

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY IN POST- COLONIAL AFRICA: WHITHER THE STATE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper relates the state to culture and creativity. And that is precisely because the three are interrelated. The paper argues that, culture, being an embodiment of the arts, modes of life, value systems, traditions and belief systems of the people, determines the nature of people's creativity in society. Again, the paper further argues that, the dominant values in society at any historical epoch are the values of the dominant class, which explains why cultural values are the reflections of those of the dominant class. And that is because the dominant class dominates society at all the levels of thoughts. Furthermore, the paper argues that the nature and character of the dominant class determine those of the state because the state is a representative of the dominant class. Thus, if the state is an institution that represents the values of the dominant class it therefore means that the prevailing values and ideas in any society, which are those of the dominant class, are strongly influenced by the activities and character of the state. Finally, it is important, as argued in this paper, that we understand the nature and character of the dominant class in Africa and by extension, the African state, to enable us understand the dominant post-colonial culture in Africa and by implication the nature of creativity on the continent. That is the explanation that has been made here.*

KEYWORDS: Culture, Creativity, African State, Post-Colonial Africa.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that studies about culture are those that verge on sociology and anthropology and that is because culture is seen as not only arts and letters but also the modes of life the value system, traditions and beliefs of a people in a society. Indeed, culture is the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, materials, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society (Payne and Nassar, 2008). Thus, culture, being an embodiment of the arts, mode of life, value system, traditions and beliefs of a people, determines the nature of people's creativity in society. This is in so far as creativity has to do with the quality of the capability of being able to originate (produce) a piece of work or an idea in any field. Consequently, creativity is meaningful to the extent that it is a reflection of new ideas because ideas are one of the components of culture.

However, if creativity reflects culture, in what way is that a matter for the state? In other words, how is the relationship between culture and creativity connected with the state, that a political scientist will be explaining culture and creativity with the character of the state? It has been argued that, the dominant values in society at any historical epoch are the values of the dominant class, which explains cultural values as the reflections of those of the dominant class. That is because the dominant class dominates society at all the levels of thoughts. Furthermore, the nature and character of the dominant class determine those of the state because the state is a representative of the dominant class. Thus, if the state is an institution that represents the

values of the dominant class, it therefore means that the prevailing values and ideas in any society will be those of the dominant class.

Now, back to Africa, how can we connect the state to culture and use the connection to explain creativity in post- colonial Africa? This is the main thrust of this paper which begins by discussing some conceptual notes about culture and creativity. After that, the paper relates culture and creativity to the dominant class where in it is argued that culture is the reflections of the ideas of the dominant class in society with creativity being an expression of culture.

The concept of state and the post-colonial Africa were discussed which exposed the crises ridden post-colonial African state, the crises that are occasioned by the violent struggle for power by factions of the dominant class which is why the dominant class cannot redefine, after independence, relevant ideas to produce a culture that will conduce to creativity. The paper concludes that at present, Africa is enmeshed in anomie (crisis of culture) which is why there is no proper direction in the continent. And that is because the dominant class is in violent factional crisis, which prevents the class from having the peace to organize itself so as to be able to generate rational ideas.

Consequently, the state that is to produce ideas for cultural direction is in crisis and therefore, no authentic and genuine African culture and no meaningful and relevant creativity in Africa.

Culture and creativity; some conceptual notes

Culture refers to the ways of life of members of a society, or of groups within a society. It encompasses how they dress, their marriage customs, and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. It also covers the goods they create and which become meaningful for them – bows and arrows, ploughs, factories machines, computer books, dwellings (Giddens, A. 1993). (Srivastava, 2013) defines culture as the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society.

Kluckhohn and Kelly, (cited in Srivastava, 2013) observe that culture is all the historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men. Greetz,(cited in Srivastava 2013), defined culture as the fabric of meaning through which human beings interpret their experiences take place and and guide their actions. Social structure is the context within which these actions that is why Greetz stated that culture is the fabric of meaning through which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions. Social structure is the context within which these actions take place which explains how people have a similar idea of things, understand them in the same way, as having the same character and the same potential, capable of being dealt with in the same way. They also know that a particular idea is shared (belief) and that the people they are dealing with know, just as they do, what these things are, and how they can be used. Culture explains how people act in concert when they do share understandings. Thus, culture has its meaning as one of the resources people draw on in order to coordinate their activities. Therefore, culture makes possible a kind of independent existence as system of patterns that make the existence of larger groups possible.

