# *The Nairobi Journal of*
# *LITERATURE*

**The Journal of the Department of Literature**

**University of Nairobi**

*Number 9 (Special Issue) December, 2020*

***Literature, Critical Thinking and Value Creation***

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# Contents

# FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

**Anna Petkova Mwangi**

In this issue of *The Nairobi Journal of Literature* there are 15 articles all of which were first presented at the Second International Conference on ***Critical Thinking and Value Creating Education in a Global World,*** held from 23rd – 25 October, 2019 at the University of Nairobi. The concern of the Department of Literature regarding the need to overhaul the Kenyan education system and seek ways to instil in the young generations not only knowledge and skills but also the right attitudes and values so as to nurture future leaders of high integrity and sense of belonging with the community dates back to early 2016. At around that time about 120 secondary schools had been torched by their pupils. Reports of cheating during national examinations were on the increase. Around 7,000 primary and secondary school exam results were cancelled due to cheating. At university level, supervisors had to deal with a plagiarism. In a study that had been conducted the year before, and which had been widely reported in the Kenyan media, it was found that the majority of our young people do not mind giving or taking a bribe in order to get on in life. Whatever the reasons, some members of the Department felt that all these reflect poorly on our educational system and pointed at our failure to inculcate moral values in our students.

Learning can be intentional or random but it always involves acquisition of new information (knowledge), skills and new attitudes and values. Unintentional learning acquired from the environment can have either positive or negative effects. Therefore, the job of the educationist should be to channel learning, through an organized and systematic endeavour, in such a way as to establish conditions and activities through which positive learning should take place and thus minimize or remedy negative influences from the environment. According to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, the learning process takes place at different levels within three domains:

- The cognitive (acquiring knowledge);
- The psycho-motor (acquiring skills in physical activities of performing, manipulating, and constructing as well as in verbal and nonverbal communication, speech behaviour);
- The affective (acquiring attitudes, appreciations, values and all emotions).

It has generally been agreed that the teaching of the affective domain is the most difficult to achieve. This is because a change of already acquired negative perceptions, beliefs or taboos that inhibit the learner's learning process is essential.

Literature by nature is multi-disciplinary. It embraces all aspects of life, starting from the individual, the family, the nation and the international community. Being all-inclusive, Literature provides a starting platform for the discussion of any possible issue. However, in order to effect change, all three domains of learning that is, knowledge, skills and attitude need to be present. Any text book or manual can provide the first two of these, but it is only Literature and the performing arts that can create the emotional context that changes attitude. The

functions of Literature are didactic (to provide knowledge and experience) and aesthetic, (to involve the reader emotionally).

Therefore, Literature and the performing arts related to literature can serve as the best agent of change of already acquired negative attitudes, replacing them with new positive attitudes by not only responding to desirable role models but also rejecting socially maladjusted anti-heroes who are spurned by the community.

On the other hand, The School of Education of the University of Nairobi is a leading teacher training institution, the core values of which include:

- Provision of high-quality teaching informed by research;
- Nurturing responsible corporate citizenship with strong social responsibility;
- Embracing the virtues of truth, integrity, honesty, tolerance, professionalism, teamwork and meritocracy (high standards).

Thus, the Department of Literature joined hands with the School of Education and organized a three days ***International Conference on Value Creating Education for Sustainable Development*** which took place from **29th September to 1st October, 2016** with the support and participation of the Kenya Ministry of Education, the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development, Soka University, Japan and the Chandaria Foundation, Kenya.

With financial support from the Makiguchi Foundation, Japan, the presentations at that Conference were edited and published by the Kenya Literature Bureau in a book titled ***Value Creating Education in Kenya: Building a Humane Society.***

According to the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, schools should teach the following skills: critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving. However, for the most part, the students we admit in our universities lack these skills because of the way they are taught and examined. We, too, do little to correct the mistake. Our students memorize what we tell them and give it back to us during examinations. The Department of Literature hoped to address the issue of how to impart critical thinking skills in our students at their next conference. The opportunity came when the University of Nairobi proposed to hold annual international conferences in the month of October to promote research done in its various units.

As part of these activities, the Department of Literature held a second three-day International Conference on ***Enhancing the Teaching of Critical Thinking*** from **24th to 26th October, 2018**. Unfortunately, funds were not available and the papers presented remain unpublished.

Following the success of the 2016 and 2018 conferences, a number of enquiries about a follow up to those two conferences were received. While noting this positive response, the Department wished also to highlight the contribution of Kenya's literary icons. Therefore, in order to respond to the enquires about the previous conferences and celebrate the contribution to critical thinking of the literary icons of Kenya, the Department of Literature decided to hold a three-

day International Conference on ***Critical Thinking and Value Creating Education in a Global World*** under the auspices of the University of Nairobi Research Week.

The Conference took place from **23rd to 25th October, 2019** and attracted presenters not only from a number of Kenyan universities but also from universities in Uganda, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Japan, Austria, France, Brazil and eight USA universities. Twelve of these presentations on value creating education were published in Volume 9, No SI (2020) of the ***Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*** (JISE) which is a double-blind peer-reviewed, open-source journal. JISE is part of the Open Journal System (OJS) and the STAR Scholars Network. The Centre for Excellence in Education at Arkansas State University is the institutional sponsor of the journal.

Most of the papers dealing with the second broad theme, that is, critical thinking and the contribution of the Kenyan literary icons to critical thinking and value creating education are published in this special issue of the ***Nairobi Journal of Literature.*** The first four articles guide us into an understanding of the significance of value creation in the class room and the need for educational reform and change of attitude in teaching. We open up with ***Value Education for Human Development*** by the guest speaker **Dr Tom Destiny Namwambah** from Kenyatta University, Kenya. He claims that the basic function of education is to develop, in holistic terms, an all-round, well-balanced and self-functioning human person and to produce an individual capable of becoming a better, rational and distinct entity. However, we need to re-design our educational tools, instructions and purpose in such a way that we understand its critical role in human society and realize that the critical thinking component of education is the pace-setter for the worth of education. Critical thinking must be given precedence as the safety-valve to value creating education - an act that will spiral the production of men and women who are all round knowledgeable, competent and able to propel the world to the next level. In his paper ***Unity of Mind, Body and Spirit: Reforming Education Systems to Meet the Needs of the 21st Century Societies,*** **Prince Paa-Kwesi Heto** from the University of California, Irvine discusses the notion of mind – body dualism in order to create conditions for new models of education that would provide holistic education. This paper argues that various educational reform movements are not addressing the real needs of society because thought leaders misunderstood this dualism. He then concludes with a discussion of how educational leaders can use this alternative understanding to address the moral and creativity crisis of the 21st century. **Dr Margaret W. Njeru, et al** from Riara University, Kenya in their article ***Critical Thinking in the Classroom*** look into the enabling aspects of critical thinking. Not only does it equip the learner with the ability to reason, analyse and evaluate issues intelligently but it also enables them to make good decisions and solve problems effectively. To achieve these abilities, a learner must be exposed to a learning environment that richly embraces learner-centred methods that enhance critical thinking. At the same time, teachers need to be re-trained and equipped with new delivery methods in order for them to be able to effectively implement the new competency-based curriculum. In the final article on this sub-theme, ***Value Creating Education: A Handmaid to Transformational Leadership,*** **Fr Franklyne Mang'eni Sanya**, establishes the essential relationship between Soka Education and transformation. It also demonstrates how mentorship is key in creating transformational leaders.

Transformational leadership is here understood as one that impacts discernible change in the followers and depends on the inspirational capacity of the leader.

Starting with the article ***The Pitfalls of Descriptivism and Relativism in the Study of Language and Literature*** by Prof **Henry Indangasi** (University of Nairobi), the attention is drawn to literary scholarship and the contribution of African novelists, poets and essayists to critical thinking and value creation. Prof Indangasi is concerned about the descriptivism prevailing in the current literary criticism where instead of challenging existing knowledge and assumptions, engaging in a conversation with fellow scholars, spelling out and arguing their position on issues that matter to humanity, the critics simply describe what is happening on the printed page in some kind of academic vacuum. The goal and essence of critical thinking and value creation in education lies in establishing the universal value of one's scholarship and contributing to knowledge in the global sense of the word. In her article ***Creative and Critical Thinking and Ways to Achieve*** **It, Michèle De Gastyne** from Musique Universelle Arc en Ciel, France posits that we can find forms of dialectics in artistic expression, including Literature. Comparing the life and work of Kenyan women pioneers Grace Ogot and Wangari Maathai with the Socratic Method of Dialectics, she attempts to highlight the importance of creative, out of the box, thinking achieved through challenging questions and dialogue; the need to avoid binary thinking; the advantages of using culture and art as change agents; and the interest of collaborating with international organs such as the United Nations through NGO and university channels. She proposes four approaches for developing creative and critical thinking as well as a list of initiatives which seek to use art forms in human rights education and humanitarian settings. Like Michèle De Gastyne, **Athanas Mutisya Peter** from the University of Nairobi, also examines some of Grace Ogot's works to demonstrate how she teaches valuable life lessons. In his article ***The Contribution of Grace Ogot's Works to Critical Thinking and Value-Creating Education***, Mutisya claims that Ogot's works seek to celebrate universal social and moral values that uplift humanity as a whole and seek to make the human society a better ecosystem for all. Moreover, as a literary artist, Grace Ogot stood for critical thinking and value creating education by teaching social values in an indirect way that calls for the reader to deploy critical and analytical skills; taking a position and defending it with evidence scattered throughout the creative piece**. Dr Jairus Omuteche** from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, takes us from Kenya to Uganda. In his article ***Re-Orienting Identities in Song of Lawino: Okot P'bitek as a Critical Educator*** he looked at the poet as a critical educator who used his poetry to instil values of critical thinking in his East African audience. Through the use of interactive techniques such as rhetorical questions, dramatized dialogue, and cleverly manipulated tonal variation he creates an interactive mood, evoking new challenges that make the reader more critical, and thus reaching a new understanding. **Mumia G. Osaaji**, University of Nairobi, takes us to West Africa, Nigeria. In his paper **The Agile Thinking and Subversion in Chinua Achebe's *The Education of a British-Protected Child*** he has analysed the subversive voice of the agile critical thinker from the syncretised perspective that brings together the framework of agile critical thinking, the theory of the personal essay, the reader-response theory and postcolonialism and has explored the iterative function of the essayistic persona, the communication loops between the writer

and the implied reader. Osaaji has interpreted Chinua Achebe's essays as persuasive arguments that seek to subvert the epistemic hierarchies constructed by colonial domination.

The next two papers are by two PhD students at the University of Nairobi who are looking into the works of two playwrights. The first one, **Wambua Kawive**, claims in his paper **Theatre in Kenya and the Construct of Leadership in Francis Imbuga's *Aminata*** that theatre helps the reader/audience to enact and re-imagine the world through the possibilities of creative dissonance. Kawive further examines how leadership and feminist issues have been portrayed in this complex play. **Shadrach Mwanthi,** on the other hand, goes back to over four hundred years ago in Europe and seeks to find out in his paper **A Critical Thinking Approach to Shakespeare's Tragedies: *King Lear*** and ***Romeo and Juliet*** whether lack of critical thinking skills led to the tragic deaths of the lead characters. He concludes that the skill of critical thinking applies everywhere, every time. For one to make the right choice whether in deciding on a course of study, life partner, marriage, business, parenting or career, critical thinking skills are a must.

The next three authors go further out to the USA and the African American writers. **Joram K. Mbui,** University of Nairobi, has chosen ***Critical Thinking, Moral Integrity, and Citizenship: Lessons from W.E.B. Du Bois' Academic Career and his Relationship with Africa*** as his topic. He reviews some of the works W.E.B. Du Bois wrote on critical thinking, moral integrity, and citizenship with emphasis on their place in the education system. Mbui concludes that W.E.B. Du Bois' life exemplified a life of critical thinking and was an excellent example on the role of academics in society. Du Bois believed that the focus of teaching should be to train students to embrace deep learning of the material they encounter, and not just the passing of exams. In her paper **The Fluidity of Identity: Representation of Intersectionality in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass,* Edna Dorine Olondo** from the University of Nairobi, proposes that before we judge a person, we need to think critically of how the different facets of human existence intertwine to create the whole. She looks into the different fallacies attached to various identities and how Barrett both complies to and subverts these beliefs. Olondo concludes that the novel pushes us to think critically about humanity and identity by acknowledging that things may not always be what they seem to be. **Sean Pears,** University of Buffalo, USA, in his paper on ***Literary Praxis in the American Anti-Slavery Tradition*** examines six characteristics of critical thinking in Literature and the cultivation of critical thinking skills in the learners. Pears suggests that to focus on literary praxis is to focus on both the text and the world outside of the text. This involves an investigation into the author's life, her own relationship between thought and action, and between the knowledge of the world presented by the text and the real world in which she lived. In other words, the historical context must be well known and taken into consideration when analysing literary texts.

The final article, ***Statistics as a Tool for Critical Thinking and Value Creation*** by **Dr Isaac John Ndolo** of the University of Nairobi brings out a different angle of critical thinking. He notes that all global aspects of life, whether natural or anthropogenic, have a statistical facet because they invoke measurement which facilitates comparisons in terms of dimensions, assessments, judgments as well as making decisions for the present and future of any activity.

Statistics is important in critical thinking due to its three parts of: *data production, data analysis* and *statistical inference.* In any activity that involves critical thinking, there is the aspect of conceptualization, analysis and synthesis of information gathered from observation or experience. The end result will be to reason out and make conclusions that are sustainable. The whole exercise is to improve the process of thinking critically about interpretation of statistical findings by asking relevant questions on why the outcome is the way it is.

We hope that you will find the articles in this issue both interesting and informative. The first broad theme on value creating education is of importance to all educators. They are intended to enhance your understanding of the significance of value creation in the class room and set you thinking on how to modify your teaching methods to cultivate responsible graduates who are all round citizens knowledgeable, competent and able to fit in a globalized world.

On the other hand lecturers in Literature and the preforming arts have been given a number of examples on how to instil critical thinking and create positive values through the study of the literary works by African and African American novelists, poets and essayists.

Welcome to this Special issue on Literature, Critical Thinking and Value Creation!

# VALUE CREATING EDUCATION FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**Tom Destiny Namwambah**

**Kenyatta University**

*When you want to teach children to think, you begin by treating them seriously when they are little, giving them responsibilities, talking to them candidly, providing privacy and solitude for them, and making them readers and thinkers of significant thoughts from the beginning. That's if you want to teach them to think.*

*Education that transforms is the only education of which it can be truly said that it makes good citizens.*

**Bertrand Russell - (18 May 1872 – 2 February 1970)**

## Introduction

The role of education in human development cannot be overemphasized. To most of us, the basic function of education is to develop, in holistic terms an all-round, well-balanced and self-functioning human person. The emphasis on the intellectual development of the human person is premised on the need to produce an individual capable of translating what is learnt into pragmatic programs so as to be able to improve the conditions under which we find ourselves and become a better, rational and distinct entity.

Despite our knowledge of the cardinal role education is supposed to serve in human endeavours, we are often hard put to realize and net the best practices and avenues towards achieving that basic goal. Instead of facilitating knowledge, we often force content down the throat of its recipients, suffocating them in the process rather than treating the chronic illness of ignorance. Socrates, the epitome of perfected pedagogy, discovered by a method of systematic probing questionings, that people could not rationally justify their confident claims to knowledge. In our efforts to dispense knowledge in the critical sense, we are often imprisoned by our own egos, incessantly misconstruing appearances as reality. Our attempts to profess knowledge are curtailed by perpetual intellectual limbo occasioned by mental laxity that banishes our curiosity to unawakening dogmatic slumber. According to Socrates, this is often occasioned by the fact that confused meanings, inadequate evidence and self-

contradictory beliefs often prowl beneath our smooth and yet largely empty rhetoric. In his teaching Socrates established the fact that we cannot always depend upon those in "authority" to have sound knowledge and insight, and that knowledge is best cultivated in a motivating and mutually cost-sharing environment. He demonstrated that persons may have power and high position, or even be highly qualified and yet be deeply confused and irrational.

What's more, Socrates established the importance of asking deep questions that probe profoundly into thinking before any idea is accepted as worthy of knowledge and belief. He was cognizant of the three fundamental conditions of knowledge; that for anything to be worthy knowledge it must meet the three conditions, namely:

1. the belief condition,
2. the truth condition; and
3. the justification condition.

As a criterion for assisting his learners to cultivate knowledge, Socrates established the importance of seeking evidence, closely examining reasoning and assumptions, analysing basic concepts, and tracing out implications of not only what is said but of what is done as well. Many centuries after him, the Socratic questioning and/or teaching method still stands out as the best-known teaching strategy not only for critical thinking but also for value education in human development. His method highlighted the need in thinking for clarity, precision and logical consistency.

Universities are the repositories of knowledge. When we join universities, we are supposed to be matured in knowledge, understanding and intellectual etiquette. Universities are meant to be centres for excellence, research, innovation and dissemination of knowledge that transform individuals from dependence to independence, mediocrity to excellence, from meaninglessness to meaningfulness, and from mere consumers of knowledge to authors and dispensers of knowledge. With this understanding, I am led to ponder over a number of critical questions:

1. How often do we at the university level take our time to ponder on what education is, its significance, what it consists of and what we need to achieve when we get to class?
2. How many of us teach with a view of assisting the learner to discover and cultivate their hidden inner potentials?
3. How often do we encourage our learners to listen to their inner voices?
4. How often do we teach for knowledge fusion away from rote learning?

5. How often do we encourage our learners to ask deep probing questions without taking offence?
6. Why do we feel debased when our students correct us when we err?
7. How many of us can claim to be Socrates incarnate?
8. When you head to class to teach, what motivates you: love for knowledge, love for the subject? anxiety to keep the job? fear of losing your job? or to transform society and add value to the worth of human beings and existence?
9. How often do you teach your students to think critically through the content of your discipline?
10. How interactive are your classes?

These questions are significant to us if we want to produce well developed, highly knowledgeable and competent citizens that the world can depend upon. We are not being compelled to rush into defending ourselves with unwarranted emotional justifications. The truth is, if most of us are put to the test, we will miserably fail the test to the above questions. The overall results of a research conducted by Dr Richard Paul, Dr Linda Elder and Dr Ted Bartell in 1995 at 38 public universities and 28 private universities in the U.S.A to determine the extent to which faculties put emphasis on critical thinking in their instructions supports my assumption. The findings of the aforementioned research were very discouraging, indicating that most faculties:

- ✓ do not understand the connection of critical thinking to intellectual standards;
- ✓ are not able to clarify major intellectual criteria and standards;
- ✓ inadvertently confuse the active involvement of students in classroom activities with critical thinking in those activities;
- ✓ are unable to give an elaborated articulation of their concept of critical thinking;
- ✓ cannot provide plausible examples of how they foster critical thinking in the classroom;
- ✓ are not able to name specific critical thinking skills they think are important for students to learn in their disciplines;
- ✓ are not able to plausibly explain how to reconcile covering content with fostering critical thinking;
- ✓ do not consider reasoning as a significant focus of critical thinking;

- ✓ do not think of reasoning within disciplines as a major focus of instruction;
- ✓ cannot specify basic structures essential to the analysis of reasoning;
- ✓ cannot give an intelligible explanation of basic abilities either in critical thinking or in reasoning;
- ✓ do not distinguish the psychological dimension of thought from the intellectual dimension;
- ✓ have had no involvement in research into critical thinking and have not attended any conferences on the subject;
- ✓ are unable to name a particular theory or theorist that has shaped their concept of critical thinking.

The overall score of the research showed that although faculties think, only 28% amongst them think almost correctly, 72% think wrongly. So, where are we as faculty?

As in our case I won't be surprised if we performed even worse than our counterparts in the United States of America. Most of our lecturers, continuously pulled down by the fatigue of dismal income, frustrating working environment, disharmony occasioned by ethnicised political spill overs at work-stations, never-ending support demands from extended families, and socio-economic constrains on the part of the students, are demotivated, uncaring and casual in their handling of serious and critical academic obligations bestowed upon them.

I hold it self-evident that although value creating education is difficult to practise, it is not impossible. I am also convinced that both freedom and independence in inquiry are vital in the attainment of knowledge in the critical faculty. I am also persuaded that critical thinking is one of the main goals of education in the current age, standing side by side with technological advancement and the spiralling of globalization. As a result of this conviction, I have no doubt that critical thinking is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* (a necessary condition) to our understanding of the nature of the educational aims today.

## Education

What is our understanding of education, or what is education? In this paper we understand education to mean a status in which a person's state of mind, regardless of the situation, is so optimized as to be able to perceive accurately, think clearly and act effectively in order to achieve self-selected goals and aspirations instrumental to self-actualization and societal advancement. It is the process of growth aimed at nurturing mental abilities and acquisition of

skills requisite for rational existence. In light to this definition, education plays various roles among them*:*

- ✓ liberation of individuals from ignorance and dogmatic tendencies and slumber to rationality and self-understanding;
- ✓ transformation of individuals from a mass-mindset to autonomy and individuality;
- ✓ integration of an individual with himself, nature and society;
- ✓ being a catalyst to progress and positive change for both the individual and society;
- ✓ spurring development and re-engineering social development and individual growth;
- ✓ a means to self-actualization, self-discovery and reinvention;
- ✓ a lever for human emancipation from the shackles of self-miss-definition, self-misconception and self-deception.

To this end, the objectives of value creating education include but are not limited to the following:

- ✓ Fully developing the individual's personality in its physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects;
- ✓ Inculcating decorum as well as responsible and cooperative attitude;
- ✓ Inculcating and developing respect for the dignity of the individual and society.
- ✓ Inculcating patriotism, national pride and integration;
- ✓ Developing and widening an individual's democratic way of thinking and living,
- ✓ Developing tolerance, understanding and appreciation towards different ways of life;
- ✓ Developing and inculcating a sense of brotherhood and coexistence at social, national and international levels;
- ✓ Being instrumental in the development of self-confidence and of the belief that situations may be difficult but not impossible to navigate;
- ✓ Developing skills requisite for sound decision making and problem solving;
- ✓ Ability to make sound moral principles.

Our efforts to define education, highlight its basic roles and underscore its objectives is not simplistic, nor is it a naïve attempt to circumvent the importance of value creating education. The words of Barnes on the nature of the human person and the caution to us from Carl Sagan help in our rethinking on the necessity of value creating education. According to Barnes',

… the human being is the only animal that uses meanings - ideas, concepts, analogies, metaphors, models, theories, and explanations - to make sense of things and to understand, predict, and control things. But again, to the contrary she is also the only creature that uses meanings to negate, contradict, and deceive themselves, to misconceive, distort, and stereotype, and to be dogmatic, prejudiced, and narrow-minded. Further, humans are the only animals whose thinking can be characterized as clear, precise, accurate, relevant, consistent, profound, and fair; but at the same time, they are also the only animals whose thinking is often imprecise, vague, inaccurate, irrelevant, superficial, trivial, and biased. (1992)

In relation to critical thinking, human beings are both thinking and unthinking beings. In light of Barnes' human paradoxical dichotomies conjecture, we do not simply need to trust our instincts, emotionally informed "knowledge or our sense-derived 'knowledge'. We need not unquestioningly believe what spontaneously occurs or is thrown at us as "knowledge". We need not accept as true everything that is taught or passed to us by those in authority as true. We need not assume that the experiences of others are unbiased and so worthy of consumption. We also need to be cognizant that our stupidity and naivety, pride and biases distort and often lead us into self-misconceptions, deceit and thereby garble our thinking and our ability to access true justifiable knowledge. Education ought to assist us in acquiring positive attitudes in the formulation of intellectually sound standards for belief, truth and validity. This, in turn, will help us in cultivating habits and traits that will eventually integrate these standards into our lives and help us in the elimination of those obstacles that stand between clear thinking and value creating education.

This position is informed by our understanding that the dichotomy of human nature has significant implications for human learning and knowledge acquisition. Our capacity to learn is either through the rational capacities of our minds or through the irrational propensity of the same. There are profound reasons for the need to cultivate the human capacity through rigorous commitment to intellectual standards. The damage done by multiple forms of prejudice and narrow-mindedness is overwhelming: academic, social, personal, professional, religious, racial, national, and ideological impediments abound. To this end, the need to cultivate a kind of higher order learning in the academic setting is necessary.

In our teaching, for example, we need to be focusing on the rational capacities of our learner's mind by designing instructions that make it possible for the learner to explicitly grasp the sense that the "*logic*" of what they learn is significant and that it can make all additional learning

easier for them. This kind of higher order learning will definitely multiply comprehension and insight; it will stimulate and empower the mind from infancy. But for this to be possible, we need, first and foremost to understand the kind of obstacles we face in order to effectively address and iron them out at the right time.

To understand why human beings, and especially university students, often exhibit less than encouraging levels of interest and understanding, and why they lack critical prowess, we need not look any further than two general predispositions that many students bring with them from previous socialization and schooling environment. These are an attitude of intellectual passivity or disengagement, and negative preconceptions about academic disciplines.

Carl Sagan once observed:

> I think everybody is born with wonder but society beats it out of you. Youngsters who are slowly examining the world around them and wondering about it ask perfectly good questions, such as, 'Why is the grass green?' because they can envision it purple, or orange… The adult who is answering the question is annoyed ...and says, `Don't ask dumb questions. What colour do you expect it to be' (Sweeney, 1982).

Although not all adults are as insensitive as Sagan suggests, our culture does exert pressure on children to remain silent and follow instructions rather than asking questions. Consequently, natural inquisitiveness is soon replaced by passivity and a tendency to take cues from others. Children learn to forgo their own questions and answers and, instead, ask the kinds of questions and provide the kinds of answers they think teachers and other adults want to hear. And by the time most students reach university age, the inner-directed child has become the other-directed young adult. Passivity and caution have replaced inquisitiveness and questioning, and taking notes on the thoughts of others has replaced thinking for oneself.

Other pressures inherent in the structure of the traditional public school also encourage intellectual caution and discourage reflective thinking. It is difficult to nurture natural interests and encourage attitudes of reflection when students are never given enough time to become fully involved with the subject of reference or question the authority of the instructor.

## Critical Thinking

As earlier mentioned, we often insist on the need to infuse critical thinking skills in our subject domains. We often talk about critical thinking as if it's a common knowledge concept, easily grasped by each one of us. The research conducted by Richard Paul, Linda Elder and Ted Bartell in 1995 attested to our lack of comprehension of the concept. A doctor cannot treat an

illness without thorough diagnosis and knowledge of what it is that he/she is treating. We cannot hide our heads in the sand and pretend to be understanding what we ought to be learning.

What exactly is critical thinking? I understand critical thinking to entail the testing and evaluation of the proposed solutions to a problem or proposed explanation to a phenomenon. This can be contrasted with creative thinking which entails the formation of possible solutions to a problem or possible explanation to a phenomenon. To answer the question, I will be guided by a few definitions. In order to underscore the real essence of critical thinking, various scholars in the discipline have made efforts to exemplify its meaning.

