

# The Great Delusion: Post-Colonial Language Policy in Africa Reviewed

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## Abstract

Functional inter-cultural communication using one language assumes either the capability of expressing the unfamiliar using familiar terms or the inconsequentiality of the failure to do so. This assumption is shown to be inaccurate. Strategies used in the West to counter racism when communicated globally are found to be problematic in their apparent denial of the human and social realities of other cultures. Denying non-Western countries, especially those using European languages as in much of Africa, the means to recognise and in turn deal with the peculiarities of their own cultural contexts has tragic consequences. A focus on Africa shows how use of European languages are contributing to enormous dependence on the West and / or magic, and to gross under-development. Many examples of ignored cultural traits are outlined and explained. Vulnerable intercultural exposure using non-Western languages with concentrated efforts at understanding people's theologies, is advocated as the way forward.

## 1.0 Introduction

I asked an African Luo man which language was the best for discussing issues about his people. Out of English, Kiswahili and his mother tongue, he said all were equally suitable. I then asked him if he had heard of something called *chira* (a mother tongue word). Yes he had. I asked him how important this was to his people. "Very important" he said. The Luo people spend much of their lives avoiding *chira* – a kind of curse.<sup>1</sup> When I asked him what term(s) could be used to refer to *chira* in a conversation in English or Kiswahili – he drew a blank. There is no known term in Kenyan English or Kiswahili.

There not being a term for *chira* in these languages (English and Kiswahili), does not in itself mean that it cannot be spoken about. It could be referred to as 'that thing', or the word *chira* itself could be borrowed from the mother-tongue language (*Dholuo*). Or, the presence of *chira* could be assumed by participants in a conversation even without being mentioned.

The above mechanisms enable people to talk about something without using a word for it. That is, even if the culture underlying a particular language being used does not have the particular cultural trait under discussion. Language users can 'talk around it', and in that sense adjust the use of that language to their own culture.

A problem arises if others from different ethnicities or cultures come to *overhear* that conversation. Assuming that they 'know' the language in use, they will expect to understand what is going on. But missing frequent implicit references to something very important to the speaker's concerned about which they know nothing can throw their understanding way off-course.

This is the situation under consideration comparing Sub-Saharan African peoples and European peoples in this article. The language used these days is often common. English, French and Portuguese (and other European languages) are widely used in Africa. Presumably (and this author finds this to be the case) there are aspects of African tradition that are different to those of European peoples. And there are aspects of European traditions

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<sup>1</sup> The Luo people spend much of their lives avoiding *chira* – a kind of curse. I give this definition very loosely because in reality *chira* is not translatable into English.

that are different to those in Africa. This article asks: what happens to these differences in the course of inter-cultural communication? Things not mentioned by conversants may be essential to language comprehension. How many such things are there? How significant are they? How much do they interfere with inter-cultural discourse? What can be done about this?

## 2.0 The Question of Translatability

Some may not agree that there can be words, such as *chira* mentioned above, that cannot be translated. The failure to perceive un-translatability has given scholars a confidence in inter-cultural communication that I believe to be misplaced.

The word ‘snow-plough’ clearly cannot be translated directly into the language of a people living in an equatorial region. But, those in favour of translation will argue that the same meaning as snow-plough can be communicated by using more words. Perhaps; ‘a device attached to a vehicle which pushes snow aside as the vehicle moves forward’. Then to explain snow; ‘a white substance made of pieces of water that are cold’ ... and so on.

But, this will only work if the *components* of one language are there in another language. To tell people who have never seen a vehicle that it is an elephant made of steel with wheels that eats people (the driver) is less helpful. Of course many African societies until recently had no wheels, and the only known metal was on the end of a spear or axe. So the animal called vehicle has odd shaped legs and a skin made of axe heads. How does one explain the cold of sub-zero temperatures to someone for whom the most extreme cold he has ever experienced has had him put on a shirt? Can such a person comprehend the feeling in one’s hands after holding them in snow for a minute? Is a ‘snow-plough’ the same as a ‘sand-plough’?<sup>2</sup>

While it is true that someone can acquire some understanding of a foreign word through translation, this understanding cannot be 100% if the foreign language is linked to a culture that is less than 100% identical to his / hers. The percentage of understanding may be quite low, to the point at which it could be said that a word is in effect *untranslatable*.

