Fostering Culture and Creative Industries and the Need for Indigenous Peoples' Responsibility to Act in their Own Interests

Ignatius Tirivangani Mabasa

University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabawe

(ignatiusmabasa@gmail.com)

Abstract

While the term industries is exciting because it points to development, progress and sophistication, it can be a problem if it is harnessed together with culture and creativity because industries can be disruptive, bringing in a world system of exploitation, expansion, commodification and profiteering at the expense of the non-commercial modes of production and the indigenous traditional role of creativity and culture. This paper argues that when the logic of capitalism – markets and monetization drive creativity and culture, the ceremonial and ritualistic value and meaning of art can be sacrificed and the custodianship of cultural spaces and practices by indigenous people can be prostituted. The result can be a new type of creativity and culture that does not serve the interests of indigenous people, but of corporates.

Keywords: Industries, Creativity, Commodification

Introduction

In development discourse the word industry is positive and synonymous with progress because it is believed that industries take societies to the last stage of development – a process that was described by American economist Walt Rostow (1960) as a fully developed mass consumption society. This Eurocentric thinking suggests that Western disruption of native Africa by introducing different and even antagonistic cultural traits is progressive. It also suggests that in order to develop, Africa must imitate the Western model which Nayar (1972) termed a 'modernization imperative.' Today, before the "conflict and disorganization engendered in people by a forced acculturation," (Radin, 1952: 8) is over, another global industrial revolution that is driven by digital technologies is playing out. This, the fourth industrial revolution is particularly "characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres," (Schwab 2016) confirming that "Africa has been in a state of profound turmoil and unrest, because of repeated and persistent influences that have come from the more complexly organized civilizations," (Radin, 1952, p. 8). Success stories of industrialization are shared, celebrated and measured in the context of products, markets, profits, economic power and political influence. The Time magazine of 24 December 1990 quoted in Dorfman and Mattelart (1991, p. 11) noted that,

Entertainment is America's second biggest net export (behind aerospace) ... Today culture may be the country's most important product, the real source of economic power and its political influence in the world.

Today, this state of America's creative industries reported by Time magazine 34 years ago is aggressively progressing through global media. According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), in 2021 arts and culture added $1.016 trillion to the US GDP (nasaa-arts.org, 2024). These staggering statistics are a result of varied arts and cultural activities that make up industries ranging from music, Hollywood film studios to fashion among many. This paper looks at how African countries feel compelled and pressured to convert their cultural creative processes into industries in order to be considered progressive. Although cultural entertainment – "the act of embracing the tradition of a country or group's rich history and making it accessible and engaging to the masses" (scarletentertainment.com, 2019) is appealing and advantageous in promoting and preserving culture, it is important to state that African cultural activities can be an end in themselves considering their social rather than commercial purposes.

Where Africa is Coming From

Industrialization promises significant social transformation – but to Africa it comes as a stranger and is viewed with suspicion especially when industries are associated with colonialism, disruption, exploitation, appropriation and commodifying resources and practices that are communal. To Africa, industries are coming from outside, and bringing cargo in the form of foreign ideas, practices and tastes resulting in disruption and transformation of African societies and their cultures, identities and thinking. Generally, industrialization turns people and communities into markets, what has been termed the Coca-colonization (Wagnleitner, 2000) and Macdonaldization *(*Ritzer, 2008) of societies. However, the duality of culture – social/anthropological and economic is a widely accepted notion that suggests that perhaps Africa ought to indigenize instead of throwing away the baby with the dirty bath water.

The idea of treating creativity as an industry is foreign and can be worrying – it is a concept that came to Southern Africa with colonization and the expansion of capitalism. Without appearing to be advocating for stasis, Africans had their own creative systems and models of production which were not about mass-production, mass consumption, mass markets and now mass technologies. Therefore, to Africa the word industry is in a way odd when juxtaposed with the words "indigenous" and "culture" because capitalist mass producing industries are inimical to indigenous creative processes. While traditionally, the process of creating from and for culture used indigenous languages because creativity was not foreign-inspired or profit-oriented, today creative industries of indigenous people are struggling to fit into the logic of capitalism linguistically and methodically. While Article 5 of the UNESCO 2005 Convention reaffirms the sovereign right of state parties to formulate and implement their cultural policies that reduce the risks of the market logic and western economic hegemony, policy makers from many developing countries lack the "consciousness" and national-interest awareness to affirm this right. The reason is partly that indigenous creativity was utilitarian and embedded in, as well as consumed by the societies that created it. Also, indigenous languages were the midwife and life of that creativity because it was not "simply a means of communicating information – about the weather or any other subject. It (was) also a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people," (Trudgill 1974, p.13). Embracing the logic of capitalism therefore becomes sacrilegious in a way.

