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Are Non-state Actors Better Innovators? The Ambiguous Role of Non-state Actors in the Transition Process: The Case of Benin and Madagascar

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2. June 2004

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/977/>

MPRA Paper No. 977, posted 1. December 2006

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Abstract

The focusing on new rules and institutional innovations by the international donor community corresponds to current academic analyses on “weak” or “failing states” in Africa and elsewhere. However, the concentration on externally induced institutional innovations and on the formal sector of the society tackles only half of the problem. Frequently it even undermines indigenous development capacities. Innovators in the informal sector and the agency of the civil society, embedded in the local socio-cultural setting, but closely linked to transnational social spaces, do often outperform the state's development efforts and international aid. African culture is not inherently good or bad, but under certain conditions its propensity to change and to influence perceptions of power and values can induce important improvements in well-being. Even seemingly static cultural factors as custom, tradition or ethnicity, often said to be barriers to economic growth in Africa, have been invented or adapted to changing requirements of societies. Rather than blaming the failure of development efforts in Africa over the past decades on cultural barriers or traditional minded actors, we should investigate the propensity of African societies to create indigenous innovations, notably within the realm of the informal sector.

Keywords: *Transition, development, informal sector, indigenous innovation, culture, glocalisation, Africa, Bénin, Madagascar*

JEL classification: *Z1 - Cultural Economics; E26 - Informal Economy; O57 Comparative Studies of Countries, N37 - Economic History, Africa*

¹ Institute of African Affairs, Hamburg; invited paper for the VAD-conference *Africa in Context: Historical and Contemporary Interactions with the World*, session 2, *Social Movements and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Comparison: Africa, Central and Latin America*. Hannover, 02.-05.06.2004.; cf. <www.vad-ev.de/2004/download/01tagung/020papers2004/Sektion_2/vad2004_Kohnert.pdf>, 2006/07/14. - The following chapters are based on a revised conference-paper, delivered to the conference on *Local Economics*, organised by the section Development Sociology within the DGS, University of Bielefeld, 15. – 17.05.03. - Thanks for valuable suggestions go to Thomas Bierschenk, Andreas Eckert, Elisio Macamo, Rüdiger Korf, Richard Marcus, Friedrich Mühlberg, and Solofo Randrianja. The responsibility for any fallacies of the project proposal remains of course with the author.

1. Development and cultural change revisited

Stimulated by Max Weber's enlightening thesis on the protestant ethic as the spirit of European capitalist development², generations of social scientists searched for cultural innovations which could promote economic growth in African developing countries and elsewhere³. Do perhaps the Kimbanguist Church in the former Zaire or the mushrooming charismatic African churches, notably the Pentecostals, provide for a new ethic which could promote material well-being (of the few and affluent) and economic development, like the

² In reploughing the terrain of the age-old, engaged debate on cultural change and economic development one can hardly avoid being approached of using inappropriate definitions and its underlying concepts. The subject is situated at the interface of different scholarly disciplines, each one cherishing its own and unique meaning of culture, innovation, development, transition, formal and informal etc.. In view of this multitude of sometimes contradicting meanings, one should avoid falling into the trap of futile scholastic debates. All the same, it is imperative, to get one's own definitions right. These will be introduced one by one, as soon as it will be required to support the argument.

Starting with the definition of *development*, I propose to follow Amartya Sen and Wole Soyinka in delimitating, in opposition to cultural relativism, a philosophical concept of *development*, beyond the limitations of a concentration on material welfare, i. e. a process guided by universal aims of mankind, not related in a competitive manner (as for instance economic growth and human rights often are), but which incorporates corner stones of the *raison d' être* of the human community, like the guarantee of basic human rights (including the respect of the cultural heritage and poverty alleviation) and democratisation (as a culture of participation or, as Wole Soyinka put it, as *democratic tendency*) at the same time (cf. Sen, 2002:2-6; Soyinka 1994:7, 9; Hountondji 2001). - This academic definition apparently corresponds, at least in its recognition of universal human rights, with a widely accepted meaning of development in international relations, as reflected in the criteria for official development aid (ODA, e. g. of the German Government): respect for human rights, rule of law, popular participation in political decisions, development orientated governance, - although these criteria have been interpreted and implemented in a highly controversial ethnocentric manner. - On indigenous development concepts, as seen by cultural anthropology in the African context, cf. Ela 1998; Engelhard 1998.

Here, and in the following, *transition* is understood as including political, social, and economic transformation processes in sub-Saharan Africa; it refers to a transitional period from an old to a new system, including changing modes of production and of governance, towards a new development orientated social, economic and political order; i. e. our definition goes beyond the narrow, yet different meanings of *transition* in political science and developing economics, therefore, it should not be confused with the term *transition countries* (*Schwelienländer* in German) in the sense of the OECD-definition.

³ Cf. Weber 2002; for an overview on the vast body of literature on development and cultural change cf. Rao/Walton 2003; Sen 2002; Douglas 2002; Throsby 2001; Faschingeder 2001; 2003; Inglehart 2000; 1997; Bliss et al. 1997; Elwert 1996; Müller 1996; Schönhuth, 1991; for current views of African scholars cf. Odhiambo 2002; Masolo 1994; 2003; Soyinka 1994.

“protestant ethic” in 19th century Central Europe ⁴? Unfortunately, both the quest for growth inducing African cultural essentials, and the transfer of globalised concepts of structural adjustment, as pushed during the 1990s by international donors, failed. Under the conditions of globalised capitalism the latter became a religion in itself for many of its adherents and promoters, including economists and development experts ⁵. Pre-conceived ideas that might have worked within the European cultural setting did not perform well under specific conditions of the socio-cultural heritage of African societies, neither did the opposite, the idealization of “traditional African cultures” by European ethno-philosophers ⁶. For our purpose, however, it is important to take account of the diversity of mutually competitive systems within any given culture, including the wide range of marginal practices and value-systems, often hidden beyond the essential characteristics of a dominant culture, the exploration of which would require new approaches, methods and an important shift in the current scientific paradigms (cf. Hountondji 2001a:13, 2000; Ela 1998).

