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*Common roots, shared traits, joint prospects?*

**On the articulation of multiple modernities in Benin and Haiti**

Dirk Kohnert <sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

*The globalized Western culture of innovation, as propagated by major aid institutions, does not necessarily lead to empowerment or improvement of the well-being of the stakeholders. On the contrary, it often blocks viable indigenous innovation cultures. In African societies and African Diasporas in Latin America, Cultures of Innovation largely accrue from the informal, not the formal sector. Crucial for a proper understanding is its structural differentiation according to class, gender or religion, and between different trans-national social spaces. Different innovation cultures may be complementary, mutually reinforcing, or conflicting, leading in extreme cases even to a 'clash of cultures' at the local level. The repercussions of competing, even antagonistic agencies of innovative strategic groups are demonstrated, taking the example of the impact of African religion on development in Benin and Haiti.*

**Keywords:** economic development; cultural change; religion; social structure; Benin; Haiti.

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## **1. On the concept of Cultures of Innovation**

No culture is inherently good or bad, a simple truth that, however, has to be underlined time and again in view of fashionable but doubtful theses on the 'clash of cultures', 'rogue states', and 'axes of evil'. Stimulated by Max Weber's enlightening concept of the protestant ethic as the spirit of European capitalist development, generations of social scientists searched for similar cultural innovations that could promote economic growth in developing countries. Yet, outdated hypotheses about mono-cultural readings of a nation's past or about cultural determinism that were considered inspiring truth, turned out to be oversimplifications of little prognostic value (cf. Sen 2004). Nevertheless, they remain cherished by many scholars and development experts, not least, because they provide ready-made concepts. Though a tendency still prevails to underrate the role of culture in development, there is a consensus in social science that culture matters<sup>2</sup>. The question is rather: What constitutes the decisive element of culture in relation to development, and how does culture matter (cf. Sen 2004; Rao/Walton 2004; DiMaggio 1994; Elwert 1996)?

A holistic understanding of the linkage between culture and development is the underlying rationale of the concept of Cultures of Innovation, developed by the UNESCO (2004), d'Orville (2004) and others. Cultures of Innovation are relatively stable modes of cognition, behavior and social organization, directed towards 'modernization' and 'development'. They are often based on shared values and fulfill important roles of orientation, motivation, coordination, and legitimization, concerning the actual performance of innovation processes (cf. Heidenreich 2001). The concept provides a methodological framework for the delimitation and analysis of cognitive and action orientated elements and strategies of innovative agency.

Today as in the past, Cultures of Innovation have existed not only in industrialized countries but, in nearly every region of the world. However, there is no one-way direction of cultural change. Both the quest for universal growth inducing cultural essentials in developing countries, and the transfer of globalized concepts of structural adjustment, as pushed by

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<sup>2</sup> In the following I use the term 'culture' in the sense of A. Sen (2002) who underlines that culture has to be recognized as "non-homogeneous, non-static, and interactive", otherwise cultural prejudice and determinism lead to alienation, political tyranny, and doubtful theories.

international donors during the 1980s, failed. Pre-conceived ideas that might have had success within the European cultural setting did not act up in the face of the socio-cultural heritage of African societies neither did the opposite, the idealization of *Négritude* or other 'authentic' traditional African cultures. It is important for our purpose to take into account the diversity of mutually competitive systems within any given culture. Neither anything that is modern, is at the same time development oriented, as was demonstrated time and again by the critique of mono-causal theories of modernization. The study of occult belief systems showed, for example, the different facets of the modernity of African belief in magic and witchcraft (cf. Geschiere 1997; Comaroff/Comaroff 1999). Depending on its local environment and linkages to trans-national social spaces, these occult belief systems played an emancipating or delaying role (cf. Kohnert 2003).

On the other hand, even seemingly static cultural factors such as customs, tradition, religion, or ethnicity that are often considered as barriers to economic growth in Africa, have been introduced or adapted to changing social requirements. In many cases, they are not backward oriented, but on the contrary, represent multiple modernities of developing areas (cf. Geschiere et al 2007; Ferguson 2006; Deutsch et al 2003; Comaroff/Comaroff 2000). Therefore, it would be misleading to put the blame for lacking development in Africa or elsewhere on the cultural heritage, as supposedly incorporated in “traditional African institutions” that are frequently considered in a simplistic manner as customary barriers to democratization or economic growth. The underlying dualistic concept of culture (modern vs. traditional) ignores the reality of a universe of different co-existing, and often competing cultures within a society (cf. Sen 2004). A closer look at these so called socio-cultural barriers to growth reveals that African cultures are highly differentiated with substantial instances of 'high modernity' (cf. Scott 1998). Cultures of Innovation depend on space, time, and context specific frameworks. They are a significant part of development-oriented processes of socialization, influenced by globalization and trans-national social spaces (cf. Robertson 1995; Sassen 2001; Pries 2001; Schuerkens 2003).

