Africa; Running but not Reaching[1]?
Notes on Self Reflexivity

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Introduction: The Cyclic History of Absurdity

Who dares convincingly challenge John Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* 100 years down the line? The New African April 2011 issue titled *Cracking the Code; Unlocking Africa's Secret to Wealth* is so revealing in this respect. The story of Patrice Lumumba sets the tone. In this ingenious historical analysis Duodo (2011:43) writes…

> '…Lumumba was not assassinated only as a person but as an idea – the idea of a Congo that was independent, non-aligned, and committed to African Unity….'

The author (2011:46) continues his analysis thus…

> '...Upon the failure of the ABAKO leader, Joseph Kasavubu, to form a government, Lumumba was requested by the then colonial powers to form one He (Lumumba) clobbered together a coalition whose members were UNC and COAKA (Kasai), CEREA (Kivu), PSA (Leopoldville), and BALABAKAT(Katanga). The parties in opposition to the coalition were PNP, MNC-K (Kasai), ABAKO (Leopoldville), CONAKAT(Katanga), PUNA and UNIMO(Equateur) and RECO (Kivu). It was at this stage that Lumumba demonstrated how far-sighted he was. He convinced his coalition partners that the opposition parties should not be ignored and he proposed that they should elect Joseph Kasavubu , the ABAKO leader, as president of the Republic…..but unfortunately, Lumumba signed his own death warrant in appointing Kasavubu out of the best intentions (**that of uniting a divided country into a common goal of national building – my own emphasis**).*

Doudo (2011:47) blatantly claims…

> '…Lumumba implanted a poisonous Belgian spy in his bosom. The Belgians began to use what would have been Lumumba's political strengths against him.. they now cultivate Kasavubu, filling him with hate rhetoric (my own wording), and backed their claims with flattery and massive sums of money. Even more important, the Belgians planted into the office of the Prime Minister (Lumumba) as his principal aide, a former soldier called Joseph Mobutu….'

The above mentioned citations provoke several reflective questions: On the one hand is querying why it would be so easy for some people to manipulate others for geo-strategic gain. In this case, the person concerned was the president of one of the mineral richest countries in Africa. Joseph Kasavubu turned against his own prime minister: Patrice Lumumba. The then prime minister had sought the unity of the politically splintered Congo, by pushing for the election of Kasavubu (an opposition leader) as the president of the young independent country. Secondly, Lumumba was embarking on a developmental programme

that would benefit all and sundry. On the other hand is questioning what could account for this raw, animalistic, egoistic greed for power and short sightedness in dealing with the affairs of the public? Case studies abound. Illustrative in this instance are: Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone in West Africa. Gabon, Cameroon and Central African Republic in Central Africa, Kenya in Eastern Africa, Zambia and Malawi in Southern Africa Where pockets of sanity and sagacity prevail, for example in Rwanda and Nigeria, the cases of Uganda and the most recent adage Botswana, which for a long time were hailed as Africa's beacon of democracy and economic success, necessitates us to yet again put our acts into the analytical surgical room.

Factoring in the theme at hand, there is no better place to refocus our analytic lenses than at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), currently known as the African Union (AU). In doing this, the paper starts by providing an analysis of van Walraven's provocative historical piece on the birth and formation of the OAU. I then go on to build a case for analyzing institutional building in a scenario where a younger generation is taking on positions of power and mapping out the developmental goals for its various constituencies. I argue that at the core of a visionary yet meaningful and practical leadership is the moral consciousness that we belong despite our differences. The thesis that my paper advances is that once we recognize that this sense of unity in diversity is crucial, then our actions will proceed with others in mind. In support of this thesis, I provide analysis by three scholars, who have continually questioned Africa's political, economic and social development with an aim of charting out new paths and patterns to leadership, growth and development in the different spheres of life.

Unraveling the Cyclic history of absurdity or is it the process of self realization?: Bringing in van Walraven's analysis

Writing on the birth, formation and rationale of the OAU (1958-1963), van Walraven (2010:32 -33) introduces his article thus….

"…. it was the politics of decolonization that lay at the basis of the cooperation between African states. Nationalist struggles did not simply follow territorial frontiers…Some leaders articulated international ambitions. Kwame Nkrumah was a convinced Pan-Africanist. He believed that supranational cooperation involving unification of individual territories would enhance several key common interests…"

Very telling is van Walraven's analysis of this vision and mission that Nkrumah had taken upon himself. He writes….