The synonyms for industry are: manufacturing, business, commerce, trade, engineering. It is clear that these synonyms point to a highly organized, capital intensive, modern, automated and sophisticated mass production system – but one that is not indigenous to Africans. The Cambridge English Dictionary's definition of industry says it is "the companies and activities involved in the process of producing goods for sale, especially in a factory or special area," (dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/industry). This definition is describing a system that favours a foreign means of production. Karl Marx a German economist argued that social stratification is born out of the relationship individuals have with the means of production. Owning the means of production, such as a factory, meant that there was a bourgeoisie who belonged to the ruling, capitalist and wealthy class. In The German Ideology (1845), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels pointed out that "The ideas of the ruling class are, in any age, the ruling ideas." This view by Marx makes it necessary to ask as Africans whose interests industries serve considering that "the margins have a responsibility to act in their own interests and in the interests of their own narrative," (Dangarembga personal communication, March 31, 2024).

The word companies imply corporations that are in the business of mass producing, packaging, marketing and distribution of goods and services for sale even beyond national borders in order to make profit. While industries create and perform for mass markets and profits, indigenous people did not create or perform for money, but mainly for ceremonies, socialization, commemoration and education. Creativity and production in an African cultural context were not commercial. Indigenous creativity and cultural production were mostly communal because they were for the people and their day to day lives and needs. When colonialism came, it disrupted, suppressed and even killed the traditional system of creative production by commercializing culture in the name of development. For example, the folktale was replaced by the novel. One can catch a whiff of the folkloric in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The communal call and response song was replaced by the solo guitar-playing artist and record labels. As for poetry, George Fortune notes that,

The recitation of oral poetry was widely diffused in Shona society. There were certain social occasions which demanded and encouraged it and certain social relationships which received appropriate expression by means of it. These situations and relationships were those of the ordinary clansman and clanswoman and hence were part of their social role, to be learned as this was learned, (Fortune, ND, p. 41-42).

What Fortune (ND) is making clear is that there were no commercial expectations in the artistic performances. The artistic expressions existed to allow the society to function naturally and normatively. The subaltern were acting in their "own interests and in the interests of their own narrative" (T. Dangarembga, personal communication, March 31, 2024).

Forms of creativity in indigenous languages were left to fight for relevance in a rapidly changing and modernizing world where social relationships became redefined commercially. This modernization of society came with its own demands and values which were commercial such that it became mandatory for indigenous people to learn them.

The settlers subjugated African society politically and economically; also began to dominate it culturally. Their main lever was the world of industrial commodities which confronted the African population for the first time and exercised an irresistible attraction, (Wild, 1997, p. 17).

Therefore, not only did colonization induce change, but it also brought cognitive domination – whereby the colonized depended on the colonizer for ideas that they use to define and understand their world. Such a situation is unfortunate because not

much consideration has been given to the very deep personal problems that every individual African has to face in this period of transition, to the fact that the African has behind him an ancient and firmly established tradition, a way of thinking as well as of living, which he cannot, even if he wants to, throw aside overnight in favor of what we have to offer in its place, however convenient it might be for us and for our conscience, (Turnbull, 1962, p. 14).

When the colonized depend on the colonizer for their way of thinking, being and living, they become caricatures (Mabasa 2023) because their lives, thinking, languages and creativity get rearranged and unrecognizable resulting in things falling apart. Since colonization, the English language and culture has become a sign of sophistication, prestige and gateway to the colonizer's favour, culture, status and money. And,

In economic terms, control, ownership and distribution of wealth are still extremely unevenly balanced, the geography and social worlds of both town and countryside are as fundamentally, if less formally, segregated as in the heyday of imperialism, and as far as the modernization of politics and culture is concerned, there are huge gaps between the needs and languages of the different groups of the population, (Kaarsholm, 1991, p. 2).

