

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# African Enterprises: Receptacles of Conciliation Mechanisms

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to determine the common categories that pertain to the unique nature of enterprises in Africa. To do this, we carried out ethnographic studies in eight enterprises selected in different countries in order to identify the social systems and shared or mediating structures that constitute the embeddedness of business owners' behaviors. The results of this investigation lead us to view enterprises in Africa as receptacles of conciliation mechanisms. Precisely, this involves their shared destiny, history, strong durability, trust in the given word, and attachment to tradition. The economic reality of entrepreneurship in Africa is thus different from the fragmented image traditionally put forward in economics.

**Keywords:** *African enterprises; Conciliation mechanism; Critical realism*

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Contrary to the idea put forward by the neoclassical theory, the analysis of economic action, that of unique business creation, cannot be separated from the relational frameworks and institutional structures that shape it (Plociniczak, 2003). Unlike Sen (1977), who considers that entrepreneurs are 'social idiots' and egotistical and autonomous individuals who are only concerned with their personal interests, the aim is to consider the entrepreneurial act as a behavior embedded in social networks (Granovetter, 1995). It therefore appears legitimate to look at the specific resources that these networks procure, in particular in the context of small businesses, and even very small businesses (VSBs).

At the scale of the African continent, these discussions are a reflection of the link commonly established between African cultures and business management. One of the limits of analyzing organizations in Africa is the lack of systematic research on the nature and application of management approaches by indigenous entrepreneurs (Jackson, 2004). Yet, this concern is apparent in studies of small businesses,<sup>1</sup> which mostly operate in the informal sector (the informal economy and the 'débrouille' or 'getting by' economy) (Tidjani, 2022). In Africa,

the informal sector does not necessarily correspond to activities that totally avoid the tax system or that take place illegally. As pointed out by Backiny-Yetna (2009), there is a great deal of porosity between the formal and informal sectors, and in fact, their difference lies more in their organizational structure.

The aforementioned justifies looking more closely at these forms of business that, despite numerous structural, political, economic, infrastructural, and institutional difficulties (Kodongo & Kalu, 2016; Odeyemi et al., 2024), successfully exploit Africa's economic and social potential. The mainsprings of their frugality and agility (Causse & Biwolé-Fouda, 2020) reside in their uniqueness, and the compensation levers or mechanisms that they operate (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2023; Kuanda, 2009) to deal with the obstacles that they face on a day-to-day basis. These mechanisms are worth identifying clearly.

In the African context, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in general and VSBs in particular are types of enterprise guided by an objective of anchoring their business in rightful 'values'. These values influence their decisions and practices, and society's conception of a successful company. Based on this reasoning, we ask the following question: what structures and mechanisms in local cultures pertain to the unique nature of the African enterprise?

<sup>1</sup> Here we mainly consider VSBs, but also SMEs.

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The literature features several attempts to characterize an African enterprise model. For example, the 'village business' (Zadi Kessy, 1998) and the 'community business' (Kouanda, 2005) highlight the influence of the family on the way the enterprise operates. The 'circulatory management' model (Mutabazi, 2006) is another approach, which considers that movement is central to the way that businesses work in Africa: movement of goods and people, information, power, and human energy. Although realistic, these models do not highlight the axiology of the unique features shared by enterprises in Africa.

In addition, although the literature on business in Africa undoubtedly provides a great number of results, pertinent research avenues, and directions (Apostolopoulos et al., 2018; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2023; Gueye et al., 2024), a gnoseology of this entrepreneurial dynamic is clearly lacking. Without being idealistic, such an approach would at least have the advantage of proposing a *common category* or *common type*, or a form of unity in diversity, in line with Aristotle's logic of opposites, or Hegel's dialectics whereby opposites only have meaning as part of a higher synthesis. In the same vein, Lévi-Strauss (1985) stated that, in human thought structures, opposites are always organized around shared or mediating structures. Opposites make sense within common systems of meaning. Conciliation mechanisms (CMs), which we propose to identify in this study, follow the same rationale.

Based on the principles of African humanist philosophy, this approach postulates that a business exists because it is built upon CMs specific to its environment. We might thus consider that many enterprises fail due to their incapacity to skillfully handle conflicts of interest, or due to a lack of justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991), and their inability to identify and build themselves on the base of such mechanisms.

The objective of this paper is thus to identify, based on a range of empirical data, the CMs underlying the operation of most enterprises in Africa. This ambition is bold for two reasons. On the one hand, there is a risk of reducing the density and diversity of the African business reality to a stereotype. However, it is important to note that the foundations of this diversity are primarily to be found in the values that characterize this society. On the other hand, these mechanisms might easily be assimilated to operating standards, to common modes or formulas in entrepreneurial behaviors. Nevertheless, our observation of the specific characteristics of individual enterprises leads us to consider the existence of a CM underlying the operations of each enterprise, with applications as different as the various business situations, histories, and contexts. From these two observations, we deduce that it would be difficult to enumerate such mechanisms exhaustively. A recurrence of their appearance in the cases studied would

illustrate saturation, although not total saturation, at least when considering these two reservations.

The developments that follow are divided into four parts. The first provides a concise overview of the literature on entrepreneurship in Africa and offers theoretical insight on the postulate of a model of African enterprises as receptacles of CMs. The second part concerns the method. We study eight business cases, first focusing on data and observations, then analyzing events, and finally identifying CMs. The third part provides an overview of the eight cases through a presentation of the CMs identified and their different forms. This description shows how these mechanisms, which contrast with some of the characteristics of classic companies, constitute tools that ensure the durability of the businesses in this study. The fourth and final part is a discussion of the contributions and conditions to ensure the validity of the theory of enterprises as receptacles of CMs.

### Characterizing enterprises in the African context

In this section, we look at several trends in the literature on entrepreneurship in Africa and present the basis of the social organization systems that constitute CMs.

#### **Entrepreneurship in Africa: trends in the literature**

Considering the numerous studies published on entrepreneurship in Africa, and following on from the traits already identified, we note a trend that consists in exploring new avenues and directions to understand and explain the entrepreneurial dynamics on the continent. Characteristics such as the strong influence of the family and ethnic group in business activities (Livian, 2020; Mamadou, 2020), the predominance of the informal sector in these activities (Chakuzira et al., 2024; Igwe & Ochianwata, 2022; Kuada, 2022), the role and dynamics of women (Adom, 2023; Kuada, 2009; Mamadou, 2020; Odeyemi et al., 2024; Ogundana et al., 2023), and the predominance of microfinancing and tontines (Adenutsi, 2023) have already been documented.

