

Culture, Conflict and Intercultural Dialogue

DRAFT B (Final)

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Introduction

Many African scholars and intellectuals as well as non Africans alike have contributed immensely to the problem of African identity; questions that revolve around defining the African and depicting the cultural connotations that associate to such a specified paradigm of thought. The conclusion in most instances has been polarised to define the African in terms of skin colour, and thus, the black human.

It is not possible to discuss a peoples culture devoid of associating the individual to be representative of a larger segment, unless confined to issues of character dialectics, to envisage a wholesome definition of culture will always require the associative relation that an individual, having identified himself qualitatively, thence quantifies his personality to relate to an existing behavioural organising that is usually a collective social print.

The crisis of African identity has been traced to the advent of colonialism in Africa as a continent alongside foreign cultural imposition against a subjugated people without vivid concern on heritage. Ikechukwu (2013) goes on to suggest that emphasis on the problem stems from the fact that the African of today inherits a genetic self that has experienced slavery, religious strife and colonialism thus having a confusing impact in defining such a specific society. In each hegemonic square within the African continent, attempts to reconstruct the best regional identity for Africans within such a territory has always been seen as a political priority, which inclines with socio-economic interests of a few notable elitists. The resultant effects has been countable conflicts laden with violence or contained to form a cultural factor best described as a locational behaviour for specific segment of a people in whichever country affected. This is what we call the refugee effect.

African identities, like African languages, are inventions, mutually constitutive existential and epistemic constructions (Adhengo, 2010). Invention implies a history, a social process; it denaturalizes cultural artefacts and practices, stripping them of primordial authenticity and essentialism. At the beginning of the 21st century, the maps and meanings of *Africa* and *Africanness* are being reconfigured by both the processes of contemporary globalization and the projects of African integration (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010). The subject of African identities, therefore, is as vast and complex as the continent itself; but nevertheless, a key factor in bringing to the fore, a worthy discussion of culture, especially its relation to conflict; whether of ideas or heritage.

Attempts at explicating the *cultural unity* of sub-Saharan Africa often sound mystical. Chidammodzi (1995) suggests that unless culture is coded in skin colour, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of cultural practices in Africa, or elsewhere for that matter, should not be assumed a priori in so far as these are historical processes. One of the most important aspects of Africa's representation lies not in its invention per se, but in the fact that Africa is always imagined, represented and performed as a reality or a fiction in relation to master references - *Europe, Whiteness, Christianity, Literacy, Development, Technology* - mirrors that reflect, indeed refract Africa in peculiar ways, reducing the continent to particular images, to a state of lack (Adhengo, 2010). Definitions that tend to define culture on behalf of the continent but mostly in advantage of such points of origin that reprint already set commercial goals that have political impacts. To phrase it as easy dialogue, a description of Africa and its behavioural culture is still wanting and warrants a fresh conceptualisation of the same; to integrate development oriented perception from within as opposed to induced ideologue that spells civilisation as a benchmark for understanding whatever it is that relativity of

continental relations stores for Africa. These discourses of Africa are rooted in the colonial library. They ignore in particular what *Mamadou Diouf* calls the Islamic library which has a longer history and a broader demographic and cultural scope.

If we dispense with the epistemic racialization of Africa that African identities are expressions of the ontology of blackness, we are left with the notions of Africa as geography and as history, Africa as a spatiotemporal construct, at once a process, product and a project of a complex and contradictory historical geography. The concept of historical geography, sitting at the intersection of two disciplines, allows us to combine the spatial and temporal interests of geography and history, to understand that the physical environment and human agency are mutually constitutive, that people's creativity and thought produce places as much as places produce people's cultures and identities (Scott, 2010); in short, that landscapes are not only important aspects of culture, they are products of historical processes.

To view the problem of identity through a scope of time-space continuum, it's assertively true to claim that in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, there is a hierarchy of spatial identities that are interwoven and interactive in complex ways engendering multiple cultural identities. Where space in this regard relates the locality, the occupied place which becomes a spatial stage, a platform for innovative development, experiential growth etcetera.