Halpern (1997) defines critical thinking as the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. To him, critical thinking is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed - the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions; and in so doing, the thinker uses skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task. In addition to the above, he posits that critical thinking involves evaluating the thinking process - the reasoning that goes into conclusions that we arrived at and the kinds of factors considered in making a decision, the focal point being the end result or the desired outcome

To Kurland (1995), critical thinking is concerned with reason, intellectual honesty, and open-mindedness, as opposed to emotionalism, intellectual laziness, and closed-mindedness. Critical thinking involves: following evidence where it leads; considering all possibilities; relying on reason rather than emotion; being precise; considering a variety of possible viewpoints and explanations; weighing the effects of motives and biases; being concerned more with finding the truth than with being right; not rejecting unpopular views out of hand; being aware of one's own prejudices and biases, and not allowing such biases and prejudices to sway one's judgement.

The widely accepted concept of critical thinking is that it is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, critical thinking is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions/domains, namely: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. To think critically entails the examination

of elements of thought implicit in all reasoning, namely: purpose, problem or question-at-issue, assumptions, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions, implications and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints, and frame of reference. To this end, there are nine main characteristics of critical thinking, namely:

1. asking questions;
2. defining a problem;
3. examining evidence;
4. analysing assumptions and biases;
5. avoiding emotional reasoning;
6. avoiding oversimplification;
7. considering other interpretations;
8. tolerating ambiguity; and
9. considering possible implications and consequences.

In line with the above, Bayer (2013) explains the five basic aspects of critical thinking. They include:

***Disposition:*** Critical thinkers are sceptical, open-minded, value fair-mindedness, respect evidence and reasoning, respect clarity and precision, look at different points of view, and will change positions when reason leads them to do so.

***Criteria:*** Critical thinkers apply criteria. These are conditions that must be met for something to be judged as believable. Although each subject area has different criteria, some standards apply to all subjects' domains. For example; "... an assertion must... be based on relevant, accurate facts; based on credible sources; precise; unbiased; free from logical fallacies; logically consistent; and strongly reasoned".

***Argument:*** An argument is a statement or proposition with supporting evidence. Critical thinking involves identifying, evaluating, and constructing arguments.

***Reasoning:*** The ability to infer a conclusion from one or multiple premises. To do so requires examining logical relationships among statements or data.

***Point of View:*** The way one views the world, which shapes one's construction of meaning. In a search for understanding, critical thinkers view phenomena from many different points of view.

With this understanding, what then constitutes value education for human development?

## Components of Value Creating Education for Human Development

The value of education in character and human development has already been underscored. Various seasoned scholars attest to the importance of education and emphasise the many roles education plays in shaping character and transforming individuals and society. Value creating education involves the impacting of a complex set of skills, dispositions and attitudes. These skills, dispositions and attitudes, together characterize a virtue which has both intellectual and moral aspects, and which serves to prevent the emergence of numerous vices, including mental laxity, dogmatism and prejudice. The cardinal purpose of education is to empower the recipient with the ability requisite for making rational judgement on controversial issues or questions to which they are likely to have to act. Let me interrogate these three complex sets of value creating education for human development.

### *Skills of Value Creating Education in the Critical Faculty*

In addition to having access to impartial supplies of knowledge as the tradition has been, education also needs to offer effective training in judicial habits of thought. To ensure that the knowledge acquired does not produce individuals who passively accept the teacher's wisdom or the creed which is dominant in their own society, the recipients need to develop certain *skills* far beyond mere access to knowledge; they need to acquire intelligence and not just mere internalized information. This will indicate certain critical abilities education is supposed to impact. Such critical skills grounded in knowledge include:

(i) *the ability to form an opinion for oneself*: being able to recognize what is intended to mislead, being capable of listening to eloquence without being carried away, and becoming adept at asking and determining if there is any reason to think that our beliefs of our adversaries are truer than ours beliefs;

(ii) *the ability to find an impartial solution*: learning to recognize and control our own biases, coming to view our own beliefs with the same rigour and detachment with which we view the beliefs of others; the ability to judge issues on their merits,

making efforts to ascertain the relevant facts, and having the power of weighing arguments;

(iii) *the ability to identify and question assumptions*: learning not to be credulous, applying constructive doubt in order to test unexamined beliefs, and resisting the notion that some authority, a teacher or politician perhaps, has captured the whole truth and, therefore, it is unquestionable.

In nurturing these skills, we need to remember that our most unquestioned convictions *may* be as mistaken as those of the ones we criticize or our opponents. Our account of critical skills should therefore, to a great extent cover grounds set out in dimensions of thought definitive of critical thinking, namely: purpose, issue, problem or question at hand, assumptions, points of view, data, information and evidence base, concepts and ideas, inferences or interpretations, and implications and consequences of our thinking. This is necessary because our actions are informed by our thinking, which subsequently will determine how we are going to be judged.

From the foregoing, we can deduce three critical insights of value creating education:

a) First is the emphasis on *judgement*, suggesting that critical skills cannot be reduced to a mere formula to be routinely applied. Critical judgement means that one has to *weigh* evidence and arguments, approximate truth must be *estimated*, with the result that skill demands wisdom.
b) Second is that critical thinking requires being critical *about our own attempts at criticism*. For example, we need to recognise that refutations are usually preludes to further thinking and refinement and not final products of thought; and that purposive wonder and curiosity into unconventional fields of criticism or radical scepticism stands condemned, banished and are punishable. Critical thinking must include critical reflection on what passes for critical thinking.
c) Third, that critical thinking is not essentially a negative enterprise; our emphasis on *constructive* doubt, and warning against practices which lead to children becoming *destructively* critical is positive scepticism. It is important that the kind of criticism aimed at is not just that which seeks to reject, but that which considers apparent knowledge on its merits, retaining whatever survives critical scrutiny.

***Dispositions of Value Creating Education in the Critical Faculty***

The mere possession of critical skills is not sufficient to make one a critical thinker or a fully developed individual. There are certain *dispositions* which guarantee that the relevant skills acquired are actually exercised. These *dispositions, habits* or *practices* suggest the actual translation of skills into human behaviour. In this respect, education can be understood as *the formation, by means of instruction, of certain mental habits and a certain outlook on life and the world*. Of great importance among these dispositions are:

a) *the habit of impartial inquiry* which entails the necessity of not admitting or taking at face value one-sided opinions if we are committed to arriving at conclusions which do not depend solely on time and place of our education, often doused with bias and prejudice.
b) *the habit of weighing evidence,* coupled with the practice of not giving full assent to propositions about which there is no reason to believe as true; *methodical or systemic doubt, also called deliberate scepticism*.
c) *the habit of attempting to see things truly*, which contrasts with the practice of merely collecting whatever reinforces existing prejudice; and
d) *the habit of living from one's own centre*, a kind of self-direction, a certain independence in the will, with caution of not falling victim to or prisoner of prejudice. If the latter manifest as the case, then there is need for a *critical* habit of mind to be cultivated

And because these dispositions are not simply automatic responses in which one has been drilled, such intellectual habits in effect reflect a person's willingness or *readiness*, to act and respond in various ways, the major ones being:

i. *readiness to admit new evidence against previous beliefs*, which involves an open-minded acceptance of whatever a critical examination has revealed;
ii. *readiness to discard hypotheses which have proved inadequate*, where the test is whether or not one is prepared in fact to abandon beliefs which once seemed promising;
iii. *readiness to adapt oneself to the facts of the world*, as opposed to merely going along with whatever happens.

What these dispositions have in common is the virtue of *truthfulness*, which entails the wish to find out, and trying to be right in matters of belief.

***Traits of Value Creating Education in the Critical Faculty***

Beyond the skills and dispositions outlined above, a certain set of *attitudes* characterizes the outlook of a critical person. By critical attitude we mean a temper of mind central to which prevails a certain stance with respect to knowledge and opinion which involves:

a) *a realization of human fallibility,* a sense of the uncertainty of many things commonly regarded as indubitable, bringing with it humility;

b) *an open-minded outlook with respect to our beliefs,* an "inward readiness" to give weight to the other side, where every question is regarded as open and where it is recognized that what passes for knowledge is sure to require correction;

c) a refusal to think that our own desires and wishes provide a key to understanding the world, recognizing that what we should like has no bearing whatsoever on what is;

d) *being tentative*, *without falling into a lazy scepticism* (or dogmatic doubt), but holding one's beliefs with the degree of conviction warranted by the evidence. This entails having a strong desire to know, combined with great caution in believing that what one knows must meet the test of certainty and proof. It entails assurance that open-mindedness does not become regenerate into being mindless.

As a consequence of the above, the critical outlook definitive of value education reflects an epistemological and ethical perspective which emphasizes:

- ✓ *how* beliefs are held i.e., not dogmatically;
- ✓ *the doubtfulness* of all beliefs;
- ✓ *the belief* that knowledge is difficult but not impossible;
- ✓ *freedom* of opinion;
- ✓ *truthfulness*; and
- ✓ *tolerance.*

## Conclusion

We have demonstrated that although value creating education is difficult to acquire, it is not inaccessible. We have argued in this paper for the need to understand that the complexities that characterize human life and the challenges therein can be effectively addressed by designing our educational tools, instructions and purpose in such a way that we understand its critical role in human society. The critical thinking component of education is the pace-setter for the worth of education. In our contemporary world focus is directed on three pertinent things: technological advancement and how to tame its devastating effects; globalization and how it is

squeezing the world into a village market and more importantly, how to infuse critical thinking in our educational system with a view of producing men and women who can redirect the world to sanity via human sensible consciousness. This can only be possible if critical thinking is given precedence as the safety-valve to value creating education; an act that will spiral the production of men and women who are all round knowledgeable, competent and able to propel the world to the next level. Men and women who:

- ✓ believe in the supremacy of reason as the beacon for existence;
- ✓ have the willingness to spend time reflecting on the ideas presented;
- ✓ with the ability to evaluate and solve problems as they come;
- ✓ are logical and sequential in thinking, without appealing to void emotion;
- ✓ diligent in seeking out and committing to the truth;
- ✓ eager to express their thoughts on a topic without fear or regret;
- ✓ exercise the highest level of patience;
- ✓ with the ability to tolerate ambiguity with the understanding that knowledge is dynamic and growing;
- ✓ seekers of alternative views on a topic/issues;
- ✓ ability to persevere and endure with a view of attaining truth;
- ✓ embody intellectual courage as to pursue issues to their conclusive end;
- ✓ open to new ideas that may not necessarily agree with their previous thought on a topic or issue;
- ✓ able to base their judgements on ideas and evidence;
- ✓ able to recognize errors in thought and persuasion;
- ✓ able to recognize good arguments from bad and fallacious arguments;
- ✓ able to take in criticism without turning personal and myopic;
- ✓ Men and women who are driven by the passion of leaving this world better than they found it;
- ✓ Men and women who believe that no human is limited in their positive quest to pacify the world;
- ✓ Men and women who are truly men and women, devoid of greed, lust, passion and appetite for what is in service for humanity.

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# UNITY OF MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT: REFORMING EDUCATION SYSTEMS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE 21ST-CENTURY SOCIETIES

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## Abstract

*In order to create conditions for new models of education that would provide holistic education to all children to emerge, this paper discusses the notion of mind – body dualism and the related concept of certainty, and their impact on our claims to truth and knowledge. The paper traces the origin of this concept back to the works of Aristotle and Plato. All in all, this paper argues that various educational reform movements are not addressing the real needs of society because thought leaders such as Descartes, misunderstood the relationship between the heart, body, and mind. Using the work of Saint Augustine and Giambattista Vico, the article presents an alternative understanding of the relationship between the three and discusses how educational leaders can use this alternative understanding to address the moral and creativity crisis of the 21st century.*

## Introduction

Despite a growing emphasis on creativity and innovation, conventional education systems and the global industrial culture stifle the creative impulses of children (Okpara, 2007; Adams, 2005; Cropley, 2001). According to Cropley, current teaching practices hinder student's creativity because educators regularly perpetuate the notion that there is a single best approach to solving every problem that can be learned and then reapplied repeatedly. Prioritizing the scientific method, especially its characteristics such as certainty and replicability, over everything else has resulted into a sort of curricular reductionism that has squeezed out activities essential for the development of creativity (Adams, 2005). Instead of addressing this problem directly, prevailing education reform movements are doing the exact opposite of what is needed.

School systems are rushing to hype the importance of science and technology as the quintessential field of the future. The 'scientization' of the world is based on the notion that not only is the scientific method the most objective but also the most natural – being the method most compatible with our nature – way to acquire knowledge. The false debate about

whether children need to acquire the "right-skillsets" or the "mindset" is a manifestation of this trend. This has not always been the case in history. The work and ideas of Rene Descartes played a significant role in the 'scientization' or more precisely the 'mathematization' of the world.

As a founding member of the rationalist school of thought, Descartes believed that the only things worthy of study were observable facts that one could replicate with ease in multiple situations. This was meant to ensure that we are not being deceived and so as to obtain for our observations the status of universal truth. Descartes wanted outcomes to be guaranteed, depending on which methods were employed to obtain them. By placing emphasis on methods, Descartes was indicating that right conclusions would follow from right methods. Though Descartes claimed his methods were for his own use only, the idea of dualism and the quest for certainty has had enormous effects on the world, both positive and negative.

## The Mind – Body Dualism

Rene Descartes was a French philosopher and mathematician, who argued that his existence cannot be doubted since he thinks (Cook, 2013a), thinking being the root metaphor of his known existence. To him the only true knowledge was that which cannot be doubted or of which the knower is certain.

Descartes in his day espoused numerous ideas, but he is perhaps best known for the concept of mind-body dualism and for valuing certainty above all else. He promoted the idea that the body and the mind are two separate and unequal entities. He believed that the essence of human beings is to think, entirely independent of our body and all other material things (Cook, 2013a). Between these two aspects of life, the mind is superior, and it is through the mind that the highest form of knowledge can be derived. This is because, while Descartes could doubt the existence of everything he could see and think of, the one thing he could not doubt was the act of thinking itself.

Descartes was also very clear about what was worth thinking about. To Descartes, the only knowledge worth acquiring is one that cannot be doubted and creates certainty.

## The Origin of Cartesian Mind – Body Dualism

In *A Discourse on Methods*, Rene Descartes described his quest for knowledge as one that he pursued aggressively but in which he did not find meaning. One possible explanation is that Descartes' expectations of education were not in line with what his teachers at that

time thought was the purpose of education. According to Descartes, *"from childhood, I have been familiar with letters; and as I was given to believe that by their help a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life might be acquired. I was ardently desirous of instruction"* (Descartes, 2009). Descartes by this statement is suggesting that he was misled to believe that knowledge in letters would help him acquire a higher kind of knowledge than the letters themselves offered. It is as if he wanted the knowledge of letters to be sufficient by themselves without having to do any further studies. He discounts the ability of education to help him develop his character, imaginative capabilities, critical and innovative thinking, and the ability to evaluate one's life.

Although stating in other writings that throughout his travels he was on a quest for self-knowledge, Descartes was actually seeking a universal knowledge that would be useful in all situations. This grand idea of knowledge, to Descartes, is supposed to equip him with the ability to effectively deal with all aspects of his life and would serve as a formula that each person could use to attain the same outcome. He was looking for an all-encompassing knowledge that would form the basis of everything in life. He was looking to discover one concept or a few sets of rules that would

- guarantee a particular outcome;
- be applicable to multi-situations, and
- be outwardly impressive.

In his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* originally published in 1684, Descartes laid out sets of rational rules which he suggested could be used for the acquisition of any sort of knowledge (Descartes, 2000). A critical study of the four methods of doubt that Descartes chose to replace what he called *"the great many precepts of logic"* (Descartes, 2009: 26) in the approach to knowledge acquisition, shows that Descartes wanted to completely eliminate doubt and the feeling of being ignorant. This desire to eliminate the grey areas of life to ensure that expected outcomes are always attained when a certain method is employed, made his philosophy unique and radical for his time. However, Descartes was not seen as a threat by the religious establishment, the way Galileo Galilei was, because his work provided an outlet for them to maintain control over the populace. Descartes did not call for the abolishment of religious institutions, and his ideas were not diametrically opposed to church doctrines.

Although Descartes rejected the concept of the trinity of body-mind-spirit, as suggested by Plato and other scholars before him, it would be a mistake to suggest that Descartes completely ignored the soul or spirit in his philosophy. Rather, he combined it with the mind, as a subset rather than a separate entity. According to Descartes (1998), although the spirit is a substance distinct from the body, it is known to us solely by virtue of the fact that one thinks. Descartes, in this case, treated the spirit as the invincible thing that helps the mind to perform its function. By subsuming the spirit under the mind, Descartes successfully eliminated the need to study and nourish the spirit directly. A seeker of truth, in this regard, can nurture their spirit through nourishing the mind. In effect, Descartes elevated activities directed toward practical ends over activities dedicated to nourishing our inner state of life. Like Francis Bacon and Galileo, he was arguing that human beings were the master and possessors of nature (Cook, 2013a).

The mind, to Descartes, is a knowable substance just like any physical object. He defined the mind as a thinking thing that had no physical extensions (*res cogitans),* which is directed by the laws of reason. To Descartes, there is a separation between a substance with physical manifestation and a substance that exists but has no physical manifestation. For Descartes, the mind is a substance because its existence does not depend on the existence of another substance. Since the mind exists by itself, then it is at the same level with the body, which also exists by itself. In so doing, Descartes demystified the mind and, in the process, transformed it into a powerful machine that can be studied and trained to open the door of true knowledge to a learner. This notion of dualism can also be inferred from the writings of Aristotle, but Descartes popularized this idea in his time.

## Aristotelian Unity of Body and Spirit

One can trace the origins of Cartesian mind-body dualism to the ideas of Aristotle. Although you can see traces of Plato's ideas in the work of Descartes, his world view was shaped to a larger extent by his knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy. Despite their differences, what all three philosophers (Descartes, Aristotle, and Plato) shared, was a fascination with the concept of "knowledge of universals".

Aristotle was inspired by the idea of universal knowledge just as much as his master Plato. However, Aristotle felt the universal did not exist only in one place. He suggested that no particular thing embodied the universal. One way that Aristotle applied this idea was by suggesting that there are two ways of seeking knowledge: knowledge for its own sake and knowledge for a purpose (Hoffe, 2003). Descartes seized on this idea by arguing that

knowledge for its own sake is dangerous because you end up being deceived or you will come to realize your ignorance. Descartes, on the other hand, embraced the idea that people need to seek knowledge for a purpose and built upon it.

Descartes built upon Aristotle's rudimentary *Theory of Scientific Proof* with his concept of certainty and his belief that geometry was the surest way to true knowledge (Hoffe, 2003). Scholars such as Hoffe have suggested that Aristotle anticipated Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza, but this paper would like to argue that Aristotle rather created the enabling environment for the emergence of what they all held in common, that is, faith in rationalism. Descartes proposed his theory because he saw rationally a flaw in Aristotelian logic. To explain this point, the paper will turn to Aristotle's conception of the spirit. Aristotle saw the spirit as an essential part of any living thing but not entirely distinct from the body. Aristotle believed although the body needs the spirit to survive, the spirit can exist without the body. To Aristotle, the power of sense-perception and self-motion (action) connects with the intellect to make the spirit.

In *The World*, Descartes directly utilized some parts of Aristotle's understanding of the spirit while criticizing other parts of it. Descartes argued that the body and spirit are distinct. He also argued that the spirit, through its thinking ability, causes activity in some part of the body, but it does not mean that the spirit controls the body. Descartes saw the body as an entity that is controlled by the mind. Aristotle described the spirit as a living entity that existed in all animals. Descartes agreed with Aristotle that the spirit is like a spirit (invisible to the human eye) but in another aspect saw it as that part of the human system that enables us to think, in effect limiting the existence of the spirit to human beings.

For himself, Aristotle did not attach much importance to the mind, but rather placed all esteem in the spirit. By coming up with the idea of the unity and inseparability of the body and spirit, Aristotle was trying to improve upon Plato's idea of the unity of mind-body-spirit. In the process Aristotle reduced the mind to a tool of the spirit while putting the body and spirit at the same level.

## Platonic Body-Mind-Spirit Unity

Plato conceived two worlds – one that was fixed (objects of knowledge) and a second one that changes (material world). *"The forms, or objects of intellect, are quite different from (and superior to) physical objects, or objects of sense"*. Plato thought of knowledge as *"occurring only between the intellect (or reason) and its objects, the forms. The bodily senses give human*

*beings only belief, he said, not true knowledge"* (Satris, 2014: 4). As explained by Satris (2014):

> *Plato considered human beings to be composed of a rational aspect and an irrational aspect. The intellect or reason, that which communes with the forms, is rational. The body, which communes with the physical world, is irrational. Plato looked down on the body, considering it merely the seat of physical appetites. Additionally, there is a third, intermediate aspect of people: passions, which may follow intellect (and thus be rational) or follow the bodily appetites (and thus be irrational; p 6).*

According to Satris (2014), Plato understood the body, mind, and spirit as three separate but equal entities. The spirit according to the Platonic perspective manifests itself in the form of passion. The spirit, working in combination with the body or the mind, can produce concrete outcomes that are either fixed or not. The physical immovable things, in this case, do not have the ability to think for themselves or create new forms or ideas that are rational even with the help of the spirit. In effect, the spirit is neither rational nor irrational, and its usefulness depends on the entity it collaborates with. Aristotle and Descartes had problems with this characterization of the spirit.

Descartes modelled his mind-body dualism on the platonic understanding of the body and mind but rejected the third aspect, his understanding of the spirit. Passion to Descartes is irrelevant and does not deserve special consideration, but in Plato's philosophy, it was important because it allowed him to acknowledge that a relationship exists between the three entities (intellect, body, and spirit). Although many scholars today interpret Plato's divided line as a reference to Mind-Body dualism, Plato's divided line rather symbolizes this systematic interconnectedness of the three entities. In explaining the function of the divided line, Plato actively employed the concept of good and ascribed the same function to good as he ascribed to passion or the soul in his other works. Plato also did not subsume good under the body or the mind but described it as a separate entity to the mind and the body.

Although in Platonic philosophy, one of the three dominates in each individual, they are not completely divorced from one another. This made it possible for Plato to accept the existence of ambiguity (an anathema to Descartes) and the use of questions (the dialectic) as a means to further one's knowledge. Plato also thought the real value of philosophy was to nourish the spirit in addition to stimulating the mind. This is where the Cartesian method falls short. Descartes, by subordinating the spirit to the mind, could not envision that the spirit could be sustained through another part of the body or serve as a link between the mind and the body.

By reducing the spirit to an entity that exists only in its relation to the mind, Descartes limited his ability to discover other functions of the spirit, such as possessing the spirit of compassion.

## Saint Augustine: Explaining What Descartes Missed in His Analysis

Saint Augustine is often described as a Neo-Platonist because he believed that by searching within, an individual can attain unity with God (Reynolds, 2014). The unity between the educated self and God, according to the Neo-Platonist, is the highest form of knowledge, one that each person will have to seek. Saint Augustine, like Plato, thought physical objects did not possess wisdom but that the spirit could be wise. They collectively thought the spirit is what holds an organism together. It has the capacity to allow the different parts of the human system to function because it carries the appropriate nourishment to all parts of the body (Augustine and Howie, 1969). Saint Augustine saw the spirit as playing a role in helping the mind to make judgments about reality. It was this point that Vico thought Descartes missed in his analysis and tried relentlessly to draw to people's attention to it.

## Giambattista Vico and the Tradition of Humanistic Education

Vico did not oppose the idea of certainty. He thought it was important and was supportive of the idea that science provides the means to gain certainty in thought, while technology provides the means to convert this certainty into fact (Vico and Visconti, 1993). He was, however, opposed to the idea that certainty and replicability was the end goal of the search for truth. It was Vico's wish that despite the effort to gain certainty, people should not neglect another vital aspect of human existence – the unceasing quest for truth.

For the universalistic Vico, the search for truth entailed making an effort to awaken to the true nature of human life, and that is different from simply gaining certainty. According to Vico and Visconti (1993), truth was a quest to understand the connections that exist between entities that otherwise could be perceived as separate. Vico also thought that by seeking clarity, people were looking for a finished idea, but to him, ideas were never finished in reality; they could always be improved upon. That is why Vico felt that the way the mind is defined in the Cartesian method is very restrictive.

Vico saw the mind as a powerful entity that is connected to the body and permeates all parts of the body. Vico suggested that *"the human mind in the ear hears, in the eye sees, in the stomach shows anger, in the spleen laughs, in the heart discerns and in the brain*

*understands; but still it has no definite shrine in any part of the body"* (Vico and Visconti, 1993: 41). Vico is suggesting that it is the mind that helps different parts of the human body perform its function. The mind enables the organs of the body to perform their prescribed functions.

Vico's conceptualization of the mind is closely aligned with Descartes' concept of the mind as a living substance with no physical form. However, they differ as to where the mind is located in the body. Another distinction between the two understandings of the mind is that Vico thought that there is a relationship between the things that have spatial extensions and things that do not. Vico saw the spirit as the link between the mental thinking substance and the physical substance. The spirit here can be seen as the conduit through which the mind interacts with the body.

Vico thought that the mind was powerful but that it was the Spirit that helped it to make the best judgment. The spirit for Vico was the manifest image of God that permeates all parts of the human body. The Spirit, as the dwelling place of God, is the power that enables the mind to compare things or distinguish one thing from another (Vico and Visconti, 1993). Hence, the quest for self-knowledge, just as suggested by Saint Augustine, is a quest to unite with the Spirit or the ultimate truth. Vico's concept of the Spirit is similar to Spinoza's idea of emotional well-being in their acceptance of emotion as an important aspect of life. However, it is important to note that emotion is just one aspect of Vico's understanding of Spirit. In addition to emotions, Vico saw the Spirit as moral virtue, the divine within or conscience – these are all concepts that evoke the image of purity – an attribute associated with God. In the philosophical thought of Vico, the mind cannot be elevated over the body and the spirit.

## The Unintended Consequences of Prevailing Practices in Education

The goal of this paper is not to deny the usefulness of the mind but to draw attention to the unintended consequences of the scientification of education and the negative consequence for continuing to orient education systems toward training the mind. Osho (1997), an Indian philosopher, considered the mind as a tool to help us survive by replicating patterns of behaviour that were deemed successful in some instances in other areas of society. Osho's view of the mind is that it has no inherent ability for emotions or joy, but instead it can only think of joy or a feeling (Osho, 1997). Hence, subsuming the human heart and spirit under the portfolio of the mind, as Descartes did, can at best only produce a sadomasochistic society with occasional goodness. This was the main warning of Vico. David Hume also made a

similar comment. According to Hume (2011), we study philosophy to nourish our growth and move human tendencies toward good on the spectrum of good and evil. However, if we confine philosophy to the working of our minds only, there is a danger of it leading to a refined system of selfishness (Hume, 2011).

Hence, if it accepted that a relationship exists between the mind, body, and spirit, societies can be organized to nourish all three intentionally. This means that the social contract will not only be about "head education" but about fostering human beings who will be preternaturally intelligent yet capable of genuine compassion. Such a disposition will bring about a shift from creating policies that ensure the survival of the fittest to ones that embrace the survival of the whole, including the weak, and yet still preserve the space for individual responsibility.

## Reforming Education Systems to Address the Needs of 21st Century Societies

From this discussion, it follows that the focus of education will have to be broadened beyond objective facts to include helping learners cultivate their spirit. This is because,

> the virtues which are said to belong to the spirit are really something near to those of the body; for in fact they are not already there, but they are put later into it by habits and practices; but the virtue of understanding everything really belongs to something certainly more divine, as it seems, for it never loses its power, but becomes useful and helpful or, again useless and harmful, by the direction in which it is turned. (Plato 1999: 317).