It is the huge gaps between the needs and languages of the different groups of the population that African governments and policymakers don't look at carefully before they start expecting western models and "success stories" to be replicated. Unwittingly, a hard push for indigenous creative processes to become

industries that generate sales and profits promotes an "expansionary system that has come to encompass the entire world over the past 500 years," (Robinson, 2007, p. 128). This expansionary system is cannibalistic and hostile to the end goal of indigenous cultural expressions, which is not just about new markets and profitmaking but more primarily about the formation of values, education, communication and socialisation. Therefore, the process of changing cultural creative processes into industries is not only disruptive, but presents challenges that require African creators, society and government to perform delicate surgery that does not kill the culture and heritage they once possessed. While African governments expect to see a flourishing industry from cultural creative practices – the process of transitioning from traditional to a modern and foreign way of commercializing culture has not been carefully studied to see if it is right and relevant, or to consider other possible models.

Challenges and Possibilities

While there are many possibilities of fostering culture and creative industries in Africa, the challenges must also be acknowledged and used to investigate and understand the huge gaps between the needs and languages of the different groups of the population. Looking at African filmmakers, it seems they don't make films for Africans, a view supported by Kelvin Chikonzo in an interview. "Filmmakers in Africa do not want to be part of popular culture. They consider themselves elitist, thus they imitate Hollywood," (K. Chikonzo, personal communication, March 31, 2024). If not carefully studied and guided, cultural creative industries can be a new form of imperial colonization and exploitation.

Traditionally in Zimbabwe, Shona people created for society and not for profiles or profits. They learnt to be creative from their communities such that many excellent musicians did not go to music school or know how to read music. Generally, they drew inspiration from tradition and created for heritage and posterity. However, while African creatives need to earn a living from adding value to their creative work instead of continuing to associate creativity in indigenous languages with non-commercial ways of doing things – there is need to strike a balance, or even protect the piper from those calling the tune when the piper feels a responsibility to act in his own interests and in the interests of his own narrative. When a creative fails to make money because they are not in control of all the processes in an industry, they can tragically end up abandoning their art.

Indigenous cultural creativity is not about individuals, but about national development, identity, heritage and pride. Africa needs to find her own model that is not dictated to by the modernization imperative, and one such is what was suggested by T. Dangarembga (personal communication, March 31, 2024) that, "national industries are impossible in sparsely populated countries like the majority of SADC countries, so regional cooperation is imperative." Regional cooperation will not only allow SADC countries to share and exchange cultural expression of ideas, but will bring about "efficient networking, (and) efficient thinking to decolonize and delimit boundaries set for them by colonialism and history. In any case, African stories always travelled, the same way Hare is known throughout Southern Africa as a thinker and an icon of resistance and survival," (Mabasa, 2023, p. 4).

National Indigenous Languages Strategy

African movies are generally not in the indigenous languages of the countries that produce them because the language of industry is English. Besides cultural industries being impossible in sparsely populated countries like the majority of SADC countries, it is also believed that cultural products that use indigenous languages are consumed by smaller audiences. This perspective takes us back to mass production whereby industry chases money and not the interests of indigenous people's own narrative. Where industry sees small markets as not worth investing in, traditional creativity actually thrived by catering for smaller audiences. The growth of indigenous languages cultural creative initiatives may need unique and relevant strategies by Africans. T. Dangarembga (personal communication, March 31, 2024) points out that "African governments are not encouraging the development of African languages for use in all contemporary life areas. A lot of governments, including presidents use colonial languages on the world stage, even in cases where these colonial languages are not their first language. They use their first language to speak to local populations. In this way, many of our leaders consign our symbolic life to the scrapheaps of history, preventing the unfolding of our symbolic contents in today's contexts." The situation that T. Dangarembga (personal communication, March 31, 2024) describes points to a policy and strategy malaise. African Governments need bold national indigenous language content creation strategies – radical and backed by deliberate efforts like former Zimbabwean information and broadcasting minister Jonathan Moyo's 75% local content on radio and television.

National strategies must enable content creators to create for heritage, values formation, identity, unity and nation building as art was traditionally used. Pushing western models and concepts is part of the colonizer's strategies to replace the indigenous with non-native ways of doing things. Art that seeks to turn artists into celebrities and brand ambassadors is capitalistic and cannibalistic. A new African liberation struggle is needed to enable people to,

take back cultural agency that was commonplace prior to European colonization, when communities were able to act as stewards over their own cultural resources and history—examining, remembering, teaching, learning, and protecting their own heritage," (Semali & Asino, 2013, pp. 28-29).

Semali and Asino are addressing the reclamation of African education which has been rendered inferior by dispossessing and dislocating ideologies which make indigenous people blind to the fact that "colonialism reshaped existing structures of human knowledge. No branch of learning was left untouched by the colonial experience (Loomba, 2005, p. 53).

