



Choosing Heaven: Negotiating Modernity in Diverse Social Orders¹

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Abstract

Situated within the topic of geographical contexts of knowledge production, this article interrogates the youth policies of Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania to understand how they articulate the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in planning for youth development in their national socio-cultural settings. The focus is on each country's approach to cultural transformation, in trying to divulge how the policymakers see the role of culture, both local and global, in young people's lives, and articulate this notion in the policies to produce a politically desired alternative to Western modernity. The article goes on to discuss the extent to which 'African modernity' constructs are set out in these policy documents as attempts to 'de-westernise' the concept. It recognises Ghana's approach as the most decolonial, for it distances the country's cultural transformation process from the perceived universality of Western values. The article suggests that modernity, as an 'imaginary pursuit', becomes powerful only when one chooses to imagine it in the first place.

Keywords: youth, tradition, modernity, cultural transformation, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania

Résumé

Situé dans le thème des contextes géographiques de production de connaissances, cet article interroge les politiques de jeunesse au Kenya, au Ghana et en Tanzanie pour comprendre comment elles articulent les concepts de « tradition » et de « modernité » dans la planification du développement de la jeunesse dans leurs contextes socioculturels nationaux. L'accent est mis sur l'approche de chaque pays en matière de transformation culturelle, en tentant de découvrir comment les décideurs politiques voient le rôle de la culture, à la fois locale et mondiale, dans la vie des jeunes, et articulent cette notion dans les politiques afin de

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produire une alternative politiquement souhaitable à la modernité occidentale. Le document poursuit en discutant des constructions de « modernité africaine » et leur présentation dans ces documents politiques comme des tentatives de « désoccidentalisation » du concept. L'approche du Ghana est reconnue comme la plus décoloniale, car elle éloigne le processus de transformation culturelle du pays de l'universalité perçue des valeurs occidentales. L'article suggère que la modernité, comme « quête imaginaire », ne devient puissante que lorsque l'on choisit de l'imaginer en premier lieu.

Mots-clés : jeunesse, tradition, modernité, transformation culturelle, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzanie

Introduction

With 65 per cent of population aged below thirty-five (Tracey and Kahutia 2017), Africa is largely a youthful continent. With enabling policy and legislation in place, this substantial number of young people can produce a demographic dividend, bringing much-needed economic development and growth to the continent. The African Union (AU) declared 2017 as the year of 'Harnessing Demographic Dividend Through Investments in Youth', giving member states an occasion to review their commitments to engaging young people meaningfully in democratic governance processes and socio-economic development.

Including youth in governance processes has been envisioned by the AU within the African Governance Architecture's Youth Engagement Strategy (AGA-YES), which recognises participation of young people as agents in development as their fundamental human right. This continental normative framework is further aligned with two major and current development agendas – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to 'leave no one behind', and the African Agenda 2063, which aspires to build 'An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth' (Aspiration 6) (AU undated).

To better understand the socio-economic space in which young people on the continent live and the problems they confront on a daily basis, in 2017–18, the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) embarked on a six-country research project entitled *Entry-Points for Utilising the Demographic Dividend in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Examination of the Dynamics of Youth Participation in Local and National Socio-Economic Transformation Processes*. Guided by the question: What are the main challenges and opportunities that the youth face in Africa, and how best can they be addressed to ensure that Africa realises a demographic dividend, the project was conducted in Botswana, Ghana,

Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia. The study was designed using 'youth as a resource' conceptual framework, which views young people as agents of change rather than societal problems. It is aligned with the three-lens approach to youth participation developed in 2007 by the Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom (Maguire 2007), which is premised on the idea that youth should participate in development as beneficiaries, partners, and leaders. Findings from AISA's demographic dividend study inspired this article, becoming a point of departure for a broader reflection on the socio-cultural context of youth development in three of the countries visited, namely Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana.

It is often said that African youth live in 'plural worlds' (Nilan and Feixa 2006). On the one hand, they navigate a world that is characterised by different 'traditional' African modes of maturation. On the other hand, they negotiate their identity in the world of 'modern' globalised culture. These complex social realities may appear incompatible, yet they are unequivocally intertwined in the cultural identities and lives of youth. The perceived mismatch between 'traditional' and 'modern' is the result of a Eurocentric conceptualisation of modernity; one which excludes the possibility of tradition continuing in the present time. This view does not reflect African realities. Considering that modernity is an 'imaginary construction' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xiv) that exists as a result of human interactions, how it is defined, politically and culturally, depends on social context.

With that in mind, the present article is an exploration of how 'tradition' and 'modernity' are articulated in the national youth development policies of Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana with reference to culture. The aim is to understand how the concepts may be used by the policymakers as political instruments and to determine whether the way they are constructed may affect the implementation of these policies. The article goes on to suggest the role that 'tradition' and 'modernity' should play in policymaking, as well as in the lives of young people in Africa.

Youth – A Troublesome Category

Different legal definitions of youth based on biological age apply across the African continent. For instance, the African Youth Charter considers every person between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five to be a youth (AUC 2006). The United Nations specifies the age range fifteen to twenty-four (UNDESA 2013). The Commonwealth Youth Programme considers youth to fall in the age range fifteen to twenty-nine (The Commonwealth undated). Laws and policies addressing young people's issues in African nation-states

define youth in different ways, and sometimes different documents in the same country contradict each other. For example, in Kenya, both the 2010 Constitution and the Youth Development Policy (MIIY 2019) consider youth to be people aged eighteen to thirty-four (or more specifically those who have not reached the age of thirty-five). However, the Policy further states that to be comprehensive in addressing youth issues, the interventions it suggests should also apply to young people between fifteen and seventeen years of age. Thus, in effect, the document expands the official youth age bracket. In Tanzania, the National Youth Development Policy considers youth to be people fifteen to thirty-five years old (MLEYD 2007). To vote, the citizens of Tanzania must be eighteen (URT 2005:14). Yet, girls as young as fifteen may be married (boys need to be at least eighteen years old to do so) (Law of Marriage Act 1971).² The National Youth Policy of Ghana applies the term 'youth' to people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five (MYS 2010). The right to vote is acquired by Ghanaians when they turn eighteen – the age of majority, according to the Constitution.

This dissonance between laws and policies is an obstacle to implementation when one considers the term 'youth' as a historically constructed, social category that is relational and culturally defined (Durham 2000, 2004; Abbink 2005). 'Youth' is difficult to pin down analytically because it takes on different meanings, depending on the particular context and situation. The term is vague, it tends to be defined in terms of age or biosocial stage, but even these are culturally determined (Durham 2000).

Age is relative (Fortes 1984). The age status of a particular person may shift from site to site. Thus, discourses around age, like those related to gender or race, carry pragmatic and political dimensions (Durham 2004) that need to be considered when seeking to understand the social and political implications of calling someone 'youth'. Furthermore, youth as a biosocial stage may not be recognised at all by some African cultural communities (Schlegel and Barry 1991; see Talavera 2002; Ginsberg et al. 2014); a person could simply transition from childhood to adulthood with puberty. Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (2005) argue that the status of a person as a child, youth or adult in the African context has more to do with societal expectations and responsibilities rather than years of life. From that point of view, youth is generally constructed as a period between childhood and adulthood. It is:

a time of growth, of searching for meanings and belonging; a stage of moulding characters, interests, and goals; a process of constructing and reconfiguring identities; a creative period with both risks and possibilities (Honwana 2012:11).

Bob Coles (1995) identifies three main transitional stages in the life of youth:

1. the school-to-work transition (finishing education and entering labour market),
2. the housing transition (leaving parental home),
3. the domestic transition (establishing one's own family).