To (Umezina, 2014), culture is the strategies which man has formulated to be used to confront the challenges of nature; it is what man has put in place to enable him survive and live a comfortable life. Tylor defines culture in a social scientific sense as the sum total of social

inheritance. For him, culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of a society.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn illustrate a global conceptualization of culture as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, of explicit and implicit, of and for behavior, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their artifacts, embodiments in artifacts, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e.) historically derived and selected ideas and their attached values (cited in Mayhew, 1971 :162).

Culture refers to the ideas, meaning and knowledge, both conscious and unconscious, that people share in a society (Srivastava, 2013). To Falola (2001) culture embodies the philosophy, worldview, behavior patterns, arts, and institutions of people. To Hunt and Colander, culture is the total pattern of human behavior and its products, embodied in thought, speech, action, and artifacts. It is the way of thinking and doing that is passed on from adults to children in their upbringing and can be thought of as the shared language, norms, and values of a society.

For Ferrante, (2008), culture is the way of a people. More Specifically, Culture includes the human –created strategies for adjusting to the environment and to those creatures (including humans) that are part of the environment. In responding to environment and its creatures, humans draw upon strategies already in place or create or recreate their own. These strategies include the automobile as a strategy for transporting people (and sometimes their pets) from one point to another; language as a strategy for communicating with others, and the on-line community. Culture can refer to various things and should not be limited to its common twentieth century sense of high culture (opera, great works of art, etc) sometimes it refers to actual values rather than the process by which these are disseminated. Culture is also linked to socialization, and to a wider symbolic universe which helps condition behavior from virtually cradle to grave. Culture can also be linked to the production of values, especially in relation to education, and the media. The New Webster Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, (2004:314). views culture as the sum total of the activities and attainments of (a) people, at any specific period, about their implements, handicrafts, agriculture, economics, music, art, religious beliefs, traditions, language and story. Also, creativity is the quality of being able to produce original work or ideas in any field. (The New Webster Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language, 2004). Creativity is the production of new ideas whereby in the new sciences is seen as one of the ways of enhancing national prosperity and well-being. Creativity is also defined in terms of production of new problems and solutions, inventions and innovations', in any field of human endeavor.

Culture, creativity and the dominant class.

Culture is a creation of the dominant class and that is because in any mode of production the dominant class manages the base (economy) and controls the superstructure of society which includes norms, values, standards, ideology, music, and arts. The dominant class therefore determines the ideology which the state will uphold, including the foreign policy of a state. Again, the dominant class determines the principles for the allocation of national resources, and how public wealth will be distributed. Thus, from the centrality of economic activity to mankind, the way in which that activity is organized determines all other aspects of social life,

which is why ideas and institutions are produced by the fundamental economic arrangements in society without anyone necessarily willing their appearance. (Goodwin, 1997). Therefore, one cannot survive without making a living which is why the source of man's living is the most basic determinant of man's behavior (Collins and Makowsky, 1984). Indeed, man's economic position that is, his relationship to property is a major determinant of man's life style, interests and beliefs. Under capitalism, which is our focus, the dominant class reinforces its dominant position in the economy by all possible social and political means, including the creation of the state. (Goodwin, 1977). Marx and Engel developed the materialist conception of history to explain the law of human development. The underlying principle of the materialist conception is the role played by economic factors which form the base of society. Everything else belongs to the superstructure such as the government, laws, arts, culture, institutions and ideology. Whenever there is a change in the economic base of society, there would be a change in peoples' consciousness and this logically implies that changes in the economic base would conduce to changes in the superstructure.

Marx observes that:

At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or what is but a legal expression for the same thing with the property relations within which they had been at work before, from forms of development of the forces of production. These relations turn into their fetter. Then comes the period of social revolution with the change of the economic foundation, the entire superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed (Marx, in Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2013:447).

