

Culture and language – empowering and disempowering ideas.

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Introduction and abstract

The discussion on decolonising the mind and turning to African indigenous knowledge tends to construct a contradiction between the ‘colonial’ (bad) and the ‘decolonial’ (good), as well as between the ‘foreign’ (bad) and the ‘indigenous’ (good). However, independent African thinkers have never shied away from taking in elements from abroad into their thinking and have always tried to marry the best elements of indigenous and foreign insights. One therefore wonders if the discussion should not be framed differently: as an examination of which ideas can be seen as empowering, in terms of increasing African agency, and which ideas instead can be seen as disempowering, or inhibiting African agency. This paper discusses a number of such ideas in two key related areas, the areas of culture and language. In the area of culture, it argues in favour of a view of cultures as value systems that serve as common points of reference to a people. It argues that with such a view and the methods of cross-cultural psychology it is possible in principle to chart new developments in the area of culture in Africa and to devise new policies taking those developments into account. In the area of language, the paper attacks the idea that all 2,000 living languages counted in Africa need to be treated in the same way. It shows that this idea paralyzes the debate and proposes instead a distinction between ‘discerned’ and ‘designed’ languages. It proposes five principles that would enable increased use of a limited number of African languages in more and more domains.

Empowering or disempowering?

What do I mean by empowering¹ and by disempowering ideas and how does one know which ideas are what? In general, there are ways of thinking about Africa that portray the continent as *static* and *unchanging*. They start and end by defining Africans by what they are *not*. This tends to define Africans as *other*. In my view, such ideas limit or block the scope for African agency and can therefore be seen as disempowering. In the cultural area, these ideas obscure an understanding of the different African cultural identities that form part of the full spectrum of human cultural identities. In the language area, they show Africans as fragmented and language policy as irrelevant.

In general, disempowering ideas on Africa translate themselves into two pre-scientific **myths** or tropes about Africa: the ‘Africa as a country’ and the ‘African Tower of Babel’ myths. The one sees Africa as an undifferentiated whole, leading to generalisations about ‘African culture’. The other sees Africa as incredibly fragmented, made up of a myriad of different cultural and linguistic groups. These are two contradictory myths that exclude

¹ I understand these terms in the sense as originally defined by feminist thinkers and movements at the end of the 1980s. In that sense, the term ‘empowerment’ challenges existing power relationships in society, thus increasing the scope for agency, whereas disempowerment takes away the possibility to raise such challenges. For an overview of the origins and evolution of the term, see Calvès (2009).

one another, yet happily exist side by side in the discourse about Africa (Prah 2008: 71). (Indeed, myths in other domains often contain contradictory and seemingly incompatible elements as well – that is part of what makes them so fascinating.) Both myths or tropes are a consequence of a line of reasoning that starts and ends by defining Africans as what they are not. Both essentially paint a picture of Africa as static and unchanging, are defining Africans as ‘other’ and are therefore essentially disempowering.

What is needed therefore and what would be empowering is a vision of what Africans *are* like or what they are becoming, in their unity and in their diversity, in their dynamism and in relation to other humans on the planet. With Mamdani (1996: 11), the challenge is to avoid either one of the two traps he describes: ‘abstract universalism and intimate particularism turn out to be two sides of the same coin: both see in the specificity of experience nothing but its idiosyncrasy.’

Let’s then examine what this means more specifically for the key areas of culture and language – let’s start with culture.

Ideas of culture – empowering and disempowering

Ake (1993: 1) referring to the concept of ethnicity, has already pointed out that it is ‘phenomenally problematic in Africa’. Culture and ethnicity are seen as sources of problems for Africa.

Storey (2001), following Williams (1983), gives three broad definitions of the concept of ‘culture’: as a process of aesthetic development; as a way of life; and as the product of intellectual and artistic activity (p 1-2). What these definitions have in common is that all of them reduce culture to a set of products: aesthetic developments, artistic works, ways of life. However, none of these definitions pay attention to what in my view underlies these products and to what makes them specific and different: the underlying outlook on life, the underlying value systems. As Miti (2015: 3) has pointed out, referring to Africa: ‘A popular understanding of culture is that it refers to the ways in which a people’s ancestors lived. In other words, culture is taken to be part and parcel of a given people’s past.’ This is a popular understanding of culture that is based on concepts such as those of Storey. It obscures a discussion of what contemporary cultures are like in Africa and is therefore disempowering.