This model seems to imply a linear change from one stage to another, whereas in reality the stages are interdependent and intertwined. Therefore, Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997:98) argue, the term 'transition' is inadequate, because the lines between the different phases are blurred. In order to establish a home, one needs to find a job and earn money. Oftentimes, to complete education, one needs to work first to be able to pay school fees. At times, the transition from childhood to adulthood may be delayed, purposefully or by adverse socio-economic factors. In such a case, a young person may feel suspended between childhood and adulthood, in the state of 'waithood' (Singerman 2007; Honwana 2012).

A 40-year-old who is unemployed and unmarried is still a *youthman*. In contrast, at the age of 10, child soldiers, AIDS orphans, or child labourers assume adult roles, even if many of them are later on pushed back into waithood (Honwana 2013).

Finally, depending on the context, the life stages of 'being youth' and 'becoming an adult' may have different character.

Deborah Durham (2000, 2004) emphasises the relational character of the term 'youth' in Africa. While age organises people's progress into social rights, generational relationships – as in older/ younger than – control relational rights and responsibilities. Building on that, she suggests that the term 'youth' acts as a 'social shifter' – it does not have an absolute meaning; rather, it is a deictic, taking on meaning in relation to the speaker.

Thinking of deictics and shifters helps one recognize the nature of discourses as relational, pragmatic, and part of a shifting and contested historical and social arena. (...) To call someone a youth is to position him or her in terms of a variety of social attributes, including not only age but also independence-dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities, and so on. But in the pragmatic and political processes in which such namings take place, the category itself is reconstructed and the attributes repositioned among those involved (Durham 2004:593).

She explains, the concept of 'shifters' makes social analysis problematic, as "shifters" create the social configurations of their utterance but rely on meanings external to the utterance itself' (Durham 2004:593).

The process of (re)making or imagining youth is dynamic and often contested. In its centre lie the issues of power, agency and the moral configurations of society, i.e. 'the grounds and forces of sociality' (Durham 2000:117; 2004). From a cultural perspective, becoming an adult is a process linked to a variety of ways of maturation, which traditionally used to include gaining fertility and climbing the social ladder through acquisition of traditional knowledge (Aguilar 1998a).³ Subordination of the young to the elder was tied to knowledge and power, on the one hand, and control of productive and reproductive resources, on the other. Knowledge and power claimed by elders 'created' youth (Schloss 1988), while initiation reproduced culturally constructed age distinctions, assigning to people social and cultural identities based on an age group. In terms of control of resources, on account of their position, elders claimed the labour of youth (and women) (Meillassoux 1981). Nowadays, children more often 'become adults' through formal Western-style education, becoming taxpayers, or gaining election rights, which serve as contemporary 'rites of passage' (Aguilar 1998b). These 'new' types of knowledge and maturation can be disputed by traditionalists as the basis for coming of age. Indeed, 'the clash of disparate forms of knowledge reveals the new generational cleavage of postcolonial society' (Durham 2000:118).

The discourses around different forms of knowledge, access and control of knowledge, as well as attempts to legitimise or undermine them have all been, and still are, used as mechanisms of power and social control. In addition, the state keeps on exercising control over the entire population through the way it defines the categories of child, youth, adult or elder in the first place (Scott 1998). Governments constantly construct youth through policies, typically using cross-cutting notions to define the group. These constructions – political or pragmatic acts, according to Durham (2004) – take place in the context of processes of globalisation. Western discourse on youth, presenting them in a supporting role, adds to the complexities of African notions of childhood and adulthood, and the crossing of the frontier between the two stages. There is a variety of discursive constructions of youth in Africa, and these have changed over time, depending on the socio-political developments. Young people were seen as the 'promising generation' in the immediate post-independence time, only to be called the 'lost generation' in the post-Cold War era (Klouwenber and Butter 2011: 58–9). The shifts in society also had an impact on the perception of youth. For instance, the quality of being rebellious, once considered a necessary attribute of the group (Spencer 1965; 2004) is now being used against youths through seeing them as antisocial and prone to criminal activity. Jon Abbink (2005) asserts that youth does not participate in socially

destructive movements due to some 'natural inclination' to violence. It is the 'breakdown of a socio-political and moral order in the wider society and the degree of governability of a certain type of state' that should be held responsible (Abbink 2005:14). Youth is also regularly pulled into political games by different state and non-state actors, as their 'alliance is valuable and their enmity dangerous' (McIntyre 2003).

In respect of youth agency, scholars argue that the concept no longer merely denotes the ability of young people to act independently, but tends to include the idea of self-authoring – the production of novel selves (Davies 1991). This particular approach to youth agency has 'a strong flavour of consumerism', argues Durham (2000:117), which may be an effect of Western cultural influences. Young people continually reimagine themselves. At the same time, 'claims to the position of youth, claims about the nature of youth, and moral claims about youth are centrally involved in the reinvention of political and social space' (Durham 2000:118).

African youth and the social landscape in which the group functions influence each other. Paradoxically, Honwana and De Boeck (2005) argue, young people are both *makers* and *breakers* of society, while simultaneously being *made* and *broken* by the society in return.

'Tradition vs Modernity' or 'With Tradition into Modernity'? ***Theoretical Framework***

Even though colonial rule in Africa formally ended in the previous century, the shadow of colonial hegemony still lies embedded in the forms of knowing and understanding the world. According to decolonial scholars, 'knowledge production and everyday relations are informed by European colonial modalities of power and propped up by imperial geopolitics and economic arrangements' (Collard *et al.* 2015:323). Within this school of thought, the argument that colonial power lies at the core of the construction of modernity (Mignolo 2000) is of particular importance for this article. It brings attention to the persistent grip of imperial power over the socio-economic realities of Africans, and also provides an alert about the possibility of alternative articulations of/ within power (Grosfoguel 2012) – 'southern thinking' that is at least partially freed from Western modernity, or that manages to vernacularise Western models and frameworks (Connell 2007).

'Modernity' is a vague concept, typically defined in relation to 'tradition'. Western linear theory of social change and development processes clearly divides history into pre-modern period, characterised by 'immature' state of traditional societies, from modernity, constructed on

the premises of rational and scientific thinking, secularisation, materialism, individualism and man's control over nature (Rostov 1960; Gusfield 1967). Eurocentric binary opposition juxtaposes traditional cultures, with their holistic ways of doing things, against modern culture, which focuses on science, specialisation and spatio-temporal universalism (Giddens 1991). The Western theoretical understanding of the concepts of modernity and tradition was used in colonial times as a tool to marginalise and suppress the colonised, who did not match the Western vision of an 'enlightened' lifestyle. Western modernity sees traditional communities as in need of being saved, i.e., developed from a primitive origin to a utopian end (Gillen and Ghosh 2007:26); lifted up from a state of savagery to civilisation (Ferguson 2006). From a Western perspective then, modernity is constructed as a telos, a supreme end of a human's progressive development.

Bruno Latour (1993) argues that the Western conceptualisation of modernity as a pinnacle of rationalisation and scientific enlightenment is a delusion; it is based on a dualistic distinction between nature and culture, which in reality is simply not possible. From this perspective, Latour posits, 'we have never been modern', as the natural and social worlds are always intertwined. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1993:xiv) echo Latour (1993), in claiming 'simultaneity of the meaningful and the material in all things'.

The polarity of tradition and modernity is also based on an assumption that tradition resists change and innovation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), that culture is static. Thus, traditional institutions and values are seen as obstacles to modernisation. Yet, if cultures are dynamic, traditions can change. And if they change, then fundamentally 'every society in our modern world is "traditional"' (Gyekye 1997:217), for the cultural creation of the present needs the past (Ton Kin 1992:68–70). From an indigenous perspective, tradition is a process that involves cultural continuity and innovation (Porsanger 2011:239); it is not just the transfer of beliefs, attitudes and practices, but a cumulative process of change that is rooted in indigenous understandings of time, space and knowledge. As Joseph Gusfield (1967:353) observed, "traditional society" is often itself a product of change'. It does not have a monolithic social structure, and represents a diversity of norms and values. Old traditions are not necessarily replaced by new ways of doing things – the new additions may merely increase the range of alternatives creating a syncretic culture. Accordingly, 'the outcome of modernising processes and traditional forms is often an admixture in which each derives a degree of support from the other, rather than a clash of opposites' (Gusfield 1967:355). Historical context and cultural setting help to determine which new element is rejected, accepted, or adapted.