According to Zeleza & Kalipeni (1999), space and the spatial stage then contextualize cultures, economies, and politics, and invent and inscribe places and landscapes with ethical, symbolic and aesthetic meanings. Space is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global (Jenks, 2004).

Zeleza & Kalipeni (1999) add that space is not a static and passive template of social existence, but an active, constitutive force of the social's very composition and construction.

The notions of space and spatiality are complex and articulated material, cultural, symbolic, and discursive formations that structure and are simultaneously structured by historical change. Seen in this way, then, the multiple mappings of Africa are indeed to be expected thereby depicting behavioural similarities and aesthetic visibilities as portrayed by the inhabitants. The numerous peoples and societies that have carved out a place of their own across this vast continent have, in a sense, been creating their little *Africas*, each laying their bricks across the huge and intricate cartographic, cognitive, and cultural construct known as **Africa** (Mudimbe, 1994).

A geographical conception of Africa, therefore, does not need the existence of racial solidarity or the invention of cultural homogeneity. But this is not an empty cartographic vessel either in so far as the diverse cultures and identities that have emerged and have yet to emerge, have been and will continue to be shaped by the mapping and materiality of Africa as an ever changing spatial entity and social construct.

Definition of Concepts

Looking at most African countries, one realises that the social imaginaries which make us who we are, continue to be an issue in every society (Sanni, 2015). It is even more rampant when we think of the role religion plays in determining who we are, what we believe and how we should act and react. We must agree that the concept of cultural identity has referred to

familial and cultural dimensions of a person's identity, and how others perceive him, that is, the factors that are salient to a person's identity both as perceived by the individual and how others perceive the person's identity.

As a psychological construct, culture is a shared meaning-making system according to Stanik (2004). It is an intergenerational transmission. As a meaning-making system, culture is composed of a group narrative or history. It is also constituted by specified ontological (understanding of the nature of reality), epistemological (ways of knowing reality and truth), axiological (value standards), and teleological (purpose) orientations. Culture prescribes commonly accepted roles and behavioural norms, communication patterns, and affectivity. Identity is the sensation and perception of a self. Taken together, *cultural identity* can be thought of as one's sensation and perception of a self as it is informed by a shared and intergenerational transmit of integrated historical, ontological, epistemological, axiological, and teleological meaning making system.

Behavioural Linguistics in Cultural Globalisation

The worldwide reach of globalization is occurring in many arenas and can be described in terms of regard *language*, *diet*, and *media*. Each of these three arenas typically forms important components of the custom complexes of a culture, as well as of the cultural identity developments.

According to Schwartz et al., (2011), English is the first language for over 400 million people; it is spoken on a daily basis as a second language by 375 million people; and it is used occasionally as a foreign language by over 700 million people for business or pleasure. Moreover, exposure to English is expected to rise exponentially in the years to come. By the year 2050, it is estimated that half of the world's population will be proficient English speakers thus elucidating globalisation as an accepted way of life regardless of developmental priorities a country has.

While English is becoming a global language, many local languages are dying out. More than 7,000 languages are in existence today. With the current rate of language *death* at 1 per 14 days, however, the expectation is that fewer than half of today's languages will remain in about 100 years (Hoffmann, 2009).

With its communicative, symbolic, and social functions, language constitutes a key part of cultural identity, and the linguistic changes occurring as a result of globalization are likely to influence the cultural identity developments of many emerging adults. For example, as stated above, around the world, youth are particularly likely to learn English. This occurs formally in school, but also informally through work, the media, contact with tourists, and so forth. Youth are also particularly likely to lose the languages of their local communities, either because the local languages are not passed on from the older to the younger generation, or as a consequence of adolescents and emerging adults moving away from their local community.

Globalization has also made local cuisines available far from their original locales. A rapid increase in the availability of Western fast foods is occurring in the developing world and this still impact greatly on the African cultural identity, either as a reconstructive dilemma or an agenda for development. Global dietary changes also have psychological implications. Food - *what, when, where, and with whom we eat* - is part of daily cultural customs (Roudsari, 2017). Food is also a crucial part of a culture's holidays. Finally, food is often linked to moral

values and cultural worldviews. For example, foods can be seen as sacred, forbidden, virtuous, disgusting, male or female, and so forth. As with language, youth are particularly likely to change their dietary habits. As with language, the changes are likely to have implications for their worldviews and cultural identity development.