In addition, the literature explores new imagined realities of entrepreneurship in Africa (Gueye et al., 2024), the role of tech and innovation companies (Kansheba, 2020; Weiss et al., 2022), and social inclusion of marginalized groups, especially women, young people, and rural inhabitants (Moloi-Motsepe et al., 2023; Osei, 2024). Paradoxically, this literature mentions numerous persistent difficulties, in particular limited access to funding to develop social enterprises, educational resources and business networks, the lack of favorable ecosystems in rural areas, and specific obstacles related to gender such as restricted access to property or funding for female entrepreneurs (Odeyemi et al., 2024).

All of the aforementioned result from certain inappropriate public policies (Apostolopoulos et al., 2018; Chakuzira et al., 2024; Hansen et al., 2018; Weiss, 2021), the complex nature of the informal business ecosystem (Daradkeh, 2023; Igwe & Ochinawata, 2022), and the debatable analyses of some authors that only focus on the formal-informal dichotomy (Ado, 2024; Ado & Soparnot, 2022; Causse & Hien, 2024), even though the joint presence of small and large enterprises in the formal and informal sectors of African economies is undeniable (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2023).

This observation leads us to consider, following on from Chakuzori et al. (2024), the existence of a business discontent in Africa, which encourages us to explore and propose other approaches promoting a return to established values and fostering multiform resilience (social, economic, ecological, political, etc.) in the face of persistent obstacles. These solutions exist and are in fact pursued by a small handful of business owners, such as women who, despite facing greater funding difficulties, successfully overcome obstacles by cultivating social relationships and exploiting their social capital (Kuada, 2009). We consider that this type of compensation mechanism, or alternative lever, characterizes enterprises in the African context and explains their durability despite difficulties. These mechanisms seem to allow entrepreneurs, through their proactive commitment to local communities and interested parties, to contribute to creating a support network, which fosters resilience against the impact of multiple political uncertainties.

### **Entrepreneurial acts at the heart of discussions on how economic action is embedded in social structures**

The notion of embeddedness was introduced by Polanyi (1983 [1944]) to show that economic and noneconomic institutions condition the human economy – precisely because social, political, and cultural rules influence production and economic exchanges. To the extent that it is difficult to imagine an economic activity being pursued outside the social relations that shape it.

In line with the African enterprise model, this theoretical framework helps us to understand both how entrepreneurs mobilize the resources represented by CMs, through their relations, and how these mechanisms influence the management of their business. It therefore seems important to contextualize the entrepreneurial act since it is shaped and constrained by the relational structure of which it is a part. An explanation of the entrepreneurial act therefore moves from the fragmented dimension to the social structural dimension. Here, the local relationship-based environment of small enterprises is related not only to the influence of the environment on business owners but also to a collection of different social relations, multiple networks, and individual actions.

Since the entrepreneurial act is locally embedded, it would be incorrect to focus only on the psychological and individual attributes of business owners. It appears more pertinent to also consider their ability to identify and grasp the opportunities that arise from mobilizing local social relations, through the resources brought by local social networks (Plociniczak, 2003).

By identifying the local social relations of indigenous African entrepreneurs and their patterns, the structural approach of an African enterprise model contextualizes the behavior of members of the structure by calling on a number of CMs.

### **The CM as the basis of a structural African approach to business**

In Africa, like everywhere else, companies come in different sizes (large, small and medium, very small, etc.), have different legal statuses (public, private, personal, and subsidiaries of multinationals), and operate in different sectors (formal and informal).

We have opted to center on small businesses, partly to ensure quantitative representativeness, since this type of enterprise can be found everywhere in large agglomerations on the continent. Small businesses make up 90% of the economy in sub-Saharan Africa (Jaidi, 2020). In addition, despite the African continent's diversity, there are clear similarities in the essence of African culture and the way its businesses operate, in particular small, local businesses. As pointed out by Mutabazi (2006, p. 190), in Africa, 'the concrete operations of local companies are characterized by similar, sometimes identical phenomena, in the North (Algeria, Morocco), the Centre (Congo, DRC, etc.), the East (Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania) and in the West of the continent (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, etc.)'. We deduce that the business model that we envisage is a visible, recurrent reality all over the continent. This diagnosis shows the interest of the question asked and prompts us to set out the basic elements of the principle of the CM and present the idea behind it.

Usually, publications on the African enterprise model highlight that families, communities, and ethnic groups have a clear influence on the way that these businesses operate (Hernandez, 2007; Ouédraogo, 2007). They often refer to the 'community business' or 'village business' model. However, this approach is imprecise due to the numerous meanings that can be given to the notions of family, village, and community. Each of these terms relates to multiple, often different realities in the same geographic area. Given this imprecision, identifying the elements that characterize an African enterprise model using this analytical framework seems too narrow. These models do not have a common denominator that can simply be mobilized to explain the way these businesses operate.

The 'circulatory management' model is also proposed to analyze how businesses operate in Africa. The circulation of

goods and people, information, power, and human energy is thus presented as a unique feature of the African enterprise model. These combined dynamics are activated in businesses in order to ensure the social cohesion needed for the survival of the community and the fulfillment of each of its members.

With this approach, as for the previous models, the collective interest overrides the individual interest. In addition, the circulatory model has the advantage of extending the analysis to the different facets of the company's operations, considering the community not as a means for business expansion, but as a motivation for its action and that of the actors involved. The consideration of the notion of community is secondary, since the focus is rather on the circulation of goods, people, energy, power, and information. The methodological implications of this choice mean that only the dynamics are observed, without any real concern for determining what they are based on or driven by.

As mentioned by Iribarne (1989) when talking about honor in French companies, it is important to delve deep and identify a hard core of common categories that can explain the different forms of an African business model. Existing attempts to define a model fail to do so, both theoretically and methodologically.

### **The concept of Ubuntu: the principle at the basis of CMs**

The concept of *Ubuntu*<sup>2</sup> is the principle at the basis of the CMs that we set about to identify (Biwolé Fouda, 2020). *Ubuntu* originated in South Africa and the Zulu and Xhosa languages and pertains to a philosophy of socially embedded individuals. It also defines the relationship between individuals and otherness. As a result, *Ubuntu* management is a model that translates 'values' like respect, helpfulness, sharing, community, generosity, trust, and disinterest, which are shared by a large number of African managers. These 'values' are both means that guide the decisions of entrepreneurs and the keys to their social integration. This concept thus appears to be rooted in the African socio-anthropological context. It puts into perspective the CMs that indigenous African entrepreneurs employ on an everyday basis in their interactions with the business world and their exchanges with the social sphere and their community. This philosophy is thus an axiological resource for these business people and guides their decisions and actions to guarantee harmony with their peers. By leveraging the construction and consolidation of intra-community redistribution rationales,

<sup>2</sup> This concept shares similarities with *Teranga* in Senegal, *Akwaba* in Côte d'Ivoire, etc. *Ubuntu* philosophy here constitutes a search for meaning concerning real observed situations. The departure point of the analysis is therefore not an anthropological approach from which consequences are drawn, but rather an insight into concrete situations that we use as a basis to give meaning.

this concept can be described as an activator of conviviality and solidarity. It allows entrepreneurs to acquire an image whose social value positively impacts their business.