Cf. MacGarry (1999) on the Kibunguist movement, the lucid analysis of the Comaroffs (2000) on the quest for privatisation and the spirit of global capitalism in the 1990s, promoted by new protestant ethics in Africa and elsewhere, and Marshall-Fratani (1998) and Meyer (1998) on the Pentecostal movement and economics.

⁵ Cf. Benjamin’s thesis on “capitalism as religion” (Benjamin 1921) and Dirk Baecker (2003). According to Benjamin, capitalism may be characterized by four criteria of essential religious character: first, its cultic nature, already referred to by Marx’ analysis of commodity fetishism, and its absence of additional dogma for justification; second, its quality as a cult of permanent existence, the continuous need for accumulation without interruption, and the new religious promise of the potential wealth for anybody; third, its quality as generalized cult of indebtedness, instead of the Christian forgiveness or mercy; fourth, universalism of debt as *conditio sine qua non* of existence, without mercy, the only hope provided for in capitalism is the accumulation of wealth and economic growth, as was shown already by Weber’s analyses of protestant ethics.

⁶ The cultural heritage of African societies has often unjustly been reduced to dominant characteristics like the rent seeking or prebend economy (cf. Chabal/Daloz 1999; Menzel 2003) without due regard to its historical roots and dependency on the global economic system as explained by Bayart 1989 and Bilgin/Morton 2002:73-75. For a critique of the lack of regard for the pluralism of African cultures, as well as of ethnocentrism and of the ideological facets of ethno-philosophy, cf. Hountondji (2001, 1997). - Ela (1998) analyses the wealth and dynamics of social innovations in sub-Saharan Africa at the grass-root level; he engages in a passionate call for a new approach, in considering rural life in Africa with its enormous potential of creativity, as a laboratory of social change, with often surprising and highly competitive results, promising an African renaissance. – The growing awareness of the importance of cultural change for African development is reflected in development policy as well: On 20 June 2003, the ministers of culture of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, on their first meeting in Dakar (Senegal), adopted the Dakar Plan of Action to start an innovative approach with culture as a driving force for development (cf. *The Courier ACP-EU*, no. 199, July 2003:8-9 and <www.acpse.org>).

⁴ There exist several – sometimes contradicting – definitions of *culture* and development in social science (cf. Elwert 1996:51-58). A definition, which regards culture as a dynamic structure of innovations, i. e. as any human action with the aim to create something new to be added to existing goods or ideas (cf. Wolfgang Rudolph, quoted in Elwert 1996:53), would be too unspecific for our purpose, notably as it does not permit to differentiate between culture and innovation. Nevertheless, our definition of *culture* should be sufficiently abstract to include all aspects, relevant in relation to our subject, therefore I hold with the general approach of Rao/Walton (2002:1), who regard culture as “those aspects of life that facilitate the comprehension of relationships between individuals, between groups, between ideas and between perspectives.” This corresponds with the definition of Mary Douglas (2002:3): “Culture is a dynamically interactive and developing socio-psychic system. At any point in time the culture of a community is engaged in a joint production of meaning.” Culture has to be recognized as “non-homogeneous, non-static, and interactive”, otherwise cultural prejudice and determinism easily lend themselves to cultural bigotry, alienation, political tyranny and doubtful theories (cf. Sen 2002:8-13).

There is a common understanding in social science that culture matters ⁴. The question is rather: What constitutes the decisive element of culture in relation to development, and how does culture matter (cf. Sen 2002)? Culture is not inherently good or bad, but under certain conditions its propensity to change and to influence perceptions of power and values can induce important improvements in well-being (cf. Rao/Walton 2002:1). Even seemingly static cultural factors as custom, tradition or ethnicity, often said to be barriers to economic growth in Africa, have been invented or adapted to changing requirements of societies (cf. Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983). Rather than blaming the failure of development projects in Africa over the past decades on cultural barriers, we should investigate the propensity of African societies to create indigenous innovations ⁵, notably within the realm of the informal sector (cf. Elwert 1996:58-59; Le Roy 2003; Hountondji 1997, 2000, 2001a).

Apart from the quest for development orientated religious systems mentioned above, there emerged a common understanding on key elements of political- or civic culture, regarded as a conducive framework for development, in the past decades, as summarised by Elwert (1996:79-80) ²: (1) monopoly of violence adhering to the rules of a state of law, (2) state of law, which acts to restrain the illegitimate power and/or expropriation of lower classes by powerful minorities, (3) freedom of public opinion, which allows for both the exchange of news, and of values and evaluations, (4) institutionalised pluralism, which allows, last but not least, for the discussion and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and (5) generalised reciprocity, a vital element of the economy of affection, which is considered to be of crucial relevance for

the development of African economies, still dominated by simple reciprocal exchanges (cf. Hyden 2003). To these we add the term of a development orientated *civic culture* and its left be added three complementary criteria of political culture (as reflected in the political conditions of major international donors), i.e. transparency, accountability and

development orientation of government and public administration (cf. Paden 1985) and Claude Ake (1993) used the term. Nevertheless, the reception of foreign influence, its acceptance, and its integration into the local imaginary, constitute *indigenous innovations* as well (I am grateful to Elisio Macamo for this suggestion), notably if these external factors are adapted to local conditions, which is usually the precondition for wholehearted acceptance. This is especially important to note in view of the increasing importance of transnational social spaces in the transmittance of innovations, which will be explained later on in more detail. However, not any local innovation applied by the African peasant is necessarily indigenous; the history of development aid is rich in examples of ill-adapted innovations, forced on the peasants by misguided development projects (cf. Bierschenk et al 1993; Kohnert/Weber 1991).