Accordingly, the unidirectional character of the social, cultural and economic transformations that the Western model prescribed as part of the social change process is a fallacy; its properties and outcomes depend on many variables. Based on these premises, the idea that history is a teleological unfolding or a gradual rise through a hierarchical progression of development stages (Ferguson 2006), independent of socio-cultural settings, can be questioned, in which case modernity stops being a telos. Different cultures can now negotiate their own 'alternative modernity' in ways suitable for their socio-cultural and economic contexts. In such an open-ended model, there are many modernities, and many global systems are possible. New modernities can emerge by mixing elements of local cultures with ideas and solutions adopted from the 'global' culture. However, cultural hybridities that develop as a result (Bhabha 1994) reveal underlying power relations, which direct the way the cultural interaction between the local and the global, the hegemonic and the subaltern, the centre and the periphery, leads to the process of cultural transformation.

The term 'modernity', James Ferguson (2006) further suggests, is often used today simply with reference to some fixed global status – a state of being 'first class' – which may be achieved one day. But as it is no longer a telos, it is not a given that one could expect as an end result of a gradual rise in the world socio-economic hierarchy. Consequently, reaching this highest standard of living becomes more of a distant dream than a promise. Unreachable for most, the status turns into a high-hanging fruit planted by the West.

The process of constructing alternative modernities as a way of breaking free from imperial designs can be considered an example of what Walter Mignolo (2009) calls de-linking from Western modernity through de-westernisation. It is a process that does not question the transformation itself, but interrogates the rules of engagement within the capitalist economy established by the West, demanding the right to shape the properties and modalities of the developmental path to suit the context. A more radical path suggested by Mignolo (2009:3) is the decolonial option, which questions the rhetoric of capitalist economy, in trying to imagine other possibilities (for e.g., 'regeneration of life' over 'production and reproduction of goods'). This option undermines the universality of the process of transformation as a whole and its end result. In other words, it neither prescribes the path nor the destination, believing that 'there are not only many roads to heaven but also many heavens' (Lall 1992:7). The decolonial option, Mignolo (2000:59) argues, replaces the discourse of globalisation/civilisation with *mundialización/culture*, for,

unlike globalization, mundialización brings to the fore the manifold local histories that, in questioning global designs, aim at forms of globality that arise out of cultures of transience that go against the cultural homogeneity fostered by such designs (Mignolo 2000:59).

By recognising a multiplicity of heavens and a diversity of social orders, this approach emphasises the diversity of the world.

Methodology

Building on Mignolo's statement, this article uses the notion of culture as an analytical tool to understand how the categories of 'tradition' and 'modernity' are articulated in the youth policies of Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana.

Culture is a complex notion that can be defined in a number of ways. It has been understood as meaning embedded in human interactions (Alexander 2003), a set of tools to be used to inform behaviour (Swidler 1986), or as a system of norms and values that organises a society (Parsons 1951). The classical anthropological definition of culture describes it as a way of life, 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society' (Tylor 1871:1). Culture can also be seen simply as art, exhibiting both intrinsic and instrumental values.

Culture functions on different levels (individual and collective), takes on different aspects (static and dynamic), and may acquire varied properties (e.g., contextual – ecological, economical, socio-political; perceptual and material elements). Ann Swidler (1995) speaks of three important characteristics of culture, namely: publicness (public symbols acting as a system of meaning), practices (habits, styles and skills recreating culture), and power (which shapes culture, but also culture as a form of power).

With so many definitions, aspects and dimensions, it is difficult to settle on a clear meaning for the term 'culture'. The spiritual, intellectual, and emotional features of culture can be approached in two ways – from an essentialist point of view, in which case they become finite, historical phenomena that determine the individual, or in a non-essentialist or dynamic way, as socially constructed and continually renegotiated. In brief, culture can be regarded either as objective reality or as a 'social construction'. Cultural essentialism looks at aspects of culture as objective 'schemes', which may lead to people being categorised according to established patterns. The non-essentialist approach to culture sees it as an outcome of a dynamic process of change, in which people construct their identities rather than

acquire them (Baumann 1999). None of the many identities ‘created’ in this process are ultimate, and none of the values associated with them are universal. They are all contextual.

Given the complex, contextual character of culture, this article does not delve much into the definition of the notion used by each of the three countries under investigation but focuses instead on the approach to culture in the respective policy documents. The approach to culture informs the construction of the categories of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, which become political instruments in relation to youth development. Looking at how these policymakers see the role of culture in the lives of youth further reveals how they envisage the development trajectories of their countries. It also exposes potential policy implementation obstacles.

The article also recognises the difficulty in defining youth, given the deictic, relational and socio-culturally specific nature of the term. However, it is beyond the scope of this work to examine the construction of ‘youth’ through the discourses evident in the selected policy documents. Rather, the author follows the technical definitions of the group provided in the policies to understand how the policymakers see the roles and responsibilities of youth within national projects. The underlying cultural assumptions about the group that may transpire from the analysis of each document are discussed if they add value to the research question of the article. Given the central role that young people play in negotiating tensions between cultural continuity and change, traditional and modern, local and global, leading to the creation of ‘African modernity’, the focus of the article is on youth policies.

Policy Observations

The Kenya Youth Development Policy

The Kenya Youth Development Policy (KYDP), which was adopted in 2019 (MIIY 2019), considers youth to be between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four (i.e. those who had not yet reached the age of thirty-five), though the document also makes provision for young people of fifteen to seventeen years. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, in 2015/2016, this group represented 35 per cent of Kenya’s population and 55 per cent of the labour force (MIIY 2019:1). Despite that fact, youth in the country is considered marginalised in socio-economic outcomes, including employment. The 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census report indicates that 29 per cent of Kenyans were in the youth age bracket that year. Of the total youth population, 38 per cent were not in employment. Those employed constituted 18 per cent of total Kenya’s population (MIIY

2019:6, 8). The Census also stipulates that 51 per cent of all voters registered for 2017 elections were young people, an increase in comparison to previous elections of 2013 (MIIY 2019:6). In response to these statistics, the KYDP means to put in place measures to remove obstacles to youth socio-economic development in order to engage young people productively and thus accelerate economic growth in the country. It also aims to further advance youth political participation. Within this overall goal, the document emphasises the need for equal opportunity for youth.

In defining youth, the policy uses the term to refer to both biological age and the state of youth-hood. It explains that youth-hood is understood as

the specific stage between childhood and adulthood when people have to negotiate a complex interplay of both personal and socio-economic and cultural changes to manoeuvre the transition from dependence to independence, take effective control of their lives and assume social commitments (MIIY 2019:xi).

The policy does not explain how 'youth' as a social category is aligned with the stipulated biological youth age bracket.

The document stipulates specific categories of youth, recognising their different needs, expectations and obstacles with regard to the many socio-cultural stages that they go through between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, physical changes they experience, or the socio-economic challenges they face along the way. Accordingly, the KYDP differentiates between: male and female youth; educated and uneducated young people; formally trained and informally trained; rural and urban residents; in-school and out-of-school young people; adolescents and young adults; physically challenged and able-bodied youth; economically engaged or not; detained and not-detained; migrant and non-migrant; skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled; street and vagrant youth; youth infected and affected by HIV and AIDS; female youth and the boy child; unemployed youth; incarcerated youth; and youth in humanitarian settings.