In a different vein, there are a number of Marxist-inspired discourses on Africa also mired by a disempowering view of culture. In such Marxist views, ‘culture’ is at best a thing of the past, consisting of folkloric remnants from a precapitalistic past. The unifying effects of capitalism are supposed to lead to all workers being equal in their impoverishment (*‘Verelendung’*). After the socialist revolution, they all become equal in the ideal world of socialism. At worst, ‘culture’ is an instrument in the hands of the capitalist class, used to divide workers and to enlist their support for wars fought in the interest of capitalism and imperialism.

These views can still be seen in current thinking about Africa – denying, downplaying, deprecating or incriminating cultural identities is common. However, as Ake (1993) points out: ‘we tend to forget that even though ethnicity might be constructed it is also a living presence, an important part of what many Africans are.’

One example of the Marxist type of analysis is Walter Rodney (1972). His 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' is still a standard text on Africa's history and a must-read for all progressive thinkers on Africa. However, his framework leads him to employ a strict Marxist schematic, according to which societies progress from the communalist system via the feudal system to the capitalist and then the socialist system. That means that to him, the development to capitalism is progress: it is a necessary stepping stone before socialism. Nationalism, in Rodney's approach, is a phase in social development (p 242), occurring when large enough units are formed. As a true Marxist, he assumes that it will disappear under socialism.

The intellectual difficulties that this presents can be illustrated by Neocosmos (1995). Neocosmos, himself a Marxist, discusses and criticizes the 'invention of tradition' discourse that has been put forward by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1984). In looking at the history of struggle in Southern Africa, he is forced to admit that "not all 'ethnic' movements are in and of themselves anti-democratic" (p 43). He explains this by saying that due to the undemocratic and oppressive nature of colonial regimes, progressives were forced, almost against their will, to mobilize along ethnic lines. However, as soon as democracy appears, Neocosmos contends, progressives will abandon ethnicity and organize in accordance with their true class interests. The possibility that people might at the same time decide to organize within frameworks bounded by common cultural identities *and* be progressive is not one that many Marxists can admit to.

Appadurai (1996) criticizes the use of the word 'culture' as a noun, because he objects to thinking of culture as some sort of object, as a (fixed) thing. Instead, he looks at the 'cultural' as allowing for a description of differences between different categories of people. He proposes to restrict the use of the term 'culture' to 'the subset of (...) differences that has been mobilized to articulate the boundary of difference' and thus to demarcate group identity (p13).

Seeing culture as a marker of difference between groups points to a number of difficulties that need to be addressed. One of the difficulties has to do with the tendency to see cultures as static, somehow genetically determined attributes of people (the primordialist perspective). This fallacy has been criticised from many angles, partly, I suspect, by constructing strawman arguments. As Vansina (1990) has demonstrated for Equatorial Africa, cultures are not static - they are constantly reproduced in complex interactions between local and larger levels and in that process, they also evolve. But because all cultures evolve along lines that are not necessarily or not even primarily convergent, differences between cultures remain as difference - even though the substance of such differences may change.

Then, there is the issue of hybrid and multiple identities. It is often said that people nowadays are more mobile than ever before, that they are subjected to all kinds of influences via the mass media and the internet and that this affects their sense of identity and belonging. Blommaert (2013) refers to this as registers: multiple normative orientations that people have access to and shift between. There is certainly truth in this and yes, it complicates the picture. It is possible for people to learn to use and be comfortable in different cultures and to use different sets of orientations. Many Africans are skilled in this area. It is also possible for people to acquire a hybrid mode that allows them to navigate in different cultural contexts, although not in the same manner in each

context. Other coping mechanisms are possible as well. However, this still means that those different contexts, registers or cultures are distinguishable from one another. Even though people may be able to navigate between cultures with greater or lesser ease, this is still an acquired skill. It does not change the fact that this world is characterized in part by cultural difference.

With Ayittey (2010), I think a different perspective is possible, one that sees African cultures as a positive source of inspiration. But what does that mean for an empowering definition of culture?