## **2. Specific Cultures of Innovation within the Informal Sector**

*Multiple Cultures of Innovation vs. Globalized Western Concepts of Modernization*

The breeding ground, for African and Afro-American Cultures of Innovation is the informal, not the formal sector. In the following, I prefer to consider the informal sector with Elwert/Evers/Wilkens (1983:283), Portes/Castells/Benton (1989:12), and Feige (1990:990) as the sector of the economy that is not, or only insufficiently recorded, controlled, taxed, or otherwise regulated by state activities. Hitherto, academic interest and research focused on innovations in the formal sector, e.g. on the state, national political, or economic elites, i.e. driving forces of change and their innovative agency or management qualities, mostly linked with supposedly universal values of democratization and economic growth, with their globally propagated concepts, like good governance, accountability, structural adjustment and free markets (cf. Grindle 1996; UNESCO 2004). Unfortunately, the neglect of informal Cultures of Innovation prompted the disregard of crucial potentials of innovation, particularly in the poorest African countries and in the African Diasporas of the Americas. Redirecting research towards the informal sector is crucial because of the following reasons.

First, because of the utmost importance of the informal sector for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in general and for the African poor in particular<sup>3</sup>. To guarantee the survival of the poor who can no longer merely rely on their local cultural heritage (e.g. traditional norms of reciprocity and solidarity are rapidly disintegrating under the pressure of globalization) have to look for innovative solutions within their social setting that is the informal sector. The quest for these solutions is strongly influenced by Cultures of Innovation.

However, and this is the second reason that will be explained in detail below, significant structural differences exist not only between Cultures of Innovations of the formal and the informal sector, but also within the informal sector. Both differences have serious repercussions with regard to the developmental trajectory.

Third, the fault lines between the formal and the informal become increasingly blurred by globalization. This has been demonstrated with respect to different standards applied to cultural innovations between the so-called 'useful' and 'useless' development regions by Reno

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1990s, the informal sector contributed on average 41% to the GDP in sub-Saharan Africa (Benin: 41%; Ghana: 58%) and 29% in Latin America, according to tentative estimates of the ILO (ILO 2002: 24).

(1998) and Ferguson (2006: 380)<sup>4</sup>, who took 'governance' criteria for strategic investments of oil-multinationals as examples. The enclaves of the 'useful' Africa are no longer delimited neither by national frontiers, nor by the divide between the formal and informal, but by boundaries of transnational economic and social spaces. The chains of transnational enclaves of the 'useful Africa', e.g. of oil multinational enterprises in West Africa (often backed by powerful and hidden national interest), seem to function according to rules and ethics beyond the global discourse on governance or international development cooperation. In these regions, the poor are regularly excluded from the 'useful Africa', as shown by the example of the Niger Delta. They have to accept the particular character of globalization, i.e. globalized exclusion and marginalization. One way to overcome these adverse effects of globalization for the poor is the quest of the stakeholders for indigenous Cultures of Innovation<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, globalization is accompanied by new forms of (re-)construction of social and cultural identities and by a new dynamic delimitation of ethnicity. The strategies of exclusion or of political instrumentation of ethnicity and religion deal with instructive examples (cf. Berking 2003; Kohnert 2003). In addition, globalization is geared toward the integration of new elements of a universal culture that are more often than not adapted to local conditions in order to maintain the identity of the group in question (cf. Berking 2003). Globalization is not just a question of growing uniformity, but at the same time of diversification, the creation of new cross-cultural social spaces of meaning and livelihoods. This kind of 'glocalization' (cf. Robertson 1995; Altvater 2003; Schuerkens 2003) is typical for the configuration of innovative groups in the informal sector in Africa and the African Diasporas in the Americas.

### *Differences between formal and informal Cultures of Innovation*

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<sup>4</sup> Machiavellian terms coined by Reno (1998) with allusion to the French Gaullist interpretation of *l'Afrique utile* vs. *l'Afrique inutile*.

<sup>5</sup> I consider cultural innovations as indigenous if they are rooted in the culture of the group, e.g. in the sense Paulin Hountondji (1997); Paul Richards (1985; 2006), Diawara (2003), and Brigg/Sharp (2004) used the term. Yet, the acceptance of foreign influence and its integration in the local imaginary constitute indigenous innovations as well, notably if these external factors are adapted to local conditions.

In spite of the strong articulation of modes of production of the formal and informal sector (cf. Elwert/Evers/Wilkens 1983), there are decisive differences between the Cultures of Innovation of both sectors. These differences concern both their social and economic structure and the political evaluation of their impact. Generations of innovative Hausa, Fulbe, Igbo, and Yoruba entrepreneurs in West Africa, for example, have contributed to the economic integration of the region through parallel cross-border trade between Nigeria and its neighbors. They established a sustainable culture of trans-national trade networks (cf. Meillassoux 1971; Igué/Soule 1992). Even though pursuing similar goals as the regional organization ECOWAS, they were accused by the latter of undermining national economies because of their illegal activities. Consequently, they were harassed by the state (cf. Meagher 1995; 1997; 2003). With regard to structural differences, one has to note that informal Cultures of Innovation are mainly based on local oral traditions and empirical indigenous knowledge, whereas their formal equivalents rely heavily on written sources, science and knowledge on a global level. As a rule, the former is better adapted to its respective natural, economic, social, and political environment with a strong propensity for flexible responses to external shocks (cf. Richards 2006). Even though their relevance is mostly restricted to the micro or meso level, they bear significant potentials for innovations in the poorer groups even on a national level and beyond (cf. Richards 1985; Hountondji 1997; Diawara 2003).