## 3.0 The Existence and Nature of Cultural Difference

Lip service is often given to cultural differences. No level-headed scholar would overtly deny their existence. Examples are variously discussed: Some people shake hands, and others do not. Kissing may be an accepted and normal form of greeting or otherwise. Some people want to stand embarrassingly close when they talk to you. Then of course people’s ‘religions’ are different – but then ‘that is their private business; so it is thought. It is as if we deal with ‘cultural differences’ in the polite chat that precedes a serious meeting; but then the same are considered to have disappeared when we get down to ‘real business’. As if culture can be confined to a box and quarantined like a virus in a computer to make sure it does not interfere with ‘normal’ operations.

It is this view of ‘cultures’ that I want to critique. It is a pragmatic view apparently widely held in the West. It is the basis from which the West – perhaps especially the monolingual USA and the UK – choose to ignore the complexity in the world around them, preferring to treat ‘everyone else’ as if they are ‘like them’.

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<sup>2</sup> My examples refer to the content of Western culture not found in Africa. The reverse also applies, but for obvious reasons is difficult to explain in English.

I will draw a comparison between Sub-Saharan African and Europe or ‘the West’. I write as a Westerner, pointing out ‘differences’ that are there in African societies that I believe to be deeply consequential to all sorts of communication let alone development processes. I do so because I consider it vital if there is ever to be a prosperous Africa, for the West that greatly economically dominates the continent, to do so while taking account of and not ignoring such differences.

I am aware of an evil called ‘racism’ Those who point out racial differences risk being accused of perpetrating such ‘evil’. It would be tempting to say nothing and be quiet, if it wasn’t for the fact, that is, that there is also an ‘evil’ that arises from the ignoring of difference. Ignoring difference can be racist, if this means that differences cannot be permitted or *addressed*. The West’s choosing to minimise perception of differences in the name of avoiding racism becomes very problematic on the international scene: If an assumption is made about a person coming from country X visiting a Western country, the same assumption by extension will be made by the West regarding people who live at X. The same assumptions are implicitly contained in material produced by the West and subsequently will be spread globally via the internet, radio, television, educational curricula etc. As a result the global information system feeds foreign countries with assumptions about *their* people which by ignoring cultural differences assumes them to be ‘Western’, whether this is the case or not.

Hence strategies used by Western countries to counter racism can have a debilitating kickback on the rest of the world. For example in line with the West, Kenyan family life is typically depicted with Western style nuclear families and homes, implicitly ignoring African peoples and culture (traditional houses and large families).<sup>3</sup> Linguistically, educated people around the world speak English, but unlike in native-English speaking countries, skillful English use comes only at great cost in time, finance and close contact with the West. Hence Anglophone Africa’s orientation to English gives it a deeply rooted dependency.

Attempts at resolving cultural issues that happen not to be issues in the West are suppressed by the West’s domination of the international media and education, which penetrates increasingly into people’s lives and homes. It is, I suggest, imperative for the sake of world-wide stability and progress in this globalising age, for Western societies and scholarship to wake up to the need to recognize and value *difference* as an ongoing quality and not something to be countered by all means possible; especially monolingual globalising communication processes.

#### **4.0 Little-known But Socially and Economically Consequential Aspects of African Life and Culture**

African people’s orientation to freely sharing material goods but concealing information mentioned by Maranz (2001:30) contributes to the ignorance of Western Scholars, who are having an increasingly powerful controlling influence over the African continent. I seek to redress this imbalance below by frankly and openly stating and explaining functionally important aspects of African culture that differ from the West. As I do so I will emphasise both the importance and the hidden-ness of these cultural features.<sup>4</sup>

##### **4.1 David Maranz’ Study**

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<sup>3</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>4</sup> The hidden-ness of the features I consider makes it difficult at times to draw on supporting literature, forcing me instead to draw on the experience of having lived in rural Africa using African languages for 20 years.

