[Aalborg Universitet](http://www.aau.dk/)

**Cultural challenges expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their international assignments.**

A thesis presented to the Faculty of Humanities and the School of Global Studies at Aalborg University, Denmark, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Master programme of Culture, Communication and Globalization(CCG)

Specialization: Organization and Leadership

**Presented by:**

**Claude Joseph Mpika**

**Under the supervision of:**

**Pauline Stoltz**

May 2014

**Abstract**

This thesis expands on expatriates’ management literature by examining what cultural challenges expatriate employees working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their international assignments.

The study also focuses on how these cultural challenges influence their professional performances, how they cope with and what should be done to avoid facing them. The study makes use of qualitative methods where data were collected through qualitative interviews with five participants.

The research problem required the theoretical approach to be based upon two distinct theories which are experiential learning theory and social constructionist theory. Then, the data I collected are analyzed through qualitative content analysis.

The results indicate that most of expatriates encounter cultural challenges which mainly refer to language, interpersonal relationships and the notion of time. These results reveal that cultural challenges are in most of the cases due to cultural differences. The results also reveal that cultural challenges expatriates encounter while doing their international assignments influence their professional performances either positively or negatively and this depends on each individual’s experience. It has also been revealed in this study that each expatriate finds the way to overcome these challenges by being based on his own experience.

Finally, the results of this study provide some recommendations to help expatriate avoid such challenges in the future.I hope that the results of this research could be useful for multinational companies ‘managers in the preparation of their employees before sending them abroad for international assignments.

**Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Almighty God and several individuals who in some way contributed to its completion.

First of all,I want to thank Jesus-Christ for having given me strength, spiritual support and courage during the difficult time I spent when writing this thesis.I did not believe that I could concentrate on my research since I was confronted to big issues concerning the visa that could allow me to return to Denmark for the defense of this thesis. Thanks to him,I could work on this thesis during the turbulent time.Secondly,I am particularly going to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Pauline Stoltz,for her constructive critical comments on my research.I have learnt so much from knowledge in the field related to my research that she has provided with and that will help me in my future academic researches.

I would also thank other people who contributed to my training as a researcher at the Faculty of Humanities and Global Studies of Aalborg University. Special thanks to my previous semester projects’ supervisors, Heidrun Knorr, PhD, and Andrew James Fish, PhD, for having provided me with many lessons and insights on the workings of academic research.

I would like to thank the following people for their special help.I first of all wish to thank Bruno Kibiti, his wife Rebecca and their children for having supported and encouraged me during my stay in Denmark. Special thanks to members of the Congolese community in Denmark, particularly Willy,Patrice,David,Pierre and Kukké but also to Augustin and my cell group fellows at Bethania Kirken in Aalborg,Jan,Keith and their wives;John,Sunitha,Marin and Lucy with whom I spent memorable time in the love of God.I also thank Pastor Lachat, Eiddy and all my classmates of the department of Culture, Communication and Globalization(CCG) and all those who contributed to make pleasant my stay for studies in Denmark.

I also express my deep gratitude to people, especially expatriate employees of multinational companies, who participated to interviews when I gathered data in the Republic of Congo.

In the end,I dedicate this thesis to my late parents(Joseph Mpika and Veronique Bidilou) and late sisters(Nicole and Lydie Mpika) who would be proud of me today if they were still alive. This thesis is also dedicated to all my family members: my sisters Nina,Agnes,Carine and Marcelline;my uncles Father Marc Mfoutou,Victor Ngondo and Alphonse Miyalou;my aunts Augustine Kintsoungoula,Pauline,Albertine and Louise; my fiancée Estelle Nkounkou,her mum Romualde Louvouandou,my son Genie Claude. Thank you for their love and support.

**Table of contents**

**1.Introduction…………………………………………………………………………………..**

1.1.Purpose of the study…………………………………………………………………………

1.2.The thesis’ procedure………………………………………………………………………..

1.3.Limitations of the study……………………………………………………………………..

1.4.Profile of the Republic of Congo……………………………………………………………

**2.Methodological approach……………………………………………………………………**

2.1.Research design and research strategy………………………………………………………

2.2.Qualitative research………………………………………………………………………….

2.3.Quantitative research………………………………………………………………………...

2.4.Epistemological and ontological considerations…………………………………………….

2.5.Qualitative research methods………………………………………………………………..

2.6.Case study…………………………………………………………………………………...

2.7.Data collection and analysis…………………………………………………………………

2.8.Interviews……………………………………………………………………………………

2.8.1.Selection of participants…………………………………………………………………...

2.8.2.The interviews’ details…………………………………………………………………….

2.9.Data content analysis………………………………………………………………………..

2.10.Ethics in research…………………………………………………………………………..

**3.Theoretical approach…………………………………………………………………….......**

3.1.Definition of concepts…………………………………………………………………….....

3.1.1.Globalization………………………………………………………………………………

3.1.2.Socialization……………………………………………………………………………….

3.1.3.Ingroup-outgroup………………………………………………………………………….

3.1.4.Culture……………………………………………………………………………………..

3.1.5.Cultural identity…………………………………………………………………………...

3.2.Theories……………………………………………………………………………………...

3.2.1.Experiential learning theory……………………………………………………………….

3.2.2.Social constructionist theory………………………………………………………………

**4.Data analysis and discussion………………………………………………………………...**

4.1.Data analysis………………………………………………………………………………...

4.1.1.Encountered cultural challenges…………………………………………………………..

4.1.2.The impact of cultural issues on expatriates’professional performances………………….

4.1.3.Strategies used to overcome cultural challenges…………………………………………..

4.2.Discussion…………………………………………………………………………………...

**5.Conclusion and recommendations…………………………………………………………..**

5.1.Recommendations…………………………………………………………………………...

5.2.Conclusion…………………………………………………………………………………..

**List of references……………………………………………………………………………….**

**Appendices…………………………………………………………………………………….**

**Appendix A: Interviews presentation………………………………………………………..**

**Appendix B:Interview-guide………………………………………………………………….**