Indigenous Cultures of Innovation are especially relevant for LDCs, but also for the marginalized population of African descent in emerging industrialized countries like Brazil, notably because of their limited access to resources. Only empirical studies can show to what extent there are still niches for the development of indigenous Cultures of Innovation of the poor under conditions of “glocalization” (cf. Briggs/Sharp 2004). The outcome depends on the relation of different Cultures of Innovation to transnational social spaces.

### *Towards a comprehensive Approach in the Analysis of Cultures of Innovation*

Recognizing the Cultures of Innovation of the informal sector as distinct from formal sector ones does not suffice. Besides the inter-sector divergences of formal and informal Cultures of

Innovations there are strong indicators of intra-sector differences. Moreover, one cannot deny the existence of common intersections of informal Cultures of Innovation. However, recent studies demonstrate that it is crucial to take into account not just the impact of the heterogeneity of the informal sector in general, e.g. its stratification according to different socio-economic strata, as recognized by the ILO (2002) and the World Bank (2006:187), but also a structured variety of informal Cultures of Innovation. The latter may be differentiated according to spaces (geographic as well as social) and cultural settings (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.).

Therefore, I propose a more comprehensive approach to the analysis of Cultures of Innovation that takes into account not just inter-sector, but also possible intra-sector cleavages and potentials. I will focus on the impact of differentiation (class and gender), and its articulation to different regional and trans-national contexts.

The articulation of multiple Cultures of Innovation, its linkages, and mutual reinforcement or obstruction, is especially interesting with regard to the comparison of cultures in Africa and of the African Diasporas, notably in the Caribbean. What matters in this respect is not just the common socio-cultural heritage, but even more its actual embeddedness in common trans-national social spaces, as indicated by the ongoing discussion on the concept of the African Diaspora (cf. Copley 1999; Byfield 2000; Manning 2003; Zeleza 2005). The perspective to rewrite global history 'from below', taking African migration over the centuries as an still unfinished process (in the Habermasian sense of an 'unfinished project') could contribute to overcome the prevailing Eurocentric interpretation of 'modernity' and the linkage between culture and development (s. Patterson/Kelley 2000; Manning 2003; Zeleza 2005). The deplored weakness of current Diaspora Studies (that is its essentialist character and its lack of systematic cross-reference between actual life-worlds of the homeland and the diasporas) let us look for empirically proven links between both, in order to contribute to the advancement of African Diaspora studies (cf. Manning 2003: 506). Hitherto, empirical studies on the current social relations of African communities in Africa and beyond, have concentrated on economic aspects (e.g. remittances, capital flow). Cultural linkages have been disregarded or referred to with anecdotic evidence, although their impact is as important as economic factors. The importance of Aimé Césaire's *Négritude* philosophy (later on adopted by Léopold Sédar Senghor), the US-American *Black Power* movement on African liberation movements, the self-reflection of Africans (cf. Gilroy 1993), or the current discourse on African Renaissance



by politicians of the post-apartheid government in Pretoria bear testimony for the cultural factors.

*Multiple Fault Lines: On the threefold Differentiation of Cultures of Innovation*

The boundaries of Cultures of Innovation do not necessarily run along the formal and informal divide. Their articulation is characterized by a differentiation on three major structural levels:

- Between the formal and the informal sector (*inter-sector differentiation*),
- Between different social strata of the informal sector (*intra-sector differentiation*),
- Between local and global or trans-national social spaces (*trans-national differentiation*).

Depending on the particular impact of these multiple fault lines, Cultures of Innovations can supplement and reinforce (synergy effect), or obstruct and even oppose each other, leading in extreme cases to violent confrontations, resembling local 'cultural revolutions' or 'clash of cultures' (including important changes in gender roles). As a rule, at least one of the opposing groups represents itself as an innovative-emancipative force. Its forging and consolidation as Culture of Innovation, can contribute to enhance the chances of goal-implementation. The members of these social groups contribute with their actions that are influenced by particular innovative cultures, to the multiple modernities that are characteristic for the development process of LDCs. Examples are the 'cults of counter-violence' (Wilson 1992) that originated in the informal sector during the liberation movements of different African countries. Corresponding '*popular modes of political action*', trying to reinterpret traditional communal ideals, and to implement them countrywide, are typical for the transition processes of many African states (s. Geschiere 1997: 99-100).

Within the informal sector, differentiation may run along class, ethnic, religious or gender lines. Actors of the different groups may have access to resources, but have divergent possibilities. Thus productivity, income, and political interest depend on class and gender. The same holds for the cultures characterized by the informal sector. An example for the latter is the *njang-njang* movement of Guinea-Bissau in the 1980s, where women defended their

newly secured cultural rights that they had obtained because of their active participation in the war of liberation (cf. Jong 1987). After independence (1974), traditional and modern political authorities alike did not want to honor the newly acquired gender equality. This was one of the reasons why some enlightened Balante women created and sustained a gender-oriented religious liberation movement, the *njang-njang*. First limited to their own ethnic group, it later spread nationwide, including witchcraft accusations against dominant rulers on all levels of society (s. Kohnert, 1988). Because these intra-sector fault-lines often have a decisive impact on the implementation of the aims of Cultures of Innovation, they deserve special attention. I will demonstrate this phenomenon by taking the example of inter-class differentiation at the grass-roots level between the poor, the middle class and the upper class.