However, despite listing the many variables and recognising youth as a social category, the document does not ascertain the differences between them in addressing issues affecting young people in the country. The KYDP lists health (including nutrition and well-being); education (including training and skills development), unemployment (including underemployment and inactivity), environment protection, agriculture, entrepreneurship, civic participation, and transformative leadership as its main areas of focus. It further sets out special target groups among youth for the relevant government affirmative action – these are: youth with disability; street and vagrant youth, youth living with HIV and AIDS, unemployed

youth, out-of-school young people, incarcerated youth, young people who are migrants and in humanitarian settings, as well as youth living in informal settlements. Although these youth categories are clearly defined, there is no indication how they are to be mainstreamed or what measures are to be put in place to ensure that assistance is adapted to their specific needs.

The KYDP applies cross-cutting notions of youth that tend to be used as descriptors of the whole group independently of context (see Durham 2004). For example, as Durham (2004:598–9) argues, ‘being at school’ has become a normalised condition of youth in Africa. At school young people are prepared for national service, infused with national goals of progress and self-sufficiency. In a way, they can be controlled. Out-of-school young people exist in the space of youth but are unable to claim the rights ascribed to the group or fulfil the associated obligations. Together with other vulnerable young people – those living on the street or struggling to find employment – they cannot reach the goal of independence and self-reliance.

The KYDP sets out key values that are to guide implementation of the document, namely: patriotism, respect of diversity and ethical values; equity and accessibility; inclusiveness; good governance, and mainstreaming youth issues. Under ‘respect for diversity and ethical values’, the policy elaborates that it

respects the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds of the different communities and conforms to universally recognised human rights, without discrimination based on sex, race/ origin, age, ethnic, creed, political affiliation or socio-economic status (MIY 2019:25).

Aligned with these values is the objective of the policy to, among other things, ‘nurture value driven, morally upright, ethical generation of patriotic youth for transformative leadership’ (MIY 2019:35). The issue of morality, moral values, positive morals or moral uprightness is repeated several times throughout the document. However, there is no indication of how the policymakers understand these terms or the concepts of morality and ethics. Proper definition of these notions seems pertinent, considering the cultural diversity of Kenya and the abovementioned pledge to respect the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds of the different communities.

The KYDP recognises the importance of culture in the lives of youth, though it speaks of culture indirectly. The term *per se* does not appear in the document. However, a closer look at how the policy sees the transfer and exchange of cultural values through inter-generational dialogue, mentorship, family system and community as a whole, allows the deduction that the policymakers see culture as a way of life, and system of values and controls that gives meaning to people’s experiences.

The policy understands culture as dynamic, while at the same time recognising that people are culturally embedded within a system of meaning that is historically created. Thus, it shapes the lives of people and controls their behaviour but can, and in some instances should, change in the process of negotiation and manipulation of symbols that leads to the creation of new meanings. The document thus integrates an essentialist approach to culture with a non-essentialist stance.

The inclination towards a more essentialist understanding of culture is disclosed in the KYDP in a number of statements related to the role of family as a key unit that is to 'pass on' values and inculcate moral precepts in youth, and the responsibility of community elders who, as 'custodians of morals, communal values, traditions and customs', are to 'bequeath this wisdom to the youth' (MIIY 2019:51–2). The document seems to repeat the widely accepted view that tradition is 'handed down' or 'transmitted' from the past to the present. This passage of values should, however, only include the positive aspects of culture (MIIY 2019:51), according to the policy. The question therefore remains, which values can or should be considered as positive, and who is to decide what should be discarded as negative or harmful.

By recognising that continuity of culture that is dynamic includes social change, which brings about innovation, and showing that systems and values can adapt to present realities, the KYDP moves towards the non-essentialist view of culture. It indicates the potential of culture to change by mentioning that cultural standards and values which characterise a community should not infringe on people's rights – they should have relevant standards. In this particular case, the KYDP refers to 'retrogressive' cultural practices. Using such a judgemental language, the document seems to suggest that culture can be instrumentally changed when its norms and practices are not aligned with some 'higher', more progressive principles. The document suggests that there are 'universal' criteria (such as the universal human rights) based on which people's ways of life can be regulated. It also explicitly demonstrates that it espouses the belief that culture transforms by passing from a higher to a lower level of organisation in a linear way.

It appears that Kenyan policymakers tried to follow global (universalised) Western standards while simultaneously staying true to local values and norms. For instance, saying that the document 'respects the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds of the different communities', they also claim that the policy shall 'conform to universally recognised human rights without discrimination based on gender, race, origin, age, ethnicity, creed, political affiliation or social status' (MIIY 2019:25). It remains unclear

whether the global or the local system should be applied on matters where the two approaches do not agree.

What happens when people from different cultural, religious and other backgrounds do not uphold the 'universally recognised rights'; and how are the local cultural beliefs regarded when they create attitudes that disempower certain segments of society? Finally, which system should be considered when it comes to choosing 'positive morals and values' that should be transferred to the youth by the elders?

Speaking of equality, the KYDP recognises that, from a cultural perspective, female youth in Kenya are disadvantaged due to certain social and cultural practices and traditional gender roles (MIIY 2019:32). However, it is silent on how to bring about change through practice and reconcile it with the claimed respect for diversity. The policy recognises marriage at the legal age of consent as a right of youth (MIIY 2019:28). Yet, it does not mention the socio-cultural factors that lead to the occurrence of child marriages in the country (see *Girls Not Brides* undated); factors that will have to be addressed to produce a lasting change in behaviour. The document upholds youth's right to ownership and protection of property (MIIY 2019:29). Yet, despite the Matrimonial Property Act (2013) which protects women's access to their property, patriarchal traditions and customary laws do not always recognise women's rights in this regard (Mbugua 2018). The policy does not provide solutions for how to address cultural norms that go against the recommendations; that is, how to marry the traditions and customs held in custodianship by the elders with the premise of universal human rights.

Traditionally in Kenya, the responsibilities of the members of the family and community were defined by maturity of the members and their gender. The passage from childhood to adulthood was aligned with advancing in the community hierarchy, and associated with acquiring new roles in the family and society at large (Aguilar 1998a). The KYDP deplores the weakening of the 'family ties inherited from our traditional societies, which called for mutual respect between the various age groups' (MIIY 2019:30). It sees 'signs of rebellion' visible among the youth as the outcome of this process. At the same time, in a move to empower youth, the policymakers urge parents to offer room for youth participation at all levels (MIIY 2019:30), and call for exchange of knowledge and values between the different generations (MIIY 2019:53)

The policy calls for support to youth leadership in public, private and political spheres (MIIY 2019:67) and tasks the government of Kenya with enhancing youth leadership skills (MIIY 2019:56). The document thus praises the 'old' community and family structures built on respect and

social hierarchy, but seems to simultaneously undermine the traditional role of elders in running communities; the role that centred on the power and control that the seniors exercised over resources, among other things. Suggesting a change in the position of youth, who are seen as rebellious and in need of guidance, while being called to leadership and dialogic exchange with adults, the document does not reflect on the effect such change would have on the traditional family structure and the functioning of communities and societal well-being. This recommendation is aligned with the policy's stance on the dynamic nature of culture, which enables systems to change and adapt to new realities. However, it does not explain why such a change is indeed needed, if the traditional ties that ensured mutual respect between various age groups are longed for and considered valuable for people. Seemingly, the policymakers try to 'update' the 'traditional culture' in a move to align it with foreign 'universal' standards, without taking into consideration meanings embedded in both local practices that they expect to change and the new principles they want to see taking root.