Plato espoused the view that the spirit is not by itself inherently good or bad, but it has the potential to be either good or bad; hence, education in its purest form can serve as a compass that would direct the spirit toward good. Based on the quality of education a person gets, they would be able to develop knowledge of the divine within and turn it toward a direction that is either valuable and useful or useless and harmful.

This means education ought to nurture the innate power of everyone in addition to nourishing their mind. The individual ability to understand what they learn is key in this regard. Understanding, by its nature, according to Augustine and Wells (2001), is not something a third person can do for a learner. Others can only provide the occasion and space for learners to achieve and project their understanding. In other words, understanding (scientia or episteme) needs to be based on first-hand knowledge, personal and verified by the student's own reason and divine wisdom (Augustine and Wells, 2001). For education to

foster in students the ability to understand things on an emotional and rational levels, it must nourish the spirit and the mind (Augustine and Wells, 2001). However, it cannot be accomplished without great effort on the part of the learner (Vico and Visconti, 1993).

With a strong seeking spirit, a person dedicated to the study of wisdom, argued Vico, is able to learn in a relatively short amount of time and in a manner befitting them the total accumulation of knowledge transmitted down through the generations (Vico and Visconti, 1993). Vico, by this statement, does not mean an individual will come to know everything, but rather such a person will be able to get the gist or the salient points of what they learn. It can also mean that a student can learn and master any new topic or subject within a short period of time.

Furthermore, Vico's statement does not mean that the teacher is useless; far from it, given the magnitude of this task. According to Vico, lack of a sufficient number of teachers or the incompetency of a teacher can hinder the mind and heart from making great advance in the pursuit of truth (Vico and Visconti, 1993). From a Deweyan perspective, the pursuit of truth means teachers in addition to facilitating the process of knowledge acquisition need to help students cultivate and internalize a strong seeking spirit to learn (Dewey, 1938). The teacher has to find ways to make the student become part of the experience and in the process learn how to search for knowledge on their own (Dewey, 1915). Hence for a teacher to be able to influence his student to love a subject, the teacher must him/herself be a student in the literal sense of one who ardently desires to attain a deeper and broader level of understanding in that subject and must be in love with that subject (Augustine and Howie, 1969).

In this sense, an educated person is a person that does not only reduce things to simple, sure and certain unity but one that is able to contemplate, understand and retain knowledge of divine matters (Augustine and Howie, 1969), which may be read today as a metaphor for the human condition itself.

> Know your spirit, and you will acknowledge how admirable, how exceptional, how uncommon you will have known it to be, unless you wish to deceive yourself. 'The acuity of the mind, to whatever degree, can penetrate all other matters, but becomes dull when considering itself' (Cicero, 1660 as cited in Vico and Visconti, 1993, p 40).

This statement describes the divine within as the essence of our being or our life condition or state of being. Truth, in this case, is something that can be understood intellectually and lived by morally (Herberg, 1986).

In other words, the quest for truth is not a narcissistic search for knowledge or self – actualization but a search for the divine in all things. From the search of the divine in all things will well-forth a deep understanding of the essence of one's life. Coming to a knowledge of the purpose of one's life through nurturing the spirit will help a person develop in themselves a solid anchor of conviction, a life that rather than try to eliminate the storms it experiences will hold firm in the face of them.

This is not a superfluous quest for character education. Educators, based on the findings of this paper, need to create an educational environment that pushes students to live beyond the known and be comfortable with some level of uncertainty or risk; an environment that values the intellect and character and helps students to acquire valuable life experiences and become more resilient. As a result of their education, students need to develop the capacity to face head-on the struggles of life, and in the midst of it all, remain hopeful and calm in their hearts.

To accomplish this goal, subjects such as the arts ought to be valued and given the resources to thrive. The hidden curriculum of school would need to be enriched to nourish the inner world of students. Helping students to be in touch with the content of their hearts will ensure that they will not be caught in the never-ending circle of self-pity or egotistical pursuit of self-actualization. Instead, they will become individuals who will develop an imaginative empathy that embraces others and honours their humanity. Developing empathy for people who are different than us involves our ability to feel (heart), understand (mind), and care (action) or the tripartite of heart-mind-body. In effect, the ability to transform education systems into entities that foster in students a strong seeking spirit and an insatiable thirst for truth and the divine in all things and people, holds the key to solving the creativity and moral crisis of the 21st century.

## Conclusion

This essay discusses the notion of mind – body dualism and the related concept of certainty, and their impact on our claims to truth and knowledge. It then traced the origin of this concept back to the work of Aristotle and Plato. The work of Saint Augustine and Giambattista Vico was used to provide an alternative understanding of the relationship between the three. The essay concluded with a discussion of how educational leaders can use this alternative understanding to address the moral and creativity crisis of the 21st-century.

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# CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

Critical thinking has been defined variously by different scholars but it comes down to the ability of an individual to exercise higher levels of thinking in their judgments. A critical thinker reflects on thinking as a process and also applies high level analysis towards decision making as well as problem solving. As researchers have noted, critical thinking develops in stages, from the very rudimentary to the most advanced levels. At the same time, critical thinking does not just develop. Rather, it must be nurtured within an enabling environment. Notably, no learner, even at the earliest age, comes to the learning institution with a blank mind. Every child brings to school knowledge already gathered at home and other environments to which he or she has been exposed. Also, every child is unique, each with varied abilities that are largely controlled by i) the role of the brain and the most active functions, and ii) the exposure or experiences that the child has gone through. This uniqueness makes each child capable in some areas more than others which leads to different talents and levels of creativity. To develop critical and creative thinkers, therefore, learning institutions of all levels should expose learners to experiences that focus on enhancing their current individual and unique levels of knowledge to higher levels. Learning activities, for instance, must be geared towards development of the higher level of thinking, that is, critical thinking. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in many learning environments. Traditionally, the teacher has always usurped the role of teaching and learning, and the learner has mostly been relegated to the position of a passive listener. In such an environment, the opportunities to develop critical and creative thinking among learners are completely strangled.

This paper explores the concept *'critical thinking'* and how institutions can engage their learners in order to enable them become critical and creative thinkers. Beyond examining the concept, the paper will explore in depth learning activities that enhance the development of higher levels of thinking among learners. Empirical research is expected to follow this initial theoretical paper.

**Key words**: Critical thinking; Kenya Competency Based Curriculum (KCBC)

## Introduction: What is Critical Thinking?

The term 'critical thinking' as applied within the context of learning is thought to have been first made reference to by constructivist John Dewey who referred to it as 'reflective thinking'.

Dewey (1933) defined the term 'critical thinking' as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9).

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy makes the observation that "critical thinking is a widely accepted educational goal. Its definition is contested, but the competing definitions can be understood as differing conceptions of the same basic concept: careful thinking directed to a goal ( https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/). Similarly, Watanabe-Crockett (2018) notes that the concept 'critical thinking' might be interpreted differently by different people. He goes on to observe that "critical thinking is about thinking *independently*. Critically thinking is about formulating your own opinions and drawing your own conclusions" (https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/12-strategies-teaching-critical-thinking-skills).

Doyle (2018) further observes that "critical thinking is one of the most sought-after skills in almost every industry and every workplace. What is critical thinking? It refers to the ability to analyse information objectively and make a reasoned judgment" (https://www.thebalancecareers.com/critical-thinking-definition-with-examples-2063745).

It, therefore, is clear that while definitions might vary, they all lead to some form of consensus of the concept - a carefully undertaken thinking process directed to the achievement of a particular goal. A summary of critical thinking is captured in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Critical thinking*, Adopted from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking

In a nutshell, critical thinking should enable learners at all levels to navigate the path between a problem and a solution, as depicted in Figure 2.

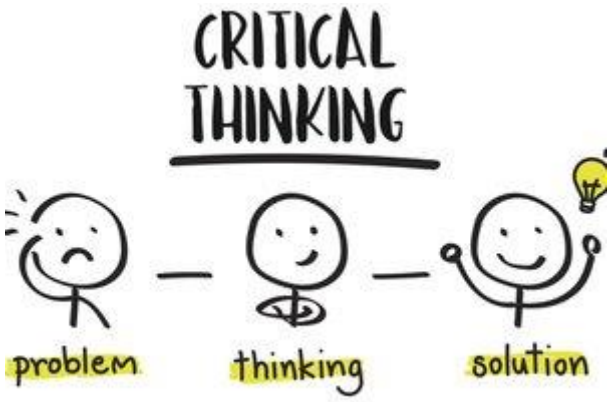


**Figure 2: From problem to solution**

*Image credit: Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock*

## Critical Thinking within the Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum

Noting that the current 8.4.4. academic system in Kenya is basically academic and exam-oriented (Basic Education Curriculum Framework), a need to design and implement an alternative, skills-based curriculum has been largely viewed as necessary. As the name for the new Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) suggests, learning is intended to be skills-driven. Teachers are viewed as facilitators of the learning process while the learners actively engage in the learning process, and ultimately owning their learning process and progression. To make this process successful, educators must embrace a pedagogical shift from the traditional teacher-centred to the modern learner-centred learning approaches. Subsequently, educators must be knowledgeable of methodologies that can be applied to effectively achieve learning where the learner is at the centre. In the section further below, the paper addresses learner-centred learning methods that have been proven to produce an engaged learner.

The background to the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum in Kenya is well captured in the paper *The Why, What and How of Competency-Based Curriculum Reforms: The Kenyan Experience* authored by Kabita and Ji (June, 2017, No.11). The authors note,

> Curriculum is the vehicle through which a country empowers its citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable them to be empowered for personal and national development (p. 4).

They further observe that "Curriculum should, therefore, meet the needs of the individual citizens and the nation" (p. 4). The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) ultimately developed the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) (2017) to guide the design and implementation of the competency-based model through which these competencies could be achieved. The decision was further informed by the following considerations:

1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
2. A needs assessment study carried out in 2016;
3. International best practices in education systems and curriculum reforms; and
4. A desire to make learning more meaningful.

The Basic Education Curriculum Framework observes that "the vision of the basic education curriculum reforms is to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered and ethical citizen". Further, the document notes,

> This will be achieved by providing every Kenyan learner with world class standards in the skills and knowledge that they deserve, and which they need in order to thrive in the 21st century. This shall be accomplished through the provision of excellent teaching, school environments and resources and a sustainable visionary curriculum that provides every learner with seamless, competency based high quality learning that values every learner (p. viii).

Pegged on this claim, it is important for educators at all levels to interrogate the teaching and learning processes that will help realize this vision. BECF further notes that in the context of the Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum (KCBC), "competency will be understood as 'the ability to apply appropriate knowledge and skills to successfully perform a function'" and that "the curriculum will be designed to emphasize the importance of not only developing skills and knowledge but also applying these to real life situations" (p.9). At the core of this CBC are seven Competencies listed below:

1. Communication and Collaboration;
2. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving;

3. Imagination and Creativity;
4. Citizenship;
5. Digital Literacy;
6. Learning to Learn;
7. Self-Efficacy.

While all the competencies are critical in the new curriculum, the main focus of this paper is critical thinking and its place in learning.

## Why Critical Thinking is Important in the Classroom

On the critical thinking competency, the BECF observes,

> When learners are empowered with critical thinking, they avoid being subjective, and use logic and evidence to arrive at conclusions. Critical thinking also facilitates exploring new ways of doing things and learner autonomy. Children learn that for every issue there are multiple perspectives that they can explore, rather than a rigid and regurgitation of information (p. 11).

Scholars in education have long observed that critical thinking and problem-solving approaches to learning have often been overshadowed by the traditional approach that focuses on memorization. Raths, Jonas, Rothstein and Wassermann (1967) for instance, argued that memorization and drills, rather than enquiry and reflective learning, was the norm in most schools. Freire (1970) decried this type of teaching and learning that depended almost entirely on memorizing, noting,

> Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor…This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits (pp. 71-72).

Similarly, Hargreaves (1982) made the following observation of the teacher-centred learning whose focus was on memorization:

> Teachers are qualified in their subjects; they know; and they are not satisfied until they have told their pupils what they know. In the jargon of the

> educationists this is the 'transmission' model of teaching: the function of the teacher is to impart knowledge to (in this respect) ignorant pupils, and the most obvious way in which to achieve this is by telling (p. 200).

In contrast to this memorization-driven approach, Freire (1970) argued that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). Socrates observed this phenomenon of learning many centuries ago when he claimed: "I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the inquiry with me: and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining to him, instead of eliciting his opinion" (Socrates c. 400 BC). This is now widely referred to as the Socratic method of learning which is largely inquiry-based and will be discussed later.

While steps may have been taken to move away from the traditional method of teaching, observation in our institutions, from the lower to the higher institutions of learning, however, indicate that many learners are still going through the memorization learning style which is basically focused on the passing of examinations. Complaints of poor analytical skills and the tendency to reproduce lecturer notes by students in assignments and examinations, even at the university level, abound. Yet today the world is constantly bombarded with the call for the 21st century skills, a call for new ways of thinking and doing things. Some of the skills now in demand include communication, collaboration, leadership, creativity and critical thinking. High academic grades are not enough by themselves for a graduate to be considered competent in the new world. The new job market and society in general requires that one is equipped with these other skills, often referred to as soft skills, beyond the academic grades. Locally in Kenya, these are the skills called upon if the country is to achieve its Vision 2030 whose objective is "to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean and secure environment." It is, therefore, important that educational institutions at all levels expose their learners to an environment where these skills are learned and nurtured. Ultimately, critical thinking in the classroom leads to critical thinkers and problem solvers in the society.

## Developing Critical Thinking

It is worth noting that critical thinking is not a one-time acquired skill. Rather, there are several stages that take the learner from the very rudimentary to the most advanced stages of critical

thinking. Elder and Paul (2010) for instance, talk of six stages of critical thinking development, as listed below:

Stage One: The Unreflective Thinker
Stage Two: The Challenged Thinker
Stage Three: The Beginning Thinker
Stage Four: The Practicing Thinker
Stage Five: The Advanced Thinker
Stage Six: The Accomplished Thinker

Stage One, the unreflective thinker refers to a learner who does not engage in critical thinking, while stage Six, the accomplished thinker, is one who has engaged in the critical thinking process to an extent where they are able to apply the skill to the utmost level. It is also important to add that critical thinking should be part of learning throughout the learner's school life, right from the early years to the advanced years in school. It is not, therefore, enough to start teaching courses on critical thinking at university level for instance, when learners have all along been exposed to learner-passive, teacher-centred approaches in their formative years. For learners to embrace critical thinking as part of their way of thinking, they must be introduced to it early in life.

## Towards Critical Thinking: Some Teaching and Learning Methodologies

Carr (1988) observed that while most people recognized the importance of critical thinking in teaching and learning, the methodologies applied in teaching were often defective and did not achieve the objective. This is often the case when teachers are not well prepared to engage learners in critical thinking, or to apply methodologies that enhance critical thinking. In this paper, several methods are suggested as practices that, when well designed and implemented, could promote critical thinking. One of the key methods of enhancing critical thinking is through inquiry, which we shall discuss next.

### *Inquiry-Based Learning/ Socratic Approach*

In contrast to the traditional teacher-centred 'transmission' methods which produce passive learners (discussed above), inquiry-based methods are learner-centred with a focus in producing independent learners who are actively engaged in their learning process. Inquiry-based learning encourages learners to develop as critical thinkers and problem solvers. In this

inquiry-based approach, learners take control of their learning while the teachers facilitate the process. Among other things, learners are encouraged to explore the most effective ways of solving problems. The role of the teacher, therefore, rather than taking the traditional approach of providing or 'transmitting' knowledge to the learners, takes the facilitator approach, providing an environment whereby learners are able to explore knowledge through various ways, e.g. through research, reflection, experiments and group discussions among others. Several inquiry-based learning models have been suggested. In the next section we shall explore the 5E inquiry model as proposed by Bybee & Landes (1990).

### *5E Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning Methodology*

The model is grounded in constructivism (e.g. Piaget, 1926; Dewey, 1910, 1933; Vygotsky, 1978) who argue that learning takes place when learners engage in constructing their own knowledge. Constructivism argues that learners learn when they are able to create meaning out of their interactions and experiences with the world around them. The 5E inquiry-based approach, while originally designed with a focus on the Science class, can be adapted to suit teaching and learning in all other areas and at all levels. It entails five levels, namely: engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate as briefly described next.

**Engage:** This is the introductory stage and the teacher applies methods that capture the learner's interests. The teacher may use various activities in the classroom, including demonstration, reading aloud, assessment of prior knowledge and also asking questions about the topic.

**Explore:** At this level, learners go a bit deeper and may carry out cooperative activities to explore the topic and to develop a common set of concrete knowledge.

**Explain:** Learners develop their own explanations and listen to each other through collaborative learning. At this point, the teacher may make clarification on concepts, introduce new vocabulary, and may correct misconceptions. Learners get the opportunity to critique, ask questions and may engage in extended learning activities to develop further concrete explanations.

**Elaborate:** As learners advance to these higher levels of learning, they may carry out further activities to deepen their knowledge, answer new questions, or confront misconceptions.

**Evaluate:** at this level, learners are considered advanced in their learning process and they may engage in sophisticated learning activities that could include self/peer evaluation of the learning process. The teacher evaluates student learning of concepts and skills. Evaluation may lead into a new 5E cycle of learning to expand on or correct concepts.

For a learner to develop to the advanced level of learning where they are fully engaged in critical thinking and can engage in evaluative activities, they must be exposed to a learning environment that enhances their development. In the next section we shall suggest and examine a few methods that nurture critical thinking.

## Some Learning Methods for Enhancing Critical Thinking in the Classroom

With the understanding that critical thinking is independent thinking in a self-regulated and self-corrective manner, the following methods are some of those considered effective in developing the different levels of inquiry and ultimately critical thinking in learners in the classroom setting. This is especially relevant as the Kenyan government introduces CBC.

1. **Socratic Method:** The Socratic Method is inquiry-based and encourages the learner to seek solutions to problems. When using the Socratic Method, the teacher acts as a model of critical thinking by showing respect for the learners' initial understanding of a given topic, probing their understanding, and showing genuine interest in their thinking. The teacher asks questions that are more meaningful and relevant to a given topic and allows learners to develop their own meaning and understanding. During the development of critical thinking, the teacher creates and sustains an intellectually stimulating classroom environment and acknowledges the value of the student in that environment. In an intellectually open, safe, and demanding learning environment, learners will be challenged, yet they will still be comfortable in answering questions honestly and fully in front of their peers. This method provokes the minds of learners and inspires a quest for knowledge. The questions posed can be a review of a previous lesson, assignments in or out of class or from a play or video that the learners have watched. This form of learning brings about explorations of various situations and brainstorming. Questions can also be based on project learning scenarios that enable them discover various aspects of the communities they live in. Inquiry-based learning

fosters problem solving techniques and sharpens knowledge retention among learners without necessarily going through memorization.

2. **Group discussion**

Critical thinking skills develop best through teamwork and collaboration. Learners view their peers as an excellent source of information. Through group discussions learners learn to give their views freely and develop confidence when speaking in small groups. Furthermore, they learn to critically apply knowledge by explaining themselves in the midst of their peers. They identify with the strengths and weaknesses of others and easily work on their own. They build on their reasoning and have critical perspective on the issue under discussion. The discussion can be based on a current situation, past experiences and what they learnt from it using relevant knowledge.

3. **Role playing**

Role playing is an excellent method of exercising critical thinking. This involves embodying another person and assuming her or his characteristics. This calls for stretching both the analytical and creative mind. Learners can watch a play, or a video and choose a character whom they wish to enact. They create their own views of a conflict and explain their point of view. This translates their thoughts to visualize themselves as the real characters and encourages critical thinking beautifully. The learners are also guided using the unique mental skills of other characters. Role playing among learners stimulates their thinking capacity and encourages character learning. It is exciting and learner driven. The character strengths and or weaknesses form the priority issues to the learner's choice. Personal biases are expressed and any assumptions on a character freely aired.

4. **Research**

Learners can be trained to conduct research from early years, even where it entails simply interviewing their parents about their extended family members. Research equips the learner with the skill to search for information individually. They also get to learn how to analyse the data they collect and write reports. Thus the learners become independent and are able to conduct and own their own learning process.

5. **Reflective Journaling**

Learners are encouraged to keep a regular record of the events taking place in their lives and taking time to reflect on them. Within the learning context, the learner can reflect on what they learn, how they are learning it and also what they could do to improve their learning.

6. **Story telling**

   Stories provide an excellent and fun way of learning. From the use of the most basic folk tales of the escapades of the hare and the hyena to the most sophisticated ones, learners can use stories to reflect on the theme/s of the story and relate them to real life experiences. Stories can be adapted to suit learning in different subjects.

7. **Debates**

   Learners can be issued with topics upon which they conduct intensive research and prepare to engage in an intelligent debate amongst themselves. Apart from enriching their research skills, learners engage in critical thinking as they analyse the topic from both the supporting and the opposing points of view. During the debate, they have to engage in quick thinking as they respond to points raised by the opposing side during the rebuttal session. In addition, debate is a great method for equipping learners with several other skills. For instance, they learn to listen to each other, respond to each other with respective, speak confidently in front of others and also cooperate as members of a team. All these are skills that are highly demanded in the modern work place and society in general.

## Some Challenges and Possible Solutions in Implementing Approaches for Critical Thinking

While the development of critical thinking is without doubt a great idea, implementation of the suggested learning methods that enhance it within the CBC classroom may be hindered by several factors, among them the following.

1. **Teacher preparedness**

   Most teachers in the field are a product of the traditional teacher-centred pedagogy which largely shapes their practice. To be able to practise the new learner-centred methods which enhance critical thinking, the teachers themselves need to undergo intensive re-training where they must unlearn the old habits and learn new ones. Until all teachers are well familiarized with these teaching/learning methods, enhancement of critical thinking and other related skills will not be achieved effectively. To counter this challenge, all teachers need to be well trained and prepared in these methods.

2. **Large class sizes and time factor**

   Most of these strategies are best practised in small to moderate class sizes. However, in some cases, especially in public schools, a class may hold as many as 80 -100 learners. The size becomes a challenge as the teacher needs to continually monitor the progress

of each learner. At the same time, a teacher may feel pressured to complete a given syllabus and this jeopardizes the learner-centred approaches which are more time-consuming. To control on class size and time factor, more trained teachers are needed in schools where there are large classes.

3. **Attitude towards the new curriculum**

   Change is not always welcome and given the opportunity, people prefer operating within their comfort zones. The new CBC brings with it many changes and demands a mind shift by all those involved, including the learners, teachers and parents, among others. Shifting from the traditional examination-oriented teaching and learning to a new independent and skills-based approach will pose a challenge to many of the stakeholders who may not understand it fully. To develop a positive attitude towards the new ways of learning, it is important for the education agencies involved in the development and implementation of the new curriculum to continuously engage the stakeholders to provide them with relevant education on its benefits.

## Conclusion and Way forward

Critical thinking is now recognized world-wide as one of the fundamental aspects of learning that enables the learner to engage effectively in the outside world. Critical thinking equips the learner with the ability to reason, analyse and evaluate issues intelligently leading to ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively. To achieve these abilities, a learner must be exposed to a learning environment that richly embraces learner-centred methods that enhance critical thinking. At the same time, teachers must be well prepared to engage in a new way of teaching which differs from what they have traditionally been used to. In Kenya, teachers need to be re-trained and equipped with new delivery methods in order for them to be able to effectively implement the new KCBC. At the same time, on-going research is required to continuously monitor the progress of the new curriculum in order to provide effective feedback and suggestions for improvement. As a follow-up to this paper, the authors intend to engage in field research which will provide a detailed analysis of the development of critical thinking skills in the new CBC classroom.

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# VALUE CREATING EDUCATION:
# A HANDMAID TO TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

**Sanya Franklyne Mang'eni**

## Abstract

*Learning happens when transformation is experienced. This study establishes the essential relationship between Soka Education and transformation. It also demonstrates how mentorship is key in creating transformational leaders. Transformational leadership is here understood as one that impacts discernible change in the followers and depends on the inspirational capacity of the leader. The study concludes that other forms of leadership are also sustained by the lasting transformation they seek. Leadership is a fruit of nurture and nature. While there exist natural propensities to good leadership in people, leadership is also a skill and an art that can be learnt. Value creating education is one such handmaid for transformational leadership nurtured.*

**Key Words: education, leadership, mentorship, purpose, transformational, Soka**

## Introduction

What is the value of education if society is unchanged by it? And, what is the need for leaders if their leadership leaves no lasting value-adding impact on the led? The crisis society faces today is a crisis of leadership. There is so much potential locked up in individuals and the society is crying for that one person needed to properly utilize it. Suffering under the yoke of corruption, negative ethnicity, a-hubris-driven-science and misplaced nationalism, the world risks self-annihilation unless a system is put in place to redeem the masses from themselves. Education should have done it, but education, as it currently is, is not trustworthy. The system that needs global recognition and that should be embraced with a ripple effect in all sectors of human existence, is the Soka philosophy and education. Its focus on empowerment is what transformational leadership is in essence.

## The Dual Purpose of Education

In the presentation *Mentoring and Moral Development in Value Creating Education* at the First International Conference on Value Creating Education for Sustainable Development at the University of Nairobi, 2016, I suggested that "to understand *Why Education*, (we must ask) *What is Education*?" (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018). It was my take that the purpose of education

is properly to be read together with the essence of education. It was my considered opinion that the reason people seek education depends largely on the meaning they attach to education. People seek education at different levels because of the importance they attach to it.

In the etymological dissection of the concept *education* from the Latin roots *educare*, *educer*e, and *educatio*, I established that the two verbs and the noun, respectively, donate to the concept of *education* "the notion of growth." Consequently, I proposed the understanding of education as "a facilitated movement of one towards an ideal or away from a lesser state" (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018).

The concept *education* denotes aided growth in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities of the human person. From its essence, I found that education should enhance human rationality and highlight intellectual freedom to facilitate an objective view of reality so as to exist in society and participate in its affairs more usefully and consciously. It is a tool of empowerment that enables learners to improve on who they are for their good and for the good of others.

It is an interesting observation that while education is just as old as humanity itself, its purpose continues to be the subject of a never-ending debate. The notion of whether the young are educated for gainful employment or for social, academic, cultural and intellectual development for the good of society, has lacked consensus.

> Although education is understood as a process that seeks the development of the competencies of individuals to favor their access to opportunities, the question is: what is it for in society? In this sense there are two clear currents: the first, believes that the role of education is to reproduce a system, a social order; the second, considers that education has the responsibility of resistance and social transformation. It is possible to mention a third current that considers that it is both: on the one hand, perpetuate aspects of an established order that guarantee equilibrium to society and, on the other, the formation of human beings critical, constructive and capable of imagining a new future. (www.lifepersona.com).

While it is simplistic to merely consider education from a functionalist perspective, we note that many schools of thought, in fact, view the purpose of education as a duality. The great ancient philosopher Plato found in education the means to achieve *individual justice* and *social justice* for the harmonious existence of men and women of the world. *Justice*, in Plato's view, is *excellence* which in Greek philosophy is *virtue*. Socrates equated virtue to *knowledge*.

