

Rediscovering Mahdi Elmandjra

Reflections on the Global South, Development, Technopolitics and Knowledge Production

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Abstract

Mahdi Elmandjra is a pioneer of futures studies in Africa and the Global South. Over half a century and throughout a long career in international institutions, Elmandjra was an engaged scholar who tackled burning issues such as neo- and post-colonialism, globalization, development, values, cultural dialogue, education, etc. This paper rereads Elmandjra's work by engaging it with timely debates on the place and the role of Africa and the Global South in global governance, technopolitics and knowledge production.

Keywords

Mahdi Elmandjra, Africa, Futures Studies, Global South, Knowledge Production




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Introduction

Throughout history, humans have been captivated by the idea of predicting the future. Yet, it was only in the post-war period that this took the form of a mature academic discipline, futures studies, with a global, institutional, systemically embodied status (Kristóf & Nováky, 2023). At the turn of the century, reflections on climate change as a perfect moral storm, baffling signs of technological singularity and knowledge explosion amid increasing complexity, and peak levels of uncertainty and ontological insecurity, all have heightened the imminent need for methods and tools of foresight. A sense of post-modern, liminal vertigo, partly due to the quasi-erosion of demarcation between when the present ends and the future begins, has further increased interest in the discipline.

This year, the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), the organization created to promote the development of this discipline, celebrates its 50th anniversary. And so, in the last fifty years or so, futures studies have developed in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and have moved beyond “predicting” the (singular) future, to “mapping” and “shaping” alternative (plural) futures (Inayatullah, 2013). But in these same last fifty years or so, futures studies have largely been confined to the Western world—hereafter the Global North. In Africa as in most parts of the Global South, as Olugbenga Adesida (1994) wrote almost two decades ago and which still holds in some way, “the future [was] actually being sold because of immediate preoccupation with crisis management and lack of foresight.”

For a continent that stands at a pivotal juncture in its development trajectory, such as Africa, futures studies are of utmost importance to support strategic decision-making. Yet, besides a few scarce exceptions, the discipline still did not take root in the continent’s research and academic institutions—a dozen to date. In fact, up until the early 1990s, Africa did not have any research centers dedicated to futures studies. At the continental level, only a few futures’ thinking exercises took place, such as the 1979 Monrovia Symposium on the Future Development Prospects of Africa Towards the Year 2000, and the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action, mostly driven by visionary individuals in their own capacity or from within the United Nations (UN) and/or Organisation of African Unity (OAU) systems.

Among these visionaries was Mahdi Elmandjra (1933–2014), one of the pioneers of future studies from Morocco, Africa and even the Global South. Over half a century, and throughout a long career in international institutions, Elmandjra was an engaged scholar, fulfilling the *responsibility of intellectuals* in the Chomskyian sense, as he dedicated his lifetime to theorizing change (and emancipation) in the then called Third World. His contributions were always provocative, tackling burning issues such as imperialism and neo-colonialism, globalization, global governance and justice, cultural values and dialogue, development, education and knowledge production, etc. Hence, Elmandjra, as a norm entrepreneur and, assuredly, the pioneer of futures studies in Africa, is a compelling entry point into our examination of how the continent is shaping its destiny in a changing world order.

A Short Biography of Mahdi Elmandjra

Mahdi Elmandjra started his career in the 1950s in the public service in Morocco, before joining the UN—a system of which he would later become a sharp critic—where he occupied senior roles from 1961 to 1981, especially in the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN Development Programme (UNDP)¹. He was one of the first presidents of the WFSF (1977–1981) then of Futuribles International (1981–1990)—one of the first research centers in the world dedicated to futures studies. He was also the founding president the Moroccan Association of Future Studies and the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights, and sat on the boards of various Moroccan, African and international organizations including the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, the World Academy of Art and Science, the World Academy of Social Prospective, the African Academy of Sciences and the Pugwash Movement and Council for the Society for International Development.