² In political science, a controversial debate has been going on for decades on the concepts of *political culture* (a term coined by Gabriel A. Almond; cf. Inglehart 1997) and of *civic culture* (cf. Almond/Verba 1989; Laitin 1995); cf. Berman (2001) for a review article on ideas, norms and culture in political analysis. - The political culture which guarantees optimal stability for a (Western style) liberal democracy has been considered as *civic culture*. With few exceptions (cf. Berg-Schlosser 1995), these concepts did not take into account the specific aspects of the African cultural heritage. In addition most of them have several theoretical and methodological shortcomings, notably a tendency towards (Western) cultural determinism, neglecting cultural pluralism within African societies, and lack of consideration of its historical roots. - In the following, the term *civic culture* will be used, not in the tradition of political science, but in reference to sociological concepts of culture and of the process of civilization, as analyzed by Norbert Elias (1976), who underlined, among others, the crucial importance of the monopoly of violence for the process of civilization.

The focusing on new rules, organizations, and other institutional innovations by the international donor community corresponds to current academic analyses, notably in political science, on the “weak” or “failing state” in Africa and the crucial role of promoting the institutional, technical, administrative and political capacity of the state and institutions in the development process, each embodying distinct challenges for responsible governments³. In the following, neither the crucial role of state and institution building in the African development process, nor the importance of dynamic interactions between markets, state actions, capital formation and culture will be denied. However, in the African context the concentration on externally induced institutional innovations and on the formal sector of the society seems to tackle only half of the problem.

Whereas a neo-classical minimalist notion of the state prevailed up to the late 1980s, where state intervention in the economy (para-statal, marketing boards, socialist single party trade unions and cooperatives etc.) was seen as a major impediment to economic growth, the new institutional economics of the 1990s increasingly focused on the quality of state intervention rather than on its quantity (cf. World Bank 1996, 2001; Grindle 1996:4-5)². Indigenous “social capital”, e. g. social solidarity groups and associations, were often assumed either to contribute by enhancing the quality of formal organizations in the African context (cf. Rose 1997; Throsby 2001) or to create alternatives to capitalist orientated market economy³. However, the analytical power of the concept rests limited, as it conceals more than it elucidates; it encourages a selective view on social, cultural and economic realities. Whereas Marxism tried to press home its point that capital constitutes a social relationship, institutional

³ cf. Grindle 1996:8-9, 180-184; Menzel 2003; Reno 1998; Scott 1998; Tetzlaff 2000; Wunsch/Olowu 1990; Zartmann 1995. – The representation of post-colonial states in Africa as ‘failed states’, ‘weak states’ or ‘rogue states’ is questionable out of different reasons, notably because of lack of historical considerations and a ‘cold-war’ bias in international political science (cf. Bilgin/Morton 2002; Clapham 2000; Kale 2001), and because there is little empirical evidence of the uniqueness of a *sui generis* African state (cf. Goldsmith 2000). The concept of “failing states” is doubtful insofar as it is often concerned with rather strong African states, which, unfortunately, have too many failures. Whereas institutional economics part from a concept of formal and informal “institutions” on a high level of generalisation, as “rules of game in a society or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North, 1990:3), referring in a dualistic manner to the modern and the traditional sector, most operational concepts of development policy stick to the concept of “institution (building)” in the conventional narrow sense of (formal) “organisations”; this corresponds to its view on the (limited) possibilities of promotion of innovative cultures for business, research and education by governments (cf. OECD 1999:64). In either case, there is a strong bias to regard “traditional” institutions rather as a constraint to development than as a potential to be explored. For a critique cf. Douglas 2002; Rao/Walton 2002:10.

² „Empirical evidence of the impact of state policies and institutions on development ... conveys three principal messages: (1) Development – economic, social, and sustainable – without an effective state is impossible. It is increasingly recognized that an effective state – not a minimal one – is central to economic and social development, but more as partner and facilitator than as director. States should work to complement markets, not to replace them. ... (3) The historical record suggests the importance of building on the relative strength of the market, the state, and civil society to improve the state’s effectiveness. This suggests a two-part strategy of matching the role of the state to its capability, and then improving that capability.” (World Bank 1996:18)

³ The ongoing discussion of “social capital” and development, as reflected by the World Bank “social capital initiative” (cf. ; and Grootaert/Bastelaer 2002), includes relevant information on innovative cultural change. In a narrow definition “social capital” is defined as “a combination of networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (OECD 2001:41). - However, the concept of “social capital” is problematic as it constitutes no general purpose asset (like capital is, in general conceived in economics), but can have positive or negative effects on development, depending on the social group promoted or suppressed by it (cf. Sen 2002:5-6; for a conflicting view cf. Robison et al. 2002). - Notably the Anglo-American literature tends to assume that informal social capital and formal organizations interact in ways that have rather positive outcomes, e.g. that innovative informal networks are the base for creating true democratic formal institutions of civil society (cf. Rose 1997, n. p; World Bank 2001:171). This might be true in some cases, but the opposite is true as well, informal networks can be anti democratic, insofar as they are used to corrupt formal organisations, the role of the Mafia in Southern Italy or Russia are outstanding examples (cf. Rose 1997, n. p.). On the linkages of “social capital” in the formal and informal sector that may reinforce each other see the debate on the articulation of modes of production, notably on subsidisation of the formal by the informal sector in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Carls 2003; Evers 1987).

economics falls into the other extreme; in trying to reduce the role of “social capital” to its economic value for (formal) institution building.