On the aspect of media exposition, we must agree that the global world begs for our attention today more than ever as can be seen overwhelmingly in the excessive use of cell phones, whether for social connectivity or business thus impactful on livelihood design. In sum, today's adolescents and emerging adults seldom grow up knowing of only one culture but increasingly have interactions with people from diverse cultures, either first-hand or indirectly through different media (Jensen, 2012). These interactions influence their everyday lives in myriad ways, from everyday habits such as language use and diet to key life-course decisions about where to work and whom to marry. Consequently, developing a cultural identity has become more complex, and it is no longer a question of becoming an adult member of one culture - but rather a task of navigating both local and global cultures.

Cultural Policy and Identified Africa

Having delved situationally on the issue of identity and the strife existing towards having a core uniqueness as Africa, it is important to relate what is happening not only in different cultural spaces or hegemonic zones but also, the priorities of the continent as shared by the various governments. Perhaps this will be clearer when we explain the concept of cultural diplomacy; but towards the understanding, it is of concern to mention the policy fundamentals as involved.

A policy document expositis how a country wishes to relate with its citizenry and other foreign countries with specific concerns that relate to the document. Thus, cultural policy will spell as a blue print all elements that promote heritage, nationalism and identity of a particular country, especially in its relativity issues when diplomacy is a core concern.

Noting that the wider problem of continental identity remains a key concern to most African countries, there still exists undefined priorities of why countries should have their policy documents published and thus, the situation is mostly draft proposals; perhaps a diplomatic tactic of hoping for the best by always amending. All in all, livelihood experiences can be depicted as happening in whatever country and the spatial connectivity produces similar response mechanisms; thus, in as much as having a homogenic continental culture is problematic, it is also difficult to integrate lingual preferences of many countries into a grid description of culture and translate such as an harmonious representation of the majority or inhabitants of the various geographical spaces in a country (Zezeza, 2006). Mostly so, the cultural similarities along country borders make policy documents in Africa in need of scientific approach as opposed to social analytical methods (Spenser-Oatey, 2012). The inevitable path that originates from a chaotic understanding or a void created by not having a shared view of culture, is always a conflict of interest but to indecent results, political instability from identity confusion.

Culture and Conflict

When the self is exposed to different options of defining its cultural inclination, the greater possibility of cultural confusion must be expected (Nunn, 2012). Such confusion may take

somewhat different forms and some cases; there may be lack of commitment to any culture whether traditional or new, local or global.

Identity confusion can take the form of bouncing between or among different cultural identities across situations and contexts (Jensen JA, Jensen LA, & McKenzie, 2011). Although some degree of alternation might allow for useful flexibility, in other cases it may be confusing when moral perspectives are put into play, thereby sharing to questions like whether *cultural identity confusion* may be related to problems such as substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide which remain open or unanswered from the traditional African context, considering that none of these traits define the original space.

Africa has continuously been characterized with litanies of negative conditions, such as series of famine, diverse national disasters and calamities, political instabilities, endemic tribalism, injustices, human right abuses, corruption, cultural dislocation, economic backwardness, violent conflicts, over population, mass poverty, chronic debt problems, poor and inadequate exploitation of human and natural resources. The tragic experiences of racialism, slave trade, colonization and ideological contamination of Africa's post-colonial elites, have caused dislocations and some internal conditions of instability.

African identity is first and foremost on the African selfhood making him identifiable ontologically. In African metaphysics, the self is conceived essentially towards other, that is, a *being-with-others*. The African is not just a human being but essentially a *being-with*. Consequently it is the community which makes the individuals, because of his relationship with others in the community. The African *self* being defined in terms of "*we-existence*."