In my view, cultures can be described in terms of **value systems that serve as common points of reference to a people.**²

This means that I look at culture at the level of societies, rather than at the level of individuals.³ Yet, the two levels are linked: people who are knowledgeable about a particular culture have a certain mental ‘map’ of what can be considered ‘normal’ or ‘appropriate’ in that culture. How this works was well described by Peterson and Barreto (2014) through their cultural expertise and personal values proposition. Of relevance are the ‘Social learning of expertise and values principle’ and the ‘Personal value principle’ (p 1135). The first states that socialization strongly supports expertise on culture, but only moderately supports acceptance of specific aspects of that culture. In other words, individuals can be part of a culture without accepting all of it. This is further elaborated in the second principle, which states that individuals vary in their support or rejection of aspects of their society’s culture.

It is worthwhile to explore these points a bit further, especially when dealing with an African context. Many authors who write about ‘culture’ or ‘identity’ define culture as something that is *shared* by the individuals who are part of this cultural group. This implies that the value systems that are supposed to characterize a specific culture also characterize all individuals that belong to that culture – it is what the word *sharing* seems to suggest. This type of definition is open to the criticism of being *essentialist* – assuming that there is something in the ‘national culture’ of a nation that is so strong that it determines the values of all those who are born into that culture.

The principles described by Peterson and Barreto show that what is shared are not so much the values held by individuals. These can be very different as described by the ‘personal value principle’: individuals may have personal values that are considerably different from the dominant cultural norm – but they can still identify with that culture. This is because of the ‘social learning of expertise and values principle’: what is shared are not so much the values in themselves, but the *knowledge about the cultural norm*. The values may not be shared, but the knowledge about these values is. This is what makes my definition of cultures *non-essentialist*: culture is defined as a common point of reference about which people as individual members of a cultural community share knowledge, but by which they are not determined and to which they do not need to all subscribe. Of course, this concept becomes meaningless if there is no commonality – in order for a culture to be distinct from others, *many* individuals who are part of it will

² The importance of values as elements of culture was pointed out already in 1935 by Talcott Parsons – see Camic (1991).

³ See Hofstede (1995) for a fuller discussion of the methodological significance of this distinction.

subscribe to and in that sense indeed *share* many if not all the values that are part of that culture. The boundaries between when one can still speak of a common culture, given the variety between individuals, and when this is no longer the case can be fluid – exactly how this works in particular cultures remains to be explored.

For Africa, this means that there could be countries in which different peoples live together each with their own traditions, languages and cultures (and with their own internal diversity), but with at the same time a shared knowledge about a dominant or common culture that all can refer to and understand.

Many authors over the past decades have wondered why Africa seems to be underperforming and have offered several types of (partial) explanations. My starting point is the one offered by Vansina (1992: 9):

‘[T]he uniqueness of Africa south of the Sahara and its difficult situation today flows from problems with its basic cultural traditions.(...) there is no longer a single cultural tradition to which all the people within each country or larger region subscribe. This means that even the basic criteria for perceiving reality are not commonly held by all (...) This situation is the fruit of a cultural history unique and specific to the region as a whole.’

What makes Africa unique in Vansina’s eyes is not the content of its cultural traditions by themselves. Rather, it is the way these traditions were destroyed in the colonial period (p 16):

‘By 1920, the conquest had cost the lives of perhaps half the population of East and Central Africa and had ruptured the continuity of the old traditions in the whole region by breaking their capacity for self-determination.’

So, in the Americas and in Australia, the indigenous populations were basically decimated and a settler population took over. In Asia, existing cultural traditions were largely left intact. It is only in Africa that a significant population was kept, but their cultural traditions were not. A dichotomy was created between the colonially-educated elites and the masses. Such a dichotomy did not exist before.

In Vansina’s view, the relatively weak performance of Africa is due to ‘the congruence of a minority tradition with a despotic ruling group which denies the self-determination of the majority tradition that is the rootcause.’ (p 22).

However, Vansina holds that this situation is by definition unstable and unsustainable. He predicts that new traditions will emerge in Africa and that these will be carried by African languages. He feels that this is a condition that must be met, before Africa is able to ‘flourish’.

Vansina wrote his prediction almost 30 years ago – that means that we are now almost one generation later. In his prediction, we still have to wait for another generation until the formation of ‘a stable common majority tradition’ is complete. If that is to happen, however, the process of forming such a tradition should already be on its way and it should be possible to see a glimmer of where things are going. It should also be possible to devise empowering policies that make use of knowledge of these processes and try to encourage them.