In the following, we are more concerned with a critique of current hypotheses and assumptions concerning the functioning of the informal sector as social construct, revealed already by Portes et al (1989) and Elwert/Evers/Wilkens (1983:292), e.g. concerning the *Vermachtung* of markets, or with respect to the linkage between the informal and the formal, the former subsidising the latter. Last but not least, contents and impact of the informal sector are unlike in different social strata (cf. Kohnert 2000). Wrong basic assumptions on the structure and functioning of the informal sector and a dualistic confrontation of the formal (modern) and informal (traditional) sector result in biased solutions, concentrating on the circulation sphere of the economy. Opening and deregulation of markets do not automatically result in the optimal allocation of resources.

From the problem analysis outlined above emerge the following general hypotheses on the linkage between cultural innovations and development in sub-Saharan Africa. They should provide the starting point of a new process-orientated analytical framework for investigating the impact of cultural change on development in Africa:

- () The advancement of our knowledge about cultural change and development is considerable, but the white spots in our cognitive map grew even faster. Dated hypotheses about “monocultural” readings of a nations past or about cultural determinism, which have been regarded over generations as inspiring truth (e. g. about the impact of the protestant ethic on the growth of European capitalism), have been revealed as heroic oversimplification of little prognostic value (cf. Sen 2002: 6,10-13). Nevertheless, they are still cherished by many people and social groups (including development experts), last but not least, because they provide for self-assurance and ready made concepts in delimitating social peers from strangers.
- () The recognition of the fact that “culture matters”, should not seduce social scientists to provide one-dimensional ready-made concepts of the linkage between cultural change and development. Culture has to be recognised as non-homogenous, non-static and interactive (cf. Sen 2002: 8-13), otherwise it is likely to promote ethnocentrism, xenophobic reactions and doubtful theories. The cultural heritage of African countries, frequently labelled “traditional culture” or “traditional institutions”, is habitually regarded in a simplistic and deterministic manner as customary barrier to economic growth as “informal constraints” (North 1990:37) or “informality trap” (Kappel 2001:87)⁴. This dualistic concept of culture (modern vs. traditional) ignores the reality of a universe of different co-existing, and often competing cultures within a society, as well as the development potential of indigenous cultural innovations. Not only is this view based on analytic oversimplification it is also ethically and politically irresponsible (cf. Sen 2002:2, 9-11; Douglas 2002; Houndtondji 2001a; Odhiambo 2002:2-3).
- () The impact of cultural change on development is strong, but highly ambiguous. Cultural change is difficult to classify as either good or bad. The same sentiments or value-orientations may work in opposite directions, depending on the social setting and the nature of the group involved. Seemingly similar process-innovations, like popular movements of the educated elite for a democratic renewal and for sovereign

⁴ For examples of doubtful oversimplifications of the role of African culture as an impediment to modern economic development cf. Harrison/Huntington 2000:xiii on Ghana (and its sharp critique by Sen 2002:10-11); North 1990: 36-37; Chabal/Deloz 1999:128-30 or Kappel 2001:87; 2002:277, 288-90.

National Conferences in Benin and Togo in the early 1990s for example, resulted in opposite outcomes. The sustainability of cultural innovations is even more difficult to evaluate. What has been regarded as development orientated improvement in the short run might reveal itself as bottleneck in the long run, and vice versa. Nevertheless, cultural change is not casual or arbitrary. History shows that it can and should be directed. Unquestionably, there exist progress in human development, as proved by various Human Development Reports of the UNDP, last but not least, because of sound cultural politics.

- () Development economics and –policy up to now tend to focus on formal or public institutions in their quest for innovative approaches to cultural change and development to the detriment of the informal sector ⁵. The latter, however, still dominates the economy as well as politics in most African countries even with respect to development orientated cultural innovations.
- () Enlarging the base of choice by promoting external stimuli for innovations and by improving the competition of cultures and ideas is an important means in promoting development. However, we have to give due regard to the serious problem of asymmetric power relations in a globalised world (cf. Sen 2002: 18-19). The hubris of the *high modernist ideology* (Scott 1998) still propagated by Western and African experts alike (cf. Kohnert 1995), incorporates not only the danger of euro-centrism and top-down approaches. It also diverts attention from exploring the potential of indigenous innovations, and even worse, it tends to undermine the informal social and economic structures of indigenous cultures on which local innovations may flower.
- () Indigenous cultural innovations (as defined above) are c. p. more suited to promote sustainable development than externally induced innovations with questionable potential of adaptation.
- () The TSS-networks play an increasing role in promoting the interaction of cultures and in transmitting cultural innovations into the informal sector which might be more readily adapted than innovations proposed by official aid or formal institutions. The impact of pluri-local social spaces on the interactive process of cultural change and on the diffusion of innovations in the informal sector is not restricted to the educated elite, but it concerns different social strata on macro, meso and micro levels.
- () To what extent the process of commercialisation of social relations promoted by globalisation, and the accompanying spread of venality, violence, and criminalisation of African states and societies affects cultural change and economic development positively or negatively is open to question. Although it is often considered to be a barrier to development, it might under certain conditions even contribute to the process of primary accumulation ⁶.
- () Common African structures should not obscure essential differences of cultural innovation processes in different countries, which probably can be observed best in times of transition, as in the case of Benin and Madagascar.

⁵ cf. Rao/Walton 2002:10; and Rao/Walton 2002a for their search for equality of *agency*, i. e. the capacity of individuals to affect the factors that influence their lives, in *public policy* (my italics).

⁶ On different, sometimes contradictory explanations of growing markets of violence in Africa and its impact on development, divergences enhanced by cleavages between different academic disciplines, cf. Richards/Vlassenroot (2002) for a sociological concept based on theories of solidarity and labour division vs. a utilitarian economic concept as presented by Collier (2000a or Addison et al (2002); cf. in addition Bayart/Ellis 1997; Elwert et al 1999; Fafchamps/Moser 2002; Botte 2002; Menzel 2003. – For a critical review of the debate on the role of primary accumulation in capitalist development and the articulation of modes of production in Africa cf. Kohnert 1982:62-241.

