



David Kaulem

Morality and the Construction of Social Orders in African Modernity



LAMBERT
Academic Publishing

David Kaulem

**Morality and the Construction of
Social Orders in African
Modernity**



LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing

Impressum/Imprint (nur für Deutschland/ only for Germany)

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Alle in diesem Buch genannten Marken und Produktnamen unterliegen warenzeichen-, marken- oder patentrechtlichem Schutz bzw. sind Warenzeichen oder eingetragene Warenzeichen der jeweiligen Inhaber. Die Wiedergabe von Marken, Produktnamen, Gebrauchsnamen, Handelsnamen, Warenbezeichnungen u.s.w. in diesem Werk berechtigt auch ohne besondere Kennzeichnung nicht zu der Annahme, dass solche Namen im Sinne der Warenzeichen- und Markenschutzgesetzgebung als frei zu betrachten wären und daher von jedermann benutzt werden dürften.

Coverbild: www.ingimage.com

Verlag: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG
Dudweiler Landstr. 99, 66123 Saarbrücken, Deutschland
Telefon +49 681 3720-310, Telefax +49 681 3720-3109
Email: info@lap-publishing.com

Herstellung in Deutschland:
Schaltungsdienst Lange o.H.G., Berlin
Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt
Reha GmbH, Saarbrücken
Amazon Distribution GmbH, Leipzig
ISBN: 978-3-8443-3031-1

Imprint (only for USA, GB)

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek: The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Any brand names and product names mentioned in this book are subject to trademark, brand or patent protection and are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders. The use of brand names, product names, common names, trade names, product descriptions etc. even without a particular marking in this works is in no way to be construed to mean that such names may be regarded as unrestricted in respect of trademark and brand protection legislation and could thus be used by anyone.

Cover image: www.ingimage.com

Publisher: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG
Dudweiler Landstr. 99, 66123 Saarbrücken, Germany
Phone +49 681 3720-310, Fax +49 681 3720-3109
Email: info@lap-publishing.com

Printed in the U.S.A.
Printed in the U.K. by (see last page)
ISBN: 978-3-8443-3031-1

Copyright © 2011 by the author and LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG and licensors
All rights reserved. Saarbrücken 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
Chapter One: The Paradoxes of African Modernity	7
Chapter Two: The Making of African Modernity	44
Chapter Three: The Rationalisation of Modern Life	75
Chapter Four: Africans in Modernity; Included but not Integrated	91
Chapter Five: African Modernity and Modern Moralities	104
Chapter Six: African Modern Self	130
Conclusion	154
Bibliography	159

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
Chapter One: The Paradoxes of African Modernity	7
Chapter Two: The Making of African Modernity	44
Chapter Three: The Rationalisation of Modern Life	75
Chapter Four: Africans in Modernity; Included but not Integrated	91
Chapter Five: African Modernity and Modern Moralities	104
Chapter Six: African Modern Self	130
Conclusion	154
Bibliography	159

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is a result of my attempt to make sense of the issues that caught my interest during my fifteen years of reading and teaching courses in African Philosophy, Ethics, Applied Ethics, Marxist Philosophy, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Rationalism and Empiricism, Epistemology, Metaphysics and Modern/Postmodern Philosophy. Right from the start, I was always struck by the paradoxical context that any professional African philosopher faces in doing and teaching philosophy. The debates that took place in the 1970s and 1980s on whether there is African philosophy, and if there is what is its character and role in African societies kindled my interest. I am grateful to have met Kwasi Wiredu who came to the University of Zimbabwe in 1985 as the philosophy external examiner when I was an M.A. philosophy student. His work and Paulin Hountondji's raised issues which this work grapples with. The late Odera Oruka invited me to my first international conference in Nairobi in 1985. Joseph M. Nyasani invited me to a similar conference in Mombasa in 1989. At these conferences I met with and discussed issues with many African philosophers including G.S. Sogolo, D. N. Kapagawani, Wamba dia Wamba, D.A. Masolo, K. Gyekye and many others. It is in listening to and discussing with these older philosophers that it became clear to me that there was a deep paradox involved in being an African philosopher. Further thinking and reading has convinced me that this paradox is not unique to the African philosopher. It is a paradox of African modernity in general.