The KYDP admits that societal attitudes are responsible for the low status of youth, which results in limited youth participation in economic and political spheres (MIIY 2019:12). The cultural perceptions of age that subconsciously continue to regulate social relations in the Kenyan society (Aguilar 1998b; Durham 2000, 2004) are therefore acknowledged. However, such socio-cultural barriers are mentioned in the policy only briefly, next to challenges with proper organisation and orientation. Meanwhile, this factor constitutes a serious policy implementation obstacle. For instance, Kenyan women in some communities may not have a youth identity at all, even when falling within the defined youth age bracket. They move from childhood to adulthood with marriage, transitioning from one social role to another. In the Western Province,

when we are unmarried, the community views us as children who cannot "address" elders and ask for votes. When we get married, young women "belong" to their husbands. We are no longer youth but adults. We therefore cannot vie for political seats on a youth ticket even when we are within that age bracket (Siri-Njongo and Mwangda 2011:36).

In the above example, a married woman will be an adult, even if age- and policy-wise, she is still considered a youth. And yet, like a child who is dependent on parents, she now 'belongs' to her husband. The change of status comes with the responsibility of managing the household, even though it is not associated with the ability to think and act independently (see Durham 2004:596 for an example from Botswana, where a woman's status shifts through death of a parent, managing a household, or supporting others).

The National Youth Development Policy of Tanzania

The National Youth Development Policy (NYDP) of Tanzania was adopted in 2007 (MLEYD 2007). It defines youth as people between fifteen and thirty-five years of age. Citing the 2002 Population and Housing Census, the document states that youth constitutes 35 per cent of the total population (MLEYD 2007:1). The NYDP largely treats the group as homogenous, describing the situation of youth in Tanzania with no regard to the different stages of life that young people within the set age bracket go through, their location – urban/ rural, their education level, or their family status. Only disabled youth and nomadic people are named as separate youth categories that need interventions particularly appropriate to their circumstances. Gender is also considered, though marginally, to the extent that the policy recognises cultural practices that prejudice women.

Among the priority areas, the document lists economic empowerment, environment, employment promotion, youth participation, HIV and AIDS, gender, arts and culture, sports, adolescent reproductive health, and family life issues. With regard to these priorities, the focus of the policy is on agriculture and urban employment, information, labour-intensive works, the mining sector, natural resources and tourism infrastructure development, education, and training and services.

Culture is presented in the NYDP as being in danger of being diluted. The term ‘culture’ probably refers here to the national culture of the country (as the singular form used and reference to national values would suggest) or the local cultures that the inhabitants of Tanzania represent as a collective.

The policy sees foreign influences in culture as being damaging to the well-being of the Tanzanian people. It claims that ‘through modern technology and media some foreign cultures have adversely affected the once established cultural practices’ (MLEYD 2007:4), in result of which young people have allegedly ‘lost their identity’. The document does not provide more detailed information about what cultural practices have been affected or in what way it considers the influences to be harmful. However, given that the policy deplores the change of ‘once established practices’ as being damaging, this suggests either that ‘established practices’ are seen as a fixed legacy which should be ‘deposited’ in the next generation in their ‘pure’ form, or that cultural practices are treasures that can be changed internally but should be protected from any outside influence. There is also a third option – when a change in practices that comes through a foreign culture is acceptable because its effects are favourable for society. The question regarding the third option, and the initial statement about adverse effects of change, is who holds the right to decide what is ‘acceptable’ or ‘harmful’ when it comes to culture.

The NYDP does not shy away from naming some of the local cultural practices that it deems harmful to the health of the youth, namely female genital mutilation and early marriages (MLEYD 2007:19). The criteria for these judgements are not specified. The longevity of these traditions could be associated with the solid grasp that local cultures have on the population.

Another point that the NYDP makes is that cultural identity can be lost, which would suggest that it is seen as fixed, inherited, and it defines a person as part of a cultural community. This view creates a perception of culture as something that is imposed on an individual, shapes them, but is not necessarily reciprocally shaped by them. Its repertoire of expressions cannot be expanded to include foreign influences either, if it is to remain genuine.

The policy attributes harmful changes in traditional lifestyles and the associated socio-economic well-being of people to globalisation (MLEYD 2007:4). Globalisation is also blamed for 'imposing new cultural norms and values which conflict with national values' (MLEYD 2007:13). The strong language used would suggest that these new norms and values were not willingly accepted by people, even though hegemonic ideologies need to be internalised by the 'dominated' to induce consent.

In the way the NYDP considers youth and its development, it seems that the policymakers specifically blame young people for subscribing to ideas and ideals that policymakers view as contradictory to national goals and principles. Here the policy juxtaposes global culture with its norms, which youth seems to embrace, with the 'politically' desired national values, which are clearly not always compatible. The likelihood that youth will be interested in global culture is not very surprising, as young people across Africa tend to be in the centre of negotiations between the local and the global (Durham 2000:114). Their social condition is heavily influenced by the interaction between these two pressures (Diouf 2003). They are major players in the processes of globalisation. The policy statement seems therefore to suggest that policymakers view the alternative forms chosen by youth as invalid with regard to national objectives.

The NYDP further deplores the disintegration of traditional families and community life, claiming that children are no longer raised by their communities, whose role was taken over by public institutions dealing with youth development (MLEYD 2007:4). The policy is not clear about the reasons for this state of affairs. Policymakers seem to believe that there has been a shift in the society – from communitarianism (collectivism), which emphasises community relationships and integration of an individual into a social network (including the importance of the family unit), towards a

more individualistic society, with the noticeable centrality of individuals, relatively independent of others, and their personal development outside of the community.

Whether the youth development provided by the public institutions mentioned in the document is benefiting young people is not disclosed. Similarly, there is no discussion over the role that such institutions should play in the lives of youth. Given their public character, one would expect them to provide the young people with citizenship education to prepare them for their obligations towards the country. However, according to the NYDP, there is currently no mechanism to prepare youth for their responsibilities as good citizens of a democratic nation – i.e., to protect the country and its Constitution, and to respect established rules and ethics.

The policy states that youth have a right to participate in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life of their country (MLEYD 2007:11), which includes access to the political arena in Tanzania. However, there is no clearly defined system in place to help young men and women to take up leadership positions (MLEYD 2007:6). The policy specifically acknowledges the unequal access of girls to decision-making and leadership positions. Discrimination towards young women with respect to land ownership and inheritance is also noted (MLEYD 2007:11). The reasons for this state of affairs are not mentioned, but it can be assumed that the traditional perceptions of age and gender roles have a bearing on the situation. Accordingly, implementation of the policy would require a cultural change.

The NYDP raises the issue of ‘disintegration of traditional families and community life’ and calls for a mechanism that would prepare youth for their role in society. It further argues that young Tanzanians ‘need to be appraised [*sic*] on the need to preserve the culture and heritage of the nation’ (MLEYD 2007:19). It is surprising that traditional family and community structures, which used to provide traditional education and prepare young people for community life, are not recognised as a genuine culture-specific regulatory mechanism.

In the end, culture is a powerful control mechanism and neither this, nor its true value or meaning for people’s lives, is fully appreciated. The policymakers seem to have a somewhat nostalgic attitude towards ‘traditional culture’, understanding that some aspects of it may not seem fitting anymore, but not realising that local cultural practices can also change and adapt to respond to the contemporary challenges Tanzanian youth is facing. Moreover, the document remains blind to the still-strong influence of local cultures – in the form of still functioning subconscious cultural perceptions and value systems in use – on Tanzania’s contemporary society life.

To preserve tradition, the NYDP proposes establishment of a mechanism which would, on the one hand, protect 'acceptable' cultural practices and promote Tanzanian cultural values and, on the other, defend youth from 'harmful' external cultural influences. Without indicating who should decide on what is acceptable and what is harmful, the policy acknowledges the dynamic character of culture and its ability to change. However, by suggesting the introduction of a mechanism to protect and preserve traditions, the policy is more inclined to seeing in culture a fixed system that organises a society, rather than a self-regulatory, meaning-making 'set of tools' that people can use. Hence, while 'traditional' norms and practices appear to silently endure the passage of time and the 'invasion' of more contemporary standards and expressions, often propagated by the mass media and spread through new technologies (MLEYD 2007:4), the policymakers seem to be stuck between cultural transformation, which in certain cases seems advisable, if not unavoidable, and the 'glorious old days'.