2. Non-state actors and development in Benin and Madagascar (general hypotheses)

The following two sets of working hypotheses are meant to highlight and specify some crucial facets of the linkage between cultural innovations and development in Benin and Madagascar, taking into account the general research guidelines delimited above. Notably, they are meant to illustrate the path-dependency of these innovations, though in different ways, its embeddedness into pluri-local or transnational social spaces, its interdependency and ambiguity ⁷.

Because of the ambiguous character of cultural change, an *ex-ante* classification in more or less effective, efficient or sustainable innovations as research guideline would be misleading. *Ceteris paribus*, the impact of product innovations, e.g. newly introduced and widely accepted technologies in agriculture (e.g. the use of fertiliser, insecticides or animal traction), health (e.g. anti-malaria drugs or mosquito-nets) or communication (e.g. the cellular phone), on development is more easily to evaluate than the impact of process innovations, like the change of value orientations or the recognition of empowerment strategies at village level (e.g. decentralisation policies) ⁸.

The following two sets of hypotheses should provide a useful starting point for analysis. They are meant as scientific tracks along which different cultures of innovations shall be identified and analysed, in order to find the most promising with respect to sustainable development. The hypotheses are based on examples of rather heuristic value, as delimited from available literature in the respective subsection to the hypothesis; they do not claim to be exhaustive in covering all aspects of the subject, nor are all of them backed by rigorous empirical investigation. Much more research effort will be needed to prove their validity and to link them systematically, guided by the conception of a new theoretically sound analytical framework for investigating the impact of cultural change on development.

A review of the relevant country specific literature and personal working experience in both countries served as a background for the formulation of the following working hypotheses on the interaction of cultural change and development in Benin and Madagascar. There are tendencies of increasing involvement of trans-national social spaces in African transition processes in general, and on indigenous cultural change and development in particular. The impact of globalisation on local economies and politics, however, is rather ambiguous. Sometimes it promotes, sometimes it hampers bottom-up development efforts. Even in cases of positive influences of specific cultural innovations on development, these innovations are often not sustainable or rebuked by counteracting forces.

2.1 Benin: *Transition driven by indigenous cultures of innovation, but hampered by ill-adapted aid, commercialisation of social relations and the lure of venality.*

⁷ On the concept of Transnational Social Spaces (TSS) cf. Callaghy et al 2001; Pries 1999; Robinson 2002; Sassen 1999; 2003; Kohnert 2003; Nuscheler 2000).

⁸ But even in this case the dividing line between both categories is fluid. Generations of extension workers, for example, failed to convince the seemingly homogenous West African peasantry of the virtues of plough and oxen because they did not recognize that the profitability and acceptance depended on the highly unequal resource position of the farmers (cf. Kohnert 1982).

- **Transnational social spaces as trigger of transition:** The informal network of the *quartier Latin* of francophone Africa ⁹, in close interaction with development orientated ethics of representatives of the catholic church in Benin, had a decisive impact on the organisation of the sovereign National Conference (1990) which initiated a peaceful alternation of political power structures in Benin at the national level. This *renouveau démocratique* organised by an educated elite, and embracing different ethnic, regional, professional and religious groups of the civil society, was regarded as a model by other African countries. Even marginalized groups, like peasant organisations, got a chance to participate in it (pers. com., L. Séhouéto, 13.4.94; cf. Séhouéto 1994; Ehuzu 1990; Adamon 1995; Heilbrunn 1993; Houngbedji 1994; Monga 1995; Monkotan 1991; Nwajiaku 1994; ONEPI 1990).
- **Indigenous civic sub-cultures in West Africa as pioneers of transition:** As early as the late 1980s, interactive civic (sub-)cultures in different West African countries promoted indigenous cultural innovations “from below”, like local political theatre groups of students, griots and NGOs, which prepared the political terrain for the process of democratic renewal in Benin, Togo and Côte d’Ivoire (cf. Séhouéto 1994; Monga 1995). At the same time, dynamic Fulbe intellectuals acted at the meso and micro level as political and cultural brokers of indigenous cultural change in Northern Benin, promoting a new, more development orientated ethnic identity, based on the mediation of the aims of the modern nation state and traditional elements of Fulbe culture (cf. Bierschenk 1995).
- **Bottom-up process of indigenous cultural change and transition dominated by aid, local development brokers and venality:** As a result, the transition process in Benin had been promoted initially not so much by a transfer of Western culture, knowledge, technology or finance but by a bottom-up process of indigenous cultural change. Later on, it became dominated by top-down propagation of concepts of Western political culture, focussing on institutional change of public organisations, as promoted by the political conditioning of development aid. Local brokers of development aid accelerated this change in cultural policy, which however, was ill-adapted to sustainable development (cf. Bierschenk et al 1993).
- **Constitutional court as third tiers of state control, strengthened by globalised human rights standards, but hampered by role-back strategy of the power elite:** Driven by a strong impetus of liberation from autocratic rule (i. e. the "Beninism-Marxism" of Kérékou’s socialist regime, 1972-89), and by globalised standards of Human Rights (backed by the international donor community), the Constitutional Court under the guidance of the first president Elisabeth Poignon, established a new culture of independent judiciary as an effective counterbalance of power at the national level. This promising development did not trickle down as expected to the lower levels of the Benin judicial system. The latter remained highly corrupt and exposed to the politics of neo-patrimonialism. Subsequently, the "politics of the belly" once more gained predominance, even in the decisions of the Benin High Courts, during the role-back strategy under the second and third Kérékou regime (1996-2003).
- **Top-down approaches of decentralisation without substantial empowerment,** as promoted since the early 1990s by massive development aid, were transformed in