Class for Marx symbolized the collective unity in the same manner as the nation in Hegel's theory. Marx argues that the dominant class ideology plays a pivotal role in controlling people's mind and there are three ways by which this done. First, they depict the existing order as entrenched in forces beyond human control, that is, . things are not arbitrary, but instituted by certain sections of people for their own benefit. Second, ideas explain how the existing order benefits everyone in a society. Third, ideas depict the existing order as beneficial in a particular way, that is, to promote the interests of the dominant economic class and protect class privileges.

According to Marx,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, that is, the ruling class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production has control at the same time of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling class are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, hence of the relationship which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance (Marx, in Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2013 :449).

The concomitant effect of this is that as one class gains control over the means of production, it automatically exerts control and monopoly over the means of mental production, that is, the generation of ideas, ideology, norms, standards, and the formulation of policies. The policies and ideas, which characterize political governance, for example, become those of the dominant class, the class that controls the base while the base in turn influences the superstructure. Consequently, the dominant class in any mode of production is always the one that has control of the base and it automatically controls the superstructure. Thus, the dominant class is responsible for the construction of hegemonic process in society and part of the hegemonic process is the way the dominant class maintains a dominant culture through the use of social institutions to formalize power, consolidate hegemonic process and institute socio-cultural values, particularly for socio-economic production. In other words, through social institutions, the dominant class presents its ideals as the most suitable ideals for society through education, media, advertising, the laws, judiciary and the mobilization of the police force. (Fadakinte, 2013)) Indeed, the same class controls the mental productions that prevail as the values, norms and culture of society. Even government policies are the reflections of the ideas of the dominant class. That is why, most times, knowledge and ideas correspond with the interests of the dominant class. And the dominant class is able to lay claim to the universality of the ideology which legitimizes its position of domination (Giddens, 1996). Also, the position is made possible because the dominant class, not only controls all social relationships, it also dominates society at all the levels of thoughts. (Goodwin, 1997)

Consequently, creativity cannot be divorced from culture because ideas are the products of the human brain in sensory transaction with a knowable material world because ideas are not found in immanent categories produced in the human mind independently of experience. (Giddens, 1996). Therefore, in so far as creativity cannot be divorced from culture, so it is a reflection of the ideas of the dominant class.

The state, culture and creativity

Although the definitions of state vary from what can be described as liberal to radical perspectives, the definition of the state is also a question of linking the state to its origin and or its functions.

The ideas about the state have long appeared in the writings of socio/political theorists and each definition or description of the state has always included power, authority violence and control. In addition, it has always included the fact that people use the state to exercise power. Although, any definition of the state is controversial and that is why it has been argued that the state is not a suitable concept for political theory because it is impossible to define it, and thus, it has since been so problematic as to defy any definition. (Hoffman and Graham, 2009)

However, to us in this paper, the idea of the state will be the radical idea that defines the state to be the dominant group of people that exercises power and authority, through the government. (Fadakinte, 2013) It has been argued that the state is not as old as human society because it is a product only of class society. That is precisely because the state became necessary in order to maintain the dominance of one human group over another. (Jalee, 1977) In other words, as soon as one group or class within a society has successfully used force to dominate another and appropriate its labour, it will then become necessary for the dominating class to create the institutions and instruments that will be capable of giving permanence to a society and be able to control and manage internal conflicts. (Jalee, 1977).

Thus, the state is not a creation of common consent at a stage in human development but that of the dominant class for its own ends. In short, the state is the very creation of the dominant class (Jalee, 1977) and the state not only represents the dominant class but protects its interests. That is why it is argued that state behavior is carried out through human agents (Young, 1988).

As argued earlier, the dominant ideas in society are the ideas of the dominant class, and since the state is a creation of the dominant class, and it is also the institution that represents dominant class interests, the state then becomes the custodian of dominant ideas and culture of the society. Consequently, the character of the state will automatically bear a lot of influence on the dominant ideas in society and by extension bear a lot of influence on the dominant culture in society. The implication of this is that creativity, being a reflection of culture becomes highly influenced by the character of the state. Thus, we need to understand the character of the state in post-colonial Africa to enable us appreciate the level of creativity in the continent?