By giving primacy to the community, which is a representation of proximity, the concept of *Ubuntu* resonates with studies by Tönnies (2010), which provide insight into this notion of proximity and its possible expressions in the African context. An analysis of studies on the subject leads us to identify: first, the family, clan, kinship, etc. as the constituents of a community synonymous with proximity of blood; second, the neighborhood, vicinity, small communities, etc. as elements of a community synonymous with proximity of place; third, religion, tradition, similar animist practices, etc. as the components of a community synonymous with spiritual proximity. These different conceptions of proximity could be considered as CMs or constitute their foundations. They thus participate in the characterization of an African enterprise model.

On this basis, the intuition that guides, but does not condition, our empirical investigation leads us to consider that in the African context, enterprises are a receptacle of CMs. An enterprise exists because it has been able to harmoniously connect to these elements of its ecosystem: the existence of such mechanisms within a company ensures its durability. As a result, we retain the latter as a key criterion for choosing the companies in our sample, whatever their status in the informal or formal sector.

As such, considering enterprises in Africa as receptacles of CMs pursues the idea put forward by Iribarne (1989) whereby traditions shape what the members of a people 'revere and disdain'. In line with this approach, a business that goes bankrupt is considered to have failed to identify and exploit these CMs. CMs can therefore be seen as categories that justify and legitimize a company's action. From this point of view, they are in line with justification theory, which maintains that individuals justify their actions by calling on different justification rationales, depending on different values, the only condition being that these values allow them to secure a certain recognition and a certain legitimacy, in specific situations and contexts (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991).

### **Identifying CMs: From empiricism to reality**

In this part, we present the points of reference of critical realism in our study, its methodological implications, the sample selected, the data collection methods, and the analysis methods. We then describe the cases studied and the first analyses that emerge.

### **Steps of the process and analysis method**

Critical realism is an epistemological approach situated between realist epistemology and relativist epistemology

(Meissonier, 2022). Bhaskar (2008) considers reality by breaking it down into three levels: the real domain that comprises structures and mechanisms; the actual domain in which events occur; and the empirical domain which is made up of experiences and observations. This conception of reality corresponds to the object of our research, for at least two reasons. First, the CMs that we employ have already been established. They existed before our investigation and have been employed to determine the behaviors and decisions of entrepreneurs, although they had not yet been identified in the literature as such. For this reason, they are not necessarily known *a priori* by researchers and are not naturally observable. They correspond to the structures and mechanisms that constitute the real domain in Bhaskar's categorization. Second, our empirical approach starts by observing the everyday lives of the businesses studied. It then involves interviews with the business owners and continues with a description and analysis of key events in their business activity. We consider that this sequence corresponds to the empirical domain and, to a certain extent, to the actual domain in Bhaskar's philosophy.

Consequently, our investigation took place in three stages following a bottom-up process similar to the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Stage 1 comprised data collection following semi-structured interviews with different entrepreneurs. We used the triangulation technique by each time comparing the content of our observation notes with the content of the interviews in order to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Stage 2 concerned key events in the enterprises' activity. The occurrence of these events was initially revealed by the entrepreneur in the first phase of the interviews or figured out by the researcher, thanks to his knowledge of the activity of the business over a year. Following a description and an analysis of the event jointly carried out by the researcher and the entrepreneur during a second phase of interviews, the ethnographic method was used to produce an account. Stage 3 consisted in analyzing the content of the different accounts and, through open coding,<sup>3</sup> producing a categorization. The *ex post* categories that emerge are considered to be CMs. This approach (see Table 1) was systematically repeated for each new business case studied, until the point of saturation.

### Selection criteria for the sample

We carried out ethnographic studies from February 2021 to July 2022. Eight entrepreneurs from six African countries were interviewed. The sample was built based partly on the durability of the activity, which we expect to be rooted in CMs, and

<sup>3</sup> This coding could be assimilated to what Locke (2001) calls coding-naming. As indicated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the aim here is to understand and identify the underlying elements featuring in the entrepreneurs' accounts.

partly on the relationship of trust established with the different entrepreneurs. The teachability of the case also guided us in our definitive choice of enterprises. To paraphrase Granovetter (2003), these enterprises, independently from their size and business sector, provide an interpretive and comparative framework to investigate the level of embeddedness and the type of social structure capable of fostering economic activities. These activities are less likely to be companies with a legal and bureaucratic status (2 out of 8) than social structures more suited to indigenous African entrepreneurs – a type of entity whose success is little known on a macroeconomic level. This teachability made us particularly keen to choose a bank, since its background and that of its promoter were very strongly anchored in the local business ecosystem, and because of its original structure characteristic of small enterprises. From our point of view, this criterion of teachability indicates the experience of the entrepreneur from whom we collect the data. We could thus logically expect this experience to determine the durability of the business.

We carried out a series of two interviews totaling 2 h on average with each entrepreneur. Depending on the time of year and the key events of their activity, we interviewed each entrepreneur twice: during the sowing season and the harvesting season (C3); during the Ramadan and outside the Ramadan period (C2, C7); at Easter time and at an ordinary time (C6); at the start of the 2021 school year and during the 2021–2022 school year (C1, C4); at the time of funerals and major traditional village festivals (C8, C5).

These interviews were carried out in a semi-structured and individual manner. During the previous 12 weeks, we made direct observations in the territories where these companies were established, which allowed us to later hone the responses obtained during the semi-structured interviews, in particular using the reminder technique. This ethnographic approach is particularly recommended for studies regarding the local embeddedness of entrepreneurs since it indicates the measures through which the local relationship structure influences the construction of the entrepreneurial act (Plociniczak, 2003).

To carry out our observations and interviews, we previously established close contact with each of the eight entrepreneurs.<sup>4</sup> Initially, we paid close attention to the description of local features. Then, we centered on the entrepreneurs' perspectives and their perception and interpretation of key events in their activity. Finally, we opted for a low level of pre-organized instrumentation. Ethnographic methods center on description, and we thus turned our attention to the behavior patterns identified during interviews, since these are generally expressed in terms of 'models', to provide us with the keys to understanding an African enterprise model. As defined by Van

<sup>4</sup> This contact was possible, thanks to the presence of participants in the training seminar organized in Dakar in October 2020 on strengthening the business capacities of African civil society.