David Maranz has done excellent research in this area by focusing on differences between African and Western economics (Maranz 2001). This extra-ordinarily honest and comprehensive (within the parameters set by the author) study is well worth a careful read. I will look at only a few of Maranz' points here.<sup>5</sup>

Maranz finds Western and African economics to be incompatible (2001:1) – rather than one dovetailing into another, they clash. He points out that the *only* basis for meaningful relationship between African and Westerner is typically the Westerners' resources (2001:9). Africans will, says Maranz, defend to the hilt the sharing of resources amongst themselves and the use of resources for the next immediate need, such that “the notion of ‘surplus’ cannot be separated from that of ‘selfishness’” (2001:19). The better off in Africa have an *obligation* to give to the less-well-off (2001:35). Money itself can be resented (2001:39) and borrowed money is not designed to be paid off (2001:52). Anything less than great generosity on the part of the wealthy towards the less-well-off is easily taken as “beneath the patron's dignity” (2001:54). Friendships are invariably entered into for material advantage, such that “... a disinterested friendship is something without sense” (2001:65). Offering a choice of food or drink to a visitor is considered impolite, so instead food is just prepared (2001:80). Ambiguity in plans is greatly liked (Maranz 2001:92).

It is helpful to note that Maranz's observations, being comparisons ‘with the West’, are not the kind of observations that Africans would or could themselves make. Africans will not find their economics to be incompatible with Western ones, unless they first do some in-depth studies of Western economics. Rather – the proximity of a Western economy provides a major boost to theirs. Africans will not make the observation that their friendship are materially based, because they do not “have the concept of real disinterested friendship ...” with which to contrast their own (Maranz 2001:65). Generally, they do not believe that anyone else can have ‘disinterested friendships’ in the Western sense. There is an accepted ‘game’ when it comes to borrowing money, in which promises are made in good faith to return what is being borrowed. The difference with the West is that a change of circumstances that delay or prevent repayment is considered normal and to be the responsibility of the person lending money and not the fault of the one borrowing.

I highly-recommend Maranz' book for anyone wanting to engage seriously with the African context. There are just a few points where I would disagree with him. One is on his advice given near the end of his book, to the effect that it is appropriate for Westerners to continue being generous (2001:208). He seems not to realise that the generosity of Westerners in Africa “puts in place mechanisms that lead to dependence and perpetuate the poverty they were supposed to eradicate ....” (Domingues nd:7). It can be more helpful to encourage African people to work “to the extent that is possible, also with the financial resources *they* can gather” (Domingues nd. :7) (my emphasis). My second point of difference with Maranz relates to the origin of the beliefs of African people. Maranz, expresses a materialist view of the origin of African cultural features, in saying that Africa has developed its economic principles in response to being subject to continual disasters (Maranz 2001:2-3). Maranz apparently does not consider the reverse option – that African people's vulnerability to disasters could arise from the particular nature of their culture and beliefs.

#### **4.2 A Tax on Privilege**

African tradition seems to have its own equivalent to tax systems that are designed to avoid excesses of poverty and wealth in Western countries. This is what I am calling a ‘tax on

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<sup>5</sup> I have also considered Maranz's article in depth in Harries (2008a).

privilege'. While similar to the points mentioned by Maranz, it seems to deserve special attention.

The 'tax on privilege' arises from the African assumptions that everyone has a right to benefit from any surplus wealth held by someone else, presumably linked to the assumption that there is a limited amount of available 'good' (Foster 1973:35). One person having more implying another having less underlies people's freedom to demand things from someone who has (or appears to have) more. Such demand is likely to be met a positive response because of African people's fear of spirits that take revenge on anyone who appears to be unnecessarily selfish. A very common means of avoiding the making of such demands, is to present an appearance of poverty even when much wealth is actually available. This appearance of poverty easily 'fools' visiting Westerners who can extend generosity to help a person, then are frustrated when he /she chooses to perpetuate the same overt lifestyle! Should the person be forced to 'appear better off' he/she may be in trouble with the witches. (According to Hinfelaar, the person may find protection from witches via 'Muzungu' status (i.e. as if he / she is a European) if they live a European lifestyle – but such 'cover' is likely to be only temporary (2007:243).)

Even lengthy dialogue with such a person will most likely not reveal their true circumstances, simply because keeping circumstances hidden is a key objective of many African people (Maranz 2001:30-31). Asking someone to 'declare their' wealth' will certainly raise suspicions regarding the motive of the questioner; especially that he / she is jealous and may enlist witchcraft powers to push the person concerned back into a state of poverty (Harries 2007a:50).