The state, culture and creativity in post-colonial africa

All the descriptions and characterizations of the state in Africa or the African state either as pre-colonial state , colonial state post-colonial state, failed state, emerging state, overdeveloped state, need not detain us here. We are going to focus on post-colonial African state.

However, let us start with the dominant class and the post-colonial state in Africa, since the dominant class is responsible for the dominant ideas and culture in society and creativity, a reflection of culture. b

The post-colonial state

It is important to note that the state is the power house of society because it is the instrument of order. A class usually holds this instrument in bringing about hegemonic order, that is, leadership, discipline and domination, but before that can be possible, the dominant class must be cohesive united and have a common interest to enable its members pursue their class project (Fadakinte, 2014). Thus, the key political institution in society is the state, precisely because it provides the methods and models for the aspiration of society, by being crucial to development efforts and also as the arbiter of the conditions of the lives of the citizens (Kingsbury, Remenyi, McKay and Hunt, 2004).

The idea of the modern state, a creation of capitalism, as it had evolved in Europe was imposed on Africa. The anti-colonial rule efforts of the nationalist movements by indigenous elites only aimed at reversing external domination, i.e. a recovery of the past, and a chance to construct an independent future (Opello and Rosow, 1999). However, in their struggle for self determination, indigenous elites either accepted the institutions of direct rule as imposed by the colonial powers which was in form of liberal democracy of one man one vote on the platform of a multi-party system or created their own, which would be indigenous to Africa. What happened, however, was that the indigenous elites inherited the instruments of the colonial state machinery but failed to either recover their past or construct an independent future for their society.

One of the uniqueness of the post-colonial state was the evolution of a political class that was created by colonialism but with its own trajectory of development based on the unleashing of capitalist forces. And that was because colonialism created capitalism in Africa, when there

was no capitalist class and also created capitalist political institutions when there were neither capitalist state nor capitalist social classes (Fadakinte, 2015).

Other characteristics of the African post colonial states are low-level of economic growth, difficulty in maintaining the territorial and external sovereignty of poor states, dependence of African states on loans in order to finance development projects. As a result, there are many states in post colonial Africa which have found it extremely difficult to maintain political consolidation within their territory, to protect their sovereignty and accomplish monopoly of the use of coercion (Burnell and Randall, 2003).

To (Alavi, 1982), three important factors are to be noted about the post-colonial state and which give a definition to the state as being central to African post-colonial formation. Thus, the post colonial state is characterized by over developed state structures, particularly the superstructures, a relatively autonomous economic role, creating a uniqueness of production processes and lack of cohesive dominant class as a powerful political power centre.

The African post-colonial State is therefore characterized by patrimonial rule and patronage which has deleterious consequences on the independence of institutions such as the courts, bureaucracies, armies and other state owned agencies (Burnell and Randall, 2008).

Thus, colonization “refigured the terrain” of African society everywhere and even though decades after flag independence from European imperial powers, their experiences of years of past colonial rule still showed how much the ghost of colonialization still looms over the entire African society. (Burnell and Randall, 2008). The African post-colonial state is therefore, disconnected from the African past, and the mass of the African people because of its colonial origin which makes state institutions to possess some peculiarly alien character (Olowu, 1994).

In Africa, competition among contending elites for power and for the control of institutions of the state for direct rule, came to be organized around ethnicity, with different leaders drawing their support from particular ethnic groups whose solidarity they constructed and played upon. That is precisely why, up till now, the control of the state institutions (power) is fiercely contested by individuals who rely on a network of their clans, tribes, ethnic and regional groups. (Opello and Rosow, 1999). Consequently, the African post-colonial state is not cohesive and integrated and therefore state control is far more rhetorical than actual (Kingsburg, Remonyi, McKay and Hunt 2004). It is therefore, tragic that Africa fails to possess the five major imperatives which shape the behavior of the state, which, according to (Young, 1988) are hegemony, security, autonomy, legitimation and revenue.