**Table 1.** Overview of the empirical process

Step of the process	Domain	Method/tool/action
First step	EMPIRICAL	Data collection through observations and semi-structured interviews; Triangulation of data.
Second step	ACTUAL	Identification of events; New semi-structured interviews specifically on the events identified; detailed description of the events (by the entrepreneur and the researcher); Analyses and interpretations of data on the events; Production of an account based on all of the data collected since the first step (ethnographic method); Comparison with the literature.
Third step	REAL	Analysis of the content of the different accounts, using open coding; Categorization (category <i>ex-post</i> ); Identification of CMs.

Source: own elaboration.  
CM, conciliation mechanism.

Maanen (1979), this approach revealed the ways in which numerous indigenous African entrepreneurs understand their situation on an everyday basis.

### Case presentation

In order to provide a synthetic overview of the facts observed, here we present a series of eight cases selected in six countries on the continent<sup>5</sup> (see Table 2). Thanks to the analysis of our observations and the interviews that we carried out with each entrepreneur, we produced accounts focusing on several aspects of the way that the business operates in order to identify the CMs. In line with the criterion of durability mentioned earlier, we note that all of these businesses have been established for more than 10 years, and some go back more than 40 years.

### Coris Bank Burkina

Coris Bank Burkina (CBB) is a Burkinabe bank created in 2008 on the ashes of a financial establishment. Its promoter, Mr. Nassa, bought the financial establishment with his savings and those of his family and a fund made available by other funding individuals from the Rood Woko market. The financial establishment had specialized in selling motorcycles and spare parts on credit. Mr. Nassa very quickly developed the business by building relationships of trust with the main moped suppliers, members of his family. The financial establishment obtained mopeds on credit with very advantageous supplier lead times; guarantees were the given word, trust, and the family. The father of a family can acquire this mode of

locomotion on credit without any guarantees or formalities. Unknown clients can access credit by making an application through a known person, who acts as guarantor. Note that credit is granted based on trust due to proximity of place and blood, which is the consequence of the structural and relational dimensions of the CBB's embeddedness. In general, the loaner knows the borrower; he knows his family and the family's reputation, he knows his house, or else, he knows people in his relational network who know the borrower very well. Consequently, the borrower's capacity to honor his commitments is analyzed on the basis of relevant information. The efficiency of the finance decision therefore relies on a socio-cultural anchoring similar to in microfinance and informal finance (Fall, 2011).

The CBB then increased its business portfolio by converting into a bank specializing in funding SMEs/VSBs. These enterprises are mostly active in the informal sector and operate according to a clearly defined strategy. Mr. Nassa drew on his knowledge of the environment to establish a specific credit risk management policy that takes into account the realities of this business environment. For example, a young tradesman who needs financing to develop his business can obtain a loan, with no material or financial guarantee, on the sole condition that he is supported by an old market seller. This principle is based on trust and integrity: an individual who does not repay their credit will not be able to carry on working easily at the 'Rood woko' market and its vicinity. He or she would therefore damage their reputation and that of their parents. Here too, the decision to grant funding is based on a pertinent evaluation of the risk of non-repayment. The proximity of place and the relational network create objective trust because they are a product of the way the market works: applicants are obliged to preserve both their reputation and that of their families in order to maintain the possibility of being able to borrow again;

<sup>5</sup> For editorial purposes, the accounts reproduced are a summary of the in-depth descriptions and studies produced for each case studied.

**Table 2.** Sample of case studies

Case	Name	Activity	Country	Year created
C1*	Coris Bank Burkina (CBB)	Bank	Burkina-Faso	2008
C2	Malian restaurant in Dakar	Catering	Senegal	2005
C3	Vieux Ablaye	Farming	Senegal	1996
C4	Sékou mechanic	Small garage	Burkina-Faso	1980
C5	Kibiss transport	Goods transportation	Mali	1990
C6	Shop in Mbrimbo village	General trade	Côte-d'Ivoire	1982
C7	Kibi fritter seller	Street food	Niger	2006
C8*	Transport company	Interurban passenger transportation	Cameroon	1999

Note: \* companies active in the formal sector.

Source: own elaboration.

the loaner is aware of the scarcity of credit and the price granted to the family reputation in this local environment, to the extent that he bases his financing decision on this immaterial guarantee.

In addition, the CBB has developed an offer that consists in granting a loan in 45 min, with no financial guarantees, and which only needs to be paid back when the applicant has fulfilled his or her objectives. Nevertheless, very few payment defaults are recorded. Small, known entrepreneurs can therefore benefit from an advance payment to help kick off their project, on the sole condition of being known. Trainee civil servants can obtain an equipment loan with no conditions or formalities before they receive their first pay check. Despite the strong growth of his business, Mr. Nassa is still supportive to his clients and participates in socio-cultural events (baptisms, funerals, weddings, etc.) that they organize.

### Malian restaurant in Dakar

This restaurant has been serving Malian specialties for over 15 years. The business is owned by a female Malian national who employs more than 10 people, most of them from her own family (children, cousins, nephews, nieces, etc.). The price of a meal varies from 1,000 to 1,500 FCFA<sup>6</sup> depending on the customer. In fact, the customer base is mainly made up of regulars of Malian origin, who get a cheap price (1,000 FCFA). Throughout the month, these customers come and eat on credit as often as they like; they only pay their tab at the end of the month once they have received their salary. As well as being able to 'eat well' at a 'good price' at the restaurant, the Malian community in Dakar also benefits from a meeting place. Malian nationals regularly get together to discuss problems in their country and sometimes raise funds to carry through small projects in their home village. The way this

<sup>6</sup> Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine (Franc of Central African States). About 1.5 euros and 2.3 euros.

business operates is an illustration of a community based on proximity of blood.

### Vieux Ablaye farming business in the Kaolack region

Vieux Ablaye (old Ablaye) lives in a village in the Kaolack region of Senegal. In this region, Islam is the main religion (over 95% of the population). The small local economy mostly revolves around farming, which employs more than 75% of the population. Vieux Ablaye is a farmer and an important figure in the village, the father of 15 children and husband of three wives. He is the head of a large family, being responsible for around 30 people (15 children, three wives, two sisters, four nieces, one brother, seven nephews, one sister-in-law, and four daughters-in-law).