In order to be able to research this, I have had to turn to methods outside of the field of anthropology and have instead looked at the field of cross-cultural psychology. Discussing the results I obtained falls outside of the scope of this paper, but part of them have been reported in the Cross-Cultural Research journal (Van Pinxteren, 2020).

Prah and others have pointed to the key role of African languages for such developments and have emphasized the need for using African languages more, for example in higher education. However, this points to another set of empowering and disempowering ideas that need to be discussed, in the area of language.

Ideas on language – empowering and disempowering

Let me start with a provocative statement: the common trope that Africa has over 2,000 living languages is one of the most disempowering statements on Africa that I know. Yet it is uncritically repeated time and again.

Before delving into that, let me first examine on what basis the statement is being made. One of the sources cited most is undoubtedly the Ethnologue. One would hope that the claim bases itself on unambiguous, objective linguistic criteria, leaving no room for misunderstanding. However, this is not the case. The Ethnologue uses in fact three criteria, the first of which is the criterion of *mutual intelligibility*. Thus, in order for a language to be considered separate from all others, it should be ‘*not mutually intelligible* with any other language.’⁴ This criterion is open to different and subjective interpretations and has been criticized as ideological (Rajagopalan, 2010). Several attempts have been made to find tests and to establish criteria for deciding on mutual intelligibility, but no general model has emerged, as Gooskens (2013: 209) concludes in her methodological overview. Therefore, the decision on what to call a language is, in principle, not only a scientific but also a political decision. The Ethnologue is clear about this, listing two criteria in addition to the criterion of mutual intelligibility:

- Where spoken intelligibility between language varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central variety that both speaker communities understand can be strong indicators that they should nevertheless be considered language varieties of the same individual language.
- Where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, they can nevertheless be treated as different languages when they have long-standing distinctly named ethnolinguistic identities coupled with established standardization and literatures that are distinct.’⁵

This means that for example for English, it is possible to speak of one language, in spite of the numerous varieties of English (also known as ‘World Englishes’) that exist in the world, with partly very limited mutual intelligibility. On the other hand, this type of criteria setting allows the Ethnologue to split Oromo, a language of Ethiopia spoken by

⁴ <https://glottolog.org/glottolog/glottologinformation>, retrieved 22 June 2020.

⁵ <https://www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification>, accessed 23 June 2020.

more than 37 million people and widely used in the media and in education, into four different languages. By its own admittance, the Ethnologue's criteria for keeping the various Englishes together as one language but splitting up Oromo into four are not purely linguistic. Makoni and Meinhof (2006) make the point, also made by several other authors, that what is and what is not called a language in Africa has been manipulated by the needs of missionaries and colonial administrators.

What this means, then, is that the statement itself can be (and has been) questioned in the literature, for example by Prah (2012). But why do I call it disempowering? To be honest, it is not the statement itself that is disempowering – it is rather the use that is being made of the statement. Explicitly or implicitly, the statement is often followed by two further steps in the reasoning (not necessarily in the combination or in the order shown here).

Step one is the position that all languages deserve to be treated equally. This leads to empty policies such as those of the African Union, which designates 'any' African language as 'official'.⁶ Others such as Kamwangamalu (2016) plead in favour of using African languages more, without pronouncing themselves on the choice of such languages. The net effect of this, as De Swaan (2001) has shown, is only a de facto strengthening of the position of the former colonial languages.

Step two goes in the same direction. It holds that because there are so many languages in Africa, (more than 500 in Nigeria alone, for example) using them more would be very costly and not practical.

It is because either one or both of these steps usually follow the statement about the 2,000 languages that it is, in my view, profoundly disempowering.

In order to deal with this type of problem, one fashionable answer has been to question the whole idea of languages as 'bounded objects' – the most well-known proponent of this school of thought is probably Alastair Pennycook (2010). Instead, linguists belonging to this school argue in favour of taking language repertoires, language registers as actually used by speakers as the starting point; they prefer to talk about 'languoids' rather than languages. This approach, which portrays itself as being decolonial and against Eurocentrism, has some advantages – but it also has some much more important disadvantages.