Even though celebrated as a unifying force and source of rootedness, shared identity and belonging; heritage simultaneously always works to disinherit, divide and articulate differences with *other* groups. The process of giving meaning to the past through heritage so as to reconstruct who we are, how others see us and how we understand others is never performed for its own sake.

Through claiming who we are in relation to our past, we legitimize a particular social order and claim a particular understanding of the reality and our rights, relations and responsibilities in it. Our claims are therefore often competing with different, sometimes conflicting beliefs, values and aspirations of others. The order of discourse of particular heritage is therefore never fixed, even if there is a dominant hegemonic discourse that has been naturalized over time. Heritage gets invested with different contents by different social actors in the struggle to make their particular understanding of history and society the prevailing one.

What happens to a nation that neglects its history during a socio-political crisis by destroying or looting its cultural heritage resources? What are the main factors in political interpretation of heritage in some African countries that make it a political and not a cultural issue? Are there established policies to manage and preserve people's cultural identities during times of socio-political crisis?

These and many unconstructed questions propel the relativity of culture when conflict permeates to not only underpin a crisis of identity but to be defined from the absentia of heritage. The destruction of heritage is a long-standing weapon used by one force against a people, (the Romans used a tactic against individuals called *damnatio memoriae*) resulting in

the erasure of another culture's identity. Used as means through which to dominate local historical narratives, suppress particular communities, and exploit resources (in the form of artefacts) for their own political gains, tangible heritage is under continuing threat. In the format of war, the Congo crisis and the situation in Libya warrant a deeper restoration of identities that are otherwise threatened or misplaced.

Just as the destruction of heritage can be used as a weapon, its preservation can be used as a tool for healing. The reclamation or preservation of heritage can foster respect and dialogue between cultures that are experiencing continuing trauma caused by the impact of armed conflict. Links to the tangible past can be a first step towards rebuilding a community torn apart by war. A notable example is the rebuilding of the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Built by an Ottoman Turk in the 1500s, the old bridge represented Muslim history in a multi-ethnic city. In 1993 it became the victim -- symbolizing the broken relations between the city's Muslims, Serbs and Croats -- when the bridge was blown up by Croat forces. Today, preservation specialists can study the successes and failures of restoration projects in post-conflict areas - like the reopening of the *Mostar Bridge* in 2004 - to understand how these projects may become a tool for dialogue and peacebuilding.

Conflict tends to give rise to a revived civil society as a reaction to the fundamental limitations it poses and South Sudan is a visible example with no exception of DRC Congo. The majority of Civil Society Groups in South Sudan emerged first as activists and community groups committed to non-violent political activism. As violence began to intensify across the country, they turned to focus on providing necessary services and humanitarian aid activities supported by individual donations. Later, a number of these initiatives developed into nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) where in addition to individual donations they began to receive support from various international donors. The practices of CSGs include diverse sets of programmes and activities that utilize culture and heritage as an instrument and resource to provide cultural relief programs that meet the cultural, social and psychological needs and aspirations of the affected communities. These practices first emerged to address the needs and aspirations of local communities that were not covered by humanitarian or heritage agencies, for example, information and entertainment; thus being able to offer various cultural and educational programs that target their local communities with a special focus on children by use of poetry, music and dance performances.

The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development. Historically, cities acted as places where diverse people could come together to exchange ideas or goods, where the specialization of services allowed for human creativity. While the diversity that resulted from these interactions can work in favour of innovations and the development of ideas in cities, under different circumstances, diversity becomes a source of conflict, contestation, tension and even outright warfare. The emergence of conflict usually coincides with several factors, such as being located within close proximity to borders, having diverse populations ethnically and/or religiously and having a heritage of imperialism or colonialism.

Many conflicts and violence are rooted in ethno-nationalistic narratives which use the past and heritage to demarcate and track tension and identity claims back to prehistory. Narratives underlining the longevity of a particular ethno-national identity and subsequent territorial

claims are particularly dangerous as they often overlap and contest with similar claims of neighbouring countries.