His activity involves growing peanuts, *mil sounas*, *niébé*, and corn, and selling his crops. His harvested crops are stored in a warehouse that he has built in the village. Most of the crops are sold on site to traders who sometimes come from Fatick or Kaolack. The remainder is sold at regular markets in the surrounding villages by his children, nephews, and nieces, whom he employs for the task. He therefore has a team of over 20 sellers who distribute his produce at several markets on different days, which adds up to a significant turnover. At the end of the winter, he shares out his harvest, and the results of his sales are as follows: one portion is kept for seeds for the following year; another covers the family's needs (food, health, and family events); one portion goes to charity (it is recommended to distribute a share of each harvest in the form of charitable handouts); another portion ensures the school fees of his children, nieces, and nephews; a portion is reserved for replacing work equipment; the rest is shared with his brother and the older members of his family, including small gifts for the children and wives (toys, fabric for religious ceremonies, etc.). The durability of his activity is more important to Vieux Ablaye than its growth. By managing his business in this way, he successfully ensures the durability of his activity and the livelihood of his large family.

### Sékou the mechanic in Ouagadougou

Sékou is a garage mechanic who has been based in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso since 1980. At that time, most young people of his generation were still going to primary school. He started his business in a shed located at the side of a neighbor's yard in a small street in his neighborhood. His good neighborly relations made it easier to set up his activity, which gave him employment and brought him enough to meet his basic needs. The services that Sékou offers include mending and pumping tires and repairing motorbikes and bicycles. He provides his neighbors with an easy repair solution given his proximity and readily offers credit, using rudimentary materials. Fifteen years after starting his activity, Sékou moved his business to a different location in the same neighborhood.

In 2001, Sékou built a new residence about 10 kilometers away from his original neighborhood, where he maintains his activity. He can be found at the workshop every morning, and his workplace has become a place where neighborhood residents come and sit all day to pass time and chat. His clientele still mainly comprises local residents and remains loyal. Sékou has no competitors in the neighborhood, and the nearest mechanics are about three kilometers away. This geographic situation is exceptional in a city where small mechanic businesses can be found on every corner. Sékou has never thought about innovating or expanding his activity (e.g., extending the shed or taking on new activities such as selling spare parts). He has a monopoly in the area, yet he has never raised the price of his services in spite of frequent inflation.

### Kibiss goods transportation in Mopti, Mali

In the 1990s, Mr. Kibiss created a sole proprietorship company to transport goods in the Malian city of Mopti, the fifth administrative region in the country and a trade hub between adjacent countries. The city's geographical location has led to the development of a vibrant transport activity. From the start, the truck driver and his assistant were Mr. Kibiss's younger brothers. The driver did not receive a salary, but the business owner paid him a small sum for each trip to cover living expenses and also paid his family expenses (health, children's school fees, etc.).

After 2 years of operation, Mr. Kibiss's company purchased a new truck to be used by the driving assistant of the old truck. This new truck was given to its driver in the form of a repayable loan (commonly known as 'work-pay') based on the net revenue of a year of operation. As a result of this system, after 4 years of activity, the entrepreneur and his two brothers had built up a fleet of four trucks. At the same time, Mr. Kibiss began to diversify his business by applying the 'work-pay' principle. He

also opened stores to sell spare parts and lubricants in Bamako. Many of these new stores have been passed onto other brothers and half-brothers. M. Kibiss currently has more than 20 vehicles and four stores selling spare parts.

### Mbrimbo village store in Côte d'Ivoire

The village of Mbrimbo is located in the region of Tiassalé in the south of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, about 135 kilometers north of the economic capital Abidjan. In July 1982, M. Tiekoura opened a grocery store. Mbrimbo has a population of about 2,500 inhabitants. The main objective of this entrepreneur in opening his business was to make it easy for village residents to access basic goods. The store is equipped with a diesel-powered generator that produces electricity to supply the entire village. M. Tiekoura, a business executive living in Abidjan, employed a young person in the village to manage his store in return for a monthly pay check.

The operating principle of the store is simple: villagers are authorized to take goods on credit and pay back their debt by Easter of the current year at the latest. The owner reviews the accounts of his store during the same period to ensure financing of enough stock to cover the coming 12 months. At this time, he calls on the head of the village, who is the moral guarantor of the activity, with the aim of denouncing any villagers who have not paid their debt. In such situations, an amount of money equal to the debt is withdrawn from the financial payments of the defaulting villager's family. The village has a kind of insurance fund managed by the village head, whereby each family hands over a minimal amount of money to the head every month. In line with established tradition, when a happy or unhappy event occurs in a family, the head draws from the fund to assist them financially. This mechanism also serves as a guarantee of payment to the village store in the case of outstanding debts. Families are keen to maintain their reputation, so that activating this payment mechanism is considered as an offense to the well-being of the village community. Since its creation in 1982, few payment defaults have occurred, and the business has never gone bankrupt.

### Kibi: Fritter seller in Niamey

Kibi sells fritters made from millet flour along with rice porridge and bean sauce. She carries out her business in a makeshift shack along the side of one of the busiest streets in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Her fritters are particularly popular with her mostly Muslim clients during the Ramadan period to break their daily fast. The seller's clientele includes people from all social classes. One evening, during Ramadan, a non-regular client offered to buy the entire production of fritters at a unit price five times higher than the usual price. Kibi refused to sell the merchandise to this customer to avoid disappointing

regular clients coming to buy fritters later that evening, even though they would pay the usual price. This same attitude to customer loyalty leads Kibi to ration her sales on particularly busy days. Since she can only prepare a given number of fritters, she reserves the right to restrict the quantity of fritters that she sells to individual customers based on their years of custom, matrimonial status, or for married men, the number of wives and children. The fritter seller knows every one of her numerous regular customers.

### **Questrans interurban transport company in Cameroon**

This transportation company belongs to an entrepreneur originally from the West Region of Cameroon. The business was created in 1999 and transports passengers from Yaoundé and Douala to the regional capital of West Cameroon (city A), and one of the administrative areas in the West Region (city B), which happens to be the entrepreneur's home village. A distance of 80 kilometers separates these two cities. To reach city B, you need to go through city A, whatever your point of departure. Given the distance, and from an economic point of view, the price of a ticket to reach city B should be higher than the price to reach city A. However, this transport company does not apply such a policy, since the price to reach city B (3,500 FCFA<sup>7</sup>) is surprisingly lower than the price to reach city A (4,500 FCFA<sup>8</sup>). Consequently, on weekends, high numbers of passengers travel to city B. Most of these people make the journey to participate in sacred funeral ceremonies and other traditional rites. By applying this commercial strategy, the transport company promoter contributes to supporting his tradition by making it easier for members of his community to travel to the village at a preferential rate. This activity thus promotes his culture and preserves the cultural heritage of his region.