Elmandjra wrote extensively, both long essays and short newspaper/journal articles, and several of his publications have been translated into different languages. His many publications include the following books [Arabic and French titles are hereby translated to English]: *The United Nations System* (1973); *No Limits to Learning* (Report of the Club of Rome) (1979); *Reclaiming the Future: A Manual on Futures Studies for African Planners* (prepared for UNDP) (1986); *Islam and the Future*, (1990); *The First Civilizational War* (1991); *Retrospective of the Futures* (1992); *Cultural Diversity: Key to Survival* (1995); *Cultural Decolonization: The Challenge of the 21st Century* (1996); *Regionalization of Globalization* (1999); *Humiliation in the Age of Mega-Imperialism* (2003); *Dialogue of Communication* (2005); *The Value of Values* (2006).

Throughout his career, Elmandjra received several distinctions and awards, including: the Curzon Prize of French literature at Cornell University (1953); the Rockefeller Award for International Relations at the London School of Economics (1955); the Order of Independence of the Kingdom in Jordan (1959); the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France (1970); Grand Medal of the French Academy of Architecture (1984); the Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France (1985); Order of the Rising Sun (III), Japan (1986); the Medal of Peace the Albert Einstein International Academy (1991); and the Award of the World Future Studies Federation (1995).

Reclaiming Africa's Future(s)

Elmandjra was one of the first voices that challenged the knowledge base of futures studies as “a monolithic entity driven by ‘Western’ interests” (Slaughter, 1996). His activism was particularly important in supporting the WFSF, under the auspices of UNDP, in the promotion of “African futures constructed by Africans” (Cole, 1994). Most importantly, it was thanks to his *Report on the Desirability and Feasibility of Establishing an African Institute for Advanced Public Policy Analysis and Future Studies* published in 1980 that African leaders and academic institutions started

¹ His biography in details is available here: UNESCO Archives AtoM Catalogue. (2023, October 15). *Elmandjra, Mahdi*. Retrieved October 15, 2023, from <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/elmandjra-mahdi>

to open up to the discipline (Rezrazi, 2023). Eleonora Barbieri Masini (1998), a leading figure of futures studies herself gave Elmandjra credits for his exceptional efforts in disseminating foresight methods in Africa.

Throughout the 1980s, Elmandjra has been active in fostering African-led future studies initiatives as promoted in *Reclaiming the Future: A Manual on Futures Studies for African Planners* (1986) that he prepared for UNDP. He was also one of the first African scholars to ring the alarm on the damage that futures studies projects carried out by non-Africans might cause to the African psyche and policymaking. To *reclaim their future*, Elmandjra believed Africans should lead the debate over their future (Adesida, 1994). Pan-Africanism had also had a place in this pioneer's futures thinking (1984, p. 575). He thus declared in that sense:

Although each African country will gradually develop and refine its futures studies mechanisms, certain exercises are meaningful and feasible only at the regional and continental levels and cannot be fully apprehended at the national level. Problems such as those of food self-sufficiency; primary health care; scientific and technological research; the training of manpower; rural development; intra-African and international trade; energy; desertification; industrialization; transport and communication; and cultural identity—to cite but a few example—all call for a unified approach and a different timeframe from those of national planning exercises.

A militant against epistemic injustice, with a realistic inclination, Elmandjra (1984, p. 576-77) considered that since “no science—hard or soft—is neutral, futures studies can never be value-free.”² This entails that Africans embarking on futures studies must “rediscover their past through their own eyes and free their present through the assertion of their cultural identity,” before they can attempt to reclaim their future. To him, the reason is that:

We have several examples of what can happen when Africans do not take into their own hands the study of their future. [For instance], the 1981 World Bank Berg Report [titled Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa] was the very antithesis of the OAU Lagos Plan of Action and of the unanimous vision of 50 African heads of state about the future of their continent. Hence the urgent problem of the decolonization of Africa's future. It is also a matter of ethics, [as] one has the right to preempt the future of others without the consultation or the consent of those directly concerned.