Culture and Creativity

In looking at culture and creativity, emphasis should be on culture because as observed by anthropologists, culture consists of the overarching values, motives and moral-ethical rules and meanings that are part of a social system. It is also argued that culture embraces not only values and ideas, but the entire set of institutions that humans live by (Harris, 1999).

Indeed, culture is crucial to creativity because culture consists exclusively of learned ways of thinking and behaving which are embodied in thoughts and ideas plus associated activities. (Harris 1999). Thus, the centrality of culture to creativity is explained by the fact that culture is the socially learned ways of living that are found in human societies and which embraces all aspects of social life, including both thoughts and behavior. (Harris, 1999). Thus, man organizes his life in conformity with culturally patterned rules and ideas which make our brains

to get filled with cultural instructions, rules and ideas. (Harris, 1999). Culture, therefore, refers to the ideas, meaning and knowledge, both conscious and unconscious, that people share and that is because culture is concerned with actions, ideas and artifacts that individuals in a tradition learned and share. (Srivastara, 2013)

The centrality of culture to humanity explains that man is not ruled so much by biological or physiological demands as he is by different ways of perceiving the world and the mode of viewing the world is shaped by his cultural background (Cuzzort, 1969). Culture, therefore, invades the mind, becoming obsessions which dictate how the world is to be seen and what we can make out of it. Consequently, the lessons acquired from culture become obsessions which are the reasons why we are absorbed by certain beliefs and attitudes and find it difficult to change. (Cuzzort, 1969). Thus, man becomes a being who live by culture (Srivastava, 2013)

According to (Cuzzort, 1969), creativity and inventions are the synthesis of existing cultural elements because creativity and invention are functions of the cultural base. Thus, an extensive cultural base is required to be creative and once that base exists, inventions, discoveries and creativity will take place. In other words, culture provides the opportunity and where- whither to be creative and be able to invent. And when the cultural base has reached a point, where it is capable of supporting a particular invention, that invention will come into being, sometimes unexpectedly. This is the nexus of culture and ingenuity, which is why (Cuzzort, 1969) subordinates the man of genius to culture.

However, colonialism was diametrically opposed to the cultures of the colonized peoples of Africa. It led to the degradation of African cultural values by making Africans to look at their cultural values with contempt or to out rightly condemn their cultural observances and practices as primitive, barbaric or unbecoming of modern and educated people. The major tools used by colonialism in degrading African cultural values were religion and education. (Nwabueze, 2010).

Consequently, it is obvious that the impact of colonialism has been transformative rather than transitory and that is why more than six decades of post independent years, Africa still lives with colonialism, (Burnel and Randall, 2018), confused and disorganized by psychological violence and the rondo of political and ethnic bloody violence that imperil her future.

Although colonialism was also in Asia, but there is a major difference between the Asians and the Africans with regard to their attitudes to colonization. Thus, when colonialism got to Asia, the Asians kept their culture, but when colonialism got to Africa, Africans threw their culture away. Consequently, when colonial rule ended, the Asians went and picked their culture where it was kept while Africans could not locate their own. That is why it was relatively easy for the Asians to reconstruct colonial culture and recover their past, blend it with selected European ideas and today Asia is the centre of global economic activities.

Again, by the early 1990s, the growing wave of democratic movements turned the African continent into a frenzied theatre of 'follow-followism', which was in response to the agitation for multiparty democracy in Europe, occasioned by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

While Africa was agitating for the liberal multi- party version of democracy, little thought was given to the economy and the economic conditions of the continent. Africans, at that time, failed to realize that democracy is driven and sustained by institutions most notably a cohesive state and society with hegemonic process, political parties, and a productive and autonomous

economy. Today, everything is present in Africa but the above factors which are the needed ingredients for Liberal democracy. Thus, there is “their own” democracy in Africa, today, without “their own” democratic values and culture.