The first goal of education, therefore, is to develop the potential of the individual to be their best. Plato calls it *individual justice* "when each individual develops his or her ability to the fullest." (Lee, 1994). Abraham Maslow would, however, call it self-actualization, which *Dictionary.com* defines as "the achievement of one's full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization". (Maslow, 1987).

Self-actualization is, in a sense, living the purpose for one's existence. Plato also regards education as a means to *social justice*, which "can be achieved when all social classes in a society, workers, warriors, and rulers are in a harmonious relationship." (Lee, 1994). This state of harmony is facilitated by availing equal educational opportunity to all citizens from the least to the greatest.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the iconic human rights crusader, considered the essence of education as beholden to the appreciation that formation of the educated for life is as important as the skills learnt in the process for gainful employment. He said,

> As I engage in the so-called 'bull sessions' around and about the school, I too often find that most college men have a misconception of the purpose of education. Most of the 'brethren' think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with noble ends rather than means to an end. It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. (King Jr., 1947)

Jacque Delors, in his report to UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, underscored the value of education to humanity as a tool for confronting the global challenges both present and future, and a catalyst for personal and societal development too. He observed,

> In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. As it concludes its work, the Commission affirms its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. (Delors et al. 1996)

The Delors Commission treated the goals of education as a serious undertaking. "Beyond education's immediate functionality, it considered the formation of the whole person to be an essential part of education's purpose". (Wikipedia, 17/11/19).

Sugano Yoshiki, a postgraduate student of Literature at the University of Nairobi observed that the purpose of education is betrayed where focus is solely to churn out competitive scholars and experts to serve the job market. He refers to Daisaku Ikeda's humanistic breath into the philosophy of education, to "create something more valuable for the happiness of human beings." (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018).

Learning is measured by transformation and should be defined as equipping the learner to confront their environment for themselves and for the society. Without doubt, therefore, education has an inalienable transformative effect. Because it informs the ethics of the individual and the society as well, education prepares the individual to live with dignity. Minds are formed, cultures are purified and stereotypes polished by education. It should be impossible to learn and remain unlearned.

We are, of course, not blind to the reality that many purportedly educated individuals are in every way an embarrassment to education. People who are deficient in values rather than improve on their society, have robbed it of joy and potential. This unfortunate lot cannot deny education of its true identity.

The educated, freed from the choking of ignorance should be change agents for themselves and for their community. Armed with the enthusiasm and skills of influence, they should be able to facilitate a broad-based transformation agenda whether political, cultural or socio-economic. In a cross-cutting fashion, education lights up the transformation of all sectors without exception. "The view of the learner changes when he is educated, because he is no longer formed to achieve personal success but to carry out, in community, the transformations that society requires." (www.lifepersona.com).

## The Treasure in Soka Education

Prof. Winston Akala of the University of Nairobi observes in the preface to *Value Creating Education in Kenya – Building a Humane Society*, that "Education has been used as a tool to facilitate change for many centuries." (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018). Whenever we open up dialogue on value-creation in education we will always, and inevitably so, be drawn to the iconic thought presence of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. His approach to education reinforced the

underlying value of education as a handmaid to the emancipation of individuals, generations and the society.

### *Value-Creation*

The concept of value-creation is a unique philosophy of education greatly attributed to Makiguchi. It is one of the two treasures I consider donated to modern day learning by the Soka philosophy, the other being the role of mentorship. At the heart of education, in the Soka approach, is transformation – value addition. The movement from good to better, the transition from dependence to independence and the growth from individual to global citizen are hallmarks of Soka education. Education is rendered superfluous where the expectations of value creation and/or addition are not met.

While he defined *happiness* as the gist of the Soka educational philosophy, Makiguchi went deeper to dissociate *happiness* from mere pleasure. The soul of education is richer than momentary excitement. Happiness is the umbrella value in which are the values of *beauty*, *gain* and *good*. And as it enhances the life of the individual and the society, *value* is a positive transformative principle. (Ikeda, 1995). "The ultimate goal of education, therefore, is value. Happiness is the value sought to strengthen the capacity of people to effect that positive transformation of reality." (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018). In encouraging imagination, and creativity while arousing interest in knowledge, education not only becomes a means to employment and economic security, but plays the bigger role of freeing the intellect from myopia. The resultant effect is an improved world view and a value adding interaction with society.

Yoshiki in his article *The Youth Education We Need in Kenya* wrote,

> Despite my current status as an MA student, I do not think every young person must go for university education. I feel the question about the purpose of university education has become vaguer in the minds of the youth these days. For example, academic education systems in Japan are not capable enough to give the youth the sense of ambition and the will to overcome challenges and most importantly, the responsibility for both the self and society. (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018).

While the society of his time prepared the youth to unquestioned service to the state, Makiguchi wanted learners to love education for what it does to them – empowers them to discover themselves and their environment. Education completes that journey into their identity. He wanted learners to enjoy their time in school. He did not want to see the robotic ills of the education of his time transferred to the next generation of learners. Of this he said,

> I am driven almost to distraction by the intense desire to prevent the present deplorable situation – ten million of our children and students forced to endure the agonies of cutthroat competition, the difficulty of getting into good schools, the "examination hell" and the struggle for jobs after graduation – from afflicting the next generation. (Ikeda, 2010)

For Makiguchi the end of education is happiness. Education should be the catalyst to lifelong happiness to which the learner and educator are mutually bound. Considering the stressful environment of the growth of Soka education, happiness was no doubt the transformative end of education.

Dr. Masumi Odari of the University of Nairobi, herself a graduate of Soka University, drew inspiration from Daisaku Ikeda's lecture at the Columbia University:

> The proud mission of those who have been able to receive education must be to serve, in seen and unseen ways, the lives of those who have not had this opportunity. At times education may become a matter of titles and degrees, and the status and authority these confer. I am convinced, however, that education should be a vehicle to develop in one's character the noble spirit to embrace and augment the lives of others. (Indangasi et al. (Eds.), 2018)

Dr. Odari opines that the goal of true education is in the development of character and a critical mind. The obsession with titles and monetary gains resulting from earned positions is dangerous to the entire trade of education. When education is sought for the personal gains intended, morality flies out of the window. Thus, is the value of education lost in the maze of moral absence. As was in my earlier observation,

> This crisis of *moral absence* among the educated has resulted in a society that distrusts the competence of its own systems. The education system is perhaps the most distrusted, and is perceived to add little or no value to the wellbeing of society. Education is today largely considered a trade and certification is in some cases awarded to the highest bidder! Devoid of the ethical commitment to value, some graduates are spewed out of institutions of higher learning with their only change being the prefix or suffix they add on to their name, as the case may be, or the memorabilia connecting them to the said institutions. (Ibid.).

Education should focus on the unity of the human race and be a champion of harmonious coexistence with each other, irrespective of the differences of creed, race or social status. Education that is not humanistic in purpose is thus a hazard and a threat to human existence.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr.,

> The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals… We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character… that is the goal of true education… If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. (King Jr., 1947).

When education lives its true purpose, it transforms the learners into global citizens and good humans, too. The ideals of human existence are imbued in an educated soul.

### *Soka Mentorship and Empowerment*

It is interesting that the Delors Commission titled their report on education to UNESCO as *The Treasure Within*. Of this title Jacques Delors said,

> The reason I chose the title *The Treasure Within* for the UNESCO report is directly linked to what I said earlier about children, because within each child there lies a treasure. Children must be helped to thrive; this is the encouraging dimension of the battle against inequality of opportunity. (Delors, 2013).

This inspiration resonates greatly with the Soka ideals. Soka education is heavily inspired by Buddhist culture and philosophy whose main focus is human happiness and development and the path to it is mentorship and empowerment. The mentor-disciple relationship is critical to the achievement of the happiness of the individual and of others. Like Buddhism, Soka philosophy

> … is a philosophy with the aim of empowering people. Its central premise is that each person has the innate capacity to triumph in any circumstances in which they find themselves, to surmount any source of suffering, transforming it into a source of growth and strength. It is a philosophy established on the conviction that there exist within the lives of each of us at each moment inexhaustible reserves of courage, wisdom, compassion and creative energy. (SGI, Jan 2010).

It is the role of the mentor to make the disciple conscious of the immense deposits of potential in them. Through his own life and example, the mentor inspires confidence into the student to seek the realization of their own unrealized possibilities.

The Soka Gakkai International defines a mentor as "a person who aids the development of another" (SGI, Jan 2010). The mentor's life is modelled on the premise that the human person's highest potential and happiness are realized in concern for others.

I have many times heard it said that success in life depends less on where you are today and more on the direction you face into the future. The role of the mentor is, therefore, to align their disciple in the direction of finding the treasure hidden in the disciple's own being. The mentor must develop in the learner the disposition ideal for their take-off. The requisite attitude is indispensable or the take-off will abort.

Society is full of innumerable treasures hidden from the ordinary eye. It takes a special eye to see opportunity in failure; a special soul to find love and happiness in pain and confusion and a mentor to see the bright future in a learner's life. What one person sees as filth and useless garbage, another one sees as a lucrative recycling opportunity because of their variance in attitude. "Attitude is like the shades of goggles you put on your eyes, allowing you to see only as their colour dictates." (Indangasi et al. (Eds), 2018).

In the wisdom of the Delors Commission, education is understood as this mediated journey into self-discovery. It is an enterprise that facilitates an encounter with a treasure unseen to the naked eye. Delors sees in every learner a great treasure that can only be unlocked by a mentor through a patient walk into the learner and with the learner. The Commission highlights the prime role of the mentor in helping the children interact with their potential for purposes of actualization.

Buddhist philosophy describes self-actualization as developing one's own humanity. It is enlightenment achieved "in the balance of having the courage to squarely confront one's own challenges, striving to grow and develop as a person, while taking action for the sake of others." (SGI, 2010). In this journey, the role of the mentor cannot be gainsaid.

It is the mentor who grants courage to a feeble soul. The mentor stands as a beacon of hope to a faltering disciple, and an example to be referenced upon. Through their teachings and way of life, the mentor illumines the path of enlightenment which is marked by fear, complacency, laziness and other detractors that may need to be overcome. In the words of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, "A mentor helps you perceive your own weaknesses and confront them with courage." (SGI, 2010).

Soka philosophy so cherishes personal empowerment that the ultimate responsibility of the learning process is tasked upon the disciple. The role and commitment of the mentor is to enable the disciple to confront and overcome their environment. The mentor is to the disciple what a midwife is to a gravid.

> The relationship between mentor and disciple can be likened to that between needle and thread. The mentor is the needle and the disciple is the thread. When sewing, the needle leads the way through the cloth, but in the end, it is unnecessary, and it is the thread that remains and holds everything together. (SGI, 2010)

Ultimately it is the spirit of mentorship that makes real the commitment to happiness. Like pieces of firewood in a furnace, one lit piece warms up and eventually lights the one adjacent to it until the whole furnace is lit. So does the aspiration of one light up another until all are happy and inspired.

## Leadership

Kevin Kruse in *What is Leadership,* published in the authoritative *forbes.com*, defines leadership as "a process of social influence which maximizes the effort of others, towards the achievement of a goal." (Kruse, 2013). This definition by Kruse makes the observation that the source of leadership is social influence rather than mere authority. The exercise of the influence is not for its own sake but for the purpose of guiding others towards certain intended goals that supersede personal goals. By its own definition, therefore, the concept *leadership* carries within it the notion of transformation, for that is what *influence* denotes.

### *Transformational Leadership*

There exists leadership that is specifically considered *transformational*. The concept of transformational leadership describes the situation when a "leader works with teams to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group." (Wikipedia, October 2019). The operational philosophy of transformational leadership, therefore, is influence through example and role modelling, winning trust and respect, inspiring and empowering individuals to achieve beyond their own expectations.

The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in his descriptive research on political leaders. Burns considered *transforming leadership* as a process in which leaders and followers mutually support each other to achieve set goals. He contrasted *transforming leadership* and *transactional leadership*. As he saw it, the former relishes in impacting noticeable changes in the being of individuals and organizations, redefining attitudes, values, motivations and goals, while the latter is based on a "give and take" relationship between leader and employee. In transforming leadership, focus is on the

leader's personality as a moral exemplar who inspires change and energizes subjects towards a vision.

The development of the concept from *transforming leadership* to *transformational leadership* is credited to another researcher, Bernard M. Bass, "who extended the work of Burns by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transforming and transactional leadership" (www.langston.edu/sites).

Bass also came up with parameters that could be used to measure transformational leadership. To identify the transformational leader, his or her influence on the followers is key. Such a leader is held in awe, trusted, respected, admired and held in high esteem. The subjects have a natural sense of loyalty towards this leader. They thus strive to work harder than originally expected.

This unquestionable loyalty is because the leader,

> provides followers with an inspiring mission and vision and gives them an identity. The leader transforms and motivates followers through his or her idealized influence intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. In addition, this leader encourages followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and to alter the environment to support being successful. (www.langston.edu/sites)

Thus,

> Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. Enacted in its authentic form, transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers that inspires them; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so the leader can align followers with tasks that optimize their performance. (Ibid).

### *Transformational Leadership in Soka Mentorship*

Having already considered the treasure in the Soka philosophy as value creation and mentorship, to properly relate them to transformational leadership, we need to consider the

individuating elements of transformational leadership according to Bernard M. Bass. (www.langston.edu/sites).

**a)** ***Individualized Consideration***

In attending to the needs of each follower, the leader acts as a mentor or coach, keen to know and understand the concerns and needs of the follower. With empathy and full attention, the leader listens to the follower, respects their contribution and celebrates their achievement with them. This attitude inspires in the follower the desire to give their best.

**b)** ***Intellectual Stimulation***

The leader here undertakes to challenge the follower into deeper action and to take risks. He or she makes the follower feel valued, respected and appreciated. The leader strives to nurture and stimulate creativity and initiative in the follower and the ability to think independently. He or she encourages the followers to ask questions and to think critically about better ways of executing their duties.

**c)** ***Inspirational Motivation***

This element describes the degree to which the leader communicates his/her vision to their followers in a manner that is both appealing and inspiring. "Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task at hand. Followers need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act. Purpose and meaning provide the energy that drives a group forward." (www.langston.edu/sites). Proper communication techniques "make the vision understandable, precise, powerful and engaging" and challenge followers to invest more effort in their tasks. (www.langston.edu/sites).

**d)** ***Idealized Influence***

The leader here is a moral exemplar, a role model who instils pride and gains the respect and trust of the followers.

Considering the above characteristics of the transformational leader, we find a very close relation with the Soka ideals. The goal of mentorship is to establish an environment in which one strengthens his or her ability to discover and realize the potential in him or her. (National Academies, 1997). The mentor is tasked to journey with the disciple in a unique relationship to help them discover, know, learn and create value. "The mentor develops in the mentored a unique character, and helps them realize their potential." (Ikeda, 2010).

Makiguchi himself advocated for the reform of the education system to encourage independent thinking, students' happiness and creativity. With the teacher as mentor, children are assisted to develop stable and reliable characters and personalities. Makiguchi envisaged a mentor-disciple relationship that eventually established the mentored as independent and capable of the tasks as the mentor, if not better.

The growth of the Soka concept is itself evidence of the transformational principles of Soka philosophy. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871 – 1944) was an educator who "was devoted to the happiness of children, and worked assiduously to ensure that economically disadvantaged children were given equal opportunities." (https://www.tmakiguchi.org/biography.html). He laboured to make education theories practical and wrote broadly on this matter. His works were later published by Josei Toda, his disciple with whom he founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, later Soka Gakkai.

Together with Toda, Makiguchi was imprisoned and tortured in order to recant his teachings and beliefs which he refused to do. He later died in prison from malnutrition and old age in 1944. Josei Toda was released in July 1945 and went on to promote and establish even further the thoughts of his mentor.

Toda stressed the importance of the mentor-disciple relationship in the practice of Buddhism within the Soka Gakkai. He was an example himself, with Makiguchi as his mentor while he formed and nurtured a disciple and successor, Daisaku Ikeda. He developed the Buddhist philosophy of the mentor-disciple relationship for the contemporary age. This indispensable place of the mentor has become a hallmark of the Soka Gakkai. The oneness of mentor and disciple is recounted by the gratitude of Toda for the jail term served together with his mentor.

In his turn Toda, too, established his own disciple (Ikeda) to take up the mission and spread it yonder. "Without Ikeda as his disciple, it is unlikely that the plans that grew from Toda's cherished desire to rid the world of suffering would ever have been realized. It is because these ideas did not remain as mere ideas, but were inherited by Ikeda as Toda's vibrantly enduring spirit, that the present-day achievements of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI have been possible." (www.joseitoda.org).

What is especially key in understanding this mentor-disciple relationship is that in the Soka thinking, "the aim of the mentor-disciple relationship… is not that the mentor exacts obedience from the disciple, but that the mentor seeks to train the disciple to achieve an even greater state of development than that of the mentor." (www.joseitoda.org/religious/mentor_disciple.html)

This is exactly the principle of transformational leadership, empowering the follower to optimize their potential.

Soka education, therefore, seeks the transformation of the individual in the quest to transform the world. According to Ikeda, "A great inner revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind." (SGI, 1998). Ikeda has gone ahead to fulfil the aspirations of both Makiguchi and Toda. The Soka Youth Empowerment Program that runs globally is one initiative that seeks the transformation of the young to make an impact in the world.

So powerful is this initiative that I see in it the actualization of the accusation against Makiguchi as a *thought criminal*. Once the young are liberated and freed from the capture of the state or the mighty, we shall experience true revolution and the release of hidden energies. This is evidently the noble goal of the Soka Youth Empowerment Program.

## Conclusion

Education contemplates a change-effect in the learned and their environment. Soka education emphasizes empowerment of the change agents through mentorship and character formation to enable realization of hidden potential and a dignified human existence. As transformational leadership seeking to inspire change agents to act independently and responsibly for maximum output, Soka mentorship is, no doubt, transformational leadership epitomized. Hence Soka philosophy is a handmaid to transformational leadership. A student of the Soka school of thought is naturally schooled into transformational leadership.

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# THE PITFALLS OF DESCRIPTIVISM AND RELATIVISM IN THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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## Introduction

Much of what is called academic writing stinks; it is bad writing. The derogatory name for it is *acadamese*. I should know because I have been interacting with this kind of writing for over forty-five years. Rarely would you linger on a sentence, or a paragraph, or even an entire composition and exclaim: "Wow, this is good writing!" Academic writers get away with crimes for which they should be hanged: mangled syntax, sloppy paragraphing, and poor organization. In short, a kind of writing that induces sleep even at 8 a m.

Many academic writers simply describe or explain phenomena. They regurgitate what they have read, such that every other sentence is a quotation; and as they do so, they imagine they are contributing to knowledge. They play it safe. They don't make waves; and they don't say anything provocative. They get trapped in their own narrow academic cocoon, and say sheepishly that truth is relative. There is no claim that is worth fighting for; and your claim is as good as mine. You don't have to dig in.

A few months ago, Professor George Magoha, our former Vice Chancellor and now the Cabinet Secretary for Education, urged universities to stick to their academic and professional specializations. *"I don't see why the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology is teaching economics,"* he added with an air of authority. By saying this, Magoha was showing the world that he is not a critical thinker. He cannot see the big picture; he cannot connect the dots and understand that a civil engineer, for instance, needs to know the cost of road construction.

Sadly also, the professor was revealing to the world that he does not understand what goes on in his own School of Health Sciences. This school houses the Department of Public Health which, among other things, teaches a course called Health Economics. The argument, which

must have escaped the professor of surgery, is that a medical doctor should learn about the cost of medicine and medical equipment.

I have said elsewhere that critical thinking in Kenya is in short supply. George Magoha's statement exemplifies this unfortunate reality.

The most serious crime committed by these academics concerns the refusal or the inability to demonstrate the value of what they're writing. They don't tell you why the reader of their articles or books should care. They don't show the overall significance of their writing. In other words, they don't answer the most important question in academic writing – the question: so, what? How will humanity benefit from their research and publications? Which, therefore, means they don't see the intersection between critical thinking and value creating education because they themselves have no critical thinking skills.

I know you'll say but these articles are published in refereed journals. Yes, they are. The truth, however, is that the editors and reviewers of these journals don't know any better. Besides, they are in it for the money. Academic writing has been commercialized. These days you can write the stupidest article and get it published because you will have paid heftily for it. The Israeli public intellectual Yuval Harari has published a book called *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. My favourite is: *"Never underestimate human stupidity."*

## The Case for Effective Writing

In the early 1960s, when I was in what was called intermediate school (now upper primary), we used to draw boxes containing the subject and predicate of a given sentence. We would then go further with respect to the predicate and show the auxiliary verb, the main verb, the direct and indirect object. Our teachers told us about subject-verb agreement. They also told us that a sentence was a group of words that made sense. And we understood this to mean that one sentence began at point A and ended at point B. In other words, we were taught to guard against constructing so-called run-on sentences.

These rules of grammar were reinforced during my high school years, between 1964 and 1969. The emphasis this time was on learning a more conversational and a more communicative kind of English. Oral English was taught and later examined in the then Cambridge School Certificate as a separate subject. The goal of the combined English syllabus was to speak and write well.

We were taught that "disinterested" meant impartial or public-spirited; and that it did not mean uninterested. The phrase "due to" meant caused by; and "owing to" meant because of. Nowadays, many speakers and writers use these two phrases interchangeably. Further, we were told there was no need to qualify absolutes. The word "excellent" meant very good, and so it was a mistake to say "very excellent." The same applied to words such as "huge" and "enormous." But modern dictionaries have normalized "very excellent." *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* even has "absolutely excellent"!

There was no need to use unnecessary redundancies such as "I can be able" or "the reason is because." These and other forms of wordiness such as "return again," "small in size" were expressly forbidden. My English teacher at Friends School Kamusinga used to call this habit of using superfluous words verbal diarrhoea. But nowadays, even the best educated among us say "I can be able" and "the reason is because."

When it comes to composition writing, the emphasis was on cohesion and coherence. In the introduction, you said what you wanted to say; in the body, you said it; and in the conclusion you said what you had said and why. You didn't muddle through, with a bunch of disjointed sentences; you had a strategy.

A good introduction was like freshly baked bread: it whetted the appetite of the reader. The body paragraphs were arranged in an emphatic or ascending order, from the least to the most important. In stylistics, this was called the principle of end-focus, that the last is the most important, because people remember best what they hear last. And as for the conclusion, you crafted a clincher paragraph that gave a definitive sense of closure, and if possible, you did a full circle in which you ended where you began.

The secret of good writing, it was emphasized, was the interesting detail, the detail that revealed some universal truth. Readers looked for an *aha* moment, a eureka moment in your writing. They looked for some blinding insights, some unforgettable truths.

This was the stuff good writing was made of; and I don't know too many Kenyans who care for it. And when the BBC reported yesterday that some Kenyans were writing essays for students in developed countries such as the UK and the US, I thought the standards in those countries must have plummeted precipitously. Gone must be the days when professors would insist on hearing your individual, authentic, and original voice in your essay. Now they have to rely on mindless technology, which cannot detect material that is not on the Internet.

## The False Notion of Linguistic Adequacy

I first came across the concept of *linguistic adequacy* in a course in the Department of Literature called Introduction to Language back in 1970. This course was taught by a British linguist called Tom Gorman. Gorman used to read his lectures in a kind of monotone, and whenever he saw some of us dozing, he would joke about it. *"I don't blame you"*, he would say**.** *"I also find this stuff boring."*

Proponents of *linguistic adequacy* argued that every language was adequate in relation to the experiences of its speakers; and that every language had the necessary vocabulary to describe what its speakers saw, heard, touched, tasted, and smelt in their environment. This sounded flattering to us Kenyan students because it demolished the view that English and other European languages were superior to African languages.

But the notion of *linguistic adequacy* clashed with something else I encountered in yet another course called Stylistics. In this course, we read Geoffrey Leech's book titled *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry.* Leech, among other things, talks about the process of word formation called neologism. Speakers of various languages coin words to express new things they discover in their surroundings. In my book titled *Rethinking Literature: My Personal Essays on a Troubled Discipline,* I have talked about William Shakespeare who is said to have invented approximately 2,000 words which became part of the English vocabulary. Words such as *assassination, obscene, tradition, worthless, lacklustre, cold-blooded, tranquil, flawed, jaded, countless, deafening, premeditated, lonely,* and many others were brought into the English language by the famous playwright.

In the year 2000, Chris Wilson edited a book titled *Obamamania: The English Language Barackafied,* in which he talked about the new words that came into English as a result of the historic campaign of the former American president. Words such *Obamenon, Barackstar, Barackupied, Obamaton, Obamateur, Obamazon, Obamafioso, Baracademics* are among the many that came into existence during this improbable campaign by the Kenyan American.

And after Obama won the presidency, his enemies, led by the current president Donald Trump, fabricated a story to the effect that he was not born in America. They claimed President Obama was born in Mombasa in 1961 in the Republic of Kenya. These people were too wilfully ignorant to know that in 1961 Kenya was still a British colony. Be that as it may, a brand-new word was coined to refer to these people: the word was "birthers," and the campaign they spearheaded was referred to as "Birtherism".

The British, the owners of the English language, are currently struggling with something they call "Brexit," a coinage that captures the desire of some of them to leave the European Union. Clearly, this is a new experience in British politics, and somebody had to invent a word for it.

In 1970 I didn't quite know where Tom Gorman was coming from; but I confess I wasn't fully persuaded by the arguments surrounding the notion of *linguistic adequacy*. I do know now that Gorman's ideas were grounded in what was evolving as philosophical relativism. Yes, all languages are equal in a vaguely democratic sense; but they are not in themselves adequate. Human societies are constantly experiencing new things; and their languages are always expanding in order to accommodate this reality.

## Critical Thinking and the Study of Literature

When I was studying for my O-levels and later A levels, our teachers used to warn us against a mere re-telling of the story of a book or simply writing a plot summary. Writing about literature, they said, was an exercise in critical thinking. Did Chinua Achebe succeed in showing that *"traditional Africa was not a long night of savagery"*, or was it a case of intentional fallacy, given the barbarities we witness in say *Things Fall Apart*: the killing of twins, the practice of human sacrifice as shown in the killing of Ikemefuna, and the treatment of the so-called Osu? Who exactly is the hero of *Julius Caesar?* Is it Julius Caesar himself or is it Marcus Brutus? And is William Shakespeare contemptuous of the masses in depicting them as fickle and capricious?

The requirement that we arrive at a critical verdict on a literary work persisted into our university life. We would ask: was Shakespeare a conservative advocate of the golden mean, the idea that we can be too good or too bad, and that we need to stay in the middle? Or did the English dramatist want to dismantle and remake Elizabethan society? Was Negritude a reactionary and backward-looking literary movement or was it a positive affirmation of African values? Was Ocol's rebuttal in *Song of Ocol* aesthetically superfluous or did it reveal another and more progressive side of Okot p'Bitek?

These and many such questions were the ones that tested our critical thinking capabilities; they were the ones that made us burn the midnight oil, if you will excuse the cliché.