Identity, values and (collective) memory are central to Elmandjra's futures thinking. It is therefore not a surprise that Samuel Huntington, in his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996, pp. 39, 246), credits him as the futurologist who discovered world history not as a process, but as a constant clash of civilizations, drawing attention to the rise of fault line wars (Benkirane, 2002). In this context of civilization wars, Elmandjra did foresee the coming of post-truth politics; through the coining of the term “mensongeocratie”, which can translate as *governing by*

2 On the centrality of normativity in futures studies, Jordi Serra writes that it has been supported by authors such Eleonora Barbieri Masini and Enric Bas and himself, “but the strongest contribution in this regard is that of non-Western thinkers such as Sohail Inayatullah, Ziauddin Sardar, and Mahdi Elmandjra—who have outlined that prospective is essentially a political activity and therefore the importance of the normative aspects when working with it.” See: Serra, J. (2005). Territorial Foresight: More than Planning Less than Prospective. *Journal of Futures Studies*,9(3), 81–88. p. 84. <https://jfsdigital.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/93-E02.pdf>

lying, he underlined the risk of instrumentalization of media (and the information explosion) in reinforcing (neo-)colonial and domination dynamics. Wary of the (idea of the) West, this civilizational ‘bloc’ that hosted him for decades but of which he remained nonetheless critical, Elmandjra repeatedly criticized the way Western countries pompously display their supremacy in broad daylight, and the impact this has on the memory of those who came under this domination. In this respect, as Zhor Gourram (2019, pp. 64-66) underlines, “Elmandjra does not limit himself to theoretically valuing memory; he writes down this memory and gives it a voice”, through his original reflections on the past, but also through rediscoveries of deceased Moroccan and African scholars, scientists and artists two whom he pays tributes in his books. For him, there is no way forward, without a step back.

Methodologically, as Yahya El Yehyaoui (2016) puts it, Elmandjra conceived future studies “not [as] a self-sustaining vertical field, but rather a “lateral” academic discipline that permeates all other extant fields.” In this sense, he was truly one of the early promoters of an interdisciplinary, holistic method in future studies, not akin to the restriction of specific economic or social indicators. This approach is also reflected in the venture in his latest texts beyond the numerical, towards more philosophical, blunt and critical reflections³.

On The Global South and Global Governance

Engaging Elmandjra’s texts with contemporary debates brings us to that of narratives and meta-categories of global politics. Throughout his texts, Elmandjra portrayed himself as a citizen *from* the Third World, who writes *about* the Third World, *for* the Third World. After the end of the Cold War, and as the ‘Third World’ terminology started to lose relevance and a ‘Southern’ identity was on the rise, Elmandjra’s texts were also adapted to focus on North-South gap/dialogue and to the status of South-South cooperation. He considered the latter to be the one and only path for “a peaceful decolonization of the future” (1983, p. 51-53), emphasizing that:

Very little progress can be expected in South-South relations until the South—individually and collectively—attempts to liberate itself from the hegemonism of the patterns of thought and systems of values of the North. This would also be most healthy for a North which is practically unconscious of the degree of its ethnocentricity. (...) Most discussions on South-South Cooperation attempt to find solutions to enhance horizontal links without seriously questioning the environment of the system; to adapt. The objective is usually to “adapt” the system or to “reform” it gradually. As helpful as this approach may be tactically, it can lead nowhere unless it is part of a more global and forward-looking strategy which seeks not only to adapt the system but to transform it in due course. Strategies of this nature can only be generated by visions, dreams and reactions to unbearable oppression. (...) The South needs its own vision of

3 This is particularly the case of his books *Humiliation à l'ère du méga-impérialisme*[Humiliation in the Shadow of Mega Imperialism] (2003) and *Valeur des valeurs* [Value of Values] (2006). In the first, he adopts a loudly critical stance vis-à-vis the failure of the UN system to support the developmental trajectories of newly-independent countries, the reforms and development models imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions, the brutality of capitalism, and the incapacity and opportunism of Arab and African leaders. In the second, he engages in a reflection on values and society, and discusses the role of intellectuals and artists in changing value systems, as well as the place of memory as a value which rejects amnesia.

the world. It cannot afford to go on borrowing the one of the North. There is a North but is there a South on the international scene today?