There is a threefold socio-economic differentiation of the informal sector that extends to corresponding Cultures of Innovation.

- a. *The poor*: Cultures of innovation of the poor have as a primordial orientation the assurance of their survival as human beings. But in addition they are often directed towards emancipation from oppression and empowerment; therefore, these cultures empower the group (cf. Altvater, 2003: 14-18). The poor are marginalized because of their feeble resources, including a limited individual development potential (lack of education, poor health conditions, etc.). Their survival as human beings depends on the informal sector, as their access to the formal sector is severely restricted (schooling, labor and capital market, housing, health-sector, judiciary, etc.). The effects of the neo-liberal adjustment programs have rather spurred the marginalization of the poor in the past decades. Typical actors are migrant workers, the families of small farmers, petty traders, child-laborers and child-soldiers. Their Culture of Innovation is restricted to indigenous innovations. They are vulnerable to external shocks (e.g. disasters, epidemics, economic or political crisis) and liable to harmful external interventions (e.g. war-lords, drug- and child-trafficking). Women, children and the elderly are disproportionately represented in this group.
- b. *The middle class*: In general, their resources allow the reproduction of the members of this class. They are deeply engrained in the formal and the informal sectors. However, this class can be divided in two sub-groups. The

low middle class encompasses those whose resources are endangered and who are threatened by social decline. They take part in the activities of the informal sector mainly to secure a supplementary income. Their innovation culture is characterized by the aim to preserve their acquired economic and social status. Typical actors are wage earners and employees in the formal sector, some greater peasants, and small traders. On the contrary, the upper middle class (senior officers, academics, small and middle entrepreneurs, etc.) is oriented towards risk prevention and income diversification. Their involvement in the informal sector is meant to consolidate their position in the formal sector, e.g. a good career in the civil service. Their innovative culture is directed towards social advancement.

- c. *Upper class*: The rich and powerful: their livelihood is secured in the formal sector, amongst others by their affluent resources, and is sustained by social and political networks they are embedded in. They use the informal sector strategically for profit maximizing and risk diversification, e.g. by large-scale parallel trans-border trade (smuggling and re-export of used cars, drugs, weapons, or humans, etc.), warlordism. This is predominantly a male domain and the corresponding innovative culture aims at power consolidation. Local rulers frequently use their innovative cultures for the pursuit of vested interests and the suppression of the poor and marginalized, what leads then to the cultural foundations of 'markets of violence', anchored at the cross-road of the formal and informal, local, regional and trans-national social spaces (cf. Elwert et al 1999; Collier/Hoeffler 2004).

Gender specific lines of differentiation of innovative cultures run across these socio-economic fault lines. Female related cultures typically aim at assuring the reproduction of the family or the emancipation from male dominance (cf. the example of *njang-njang* in Guinea-Bissau, mentioned above). Hence, gender orientated development is not just a normative end in itself, but can be deemed to have positive repercussions on the economic and political development, too. Further examples are given by Chamlee (1993), who shows that women in the Ghanaian informal sector created an innovative culture of trust-based business relations, and Burger et al (1996) demonstrated that the culture of social learning was gender specific among coffee-

growers in Kenya, who predominantly adopted innovations from innovators of the same gender.

African Cultures of Innovation in Benin and Haiti are well suited for an in-depth study of these articulations, not just because of their common socio-cultural heritage, but because of the continuing cultural exchange that is not restricted to bilateral contacts but concerns as well the exchange of Cultures of Innovation between Africa and the global African Diaspora. In times of globalization, the figuration of embeddedness of conflicting groups and cultures is influenced in a growing manner by transnational social spaces, a fact that holds true in particular for the articulation of African cultures and societies with those of the African Diaspora. Again, the impact of these multi-local and transnational social spaces is ambiguous; it can be conflict reducing or enhancing.

### **3. Case Studies: *vodun*-based Cultures of Innovation and empowerment in Benin and Haiti in times of globalization**

A significant number of cultural innovations were inspired by religion. Well-known examples are the impact of the protestant ethics on the growth of European capitalism mentioned before, or the popular movement for democratization and human rights, driven by the liberation theology in the Americas since the 1970s (cf. Smith 1991). In the following I will elaborate on comparative studies of the less known example of popular movements for democratization in Benin and Haiti. They share the strong influence of Cultures of Innovation inspired by an enlightened *vodun* (including its Afro-American equivalent)<sup>6</sup>, combined with different denominations of Christian orientation, on the democratic transition and the empowerment of the poor.

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<sup>6</sup> The African religion of *vodun* originated in the pre-colonial kingdom of 'Dāxome' (Dahomey, in present Southern Benin Republic, still considered to be the spiritual center of this religion and of its Latin American derivatives). West African slaves, primarily descend from the Ewe, Anlo-Ewe, and other West African group, brought it to the Americas, where it became transformed and adapted to the specific social and political conditions of various countries, like Haiti (*vodou*), Cuba (*Santería*), and Brazil (*candomblé*).