Professor Jameson Kurasha should take credit for convincing me of the necessity of embarking on research for Doctor of Philosophy Degree. That research forms the basis of this book. As supervisor, he helped me "find my own voice". I am grateful to Professor George McLean for hosting and supporting my intellectual exposure while working on research for this book.

INTRODUCTION

Every society constructs its own form of morality. Several accounts have been given on the nature of modern morality in contradistinction to medieval morality and classical morality. Since Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's book, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, modern morality has been characterized as a failure. The failures of modern morality have been understood as involving a paradox. Ross Poole explains that the paradox is that "the modern world calls into existence certain conceptions of morality, but also destroys the grounds for taking them seriously." (Poole, 199:ix) Other philosophers demonstrate how people living in modern societies recognize the need for morality and they go so far as to construct it and yet fail to live according to this very morality because they are not sufficiently motivated to do so. If they are so motivated, there is something about the complexity and dynamism as well, at the same time, as the simplicity and rigidity of modernity that undermines that motivation or at least makes available competing motivational forces and powerful objects of desire. People in modernity are, therefore, not sufficiently motivated to fulfill their own morality not because they are evil people but because their world is institutionally and systemically organized in such a way that they are motivated to pursue goals which undermine the very goals which morally justify their institutions. While it is possible to talk about modern morality in general, this work will focus on the morality of African modernity. Chapter one identifies the paradoxes of African modernity and explains them, giving illustrations from the different spheres of African society. The paradox is clearly demonstrated by the nature of life in the African township. The ambivalence that Africans feel about the African township is clear because it is both a place of restriction, humiliation and exploitation and yet also a place of struggle, solidarity and commitment to liberation. It is both a place of African pride as it is of the ultimate humiliation of the African. It is a place in which the morality of traditional Africa is challenged and yet also the cradle of new African moral values.

Philosophers who have postulated the paradox of modern morality have tended to take it for granted that modernity is monolithic and that it can only be fully understood from the point of view of Euro-American experiences. Those scholars, like Anthony Giddens (1991) who have recognized that there may be counter-trends to the core of Western modernity have not brought their insights to bear on their analyses. This work is in many ways, a case study to demonstrate some of the counter-trends to Western modernity. But it is done not from the point of view of Western modernity, although a complete disengagement from Western modernity is impossible. Paradoxically,

attempts to disengage from Western modernity are in themselves forms of engagement.

The present work postulates the existence of more than one form of modernity. Its aim therefore, is to provide an account that makes sense of the moral experiences of African modernity. Chapter Two traces the making of African modernity paying special attention to the narrative construction of African identities. It illustrates how Africans both participate and rebel from Western modernity. They both love and hate Western modernity.

Chapter Three looks at the role of a particular form of reason that shapes modern life. This rationalization of modern life is analysed in three major spheres of modern institutions, that is, in modern bureaucratic administration, legal systems and democratic institutions. It describes the processes that have characterized the construction of the modern African social order, paying special attention to the morality that is called into being and yet made impossible to be taken seriously because it is systematically undermined. It is demonstrated how the institutional forms of African modernity undermine the very moral goals they are constructed for. The conception of self-identity, of human relationships and human society embedded in the moralities of African modernity do not facilitate individuals to be motivated in ways that fulfill the moral goals of modern institutions, although they may fulfill other goals. Thus, people who work within modern institutions to fulfill the moral goals of those institutions are not sufficiently motivated to do so. This explains how it has virtually been impossible for Africans to fulfill the modern moralities of liberation, enlightenment, health, peace and democratic practice even though institutions for liberation and enlightenment proliferate. Poverty in Africa has continued to grow as the number of poverty reduction programmes has grown. How else can we explain the fact that violence and conflicts have multiplied as peace-building institutes and initiatives develop and continue to multiply? I do not, however, claim that violence multiplies because of peace building programmes neither is poverty necessarily enhanced by poverty reduction initiatives.

The discussion in this work will include the character and role of morality in several institutional spheres of the social formation of African modernity. This constructed morality is informed not only by a specific conception of individual identity but also by a specific form of rationality. The implications of transcended autonomous rationality that informs modern morality will be analysed in the context of African modernity paying special attention to the rationality of the modern market sphere, modern bureaucratic administration and the modern legal sphere.