What Elmandjra's optimism about South-South cooperation has missed—for developments that happened mostly after his ex/seclusion, conditioned by sickness and censorship—was the heterogenous economic growth paths of the South. Even today, there is still scarce scholarship on what the Global South *really* is and how political and economic heterogeneity could impact the future(s) of the Southern identity—if there is a singular one at all. Nonetheless, Elmandjra was aware of how “countries and societies of Southeast Asia, in addition to China and Japan, did have a ‘vision’ [independent from that of hegemonic Western powers]”, which we African miss, and which caused “a deep trust crack” between our citizens and institutions (Elmandjra, 1999a, pp. 54-56), making the South divided between various internal struggles (p. 102).

The issue with this lexical substitution (of the ‘Third World’ by the ‘Global South’) is its inability to account for the complex ways by which globalization has challenged the notion of two distinct geographic-economic spheres—and the major mutations in the global center-periphery relations (Hannerz, 2015). In such a liminal phase, questions emerge about who is to be *admitted* to the Global South, and under what apprehensions. For instance, despite being historically from *outside* the Third World, China has built a narrative that self-styles it as “a natural member of the Global South”; a grouping it considers a challenge to “Western hegemony.”⁴ Such claims obstruct the fact that, despite the legacy of Third Worldism in the shaping of a Southern identity, the Global South is not the post-cold war synonym for the Third World. Both had a ‘shared’ struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and hegemonism. Yet, their *development* paths and status have differed in many ways, implying various levels of *responsibility* under international frameworks—in respect to both old principles such as global/South solidarity and recent ones such climate action and reparation. Seen this way, the ‘Global South’—just like ‘Global North’—is a meta-category that holds an increasingly normative value, as moving towards the ‘center’ comes with greater responsibility; a dilemma that the ‘Third World’ did not encounter, as it was meant for it to ‘sit’ in the ‘periphery’.

Twenty years ago, Elmandjra foresaw the shaping of today's critical moment of shifting attitudes toward globalization, based on the conviction that the effects of globalization are both unequal and highly uneven. Accordingly, if he was still among us, Elmandjra would have certainly celebrated the emerging *paradox of globalization* by which the free-trade consensus is no longer profitable to the Global North (which now retreat into new forms of protectionism which further complicates global markets). He would have probably also celebrated how openly the World Trade Organization (WTO) discourses of a deglobalization; and how the organization's leadership states the liminal nature of the hour, our standing at ‘crossroads’, advocating for a ‘re-globalization’ after a decade of ‘slowbalization’⁵.

4 This self-styling came bold at the 2023 UN General Assembly as in the parallel G77+China Havana Summit (The South Summit). See for example: Anthony, T. (2023, September 22). China, at UN, presents itself as a member of the Global South as alternative to a Western model. *Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/un-china-global-south-general-assembly-d8620e4502757c4de9ab41543f14eccb>; China wants to be the leader of the global south. (2023, September 21). *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/09/21/china-wants-to-be-the-leader-of-the-global-south>.

5 See: World Trade Organization. (2023). *World Trade Report 2023: Re-globalization for a Secure, Inclusive and Sustainable Future*. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/wtr23_e.htm

Yet, I wonder, what would he have thought of the new hierarchies within the Global South itself (semi-institutionalized through groupings such as BRICS)? Elmandjra advocated a double-ended method for those in the periphery—to establish themselves in the center while committing to the periphery. How naive was that of him? Are the emerging Southern economies really using their ‘rising’ power status for the Southern solidarity cause? Is there a risk of instrumentalization of the Southern identity –and not only by the Northerners?