The following comparative case studies are intended to generate hypotheses within the framework of the above described theory building. They underline that any mono-causal explanation of cultural change that focuses solely on religion or another single variable, is doomed to fail. The outcome of Cultures of Innovation is a process that depends to a large extent on the link of competing cultures. Only a prudent analysis that takes due care of the articulation of different strands of cultural innovations and their linkage to social stratification, transnational social spaces, and globalization makes for their explicatory and prognostic power.

### **I. Benin: *Multiple local Cultures of Innovation***

Benin, formerly known as Dahomey, is located at the West African Bight of Benin, sandwiched between the neighboring giant Nigeria and Togo. It has a reputation as both, the *quartier Latin* of francophone Africa and the cradle of *vodun*. The Benin democratic renewal (*renouveau démocratique*) that started in 1989 and put an end to nearly two decades of autocratic socialist rule, was welcomed as a model of democratization in sub-Saharan Africa. Not least in light of its possible spread, Benin provides an illustrative example of the impact of innovative cultures on democratization, rooted in, and inseparably linked to transnational social spaces, as explained below. Contrary to a widespread belief, the second wind of change in Benin was less determined by the effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but was prepared and triggered off by popular indigenous opposition movements. As shown below, they were inspired by development-oriented ethics of Christian institutions that closely interacted with agents of change encouraged by a modern *vodun*:

- (i) ***The ambiguous role of African religion and traditional leaders:*** The democratization process in Benin had been initiated and promoted by the 'return of the religious' (Mayrargue 2002). A modern *vodun*<sup>7</sup>, Pentecostals, and the Catholic

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<sup>7</sup> As represented by the syncretistic movement for the inculturation of Christianity and the reinterpretation of the *vodun* (*Mewihwendo*, or *Sillon Noir*, cf. Adoukonou 1989); or by the

Church were united in their opposition to the 'socialist project' of the Kérékou-era (1972-89) that had become incredible (cf. Tall 1995; 1995a). While creating different, often conflicting Cultures of Innovation in the 1980s, they upheld a common aim, paving the way for the fall of the autocratic Kérékou-regime (cf. Banégas 1995; 1995a). Whereas the Marxist policy of the Kérékou-regime in the 1970s and early 1980s regarded African religions and their representatives as a 'relict of feudalism' and was highly suspect of the role of the Catholic Church as well both played an important role as mediator and broker of the *renouveau démocratique*. This resulted in a change of roles in its leading ranks, notably of Mgr. de Souza, archbishop of Cotonou, who became the president of the National Conference and of the interim government. But the failure of the 'socialist project' also resulted in a new legitimization of an enlightened *vodun*, of charismatic churches (like the *Chrétiens célestes*), and of new anti-witchcraft movements (cf. Tall 2003: 77, 87). Occult belief systems, notably the belief in magic and witchcraft, incorporated in both the *vodun* and the Pentecostals, played an ambiguous role in Benin's development process (cf. Tall 1995). Depending on local historical pre-conditions and the actual social setting in different provinces, not all 'traditional authorities' (like village heads and *vodun* priests) were necessarily 'progressive'. Some of them acted as intermediaries and facilitators of indigenous innovative capacity that promoted development, others operated as stumbling blocks of cultural change (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995; Tall 2003). Thus, on the eve of the electoral campaign for the presidential election in 1991, the contender of Kérékou, and subsequent winner of the election, Nicéphore Soglo was poisoned but could restore health. The crime was attributed to political adversaries of Soglo, who were accused of employing witchcraft (cf. interview with N. Soglo, *L'Intelligent – Jeune Afrique*, No. 2094, 27 February 2001, p. 33). Later on the incumbent head of state was cured with the help of *vodun* priests of his hometown Abomey. As a result, the Soglo government officially recognized *vodun* in 1996 as one of the important religions of Benin, beside Islam and Christianity.

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*Atingali* and *Glo- and Kpe-vodun*, imported from Ghana already in the 1930s, cf. Tall 1995; 1995a.

(ii) ***Competing cultures of opposition movements imposed the democratic renewal.***

Indigenous opposition movements in Benin can broadly be classified as belonging to two categories: popular movements of resistance 'from below' and elitist opposition movements. The former comprised organizations from different denominations, notably trade unions and peasant groups that were opposed to the payment of the *per capita* tax, and obstructed or circumvented public regional development programs (CARDERS), and promoted a general climate of passive resistance and civic disobedience (cf. Kohnert/Preuss 1992). The outlawed communist party (*Parti communiste du Dahomey*, PCD, founded in 1977) that established its headquarters in two rural districts (Djakotomé in the Mono province, and Boukoumbé in Atakora), struggled since 1988 to unite these socio-cultural forces in a common opposition and played an outstanding role in the organization of mass protests in December 1989 (cf. Banégas 1995: 29).

The opposition of the elite, spearheaded by the students and teachers unions, were embedded in the informal network of the *quartier Latin* of francophone Africa<sup>8</sup>. They had a decisive impact on the democratization process, and on the organization of the sovereign National Conference (1990) in Cotonou. The latter initiated a peaceful alternation of political power structures in Benin at the national level (cf. Nwajiaku 1994; Adamon 1995; Heilbrunn 1995). This *renouveau démocratique*, mainly organized by an educated elite, that embraced different ethnic, regional, professional, and religious groups of the civil society, was admired and imitated as an excellent example by other African countries. Though even marginalized groups, such as peasants, and local development associations received a chance to participate (cf. Banégas 1995a; Séhouéto 1994), the grass-roots opposition movements, who had paved the way to this first

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<sup>8</sup> The expression „*quartier Latin*“ refers to the high percentage of an educated francophone elite in Benin, compared with other French speaking African countries (cf. Bako Arifari 1995). However, we should bear in mind that the Benin elite, since the advent of colonial rule, 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* is inseparable from the transnational social spaces of French speaking West Africa.

successful civil coup d'état in Africa, were later disregarded and deprived of the fruits of their resistance.