"…As with every self-styled messianic leader, he (Nkrumah) imagined himself to be at the helm of such a a grand project. This personal ambition, in turn, made the realization of such an undertaking even more difficult. – as it resulted in competition with rival political tycoons such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt's Gamal Nasser, or of the leaders of Nigeria…(van Walraven 2010:33)

And here lies our first reflective sticky point: personal ambitions that are articulated positively as grand projects to unite people under a common vision but often misinterpreted as personal strategies for garnering political muscle. Coupled to this, is the second reflective point, that is, the lack of articulate common and shared interests. Van Walraven (2010: 33-34) points this out by stating…

"…Nationalist movements gathered in Accra in December 1958, unleashing a wave of anti-colonial rhetoric, adopting resolutions full of nationalist fervor and hazy appeals for Pan-African Unification and the abolition of "artificial" borders….Francophone leaders meanwhile tried to salvage something of their inter-territorial federations…."

What is further telling is the divisive logics of procedural matters, which van Walraven (2010:34) outlines as characterizing the Monrovia group, whose procedural logic was that of decolonization and disarmament and a common African strategy in the UN and peaceful settlement of disputes. Meanwhile, the Casablanca group was hardened in its resolution of a joint African high command – Nkrumah's idea for a common defense policy- and an African consultative assembly bringing together African Parliamentarians. To hammer his points home, van Walraven divides his further analysis in three parts pointing to the number of contradictions and controversies that characterized the OAU. From pages 34 – 55, van Walraven, traces the rationale of the formation of various institutions within the OAU and how these key institutions interacted. Through his vivid depictions, several other analytic sticky points can be drawn. His allusion to leadership styles, i.e. personalities and characters, lack of a common will which follows hand in glove with charismatic, visionary leadership v/s. the lack of collective thinking, the interplay of time, space and place, alliance formation, the role of sabotage of ideologies (understood here as ideas that drive society out of its various deadlocks) through the lack of collective action rendered pervasive by power differentials, power struggles, estranged egos and self-aggrandizement, unrealistic economic

objectives and budgetary issues. Indeed, the analysis of lived experiences of individual country case studies stated here above and how one can learn from these in order to realise transformation is here the catch phrase.

Knowing Ourselves

Mkandawire (2010) in his inaugural lecture as the first holder of the Chair of African Development at the London School of Economics (LSE) shows that indeed Africa has witnessed, time and again, success which unfortunately has either been ruthlessly eroded by outside influence or down played by leaders who seek self-aggrandizement at the expense of the *mwananchi*. As an example of the former case, he cites the erosion of the knowledge base by institutions such as the World Bank. A knowledge base, Mkandawire (2010: 14) argues, is the foundational driver of development. He writes…

"….Catching up requires that countries know themselves and their own history that has set the 'initial conditions' for any future progress. They need a deep understanding of their culture not only for self-affirmation but in order to capture strong points of their culture and institutions that will see their societies through rapid social change…."

In contrast, he shows how some leaders, acting on the basis of ego-fulfillment, have steadily eroded the little developmental gains that had been made. He cites Africa's banana cases like Idi Amin, Boukassa, Joseph Mobutu, to name but a few.

Indeed, what is very exciting in his treatise is his discussion of development as "catching up", where he shows that for Africa to get it right, we need a number of fundamentals. Topping the list is knowledge of one-self, which he then goes on to discuss in light of knowledge acquisition and production. In regard to knowledge of oneself he posits…

"…development and the "catch up" aspirations driving it are not foreign impositions but part of Africa's responses to its own historical experiences and social needs. The development project has much deeper historical roots and social support. The idea of "catching up" entails learning not only about ideas from abroad but also about one's capacities and weaknesses. The real issue about "catching up" is not that of simply taking on every wretched instrument used by pioneers to get what they have – wars, slave labour, child labour, colonialism, Gulags, concentration camps – but to finding more efficacious and morally acceptable ways of improving the life chances of millions of poor people…"(Mkandawire 2010:p. 7 and p.14)

Cognitively, the knowledge of oneself, which I argue can be arrived at through internal dialogue with oneself and relating this to the actions of others or what is called self-reflexivity or self-confrontation (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) is what Lonsdale (1995) in his theory of a moral ethnicity and Mamdani (1996, 2001) in his conceptualizations of a bifurcated citizenship seek to unpack.