Due to the disregard to ethnicities in the development of colonial boundaries, newly liberated states included multiple ethnicities but wanted to centre these diverse people on one nationalistic idea that resulted in these post-colonial conflicts. While they had co-existed until the end of the 19th century in relatively peaceful terms, modernism and nationalism had changed the dynamics among different groups of people in Africa.

Practices and actors appropriating the words peace-building, post-conflict action and reconciliation have been numerous, but hardly any of their practices explicitly articulate the meaning, philosophy and policies behind these terms in relation to heritage actions and programmes undertaken. Even within post-conflict studies, the word reconciliation has been a vague term signifying concepts of both looking backwards as 'reconciliation with history' or 'coming to terms with the past' and looking forward as 'rebuilding relationships'

Heritage practices, in conflict and post-conflict contexts, ought to be *people-centered*, socially innovative and future oriented processes that move beyond the visible and tangible towards the invisible, intangible and the experiential in order to provide a *space* for critical, open ended and creative practices. These practices should not take for granted that the preserved legacy of the past is a positive thing that needs to be saved. Rather, they suggest a dialogic relationship between heritage and conflict that seeks to critically question, build on and reconstruct - from within - the beliefs, values and traditions of the past in a creative and participatory way. By this, our heritage practices can positively contribute to the rebuilding of the society by participating in managing the transformation process to a post-conflict society.

Cultural Dialogue

Culture is often considered in itself to be a *unifying, mediating and supporting element* in the process of globalisation - concerned with entering in dialogue with one another, encountering, and getting to know one another on the same level in order to overcome prejudice in a meeting which takes place as independently as possible of political dogma and on a peaceful basis.

Colonialism and Westernization that was spread in advent of globalization as well as through the technological and media revolutions has challenged local traditions and lead to submission, loss, dominance, accommodation, or adaptation (hybridity) of historically different cultures and societal management practices. As if not to retract from the effects of media and globalisation, the persistence of identity crisis loses meaning and in its place emerges a dialogue on culture as experientially seen in its present state. *Intercultural dialogue* is understood as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage'.

Globalisation has raised the issue of cultural diversity to a new level. Cultural-ethnic and religious communities have become acutely aware of the threat to their identities by an engulfing, mainly western driven, economic globalisation. The question is increasingly being raised. How can we reconcile these identities and cultural practices, which diverge in many essential ways with the idea of international standards?

The refugee phenomenon in Africa supplies a redefinition of hegemonic roles whether in East or West of the continent as provoked by the movement of people and by the increasingly porous nature of our national identities. We are living through osmosis of cultures facilitated by travel, technology and the interconnectedness of our contemporary economies and cultures. The exponential increase in contacts of people and societies enhances knowledge of alternative ways of life, values and concepts. Thus, there is an understandable pressure to return to old conventions, traditional cultures, fundamental values, and the familiar, seemingly secure, sense of one's identity noting that without a secure sense of identity amidst the turmoil of transition, people tend to resort to isolationism, ethnocentrism and intolerance of other cultures and this calls for dialogue of civilisations to meet such challenges.

Cultural democracy emanates from associated cultural dialogues; and thus, being accommodative it promotes pluralism of values arising from within communities and applied by those communities to activities they individually or collectively undertake. People should have rights of access not just cultural outputs, but to the means of cultural input.

Understanding that politics permeates culture and makes use of its utilities, the inevitability of cultural democracy becomes a core action and develops programmatically towards building a consensus for the inversion of our cultural institutions as a continent through decentralising the means of cultural production. With this, it is easier to define diplomacy in its relation to culture.

Cultural diplomacy is a set of activities undertaken by or in collaboration with the diplomatic authorities of a state with direct aims to promote the foreign policy interests of that country in the realm of cultural policy by means of fostering cultural exchange with other foreign countries.

We live in an age where the main intellectual currents of critical thought define the nation state in wholly pejorative terms. In defining cultural diplomacy for informal cultural agency, we need to consider the various ways in which 'internal/external' is conceived, particularly in relation to key policy terms favoured by supra-national agencies. Moreover, the concept of *Cultural Diplomacy* is surely in need of critical historicisation. The parameters that define the concept have mutated, and its current conditions of meaning arguably disconnect a cultural politics of *internationalism* in the arts from the international political realm proper. Cultural Diplomacy is 'official' and State sponsored (i.e. there is no diplomacy outside of the State and its agents).