- (iii) ***Indigenous civic sub-cultures in West Africa as pioneers of transition:*** In addition, interactive civic (sub-)cultures in different West African countries contributed to indigenous cultural innovations 'from below'. They were active, for example, in local political theatre groups of students, griots (praise-singers) and NGOs that 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. They promoted a new, more development oriented ethnic identity, based on the mediation of the aims of the modern nation state and traditional elements of Fulbe culture (cf. Bierschenk 1995).
- (iv) ***Bottom-up processes of indigenous cultural change and a transition dominated by aid, local development brokers and venality.*** As a result, the transition process in Benin had been promoted 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 formalized and dominated by a top-down propagation of concepts of western political culture, focusing on institutional change and 'good governance', as promoted by official development assistance. Local brokers of development aid accelerated this change in cultural policy, which was not adapted to sustainable development (cf. Bierschenk et al 1993).
- (v) ***A globalized culture of Human Rights standards strengthened the Constitutional Court in Cotonou as an effective third tier of government.*** Yet, the imposition of western standards of democratization had also notable positive effects. Driven by a strong impetus of liberation from the autocratic rule of the past and by globalized standards of Human Rights (backed by the international donor community), the Constitutional Court under the guidance of its first president Elisabeth Poignon, established a new culture of independent judiciary as an effective counterbalance of power at the national level (cf. Rotman 2004). Unfortunately, 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 the 'African command state' (cf. Kohnert 1997; Elwert 2001). 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 (1996-2006).

(vi) ***The promising development of a free media as fourth tier of control of the state in the early 1990s, weakened by globalized standards of media markets, poor training and venality.*** In the early stages of transition, the free press in Benin, driven by highly motivated local agents of cultural change, acted more as an effective control of government and state administration than public legislative institutions. However, the commercialization and decline of professional ethics of journalism, caused by the daily strife for survival in a highly competitive but limited market, affected the role of the media as fourth tier of state control (cf. Adjovi 2002). Nowadays many tabloids tend to be riddled with venality and tainted by globalized western standards of the rainbow press (cf. Frère 1995). Well-adapted mushrooming communal and private local radio stations, based on a close intermarriage of international technology transfer, local culture and politics, as well as commercial radio management, were also helpful in promoting a modern innovative radio culture at the grass-root level since 1997 (cf. Frère 1995; Grätz 1997). This phenomenon stood in strong contrast to the chronically ill adapted top-down public rural radio extension programs of the former socialist Kérékou-regime.

(vii) ***The newly established laissez-faire culture, cultivated as antithesis to the centralized economy of the socialist state, had ambiguous effects.*** The ongoing top-down program of liberalization and privatization of state-owned companies (such as the oil company *Société Nationale de Commercialisation des Produits Pétroliers*, SONACOP) had ambiguous effects. While it was meant to guarantee effective management, in some cases, it rather tended to create a symbiosis and a concentration of economic and political power during the implementation process. Powerful entrepreneurs, enriched by political patronage, transformed themselves into new political leaders and hidden financiers of the government. One flagrant example was the case of multi-millionaire Séfou Fagbohoun and his influential

political party *Mouvement Africain pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (MADEP, cf. Adjovi 2002: 8) that won nine seats in the National Assembly in 2003. The general secretary of MADEP, Mrs. Antoine Idji Kolawolé, former foreign Minister, was elected president of the Benin National Assembly on 24 April 2003. In order to cope with the aftermath of political corruption during the Kérékou regime, Fabohoun was imprisoned and accused of corruption under the new government of Yayi Boni in June 2006 in the course of judicial investigations of the SONACOP scandal.

- (viii) ***The top-down approaches of decentralization promoted 'politics of the belly' rather than actual empowerment.*** Decentralization policy, as promoted by massive development aid since the early 1990s, was readopted and transformed by local political actors according to their own logic and interests. This did not necessarily lead to an increase in local participation, democracy, or legal practices (in the western sense) at the local level (cf. Grätz 1996; Alber 1997; Alber/Sommer 1999; Bierschenk 1999, 2003).
  
- (ix) ***A long established informal culture of a transit economy, consolidated by globalization and innovative entrepreneurs, promoted more effectively economic growth than aid.*** Democratization without economic growth is hardly sustainable. In this respect, Benin profited from a long established culture of parallel trans-border trade (*Entrepôt Trade*, cf. Igué/Soulé 1992), going back to pre-colonial socio-cultural West African trade networks of Hausa and Yoruba traders. An innovative shadow economy, pushed by lucrative transnational parallel markets (transit economy towards landlocked neighboring Sahara countries and Nigeria) that flourished in the aftermath of the Nigerian oil-boom and the 'second wind of change', probably contributed more to Benin's economic growth than the massive influx of development aid (cf. Igué/Soule 1992; Beuving 2004). In this respect, the 'politics of the belly', combined with the fragile state monopoly of violence and taxation of the new liberal-democratic state that have often been considered as a barrier to economic growth, created, quite to the contrary, a growth-inducing momentum.

