMA, 2011). This also includes the individual experiences, information beliefs and value systems, how we feel motivated to define the function or purpose of knowledge in providing an institutional framework for evaluating social, economic and political progress.

Situating cultural diversity in African development shows how the existing challenge of culture and development is at least as old as the social sciences, which are largely a product of the West.

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The project of the Western “modernisation” has proceeded in Africa and the South as they undergo cultural imperialism and hegemony of the neoliberal orthodoxy. After more than three decades of unsuccessful orthodox economic reforms imposed by the international financial institutions under the guise of the so-called Washington Consensus, development thinking for the purpose of reversing the negative effects of the structural adjustment programmes on African economies is long overdue in generating alternatives that can turn the tables of underdevelopment (CODESRIA, 2005). According to Unesco (2009), globalization is often conceived as

potentially antithetical to cultural diversity, in the sense of leading to the homogenization of cultural models, values, aspirations and lifestyles, to the standardization of tastes, the impoverishment of creativity, uniformity of cultural expressions and so forth. From this conceptual view, the World Bank (1998) shows how African culture was seen to be seen barbaric associated with primitivism and paganism and, as such was, were incriminated as the root cause of socio-economic underdevelopment in Africa. African development was seen as a process of acquiring western style systems, standards, expertise and problem solving methods.

In order to reverse this disturbing trend, it is imperative to promote the application of the endogenous development (ED) paradigm in Africa and the entire Global South. Endogenous development is a culturally-based development paradigm, from within which people use their indigenous knowledge as the base on which to graft relevant portions of other knowledge. It emphasizes the utilization of local resources, working with local structures and systems and learning from local experiences and perspectives with the view to coupling with relevant portions of existing sciences, relevant cultures and external resources (PANREK, 2012). Therefore, the endogenous development paradigm reinforces a learning approach to development, focusing on everyday learning that takes place through development action, which may be intentional or structured as well as informal and an outcome of different forms of engagement. The social dynamics of learning are important for individuals, for development organizations and for building coherent policies and action (JOHNSON; WILSON, 2009). The endogenous development paradigm is thus crucial in acting as global and regional alternative for development of the South.

## **GLOBAL MODERNITY AND DISEMBEDDING OF CULTURE DIVERSITY**

The world, according to Giddens (1990), is a locality which gives a physical frame to a social activity on a geographical place. In pre-modern societies where space and place to a high degree coincided, the social life's spatial dimension for the larger part of the population was determined by presence: by localised activities. With the rise of modernity, space and time were separated from place since social relations occurred among absent persons. Giddens' thesis explains the disembedding of Africa's culture in terms of time and space, given that social relations are being "lifted out of" the context of the African local interaction and is being restructured by modernization over unlimited areas in time-space. As a result, the processes of time-space are at stake now that Africa occupies a world where social relations span across the whole globe, where the disembedding of culture doesn't stop at the local and regional or even national level, but are stretched out to include the whole world.

Global modernity is defined by the globalisation which refers to the rapidly developing tendencies that characterize modern social life. "Nowadays, goods, capital, people, knowledge, images, crime, pollutants, drugs, fashion and beliefs all readily flow across territorial boundaries" (MCGREW, 1992, p. 65). The broad task of the globalisation theory is both to understand the sources of this production of complex connectivity and to interpret its implications across various spheres of social existence. Only within modern institutions such as capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, a developed nation state etc., can the complex network of social relationships characteristic of globalisation arise (TOMLINSON, 1999). More so, Marshall McLuhan's famous terminology of Global village is a

good example of the current globalisation trend that affects effective utilization of Africa's cultural knowledge and endogenous knowledge systems in learning for development. But, as Tomlinson (1999) asserts, proximity/intimacy is not the same thing as connectivity. The category of global modernity is one way or another ideologically/politically suspect on account of either a) its blindness to global relations of domination or the inherent unevenness of the global process, b) its western-centric bias, or c) its universalizing tendencies. However, this problem exists because of the erection of a simple dualism between modernity and tradition where modernity is seen as a cultural property of the west and traditional the defining cultural deficit of the rest including the Global South – Africa in particular. With dualism we cannot handle complexity, implication, simultaneity, and temporality (TOMLINSON, 1999). Different routes to modernity are taken by different cultures (CANCLINI, 1995) and, therefore, there exist multiple forms of modernity at the present.