⁹ The expression refers to Benin, as the former French colony of Dahomey, which has often been labeled „*quartier Latin*“ because of its high percentage of an educated francophone elite, compared with other French speaking African countries; in this context the “National Conference” refers to the tradition of the “*états généraux*” of the French revolution (cf. Eboussi-Boulaga 1993). However, we should bear in mind that the Benin elite over decades maintained close social and political links not only to Paris, but to their peers in Dakar, Abidjan and Lomé as well. Therefore, the network of the *quartier Latin* refers to the transnational social space, including the strong African influence on conflict resolution capacities.

local political arenas according to their special logic and interests. They did not necessarily lead to more local participation, democracy, or rule of law (in the Western sense) at local level (cf. Alber 1997; Alber/Sommer 1999; Bierschenk 2003, 1999; Grätz 1996).

- () **The ongoing top-down program of liberalisation and privatisation** of parastatals, enforced, last but not least, by political conditionality of aid, had ambiguous effects. While it was meant to guarantee effective management, it tended to create in some central cases rather a symbiosis and concentration of economic and political power during the implementation process. Powerful entrepreneurs, enriched by political patronage, transformed themselves into new political leaders (case study of multi-millionaire Séfou Fagbohoun and his influential political party *Mouvement Africain pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*, MADEP)².
- () **Promising development of a free press as fourth tiers of state control in the early 1990s, weakened by globalised standards of media markets and by venality.** In the early stages of transition, the free press in Benin³, driven by highly motivated local agents of cultural change, acted as more effective control of government and state administration than the public legislative institutions. However, the commercialisation of professional ethics of journalists, caused among others by the daily strife for survival in a highly competitive but limited market, affected the role of the media as fourth tiers of state control (cf. Adjovi 2002). Nowadays many journals tend to be submerged by venality and globalised Western standards of the rainbow press.
- () **Transnational parallel markets and informal trade proved to be more effective than aid.** An innovative shadow economy, pushed by lucrative transnational parallel markets (transit economy *vis à vis* landlocked neighbouring countries and Nigeria cf. Igué/Soule 1992), probably contributed more to economic growth in Benin than the massive influx of development aid. The fragile state monopoly of violence and taxation of the new liberal-democratic state, which has often been considered a barrier to economic growth, may have had at least in this respect a growth-inducing momentum.
- () **Indigenous agricultural change has been hampered by hierarchy of formal knowledge systems.** There exists a rich potential of indigenous agricultural innovations in Benin which has still to be explored and propagated by peer extension workers, with due consideration to the differences in resource position of Benin peasants (Floquet 1993). Participatory research and extension, as promoted by development cooperation, is still hampered by the hierarchy of formal knowledge systems and the asymmetry of power relations (cf. Floquet/Mongbo 2000).
- () **Stimulation of informal local markets might be better suited for promoting development inducing written culture than aid.** The development of a written culture (*Schriftkultur*, in German, which is not restricted to alphabetisation), an important means in promoting indigenous innovations, is still in its initial stage in Benin, despite decades of development aid for this purpose. Encouraging local market mechanisms to promote a written culture on regional and national level (like the Onitsha market literature in neighbouring Nigeria) might be more promising than top-down development aid (cf. Elwert 1997).
- () **Local private radio stations as driving belt of cultural change.** In contrast to the chronically ill adapted top-down public rural radio extension programmes, well-adapted local media, notably local private radio stations, based on a close marriage of

² The general secretary of MADEP, Mrs. Antoine Idji Kolawolé, former minister of foreign affairs, was elected as president of the Benin National Assembly on April, 24, 2003.

³ Benin has the highest rank on the index of press freedom, of all African states; it was on the same level as United Kingdom in 2002, according to *Reporters sans frontières*.

international technology transfer and local culture, are helpful in promoting political innovations at grass-root level (cf. Grätz 1997).

- (o) **Ambiguous role of traditional leaders and religion.** Depending on the historical pre-conditions and the actual social setting in the different provinces, “traditional authorities” (like village heads or *vodun* priests) acted either as intermediaries and facilitators of indigenous innovative capacity that might promote development or as constraints of cultural change (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995; Tall 2003). The democratisation process in Benin had been initiated and promoted, last but not least, by the “return of the religious” (Mayrargue 2002); the *renouveau démocratique* resulted in a new legitimisation of the *vodun*, charismatic Christian churches (like the *Chrétiens célestes*), and new anti-witchcraft cults (cf. Tall 2003:77, 87). The same holds for occult belief systems, notably the *vodun* and the belief in magic and witchcraft, which played an ambiguous role in Benin's development process (cf. Kohnert 1996: 1351).

2.2 Madagascar: *Transition externally initiated by formal institutional innovation with doubtful impact, promoted by development aid. Counteracting indigenous innovations, reinforced by networks of Transnational Social Spaces, proved successful in bringing about a legitimate power change; in its aftermath the indigenous innovators were subjugated by the new power elite.*

- (o) **Decentralisation policy, promoted by international donors, degenerated into creation of fiefdoms of the old regime, used as strongholds of political destabilisation.** Madagascar has a long history of centralisation of political and administrative power. First attempts towards democratic transition in the 1990s, notably the policy of decentralisation, as promoted by the donor community, were hijacked by the Ratsiraka regime to create six autonomous provincial fiefdoms, secured by constitutional changes in 1998. Probably with hindsight, this created even stronger parallel structures of deconcentrated vs. decentralised administrations on provincial level, even undermining the intended autonomy of communes. This contributed to accentuated political and social conflicts which brought the country at the brink of a civil war in 2001 (cf. Marcus 2002; Fengler et al 2003).
- (o) **Transition, driven by “illegal” indigenous cultural innovations from below.** As in the case of democratic renewal in Benin, the transition process in Madagascar was initiated in a civil *coup d' état*; not by external forces or by the acting Malagasy power elite, but from within and from “below”, in the aftermath of the disputed presidential election on December 16th, 2001⁴. The culture of mass disobedience and the resistance of the angry crowd in the capital seemingly erupted out of nowhere. In the view of the proponents of rules of formal democracy, it used extra-legal,