In an era of multi-alignment and non-exclusive partnerships, the North-South dichotomy is unravelling in complex ways, and the historic role of ‘rising powers’ (now often associated with the BRICS grouping) takes on new meanings, as rivalry grows not only between these ‘Southern’ powers and the ‘North’ ones but also within themselves (Gray & Gills, 2016). These questionings are a note to self, and to all African scholars who feel the *responsibility of the intellectuals* in contributing to defining the ‘Global South’ and peeling the rhetorical veneer of ‘Southern solidarity’ (especially with regards to a developed-but-developing⁶ country such as China [Benoit, 2023] but also the broader BRICS+⁷). It is perhaps time to think about a “New South”; a South that leaves the past and its ideological grievances behind, without amnesia, and does not allow itself to be instrumentalized in a zero-sum-minded global power competition.

Nonetheless, Elmandjra would have been rejoiced by the emergence of voices that stand on his side, against the commodification and Westernization of cultural values, and that protests politics of fear, humiliation and intimidation. In this sense, he is a sort of a globalist Gramscian; he protests cultural hegemony not only by the national state, but also of the capitalist countries of the Global North which maintain power through a control of culture. Like Antonio Gramsci, Elmandjra also put his hope on civil society (of the Global South) to lead this ‘war of position’– in Gramscian terms. Elmandjra has also observed a poststructuralist ethos through his call for the need for a ‘de- and re-globalization’ (Elmandjra, 1999b). This ethos, evocative, is source of his nicknaming as ‘the herald of the world’s sufferings’⁸.

Elmandjra was rather an alter-globalist–than an anti-globalist. Globalization, in principle, was key to his lifetime project of promoting cultural communication. However, what he protested against was the “fraudulent semantic takeover” by which such “a powerful word whose original meaning is full of generosity, tolerance and universal love of others [is] transformed completely to achieve the exact opposite” (Elmandjra, 1999b). Therefore, by his terms, ‘deglobalization’ is a critical and reflexive concept to globalization, a legitimate self-defense mechanism against a misappropriation of a ‘globalization’ in which “what is globalized (...) is poverty, social injustice, corruption, cultural alienation, limitations to freedom and civil rights.” Even skeptical of the hypothesis of a democratization driven by globalization, and the role national identity and multinational corporations play in this equation, his analysis (Elmandjra, 1999b) came close to what Dani Rodrik later named the political trilemma of the world economy, underlining a backlash against globalization.

6 See: Benoit, P. (2023, May 23). China Is Developing and Developed at the Same Time. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/23/china-is-developing-and-developed-at-the-same-time/>

7 In August 2023, the 15th BRICS Summit saw the expansion of the group’s membership to six new countries and its self-styling as a champion of the Global South.

8 See: Al Jazeera Documentary 2017) الجزيرة الوثائقية, January 2017). Mahdi Elmandjra – The Herald of the World’s Sufferings (video) [المهدي المنجرة - المنذر بالأم العالم]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/-V0qAhNgQG8>

On Technopolitics and Knowledge Production

Decades ago, Elmandjra has rightfully predicted that knowledge monopolies are in the making, arguing that they would be directly linked to intellectual property rights and the global patent markets, and that the barriers they create participate in the efforts of the Global South to enter the technological race. In fact, he (1975) was one of those early voices within the UN system to support the then-still-unnamed approach of open science/innovation:

The reluctance on the part of advanced countries to share and make available some of their technological know-how [is particularly unfortunate on two grounds: it is unfortunate in terms of economic development, [but also for the] free flow of ideas. (...) Knowledge should be at the disposal of all humanity without limitations of any kind [although with respect to the] rights of those who have produced [it] or hold the patents [which must be] appropriately compensated. (...) But what is happening right now is that the price of such patents is often exorbitantly high and unreasonable. It often becomes a form of monopoly. In various fields straight monopolies exist. In my opinion, monopolies, of whatever kind, are always an obstacle toward the development and welfare of human beings.