Global modernity through globalisation is disembedding the cultural diversity, which is the capacity to maintain the dynamic of change in all of us, whether individuals or groups. Cultural diversity is a major social concern, is linked to the growing variety of social codes within and between societies. It is increasingly clear that lifestyles, social representations, value systems, codes of conduct, social relations (inter-generational, between men and women, etc.), the linguistic forms and registers within a particular language, cognitive processes, artistic expressions, notions of public and private space (with particular reference to urban planning and the living environment), forms of learning and expression, modes of communication and even systems of thought, can no longer be reduced to a single model or conceived in terms of fixed representations. The emergence on the political stage of local

communities, indigenous peoples, deprived or vulnerable groups and those excluded on grounds of ethnic origin, social affiliation, age or gender, has led to the discovery, within societies, of new forms of diversity (UNESCO, 2009). Globalisation is often conceived as potentially antithetical to cultural diversity, in the sense of leading to the homogenization of cultural models, values, aspirations and lifestyles, to the standardization of tastes, the impoverishment of creativity, uniformity of cultural expressions and so forth. However, while it is true that globalization induces forms of homogenization and standardization, it cannot be regarded as inimical to human creativity, which continues to engender new forms of diversity, constituting a perennial challenge to featureless uniformity.

## **POLITICS OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE HOMOGENIZATION**

In sub-Saharan Africa, people and culture are inseparable since there is no denial of the fact that what makes any human society is its culture; a Latin word which was derived from “colore” meaning to practice or cherish. For a society to be societal it must be cultural; therefore, society and culture are also intertwined. In the same vein, going by the theory of environmental determinism, the culture of any society is largely dictated by its geography. Put another way, there is conspicuous sociological interplay among the concepts of culture, nurture, and nature.

Western project of “modernisation” proceeds to practice cultural imperialism and hegemony using the neoliberal orthodoxy in Africa and the South. For more than three decades of unsuccessful orthodox, economic reforms imposed by the international financial institutions under the guise of the so-called Washington Consensus,

development thinking for the purpose of reversing the negative effects of the structural adjustment programmes on African economies is long overdue in generating alternatives that can turn the tables of underdevelopment (CODESRIA, 2005).

The slave trade and slavery constitute one of the darkest chapters in human history. This dehumanizing enterprise, which challenged the very basis of universal values and has been roundly condemned by the international community, has nonetheless contributed to the development of some of the most valuable forms of cultural human resistance to domination. Beyond its economic impact, the slave trade has also given rise to significant interactions among the peoples of Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Indian Ocean, the Arab-Muslim world and Asia, which have profoundly and lastingly transformed their cultures, knowledge, beliefs and behavior. The intercultural process that began with the slave trade is still going on and continues to transform humanity. Hence, the concept of ‘route’ was chosen to illustrate this flow of exchanges among peoples, cultures and civilizations, which transformed the geographical areas affected by slavery — a unique interaction generating forms of intercultural dialogue of considerable importance to the building of modern societies.

By retracing these cultural interactions brought about by the slave trade, which transported so many African men and women far from their birth lands, the Slave Route Project is contributing to a better understanding of cultural traditions, forms of ingenuity, technical and scientific knowledge, skills and spirituality which were transferred from Africa to the Americas, the Caribbean, Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Arab-Muslim world. It draws attention to the major imprint of African cultures on the formation of the world’s identities, cultures and civilizations, the African contribution to

the world's rich diversity as expressed through Creole cultures, languages, religions, music and dance. The influence of African art and particularly music is widely acknowledged today. Jazz and other styles of Afro-American music, such as the blues, appeared in the 1890s, over a quarter century after the abolition of slavery in the United States. The syncopated rhythms of this music fused traits of African folk music with European popular music, but also Native American music, and reflected the mores and social situations of the first generation of African Americans born outside of slavery. African heritage is also a primary basis of Brazilian samba, Cuban rumba and Trinidadian calypso. Combining the skills of African storytelling, singing and instrument making, calypso usually involves some social commentary, typically in the form of satire, with an infectious beat. It has since been influenced by European, North American and other Caribbean cultures to produce reggae and the latest creation of black music today: the rap. Rooted in Bantu traditions of Angola, capoeira was used by Africans enslaved in Brazil to practice their fighting skills, unbeknownst to their enslavers. When colonial authorities discovered its real purpose, it was banned on penalty of death. Capoeira continued to be practiced by fugitive slaves who set up independent settlements, known as Quilombos, although it remained illegal in Brazil until the 1930s, when it finally received national recognition as a martial art. In recent years, the capoeira has spread beyond Brazil and continues to grow in popularity. According to the International Capoeira Angola Foundation, it is now practiced in 74 countries, and over 1.000 Capoeira schools are listed on the Internet. Enslaved Africans also carried spiritual traditions to the New World, where they were modified to meet the conditions of slavery. While many believe that voodoo hails from Haiti, it in fact originated in West Africa (*voodoo* means 'spirit') and took on new forms in Haiti,