However, what has continued to mark Africa's political, economic and social cultural spheres of life, in my opinion, is this lack of self-reflexivity. This has steadily resulted into a lack of a moral consciousness and conscience that we all belong despite our differences. We have consistently failed to recognize with the other sharing our space or advancing our ideals. One could rightly argue that the lack of entitlements, capacities and basic freedoms (Sen 1981) have exacerbated a type of social relations which proceeds on a narrowly defined principle of 'carrot and stick', a crony mentality (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Bayart et al 1999, Mbembe 2001) or even a minimalist definition of 'we' to mean those of kin or blood relations as against the 'other' who might be of a different group. With the unfolding generational change, where a younger cohort of African leaders is coming of age and taking on critical decision making positions in society, the lack of or the slow pace at which a more socially embedded and broadly defined concept of belonging by virtue of sharing the same space, the same reality, social conditions or principles that seek to better our lives or a broadly defined 'we' group formation (Elwert 1992) is perturbing!

Africa - Running but not Reaching: The Lack of a Moral Consciousness
There is no better place to start our analysis of this lack of a moral consciousness and how one could build it and/or enhance it than in the analysis of violent conflicts, especially those of a racial/ethnic orientation. The analysis of violent conflicts (Sall and Ouedraogo 2003, Olukoshi and Sall 2004) provides an excellent *social laboratory* into understanding this essential mechanism in our social relations, that is, moral consciousness. This is for the reason that violent conflicts depict the raw, animalistic desire to eliminate the other for a certain gain. Violent conflicts emerge out of the lack of consideration of the other. This underlying logic makes it a powerful antithesis to a moral consciousness. In addition, the notions of race or belonging to an ethnic group are based on 'innate' recognition of belongingness based on skin colour, blood relations or some kind of overt characteristics of relatedness. It requires oneself to go beyond this primordial, innate, and minimalist sense of recognition and adapt a more expansive definition of the self that recognises with another's

humanity. An inquiry into the mechanisms that either dissolve racial/ethnic differences or exacerbate these, what I conceptualize in this paper as mechanisms for a unity in diversity in opposition to processes of disintegration, can provide us with pertinent answers into how a moral consciousness that we belong despite our differences could be nurtured.

Adopting this stance in the analysis of the *Mau Mau* uprising in Kenya, Lonsdale (1995:94) starts by lamenting the explanatory *impasse* existing in the analysis of group conflicts and which does not look at how actors grapple with the question of ethnicity. He asserts that those analyzing the issue of ethnicity or ethnic relations have tended to focus on forces from within, that is, some timeless cultural essence. Other analysts look at the forces from without or at the high politics of State patronage. To Lonsdale (1995:94), ethnicity is fostered by interaction. It is a theory of social and political relations. He conceptualises this as moral ethnicity. The idea of moral ethnicity emphasizes renegotiated relations with our-selves as much as relations with others. Moral ethnicity leaves open the issue of boundaries, their formation and maintenance between a dichotomous "we" and "you" (Lonsdale 1995:99). A moral ethnicity allows others to remain or become trusted strangers. The concept allows for a continued negotiation of the boundary crossing that marked personal relations between ethnic groups whether by marriage or clientage and against a background of commercial exchange. With certitude, the Mau Mau uprising which arose out of a disgruntled ethnic group that had been marginalised from their means of livelihood, that is land, garnered enough force beyond the narrow confines of a boundary when marginalisation from what one considers their entitlement emerged as the broader organising principle that other ethnic groups recognised with.

He draws another level in which he avers that ethnicity is also a theory of political relations. In Africa, he explains, it is inextricably tied to inequalities of State power. Power is a scarce resource, which its holders try to multiply yet conserve by loaning out to their most useful and thus dangerous-followers, to the exclusion of the weaker others. A principal of division, it requires categorization, which fosters stereotypes. Ethnic attributions work better than most as a means to ration out the benefits and costs of power. Political tribalism is thus the management of ethnic clienteles from above (Lonsdale 1995:100). It's manipulative and co-optive potentials, especially in regard to an obsessive competition for scarce resources, is what is used to overshadow an existing moral ethnicity. The creation of a privileged few with ties to resources above a desperate rest, tears apart the rudiments of a moral ethnicity,

where out of desperation, everyone tries to get a bit and keep it for themselves. In his edited book, Osaghae (1994) explores these processes in which ethnic relations are being transformed. To this end, he discusses two processes, that is, ethnic awareness and ethnic consciousness. The former refers to recognition of ethnic differences without necessarily acting on it, whilst the latter describes a recognition of difference which is deliberately brought into play in order to achieve desired goals and how elites, especially politicians, have been able to play on these phenomena, especially in the rural areas.