But while studying literature at the University of Nairobi, I came across something I didn't pay much attention to, but which in retrospect, should have signalled a major shift in thinking. The year was 1970. We had this British lecturer called Angus Calder. Calder taught a course called

*Introduction to Drama* which, as I recall, focused on two texts: Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Brecht's *Mother Courage.*

Angus Calder was a fine, friendly, and liberal academic who smoked a pipe in his lectures and even in the tutorials. Yes, in those days we had tutorials, and Calder was the tutor for the group to which I was assigned. In that group, we read and discussed Anton Chekhov's *Lady with the Lapdog and Other Stories, Potent Ash and Other Stories* by Leonard Kibera and Sam Kahiga, and a poetry anthology compiled by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier called *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry.*

One day, as I was walking along the corridor of the Department of Literature in Education Building, I saw a notice pinned on Dr. Calder's office door. It read as follows: "UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN TO THE MOON, NEVER USE THE WORD 'UNIVERSAL'!"

I remember wondering why the British lecturer had taught Shakespeare's and Brecht's plays if he really didn't believe in universal truth. Calder, I had learnt, was not really a mainstream literary scholar. He had a PhD in British history, and had published a thick book titled *The People's War* which he displayed on his shelves in his office. I never got to read the book, but he had told us that the book was about Britain in World War II. However, when I reflect on Calder's rejection of the notion of the "universal" now, I wonder whether he was not pandering to the relativist ideas that were being propagated by the French postmodernists, led by Jacques Derrida. All along, I had learnt and appreciated that the messages in literary works were universal, that these works contained values that spoke to our common humanity. At that time, however, I saw the notice as some weird joke by a British scholar who was probably addicted to tobacco.

In 1976, when I was studying for my PhD at the University of California, Santa Cruz, I attended the Conference of the African Studies Association held in San Francisco. In my book *Rethinking Literature,* I have written about this conference in connection to my tribute to the late Ali Mazrui. What I do not mention in the book is a session I attended in which a Nigerian scholar, whose name I have forgotten, presented a paper entitled "Cultural Formalism in African Literature." Listening to this presentation, I remember feeling uneasy. I thought that the scholar was absolutizing and essentializing the cultural specifics of African literature. And remember that was the year Southern Africa was on fire, with the liberation movements in Mozambique and Angola enjoying the support of the then Soviet Union and Cuba, and of

course, I must add, progressive Americans. And personally, I didn't care for literary nationalism masquerading as scholarship.

When I returned from the US in 1977, I found a new and revamped literature curriculum. The discipline was being taught from an unabashedly Afro-centric perspective. World literature was being taught from the point of view of how it related to Africa and Africans. African literature and the literature of the African Diaspora were at the centre. The Department was teaching a course called Black Aesthetics; and I remember wondering whether there was white aesthetics, brown aesthetics, or yellow aesthetics.

I was assigned a course which no one wanted to teach: it was called North American Literature, split into Euro-American literature and Canadian literature. It was my first encounter with the hyphenated Euro-American literature, although I had just come from America. Only one student took the course. He was called Paul Olando, and he was the one who later rose in the civil service to become the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza.

I was researching on Joseph Conrad for my doctorate, and I had just discovered to my shock that Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* was a plagiarism of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes.* Indeed, in that same year, and by some kind of coincidence, an American Fulbright professor teaching at the then Kenyatta University College published an article in their departmental journal called *Kucha* in which he traced the resemblances between the two novels. Unfortunately, at that time, Ngugi had become a cult figure; and so, the reaction from some of my colleagues, when they saw the article, was: "These *wazungu* think Africans can't think for themselves!"

The question I asked then, and which I still ask is: if Achebe's title *Things Fall Apart* is a line from W. B. Yeats; if his other title *No Longer at Ease* is a line from T.S Eliot; if Ngugi's title *Weep Not, Child* is a line from Walt Whitman; if in Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, we hear echoes of Franz Kafka; and if Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is an unacknowledged imitation of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*; the claim of a black literary aesthetics is no more than nationalist and racist braggadocio.

## The Institutional Logic of Phenomena

Critical thinking is about seeking the institutional logic of things and occurrences. It is about acknowledging the ontological states of phenomena and how we humans relate to them. It is about recognizing the value of our knowledge to humanity as a whole. It is about making

connections or joining the dots. Most crucially, critical thinking is about seeing the big picture of how things operate institutionally in our lives.

Let us start with the institutional logic of language. Language is the universal property of all human communities. It is true that we speak different languages; but we all produce sounds that designated certain things in nature and certain experiences in life. All languages have small, indivisible units of sound called phonemes which exist as either vowels or consonants. These units combine to form words, and these words are joined together to form units of communication called sentences.

But how did this complex form of human communication come about? How did it evolve?

According to evolutionary biology, the story of language can be traced back to the invention of fire. With fire, our ancestors Homo sapiens were able to cook their food. Cooked food was easier to digest than raw food. The energy that would have been used to digest raw food was transferred to the brain. To contain the big brain, the head grew bigger. Our female ancestors could not wait for the baby to fully develop the head. The consequence was they gave birth to premature babies.

Premature babies required longer periods of parental care. Hence the invention of marriage and the family. The mother stayed at home looking after this premature baby, and the father went out to look for food for himself and the family. And with this, there developed the emotional bond that we call love.

In the meantime, with the bigger brain and a family, Homo sapiens developed a conscience, a capacity to discriminate between good and evil. Both father and mother realized that it was important to take care of the children. The parents saw themselves in their children. They felt it was wrong to have sex with their offspring; hence the evolution of incest taboos.

Evolutionary biology tells us that Homo sapiens then invented language in order to gossip and tell stories. But what were these ancestors gossiping about? They were telling stories about those who deviated from their moral norms. They told stories about those who committed incest, those who committed adultery, and even those who committed murder and other kinds of crime.

Let’s go back to our argument about the institutional logic of language. Homo sapiens invented distinctive sounds: vowels, consonants, and syllables, which then combine to form words. Words, as we have pointed out, denoted certain things in the physical and non-physical world.

Each word meant something; it had a semantic content. And a particular band of Homo sapiens knew and understand the meanings of these words.

But our ancestors wanted to communicate with each other. So, they invented the sentences as a group of words that made sense. The idea was not just to communicate, but to do so effectively. So, again all the bands of Homo sapiens without exception created a grammar. There was a correct way and an incorrect way of saying something. In other words, our ancestors prescribed the way language was to be spoken. Those who frown on prescriptive grammar are in effect rejecting the institutional logic of language.

The rules of grammar were known and applied by those who spoke the language. But let's face it: those who spoke well and who consciously and deliberately sought to acquire a mastery of the language were a minority. Questions of grammatical correctness and effective use of language were never going to be amenable to the democratic principle. You could not argue, as many lexicographers do these days, that if 60% of native speakers say *"irregardless,"* or *"the amount of people,"* or if a BBC news anchor says *"plenty of activists,"* or if many professors at the University of Nairobi talk of awarding *"less marks,"* then these usages must be right and grammatically acceptable. My late uncle Hezekiah Agesa was the only one in my entire extended family who cared about the nitty gritty of the grammar of Kimaragoli. And he was right; the rest of us were wrong.

Let's now turn to the logic of storytelling, and indeed the institution of literature as a whole. As I write this essay, I am looking at Richard Dorson's book called *Folktales Told Around the World.* With the help of expert assistants, Dorson has compiled stories told in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North and South America. All of them have a beginning, a middle, and an ending. All of them start with a stable equilibrium and immediately move to an unstable equilibrium of the type: Once upon a time, the hawk and the hen were friends... and then something happened to wreck their friendship. The thing that happens is called the inciting action, the action that triggers the conflict in the story.

*"All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion,"* so says Leo Tolstoy in the opening sentence of his famous novel *Anna Karenina*. The great writer is telling us that if you meet a happy family, say *hi* to them, wish them continued happiness, and then tell them goodbye. Don't waste your thoughts on them. But if you come across an unhappy family, reflect on their unhappiness, inquire into the causes of that unhappiness, meditate on

the uniqueness and universality of their experience, and tell their story. This is what the Russian writer does in *Anna Karenina.*

It is important to remind ourselves that in this novel Tolstoy is dealing with something our ancestors gossiped and told stories about – the subject of adultery. He first treats us to the adultery committed by Oblonsky and the turmoil this unleashes in his household. Then later he shows us the adultery committed by Oblonsky's sister Anna Karenina, whose consequences are more devastating and more tragic.

The opening line, therefore, points to a feature that is at the heart of literature – the feature of conflict. Indeed, literature universally would be unthinkable without conflict, and the tension that comes with it. Literary compositions are about problems, they are about the ironic gap between appearance and reality, between our expectations and our achievements. But they are also about how these conflicts, these contradictions are resolved. They are about how a stable equilibrium is restored.

Which takes us back to the folktales collected by Richard Dorson. In all these stories, without exception, good triumphs over evil. The ogre is vanquished, and the victims of his machinations win in the end. What this means is that our ancestors crafted stories that affirmed human values. Their compositions celebrated the good in the human spirit. Humanity has experienced many tragedies and catastrophes – slavery, genocide, wars, including world wars. But the reason we have survived (and now there are seven billion of us) is that good ultimately triumphed over evil; and this reality is encapsulated in our stories, in our literature.

## Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have tried to express my scepticism, indeed my anxiety, about two related tendencies in the study of language and literature; and I have called them descriptivism and relativism. These trends and assumptions have wreaked havoc on scholarship on the two areas. As we know, literary scholarship and the study of language are related in very profound ways. It is commonplace, for example, to state that literary works are conventionally regarded as models of good writing, models of good language use. Creative writing is tapping into the resources of language and expanding its possibilities.

Far too many people see literary scholarship as a matter of saying clever things about a book or a piece of writing, or describing what is happening on the printed page in some kind of academic vacuum. This is what I refer to as descriptivism, a practice that is propped up by philosophical relativism. And I want to say to these people that true scholarship entails

challenging existing knowledge and assumptions. It is conducting a conversation with your fellow scholars, and ultimately disagreeing with them. And as you disagree, you spell out your position on issues that matter to humanity. You explain why readers should care about what you are saying; you establish the universal value of your scholarship. By so doing, you contribute to knowledge in the global sense of the word. Herein lies the goal and essence of critical thinking and value creation in education.

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# CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKING AND WAYS TO ACHIEVE IT

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## Introduction

For the Athenian philosopher Socrates, critical thinking was linked to a precise pedagogical tool, an approach popularly called the Socratic Method or Dialectic(s). Today I would like to start by exploring what two exceptional Kenyan women, the writer Grace Ogot and the Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai, might have in common with this philosopher in ancient Greece. Then I will go on to discuss related topics such as dialogue, and critical and creative thinking in our hyper-connected world.

The Socratic method according to Wikipedia,

> … is a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to *stimulate critical thinking* … The principal aim of Socratic activity may be to improve the soul of the interlocutors by freeing them from unrecognized errors; or indeed, by teaching them the spirit of inquiry. (Socratic Method par.1,) [1]

I take this to mean Socrates wanted to nurture autonomous people with integrity who could think for themselves. I posit we can also find forms of dialectic in artistic expression, including literature.

Comparing the life and work of Kenyan women pioneers Grace Ogot and Wangari Maathai with the Socratic Method of Dialectics, I will attempt to highlight the importance of creative, out of the box, thinking achieved through challenging questions and dialogue; the need to avoid binary thinking; the advantages of using culture and art as change agents; and the interest of collaborating with international organs such as the United Nations through NGO and university channels (such as the UN Academic Impact program which supports the 17 SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals).

I will explore how certain literary and artistic sources helped me discover the universality of some human concerns and the importance of "intercultural dialogue," including recent inspirations drawn from Leonardo da Vinci at the time of the 500th anniversary of his death. In order to highlight all of the above, I will propose four approaches for developing creative and critical thinking as well as a list of initiatives which seek to use art forms in human-rights education and humanitarian settings. I've

included initiatives which are either the means of 'healing,' and/or Foundations, Associations, NGOs or other Civil Society organisations that build virtual bridges across borders, as well as between different communities within them.

Finally, I will propose that avoiding binary thinking will help us find a balanced appreciation of contributions from cultural and political figures – both past and present – while avoiding dangerous and abstract adoration, the erroneous concept of perfect role models. Concluding, my message of hope will be that African youth have an enormous mission to work with young people everywhere, toward a world of social justice and peace.

## The Kenyan Writer Grace Ogot

Let's start with the traditional tribal story Grace Ogot finally published with title, *The Rain Came*.[2] In the commentary I used I found Ogot's determination to publish began as a disappointment: at a 1962 African literature conference at Uganda's Makerere University, she found no East African works on display. Ogot subsequently transformed that into a long career of writing. I find the style of this short story particularly interesting, because my Association is always looking for intercultural dialogue through art forms, which I feel this work is. First of all, Ogot is recounting the story in English and not Swahili or another African language, and also, through the prism of her cultural influences, which included Western ones.

In this work Ogot masterfully connects these elements (Occidental and Kenyan Luo cultures) through the tale of a young woman about to be sacrificed by her tribal-chief father, under difficult climatic conditions for the tribe, and according to millennia-old traditions.

I feel Ogot purposefully avoids *pure logic* or Western-style reason, even though she seems equally desirous of having the reader reflect on human rights issues. First of all, I sense she wants the reader to understand the *emotions* of the characters involved and to experience empathy.

This is not an easy task and Ogot puts the reader in an uncomfortable position. We have immediate empathy for the young heroine Oganda, feeling intense concern for her up to the moment she is delivered by the young man she loves. At the same time, Ogot gives us the bigger picture so we understand the context, i.e., the agonizing emotions of a grieving father, conflicting with his responsibility to protect his people. It is as if Ogot is asking us to not just judge him, but to also understand the father's situation from his standpoint, while simultaneously inviting us to reflect on Oganda's situation as being unjust.

An impressive *tour de force*! I imagine this is the kind of intercultural dialogue we need for developing critical thinking in literary and other contexts of our globalized and multicultural society. In any case, I think Ogot shows us a way to approach the challenge of critical thinking through short-story writing, while being a creative "bridge" between vastly differing world-views.

## Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Laureate

Now without changing the country let's change the context: Another Kenyan who attended Nairobi University is the great Wangari Maathai. Maathai demonstrated that successful movements for change must be created by a multitude of interconnections. This pioneer also demonstrated the courage to ask difficult questions, while analysing a situation with international implications in her region, where ancient forests were being cut to make way for agriculture, producing devastating effects on erosion and worsening economic conditions.

Maathai recounts these pressures in her book *The Challenge for Africa*,

> …the world's interactions with Africa are not necessarily motivated by altruism, but by the self-interest of states seeking to maximize their opportunities and minimize their costs, often at the expense of those who are not in a position to do either." [3]

Here is another quote from her Nobel prize acceptance speech,

> Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come. (Maathai 2004)[4]

Other independent-minded, critical-thinking women come to mind, such as the US writer Toni Morrison who has just left us. This literary giant dared to speak out on race relations with extraordinary clarity, while never failing to encourage others. There was also the remarkable Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the significant people behind the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* signed in Paris 1948, a document many thought would never exist.

Like these other great women, Wangari Maathai never gave into pressure from people who tried to crush her vision. She knew her efforts were founded on scientific evidence on the horrific effects of deforestation. Personally, I also believe her slogan of 'Harambee', Swahili for "let's all pull together," could be interpreted as a sort of Soft Power, and should become a major inspiration for some Western cultures which are profoundly individualistic, and which therefore have difficulty building solidarity.

## The Danger of Binary Thinking

What are some enemies of critical thinking? I would say the biggest danger is Binary thinking, an approach to life seeing ideas and people in polarities: Right vs. Wrong, Us vs. Them, or Black vs. White without the myriad nuanced shades of grey in-between. On the contrary, true critical thinking is open to truth and learning. It is flexible, and therefore, critical thinking is courageous and decidedly not the easier route.

As we have seen, Maathai, Ogot and Socrates were not dogmatics, because they saw themselves as living inside a community of human beings more than inside some sort of abstract "truth." On the other hand, binary thinking creates animosity and violence. An example from contemporary history is the infamous quote by former US President G.W. Bush; *"you're either with us, or against us,"* when he launched his anti-terrorism campaign after the September 11th 2001 attacks and his subsequent invasion into Iraq. To drive in his point, Bush added at the time, *"…Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."*[5] (with us…Wiki 2001)

Around 2007, after it was proven the so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) used to justify his intervention was a lie created by the CIA, Bush publicly admitted going into Iraq was an error. But the irreparable damage had already been done to this land of ancient civilizations, which continues to be steeped in violence and insecurity, as does Afghanistan. Most tragical is the loss of so many lives, and most of them civilians…Wikipedia explains regarding these infamous phrases I've just cited: "The implied consequence of not joining the team effort is to be deemed an enemy."[5] (with us…Wiki 2001)

In my opinion, such binary thinking style statements of the former US President Bush put Muslims around the planet on the defensive, as well as many others who did not agree with the American interventionist approach. I believe all this ended up feeding the ranks of Islamist extremists; providing on a platter, as it were, some incredible promotional tools for manipulative extremist recruiters.

Other tragic examples abound, and often media play a part in manipulating communities against each other by insulting and demonizing each other, which is further exacerbated in times of unemployment or when resources are scarce. We can see this in Beatrice Uwambaje's book about the Rwandan civil war, *La silence des collines*,[6] and also in writings by Turkish cultural anthropologist at Harvard, Prof. Nur Yalman when he speaks of the carnage in former Yugoslavia.[7]

A final book I found helpful in this context of identities and simplistic definitions, is *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* by Amin Maalouf.[8] A few years before the

September 11th Twin Towers attacks, Maalouf writes he stopped smiling when people asked him if he felt more French, or more Lebanese. He had finally realized that this **either/or** question was dangerous because it creates division, is based on false logic, and too many people thought in this fashion. Consequently, the author, who is a linguist, historian, and now member of the *Academie Française*, spends much of the book giving examples in different historical and cultural contexts of how people have multiple belongings, and that cutting off parts of ourselves doesn't make us more of something else.

Over-simplified, polarized thinking leads to extremism in all areas, including religion, ideology and politics. By its nature it's violent as it puts ideologies above human beings in importance. Under certain conditions as we've seen, this collective tendency translates into sacrificing human beings and all life, just for the sake of ideas. And often, profit is behind the manipulation of populations when the community is not aware of the deception, not having learned the skills for critical thinking.

In our globalized world with internet and social media, and huge populations displaced because of war, poverty and environmental crises -- different cultures and religions increasingly meet. It is imperative we find viable solutions against extremisms and binary thinking, especially since anyone can create confusion by being at the origin of what's called Fake News; not to mention the danger of purposeful manipulation by governments, secret services, and other entities wishing to destabilize communities. However, with determined critical thinking and life-long education systems that support this, we can help people realize the urgent need to be attentive against manipulation.

## Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Life-long Learning

Now I would like to digress and discuss life-long learning because it is one of the pillars of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's education philosophy for value creation. I refer here to a book published in France this year titled *L'ecole sans murs – Une école de la reliance*.[9] My tentative translation of the title is *A School Without Walls (Is) a School that Connects*. It is a compilation of several academic essays, and Rikio Kimata from Soka University in Japan focuses precisely on this aspect of Makiguchi's thoughts on life-long learning.[10]

After attacking the ever-present rote-learning approach, and an over-focus on absorbing knowledge without immediate application, and in order to explain the concept of half-day schooling and half-day working in the community, Kimata describes that what was motivating Makiguchi was a seriously worsening social situation in the 1920s.

At that epoch, Japanese youth had difficulty integrating school and finding work. Makiguchi insisted that the school system responded in no way to the needs of the population. Therefore, the most logical solution was having learning opportunities throughout one's lifetime, together with the possibility of learning early on, what constitutes life (and work) outside the school for half of each school day.

In the introduction, Véronique Boy, University of Paris 8, evokes the importance of learning skills for self-teaching, for a future which will see change at an ever-rapid pace and for which we have difficulty even imaging.[11] This brings to mind the TED.com conferences of Sir Ken Robinson called *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* and *Changing Education Paradigms*[12] where Robinson makes this point powerfully. I believe Boy's comments also make a strong argument for universally accessible MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)-style lessons for all, most of which are free. Or the INTELLECTUS Education for all, pre-university levels.[13]

Finally, I must mention the essay by Nicole Blondeau in this book, also from University of Paris 8, who titles her paper *Literature as Access to the World*. I will share my translation of how she begins,

> Literature can be a window on the world, in other words, a means of diversified social, cultural, historic, ecological and environmental knowledge of others and of their patrimonial anchors… All literary persons are convinced of this.' (Blondeau, p.53)[14]

## The Socratic Dialogue

Now, going back to the Socratic Dialogue, I would like to discuss another aspect of this. Let us put ourselves in Socrates' linguistic context. The etymological roots of *dialogue* come from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*, with *Dia* signifying 'through', and *Logos* translating as 'word' or 'meaning'. I interpret this, therefore, as the process whereby the meaning of something is communicated *"through words or language."* Stated another way, language is a tool born from intangibles such as ideas, concepts, or feelings. Socrates understood words as being symbols. In addition, he knew the process of learning critical thinking could not happen in a vacuum. To aid his students go deeply into their thought processes, he believed they needed guided or rhetorical questions and engaging discussions in a cooperative atmosphere. His were not just debates for the sake of debates, or for just "winning" an argument or "being right." The absolute focus was on the authentic development of the student. And the understanding would occur in stages, and finally come from inside the students themselves.

Plato, Socrates' disciple, used a written form of dialogue in his famous *Republic*.[15] It is an example of showing how to bring readers gradually to seeing things from the writer's perspective. The dialectical method also had the objective of helping Socrates' students in a metaphorical sense, "give birth to their own soul" through profound and intense exchanges and subsequent introspection. "Giving birth" is a significant metaphor as it implies it's difficult and painful, but the result is profoundly gratifying. Why is authentic Socratic dialogue painful? Perhaps it is related to the difficulty of abandoning our *à priori*, those stubborn, preconceived ideas. And precisely because of this, Socrates realized changes in perception must be gradual, and they must come from *inside* the individual and never imposed.

I believe value-creating education for a peaceful and just world, leading to autonomous and critical thinking is, in fact, fundamentally based on authentic exchange: whether through face-to-face encounters with others, through contact with literature or poetry, or music or other art forms which vehicule humanistic values and respect for life. The objective must be to have sincere and authentic dialogues with others and with ourselves.

In Paris years ago I discovered activities of the UEJF *Union des etudiants juifs de France,*[19] initiated by Jewish students who invited students of all religions to join them for dialogues. The objective was to "find one's own hidden prejudices." I was so impressed, and sure that Socrates would have looked on in great interest!

Those who are masters of dialogue do not think, and therefore do not communicate in a binary fashion. One example comes from 16th century France: the great writer and former mayor of Bordeaux, Michel de Montaigne, was respected for this capacity. He detested all absolutes and extremisms of that period of Protestant and Catholic barbary, and always looked for ways to bridge differences by dialogue. As such he was sought after by French kings such as his friend from his youth, Henry IV.

Montaigne was a listener who kept confidences, respected his Protestant and Catholic interlocuters, and was therefore, a master of bridging divides. One proof is that incredibly, his small château was never attacked throughout this period. His integrity seems to have been highly appreciated.[16]

Montaigne also fought for justice with his plume. In the late 16th century he was already criticizing inhumane French colonialism in Brazil, saying it tragically divided generations by forcing a foreign culture and language on local populations.

In modern history, Nelson Mandela used sports as a channel for intercultural dialogue, as we see movingly in the film *Invictus*. Mandela's efforts to harmonize impossibly deep divisions between white and black South Africans is historic. Through education we must work hard so that many more 'Mandelas' may appear who understand his heart and continue his legacy.

Of course, an inspiration for Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi was also a known master of dialogue using all his wisdom to heal conflict between religions. He did this not only with moving speeches, but in one-on-one dialogues with suffering, ordinary people. At the same time, his dignity and force of character in front of authoritarian colonial British authorities is legendary. In the 1982 epic film *Gandhi*, the scene when he stands before a British judge is unforgettable. When the judge asks why Gandhi is not afraid, reminding him that he could crush him with one word, Gandhi responds firmly and without fear, *"But you are not in your house"*!

## Majid Tehranian's Ten « Rules of Dialogue »

Above I have mentioned different kinds of dialogue in different epochs. Now from a modern standpoint, a published list of ten « Rules of Dialogue » by Majid Tehranian from *Global Civilization – a Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue,*[17] could be an inspiration for conflict resolution contexts, inter-religious exchanges, but also, for any organization improving teamwork. As Tehranian says,

> … the Toda Institute has chosen "*Dialogue of Civilizations for World Citizenship*" for its motto. As we groped for the most effective way to conduct dialogue, we have developed a set of rules. They are suggestive more than exhaustive ...:
>
> 1. *Honour others and listen to them deeply with your heart and mind.*
> 2. *Seek common ground for consensus, but avoid 'group-think' by acknowledging and honouring the diversity of views.*
> 3. *Refrain from irrelevant or intemperate intervention.*
> 4. *Acknowledge others' contributions to the discussion before making your own.*
> 5. *Remember that silence also speaks, speak only when you have a contribution to make by posing a relevant question, presenting a fact, making or clarifying a point, or advancing the discussion to more specificity or greater consensus.*

6. *Identify the critical points of difference for further discussion.*
7. *Never distort other views in order to advance your own; try to restate the others' positions to their satisfaction before presenting your own different views.*
8. *Formulate agreement on each agenda item before moving on to the next.*
9. *Draw out the implications of an agreement for group policy and action.*
10. *Thank your colleagues for their contribution (Tehranian, p.10)* [17]

## Prof. David Norton, University of Delaware, USA

For the Socratic Method there exist different explanations of the Dialectics approach among experts. I prefer that of the late philosopher Prof. David Norton at the University of Delaware. You will probably not find this in Wikipedia, so I will share part of a *Japan Times* newspaper article entitled *Education Reformers Address Values,* from an interview with Prof. Norton in Japan,

> Norton's theme was constant: The decline of moral integrity in the West, particularly the USA, is largely the result of 17th century philosophers who diluted the original Greek approach to ethics, moral development and personal responsibility. This, he said, has led to the present corruption in the worlds of finance, business and government, the crises in business and industrial competitiveness, and most fundamentally, the crisis in education… *Self-actualization* is Norton's translation of eudaemonism, which comes from a Greek pagan word *daemon* that refers to the idea everyone possesses their own innate, unique potential excellence. And that excellence is actualized through the process of discovering oneself and one's inherently *right work*, used in the broadest sense to mean self-development in society. (Author, 1990)[18]

As Norton pointed out, the problem existing in many modern societies is that we are limited by our education (instead of being empowered by it), or by our personal experiences. Of course, we are also impacted by political and social climates. What is worrisome is that thinking patterns can also result from inheriting conceptualizations, and traumas, from not only parents, but also our grandparents and even further back!

In this context I would like to evoke a book by Franco-Algerian psychoanalyst Karima Lazali titled *La Trauma Colonial*.[19] Lazali brilliantly demonstrates – using Algerian and Franco-Algerian literary/historical sources – how difficult it is to break generations of ingrained, negative experiences, such as a violent colonial one.

## Leonardo da Vinci

So now, what about out of the box, creative thinking? I think we will agree this is parallel to critical thinking, and that it deserves a moment of reflection. We cannot speak of creativity without speaking about the universal genius Leonardo da Vinci! In France and Italy this year he is ever-present, because May 2nd 2019 marked exactly 500 years since he died in the French town of Amboise, where he had lived three years as guest of King Francis I.