including elements of Roman Catholicism, as a means of survival and resistance to slavery. A Voodoo temple in Cotonou, run by a Haitian-born priest, features candles, bells and a cross, and the gods are identified with Roman Catholic saints.

Africans enslaved in America blended African musical forms with European Christian hymns to create spirituals, which developed into gospel music. Gospel and blues merged in America to produce yet another popular genre known as soul, which also gives its name to a cuisine commonly associated with African Americans in the southern United States. Soul food reflects gastronomic responses to racial discrimination and economic oppression and makes creative use of African products, such as yams, peanuts, okra, black-eyed peas and rice. While the diversity of cultural expressions generated through the slave trade and slavery continues to influence our societies beyond the regions in which slavery was practiced, the added values of such cultural enrichment still need to be properly acknowledged as part of Africa's contribution to the world's cultural heritage. This is one of the major objectives of the Slave Route Project launched by Unesco, in 1994, and the new strategy for highlighting the African presence throughout the world (UNESCO, 2009).

## **ENDOGENEOUS LEARNING FOR SOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Learning for Development is rooted in a learning approach to development, which focuses on everyday learning that takes place through development action, which may be intentional or structured as well as informal and an outcome of different forms of engagement. The social dynamics of learning are important for individuals, for development organizations and for building coherent policies and action (JOHNSON; WILSON, 2009). Acknowledging that development

is potentially a struggle between conflicting analyses, interests and policies, therefore examination is the key to learning through and for development action. For the example, as Nederveen Pieterse (2001) argues that development should be reflexive and that development thinking is *reflective* by its nature, and that the global changes of recent times compel us to adopt such an approach. Such changes include:

- new understandings of the dynamics of development – the importance of the “software” (institutions, education and knowledge) as well as the ‘hardware’ (infrastructure and technology);
- the massive growth in actors in development, from the state to the community organizations: “development is no longer simply a mathematics of power and reshuffling the status quo” (p. 157);
- an increase in the influence of Southern perspectives in development; and economic convergence, in particular the growth of new industrializing countries and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

Such changes, Nederveen Pieterse (2001) argues, require us to redefine development “as a collective learning experience” (p. 159) involving collective reflexivity: “a collection of awareness that unfolds as part of a historical process of changing norms, ideology and institutions” (p. 163).

Building on these global changes, the imperative for endogenous learning in Africa’s development should be based on the following strategies.

Autonomous development, by involving the majority of the people, is what holds the best prospects for a genuine social transformation. This can be achieved through cultural development where by there is development and upholding of the cultural heritage

and diversity of Africans and the entire Global south. The upholding of belief systems that are endogenous best practices in agriculture, marriage and family, in traditional systems of local governance and justice systems, valuable aspects of the African traditional religions, ritual practices and taboos on environmental management. There is need for establishing national and regional museums, increase public libraries in a bid to preserve historical memory in African countries when people have shown a fantastic ability to forget things they should not forget – these cultural knowledge resources. Traditional modalities of dialogue between cultures, developed over the past decade, have largely failed because of their almost exclusive focus on what cultures and religions have in common. The present crisis calls for dialogue on differences and diversity.

There should be concrete policies on managing cultural knowledge resources in Africa, coupled with promoting cultural diversity through Government, Civil Society and Private sector partnerships. These institutions ought to partner in promoting learning economies through the means of learning (intellectual property rights, taxes, subsidies, supporting learning networks etc.), and access to relevant knowledge (libraries, databases, technological service systems etc.).