The kinds of clever means used to assist the operation of a task that are highly valued in the West easily become suspect in Africa. Go to a bicycle repair-shop in a Western country and elaborate sophisticated machines that ease the repair-person's task may be in place.<sup>6</sup> In the parts of Africa with which I am familiar a repair-person will operate outside on a dirt floor and often in the sun with a scanty set of worn out tools. Should such a repairman invest in more sophisticated technology, he could quickly become the target of jealous attacks aimed at returning equality, at the bottom. Not wanting to appear proud or to put himself in a singular class, the repairman will ensure that his worksite continues to look rough-and-ready, regardless of how much money s/he makes.

#### **4.3 Male / Female Roles**

African people are under immense pressure to appear to be following Western models of gender. Spirited Westerners with (on the African scale) vast amounts of money are seeking to prove that feminism is as relevant to Africans as to Europeans or Americans. They will not fail to get a following in African countries where money is always short (for some of the reasons mentioned above).

On the ground, a very different picture emerges. Somewhere in ancient history it was considered wise that, as far as is practical African men and women be given distinct responsibilities in households. I found such articulated in a discussion on gender roles that I stumbled on in an indigenous African church in rural Kenya recently (Indigenous 2008). Men are to build houses and *provide*, it was emphasized. The person responsible for the running of the home is the woman. Some western Kenyan languages refer to a woman going

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<sup>6</sup> For example, stands for holding a bicycle that is being repaired, electric pressure pumps, numerous shapes of pliers, various sets of spanners and so on.

to be married as “she has gone to cook”.<sup>7</sup> The role of a woman, a friend explained to me on another occasion, is to care for the people she finds at her husband’s home whoever they may be. At the above church the comment was made, to loud acclaim and with vocal agreement by people of both genders, that a woman is the floor, and it is up to her to pick up and look after whatever comes into her house.

Observers at camps for internally displaced people following post-election violence in Kenya in early 2008, have noted that men frequently picked up no domestic duties – despite the severity of the crisis their families found themselves in (personal report received while in Kenya). Having lived in a Luo village in western Kenya for 15 years, I can quite understand this. It is shameful for a woman to be sitting idle while a senior adult male in her family engages in domestic duties. While in USA in early 2007, I noted comments to the effect that divorce rates were very high for African-Americans.<sup>8</sup> That is not surprising – if the man’s role is to provide, then state provision directly to the home usurps his role. Friendships, even in marriage, being strongly and overtly based on mutual material advantage (see above) and a man’s authority traditionally being rooted in women’s dependence on him, means that state provision for single-parent families seriously undermines a man’s position. The particular division of responsibilities in African homes makes them, I suggest, much more liable to collapse under pressure from state social security systems than Western households.

As in other cases already referred to above, this nature of households of African origin is largely concealed from Western society. It is not in the economic interest of an African woman to deny being a feminist. Being known as a traditionalist even in the formal sector of one’s own African country (where the formal sector is almost invariably Western dominated) will simply earn one the reputation of being ‘primitive’. Instead, the way forward for African families is in lies and half-lies – even in denying what one is. Unfortunately once lies begin, then there is no knowing where they will stop.

Having so far merely added a few details to Maranz’s already very comprehensive descriptions, I now want to go one further than Maranz and seek to show how these cultural differences are rooted in what is in the west known as ‘religion’.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.4 Link with the living-dead**

Mbiti has found the ‘living dead’ to be the most appropriate term for use in English to describe African ancestors (Mbiti 1969:25). In other words, according to this renowned scholar and supported by many others; the dead in Africa are never really dead. They continue to hold a strong guiding hand over the activities of the living.

This hold of the living-dead over living communities becomes very evident, when someone interacts closely with African communities over an extended period. As many other aspects of African life it remains hidden if contact is occasional, especially when interaction is through the medium of Western languages and in a non-African context.<sup>10</sup>

2008 post-election turmoil in Kenya has taken a very tribal face. Injustices faced by previous generations are not easily forgotten – as the dead of those prior generations having become the ‘living-dead’ are still ‘alive’ in the communities concerned. A pre-occupation of African communities with their dead can be seen in attention given to death announcements. These

<sup>7</sup> *Dholuo*: “*nodhi tedo*” (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> “Black children are only half as likely as white children to be living in a two-parent household, and are eight times more likely than white children to live with an unwed mother” (Cherlin 1992).