Leonardo was engaged in practically every field imaginable. He painted the *Mona Lisa* and the huge fresco of *The Last Supper*, inventing all manner of new painting techniques. But did you know Leonardo also invented and played musical instruments, even composing and organizing entire musical theatre performances. Leonardo invented machines of all kinds, brought medical and natural science centuries into the future, and wrote on philosophy and every subject imaginable in his *Atlantico* journal. The world for him was not fragmented into separate fields of study, and he saw no limits between them, even using his medical studies to improve his painting.

An interesting fact is Leonardo was almost entirely self-taught. What is more, he was born into disgrace in conservative 15th century Italy, being the illegitimate child of a rich Italian notary landlord and a young servant. In other words, Leonardo rose from disgrace to ultimate success by staying true to himself, working without stop, and following his passions to understand life and improve. According to the university address of SGI president and founder of Soka University Dr. Daisaku Ikeda in Boulogne, Italy in 1994, Leonardo's universality is something we desperately need in the 21st century. I also believe that through value creating education, it is time to raise thousands of young Leonardo's! I would also posit here that if we are to solve our complex, completely interconnected global problems, humanity needs to re-find Leonardo's interdisciplinary approach to the world.

## Contemporary Role Models and Movements

Fortunately, we do not always need to go far back in time, because inspiring modern role models also exist. One such person is UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue, the American jazzman Herbie Hancock, who was awarded the Harvard University Norton Chair Prize in 2014 for creativity. In the fifth of his seven Harvard lectures, Hancock expressed his humanistic approach to music, life and creativity, where he spoke of creating value at each moment and staying aware of our mutual inter-relatedness.[20]

In addition, when Hancock was named the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in 2012, he created a movement with this institution called *International Jazz Day*, celebrated now in 195 countries every April 30th. The year 2020 will mark the first time the Jazz Day all-star concert - and related events including workshops - will be celebrated on the African continent, in South Africa. This must be profoundly significant for the IJD (JazzDay) project staff, because this event is not only a music festival but an event promoting human dignity and intercultural dialogue.

To give other examples, I would like to list various individuals who have used creative and artistic expression (including literature) in their techniques, often for humanitarian or human-rights causes. This is a non-exhaustive short list from three years of networking through my Association.

**Christiane en Barek's** book *Cité Rouge* was a 2005 project with mostly disadvantaged youth, in a housing project outside Paris which had been set to be razed by the government.[21] Ben Barek wanted to give a voice to the residents and at the same time, empower them through teaching the art of writing, together with her journalist colleague from Radio France, Anne Coudin.

**KINDNESS MATTERS** *Youth Initiative*, is a movement of UNESCO with the Gandhi Institute, launched in August 2019.

**EL SISTEMA** - founded in the 70s in Venezuela and now in many countries, this music education program with social objectives uses peer learning as a starting-off point, and ends up positively impacting other school subjects such as History, Art and Culture, Geography, and by its very nature, community-building. My friend Tricia Tunstall in New Jersey, USA who works with EL SISTEMA Global, has also published books on the movement, such as *Changing Lives* and *Playing for Their Lives*.[22]

**MUS-E Yehudi – International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation** was created in 1991 as a non-profit association by Yehudi Menuhin, one of the greatest violinists and humanists of the 20th century. Its mission is to remind political, cultural and educational institutions of the central place of art and creativity in any process of personal and societal development. His vision was to bring to life long-term projects, designed to give a voice to the voiceless through artistic expression in all its forms. As the parent company, the International Foundation coordinates a network of associations that are the national operators of programmes such as MUS-E® network.[23]

**iMOVE Foundation – Moving Matters** founded by Nikita Shahbazi, is a non-profit organization which uses dance, creative movement and yoga sessions for refugees, and disadvantaged women and children in Syria's neighbouring countries as well as in the Netherlands. Dancing and creative movement help heal conflict-affected women and children, enhance their resilience and emotional well-being, facilitate connections within their host societies and expand their cultural horizons.[24]

**Syria Music Lives**, and **Global Week for Syria** was founded by Hannibal SAAD who is also very active *International Jazz Day* UNESCO event.[25] Global Week for Syria is an annual live and online event, aimed at raising awareness, creating platforms and stimulating artistic co-creations between Syrian, Arab, and local/international musicians in their host communities. The event includes over 340 Syrian and international musicians in over 50 locations, with a music festival, conferences, and workshops in Lebanon and the Netherlands.

**SOLIYA** appeared last September in a FORBES.COM article. It is an organization committed to helping individuals recognize the value of diversity and pluralism by exposing students to immersive experiences, forcing students to have 'tough' conversations. Soliya has worked with students from over one hundred universities in 30 countries across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Europe, and North America.[26]

**LOBA** was founded by Bolewa Sabourin in the Congo (in the northeast part of the Democratic Republic of Congo) and in France. It uses dance and singing which leads to the healing of women who were brutally raped and mutilated in a war context. The objective is to use these arts to help victims re-appropriate their bodies, in order to let them eventually speak about and overcome trauma in a supportive environment.[27]

**YOUTH FOR HUMAN RIGHTS** based in Santa Monica, CA, USA raises awareness among youth on all human rights issues around the world.[28]

**COEXISTER**, based in Paris, proposes many inter-religious activities, dialogues and voyages, by youth and for youth.[29]

**TARAGALT Music Festival**, (which partners with **PLAYING FOR CHANGE**), as well as its school for disadvantaged children from many cultures, is in southern Morocco. It is intercultural, humanistic and artistic.[30]

**CHIME for CHANGE** is run by Managing Editor Marianne Pearl, widow of Daniel Pearl, who was the *Wall Street Journal* journalist assassinated in Afghanistan in 2001. Marianne

encourages story-telling for empowerment of women in refugee camps and other such environments. Marianne recounts: … I went to Iraq to deliver a storytelling workshop for young refugees, mostly Yazidi, who fled ISIS in Iraq. We met in Kurdistan, at first shocked and silent, the girls opened up like blossoming flowers over the days.[31] In addition, Mme Pearl recently said she has done this activity twice more since Iraq, in both France and in Mexico. She added that her '*Women Bylines'* has produced 14 films already.

## Activities Promoting Critical and Creative Thinking

Now, what are some activities we can pursue that will promote critical and creative thinking? I propose some approaches here, particularly for the youth.

1. Get engaged in an existing structure like those listed above, or make your own! Also, do not hesitate to think on a large-scale for the common good, even internationally. One example is the UN initiative called UNAI, *United Nations Academic Impact*, which is an integral part of the17 SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals* movement.

2. Take MOOCs classes online. These *Massive Open Online Courses* are offered more and more, including on platforms through such universities as Harvard and Columbia. Thanks to such learning opportunities which are often free, as long as we have internet connections *we can learn throughout our lifetimes.*

3. Watch TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talk conferences, debate and discuss with others, or write papers pro and con. The subjects in TED talks, such as that of Sir Ken Robinson on "Changing Education Paradigms," lend themselves nicely to practicing Critiques.

4. Seek the Universal.

I would like to take a moment to explain my last proposal fully. The following is a quote (my translation) of an extract from *La Maladie d'Islam* written by the late Franco-Tunisian intellectual Abdelwahab Meddeb who had a well-known program on *FranceInter* radio, in response to the NY Sept 11th Twin Towers attack,

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> … (We need to have) an integration of Islamic heritage at the source of thought and creation (as much as we use the sources of Greek, Latin, Hebraic, Japanese, Chinese and Indian). It would be a supplementary gage for constituting the common stage, *which should be that of a world culture*, where the products would be works of the spirit, *situated above and beyond*

> *the traditions, without interrupting the dialogues between them*… Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was already persuaded at his epoch that a universal literature (*Weltliterateur*) was in the process of being born, and further, that it was necessary to hasten its arrival. (Meddeb, 205)

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Along these lines, Meddeb reflected on the relationship between the particular and the universal and quotes Goethe's words,

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> … It is in each particularity where the universal shines… It is necessary to learn to know the particularities of each language and each nation, because it is by these that the exchange operates and is realized in all its magnitude. In this way, we will arrive at a conciliation and at a reciprocal appreciation…" (Meddeb, 205)[32]

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Along similar lines, which I find inspiring, in his 1989 *Creative Life* speech at the *College de France, Academie of Fine Arts,* SGI (Soka Gakkai International) President Dr Daisaku Ikeda said the following:

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> "In an early scene of *Faust*, Goethe (1749-1832) has Faust rapturously declare, *'into the whole how all things blend, each in the other working, living.'* If we accept this marvellous statement of the interconnection of all living things, then art becomes the elemental modality through which humans discover their bonds with humans, humanity with nature, and humanity with the universe." (A New Humanism, pg.4)[33]

As I near my conclusion, I would like to share part of a published dialogue between the SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock titled *Reaching Beyond*. In chapter 9 *Africa on the Rise*, Dr Ikeda says,

> Africa is the spiritual home of jazz and the cradle of humanity. I have long declared that the 21st century will be the Century of Africa and have promoted increased exchange with Africa; The 21st century cannot be prosperous unless humanity's place of origin prospers...The African continent has seen greater suffering and hardship than any other… those who suffer the greatest deserve to enjoy the greatest happiness. [34]

Not long after the 2015 terrorist attacks in the Paris concert hall *BATACLAN*, Herbie Hancock and fellow musician Wayne Shorter penned *Open Letter to the Next Generation of Artists*. Their ten points exude a will to encourage young artists to stay confident and fiercely independent in their thinking. I will share part of their concluding point, *We Hope that You Live in a State of Constant Wonder*,

> As we accumulate years, parts of our imagination tend to dull. Whether from sadness, prolonged struggle, or social conditioning, somewhere along the way people forget how to tap into the inherent magic that exists within our minds. Do not let that part of your imagination fade away. Look up at the stars and imagine what it would be like to be an astronaut… All that exists is a product of someone's imagination; treasure and nurture yours and You will always find yourself on the precipice of discovery … Be the leaders in the movie of your life. You are the director, producer, and actor. Be bold and tirelessly compassionate as you dance through the voyage that is this lifetime. (Open Letter, 2016) [35]

Finally, I would like to leave you with a couple of words on our common humanity, which I believe support the concept of World Citizenship, and could perhaps even provide a basis of sorts for human rights and Humanism. I believe the youth of Africa have a unique mission to lead the rest of the planet to peace, together with their fellow youth everywhere. I sincerely hope this extract from a poem written by the SGI President Ikeda just after the 1990 Los Angeles, California race riots of 1991, will provide some inspiration:

*...As each group seeks its separate*
*roots and origins,*
*society fractures along a*
*thousand fissure lines.*
*When neighbours distance*
*themselves*
*from neighbours, continue your*
*uncompromising quest*
*for your truer roots*
*in the deepest regions of*
*your life.*
*Seek out the primordial "roots"*
*of humankind.*[36]

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# THE CONTRIBUTION OF GRACE OGOT'S WORKS TO CRITICAL THINKING AND VALUE-CREATING EDUCATION

**Athanas Mutisya Peter**

*Persons merely exceling in such areas as book learning and technology are nothing more than components of a colossal mechanism of the state and society. Truly desirable people of ability are creative people who untiringly pursue lofty ideals, who have rich individuality and who can make free and effective use of their own knowledge and skills*

Daisaku Ikeda

## Introduction

In this paper, I will examine the contribution of Grace Ogot to critical thinking and value-creating education. By its very nature, literature gives readers insights into history and different cultures on our planet; it expands an individual's horizons, thus playing a role in making people better human beings. It induces tolerance among human beings and has the capacity to influence humans to make a stronger connection with fellow human beings. Literature is thus a pedagogical tool; teaching valuable lessons to the reader/audiences. I will examine some of Grace Ogot's works to demonstrate how she teaches valuable life lessons. Ogot's background as a Kenyan woman of Luo extraction affected and shaped her philosophy as a writer. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Homecoming* points out that a writer does not live in isolation and as a result all artistic outputs reflect the philosophy, challenges, conflicts, hopes, dreams and ambitions of the artist's community and environment. Ngugi observes,

> A writer responds with total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being kind of a sensitive middle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society. For the writer himself lives and is shaped by history. (47)

Like many African societies, the Luo community in Kenya was founded on a patriarchal philosophy; its social structures were gendered; roles were divided along gender lines. Ogot's works largely deal with issues of gender relations and social justice. Thus Ogot's works can be said to be a subversive or oppositional practice that deconstructs the patriarchal discourse which stereotypes and misrepresents female sexuality and existence. She defined herself as a

social activist who was opposed to any form of discrimination and exclusion. Her works thus seek to celebrate universal social and moral values that uplift humanity as a whole and seek to make the human society a better ecosystem for all. Her writings celebrate social values such as honesty, unity, inclusivity, justice and fairness, hard work, obedience, love, tolerance, hospitality and self-control. In this paper, I will interrogate five of her works: The Anthology of short stories *Land without Thunder (*1968) and four novels, namely: *The Strange Bride* (1982), *Days of My Life* (2012) *Simbi Nyaima* (The Lake That Sank) (1982)

## Definition of Terms

I will use the following key words as explained here.

**Critical thinking**: The Meriam-Webster dictionary describes critical thinking as the mental process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion. It can also be said to be the process of analysing information in an objective way, in order to make a judgment of it.

**Values**: The Oxford dictionary defines values as the principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life. This definition points to some key characteristics of values such as, involving a conscious decision and having an element of sacrifice or a willingness to sacrifice.

**Value-creation**: Daisaku Ikeda defines value creation as the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one's own existence and contribute to the wellbeing of others under any circumstances.

**Patriarchy**: The Feminist Builders' Dictionary defines it as systemic and institutionalized male domination embedded in and perpetuated by cultural, political, economic and social structures and ideologies.

**Equality**: The Feminist Builders' Dictionary defines it as, measurable, equal political representation, status, rights and opportunities. It is about treating both men and women with equal value and according the m rights as equal members of the society.

## A Brief Biography of Grace Ogot

Grace Ogot was a Kenyan author, nurse, journalist, politician and diplomat. Together with Charity Waciuma, she was the first Anglophone female Kenyan writer to be published. Ogot was one of the first independent Kenyan Members of Parliament and was appointed Assistant Minister for Culture and Social Services following her victory in the 1985 by-elections for Gem constituency. She was born Grace Emily Akinyi in Butere, Western Kenya on 15th May 1930, and died on 18th March 2015. Ogot was married to the renowned historian, Alan Bethwel

Ogot. Her books include *The Promised Land* (1966), the anthology *Land Without Thunder* (1968), *The Other Woman* (1976), *The Graduate* (1980), *Miaha* (1982) translated as *The Strange Bride, The Island of Tears* (1980), *Simbi Nyaima* (1982) translated as *The Lake That Sank, Ber Wat* (1984) translated as *The Goodness of a Relative*, *Aloo Kod Apul* (1984) translated as *Aloo and the Ogre* and her autobiography *Days of My Life* (2012). Her last works, published posthumously by her husband, were: *Princess Nyilaak* (2018), *The Royal Bead A Call at Midnight* ( 2019). Grace Ogot was a founding member of the Writers' Association of Kenya.

## Moral Lessons and Values in *Land without Thunder, The Strange Bride, Days of My Life* and *Simbi Nyaima*

In this section, I focus on the moral values and lessons inherent in the selected works. To start off, I will interrogate the anthology *Land without Thunder* where I will focus specifically on three stories: *Tekayo, The Bamboo Hut* and *The Empty Basket*. Thereafter, I will examine the novels *The Strange Bride, Days of my Life and Simbi Nyaima (The Lake that Sank.)*

### The Short Story *Tekayo*

In her short story titled *Tekayo*, Ogot highlights the destructive nature of greed; a form of moral corruption; that untamed bodily desires can wreak havoc not just on the individual, but also on the society the individual lives in. The story revolves around an old man called Tekayo who tastes a piece of liver from an unknown animal that he steals from an eagle. From then on Tekayo becomes obsessed with finding which animal has such tasty liver. What follows is a trail of destruction, death, loss and family trauma. In his pursuit of the delicious liver, Tekayo abandons 'living' and everything around him comes to a standstill. He endangers his life during his crazed hunting expeditions; leaves human habitation and ventures into a dangerous jungle where he meets a leopardess. Ogot describes this incident thus, "But the spear never landed. He came face to face with a big leopardess that was chasing the impala. The leopardess roared at Tekayo several times challenging him, as it were, to a duel" (33). He becomes obsessed and mad and as such, he leaves a trail of death and destruction in his path. Ogot describes in great details Tekayo's first contact with the piece of liver when he 'steals' it from an eagle,

> Tekayo ate the meat greedily and longed for a little more…beyond the rivers stood the great 'Ghost jungle'. A strong desire for the rich meat came back

> to Tekayo and he whispered, 'the Animal with that delicious meat must surely be in that jungle" (31).

Greed makes Tekayo risk his life; pushing him to the dangerous jungle to look for the said animal with the delicious liver; he becomes blind and progressively turns out to be corrosive and poisonous to his own family. The lack of self-control leads Tekayo to abandon his constructive engagement as a herder and protector of the family wealth and become a rabid predator with an uncontrolled appetite. Ogot narrates of the now unstable Tekayo,

> Tekayo made it impossible for the cows to graze. He rushed them along, lashing at any cow that lingered in one spot for long. They reached the edge of the 'Ghost Jungle' and there he left the cows unattended (32).

The mental destabilization visited upon Tekayo by allowing greed to rule over his life causes the deaths of his grandchildren and later his own death. His family loses a father and their small children. Tekayo's family is also forced to live with the stigma caused by their father's greed. Cannibalism is a repugnant thing among the human society and by intertwining Tekayo's greed with cannibalism, Ogot makes him equally repugnant. Having killed his first grandchild to feed his crazed appetite, the writer gives a disturbing description of death and loss,

> The limp body of the child slipped from Tekayo's hands and fell to the ground with a thud. He looked at his feet and felt sick and faint. His ears were buzzing. He picked up the body and he staggered out with it; the air screamed ominously at him. But Tekayo had to eat his meal. He buried the body of Api in a nearby anthill in a shallow grave. The other children were still playing in the field when Tekayo returned with the liver in his bag. He roasted it in his hut hastily and ate it greedily. (37)

Ogot uses Tekayo's appetite as a metaphor for greed and moral corruption. To Ogot, the absence of self-control precedes tragedy in a human being. Tekayo is also a symbol of corrupt leadership; he abuses the trust bestowed on him by his family when he kills his grandchildren. To Ogot, such corrupt leaders pose an existential threat to the society because corruption destroys the society's future. The children symbolize the society: in selfless and caring hands, children grow to become happy and dependable members of the society but if left under the care of selfish, corrupt and greedy adults, children grow up as traumatized and socially maladjusted individuals with destructive and self-destructive tendencies. Ogot further precipitates the moral lesson that the inability to control primordial human desires in

individuals is a threat to the welfare of the entire human race and to drive this lesson home, Ogot weaves the story in such a way that in the end, Tekayo dies but his problems do not end there, he is ostracized forever, "Such a man, they knew, would have to be buried outside the village. They knew, too, that no new born child would ever be named after him" (42). Tekayo's existence is thus wiped off completely from the collective communal memory because of his antisocial inclinations such as greed and lack of self-restraint.

Ogot makes the delivery of these moral lessons effective by propping up a lead character that starts off well by being a hardworking responsible father and a loving grandfather. However, along the way, Tekayo, gets morally bankrupt and corrupt by allowing his atavistic inclinations of greed, selfishness and uncontrolled bodily desires like appetite to rule supreme over his life; these catalyse his tragic death. Cannibalism makes Tekayo to automatically lose his social identity as a human being and a member of his community. His adoption of social vices dehumanizes him, transforming him into a vile, repulsive and repugnant creature; a candidate for extermination. Ogot uses her license as a writer to 'kill' Tekayo through both excommunication from his family and community and suicide in order to teach about the nobility of love for others, moderation and self-restraint and to warn the reader about the danger of engaging in the said social vices.

## The Short Story *The Empty Basket*

In the story *The Empty Basket*, Ogot pursues social values such as the power of unity, the need for gender equality and the concept of self-sacrifice for the welfare of the fellow human beings. The story centres around a woman called Aloo, a mother and the wife of a policeman named Ojwang in a village called Kadibo. A huge snake enters her house while she is out tilling her farm and the story revolves around this snake, the danger it poses to her children, Aloo and the villagers and the efforts to exterminate the reptile as a way of re-establishing the family and social equilibrium. When Aloo arrives home to find her baby in danger, her maternal instincts kick in automatically. While everyone else is in self-preservation mode, she heads straight to the danger to rescue her baby in an act that epitomizes love and self-sacrifice. The running imagery of a child in Ogot's stories is meant to be a metaphor for the society and its future survival. Therefore, Ogot here is saying that the survival of a society rests on the shoulders of women hence the need to dismantle patriarchal social structures that subordinate women to men and celebrate masculinity as the ideal of human existence. The men are unable to rescue the baby yet their society associates virtues like courage and bravery with men and

stereotypes women as perpetual cowards. Ogot looks at patriarchy as a form of moral corruption and goes on to upset it in this story by propping up a lead character, Aloo, who defies all gender stereotypes. When we first see Aloo, she is working on the farm to ensure her family has food which is a basic need for human survival. The food metaphor is, therefore, used to inscribe women into the society as the pillars that hold it together for without food, death through starvation will be inevitable. When Aloo arrives at home, a man quickly confesses to her that although he wishes to save her baby from the house, he fears the snake because, "that snake is ready to strike even from the bedroom door" (73). It is not lost to the reader that a man is confessing his cowardice and selfishness to a woman here and Ogot uses this incidence to execute a gender coup.

Evidence that there are hierarchies in gender relations in the Kadibo society is witnessed when Aloo saves her baby and in a fit of rage, taunts the men present for their cowardice, "All of you are cowardly women" (74). She is throwing back at the males the chauvinistic words men in her society have always used on women. This shatters the male ego and the men are intending on silencing her for comparing them to women. Had men respected and viewed women as equals in the Kadibo society, then they would not have been angry at the comparison Aloo makes. Ogot narrates, "They might have swallowed the words from the mouth of a man, but the naked words from a woman were unbearable " (74). Aloo's brave act makes the men realize the importance of everyone in the society and the purpose of inclusivity as a social survival tactic. They overcome their bruised egos and move in to do their part in re-establishing the equilibrium in both Aloo's house and the Kadibo village that had been upset by the presence of an enemy - the huge snake.

The feelings of anger by the men towards Aloo following her taunts are replaced by inspiration from her brave act of self-sacrifice. Ogot narrates, "They even wanted to beat Aloo. Most of the men there were related to her. But then their mood changed. In place of anger, Aloo's brave act inspired a new spirit in them" (74). In the face of a united from between men and women, the enemy, the snake retreats from the door and hides from them by sneaking into a basket; unity makes the snake which is a symbol of an enemy, a social enemy, to move from being a predator into a prey. Ogot narrates:

> The men who were searching the bedding in the yard announced that there was nothing. Obwolo entered the bedroom again and searched thoroughly. There was nothing. The

> people who stood away from the window shouted to him that perhaps the Satan had escaped through the wide gaps separating the roof from the walls. (74)

The snake is regarded as Satan, the symbol of evil whose intention it is to destroy the village through death with its very poisonous venom. The villagers described it thus, "it was as if Satan himself had descended from hell to bring death and decay to Kadibo village" (76). The use of Biblical allusion here is meant to emphasise the danger a society divided along gender lines or any other form of exclusion. Exclusion for whatever reason of a part of the society or discrimination of whatever nature are a threat to the wellbeing of all human beings and an existential threat to all human beings.

Satan is described in the Bible as the epitome of evil and God's nemesis whose influence on the first human beings made them lose their paradise-like original abode. The allusion to the Biblical story and the fact that the people of Kadibo village do not submit to the tyranny of the serpent despite the danger it posed to them is Ogot's way of saying that human beings have the power to defeat social evils; that human beings are not powerless in the face of social evils; that the subduing of social evils that threaten the harmonious existence of human beings is a battle that requires courage, unity, selflessness, self-sacrifice and love and concern for others' interests. The snake is described as, "ugly dead serpent" (78) once the villagers have managed to kill it and this choice of words that create revulsion in the reader by Ogot is her strategy of creating a sense of repugnancy in the reader's mind towards social evils.

The killing of the serpent is presented as an epic battle by the use of sensory images such as the vivid description of both the villagers' and the snake's reaction in the final showdown, "Their shouts and shrieks had aroused the snake's anger. It would fight for its life to the bitter end and would revenge itself on whoever dared to go near the house" (77). The dramatic act by the crowd of flogging the snake after Obwalo had killed it is an attempt by the villagers to exorcise themselves of any evil within themselves; collectively distancing themselves from the snake that is the symbol of evil in their environment.

The story is set inside the home, an indication that the conflict has a bearing on the wellbeing of the family. Because of his patriarchal inclinations, Ojwang, Aloo's husband had dismissed her regular calls for him to clear the bushes around their homestead since he wouldn't do what a woman tells him to do. Aloo had made it known to her husband that the bushes could harbour dangerous wildlife that could threaten the family. Aloo makes it known to the other

villagers that this could have been avoided had her husband respected her enough to heed her plea, "How often have I pleaded with you to clear this bush around our home. I am not staying here tonight" (78). Ogot here makes the argument that patriarchy is corrosive and has the potential to destroy the society by disintegrating the family which is its foundation. Ojwang's failure to respect his wife's opinion at the home place is what makes it possible for the snake to find a dwelling place near the home, from where it can launch its attacks on Ojwang's family and their neighbours.

## The Short Story *The Bamboo Hut*

In the story *The Bamboo Hut*, Ogot shows that the 'othering' of women can result in mental illness, erosion of happiness, incest (a taboo), and disenfranchisement. When Achieng gives birth to twins, she abandons the girl, Apiyo, because the chief was desperate for a boy. The birth of the male twin, Owiny, is greatly celebrated, yet the chief had many other children, the only difference being that they were all girls. Owiny is treated as a special child, as if he was the only child in the household. The bamboo hut, a metaphor for prestige and dignity, is given to Achieng because of bearing the chief a son. Despite all the privileges given to Achieng, she never gets to be happy, as she is haunted by the guilt that plunges her into depression by the constant thoughts of the child she forsook. Later, Owiny meets and then gets determined to marry Apiyo (his twin sister brought up in another village), and this would have resulted in an act of incest. Owiny falls out with his father, the chief, because of the girl Apiyo. It takes the confession of Achieng, their mother, to prevent a complete tragedy of family disintegration. All these came because of the cultural principle of 'othering' or discriminating against women and girls.

## The Novel *The Strange Bride*

The novel *The Strange Bride* focuses on the dangers of disobedience to just authority and the slippery nature of a life lived without critical and analytical skills. The storyline revolves around the family of a chief and priest called Olum Ochak whom the villagers of Got Owaga later name Were Ochak for his devotion to their deity, Were Nyakalaga. His son, Owiny, marries a girl, Nyawir, whose life is a mystery to many but whose physical beauty is unmatched. Here Ogot cautions against taking issues at face value and pushes for the adoption of analytical and critical skills as a survival strategy. When Ochak's son, Owiny, comes of age and is ready for marriage, he does not take the time to know his bride-to-be and even when his

parents caution him against marrying someone they barely know, he threatens to commit an abomination; remain a bachelor forever.