What is still mind baffling however is why these rudimentary forms of a moral ethnicity or the initial formation of a collective consciousness practiced by groups does not succeed in changing the face of political tribalism or the narrow, ego based definition of group interests? Why is it that in other contexts people are ethnically aware but do not act on the basis of this awareness rather they recognize with other higher values and broader societal interests?

Undeniably, Mamdani's[1] thesis of an inherited decentralized despotic system as a post-colonial predicament (Mamdani 1996, 2001) offers useful insights in contemplating the above-mentioned *impasse*. Writing from a political science perspective, the author argues that explanations to the various post-colonial predicaments, chief of which has been the increased level of social conflict, cannot be sufficiently accounted for by solely cultural, political economy, instrumentalization of ethnicity or social institutional explanations (Mamdani 2001:21-24). He asserts that we have, of necessity, to look at the political-governance sphere and more especially the failure of the post-colonial political State to institute a democratic despotic system by overhauling the inherited decentralized despotic system stemming from pre-colonial and colonial times. The author maintains that all post-independence regimes were determined, to one degree or another, to do away with the stigma of race that they associated with colonial rule. The tendency of the post-colonial state was to de-racialize civic identity. Consequently, civic citizenship ceased to recognise any difference based on race. However, the post-colonial State continued to reproduce native identity as ethnic. This lack of de-ethnicization of especially local governance systems continued to reproduce a bifurcated citizenship – that of ethnic indigenous and ethnic strangers (Mamdani 1996: 37 – 61 and Mamdani 2001: 19 – 31). These two identities are in constant conflict with each other. The author maintains that as long as the current definition of citizenship as ethnic is upheld,

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[1] Mamdani (1996) analysis is based on the chieftaincy system in colonial Africa. In his 2001 book, when victims become killers, Mamdani analyses the Rwandan genocide.

and there is lack of a wider conceptualisation of citizenship as civic then the bifurcation of citizens and subjects will be perpetuated. The negative consequence will continue to be an inherent system of ennoblement, where a few are privileged at the expense of the majority. As a result, the much sought after social cohesion will be illusionary and susceptible to the whims and manipulation of these ennobles.

From a sociological point of view, I posit that in addition to conceptualising citizenship as civic, the issue of entitlement is critical. I adopt Sen's (1981) definition of entitlement as a bundle of rights. I argue that so long as we have a large group of people who are not entitled or do not have access to entitlements, then bifurcation of citizens and subjects will continue unabated as those with rights over the others will fight to retain these whilst deliberately denying others opportunities to enjoy the similar rights.

Unity in Diversity: The need to institutionalize processes that show a moral consciousness
In my Ph.D. thesis (Achieng' 2004) and in an article written for the CODESRIA Bulletin: Special Issue on Rethinking African Development, a theme that marked the 11th CODESRIA General Assembly (Achieng' 2005a), I have shown how the search for a new definition of social relations and interactions as a move from a closed community to an open pluralistic society practiced through acts that show a moral ethnicity and seeks a civic consciousness that is broad based can proceed. In these two instances, I took as my case study, group relations defined on ethnic bases and secondly those that are defined along gender differences. In both cases I argued from a political-sociological perspective that the unfinished agenda facing us is the lack of recognition of acts that depict a moral consciousness and concomitant governance institutions that can be reinstated or newly put in place to institutionalise and broaden the base for these acts of moral consciousness so that all and sundry can identify and affirm their commitments to these.

In the two above mentioned writings, I extensively discussed the role of the media in vocalising such acts that show a moral consciousness. I also examined the kinds of associational life that recognise with socially embedded agendas as necessary catalysts into institutionalising actions that depict a moral consciousness that we all belong by virtue of sharing the same space be it ideological space, physical space, or visions of a better community.

In a similar vein but this time arguing from a sociological view point (Achieng' 2005b), I extensively explored how the concept of redistributive justice as an ethos could form the basis on how the issue of entitlements and sharing of societal common goods could proceed.