Indigenous language content creators in the face of rapid social change must be treated as endangered species because they and the culture they represent are hanging on cliffs. In modern social contexts that were created by colonialism, cultural creative productions in indigenous languages have been viewed as amusement. Commenting specifically on African filmmaking preferring to use English and not indigenous languages, Dangarembga (personal communication, March 31, 2024) notes that, "filmmakers have no consciousness and real narrative capacity. In most of Africa, the money comes from global Europe who have a conceptual impact on the film, or elites who are no longer proficient in indigenous languages make the films about people like themselves. …the industry is about image as much as it is about narrative, so the films project the narrative a lot of people in the industry want to project of themselves." This analysis

shows the impact of colonial cultural traditions and borrowed methodologies on Africa. This problem is also seen in the celebrated Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera who said, "I took to the English language like a duck takes to water. I was therefore a keen accomplice and student in my own mental colonisation…" (Marechera, 1978, p. 7). Not only did Marechera speak with an Oxford accent, he also disrespected fellow authors writing in indigenous languages having at one time ordered Shona writer Aaron Chiunduramoyo to be removed from a gathering of writers, "Take him out; he is not a writer! *Munyori*, not an author," (Mushava 2021). Without undoing the architecture of colonial heritage and its cultural alienation impact, indigenous languages cultural creative initiatives will continue struggling as inferior.

Possibilities

As part of the strategy and responsibility to act in their own interests and in the interests of their own narrative, creators in indigenous languages who have been creating consistently can be commissioned and given time, space and grants to create, as well as formally mentor young artists to experiment and establish new ways of organically incorporating traditional arts into industry and technology. Availing grants enables creative people to immerse themselves into creating without worrying about putting food on the table. Recently, Tsitsi Dangarembga received an unrestricted grant of US$165,000 from The Windham-Campbell, and the purpose of the award is any creative person's wish "to provide writers with the opportunity to focus on their work independent of financial concerns," (windhamcampbell.org, 2022). The Windham-Campbell does not accommodate indigenous languages because the prizes are global English-language awards that call attention to literary achievement. Besides big grants, African countries need to provide small grants that can go towards supporting incubators for organic and homegrown cultural creative industries. Competitions that involve schools can also be a way to identify talent that gets formal support that can start a cultural revolution of cultural creative industries.

Organic and homegrown cultural creative industries are possible if African governments do not leave that responsibility to donors who may sneak in themes and agendas that are removed from a responsibility to act in the interests of their own people and future. This is something that the draft Fair Culture Charter addresses, including issues raised under Article 16 (Preferential Treatment for Developing Countries) of the UNESCO 2005 Convention. Unfair practices still persist as regards how the Global North treats the Global South. This is the same argument made by Kaarsholm (1991, p. 2) of the "huge gaps between the needs and languages of the different groups of the population." Donor needs are certainly not local needs, and local priorities are not international donor priorities. Indigenous languages and the creativity that comes with them should be nurtured to flow and flourish without being bullied, channeled, shoehorned or hijacked even by governments themselves.

Africa must get to a point where the value, knowledge, role and potential of creatives who use indigenous languages becomes a decolonization project. They must safeguard the cultural institutions and the custodians of African values, customs and identity. Leaving the support of culture, arts and heritage in the hands of capitalists or donors is a huge betrayal and wrong model for growth and sustainability. By supporting creatives who satisfy the themes and agendas of donors and capitalists, Africa will be accepting to be recolonized and have her ideas and heritage appropriated for the expansion of capitalist markets.

Conclusion

History, corporate greed and profiteering make capitalists untrusted partners in the development of Africa's cultural creative expressions. Being able to create from their cultures in indigenous languages and grow the creations into an industry is a liberation struggle that Africa needs to undertake in order to free herself from fitting into models that are western. When Africa has emancipated herself physically, she must also free herself mentally and in her creative processes. Africa must have the artistic freedom to "decide her own destiny," without western paradigms.

While in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved a set of global objectives known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of Resolution 70/1 for the 2030 Agenda, this global call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and promote peace and prosperity for everyone by 2030 (UNDP, 2020) must also consider protecting non-capitalist indigenous knowledge systems of Africans. Africa has vast opportunities and potential, but she must demand space to plan for genuine organic growth of cultural expressions and creative arts that do not abort her values, nor become accomplices in her impoverishment and further relegation to the peripheries. In Zimbabwe, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), a derivative of SDGs is the second in a series of three national strategies that aim to chart the course towards Vision 2030 (Government of Zimbabwe 2020a, iv). Under NDS1, Zimbabwe is aspiring to become an upper middle-class economy by 2030. While pursuing such a status is desirable and progressive, there is also the risk of sacrificing indigenous values, identity and languages for social status and material comfort as a new value system. An upper middle-class economy by 2030 looks like a promotion into the wealthy class, but unfortunately one without the ruling ideas.