Owiny has only heard about Nyawir's famed physical beauty and that to him is everything he needs in a wife. Ochak persuades his son Owiny to change his mind because he believed that physical attributes alone do not define a human being; their character does. Ochak advices, "Even her people do not know her well because she disappeared when she was still a little girl and grew into a big girl away from home"(48). This obsession with beauty leads Owiny to marry a woman he barely knew and who causes catastrophe in both Ochak's family and the village of Got Owaga. Her disobedience to the rules concerning the magic hoe that Were Nyakalaga had gifted the villager cuts off the people's connection with their God and forces the villages to be expending an enormous amount of energy while cultivating their farms and causes family disintegration. The people of Got Owaga had been given a magic hoe that would cultivate their land on its own thus saving them from backbreaking manual labour. However, there was a condition that Ochak's family would be the guardians of the magic hoe and only his wife Lwak was to be take the hoe to the farms and leave it there for Were Nyakalaga to use her powers to till the land for the people. Lwak had to do this very early on the morning of the first day of the farming season. Nyawir convinced Lwak that she could take the magic hoe to the farm and follow all instructions to the letter. However, she did not and because of her pride and obstinacy she tilled the land with the hoe, thus breaking Were's rules. The result of this was that she was almost lynched by the villagers and she and her husband Owiny were excommunicated from Got Owaga.

The point Ogot is making here is that the law is meant to protect the interests of the people and life would be better as long as the villagers obeyed the rules. Had they obeyed the rules of Were, they would never have needed to physically till their land in order to obtain food. Owiny's lack of insight and critical thinking skills makes him fall for beauty that in reality masked an ugly personality. Nyawir had no sense of boundary, disregarded the rule of the law and disrespected her mother-in-law and Were, the supreme deity.

Ogot also uses the character of Owiny and Nyawir to caution against the vice of uncontrolled human desires which will always lead to destruction and pain. Nyawir's inability to control her curiosity makes her create a wedge between the people of Got Owaga and their God; between Owiny and his parents, sibling and the villagers. Nyawir's disobedience about the secrecy of the magic hoe springs from her inability to exercise self-restraint. Despite being

warned by her husband Owiny, she adamantly sticks to her selfish quest to touch the hoe. The fateful words she utters that morning speak of an irredeemable individualist who does not care about the consequences of her actions on others, "I, Nyawir, the daughter of Opolo, must touch that hoe with my hands; only then will my heart rest" (88). To Ogot, self-control is a security device against pain and destruction in human life. Owiny fails to obey his mother and father and the result is a disaster for many. When cautioned against marrying a stranger by his mother, Owiny haughtily retorts, "my heart is yearning for this girl whose beauty the whole of Got Owaga is talking about. She is the girl I'd like to marry. Although I have not seen her personally, all my peers who have seen her told me that she is perfect in appearance" (44).

Here the reader can see that all that is said about Nyawir is limited to her physical appearance, nothing is said about her character. It is only after her marriage that her ugliness in the form of obstinacy, vanity, lack of self-control, cunningness and selfishness become known. During the confrontation with Were on the fateful morning when she chose to openly disobey the rules governing the magic hoe, Were's voice gives Nyawir a tongue-lashing, "and it is because I know the hidden pride in your heart that I warn you not touch the soil with that metal-headed hoe"(99). This monumental pride is further illustrated when Nyawir responds to Were's warning with a lot of arrogance. Were's voice pleads, "Don't, don't, Nyawir, don't touch the soil with that hoe. Don't violate a taboo on this soil. You would bring a curse upon the land!" (99). To which Nyawir answers, "and who are you that is talking to me from the air and knows my name" (99). This was unheard of; no mortal had ever dared to engage the loving and caring supreme deity to a duel. It must also be noted that Lwak, Ochak's wife contributed to the strained relationship between Were and the inhabitants of Got Owaga; she disobeyed the rule that she was the only one allowed to take the magic hoe to the farm at the beginning of the planting season; delegating the duty to her daughter-in-law; the haughty, stubborn and disobedient Nyawir. This was not supposed to happen and Lwak's disregard of the divine law and the abomination undertaken by Nyawir results into pain for the entire community.

## The Novel *Simbi Nyaima (The Lake that Sank)*

Ogot uses myth to talk about a geographical phenomenon in her novel *Simbi Nyaima* (*The Lake that Sank*). This is an attempt at explaining what happened to the lake in Homa Bay County. In this story, Ogot weaves a narrative that the sinking of the lake was a punishment for the villagers' arrogant refusal to shelter an elderly, hungry and haggard woman from a different village. Out of this geographical phenomenon in Karachuonyo, Homa Bay County,

the writer teaches a valuable lesson about concern, generosity and love for others regardless of their age, gender or ethnic or racial extraction. She advocates for inclusivity and points out that love for others is what elevates human beings above animals. William Hayes observes that literature can be an effective means of teaching critical thinking because understanding literature requires intelligent judgments and decisions based upon reasonable and reflective thought.

## Ogot's Autobiography *Days of My Life*

*Days of My Life* is Ogot's autobiography and here she projects her identity as a social activist and a leader through her use of a consistent autobiographical narrative voice. Born in deeply patriarchal society at the height of British colonial rule, Ogot narrates her story to show that at that point in history, women in many Kenyan societies were doubly displaced by patriarchy and colonialism. To achieve any meaningful success in life, Ogot narrates that a woman needed to be resilient, hardworking, disciplined and have the support of a loving family. Ogot uses her life story to demonstrate the centrality of the family in development and nation building. Here, she demonstrates how inclusivity can help individuals, families and communities to be the best they can be in life; assets for development in all spheres of life. She narrates that her success as a writer, journalist, nurse and a political leader can be traced to her family, her father pushed to change the patriarchal traditions of the Luo people that privileged men over women. To this end, her father took all his three daughters to school. This exposure to education is what gave Ogot agency in life. Love for education is something she got from her father, she narrates about him, "he read stories from both English and Kiswahili storybooks and translated them into Dholuo" (93). Her father's love for reading developed Ogot's intellectual curiosity. Her father also sacrificed his male pride and accepted to be ridiculed by his community for practising inclusivity in his house; he helped his wife with household chores; to him, his wife was a partner and not a servant. She recalls,

> True to his word, he decided to send all of us to school, at a time when most parents in the area preferred to send only their sons to school. And since our mother Rachel was sickly and suffered from high blood pressure, our father undertook the woman's job of fetching water from a nearby river, so that his 'sons' could go to school. For an elder to do this was abominable. They laughed at him, and wondered what other woman's chore he was next going to perform. (32)

Ogot's background of a loving family that practised inclusivity is what made her turn into a national asset as a pioneer female political leader and a civil servant. Just like love pushed her father to take them to school, it also made her husband, Bethwell Ogot, to push her into the writing career. Her husband respected her and was never threatened by her success. She narrates,

> my writing career can be said to have started in the late 1950s when I met the man I was later to marry, Bethwell Allan Ogot. My letters to him, he said, were full of poetry. I told him that I had never understood poetry not taken an interest in it. He did not give, and urged me on to try writing stories. And that worked. I wrote a few stories which I shared with my friends who encouraged me to take writing seriously. (92)

Ogot posits that exclusion of whatever nature either based on gender, ethnicity or race is a vice that if not checked can emotionally destabilize individuals, wreck careers and destroy a nation. She narrates of her experience as a student in Britain where her European classmates discriminated against her wondering how an African would manage to study nursing. She recalls that she excelled in her examinations and,

> noticed a change in attitude among the British students from that of curiosity to admiration. As a Christian, I could only pray for them to learn to judge people by the quality of their lives and not by their race, ethnicity or country. (63-64).

She further points out that when she joined Maseno Hospital as a nurse, she experienced racism once again and chose to take a stance against it even if it meant she might sacrifice her job. Her protests against the inhuman treatment of African patients by the white doctors were inspired by her love for justice and equality. She recalls that she had to, "take a firm stand, sometimes at the risk of losing my job" (77). She points out that racial bigotry among the white missionary doctors dehumanized and degraded African patients resulting in unnecessary deaths. She narrates about the white doctors, "they felt nothing about causing death to African women" (77). Ogot points out that to achieve equality and fairness in a society, all people should be involved in fighting the elements that perpetuate exclusion be they from patriarchy, racism or tribalism. She celebrates men who have been pivotal in transforming her into the role model leader that she became in her adulthood; her father for his love, affirmation and support and her husband for love and support. She praises her husband in her autobiography, calling herself lucky to have found him because he was, "a man who was free from male chauvinism" (173).

When elected as the MP for Gem constituency Grace Ogot gave her all in serving her people because to her, leadership should be inspired by the love for the people, an opportunity to serve them and not one's interests. She narrates, " I loved my people and toiled for them for many years" (286). In this autobiography Ogot celebrates the values of love, self-sacrifice, hard work, resilience, justice and equality. She recalls that it was very difficult being a female political leader in Kenya because the patriarchal tendencies among the men made them not level on the political playing field. She narrates that it was resilience that kept her moving during the difficult times when violence would be used to intimidate her. She recalls how at one point during the first multiparty elections in Kenya in 1992,

> stones were thrown at our vehicles by militia youth, young girls sung insulting songs against us, some priests compared us with Judas, and the police and the provincial administration turned a blind eye to all these. Some of my supporters were killed or maimed and the police declined to record statements from us, saying that they did not wish to be involved in politics. (287)

To demonstrate that self-sacrifice is a precursor for development, she recalls the contribution of renowned educationist, Ezekiel Apindi. She notes that Apindi had a comfortable life and a career at Maseno School but thought that his services were needed to open up the other areas of Nyanza province where colonial education had not yet penetrated. She makes it clear that her appointment as an assistant minister for culture and social services gave her an opportunity to learn more about the problems of women and use that knowledge and position to craft solutions. She narrates,

> This opportunity was significant for its direct involvement in women affairs. It gave me a fitting opportunity to deal with gender problems not merely at a problem-solving level, but also policy formulation and implementation levels. Being in that position also enabled me to become aware of problems facing women regionally and globally. (174)

## Grace Ogot and Critical Thinking

Robert Ennis in *A Logical Basis for Measuring Critical Thinking Skills* defines critical thinking as, "reasonable and reflective thinking which is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (46). To Ennis, critical thinking involves making intelligent decisions about what to believe or do through "reasonable and reflective thinking" (46). Critical thinking should be a key educational goal.

The nature of literature is such that it teaches important values, but in an indirect way. To access the values and arguments of the author or literary artist, one needs to use reason and logic. Not only does the literary artist teach values that have the power to transform the human society for the better, but they also help train people to become critical thinkers. To understand a symbol, to appreciate a character, to understand how irony works; the narrative techniques and the language play at work in telling a story, the reader has to employ logic and reason. This is because, literary analysis requires one to take a position and get supportive evidence to prop their claim; the study of literature has a forensic approach at its core. To create a literary piece, writers have to deploy their critical faculties to the highest level*;* the creation of art epitomizes critical thinking in human beings.

A writer is a philosopher and a critical thinker, for the very act of coming up with a literary piece involves a philosophical outlook on life, and requires one to think not only about what they want to say, but also how they will say it. Understanding the strategies of writing, the language choice and narrative techniques necessary for the production of a coherent literary piece requires logical and critical thinking. Grace Ogot demonstrates critical thinking by realizing what the shortcomings of her own culture are, pointing them out and taking the stand that no culture is cast on stone; that culture is supposed to be dynamic and it should exist to serve the people. Ogot managed to reconstruct the history of the Luo people in several of her short stories and novels; an act of critical thinking. One of her greatest moral arguments is that culture should evolve and serve people and any culture that does not respond to the present realities of a people becomes an impediment to development and cohesiveness. Iris Murdoch in her book, *Existentialists and Mystics* observes,

> Good art is good for people precisely because it is not fantasy but imagination. It breaks the grip of our own dull fantasy life and stirs us to the effort of true vision. Most of the time, we fail to see the big real world because we are blinded by obsession, anxiety, resentment, fear and envy. Great art is liberating, it enables us to see and take pleasure in what is not ourselves. Literature stirs and satisfies our curiosity; it interests using other people and other scenes and helps us to be tolerant and generous. Art is informative (24).

## Conclusion

Grace Ogot stood against corruption and this is a running motif in her creative works. Thomas Burke in his article, *The Concepts of Corruption in Campaign Finance and Law*, isolates three kinds of corruption: monetary influence, quid pro quo and distortion (2).

Zephyr Teachout in *The Anti-Corruption Principle* identifies five categories of corruption: bribery, inequality, drowned voices, a dispirited public and a lack of integrity (2). Deborah Helman in *Defining Corruption and Constitutionalizing Democracy* describes three kinds of corruption: corruption as the deformation of judgment, as the distortion of influence and as the sale of favours (1). Most of Ogot's stories revolve around the position of women in African societies. In most of the African communities women have been expected to be homemakers, doing the domestic chores while the men were seen as the providers decision makers both on the family and political level. The exclusions dealt with by Ogot are not limited to gender, she goes further to tackle the 'othering' on the basis of tribe and race. A literary creation, or the work of literature, is a product of a critical thinker. Although her works are rich in strategies such as the use of Luo myths and words that culturally situate her stories among the Luo community of Kenya, they teach important human values such as obedience to a just leadership and just legal systems, hard work, honesty, unity, inclusivity, love and self-restraint.

As a literary artist, Grace Ogot stood for critical thinking and value creating education. She teaches the social values in an indirect way that calls for the reader to deploy critical and analytical skills. In order to appreciate her work, a reader or an audience has to deploy their critical faculties, because literary analysis is a forensic undertaking; taking a position and defending it with evidence scattered throughout the creative piece. Ogot managed to reconstruct the history of the Luo people in several of her short stories and novels. She offers non-Luo people a chance to examine the Luo culture, history and religion and this fosters understanding of her community. Understanding people's culture is crucial in fostering unity. When you get to know why people do certain things, you will understand how to live with them without hurting their cultural sensibilities. Although she celebrates her Luo culture and people (she was an advocate of writing in local languages), Ogot was alive to the shortcomings of her culture. Through her stories, Ogot shows that although her people's culture is beautiful, there is a need for change because, embedded in those cultural roots there are some retrogressive and largely corrosive cultural practices. She points out the exclusion of women in many areas of life and uses literature to comment on this. Ogot demonstrates in her stories the benefits a society can reap from practising inclusivity. She points out that a society that 'others' a section of itself, based on premises such as gender, sabotages itself because exclusion can bring destructive and tragic consequences

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# RE-ORIENTING IDENTITIES IN *SONG OF LAWINO*: OKOT p'BITEK AS A CRITICAL EDUCATOR

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## Abstract

*Colonialism operated by constructing racial stereotypes that reinforced a sense of inferiority in the African. The white image was associated with all the positive attributes of power, status and beauty while the black image was associated with backwardness and negativity. I used the ideas of Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire as theoretical framework to analyse Okot p'Bitek's poem Song of Lawino so as to assess the role of the poet who delves into the troubled materiality and psychology of colonially inspired sense of inferiority of the formerly colonized. I see the poet as a critical educator who used his poetry to instil values of critical thinking in his East African audience. The paper employed close reading as a methodology for interpreting and analysing the poem. The paper concludes that p'Bitek's poem reflects how at independence, East African poets took up the lead to highlight, challenge and re-orient the negative and alienating aspects of identities that bedevilled the formerly colonized. It shows how the poet challenged Eurocentric assumptions and re-created more viable images that with time liberated the East African people from a colonially instilled sense of inferiority and alienation by poetically helping readers to reject the negative stereotype and adopt more worthwhile sense of being.*

***Key words**: colonialism, subordination, inferiority, critical education, critical thinking, identity re-orientation*

## Introduction

East African poets use their art as a critical platform for re-educating the East African masses and hence engaging in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009) terms as 'Re-membering' of that which was 'dis-membered' by colonial violations. The poets inspire and instil critical thinking that enables the mental and psychological decolonization. I use the ideas of Frantz Fanon to understand the colonial impact on the sense of identity of the colonized East Africans so as to appreciate the momentous responsibility the poet was taking up. Then, I use Paulo Freire's ideas of critical pedagogy to analyse how the poetry under study is indeed an aspect or process of value adding education that fomented critical thinking in the formerly colonized who were facing challenges of self-perception and gave dignity to those who had suffered denigration during this period.

*Colonial Construction of Inferior Subjects*

Aime Cesaire argued that over the centuries of its practice, Western imperialism systematically and "skilfully" injected millions of people of colour with "fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, and abasement" (qtd in Fanon, 1967, 7). Hence, colonial experiences fundamentally re-shaped the sense of identities and being in the world of the colonized.

Through apt poetic strategies, p'Bitek re-educates the East African on how colonization robbed them of their dignity and sense of self. At the heart of the conflict of *Song of Lawino*, is the dispute between the 'Westernized' Ocol who comes to despise the values of his community, and his wife Lawino who represents the Acoli indigenous worldview and resistance consciousness against colonial brainwashing. Lawino, who is the protagonist-narrator of the poem, criticizes her husband Ocol's blind aping of the western cultures and the rejection of his own (35).

Frantz Fanon (1967) notes that one of the results of colonialism was the sense of a split identity. In the poem, Ocol is no longer whole in the eyes of Lawino. Fanon says that the colonized have two dimensions, one with their fellows, and "the other with the white" (17). This sense of self-division points to the internalization of subjugation and acceptance of a position of inferiority. Though African, Ocol has accepted that what is African is inferior while whatever is European is superior. Lawino pejoratively says of Ocol,

> My husband pours scorn
> On black people,
> He behaves like a hen
> That eats its own eggs… (35)

The vivid image contained in the simile of a hen that eats its own eggs is an example of p'Bitek's poetic skill in capturing the folly of the brainwashed East Africans at the dawn of independence. The brainwashing was caused by the imposition of the colonial culture on the colonized. Fanon maintains as follows,

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the mother country. The coloured is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adaptation of the mother country's cultural standards. (18)

But this acquisition of the master's language, culture and some privileges only gave the colonized partial status because the colonial social scheme was inherently racialised. For colonialism operated on "Orientalist" cultural and power arrangements that created a social

order in which the colonized was always already categorized as the inferior and the uncivilized Other with no history or culture (Said, 1997).

Ocol, who has embraced the colonialist worldview, has been forced to fit into the European preconceived stereotypes of the African as lacking culture, civilization or historical past. Fanon terms this as a colonially inspired feeling of "insignificance" or "self-abasement" (50).

Ocol, in his acerbic attack on anything 'African' manifest a pathological trait Fanon identifies as "ego-withdrawal" which results from acute experience of denigration. Having been reminded through school, church and observed day-to-day encounter with white culture of his insignificance, the colonized in the persona of Ocol becomes phobic. He is chained to the fear of being African, hence his rage against Lawino who is the epitome of African traditional culture.

Ocol can only look at what he has been given as the ideal. But despite his disavowal of the African world, he can only suffer an alienating in-betweenness because the white world is in reality a mirage. As a colonial subject, the popular Western lifestyle images he apes are but appearance because they are actually matters of class and not of inherent human value. As Fanon asserts, "One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent" (52).

In Kathryn Tidrick (2008), the white lifestyle in colonial Kenya was fired by racial discrimination, class hierarchies, greed, corruption, abuse of power, discrimination, and exclusion. The settlers were a power onto themselves, "The colonial office early developed the habit of avoiding responsibility for settler inspired excesses in Kenya" (132). These, among other form of raw power display, played a major part in creating a culture of racial inequality in the colonial society that nurtured feelings of inferiority in the colonised. In the words of Fanon,

> The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority… *It is the racist who creates his inferior*. (Emphasis in the original, 92)

The colonial system carefully worked on the psychology of the colonized to create a "good" subject – subordinate and dependent in manner. Hence, the colonized sense of inferiority resulted from a social structure of subordination. Fanon emphasizes this in his contention that "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (110).

If we go by the bitter-sad tone of Lawino, then we can say Ocol is suffering from severe condition Fanon termed as "obsessive neurosis" or "situational neurosis" which refers to a case where an individual exhibits a constant effort to run away from one's own individuality, "to annihilate his own presence". Fanon states, "The Negro, having been made inferior, proceeds from humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair" (60). Ocol clearly exemplifies this extreme sense of self-disassociation as emphasized here when Lawino describes Ocol's insults against anything African,

> He says Black People are primitive
> And their ways utterly harmful,
> Their dances are mortal sins
> They are ignorant, poor and diseased! (35)

In Ocol's disavowal of his culture we see how colonialism shattered the psychological mechanisms of the colonized. When deriding African values and culture, we are told,

> His eyes grow large
> Deep black eyes
> Ocol's eyes resemble those of a Nile Perch!
> He becomes fierce
> Like a lioness with cubs
> He begins to behave like a mad hyena. (36)

The hyperbolic images used to describe his obsession with the European ways and the determination to annihilate all things black in his nature and surroundings, accentuate the crisis of alienation of Ocol. He can be said to be suffering from neurotic psychic disintegration due to the unconscious pressure of existing in the colonial racial structure that insists on white superiority. This is a society that derived its stability from perpetuating a dual hierarchical racial social arrangement (Fanon, 98). So, Ocol's choler is to be understood in the context of the Western cultural presence and its racialised values.

## Poetic Re-Constructions of Harmful Colonial Mechanizations

According to Abiola Irele, African writers responded to "the aggressive Western colonization" by undertaking a critical reassessment of the colonizer, and of the philosophy of life which is assumed to underlie Western civilization in order to challenge the assumption that undermined the colonized. Therefore, Irele sees the African writer as providing "a pointed indictment" of the colonizer (1995, 17). Besides, the literature has served as a "relentless documentation" of

the "stark realities of the black experience as a historical consequence of the conquest and domination" (17).

In this vein, Lawino becomes p'Bitek's mouthpiece in re-orienting Ocol by recalling him to his culture and its value. Fanon recommends that the remedy for the colonized suffering from the split personality is to be helped to recognize the unconscious forces that afflict them. This can only be achieved if there is combined action both on the individual and at group level (100). Hence, poets like p'Bitek became critical for the society that was emerging from colonialism with a good section of its population exhibiting some aspect of alienation.

Consequently, the responsibility of the writer becomes akin to that of the psychiatrist as per Fanon's assertion: "As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become conscious of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure" (100).

This responsibility is implied in the poet's choice of persona and dialogical techniques such as apostrophe, repetition and anaphora to tackle the dilemma of the wife confronting a Westernized husband who has lost touch with his culture and disparages those he says are not 'civilised' like himself. G. A. Heron (1976) opines that literary techniques such as apostrophe enable a dramatized communication between the singer and the audience. In the case of *Song of Lawino*, this can be looked at on two levels: on the one hand, the speaker of the poem, Lawino, and the implied audience she is addressing directly within the song and on the other hand, the reader in the community, the target audience for p'Bitek's poetry. Discussing the use of apostrophe, Heron explains,

> The people who are addressed may be observers of, or participants in, the events that lie behind the song. Where the second person ('you') is used together with apostrophe, the people addressed usually have a role in the situation from which the song arises; where the song is in the third person throughout, they are likely to represent a supposed audience being asked to share in the attitudes or emotions of the singer. (13)

*Song of Lawino* opens with Lawino directly addressing Ocol in a formal manner and laying down the case of their domestic strife,

> Husband, now you despise me
> Now you treat me with spite
> And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt;
> Son of the chief,
> Now you compare me

With the rubbish in the rubbish pit.
You say you no longer want me
Because I am like the things left behind
In the deserted homestead. (34)

This opening serves aesthetic and thematic purposes in a forceful way. Through this strategy of direct address, Lawino seeks to be the voice of reason struggling to save a husband who has succumbed to colonial alienation. It is a struggle to save a soul from damnation,

Listen Ocol, you are a son of a Chief,
Leave foolish behaviour to little children…(34)

This technique is strategically manipulated to dramatize who is reasonable and who has lost touch with the culture. Then, as Lawino's argument peaks, it helps give an impression of communal performance as she turns from directly addressing Ocol to appealing to her community to share in her frustration with the alienated husband who has abdicated his cultural responsibilities because of brainwashing,

My clansmen, I cry
Listen to my voice:
The insults of my man
Are painful beyond bearing. (35)

The richness, vitality and powerful effect of this poetic device is informed by the ideological role it serves. Foremost, it is a poetic device borrowed directly from the Acoli oral tradition and deployed against the most lasting impacts of colonisation that essentially sought to denigrate the traditional cultures of the colonized. Heron gives examples of Acoli songs that this strategy has traditionally been used in as *otole* or *bwola* songs where "the singer assumes the voice of an observer of the situation" by using the second person to refer to those the singer addresses (15). Okot p'Bitek deploys such folkloric strategies to effectively highlight and repel the traumatic effects of colonialism, especially racist brainwashing that caused alienation and feelings of inferiority among the colonized.

Through the character of Tina, Ocol's second wife and who is also "Westernized", p'Bitek is able to make another important statement on a critical area of colonial denigration. Tina's case is more a study in the way the African body, especially the black female body, was perceived in relation to whiteness in a world dominated by Eurocentric cultural imperialism. Numerous stereotypes, especially of the African woman, characterized Eurocentric discourses in the 18$^{th}$

and 19th centuries. Therefore the African woman had extraneous existence in colonial racist hierarchal imaginaries.

Edward Said describes Orientalism, as "the discourse by which the Europeans were able to systematically produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (22). According to Jan Naderveen Pieterse (1992), the image of black has evolved over centuries in European worldview. In paintings and sculpture of antiquity the image is largely positive and difference in skin colour did not carry significance (23). This is the same case with the Old Testament in which the black African kingdoms are described as prestigious, powerful and important allies such as Kush in the case of King Solomon (Pieterse, 24).

A significant break started in the Christian period where in their writings church fathers, except in Byzantium, started equating the colour black with negative values such as evil or darkness. Black became the colour of evil and demons (Pieterse, 24). In 1830, G. W. F. Hegel asserted that Africa did not form part of the historical world. And that the Negro represented man in all his wild and untamed nature – minus respect, morality and sensitivity (Pieterse, 34). In these evolving Eurocentric discourses, Africa and Africans came to serve as a convenient tool for negative comparison (35).

Influenced by Darwin, anthropologists developed a schema of social evolution: "primitivism – savagery – barbarism – civilization..." which served as "a manual for imperial management of societies at different stages of development" (Pieterse, 37). This civilization pyramid was both a perfect explanation of and justification for European colonialism, "which according to this view was a kind of evolutionary assistance from the more advanced to the less developed – *noblesse oblige*" (57). This representation was to have a huge impact on the self-perception of Africans who were typified by the Europeans they encountered in different spheres (church, school, work place or generally public spaces) mostly as primitive or savage, hence inferior to the civilized whites.

Pieterse quotes the psychiatrist Dominic Mannoni who analysed the Western people's tendency "to project on to the colonized people the obscurities of their own unconsciousness …obscurities they would rather not penetrate" (173). For Said, these Orientalist constructions enabled the Western cultures to gain in self-aggrandizement by setting themselves "against the orient as a sort of surrogate self" (22). They self-fashioned themselves with positive attributes

by projecting the negative, opposite ones to the Other. Racial inferiority of the Other was made to seem objective fact of nature.

Within this stance, the European colonialists had strong ambivalence to African women due to the overarching stereotype of the white women representing purity and ideal beauty (white as 'Venus' or an 'unblemished flower'). This drove African women, who embraced these denigrating myths about themselves, to seek acceptance into the white world. Fanon demonstrates this when he talks of the black first meeting the white aware that the colour of his skin will influence judgment about him:

> In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (111)

So, the colonized person becomes a construct, a fabrication, not as oneself: "Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema" (Fanon, 111). This schema is enabled and woven "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (Fanon, 111) that form the mammoth Eurocentric discourses that operated in imperial circles.