### **Overview and case analysis**

The description of the eight cases follows the chosen methodology. We have centered on both the consistency of some of the facts and phenomena identified by different entrepreneurs and the key events in their activities. This does not mean that we consider that there are no conflicts of interest in these enterprises; the idea is simply to identify common categories, common types, and shared or mediating structures (Levi-Strauss, 1990). This involves identifying the motivations for the peaceful and amicable settlement of potential conflicts, so as to highlight the foundations of justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991) present within the businesses investigated.

<sup>7</sup> 5,35 euros.

<sup>8</sup> 6,88 euros.

After carrying out the analysis previously presented, the above accounts allowed us to identify a number of CMs and their different forms. We thus obtained five CMs that are central to the operation of the enterprises studied. Although recurrent, they take different forms from one business to the next. In what follows, we present each of these mechanisms and attempt to show what makes them original.

### **Family/community**

The family/community is at the heart of business operations in the African context. It is mentioned as the main motivation for all of the enterprise's activities, from its creation to the allocation of the resources it generates. However, while the results of this study confirm the key role of the family or community, already recognized in the literature, they also point to new forms of this CM and underline that the community can extend beyond tribes and ethnic groups.

### **Family: Omnipresent CM**

The family constitutes a guarantee for the funder lending money or the trader granting credit with no time limit to clients: the family's reputation is sacred (C1, C6). Should one of the members default, the solidarity that characterizes African societies is activated to honor the commitments made by the brother and preserve the common good represented by family reputation: for Africans, 'tarnishing a family's image' amounts to a curse. The action of the entrepreneur, trader, or donor is based on this conviction and even constitutes its essence. This is why the family is a CM because it is key to the satisfaction of suppliers and demanders of services and goods.

The family is also at the center of actions like offering preferential prices to customers who are family members (C2, C8), employing family members (C3), and sharing the income generated by the activity with other family members (C3). Economic actors in African systems are motivated to attain an 'ethical qualification certificate' that gives them a greater social value. This value ensures that their business stands the test of time. Different interested parties in the enterprise are satisfied by these actions rooted in attachment to the family.

Our analyses show a more original form of the family as a CM in the African context. This concerns the tendency to use one activity to create another, thanks to a brother's labor. This activity is transmitted to the brother after a certain time, to allow him to 'fly with his own wings' (C5). Concretely, in an initial phase, the entrepreneur employs a very close family member with no work contract and without formal remuneration. During that time, he takes care of the vital needs of this individual and other members of the family. In a second

phase, which might occur 2 or 3 years later depending on the type of activity, the entrepreneur hands the former activity over to this family member (brother). Alternatively, he might open a new business for the brother's benefit. This practice is similar to the concept of a spinoff, corresponding to dissemination in different places of small business units belonging to the family. Compared to a classic company, this practice illustrates that in enterprises in Africa, social legitimacy goes beyond legality. This is totally in step with the *Ubuntu* philosophy according to which 'I am what I am thanks to what we are'. A principle of the Tönnies philosophy can be found here, according to which individual interests are overridden by the objectives of the community: the individual does not exist within a community.

### **Community: Beyond ethnic group, a common destiny**

Unlike what is mentioned by Livian (2020) and Mamadou (2020), community goes beyond affiliation to a family, ethnic group, or tribe. It is conceived as a set of people with a common destiny or fate, even if they belong to different cultural areas. An entrepreneur considers that everyone needs to club together to avoid failure, to avoid everyone losing, or losing everything; together, the risk of losing everything is limited (C1). The idea conveyed here is similar to what is found in alliance strategies (Garrette, 1989), which consist in gathering the resources available to be more effective. However, in an alliance strategy, gain is the main target of the various partners, while in African enterprises, the pooling of resources or the creation of a community enterprise is based on a rationale of collective survival. The notion of 'acceptable loss' put forward by Sarasvathy (2001) as one of the principles of *effectual* entrepreneurship features here. Everyone works together to avoid everyone perishing; the action of the different interested parties, in particular that of the entrepreneur, is guided by the search for a vital minimum for all. In this sense, the community (shared destiny and fate) is understood to be a CM in this business model. The role of ethnic groups in business in Africa is already well documented. This CM shows us that the community is not limited to the same tradition and the same culture. It integrates a proximity of destiny. In other words, the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial act in Africa depends on the consideration given to the people with whom one shares the same destiny.

### **Time: A complex mechanism in African business**

Time in organizations is perceived differently depending on the context (Pulk, 2022). In businesses in the African context, time is an axiological resource mobilized for the benefit of interested parties with uncertain and relatively low incomes.

While in the classic business model, 'time is money', which justifies actors' eagerness to give its value and create financial temporality, in African humanist philosophy, and time is valued rather by taking one's time. While in the Western model, loans are granted with precise guarantees and repayment schedules, in the African enterprise model, debtors benefit from a repayment period that depends on the opportunities open to them (C1, C2, and C6). They are given the time they need to find the money to repay their debt (C2). While in a classic company, partnerships are built on the basis of the extent of the partner's financial efficiency, the African enterprise model puts greater trust in age: the older you are, the more you are respected, and the greater the amount of trust capital you will be granted (C1). While in classic companies, the time devoted to clients is remunerated, in the African enterprise model, more time is spent on specifically satisfying individual clients: this additional time does not increase the price of the service (C7). It can therefore be seen that in this business model, temporality depends on history, it is based on relationships and is a historical time. Driven by this philosophy, an enterprise takes time in its action in order to individually satisfy each customer. Time is therefore a real resource for companies in Africa; it is rich and complex; it is influenced by cultural, social, economic, and historical elements at once. For this reason, it is considered as a key CM in this business model.

### **Attachment to durability: A CM that takes numerous forms**

Africans are attached to durability. This can be seen in different ways in the enterprises studied: proximity of people (e.g., customers), by bringing them assistance at times of joy and sadness (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.) (C1); proximity of place because the place in which the activity is carried out becomes a convivial space where elders and local people get together (C4); durability with the ecosystem, which involves keeping close to the activity all the people with whom ties have been forged. This is the reason why business owners are satisfied with the little they earn, avoiding opportunistically increasing their prices as far as possible, which would lead to losing some clients (C4 and C7). For the same reason, they prefer selling to regular clients at the usual price rather than accepting a higher price offered by a non-regular client (C7). The fact of walking to the shops or to sell your produce at the closest market also participates in this durability. The same conviction can be found when an entrepreneur prioritizes the survival of the people around him or her (sharing revenues from sales) (C3). The attachment to this form of durability acts in this business model to stimulate decisions and actions that foster the livelihood of all actors involved in the operations of the business. We can therefore identify a strong durability in

the sense of Neumayer (2003). For this reason, this characteristic is considered as a CM.