The study works within the conceptual framework of certain version of non-reductionist historical materialism that is suggested by Nicos P. Mouzelis (1991). It is non-reductionist in so far as it takes seriously the ethico-political and cultural spheres of modern institutions. It resists understanding modern institutions only in economic terms. It follows a historical materialist approach in so far as it considers the material conditions which make it possible for human beings in African modernity to look at themselves in certain ways and conceptualise their moral goals in particular ways. It is not materialist in the sense of denying the reality of spiritual life. Neither is it materialist in encouraging the greediness, consumption and wastefulness of the late modern age.

This work assumes a realist epistemology in the understanding of social formations. However, it is a realism which is both anti-empiricist and anti-essentialist. It is anti-empiricist in that ‘social phenomena can only be explained if one goes beyond statistical regularities and discovers the underlying generative mechanisms which, although real, are not empirical. (Empirical in the sense of being directly accessible to our senses).’ (Mouzelis, 1990:10) It is anti-essentialist in that it does not accept that social developments should be understood either in Aristotelian terms, of unfolding essences or according to ‘iron laws of history’ as Marx (1976) sometimes seemed to suggest.

In this work, social developments are understood in terms of specific structural and systemic tendencies and social conflicts. In doing so, this work analyses the structure of each institutional sphere of modernity including the economic, political and cultural spheres without taking one sphere to be, *a priori*, more important or determinant of the others. Thus, it resists the Marxist tendency to conceptualise political and cultural structures, processes and tendencies in economic terms.

How institutions interact with individuals will be analysed. Thus modern institutions radically change the nature of day-to-day social life including the modern self. And yet the modern self also helps to shape these modern institutions. As Giddens (1991:2) puts it, “The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities... individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications.” There is therefore a need for understanding African social formations both from the point of view of agency as well as institutional structure, both as a configuration of collective actors struggling over the control of scarce resources, and as a systemic whole whose institutionalized parts or ‘subsystems’ can be more or less compatible with each other. Marxism, more than any other paradigm in the social sciences, suggests very fruitful ways of studying this phenomenon. Of particular interest are its conceptual apparatus which lead one to look at collective actors not only as products but also, and at the same time, producers of

their social world.

CHAPTER ONE

PARADOXES OF AFRICAN MODERNITY IDENTIFIED

What is it that irritates and many times even infuriates African political, religious, and cultural leaders when they are being reminded of their very ethical reason for existence as African leaders? These African leaders came and are still coming into existence in the name of working for *African political independence, African economic development and African cultural self-expression*. Underlying these African self-descriptions are modernist ethical values of *liberty, equality, autonomy and authenticity* which African leaders are committed to realizing¹. That African struggles are informed by modernist ideological sentiments is not surprising, for the very concepts of 'Africa' and 'African culture' are modern constructions². They were prompted by and their use was initiated by the processes of Western modernity, and then taken over by Africans themselves who were *keen to turn them into their own project*. The appropriation of modern projects by African people is at the center of African modernity. What is disturbing however is the way in which the modernist values appeared as if they were obviously essential and necessary for African freedom, autonomy and authenticity. Yet at the same time they have proved, over the years, *virtually impossible to realize because the motivation to work towards them on a day-to-day basis has somehow been constantly and systematically undermined*. In other words, on a grand scale, the moral values of modernity seem to be inescapable for Africans. Yet the experience of working to fulfill those values, on a day-to-day basis, does not seem to lead to their realization or the general fulfillment of the moral vision of modernity. There is something about living

¹ It is true that many African leaders who claim to be fighting for African advancement are actually not committed to it. And they know it. Many works have looked at this phenomenon. This is a relatively easier thesis to demonstrate and for this reason, it has tended to be overemphasized. What is more difficult to demonstrate are the reasons for the fact that many African leaders who have been genuine in fighting for African liberation have also failed to achieve their goals. The present work looks into this latter phenomenon.