Speaking of new influences, the NYDP dedicates a lot of space to discuss the harmful effects of information and communication technology (ICT), and the breakdown of cultural and national values due to the 'liberalisation' (presumably referring to the liberal influence) of television and radio programmes (MLEYD 2007:13). In trying to remedy the situation, it suggests regulating the use of the media to prevent its ill-effects. It is noticeable that the NYDP does not address the sensitivity of youth to more liberal content and their need for it, which may provide an insight into the ways youth see themselves. One would want to ask, why does youth choose to follow a different path, what drives the group, and why should it be considered a wrong direction? Finally, what kind of cultural upbringing and citizenship education do young Tanzanians receive, if the cultural and national values can be so easily destroyed by the power of mass media? The policy focuses on regulating access to undesirable content, addressing the supply rather than the demand. It is surprisingly silent on the potential use of traditional education as a salve for the underlying causes of the situation.

In its NYDP, Tanzania recognises the positive and negative aspects of the 'traditional culture', while attributing the destruction of the country's moral core and value systems largely to foreign influences. The socio-economic ills of the country are presented mostly as an outcome of globalisation. The policymakers criticise the impact of Western culture on their country's development. They call for the preservation of the established system, albeit denouncing certain 'harmful' practices that are part of it.

The National Youth Policy of Ghana

Featuring the theme 'Towards an Empowered Youth, Impacting Positively on National Development', the National Youth Policy of Ghana (NYPG) was adopted in 2010 (MYS 2010). It views youth as all persons falling in the age bracket fifteen to thirty-five. In 2010, based on the 2000 Ghana Housing and Population Census, the group constituted 33 per cent of the population (Paragraph 3.4). In the 2010 Ghana Housing and Population Census, youth aged fifteen to twenty-four made up 20 per cent of all people in Ghana (GSS 2013:54). The policy acknowledges 'youth' as a social category, defining the term as 'a period between childhood and adulthood' (Paragraph 3.1), but does not develop that thought much further.

The NYPG recognises that the youth is a heterogeneous group composed of males and females, living in rural and urban areas, adolescents and adults, physically-challenged and able-bodied, educated and uneducated, in-school and out-of-school, organised and unorganised, skilled and unskilled. It is interesting to note that the policymakers distinguish between adolescents and adults. Even though the difference between the two is not explained, it can be assumed that the distinction in the NYPG follows the terminology used in the Ghana Housing and Population Census, where youth aged fifteen to nineteen are considered 'old adolescents', and twenty to twenty-four year olds are considered 'young adults'. Oddly, though, the 2010 Census counts youth aged between twenty-five and thirty-five together with adults (up to fifty-nine years of age).

The NYPG acknowledges that each youth group has different characteristics, needs and aspirations. However, it does not delve further into this matter. It only addresses different needs of the so-called 'special attention groups', among which are youth engaged in crime and violence, youth with disability, youth with special talents, youth at risk, and female youth.

Among the key principles of the NYPG are patriotism, self-reliance, honesty and integrity, participation, equity, access, leadership, good governance, gender mainstreaming, respect, as well as coordination and collaboration (Paragraph 5.2.1). In addressing youth needs and priority areas for action, the policy puts emphasis on a number of issues, namely: education and skills training; science and technology; employment and entrepreneurial development; agriculture; health; arts and culture; governance, democracy and leadership; as well as nationalism and conscientisation of the youth, among others (Paragraph 6.1). The list looks very similar to the one found in the youth policies of Kenya and Tanzania, as each country uses cross-cutting notions of youth when speaking of needs and challenges without providing much context.

Speaking of culture, the NYPG hints at the instrumental value of culture as art by encouraging youth to create wealth opportunities for themselves 'in their backyards and environment' (Paragraph 6.1.5). Much greater emphasis is, however, placed in the policy on culture as a meaning-making mechanism and a set of values, behaviours and beliefs.

The NYPG describes the national culture as a means of upholding moral upbringing and law-abiding citizenship (Paragraph 9.3.1). It argues the importance of a 'proper cultural context' in which youth would be provided with the 'correct moral compass to guide them in leading responsible youth and adult lives' (Paragraph 9.6.1). Young people are clearly not trusted to make the right choices, viewed as not mature enough to decide for themselves – as needing guidance. The use of the terms 'proper' and 'correct' is problematic, as the terms of reference are not stipulated. It is equally unclear what the policymakers mean when they call for the promotion of 'good Ghanaian culture and beliefs' (Paragraph 9.3.1). The challenge of defining what is 'good', 'proper' and 'correct', and according to whose standard, is left open. 'Ghanaian culture' is another term that may be confusing, as it lacks definition. It seems the document speaks of the national culture of the country, in which case the description 'good' is rather misleading; one would not expect bad elements in that kind of political construct. Otherwise, the policy may be referring, again, to the multitude of local cultures that form part of the diverse cultural landscape of the country. In that case, the evaluative word 'good' would suggest that, according to the policymakers, cultures can be divided into good and bad, or else some elements of cultural practices may be seen as positive or negative. It is not clear how elements will be assessed and deemed to be good or bad.

Creating cultural awareness among youth is stipulated in the document as a social, political and economic development strategy (Paragraph 6.1.13). The NYPG sees traditional socialisation structures as the way of transferring cultural values. Arts and culture are also described as the medium through which norms should be transferred, as well as 'progressive skills, techniques of social relations and survival' (Paragraph 6.1.13). Culture and heritage, according to the policy, give people a sense of identity and self-respect. The policymakers turn to religious organisations, traditional authorities and socio-cultural groupings to provide youth with guidance in this regard and educate them 'through examples rather than precepts' (Paragraph 9.6.1.). That way, young people are expected to willingly 'adopt our beliefs, values and cultural heritage' (Paragraph 9.6.1.).

The use of 'our' in this statement suggests that the policy does not consider youth to be members of the collective yet. Who can claim the membership

of that imagined community? Those with a well-developed sense of cultural belonging? Those who have acquired traditional knowledge? The statement evokes traditional initiation processes in which elders exercised power over the young ones through their superior knowledge. Initiates have to go through a journey to acquire an expected amount of knowledge and maturity to prove themselves worthy of being called a member of the community.

Youth is clearly depicted here as a group that can join the collective, but only on the already established terms. This means the elders still hold the power to 'create' youth. However, before young people are made to belong, they need to be prepared and have knowledge and cultural identity infused in them. Briefly, the policy prescribes traditional education and living the culture, instead of learning about it, as ways of preserving local norms and ensuring that cultural practices continue to be practised. It is expected that, in this way, young people will naturally absorb the culture and will be able to willingly accept its values. However, one wonders how the policy sees the future of those who rebel against 'our' norms and beliefs, and try to negotiate their way into the collective on their own terms. How does change happen, if at all?

The NYPG also dedicates some space to the families, warning of the weakening role the community plays in the lives of young people. Recognising the erosion of traditional social support systems for youth, which it claims leads to deviance (Paragraph 4.0), the NYPG calls on the families to 'create culturally-sensitive guidance systems and provide the resources needed for (...) development of the youth to contribute to their respective societies and/or communities' (Paragraph 9.2.1).

Here cultural upbringing is again promoted as a way of producing responsible citizens. There is no elucidation of how its precepts, especially traditional gender roles, correlate with the recommendation to 'provide equitable conditions for males and females' (Paragraph 6.1.8) and 'advancing the aspirations of female youth (...) as equal partners in the national development agenda' (Paragraph 7.0). However, the policy clearly discourages all gender-related discriminatory cultural practices (Paragraph 6.1.8), as well as negative attitudes (Paragraph 7.0). These attitudes, as can be assumed, result from specific cultural perceptions of the role of women in society and the traditional family structure.