African leaders address their people in foreign languages and African parliaments conduct their business in foreign languages. The languages of instructions in African schools are foreign languages and African academics produce their works in foreign languages and in foreign journals. It is in Africa that a young man of 25 years, with no relationship to a monarchy, will name his first son junior and his first daughter Deborah in preference to African names. In Africa, University students are more superstitious than being critically minded and the African state is more interested in religion and spends huge sums of money in promoting it than investing in science. And that is because Africans seem to forget that religious dogmas and superstitions gave way to scientific thinking and scientific thoughts, in Europe, some four hundred years ago. In other words, Europe started with religion as a dominant value and idea and then to science. But Africans started with science as a dominant value and idea during European colonization but are now more pre-occupied with religion.

Thus far, from the character of the dominant class and the nature of the state in Africa the following areas of Africa, language, education, politics and economy, as the dominant elements of culture, should be critically examined, precisely because they are the most critical parts of culture that give expressions to human beings.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the character of the dominant class in Africa created a state that cannot function as the institution to implement hegemonic process, unite the peoples who are of different cultures and create a united and common identity for them within a given and defined geographical area (country). Indeed, the post-colonial state is rooted in a social formation which originated from colonialism and which became very unstable immediately after independence because the dominant class broke into factions and continue to fiercely struggle for power, turning elections into serious violence and even bloodshed.

If creativity is the introduction of something novel into the cultural system, then a cultural system must be devoid of turbulence before the people can have the peace to think and come up with something new. In Africa, the belligerent nature of the dominant class does not provide a favorable environment for the people and that is because the environment is not organized, structured, with the needed institutions to make the people function as normal beings. Instead, the political elites are engrossed in the political warfare for state power which will not allow the people to cohere as they are always turned apart along ethnic lines, by the ruling elites.

Thus, the post colonial state is fraught with crises, occasioned by factional dominant class, which is unable to realize its essence, that is, the pursuit of legitimation and the enthronement of hegemonic order. Consequently, the fragmentation of the dominant class prevents a ruling class to immerge, develop the needed dominant class ideology and produce a coherent body of ideas, values and principles that will guide and serve as frameworks for socio-cultural values. (Fadakinte, 2013). The African environment is therefore characterized by anomy, making uncertainty, poverty, corruption, superstition and fake religious beliefs as principal features. Consequently, Africa is in a flux, and African leaders rely more on foreign ideas and aids than

challenging their people to think and be creative and come up with new ideas. It is tragic that the dominant class that is responsible for dominant ideas and culture in society is enmeshed in violent factional struggle for power and do not have the peace to articulate ideas that will make the people to be creative.

Again, globalization as a capitalist liberal ideology is further compounding African problems by using technology that is far from the reach of Africa and creating an illusion of collective satisfaction in Africans. Thus, Africa wants to catch up with the “Jones” without realizing that the “Robinsons” have gone far (Fadakinte, 2013).

Today, the educational system in Africa is but the replication of Western fields. For example, how relevant is the type of (Western) education in Africa, to the needs of Africans. How can Africa still tie her development strategies to the models of IMF and the paradigms of World Bank? And as argued by (Ake, 1979) scholarship is an important tool the West uses in controlling third world perceptions of their world and eventually their behaviour. Thus, how does the dominant class in Africa think of themselves, their future, their environment and the future of their societies? In other words, what kind of culture do African leaders create for the people by the implication of their method of rule? Indeed, how original are the political leaders today, in terms of ideas, values and culture? Are they not mere stooges, robots and zombies of Western imperialism? Or can it be argued that Africans are more original in their thinking, values and ideas today, prior to the colonial era?

As argued earlier, innovations and creativity are products of a cultural base, but how is the African cultural base today? It is of course one characterized by confusion and it is norm less which are antithetical to creativity.

What then is the solution?

Africa must revisit the colonial boundaries that were drawn up by European imperial powers. And the best way to do that is to enshrine the right of secession in each constitution in Africa.

The implication is that a people with a common interest and heritage, forming a nation stand a greater chance of being more united with the same language, ideas and culture and therefore will be more peaceful and creative.

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This paper was presented at the Africa Conference under the Sub- Theme the Politics of Creativity, which was held at The University of Texas at Austin. USA. March 24-27, 2016.

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