The advantages operate mostly at the level of languages as spoken. I agree for example with Lüpke and Storch (2013) where they point out that the differences between languages construed by foreign observers may not correspond to the differences perceived by speakers and I also agree that those differences may be much more situational and much less absolute than what the terminology may lead one to believe. In addition, a teaching approach that takes the actual linguistic repertoires of learners as its starting point and values them all as resources seems to make eminent sense.

The disadvantages, on the other hand, are mostly at the level of language policy. Thinking in terms of spoken language repertoires or registers leads to an exclusive focus on 'what

⁶ <https://au.int/en/about/languages> accessed 20 July 2019

language *actually* is to speakers and hearers' (Lüpke and Storch 2013: 347) and blinds them to the role (implicit or explicit) of language policy and language planning. In a way, they 'otherize' Africa and Africans by situating them in a type of reserve where they live their natural lives, only marginally influenced or affected by governmental or institutional policies (for example in the area of language). These policies are relegated to a vague 'context' that they seem to accept as unchanging and not subject to being influenced by Africans as actors at that level. Where some would see harmonized and standardized languages as a form of social innovation that has its benefits, they see them as a colonial imposition.⁷ Where such authors themselves unquestioningly make use of the advantages offered to them by a conventionalized use of the English language and take these for granted, they seem to deny the utility of conventionalized language to African languages. Yet conventionalized languages are the medium of instruction at the levels of secondary and higher education. Following the analytical framework of Pennycook and others would lead to a neglect of language policy and language planning. In Africa, it would lead to an unquestioning acceptance of the political choice to use French, English and other international languages as medium of instruction in secondary and higher education. As Bamgbose (2011: 6) remarked: 'absence of a policy is indeed a policy, for whenever there is no declared policy in any domain, what happens is a continuation of the *status quo*.' The same could be said of neglect of the policy element in linguistic research: the absence of such research is a policy choice, for neglect of this field means an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. In the area of linguistic research, it leads to an almost exclusive focus on documentation of language as spoken, to the neglect of all other fields. In my view, then, these ideas are disempowering.

Therefore, we need something else. What we need to realize is that if one uses a counting mechanism that maximizes the number of languages counted, as the Ethnologue does, then giving all of them equal status becomes impossible. That is true not only in Africa, but everywhere. Thus, in a country like the Netherlands, the Ethnologue names 11 Dutch-like languages spoken in the territory. In Germany, 15 German-like languages are spoken. In Korea, there are two Korean-like languages. Yet nobody in these countries is suggesting to elevate all 2, 11 or 15 languages to the same status. Therefore, it is possible that one language serves as the formalized language and as medium of instruction for a whole group of related languages. This is in my view a liberating, an empowering idea that I would like to explore a bit further.

What I would propose is to allow ourselves to be inspired by earlier ideas that were developed by Heinz Kloss as far back as 1967, about what he called in his native German 'Abstand' and 'Ausbau' languages. These words have not been translated into English in the sociolinguistic literature, but this leaves me free to propose to use the terms of 'discerned' versus 'designed' languages. The term discerned language is essentially a *linguistic* concept that refers to the social and political act of pronouncing a dialect or speech register to be a language. The concept of designed language, on the other hand, is not a linguistic concept: it is *sociological*. It refers only to those languages that have been deliberately shaped and built to become standardized vehicles of literary expression.

⁷ Of course, language harmonization and standardization are not European inventions: these processes were around in other parts of the world long before they became commonplace in Europe.

Many languages, of course, are both: they are discernible from other languages in the spoken form and in the literary form as well. The way Kloss describes this is very similar to the concept of ‘intellectualisation’. Prah (2017: 216) quotes the definition of Sibayan from 1999: an intellectualised language is a ‘language which can be used for educating a person in any field of knowledge from kindergarten to the university and beyond’. I prefer the terminology of discerned and designed languages. On the one hand, this is because the term ‘intellectualisation’ could be seen as implying a value judgement on those languages that have not been ‘intellectualised’. On the other hand, the concept of intellectualisation is silent about other languages and can still lead one to think that *all* discerned languages should be ‘intellectualised’.