<sup>9</sup> While noting that there is no category called ‘religion’ in holistic African worldviews.

<sup>10</sup> This ‘non-African context’ may be the home of a foreigner, communication over the internet, etc.

take a lot of time in national radio, and many pages of newspapers.<sup>11</sup> Vast expenses are incurred in transporting bodies and arranging elaborate funerals attended by hundreds or even thousands in remote rural locations. Observing Christian churches it will be noted that critical debates and splits revolve around issues relating to the dead. For example, an important reason for the CCA (Church of Christ in Africa) to split from the Anglican church in Kenya in 1957 was the desire to hold traditional memorial services.<sup>12</sup> While prohibited by Anglicanism at the time; these are now widely accepted even in Anglican churches in many parts of Kenya.

The attention given in African Christianity to demons is widely known (Onyinah 2002:2). The link between these demons and untoward ancestors becomes apparent on close examination. Numerous popular spiritual churches found through much of Eastern, Southern and West Africa focus strongly on ancestors.<sup>13</sup> The way these operate remains a mystery to many Westerners. Years of living in western Kenya have taught me that these churches' popularity is closely related to their ability at communicating with and pacifying spirits. These unseen spirits are extremely influential participants in many conversations that go on between African people (Harries 2008b in print).

This link with ancestors is a critical part of ensuring the smooth operation of African families and communities. (For information on how this operates see below on *Chira*). One reason for the strength of witchcraft beliefs in urban areas is that mixing African ethnicities reduces ancestral power (Ellis 2007:47).<sup>14</sup> Such decline of ancestral powers, contributes to the lawlessness that can be found in some dislocated and Diaspora communities of African people. Hence the difficulties faced by African children raised in orphanages and similar residential institutions run by foreigners, typically Westerners, who do not respect the role of the living dead in Africa.

#### 4.5 The Impact of Chira

There being no English equivalent has forced me to use the Luo version of this term (the Luo are one of the large ethnic groups that live in Western Kenya). My information comes primarily from the Luo people themselves, although I assume that there are equivalents elsewhere on the continent, which could be unearthed through a close study of people's languages and cultures.

*Chira*, (already mentioned at the start of this article) can be understood as being a debilitating disease affecting people who contravene laws laid down by previous generations – i.e. the living dead. For the Luo people these laws (*chike*) are very numerous and extraordinarily complex. It can be said that both the number and complexity of laws is endless, and constantly being added to (while other laws are presumably also being forgotten). Lists and descriptions of these laws make up some of the very few books written by Luo people for the benefit of their fellow-countrymen in their own language.<sup>15</sup>

These laws must be followed to avoid *chira* (and in turn death – as *chira*, if not treated (and some forms cannot be treated) inevitably results in death). By way of example, these laws include:

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<sup>11</sup> Three to five or more pages (out of a total of 68) are taken up daily in the national Nation Newspaper in Kenya for death and funeral announcements. These are not obituaries, but announcements that are privately paid for.

<sup>12</sup> I have learned this in the course of interacting with these churches over many years.

<sup>13</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>14</sup> Instead, witchcraft forces utilise the power of modernity.

<sup>15</sup> For example Mboya (1983) and Raringo (nd.)

1. Brothers must marry in the order in which they are born. For a younger brother to marry while an older one remains single can result in *chira*.
2. Widows must be inherited following the death of their husbands in order to be freed for normal social interactions. Inappropriate social contact with widows prior to their being inherited can result in *chira*.
3. Certain sexual relationships, such as that between a man and a younger wife to his (living) father, or between a boy and a married woman, are likely to bring *chira*.
4. Planting of fruit trees has traditionally been thought to bring *chira* (Mboya 2001).
5. Failing to keep to prescribed gender roles in a household (see above) is likely to lead to *chira*.

*Richo ema Kelo Chira* (It is *Richo* that brings *Chira*) is the title of a book written in *Dholuo* by Paul Mboya (1978). The history of the term *richo* is also complex. It is the plural for bad (*rach*), but has been adopted by missionaries to the Luo people to represent *sin* (i.e. to translate the New Testament term  $\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\alpha$  (*hamartia*) (Stafford 2003). Perhaps the title of the book can most simply be translated in English by saying “breaking of taboo brings *chira*”.