² The concept of social construction is not used to suggest a 'conspiracy theory'. Social construction is a complex process which involves struggles and counter struggles, different social forces, institutions and sensibilities. What is ultimately constructed is usually very different from what is envisioned by any one of the movements or forces involved. Therefore, while the process is in some sense conscious, it is also largely unconscious. Only in retrospect can the process of construction be clearly appreciated.

according to the moral values of modernity which systematically undermines the moral project of modernity in general. This paradox takes a fascinating form in the African modernity context. This 'Paradox of the Morality of African Modernity' is the main subject of the present work.

The thesis of this work is that *Africans live in an ethical paradox*. The morality that is brought into being by African modernity makes a lot of sense. In fact it appears to be virtually impossible to avoid for it shows itself as absolutely necessary and virtually unavoidable. Who, for example, can, in the African social and political situation, avoid using such modernist concepts as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'emancipation', sovereignty, 'enlightenment', 'justice' and 'individual rights', as guides to social and political action? These concepts seem to be essential in justifying the morality of African people's actions, the organization of their social practices and institutions. They seem to be the only truly adequate windows through which Africans can look at and experience social reality. As part of a conceptual framework, they are indeed part of the ideological package Africans have inherited from Western modernity. This is not to say that Africans did not independently have versions of some of these ideas. Neither is it to say that Africans have not contributed to the construction of the modern ethical ideology. It is only to say that the ideological form they have taken in the modern African context cannot be disengaged from the ideology of Western modernity³. Hence the ways in which these ideas have come to be conceptualized by most Africans has been dominated by the ideology of Western modernity especially as it is informed by the European Enlightenment.

And yet it also appears to make sense for Africans to avoid taking this very morality seriously. In some sense, *Africans are deeply suspicious of the values of Western modernity*. They are suspicious for at least two reasons. First, the values have been used to justify their colonization, oppression and discrimination. It is through *law and order* that Africans were oppressed, through *justice*, that they were exploited and through *education and religion* that they were discriminated against and their dignity greatly undermined. Indeed it was through *development* that Africans were disempowered and

3

Many Africans who have tried to disengage themselves from the ideology of European modernity have ironically used Enlightenment concepts to do so. African philosophers have struggled with the concepts of 'African philosophy', 'African socialism', 'African culture', and even 'African Renaissance'. Ideological disengagement has proved virtually impossible given that it has mainly been attempted in modern European languages. Attempts to disengage have been so frustrated that many Africanists have resorted to reverse colonisation of European ideology by claiming that European philosophy is really a stolen African legacy. (James, 1951)

failed to truly develop. A number of African analysts today have argued that development aid has contributed greatly to the undermining of African independence and development. Secondly, acceptance of these values and the institutions they help to establish is seen as a kind of hindrance to the Africans' own self-expression as autonomous, sovereign and authentic. Yet the very concepts of autonomy, sovereignty, and authenticity are imbedded in Western moral landscape.

This dilemma of disengagement with western modernity is at the heart of modern African ethical practice. It is being demonstrated in debates on international trade, on debt and development aid. At a recent meeting organized jointly by Mwelekeo wa NGO (MWENGO) and the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) in Harare, one participant posed this question, "Why do we participate in negotiations on world trade when we know that the negotiation procedure and rules are not fair?" One of the responses to this question can be summarized in the following way, "It seems reasonable that Africa should disengage from entering into agreements which we know will be unfair. Yet, even if we disengage from the negotiations, we will still be affected by whatever world trade agreements are made in our absence. Therefore, we must participate."

Africans in modernity always ask themselves whether if they had not been colonized, they would have expressed themselves in a uniquely different way that would have been authentic to them as Africans. Hence the desire by many Africans to 'revive' pre-colonial chiefdoms and their values and institutions. Ali Mazrui writing in 1966 demonstrates this paradox as it applied to Kwame Nkrumah's ideals for the newly independent Ghana;

The paradox of Nkrumah's ambition for his country was that he wanted to modernize and ancientize at the same time. And so upon emerging into independence, the Gold Coast first decided to wear the ancient name Ghana, and then embarked on an attempt to modernize the country as rapidly as possible. Mali is another case of the attempt to create a sense of antiquity by adopting an old name. In Central Africa we now have "Malawi," and when the hold of the white minority government in Rhodesia is broken, we will probably have "Zimbabwe". In Nigeria a distinguished scholar has suggested that the country's name be changed to "Songhai". The desire for a splendid past is by no means uniquely African, but it is sharpened in the African precisely

because of the attempt by others to deny that the African has history worth recording.