⁴ The opposition candidate, a wealthy businessman and mayor of the capital Antananarivo, Marc Ravalomanana, claimed the poll was rigged in favor of the outgoing president, the representative of the old regime, Admiral Didier Ratsiraka. In January 2002, Ravalomanana and his supporters mounted a general strike, campaigns of civil disobedience and mass protests in the capital to support the claim of election victory and peaceful change of political power. The Ratsiraka regime and the administrative authorities of four of the six Malagasy provinces threatened with secession. The subsequent stalemate resulted in a nearly paralysed national economy and in violent conflicts which came close to a civil war. The scourge of instrumentalisation of ethnicity and regional affiliation for partisan reasons or just for economic gain, intervention of mercenaries and war lords, well known from the transition processes of other African states, emerged in Madagascar as well (Anonymus 2002; Larson 2002; Kohnert 2003; Marcus/ Razafindrakoto 2003; Raison 2002; Raison-Jourde/Randrianja, 2002; Ramamonjisoa 2002; Urfer 2002). But the majority of the population, supported by leaders of mainstream Christian churches, reached a social consensus about the necessity of a political revival.

unconstitutional means of protest in the name of democratic ends (Marcus 2002:3). Therefore, major foreign powers, including African peer countries, were initially reluctant to support this transition because it ran against their established principles of democratisation or of respect for conventional state authority.

- () **Transnational social spaces as door-opener of transition.** The political terrain for the culture of mass disobedience was well prepared in advance. The ecumenical movement of the established Christian churches in Madagascar (FFKM) played a major role (cf. Urfer 2002, 2003) ⁵. Since approximately half of the Malagasy population are Christians, the Christian religion, in harmonic co-existence with Malagasy traditional religious customs, exerts a considerable impact on the daily life, even of the younger generations (Roubaud 2000). In view of the political vacuum in the aftermath of the 2001 presidential elections, the Churches keenly propagated a legitimate (though illegal), rather than a legalistic resolution of the conflict in supporting a peaceful alteration of political power. This was the more remarkable, as the population was (and is) not in favour of political involvement of the Churches ⁶. Later-on, some church representatives apparently could not withstand the attraction of participating in the political power play, with subsequent consequences for the division of the ecumenical movement (cf. Urfer 2003:3).
- () **Ambiguous effects of public investment in education supported by foreign aid.** Another factor facilitating the transition was the ambiguous role of the Malagasy educational system. Over decades it was said to be relatively advanced, compared to other African countries. But the availability of a pool of educated professionals did not prevent economic decline in the 1990s. The higher the education level of the young school leavers and students, the more they were disadvantaged by the deterioration of the economic environment (Roubaud 2000). Therefore, these groups had a high propensity to rebel against a political system which did not give them a just chance of promotion.
- () **Political entrepreneur, promoted by the donor community, opening world markets and protestant ethics, fostered the exchange of the acting power elite, welcomed by the people.** President Marc Ravalomanana, a model case of a political entrepreneur promoted by the international donor community, who himself is an ardent Christian and vice-president of a Protestant reform movement (FJKM), exploited religion for his own purposes in his business and politics alike. The thousands of employees in his private companies as well as his political collaborators are expected to attend regular services and hold prayer meetings before they start work. The logistic and financial means at his disposal in his various enterprises served as important base of the success of his electoral campaigns for the presidential and legislative elections in December 2001 and 2002 (cf. Marcus/Razafindrakoto 2003). The efficacy of his campaigns was enhanced, last but not least, by systematic reference to bible quotations, blurring (intentionally?) the boundaries between Church, business, party politics and state (cf. Urfer 2003).
- () **Consolidation of change of political power by merger of economic and political might, at the expense of independent actors of cultural change.** To secure his political victory, the new President, who remained political entrepreneur, effected a thorough exchange of the administrative and political elite at the national and provincial level as well as within the military. To consolidate his new regime further, many members of his enterprise *Tiko*, of his proper political party (*TIM*, i. e. *Tiako-I-*

⁵ Composed of the Reformed Protestant Church (FJKM), the Lutheran Church (FLM), the Anglican Church (EEM) and the Catholic church (EKAR).

⁶ On its annual conference in Tana in May 2003 the FFKM again called for its independence and clear separation between politics and religion in Madagascar.

Madagasikara, or *I Love Madagascar* in Malagasy) and from his former supporting committee (KMMR, *Comité pour la défense de la vérité et de l'équité*) during the electoral campaigns, who overwhelmingly belonged to professional and civic organizations and NGOs, were placed in key positions, thus risking the loss of their independence from the government.