Fear of *chira* for the Luo community can be compared to the role of a bucket in relation to water. That is – it sets the boundaries to life that maintain its orderliness. At the same time as being extremely widespread and penetrating in its influence, this influence (as that of traditional laws – *chike*) is widely denied by Luo people. Such denial seems to be a rhetorical device – a means of using language as an attempt to generate reality (see Harries 2007a:54). Someone repeatedly and vocally denying being a thief clearly shows that they have been accused and so may be guilty. That is – strong denial can indicate guilt for a crime. The Luo peoples’ fear of the consequences of *chira* and indeed other African people’s overt denial of their particular equivalent, may not mean that *chira* is toothless.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.6 The Location of Good and Evil

I have dealt elsewhere with this and so will only mention in passing the African tendency of being occupied in countering evil (bad) while considering good to arise by default (Harries 2006). The prominence of evil ‘spirits’ in African people’s decision-making contributes to this. The African tendency to see good as coming by default of course contributes to Africa’s ‘poverty’.<sup>17</sup> The people filling the ‘default’ gap (i.e. providing what is good) in recent years have been Westerners. Yet again, this in practice extremely consequential aspect of African culture is hidden to international media and scholarship.

Also very consequential in the out-working of life’s choices is the question of the location of good within the human person. Plato’s teaching on the ultimate goodness of the soul as against the human body (Karasmanis 2006) is said to be extremely influential in Western countries. Hence a ‘spiritual man’ is assumed to be a ‘good man’ and bodily lusts associated with sin (greed, debauchery, sexual immorality etc). Hence also solutions to life’s problems are sought by Westerners on the inside – in the intellect, understanding, study and friendships that do not directly bring material gain (see above).

While an over-simplification simply to say that the opposite applies in Africa – deep differences become evident to a careful observer. African people tend to concern themselves with evil spirits. In the ideal world, from the African perspective, they would be done away with and then by default (see above paragraph) life would be good. There is a tendency in

<sup>16</sup> Southall noted the Alur’s (a people closely related to the Luo of Kenya) tendency to use language to bring about a situation rather than to describe ‘reality’ (1970:238-240).

<sup>17</sup> Through a pre-occupation with deterring the bad rather than working for the good.

Africa, probably aggravated in modern times by Western people's inclination to condemn African traditions as evil, to assume 'spirit' and 'spiritual' to be 'evil'.<sup>18</sup>

In Africa then the body is good, but the spirit evil. Hence spiritual people (diviners or so called witchdoctors) can easily be considered to be evil (witches). Hence the notion of a 'Holy Spirit' has been so revolutionary in Africa (leading to the booming of Christian churches – especially 'spiritual' churches). Hence the attention to bodily beauty that startles some visitors to Africa – that people living in dirty slums can emerge from their homes smartly dressed and spotless. Hence traditionally sins such as adultery are not wrong of themselves until someone is found out – that is unless a living dead is displeased (i.e. the rules of *chira* are broken and ancestors upset).<sup>19</sup> Hence also a ceaseless fascination that often strikes me on observing African television with observing dancing movements of the human body. All this has contributed to a reluctance of African people to engage in scholarship in their own languages and cultures – they fear that without the discipline involved in following foreign (Western) writing traditions, the evil that is within will come out. This is why, one can say, African people fear their own soul – thus leading to the prominence of Christian movements focused on the confessing of sin – such as the *lalruok* (fellowships) oriented to confession and cleansing that are almost a church within a church in Anglicanism in Kenya,<sup>20</sup> and Dr. Owuor's great repentance meetings in Kenya (Owuor 2007). Unlike the Western dictum 'innocent until proven guilty', in much of African the reverse applies and someone is considered to be 'guilty until proven innocent'.<sup>21</sup>

One could go on giving examples. My main point here though would be to say that the difference in orientation between good and evil of the body and the soul has a profound and widespread impact on people's lives and understanding. Ignoring this, as other difference, by simply assuming scholarly equivalence in African and Western English usage is in the long term not helping Africa. Such concealing of difference will not lead to either rectification, harmonisation or close inter-cultural understanding. These kind of differences can be so consequential as to completely throw 'development' plans for Africa off-target – and in fact this is often what happens.

My aim has been to demonstrate the existence and consequentiality of *difference*, especially between Africa and the West. Many more aspects of African people's 'religious beliefs' could be examined. I now want to move on, however, and consider the wider implications of the 'difference' identified in the context of the globalising world.