Elmandjra (1989) was even more perplexed by the effects of technological singularity, by which the North–South divide was deepening faster than any catch-up efforts in the South, emphasizing for instance that:

Informatics and telematics are not just new technologies, nor should they be seen as luxuries for the world's poorest countries; they are the ones who need it most to make the quantum jump which they will never be able to achieve with “appropriate” or “adapted” technologies alone—the latter may even become a cause of backwardness.

Through his insider experience in UNESCO and UNDP, Elmandjra was aware that breaking the technological inferiority cycle requires nothing less than a disruptive educational model, no technology transfer (selective at most) would ever give the South an edge. Accordingly, through the Club of Rome, Elmandjra has been engaged since the 1970s in discussions on how to put humans at the center of futures' thinking and educational reform. In the Club's report *No Limits to Learning* (1979), Elmandjra has therefore supported the inclusion of voices across the Global South⁹, highlighting the need to reclaim ownership over educational systems and adapt them to cultural contexts, while reexamining all the indigenous knowledge discarded under colonialism without proper evaluation. Elmandjra, through this report, has addressed a particularly harsh critic to colonial education:

The predominantly French and British schools that exist all across Africa and Asia [are a] reminiscent of an earlier era. In the home countries, the educational systems underwent changes over the years; in the host countries, these systems were preserved intact to such an extent that many countries find themselves today with a retrospective school system

⁹ The report was the outcome of a two-year project with the participation of an abundant number of scholars from the Global South: Morocco, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Ghana, Egypt, India, Mexico, Senegal, etc.

whose perspective begins in the nineteenth century. The host countries chronically seem to lag at least one or two reforms behind the former colonial powers.

In many colonial situations, foreign schooling was favored as an alternative for the upper classes to the inadequate public schools. These schools have therefore transformed into the epicenter for an elite (identity) formation in colonial and post-colonial times. But at the same time, this has led to an exteriority of the elite, a discontinuity of the educational system and, for those who do not fit in the system, a costly human capital flight—a situation that Elmandjra had experienced in Lycée Lyautey, a French high school in Casablanca, and which he repeatedly described it negatively, as ‘molding’.

Like many other publications of Elmandjra, the report also tackled the issue of the language of knowledge production and its sensitivity to the cultural context, highlighting how “the presumed superiority of foreign schooling, examinations, and credentials for jobs—as well as the presumed superiority of information, media, and technical training from the post-colonial superpowers—has led to a devaluation of traditional and indigenous learning, (...) at the detriment of cultural identity and social integration, and contrary to sound pedagogy.”

In this regard, Elmandjra had also repeatedly spoken of the values-knowledge interface; better encapsulated by his series of interrogations: “Can knowledge save the world? Can the university save knowledge? Can knowledge save values? Can values save the value of knowledge?”, which envisions education systems—especially universities—as “a humanizing force that transcends academic chauvinism, careerism, and technocracy” (Elmandjra, 2000, pp. 85, 92). Regarding this aspect, one can only be sure that, if he was still among, Elmandjra would have taken part—as he did in his own capacity—in the academic debate on alternative epistemologies, such as the “epistemologies of the South” that denounce decades if not centuries of “epistemicide” (Santos, 2014). These postures call not just for new (non-extractive) methodologies, but also for new ontologies: a fundamental questioning of knowledge production ethics. After all, it is on similar grounds that Elmandjra considered cultural decolonization an unfinished project.

On Development

One of Elmandjra’s core arguments is that the dissatisfactory socio-economic situation in Africa is both a cause and a symptom of its incapacity to invest in the human capital, knowledge production and technology (1999a, p. 103); a situation that he blamed on a combination of neocolonial dynamics sustained by mechanisms of influence by multilateral creditors and bilateral partners, and poor/corrupt African leadership. He particularly viewed North-South cooperation, debt traps, foreign aid and development agenda that are not African-produced and African-led as ‘dead on arrival’ (1987; 1988). Thus, Elmandjra has progressively shifted his focus to the critic of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions. He considered the development models ‘dictated’ by these institutions as lacking historical and cultural sensitivity and serving a ‘Westernization’ agenda—a position he sustained throughout the years, making him one of the first voices for the reinvention of global governance as well as the financial and monetary architecture.