Striving to turn culture into creative industries may be inevitable because it is in response to social change, however in the process Africa risks losing or killing those "activities which embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have," (https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-activities, 2005). This is so because the capitalist world-economy establishes market and production networks that eventually bring all peoples around the world into uniformization of thinking, processes and products. On the other hand, the cultural expressions that are found in the villages are unique, utilitarian, for the people, and not for profit. Commercialising them for the masses is prostituting and infecting their aura and sacredness.

References

Cambridge English Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/

Dorfman, A., & Mattelart, A. (1991). *How to Read Donald Duck*. I. G. Editions.

Fortune, G. (n.d.). *Shona Traditional Poetry*. African e-journals Project. Michigan State University Libraries. Retrieved from http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Government of Zimbabwe. (2020). *National Development Strategy 1 January 2021 – December 2025*. Government Printers.

Kaarsholm, P. (1991). Introduction. In P. Kaarsholm (Ed.), *Cultural Struggle & Development in Southern Africa* (pp. 1-15). Baobab Books.

Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism-postcolonialism*. Routledge.

Mabasa, I. T. (2023). *Chave chemutengure vhiri rengoro: Husarungano nerwendo rwengano dzevaShona*. Edulight Books.

Mabasa, I. T. (2023). Chifunyise and the folktale as ideology and pedagogy: an autoethnography. *South African Theatre Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2023.2276452

Marx, K. (1998). The German Ideology. In J. Rivkin & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2nd ed., pp. 653–658). Blackwell.

Marechera, D. (1978). *The House of Hunger*. Heinemann.

Mushava, O. (2021). When Dambudzo Marechera Met Aaron Chiundura Moyo: A Brief History of Zimbabwe's Language Wars. Retrieved from https://brittlepaper.com/2021/11/when-dambudzo-marechera-met-aaron-chiundura-moyo-a-brief-history-of-zimbabwes-language-wars-onai-mushava-essay/

McGovern, S. (2013). *Education, modern development, and indigenous knowledge: An analysis of academic knowledge production*. Routledge.

Mishler, C. (2013). *The Blind Man and the Loon: The Story of a Tale*. University of Nebraska Press.

NASAA. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/facts-figures-on-americas-creative-economy/

Nayar, B. (1972). *The modernization imperative of Indian planning*. Vikas.

Radin, P. (1952). *African Folktales and Sculpture*. Pantheon Books Inc.

Ritzer, G. (2008). *The McDonaldization of Society*. Pine Forge Press.

Robinson, W. (2007). Theories of Globalization. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470691939.ch6

Rostow, W. (1960). *The stages of economic growth*. Cambridge University Press.

Scarlet Entertainment. (2019). *What is Cultural Entertainment (and why you should book this for your event)*. Retrieved from https://scarlettentertainment.com/blog/what-is-cultural-entertainment-and-why-you-should-book-this-for-your-event

Schwab, K. (2016). The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What it means, how to respond. *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org

Semali, L. M., & Asino, T. I. (2013). Decolonizing cultural heritage of Indigenous people and their knowledge from images in global films. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2*(2), 1-20.

Trudgill, P. (1974). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. Penguin Books.

Turnbull, C. M. (1962). *The Lonely African*. Simon and Schuster.

UIS. (1994-2003, 2005). *International Flows of Selected Cultural Goods and Services*. Retrieved from https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-activities

United Nations Development Programme. (2020). *2019 Annual Report. United Nations Development Programme*.

UNESCO. (2023). Fair Culture Charter (Draft as of 12/11/2023*)*. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2013). Basic texts of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2013 edition. *UNESCO.*

Wagnleitner, R. (2000). *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The cultural mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. University of North Carolina Press.

Williams, S. (1991). Art in Zimbabwe: From Colonialism to Independence. In P. Kaarsholm (Ed.), *Cultural Struggle & Development in Southern Africa* (pp. 137-160). Baobab Books.

Windham Campbell Prizes. (2022). *Tsitsi Dangarembga*. Retrieved from https://windhamcampbell.org/festival/2022/recipients/dangarembga-tsitsi