## **5.0 Africa in Relation to Global Society, Culture and Scholarship**

Someone's position in a relationship will affect one's view of it. To take an obvious example – someone having to work without pay will have a different view on their activity to the person who gets a labourer for free. The fact that such a relationship is desirable to one party, does not in itself make it into a 'good relationship'. Someone's having their mains power supply tapped by a neighbour may be good for the neighbour, but may not please the householders should they discover what is going on. One could argue that permitting this is not actually good for the neighbour – as it is encouraging theft. That is simply to say that – African people's satisfaction over their relationship with the West does not in itself mean that the relationship is in the long-run a healthy one.

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<sup>18</sup> This is obviously a complex case to make, as the English terms will carry their own valuation. Indigenous African equivalents to 'spirit' however, tend to be evil.

<sup>19</sup> "Something is evil because it is punished, it is not punished because it is evil" (Mbiti 1969:207).

<sup>20</sup> Personal experience.

<sup>21</sup> This is related to the wide spread of 'witchcraft' beliefs in Africa – for which see Haar (2007).

Certainly African people's use of European languages such as English is a case-in-point. In the current global system, anything done in English is liable to receive enormous subsidy. Activities engaged in other languages (especially non-European languages) are easily ignored by wealthy donors. For Africa this means that writing or scholarship that is not in English (or that is in English but accurately takes account of the kinds of factors mentioned in this article that are closed to the view of Westerners) will result in neither foreign funding or global recognition. To reverse that argument – in order to acquire funding and international recognition African scholars are obligated to be fools to their own people and communities.<sup>22</sup>

Influential Westerners who consider the deciding factor on 'which language to be used where' to be the expressed will of the (African) people concerned are missing the point: that African people are responding to economic pressures.<sup>23</sup> Underlying this is the self-delusion that so-called 'independence' of African states obviates Western power brokers from responsibility for decisions made in those states. It should be very clear that this is not the case. Western powers need to be held accountable – because the states concerned as well as being economically almost totally dependent on it, are formally running almost entirely on the basis of that bequeathed to them by the West; technology, language, national boundaries, political structures, constitutions, legal systems, educational and communications infrastructure, and almost everything else! Economically forcing African countries to operate on European languages, and thus to ignore their issues as they participate in European debates, has been a terrible travesty that has locked African peoples into being ongoing developmental, economic and social disasters. The West has controlled Africa through economic means ever since independence. It is time for this control to be put onto a responsible footing.

One means that the West currently uses to deal with cultural differences already considered (above) is under the title of 'racism'. Supposedly in-house to Western nations, this is an (often legally – supported) social taboo prohibiting discrimination against a person based on their ethnic origins. There are laws in countries like the USA that insist on large employers having a workforce that is representative of the ethnic make-up of their community.<sup>24</sup> There would probably be nothing wrong with anti-racism legislation – if it were confined to a particular community, such as the USA. Problems arise when the standards by which people are judged to be 'normal' in the West are broadcast around the world in the global communication system. As a result 'ideal people' of other nationalities – in our case we are considering those of African origin – are depicted as thinking and behaving like Westerners.

I hope the dilemmas faced as a result by leaders of non-Western nations are here sufficiently graphically portrayed; the 'international community' requires their people to be what they are not. Resisting this requirement (insisting that one's people are 'different' and therefore resisting the pressure to follow international norms) is to refuse all sorts of funding. Accepting it is to live with incongruence, lies, incompetence and being denied opportunity to address one's own issues. The response by the West to 'cultural difference' is to establish the doctrine of 'anti-racism', as a means of denying what is all too true. This doctrine may help the West within its shores, but certainly in the case of Africa, is potentially disastrous as it is preventing African populations from thinking for themselves.

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<sup>22</sup> Thus in African historiography "finished 'universal categories' ... are imbibed and indiscriminately applied" says a concerned Ogot (1999:219) on realising that African history has been "... the 'invention' of African societies as objects of knowledge from which those very societies are excluded" (1999:210).

<sup>23</sup> Hence Albaugh's discovery that African people are *not* asking for their languages to be used in formal education (2007:1).

<sup>24</sup> This is known as positive discrimination or affirmative action, and it remains much contested (Affirmative 2008).