The policymakers clearly recognise the need for culture to be dynamic and change when its practices are no longer useful or become invalid for a particular context. And it is usually youth with whom the 'innovation' within culture tends to start, as they find themselves in the centre of

negotiating tensions between continuity and change in the process of cultural transformation. Consequently, while the society prepares youth for being part of the community, society claims the power to shape the collective they will join.

The NYPG does not make anyone responsible for providing equitable conditions for males and females, or for changing gender-related discriminatory cultural practices. It also does not seem to allow youth to reject long-established cultural norms and empower them to follow a different path on pain of being excluded from 'our collective'. They cannot exercise individual agency.

Among challenges, the NYPG mentions 'negative effects of urbanisation and modernisation' (Paragraph 4.0). The document does not provide any explanation of the nature of these effects. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the policy sees science and technology as prerequisites for the youth to join the global scientific revolution, and lists them among its priority areas (Paragraph 6.1.3). It also promotes participation of youth in 'modern agriculture' (Paragraph 6.1.7), but does not clarify what the term 'modern' might mean in this context. How is 'modern' agriculture different? Is it agriculture that uses innovative technology and novel machinery, or simply 'non-traditional' agriculture? How can policymakers criticise 'modernisation' while promoting technological progress at the same time? The NYPG may be referring here to the modernisation theory, according to which

development meant assuming the mental models of the West (rationalization), the institutions of the West (the market), the goals of the West (high mass consumption), and the culture of the West (worship of the commodity) (Peet 1999:85–6).

The NYPG seems to be critical of the undesirable results of transformation in the socio-cultural sphere, and of the values and modes of operation propagated by the West. But it encourages the pursuit of innovation and technological advancement in the economic sphere as the prerequisites for the country being 'modern'.

Modernity – A Pursuit of the Imaginary

The youth development policies of Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana all use biological age as the defining characteristic of youth. Socially constructed definitions of youth are not directly integrated in any of them, though the Kenyan and the Ghanaian documents acknowledge that youth is a social category and a heterogeneous group, including people from different

backgrounds, with different needs, aspirations and challenges, without pursuing the topic any further. None of the texts mention the relational character of youth, consider the term as historically constructed, or refer to the 'social shifter' phenomenon identified by Durham (2004). None of the texts acknowledge 'waithood' or make provision for young people older than the specified age-range in each country who may find themselves in this transitional phase.

The policies all use broad cross-cutting notions of youth, constructing the group through the challenges it experiences: high levels of unemployment, access to quality education, as well as health-related problems. Each document provides a list of targeted youth, emphasising the need to cater specifically for the most marginalised and vulnerable, including female youth, out-of-school youth, rural youth and the disabled. However, the texts rarely refer further to these clusters with specific recommendations.

Looking at culture, the Kenyan policy does not refer to it explicitly at all. The other two documents use the term in the singular form, which suggests that they refer to the respective national culture. All three documents recognise the dynamic nature of culture and leave the door open to potential change in practices, especially if these practices are no longer valid or even harmful to people in some way. The Tanzanian and Ghanaian youth policies see foreign influences largely as unwanted elements, destructive to their local culture.

The policies of Kenya and Tanzania see culture as both a repository of values and norms bequeathed from previous generations that control the behaviour of people, and a 'living organism' that shapes social realities of youth. Culture is acknowledged as being constraining, but also subject to change based on lived experiences.

The Kenya Youth Development Policy seems to want to combine 'traditional' Kenyan values with Western 'universal' norms, acknowledging that change and continuity are both elements of the process of cultural transformation. At the same time, the policymakers clearly do not consider instances when the two systems are arguably incompatible. The modalities of the process of cultural transformation are not clearly defined, but they seem to be guided by the Western-construed 'universal' standards for a 'modern' society. Consequently, modernity is articulated as a status in a global system that makes one belong to the group of developed and progressive, albeit on one's own terms. The core of this modernity revolves around traditional culture, which has the capacity to change, but should also be protected from unwanted influences that weaken traditional values. The policy seems to view certain Kenyan cultural practices as relics of the past that

should be eradicated because they are not aligned with 'universal' standards. Hence, Kenya is arguably striving to arrive at its 'alternative modernity' by 'modernising' its culture. Yet the possibility of transforming culture by adapting some of the 'old' practices to current realities, or reviving traditions instead of simply rejecting them, is not spelled out as an option.

The National Youth Development Policy of Tanzania repeats the mantra of the need to protect local culture, its traditions and expressions, from the damaging effects of globalisation, modernisation and the Western imperial system of values, but sees the need to challenge local cultural practices and norms that are no longer fitting and desirable for the contemporary society.

The document sees local (national) culture as traditional and opposes the influences of global culture. The latter is depicted as a system incompatible with the ideologies envisaged by the policymakers as the country's foundation, as well as with the cultural values the policy wants to mainstream among young people. The NYDP articulates Tanzania's modernity as being rooted in local traditions and values, and sees globalisation as a destructive force, affecting young people's cultural identity and their socio-economic well-being. Tanzania's policymakers see youth's identity being lost due to the impact of global culture. Cultural hybridisation or cultural liberalism are rejected, even if the document, like its Kenyan equivalent, is clearly influenced by principles and norms that are external to local culture.

The National Youth Policy of Ghana sees culture as a way of life that is acquired by an individual as a member of society. As such, the policy recognises the importance of cultural upbringing and traditional socialisation structures in shaping the value system of its nation, including the youth. The policy rejects Western ideology and norms, but understands the advantages of the country having a strong science and technology focus. Hence, it is eager for Ghana to join the global scientific revolution, seeing it as a prerequisite for claiming the state of being modern. Modernity is thus seen not as a status in a global hierarchy, but rather a technological advancement of the country. Ghana's policymakers seem to separate people's culture from the world of technology. Culture is treated as that sphere of life that should not be interfered with by foreign influences, as it is where the soul of the nation resides. Science, however, is presented as a separate sphere, a matter of global interests. Being recognised as part of the scientific revolution means claiming access to the 'modern' world. The policy seems to suggest that modernity as pure science can be divorced from society. Construed in this way, Latour (1993) argues, modernity is a utopia, for culture and nature always mix.

Searching for African Heavens

Ferguson (2006:17) speaks of a 'colonial shadow relation between "Africa" and "the West", which persists and has even haunted the continent since its independence. It subsists on Africa's 'aspiration to membership', which depends on the continent's progress towards 'development' and 'modernity', both of which can be deemed 'imaginary pursuits'.

Colonialists claimed their culture and values were universal. Drawing from social Darwinism, they constructed indigenous⁴ identities as homogenous, unchanging, their cultures fixed and ahistorical. For the West, the 'Other', stuck in the past, undeveloped, 'savage', was racially stereotyped and regarded as being in need of 'saving' from primitiveness by the modern European human. Modernity – a desirable state of development characterising 'advanced' nations – has become a telos and a criterion against which 'developing' countries have been evaluated.

Questioning the supposedly universal trajectory of economic and socio-cultural transformations needed to achieve 'Western modernity', the non-Western countries managed to break out of the modernity-telos cage and decided to create their own 'alternative modernities'. In Africa, after independence, intellectuals tried to give the continent its own modernity too. In an attempt at de-westernisation (Mignolo 2009), this new modernity was to be adapted to the cultural and historical experiences of Africa. Nkrumah's 'African Personality', Senghor's 'Negritude', and Nyerere's 'African Socialism' were efforts at giving the project of modernisation an African soul (Mkandawire 2005). However, the project has failed, for tradition can also be used as a legitimating principle and turned into an ideology. The project ended up adapting the same language of one-sidedness and idealisation that the colonial oppressor had used before. As a result, African nationalism represented the entire continent as ahistorical and asocial (Mkandawire 2005).