## **II. Haiti: *Democratic transition driven by subversive Cultures of Innovation and inspired by vodun***

The specific blend of religious Cultures of Innovation (*vodun* and Catholicism) that stimulated democratic transition in Benin had an impact in Haiti as well, although in a different manner. Nevertheless, the stakeholders as well as outside observers stressed the common African roots of their venture with lasting repercussions. Haiti is the only country worldwide, where African slaves, guided by *vodun* as a liberation theology, defeated their colonial masters, establishing their own free state already in the 19th century. Since the 1980s, subversive Cultures of Innovation, inspired by *vodun* and Christian liberation theology drove again democratic transition.

- (i) ***The Haitian vodun acted as a modern driving force for democratic transition, along with transnational networks of liberation theology, against the firm resistance of the religious and political establishment:*** Since the slave rebellion of 1791-94 and the subsequent liberation of Haiti, the Haitian variety of *vodun* (*vaudou* or *vodou* in French spelling, dominated by Yoruba elements and those originating in Dahomey, and imported by the slave trade) was the religion of the people, and crucial in forming the Haitian ethos and nationality. About 90% of the population adheres to it. In informal politics, *vodun* had always had a great impact, both on the local and the national level. Various political leaders utilized the cult with ambiguous effects, ranging from the emancipation from slavery (the only slave rebellion worldwide that succeeded in creating a proper nation state), to the brutal oppression by the *tonton macouts*, who were assisted by corrupted *vodun* priests under the Duvalier dynasty that ended in political turmoil in 1986 (cf. Laguerre 1990; Rotberg 1997: 28-29; Michel/Bellegarde-Smith 2007). However, the overwhelming part of the elite, politicians and development experts alike, publicly denounced it as superstition, relict of the past and impediment to development (cf. Rotberg 1976: 356).

In addition, Catholicity, recognized by the concordat of 1860 as the only official religion in Haiti, tried in vain to eliminate *vodun*, even though it maintained a fragile peace with its rival by incorporating elements of its liturgy in its own service since the 1950s (cf. Corbett 1988). Thus, in fact, the church copied a strategy, successfully employed already some 300 years earlier by adherents of *vodun*. African slaves had

camouflaged their continuing worship of *vodun*, outlawed by the church and colonial authorities, by integrating Christian elements in their religion.

To counteract dictatorship and human rights violation by the Duvalier regime and its successors, a grass-roots movement for the empowerment of the poor and marginalized, called *Ti Legliz* (Creole, literally meaning 'small church'), came into being in the 1970s. Religion, both Haitian *vodun* and the Haitian variety of Christian theology of liberation, played a decisive role.<sup>9</sup> They progressively transformed these ecclesial base organizations into 'grass-root communities' with a threefold vocation, religious, social, and political. The movement gained full momentum with the religious-political campaigns of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a charismatic Catholic priest of an impoverished parish in Port-au-Prince, in the aftermath of the deposition of 'Baby Doc' (Duvalier jun.). Subsequently, the movement expanded quickly, through the formation of thousands of *Ti Legliz* and similar *Tet Ansanm* peasant groups, notably in the countryside and among youth and slum dwellers in the cities. They were considered as cradle of the '*Organisation populaire Famni Lavalas*', forerunner of the renowned party '*Lavalas*' or '*Famni Lavalas*' (Creole, 'family avalanche' in English, referring to the biblical flood), a title borrowed from a popular peasant song (cf. Rotberg 1976; Taylor 1992; Corbett et al 1999) designed to bring Aristide to power. As a result, the power elite considered the movement a serious menace. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church upheld its critical attitude up to the present days (cf. Taylor 1991: 817-19). Politically motivated persecution, intimidation, torture, imprisonment, and murder were at the agenda. Even the US-government and the CIA, which sided with the Haitian political establishment, realized the revolutionary potential of *vodun* as being greater than that of the Haitian Communist Party at that time (cf. Patrick

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<sup>9</sup> One indicator for the 'marriage' between Haitian liberation theology (*teyoloji liberasyon*) and *vodun* was the close linkage with the famous 'Boukman's Prayer' as base of the *Ti Legliz* philosophy. The prayer, inspired by the wisdom of *vodun*, had been already used as a call for action by Boukman Dutty, a *houngan* or *vodou* priest, that launched the Haitian Revolution, on 14 August 1791, at the Bwa Kayiman Vodun ceremony. Some 200 years later, it contributed again to the formation of Haitian liberation theology (cf. website: <[www.margueritelaurent.com/campaigns/campaignone/presswork/freepersoners.html#prayer](http://www.margueritelaurent.com/campaigns/campaignone/presswork/freepersoners.html#prayer)> (cited June 16, 2006).