(Mazrui, 1975/76:12)

Hence, Africans are deeply involved with modernist ethical values and yet at the same time deeply suspicious, if not hateful of them. This is a paradox for they have very good reasons to be both involved in modernist ethical values as well as to be suspicious of them. This paradox is not only true for African leaders. It applies also to ordinary Africans for they also find it difficult, if not impossible to take seriously the morality that provides the conceptual framework for thinking about moral actions, practices, and ways of social organization. This can be demonstrated by analysing cultural practices in African modernity. Many rituals and practices in African modernity demonstrate how ordinary Africans eagerly participate in modern institutions and their appropriate conceptualisations of the good. For example, ordinary Africans will consult modern medicine in hospitals and clinics. Yet as Chavunduka points out, 'many people who refer their illnesses to modern medical practitioners later take the same illness to traditional healers.' (Chavunduka, 1994:70)

The fact that ordinary people in Africa can smuggle traditional medicines into hospitals and clinics shows their double consciousness. This double consciousness is demonstrated in many other rituals and practices, like marriage, burials, and worship. While many African women may aspire to go through a modern Western wedding as part of their being married, they also will feel that the Western wedding on its own cannot replace the traditional processes of marriage that include the payment of "roora"⁴. They will want freedom and equality in the home with their husband, yet will at the same time want their husband to be subservient to the traditional demands and hierarchy insisted upon by his father-in-law and the rest of the family. The same hierarchy places the woman under the patriarchal control of her husband, thereby undermining the equality she yearns for. Generally, the same is also true of the husband's expectation of his wife's behaviour. Many Christianised Africans still enthusiastically participate in African traditional religious rituals.

African leadership sees the African modernist project as first and foremost moral. It therefore characterizes its role as essentially moral. It sees it as that of constructing and encouraging the development of an African social order which realizes objective moral standards. However, there is an ambiguity in the meaning of ethical objectivity here. To

4

'Roora' in Shona and 'lobola' in Ndebele refer to the wealth that a suitor pays to the bride's family in the process of getting married.

this extent the project of African modernity is an ambiguous project for the objectivity of the ethical standards has been understood by different African leaders in different ways. They are understood either as particularistic or universalistic; absolute or relativistic.

AFRICAN ETHICAL PARTICULARISM

Many Africans have understood the values that inspire them on a grand scale as particular. From this point of view, African people are understood to be one distinct or particular social entity with objective political, economic and social interests that can be discovered and pursued. These are understood to be objective in the sense that they can be discovered by anybody who analyzes the African situation rationally and impartially. From this perspective, African leaders, especially the ‘early ones’, were committed to discovering what these particularistic African interests were and to pursue them even against the interests of other particularistic communities. The moral obligations that the African leaders had were to the African people and not to anyone else. The common good that they fought for was only common to the African people. Their moral obligations ended with the Africa people. Hence the objective moral good here was relative to Africans. It did not apply to other cultures.

The African leaders who took a particularistic view of their moral role did not like it if it was suggested that what they were doing was not compatible with the interests of the African people. But they did not worry if they were accused of not caring for the interests of the Japanese people for example. In fact, the commitment to the ‘African cause’ or the ‘African common good’ sometimes demanded that they fought against the interests of other particular communities as was the case in the fight against colonialism and the use of the slogan ‘Africa for the Africans’. It implied that “Europe was for the Europeans” and they did not care much what the Europeans did with their Europe. As Robert Mugabe was to burst out to Tony Blair, “You can keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe”. This particularistic conception of morality inspired many African leaders and the narratives many of them constructed about their social and political roles fit this paradigm.

Within this paradigm, members of a particular society are made morally blind to the welfare of anybody who is perceived not to be part of their society. They become indifferent to the suffering of those people perceived as outsiders. In countries where this ideology is dominant, people identified as outsiders but leave in those countries are likely to face hard times characterized by discrimination and sometimes persecution. Hence the particularistic conception of morality encourages particularistic conception of