What, then, should African modernity look like? Kwame Gyekye (1997: xii) claims that the '*self-created modernity* – forged and refined in the furnace of conversations between African intellectual creativity and Africa's complex cultural heritage' – needs to draw on African experiences and 'appropriate' rather than 'transfer' or 'transplant' technology. It also needs to be ready for some radical changes in terms of leaving behind those aspects of 'traditional' expressions that no longer serve their purpose. For, as Gusfield (1967:358) argues, both tradition and modernity are categories of choice. This choice is made based on the value systems of people.

Ferguson (2006) argues that in the pursuit of a higher standard of living associated with modernity, Asian countries focused on transforming their economies, but in line with their local cultural precepts and philosophical

standpoints. In Africa, however, culture is widely seen as a relic and an obstacle to development, he claims. Hence, the countries on the continent chose more often to 'modernise' their cultures by eliminating 'backward practices', in hope of reaching the status of a 'modern' state. The youth development policies of Kenya and Tanzania seem to follow that trajectory. Ghana, on the other hand, has arguably chosen a different path than its East African counterparts, associating being 'modern' simply with scientific advancement and the global technological revolution.

Whatever the trajectory chosen to pursue an 'alternative modernity', the motivation behind it remains the same, namely an 'aspiration to membership'. It does not question modernity (or development) as a concept or a path (whether as progress or regress; see Ferguson 2006). It simply changes its features. Mignolo argues that, if knowledge-making is to serve well-being, it 'shall come from local experiences and needs, rather than from local imperial experiences and needs projected to the globe' (2009:19). Hence, the aspiration matters. It is key to deciding on the path but also, more importantly, on the destination. Imagining different types of modernity or different ways of arriving at modernity does not address the problem of the 'imaginary construction' that is modernity. It presupposes that everyone imagines it in the first place. It is by renouncing the 'aspiration to membership' that one becomes free to choose one's own future, being guided by one's own value system, without the burden of someone else's expectation.

Indigenous methodological thinking considers axiologies (value systems of people) as a key dimension, next to epistemology and ontology (Porsanger 2011:233). Speaking of the importance of value systems, Kristine Nystad (2003, quoted in English in Porsanger 2011:233) gives an interesting example of reindeer herding among the Sami people. This occupation is considered a more valuable option than typical 'modern' job and formal education. It is not a choice between two opposites – moving forward with time or choosing to stay 'stuck in the past' – but 'a preference for continuity in the traditional Sami way of living within contemporary society'. It is therefore a question of values attributed to a particular lifestyle.

Seen in this light, the approach taken by Ghana in its National Youth Policy with regard to cultural upbringing of youth and instilling in the young people the values of their culture can be better understood. The idea is to prepare youth to participate in the contemporary world fully aware of who they are. Raised in a particular socio-cultural setting, they should then be able to choose consciously their path, appreciating their local values and beliefs, instead of automatically pursuing some 'universal' objectives and 'borrowed' standards, driven by the 'aspiration to membership'.

The suggested 'renunciation of aspiration', driven by people's axiologies, could be then seen as a form of decolonial detachment, not just from Western modernity but from modernity in general. It offers liberation from the discourse of globalisation/ civilisation, which mainstreams the neoliberal world order, by replacing it, as suggested by Mignolo (2000), with *mundialización*/ culture that recognises a multiplicity of social orders. Accordingly, the view that civilisation (or modernity) is the highest point in the linear progressive development trajectory from savagery would lose its merit. Instead, culture in all its diversity will constitute the only reference; its transformation, marked by both continuity and change, will neither be bound by linear time nor a fixed destination.

Conclusion

Conceptualising tradition and modernity as binary opposition makes tradition's continuity in the present impossible. Such an approach connects the notion of tradition only to the past and sees it as a relic. The Western theoretical understanding of the concepts of modernity and tradition is incompatible with African contexts, where every modern society is traditional. However, de-westernising modernity simply by flavouring it with African culture does not seem an effective solution; it only breeds African nationalism that appears as a shadow of Western hegemonic power. Such an 'alternative modernity' remains construed as a status founded on Western imagination, or a destination one should aspire to reach. In other words, modernity remains a goal one is subconsciously being forced to aim for. And what if one decided not to play the game?

The decolonial option offers African countries a possibility of imagining not just other ways of arriving at the ultimate destination of modernity (whether Western or African or another alternative), but possibly imagining an entirely different destination. It speaks of freedom from the 'colonial shadow relationship' Africa keeps with the West.

To break out politically from shadowing the West, policies on the continent need to design African heavens using local axiologies, instead of responding to imperial global agendas. The latter continue to divide countries and people according to their level of 'modernisation' and 'enlightenment'. The ways cultures shape behaviours and create meanings through norms and values need to be better understood by policymakers so that the legal documents they adopt do not perpetuate Western-created paradigms in which the communities living their culture are defined through the prism of the 'modern' Western human.

Of the youth policies studied for the present article, Ghana seems to best understand the importance of local axiology in actively living and creating one's culture. Unlike Kenya and Tanzania, Ghana highlights the importance of personal development of youth in the spirit of local beliefs and value systems in order to 'bring about' recognition for 'our own' in young people. This in turn is supposed to lead youth to choose willingly a different heaven for themselves, away from the Western one built on the principles of consumption, capitalism, and love for commodity. Here axiology plays an important role by equipping youth with a sense of personal value and a strong cultural identity which should help them renounce the pursuit of a Western illusion.

The youth policies of Ghana and Kenya recognise the term 'youth' as socially constructed, even though they do not further address youth development with that in mind. The text of Tanzania's policy follows the categorisation of youth based on biological age only. Disregard for socially constructed definitions of youth in policies causes a 'semantic rift' between the official state classifications, and local conceptualisation and cultural perceptions. Correlating traditional rites of passage with other 'legal' and societal ways of reaching adulthood, such as through marriage, giving birth, becoming taxpayers, or gaining election participation rights, remains a challenge.

The resulting misalignment of youth realities with the existing legislation and policy regimes results in implementation obstacles, as young people may struggle to identify themselves with the picture of youth painted by the policymakers. They may simply disagree with the path that these policies propose for their future. For instance, the global culture that the policymakers try to steer youth away from when constructing 'African modernity' plays an important role in the lives of young people. Instead of controlling access to its different aspects in an attempt to 'protect' youth from its influences, providing young people with a steady footing in their own culture would enable them to chart their own path consciously rather than blindly follow the crowd.

The place that culture occupies in youth's realities and imaginations needs to be examined with a deeper understanding of how young people experience the processes of globalisation. By looking at how they negotiate their different fractured identities today, while navigating their lives in mixed temporalities of the continent, would help envisage a future in which they will be able to construct their selves out of many variables. If this is successfully done, the lives of youth will not be regarded as a struggle between 'plural worlds'. Cultures can change and adapt to present conditions. Traditions can be reinvented and cultural practices can be re-embedded within contemporary (rather than 'modern') society.

Notes

1. This work is based on the research supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number 103462). Opinions and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author.
2. In 2016, the High Court ruled against child marriage and directed the government to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both sexes. On 23 October 2019, the Tanzania Court of Appeal dismissed the government's appeal against the High Court judgment.
3. The persistent myth of authority resting with elders due to their age is a result of the colonial interpretation of the system. Colonial administrators assumed models of knowledge based on their own perception of age, i.e., using biological age, instead of local understandings of life stages as linked to traditional knowledge, rites of passage, and the local cosmology.
4. I refer to 'indigeneity' after Chilisa (2012), who refers to the term as a cultural group's ways of knowing and the value systems that inform their lives.

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