Bellegarde-Smith, in: Corbett et al 1999), an assessment that proved to be quite accurate. Notwithstanding, the death of thousands of activist, and at least nine unsuccessful murder attempts of the movement's leader, four years later in December 1990, J.B. Aristide became the first freely and democratically elected president in the country's history. The population celebrated the event as a 'second independence', with reference to the liberation from slavery some 200 years ago. Yet the traditional power elite, the military and economic establishment, reacted with a rollback strategy. Only eight month later, Aristide, the legitimately elected leader, was ousted the first time by a military coup on September 30, 1991.

*Vodun* was officially recognized as a state religion besides Catholicism in April 2003 by the second Aristide government (2000-2004) in a desperate act of populist legislation. The state recognized baptisms, marriages, and funerals performed by *vodun* officials by a decree; this fact constituted a significant step in guaranteeing religious freedom and in breaking down the Haitian social class structure. Thus, during political transition, antagonistic Cultures of Innovation in Haitian's informal sector, each reinterpreting *vodun* according to their own group's interest, portraying themselves as agents of change and 'modernizers', were confronted (cf. Averill 1997).

(ii) ***Popular music, stimulated by a modern interpretation of vodun, was crucial in establishing a subversive freedom culture that promoted democratic transition:***

There is an exceptionally strong relationship between popular Haitian music, power, and politics, as shown by Gage Averill (1997). He establishes four points: First, 'Haitian politics and more generally the struggle for power have been introduced into every arena of musical expression. Popular music, as a discursive terrain, is a site where power is enacted, acknowledged, accommodated, signified, contested, and resisted.' (cf. Averill, 1997: xi-xv). Second, just as in the area of religion, the instrumentalism of music in politics is highly ambiguous. It can and has been used both, as a tool to justify and to camouflage despotic rule, such as the '*noirisme*' by Duvalier's regime, or as a struggle for empowerment of the oppressed, as illustrated below in the case of the *angaje* (politically engaged) music of pop-groups like Boukman Eksperyans. Third, since the 1950s, the message, songs, and rhythms of *vodun* have increasingly been incorporated into popular Haitian music, albeit not in an unchanged 'traditional', but in an adapted modern way, corresponding to the actual

social and political conditions. Finally, the Haitian diasporas, forced into emigration by economic need or by political harassment, have played a crucial role in creating a Haitian freedom culture (*Kilti libète*, in Creole) with its engaging poetry, drama, and music, linking 'traditional' peasant cultures with progressive politics. The 'unfinished migration' of the slave trade, combined with a continuous migration of Haitians of all classes, due to different, often opposed economic or political reasons, contributed to a dynamic and inspiring culture that had a profound impact on the essentially transnational composition of Haitian identity, including its intimate relationship to the West African *vodun* cosmology (cf. Averill 1997: 161-207).

The pop-group Boukman Eksperyans was an outstanding example for such *angaje* music. It was part of the popular resistance movement *Operasyon Dechoukaj*<sup>10</sup> that contributed to the fall of the Duvalier regime. Like other popular activists of *mizik rasin*, or new roots-music, e.g. Manno Charlemagne, Boukan Ginen and the roots band Ram, they combined the liberating aspects of Haitian *vodun*, as represented by the legend about the *vodun* priest Boukman Dutty (see above), and visions of global syncretism of world religions, with demands for the empowerment of the poor, elements of *rara* carnival, Afro-pop and American rock music. (cf. Averill 1997; McAlistar 2002; Ewen 2003: 11-13).

#### **4. Potential of indigenous Cultures of Innovation in times of *Glocalization***

Enlarging the choice by promoting stimuli for innovative actors and by improving the competition of cultures and ideas is an important means to promote development. However, we have to consider the serious problem of asymmetric power relations in a globalized world (cf. Sen 2002: 18-19). The hubris of the *high modernist ideology* (Scott 1998), still propagated by many western and African experts alike (cf. Kohnert 1995 for a critical evaluation), is not only tainted by the dangers of euro-centrism and top-down approaches. It

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<sup>10</sup> *Dechoukaj*, or uprooting in Creole, and *mawonaj* that means resistance, originally from slavery, and currently from any form of oppression; this later expression having the same roots as the English word Maroon.

diverts attention also from exploring the potential of indigenous cultural innovations, but it tends to undermine the informal social and economic structures of indigenous cultures, the ground where local innovations may flourish.

In general, Cultures of Innovation are powerful stimuli for agents of change. However, awareness does not necessarily lead to political action, and not all Cultures of Innovation in the informal sector have positive effects on the poor. In order to have a sustainable positive impact, they must be embedded in a social structure that favors development. In particular, their articulation with social stratification and gender is crucial for the outcome of the innovation process.

Indigenous cultural innovations are thus better suited to promote sustainable development than externally induced innovations with questionable potentials of adaptation, notably if they are reduced to one-dimensional categorizations and identities.

Transnational social networks play an increasing role in promoting the interactions of cultures and in transmitting cultural innovations into the informal sector where they may be adopted easier than innovations imposed by official assistance or formal institutions. The impact of multi-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. It concerns different social strata on macro, meso, and micro levels, as shown in our comparative case study.

To put it in a nutshell, the globalized western culture of innovation, as propagated by major assistance institutions, does not necessarily lead to empowerment or improvement of the well-being of the stakeholders. On the contrary, it often blocks viable indigenous innovation cultures. However, the latter are not *per se* the better alternatives. All depends on their embeddedness in development oriented social structures.

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