Histories of diplomatic relations date the emergence of this institution to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War (also known as the *Wars of Religion*) in Europe. Scholars of cultural diplomacy, by contrast, point out that the various peaceful methods two parties employ to *persuade* one another (including grants of things such as land, slaves, and even spouses) go back much further in time, even to the city-states of *Ancient Greece*. All these things aside, if one must assign a start-date to cultural diplomacy, it ought to lie towards the end of the 19th century, when colonialism began frantically dividing up the globe, and when services such as language, education, and culture were provided to citizens (colonists) living outside their home countries.

In our own day, cultural diplomacy is an indispensable component in the organizational charts of foreign ministries. In other words, cultural diplomacy is, in large part, planned and carried out by diplomats in accordance with policies and trends established at these

ministries. It is debatable just how capably this task can be performed by diplomats with expertise in international relations or its traditional sub-fields.

Embarking on the notion of refugees and globalisation, it is an inevitable discussion that relates consequentially to the state of events in Africa, a continent laden with resources but also ideally confused about its identity in relation to the universals. Induced conflict and escapism continues to engulf territorial integrity and immigrants into countries such as Kenya and Uganda, remain visible in the name of asylum seekers. Many of these refugees at the *Kakuma* centre in Kenya, have been seen to establish themselves to cultural associations of their founding, be it Somali, Sudanese or Congo groups and for many years participated in national events at their own rights as identified people from a place. Integrating their cultural productions and sharing their livelihood processes as an art best expressed politically as democracy. Artistic projects about and with migrants and refugees play a different role. Mostly, they understand themselves as a form of political art directed against racism and xenophobia; they contest national boundaries and/or the ways in which national boundaries work as exclusionary mechanisms. The arts can translate and sublimate experiences, even traumatic experiences, to another sphere, another language. In this way, the arts can be a means to deal with these experiences or to express them in another way like providing healing.

But even independently of the intentions of artists themselves the arts play a political role in every society and, especially in democratic societies, and this role is always related to questions of collective identities. Every society needs some kind of collective identity, of social cohesion, and loyalty between the citizens as well as between citizens and the government. In democracies, this cohesion is especially important as democracy means “government of the people, for the people, and by the people” – and for such a kind of government, “the people” has to be constructed.

Cultural associations of migrants and artistic projects about migration pursue different aims and have different consequences. While the former rather aim at upholding the culture of the country of origin and at stimulating cultural encounters, the latter can usually be understood as a critique of government and the attitude of the majority society towards migrants. Some contemporary artistic projects stand in a direct relationship with newly arrived refugees and aim for different forms of representation of this group.

National culture, the national cultural heritage, national artistic achievements are an important means to create national solidarity and to keep it up. This means, on the other hand, that all these elements are also used to differentiate us from other nations and national cultures and to exclude those who do not share “our culture”. Whether this exclusion is a very rigid one or if the limits of our societies and our solidarity are seen as open and changeable, depends on political interests. Cultural diplomacy, cultural exchange, and intercultural encounters are certainly ways to make these boundaries more permeable – still, they are based on the precondition that there are important differences between cultures which have to be negotiated.

Conclusion

The inevitable need for a cultural dialogue becomes evident with the overt confusion portrayed by lack of identified definition of the self in continental Africa. War for dominance results in scattered hopes and successive division a progressive agenda when territorial boundaries beyond the colonial agenda remain a myth.

To avoid being immersed in competitive cultural identity confusion, Africa as a continent needs to grip its collective heritage, in space and archived by time. the shared experiential wisdom gains to add moral bondage that stems out as a cultural by-product, and in such memories anticipated, pathways for ethnic dialogues and cultural relations will promote a collective understanding of a people with respect for one another, defined not by their micro-spaces but by the continental habitat. To this end, development is possible and global influence towards other continents, whether seen as cultural appreciation or participation, becomes possible.

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