Kloss also points out that there is a certain degree of freedom here: forming of designed languages is a historical process that can be sped up or in fact reversed as a result either of shifts in power relationships or of changes in policy or (as will most often be the case) of both. Kaschula and Nkomo (2019: 607) point out that such a reversal indeed took place in Africa:

‘The arrival of foreign traders, explorers, missionaries, and colonial settlers resulted in cross-cultural encounters and the transformation of economic, cultural, religious, and political domains, which devalued indigenous knowledge and African thought systems. This not only alienated indigenous people from the socioeconomic and political organizational structures of the new societies, but also de-intellectualized their languages.’

This analysis ties in closely with the assessment of Vansina quoted above on the destruction of cultural autonomy. It also means that there may be some scope for reclaiming or re-intellectualizing languages, for example by preparing new renderings of old and perhaps partially forgotten literary texts in African languages. An interesting resource in this regard may be the Verba Africana website.⁸

It is important to stress that in order to master a designed language a certain amount of formalized learning is always required. Above, I hinted to the example of German: in Germany, speakers of all 15 discerned German-like languages use Standard written High German as their common designed language, but this standardized version is different from all of the spoken languages and requires learning in order to master it. However, learning standard written high German is easier for speakers of any of the German-like languages than it would be for speakers of, for example, French. The basic thing that this distinction makes clear is in fact that like in Germany, one designed language can serve several discerned languages. An African example, also hinted to above, is that of Oromo. Even though the Ethnologue discerns four Oromo-like languages, only one of them in fact serves as the designed, standard form of Oromo for use in educational and other domains in Ethiopia. For all speakers of Oromo-like languages, this is much easier than using for example Amharic would be.

⁸ <http://www.verbafricana.org>, accessed 15 September 2020.

The empowering thought, therefore, is that for Africa, it is not necessary to develop all 2,000 languages for use in higher education⁹ and other domains that require a formalized use of a language. In fact, this is the first of the five principles that I propose for making rational choices for use in higher education. Let me just list those principles here:

1. Develop a limited number of designed languages for education.
2. Designed languages should be chosen in such a way that they are easy to learn for as many speakers of discerned languages as possible.
3. Strive for inclusivity: choose designed languages in such a way that all have to exert a relatively low but relatively equal effort to learn them.
4. Make use of existing bilingualism as a resource.
5. Build incentives for linguistic collaboration, especially for smaller linguistic communities.

Conclusions

In this paper, I looked more closely at a number of empowering and disempowering ideas related to culture and language.

In the culture area, I have argued how various ideas about culture work to obstruct a view of both the constants and the dynamics of African cultures and cultural identities. These ideas relate either to the concept of culture as related to artefacts or products, or to the view of culture as the way our ancestors lived, or the idea that only associates negative things with culture, such as its use as a marker to artificially mobilize primordialist sentiments. I have also shown how authors tend to assume that culture needs homogeneity and they then say that because in practice they do not see such homogeneity (with individuals having ‘multiple’ and ‘shifting’ identities), culture as a concept is outdated. In general, there is often a confusion between what describes the level of individuals and what describes the level of larger groups. All these obstructions work together to create the situation already described by Claude Ake in 1993: referring to the concept of ethnicity as ‘phenomenally problematic’ in Africa, where there is a ‘tendency to problematize the people and their culture, an error that continues to push Africa deeper into confusion.’

Instead, I have proposed a view of cultures as sets of **value systems that serve as common points of reference to a people**. Using this view has enabled me to consider questions such as the possible emergence of new African cultural traditions and new national cultures, healing the rift that has been created between the African elites and the masses.

In the language area, the assertion that Africa has more than 2,000 living languages is often repeated uncritically and leads to an unwillingness to engage with language issues. This is not made any easier by the fashionable ideas about ‘languoids’. These ideas lead to a neglect of language planning and language policy, and to a focus on discerned languages or language as spoken by people, away from a discussion of how designed

⁹ Elsewhere, I have argued that using African languages more in higher education is likely to become unavoidable, for different reasons: see Van Pinxteren, 2018.

languages and policies favouring indigenous designed languages can play a role as inclusive enablers rather than as exclusive gate-keepers.

What remains to be seen, of course, is in how far these empowering ideas on culture and language also lead to new insights that have some form of practical applicability in today's Africa. For that, I encourage you to look out for my PhD thesis on 'Language, Education and Identity in Africa', hopefully available sometime later in 2021.

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