### **Trust that people will keep their word and in the relational network**

Business actions and decisions often depend on trusting that people will keep their word and on the quality of the relational network, in particular in customer relationships. In the place of a material guarantee, Africans believe in people's word, in particular when given by older or reputed people (CI). The word 'in Africa possesses an extraordinary primacy over all of the other instruments of political, religious, intellectual or pedagogical power' (Noah, 1974, p. 350). A person's word is considered to be a sufficient guarantee to obtain merchandise or foodstuffs from a tradesperson who will be paid back later: A project manager who does not have the money to see through a project can obtain an advance to start the work; a young civil servant waiting for their first pay check can purchase the equipment they need for their house (CI). To obtain credit, the word of a notable or old person can be 'bequeathed' as an asset to another member of the community who does not belong to the family or to a young trader starting out with no source of financing (CI). In this case, a kind of combination is established between trust in the word and the relational network: these determine the entrepreneur's decision. The efficient operation of a small business in its socio-economic and cultural environment is undeniably conditioned by the tryptic of proximity, trust, and decision. Embeddedness through a relational network and trust in people's word, as forms of proximity, thus appear to be CMs.

### **Attachment to tradition**

Attachment to tradition, customs, and practices, and more generally the belief in an invisible world, imbues the everyday life of businesses in the African context. Entrepreneurs draw from these immaterial elements to act in a certain way in their commercial activity. In line with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, they use their activity to promote cultural values. As a result, from one enterprise to another, we can find practices like charity, sacrifices, and donations to the village head, in order to obtain the ancestral blessing required to ensure that the business runs smoothly (C3 and C8), and the use of traditional healers, priests, pastors, or imams, with the aim of protecting the business from mystical attacks by competitors or possible enemies (Biwolé-Fouda & Tedongmo, 2020). We observe a combination of objective and subjective variables, the cohabitation of the rational and the irrational in the way that business is carried out in Africa. These different dichotomies fit into a synthetic

rationale that drives entrepreneurs and participates in their action.

Table 3 presents an overview of our analyses.

### **Discussion: Toward a theory of the enterprise as a receptacle of CMs?**

In addition to the results obtained, we can legitimately ask the question of whether the African enterprise model, as presented here, is competitive.

### **Relational structure and mobilization of CMs**

The relationships that entrepreneurs establish with local actors make it easier to access this kind of resource. CMs allow entrepreneurs to develop activities that isolated entrepreneurs would not be able to operate. The eight entrepreneurs pay attention to both the networks of interpersonal relations that they have developed and to the opportunities that these bring them. These CMs bring a competitive advantage to entrepreneurs pursuing three very different options: establishment of relationships, coordination, and returning favors. The establishment of relationships refers to the entrepreneur's integration in the territory where his or her enterprise is located. Coordination refers to the aptitude of the entrepreneur's clients to be loyal. The return of favors is a relational process that leads the entrepreneurs to feel indebted to their regular customers.

These eight entrepreneurs look to satisfy the needs of a local clientele. They have learned the specificities of their location and their businesses. CMs allow them to be in harmony with the particular features of the places in which their businesses are located: the social capital of entrepreneurs relates here to the sum of resources derived from the local relational structure (Plociniczak, 2003). Access to these resources has positive impacts on the entrepreneurial act. These resources do not in themselves constitute the social capital of entrepreneurs: the conceptualization of social capital means considering first the resources available, then their accessibility, and finally the capacity of entrepreneurs to mobilize them. Entrepreneurs are in this way led to retain, from the available resources, those that allow their business to integrate the places where they are located. These CMs would be difficult to mobilize outside such social relations. However, these relational networks are not limited to a restricted geographic area. Here, enterprises are positioned as places to test out 'local customs, practices, rules and norms' (Plociniczak, 2003, p. 458), in order that they may exist, and that the entrepreneurs may benefit from the positive features of the relational structure of their place of location. The analysis of these eight business cases thus demonstrates a reciprocity norm that is established between

**Table 3.** Overview of cases with identification of conciliation mechanisms

Activity	Conciliation mechanism	Form or manifestation
Bank (C1)	TIME	Loans granted by suppliers with very favorable payback schedules; respect for older people, the partner's age is a guarantee, a sign of trust; loans granted in 45 min, rapid disbursements and repayments depending on applicants' situation
	FAMILY/COMMUNITY	Reputation of the family; trust in a family
	WORD GUARANTEE	Guarantee sufficient to access credit, obtain an advance payment, equip a house while awaiting the first pay check; integrity; trust
	RELATIONAL NETWORK	Being known is sufficient to access a loan, without necessarily belonging to the family
Catering (C2)	ATTACHMENT TO DURABILITY (proximity of people/solidarity)	Company assists its client for happy and sad occasions (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.)
	FAMILY/COMMUNITY	Preferential prices for customers in the same tribe, nationality; easy get-togethers between community members to discuss development projects
Agriculture (C3)	TIME	Eat on credit and pay back when you have the money
	ATTACHMENT TO DURABILITY (durability of the ecosystem)	The priority is the survival of everyone, by sharing revenues with everyone; durability is seen in terms of the livelihood of all actors, without thinking of oneself or one's own family; personal financial gain is not important
	FAMILY	The business is carried out to meet the needs of a large family; the distribution of crops is done on this basis; family labor is employed for all domains of activity; specialization according to age (sales for the younger members, management, and control for the older members)
Small-scale mechanic (C4)	ATTACHMENT TO DURABILITY (proximity of place)	Attachment to the place where the business is carried out and the people who live there; the place of work becomes a convivial space where older and local people get together
	ATTACHMENT TO DURABILITY (durability of the ecosystem)	Satisfaction with earning a low income in order to keep everyone close by; no particular desire to earn more money. For example, the prices remain the same to avoid losing some older clients
Transport of goods (C5)	WORK-PAY	Type of remuneration saving that allows a family member to set up their own activity and become autonomous, after a few years of work
	SPINOFF	Diversification of activities to hand them over to other family members
General trade (C6)	TIME	Motivation variable for poor villagers and people in need; not a constraint, they are given the time to find the money; time works to the advantage of those who have little
	FAMILY	Reputation is a pillar which is relied on to satisfy people; they are trusted
Small-scale catering (C7)	ATTACHMENT TO DURABILITY (durability of relationships, contacts)	The durability of relationships has no price; it is preferable to additional profits; actions aim at maintaining relationships for the long term
	TIME	Give time to others to satisfy them; time is for the benefit of others; you give your time to others
Passenger transport (C8)	TRADITION	Maintain your traditions and promote cultural values of your region through your business; requirement of giving to charity

Source: own elaboration.

these entrepreneurs and their customers. These actors, who know each other, make regular exchanges, thus giving value to people's word: they enrich relationships through trust and reciprocity.