- () **Problematic measures of the new regime to retrieve “traditional” cultural solidarity groups.** The new Ravalomanana government reversed *de facto* the radical decentralisation reforms of 1998, which established the autonomous provinces, without officially declaring a new strategy (cf. Fengler et al. 2003:i). The subsequent intense political bargaining about competitive concepts of decentralisation further weakened the empowerment of local rule at communal level. The detachment of sub-commune structures from the commune’s authority and the instrumentalisation of “traditional” solidarity groups (*Fokontany*, *Fokonolona*, *dina*) for modern administrative purposes of deconcentration risked to weaken effective provisions of communal services (cf. Fengler et al 2003:v) ⁷. The famous Malagasy traditional system of *Fokonolona*, i. e. of limited self-rule of villagers, by a council of village elders and other local notables, has been instrumentalised since the advent of colonial rule, alternately suppressed and encouraged by the French colonial authorities. In 1975, the socialist regime of Ratsiraka enshrined the *Fokonolona* into the new constitution as idealised decentralised public collective for economic, social, cultural, and municipal development at the local level, based on self-rule of the villagers ⁸. However, these new administrative structures were still dominated, as in the past, by a strong gender-based social hierarchy of elders and notables, and were rejected by other ethnic groups, like the neighbouring Betsileo, who saw the *Fokonolona* as

⁷ With the foreign institution imposed on them by Merina rule of communal administrative structures of *Fokontany* and *Fokonolona*, and the new law 2001 – 004, on the use of the traditional customary institution *Dina* in regulating public security at local level, the Ravalomanana government tried to profit from so-called egalitarian traditional rural decision-making structures, already cherished by the socialist Ratsiraka regime (cf. Madagascar Tribune, 06 May 2003: “Administration de proximité: le ‘fokonolana’ remis au goût du jour”; - for a critique of the myth of the *Fokonolona*, as invented tradition, ill adapted to the considerable social differentiation at village level, cf. Gallon 1992).

⁸ “The *fokonolona* ties individuals together in a network of mutual obligations. Its meetings bring together in a cooperative setting people of different kinship groups within a village, and the common use of fictive kinship terms promotes the creation of an atmosphere of amity and solidarity (*fiavanana*), necessary for sincere cooperation. The *fokonolona*, however, traditionally has not been a democratic institution despite its town-meeting character, because its meetings tend to be dominated by influential local notables. Local political power remains a function of age and membership in a high-status kinship group; in some cases, the descendants of slaves (*andevo*) attend *fokonolona* meetings, but their influence is marginal. At *fokonolona* meetings, it is possible to see one of Madagascar's most striking cultural expressions, the *kabary* (discourse), a lengthy speech in which a speaker uses flowery and poetic language to make a critical point in a most indirect fashion. The people will listen silently from beginning to end. Those who disagree will not express their opinion but will counter with a speech that at first seems to support the first speaker but that actually contains a hidden counterproposal. Speakers may express their views by telling jokes. If people laugh or if they simply act according to the second speaker's proposal, the first has lost. Rarely if ever does an open confrontation between speakers occur.” Cf. lupinfo, August 1994 <<http://www.lupinfo.com/country-guide-study/madagascar/madagascar42.html>>

- () **Ravalomanana regime resorts to "Ratsirakism"**⁹: Hardly one year after the inauguration of the new government the political perspective was rather bleak. Again, mass street demonstrations on May 13, 2003, organized by discontented members of the KMMR which had joined the ranks of the opposition in the meantime, showed the anger about the fact that the structure of the political and economic system had not changed significantly¹⁰. The new political class continued with the same comportment as their predecessors, Ravalomanana endorsed all the public institutions of his predecessor which he had severely criticised before (like the biased constitution, the electoral code, the Senate, the autonomous provinces etc.) and the cost of the political crisis was borne principally by the poor (cf. Urfer 2003; Marcus/Razafindrakoto 2003).

The aborted Malagasy culture of political change, which in the beginning looked quite promising to national and international observers, proved to be weakly anchored within the civil society. It was relegated by its own proponents to a shadowy existence beside the reinforced new power brokers which defected from the ranks of cultural innovators.

The test of these two sets of working hypotheses should act as starting point for a more thorough investigation into the interface between cultural innovations and development in the two African countries, compared with experiences and case studies from Latin America (e.g. Haiti and Brazil), guided by the general hypotheses delimited above. A focus on simultaneous comparative analyses of case studies of development-enabling cultural change within the realm of key areas, notably political and civic culture as well as religious belief systems would be recommended.

Expected results:

- New empirically founded conceptual and theoretical insight into the linkage of cultural innovations and development in Africa and Latin America.
- Contribution to the ongoing debate on cultural change and economic development in developing countries
- Contribution to the current debate on Trans-National Social Spaces (TSS), culture, and development in Africa
- Contribution to a new analytical framework for analysing the impact of cultural change on development in Africa
- Identification of promising development orientated cultural innovations with spread effects on national and transnational levels

⁹ “ To protect his seat, [former President] Adm Didier Ratsiraka had invariably made sure that no cohesion existed within the groups that surrounded him. He always saw to it that there was some conflict within the political groups to weaken them. Indeed he thought that they would hamper his actions. Currently, scared by the action being taken by Pety Rakotoniaina [recently dismissed pro-Ravalomanana province chief said to be slipping into opposition, now promoting anti-government protests throughout the country], President Marc Ravalomanana "appointed" Manandafy Rakotonirina [Ravalomanana's special adviser: national leader of Movement for the Progress of Madagascar, MFM, Pety Rakotoniaina's party] in the hope of dividing the MFM party. During his tenure, Ratsiraka firmly kept his government in place, yet its actions were decried by the public and international financial donors. On several occasions, the current head of state made it known that the [Jacques] Sylla government would stay on, come rain or shine.” Source: Madagascar Tribune web site, Antananarivo, in French 14 May 03; cf. BBC, Thu, 15 May 2003: “Madagascar: Editorial says Ravalomanana regime resorts to "Ratsirakism"”.

¹⁰ On May 20, 2003, the FFKM criticised the media and the opposition in a political statement, of destabilising the new regime, but it confirmed at the same time that the mentality of the majority of political leaders had hardly changed. (cf. «Dans une analyse politique la FFKM accuse!», Madagascar Tribune, May 21, 2003).

- Contribution to operational guidelines for development orientated cultural policies in African countries.

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