Through texts such *The Africanization of Africa* (1986), Elmandjra was particularly attentive to the construction of a counter-narrative to Africa's developmental 'exceptionalism'. His text portrayed an "Africa [that] is resolutely moving towards a new style of development based on the fulfilment of its elementary needs." It is also in the context of this battle of narratives that Elmandjra presented one of the few dissenting evaluations of the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (1986-1990) (UNPAAERD) as he considered it insensitive to African calls to review the heavy external debt on the continent, interference with African national economic priorities, and the North-South dependency¹⁰. On the contrary, Elmandjra leaned towards inter-African (and South-South) cooperation, as he believed regional economic integration is one of the only ways out of technological inferiority –as it could help share the burden of the lengthy and costly process of R&D and create markets for local products.

Seeking to deepen his understanding of how development and identity intersect and to explore models alternative to the Western one, Elmandjra turned East later in his life, to the Land of Rising Sun¹¹. There, Elmandjra was conferred the Imperial Order of the Rising Sun (1986) and started a new professional chapter as lecturer, before joining a research project on cultural diversity and communication and becoming a Visiting Professor at Tokyo University (1998) and Visiting Scholar of the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) at Tokyo Keizai University (1999). The Japanese experience had a great influence on Elmandjra's reflections on development models, knowledge production, local languages and cultural values. Despite its political alignment with the West and values of democracy and its economic growth that made it a "First World" country, Japan was in its civilization core a unique case. The Japanese culture's world view, which spurred the nation to become a major superpower through non-military means, and Japan's view of itself as a nonwhite power, have both made it have special relations with countries in the Third World (then the Global South), and further increased the appeal of the Japanese approach in Elmandjra's critic to 'Western-copied' development models in/for Africa.

Conclusion

On May 27, 2023, Rabat hosted a symposium on *The State of Foresight Studies in the World*¹² where Sohail Inayatullah, the inaugural UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies, started his speech by thanking Mahdi Elmandjra for his invitation almost three decades ago–when Inayatullah was still in his early twenties–to come *rethink global futures* from Morocco. This posthumous tribute, in itself, shows the central

10 Elmandjra's criticism of the UNPAAERD can be found in: Bortot, F. (1990). ECA-OAU and World Bank Analyses and Strategies on African Development: The Converging Alternatives. *African Review of Money Finance and Banking*, 1, 81–116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23027204>

11 Although he had also connections with some Chinese intellectual circles, his greatest interest was in Japan. In 1988, when WFSF held its annual conference in China for the first time, themed *The Future of Development*, Elmandjra was one of the only three Africans partaking in this 'movement' that believed the crux of the future is dependent on the choice of development models and their impact on North-South relations (the other two being Egyptian Ibrahim Helmi Abdel-Rahman and Kenyan Henry Odera Oruka).

12 See: Policy Center for the New South. (2023, May 27). Symposium "The State of Foresight Studies in the World" (video playlist). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWvidnYAHJJP71OdTCm650vqCYcig100>

role Elmandjra has played in inspiring and promoting voices from non-Western backgrounds in futures studies, each imbued with a particular cultural ethos. Elmandjra must be remembered as the pioneer of futures studies in Africa, an engaged scholar, a man of conviction, and a norm entrepreneur who advocated for change in the dynamics of global dominance; for cultural decolonization; for a knowledge system where the future is limitless and with infinite choices. His texts are therefore a point of reference in a world that seems to have lost its moral compass. Rediscovering Elmandjra, looking back at what he wrote about over the past half a century, is a productive starting point for any reflection on the futures of Africa.

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