### Overview of potential contributions to the organization theory

In addition to the different specific features already identified in the case overview earlier, we can consider that the model of

the enterprise as a receptacle of CMs points to other potential contributions to the literature.

### Conceptual dichotomies instructive to the study of organizations

The present research clearly illustrates the opposition between, on the one hand, a chronological time, based on a linear, mechanistic vision of time in organizations, and, on the other hand, a historical time that rather considers past events

in the trajectory of relations with a partner (Basal et al., 2022; Holt & Johnsen, 2019).

The first vision is related to objective, economic, and even financial time, whereas the second is associated with opportunity, a 'kairotic' time, to use the term of Holt and Johnsen (2019). The same analysis leads us to consider on the one side a transactional time, in the sense that it is based on the measurable terms of exchange, and on the other side, a relational time that gives priority to the quality of the relationship with the subject of the exchange. The CM that constitutes time therefore means we can consider that, unlike the standard, linear approach to time generally perceived in Western organizations, the perception and management of time in Africa present specific characteristics that guide entrepreneurial practices and determine their effectiveness.

The aforementioned results also highlight an opposition between, on the one side, weak, procedural, restricted, and selective durability (Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Landrum, 2018; Neumayer, 2013) and, on the other side, strong durability (Neumayer, 2013). In fact, by integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the conception of durability, as recommended by Dyllick and Muff (2016), the CMs above clearly illustrate the characteristics of CSR in the African context (Biwolé-Fouda, 2023) and come closer to holistic durability. Durability as described earlier in the businesses investigated appears to us to correspond to strong durability because it simultaneously takes into account ecosystems and proximity of people and place. Paradoxically, the durability model frequently adopted by businesses in the West fails to limit the degradation of the environment. It is therefore an imperfect model.

The conceptual dichotomies described earlier invite a rethink of some public policies on promoting business in Africa.

### **CMs: Ingredients for endogenous, effective public policies**

Several studies on entrepreneurship in Africa have questioned both the public policies implemented and the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They particularly point the finger at a fundamental lack of understanding of the subtleties of local business ecosystems (Chakuzira, 2024; Kansheba, 2020). Integrating the above-mentioned CMs into the conception and implementation of these policies should make them more effective. For example, focusing on the time aspect could provide information on the way in which these successful entrepreneurs adapt to uncertainty, manage crises, and fit in with wider societal or cultural paces.

Similarly, considering the plurality of time would, for example, lead to implementing the concept of temporal intermediation (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015), and setting up time brokers whose role would be to conciliate conflictual time

requirements, like durability initiatives, social enterprises, and inter-sectorial partnerships. This would help reinforce organizational legitimacy, improve coordination, and boost trust between interested parties, both in the entrepreneurial world and in that of organizations in the African context in general.

In addition, the consideration of CMs by entrepreneurs, NGOs, and public policies would connect local and global spheres, promoting the integration of the micro and macro perspectives of durability. The lack of such a vision is criticized in the literature (Delbridge et al., 2024; Landrum, 2018). In addition, the adoption by different actors of the common categories constituted by CMs would help to reduce financial exclusion and inequalities based on gender, which persist in the business world in Africa (Odeyemi et al., 2024).

### ***The model of the African enterprise as a receptacle of CMs: An incomplete approach***

The literature on organizational behavior shows us that it is possible to play with territorial and social affiliation. Local networks of acquaintances (in the family, clan or tribe) can be employed to fit in with a 'local lineage', and business owners can thus advantageously use their geographic or ethnic origin as a form of territorial anchoring that can 'bring entrepreneurs economic, symbolic and social resources' (Raymond & Chauvin, 2014, p. 114). Based on this way of thinking, the model of the African enterprise as a receptacle of CMs makes perfect sense. At the same time, it seems legitimate to point out that this 'playing' with affiliations can also involve putting them to one side. Such an approach makes it possible to move outside strictly local networks or avoid social obligations 'that could constitute obstacles to entrepreneurial projects' (p. 114).

Given the earlier, the relevance of this business model needs perfecting. The model seems to be incomplete: beyond the internal limits of this reflection framework, this approach only relates to one side of African realities. Studies on entrepreneurship already mention the social support that allows actors to implement their business projects and develop them (Etogo, 2019), but the ways in which this play of affiliation take place still need to be defined, at a macro-sociological level (beyond the family, clan, and tribe).

As defined by Pareto, a theory of the enterprise as a receptacle of CMs is easy to understand. While it is difficult to determine its accuracy, its justification is immediately perceptible. For academic researchers working on the African context, the validity of a theory of the enterprise as a receptacle of CMs is correlated with the evocation of familiar observations. Although such a theory is naturally debatable, this approach to the subject does allow us to consider a number of behaviors of indigenous African entrepreneurs. Such an approach could support a certain trend in the African academic literature that centers on mobilizing cultural traits.

## Conclusion

The intention of this article was to underline the consideration of relational networks and shared or mediating structures to explain the development process of small businesses in the African context. This anchoring gives rise to common categories, highlighting the personal relationships involved in the operation of economic exchanges.

The model of African enterprises that we have presented can be broken down into a number of axiological resources. These elements have a common denominator: their anchoring in African humanist philosophy. These values stimulate the dynamics of the business. Through the approach that we have adopted and our results, we can legitimately consider that enterprises in the African context are receptacles of CMs. This business model exists and persists because the way it operates is rooted in social arrangements that are inseparably connected to the local ecosystem.

Any possible doubts concerning the future of this model are also to be found at this level. These pertain to the empirical scope of the model, which is limited to a local environment, and to the great liberty that we take concerning the economic conception of performance. In fact, while the existence of an African enterprise model as presented in this paper is empirically undeniable, on the other hand, we can effectively consider that its future is uncertain, partly due to globalization, which has an impact on the development of competition, a strong trend for normalization that idealizes standards, and an attractive image of multiculturalism or interculturalism that generally overlooks the fact that it is not 'an antidote to essentialism'. In practice, these forms of hybridization are guided by dynamics of power and domination that ultimately lead to the strongest outdoing the weakest (Yousfi, 2021).

Partisans of the market economy, defenders of a particular type of universalism, will maintain that this business model is not exportable because the CMs that it contains are only fundamentally authentic values and therefore geographically limited. This idea can be nuanced by considering the existence of a 'logic of honor' (Iribarne, 1989) in the West, Africa, and Asia. Consequently, on all continents, we find CMs, common categories, common types, and common social organization setups that globalization will not totally wipe out. Seen this way, globalization is only a balance of power between these numerous heritages, with the result that the principle of convergence is likely to ultimately prevail.

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