There is urgent need for strengthening the human-rights-based dimension of dialogue. Rather than seeking values common to all religions and cultures, the core values of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* need to be stressed. No discrimination based on origin, race, colour, gender, language, religion or any other belief or opinion has been agreed upon by the international community 60 years ago. In line with recent UN terminology, all cultures must be considered having equal dignity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ease and frequency with which people move around the world, and improvements in communications and the global marketing of styles, places and images can lead to a cultural supermarket effect. People are no longer confined to developing identity based upon the place in which they live, but can choose from a wide range of different identities. They now adopt clothes, ways of speaking, values, and lifestyles of any group of their choice. Adherence to the pristine purity and unadulterated cultural traits, values and virtues of peoples and places are not the same. It is rapidly constant in the urban setups, while the plague of cultural values erosion is somewhat vehemently resisted, and the values consciously internalized in purely rural areas. However, this does not suggest that there are no communities that are paired by urbanism and ruralism. What we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied. Folk songs, folk dances, Cotswold cottages, handicraft products, and virginity among others are signs of something more; an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing art of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year. Disdain or pity for African traditional lifestyle equated with a “deprived” upbringing is etched into the very legislation of social service delivery in the United States which abruptly cuts off benefits to those who do not hide their traditional west African family relationships from the view of neoliberal warfare bureaucrats.

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is based on two research questions. The first deals with how Africa's cultural diversity can survive the cultural erosion brought about by globalization. The other question deals with how endogenous knowledge systems – the ground from which cultures and civilizations spring, can be harnessed for learning in Africa's development process. These questions are the point of departure for the theoretical discussions that follow in this paper and call for the discussion of culture, knowledge and development in the Global South. The analysis starts with a summary of the case studies within the Great Lakes Region in Africa, and Western Africa. Then follows a theoretical discussion of the concepts of: Endogeneity within African development explains how endogenous knowledge systems are spring from which culture and civilisation; Modernity and disembedding of culture, which is how social relations are lifted out of their local interaction; Politics of cultural *knowledge* homogenization, a section that raises the question if we are witnessing processes of homogenization of cultural starting with slave trade as one of the worst episodes in human history that destroyed African culture; Endogenous Learning for South development, this section emphasizes the need for Africa to harness endogenous knowledge systems in learning for development. The paper proposes mechanisms in promoting cultural African autonomous development,

cultural dialogue with in a human rights based approach, building of Government, civil society and private sector partnerships in preserving cultural knowledge resources, among others.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture. Endogenous knowledge. Learning. Endogenous development

## **RESUMO**

O trabalho é baseado em duas questões de pesquisa. A primeira trata de como a diversidade cultural da África pode sobreviver à erosão cultural provocada pela globalização; e a segunda lida com os sistemas endogênicos de conhecimento – o campo em que culturas e civilizações nascem pode ser aproveitado para aprendizagem no processo de desenvolvimento da África. Essas perguntas são o ponto de partida para as discussões teóricas que se seguem neste trabalho e para a chamada para discussão de conhecimento, cultura e desenvolvimento no Sul global. A análise começa com um resumo dos estudos de caso na Região dos Grandes Lagos, na África, e na África Ocidental. Depois, segue-se uma discussão teórica sobre os conceitos de: a endogeneidade dentro do desenvolvimento africano explica como sistemas de conhecimento são a nascente a partir da qual a cultura e a civilização fazem parte; a modernidade e desencaixe da cultura, que é a forma como as relações sociais são retiradas do seu local de interação; a política de conhecimento cultural, uma seção que levanta a questão se estamos testemunhando processos de homogeneização cultural da partida com o comércio de escravos como um dos piores episódios da história humana, que destruiu a cultura africana; a aprendizagem endógena para o desenvolvimento do Sul, nessa seção se enfatiza a necessidade da África para aproveitar sistemas endógenos de conhecimento no aprendizado para o desenvolvimento. A pesquisa propõe mecanismos para a promoção cultural autônoma do desenvolvimento africano, o diálogo cultural com uma abordagem baseada nos direitos humanos, a construção do governo, sociedade civil e parcerias do setor privado na preservação dos recursos culturais do conhecimento, entre outros.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Cultura. Conhecimento endógeno. Aprendizado. Desenvolvimento endógeno.