In this section, I would like to further explore how associational life, a strong debating culture, identification with socially embedded agendas of shared visions of a better community could be some of the mechanisms that could be used to institutionalise a moral consciousness that we all belong despite our difference. Elsewhere, Lachenmann and Dannecker (2008) have provided an elaborate analysis of how such a debate is ensuing in the Arab *Magrebean* World and among Muslim women. I argue that once this consciousness is nurtured, then processes that follow in line with the conceptualisation of a just, broad based and unbiased redistribution of societal goods will become the norm rather than the exception.

South Africa: an illustrative Country Case

The apartheid system in pre- independent South Africa is an example *par excellence* of how political tribalism or bifurcation of citizenship proceeded, where a privileged few had entitlements and access to resources over a majority without. Post–apartheid South Africa thus forms an illustrative case study into understanding how the bifurcation of citizenship is being overridden and a broader definition of citizenship as social is continuously being debated upon and policies instituted. Crucial, is how the processes and mechanisms of a just redistribution of societal common goods have proceeded across racial, geographical, gender and generational divides. Typical examples in this regard are policies that have been instituted that have ensured that, for example, a broad based Black economic empowerment as an equity process is achieved as a mechanism for a just redistribution of resources and rights to these. Currently, the concept of social entrepreneurship is what most businesses follow. The concept is premised on the logic of the better ones in the community carrying the less privileged ones by offering them opportunities for participation (Anheier and Siebel 1990).

Coupled to the above mentioned mechanism, the vibrant associational life evident in South Africa, a continuously nurturing of cultured forms of debate on issues by various members in society, i.e. an open pluralistic public sphere, a proliferation and divergent forms of media, tolerance of and acceptance of others' opinion, have enabled South Africa to keep pace,

institute and maintain governance structures that are socially embedded. Very telling in this regard is Villet's (2011) paper presented at a recently ended colloquium at Monash South Africa[2]. In his paper, which is a response to Vice's (2010: 323-342) and which analyses Whiteness in post-Apartheid South Africa and how this still poses a moral problem because of the continued privileged positions that Whites continue to enjoy, Villent argues against Vice's argumentation that Whites should retreat to a private sphere where they will engage amongst themselves. In contrast, Villet (2011: 1 and 9) demonstrates why it is important at this time in South Africa's post-Apartheid era that Whites be humble but actively engage and talk in the public and political sphere. He further goes on to explicate that privilege is not only restricted to Whites. He argues convincingly that there are Blacks who are accumulating wealth and at the expense of less-privileged Blacks. He strongly posits that as South Africa continues to nurture its young democracy, Blacks and Whites are more than ever before necessitated to question their actions. This is especially because of the exponential widening of the gap between the rich and the poor being experienced in South Africa and the high crime rates that continue to ravage the country.

Undeniably, one can argue that South Africa is a context where a moral consciousness that encompassing a unity in diversity, as is entrenched in its motto of a rainbow nation, can truly and continuously be discerned. One could, however, readily point out to instances where xenophobic actions continue to mar such a moral consciousness. Nevertheless, once again, a look at the public sphere and how such debates are taken up provides us with enlightening examples of how debates continue to proceed on the morally conscious path.

In Conclusion: What is our Place in the 21st Century?

As we face a generational change, it is pertinent that the younger generation that is taking up critical leadership positions, learn from history and contexts with a view of engaging in an internal dialogue in order to discover other ways of doing that would lead our different societies and constituencies out of the different impasse. Principle to this, the paper has argued, is building a moral consciousness that we belong despite our differences. This is by virtue of recognising with higher level values, societal aspirations, and/or visions of a better society to name but a few ideological and conceptual orientations. To this end, the paper has shown that in addition to producing a younger generation that is an organic intellectual for,

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[2] Charles Villet is my colleague, who is currently teaching in the Philosophy section of the School of Arts at Monash South Africa. He presented his unpublished piece at a research colloquium organized by the School on the 1st of September 2011

in congruence with Mkandawire's (2010) supposition, our place in the world will be determined more by brains than brawns, we need to interrogate our actions. The latter is with an aim to transforming our actions so that these can proceed with others in mind. Using case studies drawn from different contexts, the paper has shown that once we recognise that a sense of unity in diversity is the fundamental principle in the 21st century, this is the moral basis of our actions, then the agendas that we formulate will be broadly based and socially embedded. In this way, we will seek to positively transform our contexts so that all and sundry can equitably benefit from these.

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