Wealthy / powerful Europeans who travel the world cannot suddenly ‘switch off’ the anti-racist thinking that they operate on within their own shores. Instead they search for – ‘African natives that behave like Brits’ – in the course of their travels. Suggesting to them that ‘the world does not work like that’ is taken as a travesty. The pragmatic people in Africa, who are concerned to get bread onto their table, twist and stretch themselves so as to appear to fit this image. Traveler’s reports emphasise on what they have found that is familiar. The rest – often not even being perceived, is ignored.

Strategies employed in the West to counter racism can aggravate ‘race problems’ outside of the West (see also Harries 2007b). That insisting that all people in any society are equally effective (productive) regardless of their upbringing is flawed reasoning is often not realised. Not wanting to concede to being different to European people forces Africans into a pretence that contributes to rampant corruption.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

We began this article with the realisation that the use of a foreign language in governing Africa (if the language is still under that foreign control) is problematic because that language will not be able to express the full depth and breadth of the African people’s way of life. Incorrect assumptions will be made in the use of that foreign language – that aspects of life are there when they are not, and other aspects are not there when they are.

While lip-service is given by the West to recognition of racial differences, the existence of deep-level difference is often denied. A large part of this article is given over to identifying and elaborating on the kind of differences between Africa and the West that the West seems to deny. Ways that these differences are largely invisible to the West are explained. The African may not realise the existence of differences, or for pragmatic reasons can keep them hidden. The consequentiality of these ‘differences’ are referred to and emphasised. These are some of the important and consequential factors that in being ignored when Western languages are used create if not disasters then enormous dependence by Africa on either magic, or the West.

Western countries’ means for denying the existence of difference are justified on the basis that to recognise them would be racist. The effect of powerful nations holding such policies on the rest of the globe is here explored. Through globalisation and economic pressure, it can force African nations to deny the truth about themselves, in order to please donors. This holds back African nations and can render their people incompetent.

I believe that there is a way out of this dilemma, and that it can be followed through a three-fold strategy that I now outline. First (in no particular order) for projects and education advocated by the West for an African people to be in their language (or a closely related language). Second, for at least some outsiders coming to work in Africa to do so from a position of vulnerability – most helpfully achieved by ensuring that they are disconnected from sources of incoming donor funds other than for their own upkeep. Third, for the nature of African belief in spirits to be actively explored, critiqued and allowed for in policy making – through research in the field of theology.

As well as being empowering to a community by increasing the currency of ‘their thing’ (instead of the ‘Western thing’), use of an indigenous language will oblige, or at least enable, the outsider to learn and then to use indigenous categories. It will prevent him from pre-supposing what is not there. Thus it will enable a foreign product whatever it is (a camel,

mathematics, biomedicine, computer etc.) to become incorporated as a part of the local community.

The power/financial imbalance of Western vs. African people often conceals African reality from view. In order to keep that reality in view an outsider needs to become as dependent as possible on the local and not the outside economy, at least as far as their ministry or project is concerned.<sup>25</sup> When Africans realize that telling the truth will not result in a cut in funds, they will be free to be more honest in their deliberations. That freedom on their part can in turn be a great education to the Westerners on the scene.

At the root of many cultural differences between Africa and the West, are differences in theology.<sup>26</sup> That is, African people's beliefs regarding the divine spirits, ancestors, witchcraft, blessings and curses, god etc. Much research has shown that many African people attend Christian churches, and churches have become integral parts of their communities and lives. At least a part of the reason for this has been a prospect fostered and realisation made; that the God of Christianity offers hope to those bound in the constant battle against 'evil spirits'. African people would be further helped in their attempts at knowing God if Western theologians (missionaries) would practice their art using African languages from positions of vulnerability to African ways of life. A neglect of theology in scholarship in recent centuries is putting the West at a disadvantage in this area. Sharing theological insights that were instrumental in the development of the West surely is a moral imperative? The impact of people's beliefs on their lives needs to be brought into view of academia so as to complete the view of scholars. Theological discussion on these beliefs will reveal the critical changes needed to enable a better life on earth as well as the prospect of heaven for the African people, as for others.

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<sup>25</sup> That is – even if they need to rely on outside resources for their own survival or livelihood.

<sup>26</sup> 'Theology' here used broadly to include their beliefs regarding spirits and mystical forces.

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