Clementine, Ocol's Westernized second wife seeks to alter herself physically so as to fit in the opposite binary that is "acceptable". Mario J. Valdes asserts that in binary oppositions, the two poles must not only oppose each other, but must also be in exclusive opposition like the positive and negative charge of an electric current (511). Be it as such, Jonathan Culler states that binary oppositions operate on levels of misleading abstractions because they ignore qualitative distinctions which may not be functional but nevertheless real (1975, 15). Hence when we meet the Tina, we discern the power of racist myths and stereotypes. She is keen, to the detriment of her wellness, to become other than who she is. To embrace the vaunted but prejudiced ideal beauty, she wants to look white, so she has chemically treated her skin by applying a range of destructive skin-lightening cosmetics. Lawino lampoons her,

> Her lips are red-hot
> Like glowing charcoal,
> She resembles the wild cat
> That has dipped its mouth in blood,
> Her mouth is like raw yaws
> It looks like the mouth of a field!
> Tina dusts powder on her face
> And it looks so pale;
> She resembles the wizard

Getting ready for the midnight dance. (37)

Okot p'Bitek describes Tina's attempts to alter herself and become white to reveal the folly of self-denial and also the falsity of the myths that drive a black woman to pursue this quest. Sarcasm is the choice technique deployed here to attack the unworthiness of the practice,

She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
And when little sweat
Begins to appear on her body
She looks like a guinea fowl (37)

Lawino has lost patience with her co-wife as an African woman who has lost self-pride and lashes scornful images at her that point out how misguided she is. Tina shows all signs of a disembodied identity, self-rejection and self-abhorrence,

I do not like dusting myself with powder:
The thing is good on pink skin
Because it is already pale,
But when a black woman has used it
She looks as if she has dysentery;
Tina looks sickly
And she is slow moving, she is a piteous sight. (37)

Convinced that as a black she is outside the ideal beauty, Tina tries to re-insert herself in what she believes to be the centre. The colonial values that constructed the ideal centre seemed firm and neatly closed systems. As such, this meant that other ways of seeing reality, other values, and alternative norms must be repressed or marginalized. Because individual self-perception is important in shaping identity, Tina sees no other option once she is convinced the ideal of beauty is in the likeness of the image of whiteness. She applies her makeup,

And she believes
That this is beautiful
Because it resembles the face of a white woman! (37)

But Lawino sees it differently:

Her body resembles
The ugly coat of the hyena;
Her neck and arms
Have real human skin!
She looks as if she has been struck
By lightening;
Or burnt like the kongoni

In a fire hunt. (37)

The choice of literary techniques such as sarcasm, enhanced by irony and lampooning images and figures of speech, forces the reader to rethink if the values projected as ideal for Eurocentric images of beauty are equally viable for the African woman. Jacques Derrida speaks of the centre functioning as "a point of presence, a fixed origin" whose function is "not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure…but above all, to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we may call the free play of the structure" (247-8). The quest for domination and exploitation provided the certitude for the colonial system. The myths and stereotypes created the normative coherence that privileged Western centric perspectives in opposition, even suppression, of other views. Tina is pulled in and finds it hard to escape such well-orchestrated schema.

Ocol and Tina find themselves in a condition Paulo Freire terms as "contradiction". This is a situation where the oppressed find themselves unable to consciously engage in the struggle to overthrow oppression because they lack the resolution (1993, 27). They have chosen to absorb the coloniser's prescribed mentality, "They aspire not for liberation, but to identification with its opposite" (Freire, 28).

The variables that shape individual identity include one's self-perception of one's body image or physical appearance, which in turn impedes or enhances identity and self-esteem. For Jane E. Rose (2007), white standards of beauty both oppress black womanhood and devalue the black female body in situations where white is the hegemonic order. These had so saturated the African cultural space that at the end of colonialism, colourism became one of the most oppressive forces facing African women in newly independent societies. As Rose observes, besides being perceived as physically attractive, light skinned women were given special treatment and deemed more socially acceptable than those with dark skins.

Colourism led to light skinned women seemingly at an advantage to access jobs in offices and media, winning husbands of substance, and generally feeling socially acceptable or 'liked' (Rose, 3). Hence, colourism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism impedes black women (Rose, 6). Additionally, Jane Missner Barstow argues that these white beauty myths are hegemonic because they function and are maintained within well organized and financed political, cultural, and economic dynamics, making their psychological power over the black women's psyche enormous. As such, Barstow identifies white standards of beauty as systems of oppression (2007, 12). The powerful political and economic elite uses such organized strategies as the

Miss Universe Beauty Pageant to influence the idea of beauty in line with ideal white beauty as standard. Hence, much of what is said to be the ideal beauty "is a construction: taught, learned, and policed by fashion magazines, the casting of movies and television stars, cosmetic industry, and one another" (Barstow, 12).

Lawino, who rejects the values of colourism, has more sense of self-acceptance and self-pride as opposed to Clementine who turns her body into a site of self-hatred and self-destruction in the quest for the white ideal beauty and sense of well-to-do that a white skin promises. Okot p'Bitek shows that the disfigurement that Tina suffers is physical, emotional and spiritual. Tina persists in the quest to be beautiful in the likeness of white beauty, however much she may be suffering from the effects of that pursuit. Lawino mocks this habit of the formerly colonized who fail to see the ruse of Eurocentric values that have ensnared them into self-denial. Lawino says about Tina,

> She looks as if
> She has been ill for a long time!
> Actually she has been starving
> She does not eat,
> She says she fears getting fat,
> That the doctor has prevented her
> From eating,
> She says a beautiful woman
> Must be slim like a white woman… (40)

African women perceived themselves as outside the privileged category in a world where slim, light-skinned women found more privilege and access to advantages.

## Poetry as Value Adding Education that Instils Critical Thinking

Lawino as the narrator and the embodiment of the poet's artistic ideology plays a vital role in representing the voice of reason and revolutionary consciousness. For Ngugi, Lawino is a voice of the peasantry and her ridicule and scorn are aimed at the class basis of Ocol' behaviour (1972, 75). Heron supports this view by noting that *Song of Lawino*, like the rest of Okot p'Bitek's works, is concerned with a specific social process: the emergence and subsequent development of a parody of a Western-style class structure within African societies (102).

In the words of Freire, Ocol and Tina are fearful of freedom because "freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility" (29).

It is noteworthy that Lawino first looks at the symptoms and then digs deeper for the causes of alienation and colourism. She keenly observes her co-wife, listens to her, then notes the reason behind her psychological malady. Freire emphasizes that to surmount alienation and other forms of false consciousness, "people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (29).

Through Lawino, the poet feels he can inspire praxis into such people to re-think their state. By helping point out their irrationality, the poet aims to stimulate self-reflection and then action that can lead to authentic praxis. This is because, "action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become object of critical reflection" (Freire, 48).

As such, Okot p'Bitek was pivotal in the cultural revolution that reasserted self-pride and cultural dignity to the hitherto denigrated people coming out of colonialism. This was consciously done through Lawino who reconstitutes the prideful history and cultural wealth of Africa as well as by challenging specific colonial discourses that undermined Africa and Africans. In part two of the poem, Lawino nostalgically asserts she does not know the dances of the foreigners. It should be remembered that Ocol and Tina measure their 'civilized' status on their prowess in such Western cultural forms. So, Lawino reminds them that Africa was not lacking in dances and that they should not lose their souls in aping Western ones. The Acoli songs and dances were not only meant for socializing , but they were also relevant to their world and day-to-day realities (42).

Contrast is used in the poem where the liveliness, dignity and communality of Acoli dances are compared to the impersonal and immoral nature of Western dances. After praising the Acoli dance, Lawino condemns the Western forms of dance that have alienated the Africans,

> There is no respect for relatives:
> Girls hold their fathers,
> Boys hold their sisters close,
> They dance even with their mothers.
> Modern girls are fierce
> Like Labeja, the *Jok of Alero*
> That captures even the heads of nephews,
> They coil around their nephews
> And lie on the chests of their uncles
> And prick the chest of their brothers
> With their breasts. (45)

The poet stimulated the people to understand their situation of alienation, reflect upon it, and initiate change in their own consciousness. This is in line with Freire's insistence that action constitutes an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflections. But, Freire avers, this "is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement" (48). Hence it is my argument that as a committed poet, p'Bitek used Lawino and deployed effective poetic strategies such as irony, sarcasm, contrast and startling figures of speech drawn from Acoli landscape and worldview, to stir the reader's consciousness into an awareness of the alienation that had come to define the East African Cultural landscape even if they had raised the flag of independence.

In my opinion Okot p'Bitek was one the most accomplished educators in East Africa. He used his poetry as an effective tool for an "action education" mode of socializing. This is the alternative to the "narrative education" mode of the colonial world that produced 'desirable' subservient subjects. According to Freire, in narrative education, the learner is taken to be a container or receptacle to be filled up by the teacher. So, "the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better student they are" (53). In this approach, the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher offers "communiques" (53). Such an educational approach does not impart creativity or seek to transform. In the colonial order, "knowledge was a gift bestowed by those who considered themselves knowledgeable upon those they considered to know nothing" (53). This projection of absolute ignorance on the colonized was part of the ideology of oppression based on historical Eurocentric stereotypes. In this system, the teacher and projections through the teaching material depicting the West were presented to the colonized as their absolute opposite.

The persona of *Song of Lawino* disparages this form of education and deconstructs the myths it was based on. By so doing, the poet effectively brings the alternative forms of knowledge to the fore and, most importantly, de-centres the centrality assigned to western culture and world view which relegated African forms of knowledge to the periphery. Lawino touches on wide ranging issues surrounding these antagonistic worldviews. She sings with pride of different aspects of Acoli life that the Eurocentric myths which Ocol and Clementine have absorbed have denigrated. One is the Acoli sense of feminine beauty in part 4. Lawino notes that before Ocol was alienated by his encounter with Western forms of knowledge that demeaned African values, he appreciated her beauty,

Ocol, my husband,

My friend,
What are you talking?
You saw me when I was young.
In my mother's house
This man crawled on the floor!
The son of the Bull wept
For me with tears,
Like a hungry child
Whose mother has stayed long
In the simsim field!
……
You loved my giraffe-tail bangles,
My father bought them for me
From the hills in the East.

The roof of my mother's house
Was beautifully laced
With elephant grass;
My father built it
With the skill of the Acoli.

You admired my sister's
Colourful ten-stringed lion beads;
My mother threaded them
And arranged them with care.

You trembled when you saw the tattoos
On my breasts
And the tattoos below my belly bottom;
And you were very fond of the gap in my teeth!

The stanzas are marked by layers of discourses that directly address and at the same time allude to other aspects of colonial experience. We are forced to read a celebration and a challenge to other discourses that define Western-African cultural entanglements during colonialism, especially blanket condemnations of all things African as valueless and bereft of aesthetics. Lawino's prideful reminiscences refute the colonial assumptions of African backwardness. She celebrates the lively ingenuity of Acoli artistry, beautification, jewellery, vibrant commerce, embroidery, among others that attest to highly civilized ad dynamic society.

This strategy of multi-layered discourses is effective in creating in the reader a proactive awareness, hence triggering a consciousness of the responsibility to re-assess the realities of

their experiences. Therefore, the poet became the action teacher who seeks to inspire a more critical and humane generation to emerge. In the poem, the poet poses problems that affect them directly. Freire calls this "problem posing education" (60). Lawino challenges the reader to re-look at what may have appeared to be the norm after years of colonial enforced passiveness.

Through the use of interactive techniques such as rhetorical questions, dramatized dialogue, and cleverly manipulated tonal variation that modulates the pitch and drives home the arguments, the poet creates an interactive mood that helps the reader to see the problems Lawino is posing and how they relate to their world. They are challenged and therefore they are obliged to respond to that challenge. The ensuing comprehension will be more critical, evoking new challenges and therefore, new understanding. As the challenge points directly to their world and its contradictions, the consideration of the challenge creates commitment. Freire asserts, "As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena" (63).

More so are the use of memorable figures of speech laced with sarcasm and irony. The images this composite technique produces is so intense,

> My man, what are you talking?
> My clansmen, I ask you:
> What has become of my husband?
> Is he suffering from boils?
> Is it ripe now?
> Should they open it
> So that the pus may flow?

Images such as this one of the boil force the reader to pause and 'listen' again. The strategy startles one with its unflinching straightforwardness, and one starts perceiving the way one exists in relation to the world and history more critically.

Therefore, we can conclude that p'Bitek succeeds as a critical educationist because he manages, through his satirical poem, to produce a proactive engagement of the East African readers with the most problematic aspects of their challenges of identity as they emerged from colonialism. For as Freire puts it, men and women "must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting – and therefore challenging" (66). This is the spirit Lawino exhibits,

however much she is frustrated by the extent of Ocol and Clementine's alienation, she feels she can stir them out of the bog of alienation by showing them the possibilities colonialism erased from their consciousness. This leads to a deeper understanding of their situation, such consciousness of their situation "leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality, susceptible to transformation" (Freire, 66). Furthermore, Lawino's use of apostrophe that helps not only to dramatize but also to create participatory aura, privileges community engagement, fellowship and solidarity that contrasts with the individualism that characterizes the brainwashed and alienated Africans. Those who perceive Ocol and Clementine after Lawino has stripped them of the mask of Western grandeur of their false consciousness attain the necessary heightened perception of reality because critical consciousness is the core of cultural emancipation.

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# THE AGILE THINKING AND SUBVERSION IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THE EDUCATION OF A BRITISH-PROTECTED CHILD*

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## *Abstract*

*In this paper, we have analysed Chinua Achebe's essayistic persona in The Education of a British-Protected Child from the perspective of agile critical thinking as postulated by Anne Pauker Kreitzberg. Pegged on the construction of the agile thinking process as iterative, we have examined how the essayistic persona interacts with the 'implied reader,' incorporates 'implied feedback,' learns from the implied reader and makes 'adjustment' to his own thoughts. In doing this, we have framed the essayistic persona as a flexible interlocutor who establishes a cooperative pact with the implied reader by taking this reader on a journey of self-reexamination, self-redefinition, self-questioning and self-re-evaluation – all aimed at both subverting imposed imperial hegemony and charting a new vision defined by a hybrid identity in the postcolonial state. Achebe's argumentative agility is, therefore, underlined by an intense self-awareness reinforcing a sensitive, persuasive engagement with his readers. In addition to the agile critical thinking framework, we have syncretically referenced the theory of the personal essay as framed by Michel de Montaigne, Phillip Lopate, Theodor Adorno, Holman Clarence Hugh, John D. Ramage, and Bensel-Meyers; the postcolonial approach in the mould of Gayatri Spivak, Homi Babha, Linda Hutcheon, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Zandra Kambyesellis and Munashe Furusa; and the reader-response theory in the cast offered by Stanley Fish and Jon Harned. This paper expands the terrain of literary criticism by illuminating the essayistic persona not only as an agile rhetor but also as one who seeks to subvert the colonial hierarchies of domination and subordination in Africa.*

***Key Words:*** *Achebe, agile thinker, argumentation, hybridity, iteration, "Otherness," postcolonial, personal essay, persuasion, persona, reader-response, subversion.*

## Agile Approach to Critical Thinking

In this paper, we have embraced the position held by Ramage *et al* that "demonstrable truth is seen by many thinkers as an illusion, therefore, *to argue* is to provide ground for inferring, to make the audience more likely to agree with the arguer's claim" (*Writing Arguments: A*

*Rhetoric with Readings,*14). Thus, we read Achebe's essays as discourses that seek to construct a conversational pact with the readers, a style that easily goes with the flexibility of an agile critical thinker. According to Anne Pauker Kreitzberg, agile critical thinking has to be seen as,

> an iterative process that incorporates feedback, learning and adjustment – rethinking prior assumptions, re-evaluating the information adduced and reconsidering the conclusions. It is a thought process that uses logical reasoning towards deep and accurate understanding (2).

Kreitzberg further avers that,

> agile critical thinking is a logical process in management that entails the assessment of the situation through clarification of the question at hand; gathering and consideration of evidence; incorporation of multiple perspectives and feedback loops, also known as thoughtful candour; reflection on potential bias and risks; weighing of credible alternatives; drawing of conclusions, and seeking to persuade the audience (3).

By "thoughtful candour," Kreitzberg designates

> … the process of sharing honest views, insights, and information, which enable the agile critical thinker to raise questions, issues, concerns, or areas of disagreement that lead the conversation forward in a productive way through insightful solution of problems and exploring new possibilities" (7).

The agile critical thinker is also conceived as

> a servant team leader who not only sets out to define the task but also to encourage the team to focus on success. As a team leader, the agile critical thinker promotes self-awareness, is a good listener, helps the team to grow, and promotes their intelligence" (*Agile Practice Guide*, 34).

We have adopted this management approach in this paper not only on account of its heavy reliance on critical thinking but also for its malleability to inter-disciplinary application. Its important concepts such as agile critical thinking, feedback loops, thoughtful candour, credibility of information, weighing alternatives, drawing conclusions, and persuasion of the audience, are also applicable to the practice of literary criticism.

## The Nature of the Personal Essay

Theodor Adorno defines the personal essayist as,

> one who composes as he experiments; turns his object around, questions it, feels it, tests it, reflects on it; considers the object from different sides in his mind's eye; and puts into words what the object allows him to see" (*Notes to Literature*, 17).

He further holds that,

> the essay is a complex rhythm of multi-voicedness, idiomatic expressions, extended metaphors and play on words; … it evokes intellectual freedom by adopting a leisure-like effort and by taking inspiration from others" (8).

The stylistic principles underlying the essay are also amplified by Phillip Lopate, who states that,

> the personal essay is characterised by the "personal element, freshness of form, an intimate style, autobiographical content and the projection of the subjective voice of the essayist -- the writer's 'I' or point of view -- which focalises and presents the argument to the reader" (Lopate, xxiii).

Another trait of the essay, which Michel de Montaigne explored is its experimental nature, with an emphasis on its conversational tone: "in talking about myself, I am talking about all of us" (*The Complete Essays*, 57). The conversational thrust of the essay has also been acknowledged by Holman Clarence Hugh in *A Handbook to Literature* (348), and by Bensel-Meyers *et al* (*Literary Culture* 6). To 'essay' is, therefore, "to attempt, to test, to make a run at something without knowing whether you are going to succeed. The word 'essay' is derived from the French infinitive *essayer* [*our emphasis*], 'to try' or 'to attempt'" (Lopate, xxiii). This same definition is also shared by Joel Wingard (*Literature,* 1479). The hallmark of the personal essay is its intimacy:

> The writer seems to be speaking directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom … the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader, a dialogue, a friendship based on identification, understanding, testiness and companionship" (Lopate, xxiv).

To this end, therefore, we can surmise that freshness, innovation, improvisation, striking into the unknown, dialogue between the writer and audience, embracing other genres and a notable sense of indeterminacy, are the key markers of the personal essay.

The personal essay is as a sub-category of the essay; hence, it is important to demarcate the personal essay from the formal essay. According to Holman Hugh in *A Handbook to Literature*, the formal or impersonal essay is characterized by "seriousness of purpose, dignity, logical organization and length, in which literary technique is secondary to serious purpose" (348). Hugh adds that "the writer of the formal essay is ordinarily a silent presence behind the words" (349). Similarly, the tone of the formal essay "is usually impersonal and serious, and its structure is tightly controlled" (Wingard, *Literature,* 1485). What is implied here is that the

formal essay strives to achieve objectivity and avoids a subjective slant. The essays in Achebe's collection, *The Education of a British-Protected Child,* are not formal but personal.

## Agile Thinking and the Conversational Pact

The distinctive feature in a personal essay is the strong articulation of the personal voice of the essayist, noticeable in the first person *I* perspective. In the essay, *The Education of a British-Protected Child,* Achebe takes us on a journey through his experience as a British-protected child, to a British-protected person and finally, to a citizen of post-independent Nigeria. The contours of the essay mirror a parallel structure in which the essayist exposes the anguish of the colonised in the hands of the coloniser. Achebe's argumentative arc leads him to the realisation that the boundaries between the colonised and coloniser are not rigid:

> What I have attempted to suggest in this rambling essay is the potency of the unpredictable in human affairs. I could have dwelt on the harsh humiliations of colonial rule or more dramatic protests against it. But I am also fascinated by that middle ground I spoke about, where the human spirit resists an abridgement of its humanity. And this was to be found primarily in the camp of the colonised, but now and again in the ranks of the coloniser too. (*The Education of a British-Protected Child,* 23)

Here, Achebe is painting for us a tangible image of the problematic neo-colonial reality, the in-between state of indeterminate identity. This kind of consciousness is what postcolonial theory frames as hybridity. Munashe Furusa constructs it as one of the modes in which African artistic representations incorporate western cultures:

> African writers portray hybridity as an unstable product of alienation and cultural contamination; as an expression of ambivalence and fluidity; as a representation of an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power. Hybridity is considered to be a major weapon against grand narratives and dominant authorities because it stands for the voices in-between the dominant authority and the "other" as well as a major force in challenging polar oppositional discourses that have often characterized colonial relationships. Hybridity contests colonialist disavowal, so that the "other" denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority. (*Theorizing Hybridity through African Literature*)

Furusa's perspective sheds light on the complex cultural tensions and the resultant uncertainties that Achebe exposes in this collection of essays. By situating himself in the hybrid

middle ground, Achebe is trying to resist and correct the epistemic violence meted by Europe on Africa.

In the personal essay, *African Literature as Restoration of Celebration,* Achebe makes a kaleidoscopic scan of both African and European literatures and concludes that not only does the former celebrate humanity on the continent but it is also interlocked with the worlds of other people. Starting with the precolonial *mbari* celebration of Igbo gods, Achebe takes us through a detailed review of European writings on Africa by Joseph Conrad, John Buchan, Philip Curtin and William Shakespeare's Caliban as an allegory of black character. He then pits these foreign writers against the works of Cheikh Hamidou Kane, a Hausa oral narrative and the *mbari* traditional celebration. Using the first-person voice and by way of an anecdote, he divulges that an editorial column in one of the leading dallies in Dublin had branded him as the man who invented African literature to which he makes a polite, self-deprecating response:

> So I took the opportunity of the forum given to me at the symposium to dissociate myself from that well-meant but blasphemous characterisation. Now before anyone runs away with the idea that my disavowal was due to modesty on my part, I should declare right way that I am actually not a very modest man … (*The Education of a British-Protected Child,* 108)

The writer implicates his audience by cautioning them against making premature assumptions. He paints himself as a writer who is transparent to the reader, through this utterance: "I should declare right way that I am actually not a very modest man." This, in my view, is a creative way of endearing himself to the reader, who is already roped into this argument by the indefinite pronoun "anyone," which is, in turn, an all-embracing reference to all implied readers. We can see that the reader has no room to wriggle out of the argument. Although this essay has not been framed in the style of an active dramatic dialogue between the audience and essayist, there is a marked feigned conversation between the essayist and the implied pliant audience. Achebe's implied reader serves as a sounding board whom the writer grants participatory rights to in the dynamic forward movement of the argument. This is also the point where we situate Stanley Fish's account of the interpretive communities, consisting of participants who share a specific reading and interpretation strategy (*Is There a Text in This Class*, 328; Harned, 11). As a rhetor, Achebe is seen as working towards persuading his audience to share his world view, something akin to creating an interpretive community of minds. Although Achebe may not have conceived these essays within the framework of agile critical thinking, we find this frame appropriate to evaluating the text. Kreitzberg's idea of thoughtful candour, in agile critical thinking, comes into play here, informed by the manner in

which Achebe implicates his audience in the implied feedback loop, in his aversion to bias, and in his keenness to shape opinion by weighing credible alternative perspectives. Achebe can, therefore, be read as an agile critical thinker from the image he cuts of a servant team leader, one who encourages self-awareness and who also promotes the use of intelligence.

### *Anecdote as Evidence*

Achebe's essays are renowned for their elaborate anecdotes, which he deploys not only to reinforce his argument but also for aesthetic value. The anecdote is conceived by Lionel Gossman as a short, freestanding narrative account of a particular single detached event or incident, told as being in itself interesting (*History and Theory*, 143). Gossman also notes that anecdotes sometimes play a supportive role, are used as examples or illustrations or are occasionally deployed in a challenging role, as the repressed of history,

> Anecdotes are highly structured and tend to confirm established views of history, the world, and human nature. In contrast, loosely structured anecdotes have usually worked to undermine established views and stimulate new ones, either by presenting material known to few and excluded from officially authorized histories, or presenting counter-histories, the censored underside of authorised history (*History and Theory*, 143)

What we take away from Gossman is that anecdotes can be used to discredit the heroic account of events, usually associated with imperial cultural dominance, by "substituting an alternative, unheroic, and often petty counter-history" (*History and Theory*, 154). We are also informed by 'Nọlue Emenanjọ, who frames the Igbo anecdote as,

> a short narrative, involving no more than a single incident, generally factual and authentic in content and basically uncomplicated in plot line. The Igbo have a neologism for it: *ukabidilu*." (*Folklore*, 172).

In respect to the instant essays, we easily note that Achebe engages in a process of retrieving the "Othered" sources of truth that were hitherto viewed with contempt in mainstream Western epistemology. In this way, we may read Achebe's anecdotes as artistic devices that play a disruptive role. It is in this connection that Gossman argues that:

> The disruptive anecdote, in short, disturbs intellectual routines and stimulates new explorations of history. Anecdote as a disruptive device produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event within and yet without the framing context of historical/narrative succession of beginning, middle, and end. (*History and Theory*, 161)

One way of reading Achebe's disruption of the established Western canons and episteme is to examine the function of the Igbo anecdotes, of which Emenanjo writes,

> the anecdotes are the preserve of elders, who use them in discourse not only to make their points but also to give prestige and depth to the subject of the discourse. Igbo anecdotes make their points by indirection and allusion. Their comic nature is brought about by their irony, wit, humour and an element of surprise, which combine to intensify the meaning of the anecdote. The Igbo anecdotes are used for exhortation, to warn against indiscretion or misjudgement or against futile efforts or the evasion of responsibility. Anecdotes are also used for sat irisation of foolishness (175)

These are the very functions to which Achebe applies his anecdotes. It is also worth noting that Achebe's anecdotes wear both Igbo (African) and European garbs: they impart an oral texture to the written texts, cultivate an African setting, deal with African thematic concerns and are presented from an African perspective. In short, Achebe's anecdotes are heteroglots. It can be argued that Achebe locates his anecdote in the contact zone between the Igbo and English generic spheres, resulting in the emergence of a hybrid anecdote, which both disrupts and recuperates its two antecedents. Remarking on the role of anecdotes in Achebe's works, Romanus Egudu claims that:

> …they are employed for mitigating the intensity of gloom in a sorrowful situation, besides being used to add colour to a conversation… Some anecdotes have become such common property in a given community that their being introduced into a conversation helps to enhance communal rapport during a conversation…anecdotes help to accentuate the relationship (healthy or hostile) between characters and to enhance the narrative art. An anecdote may also generate humour through hyperbolical imagery, making it an agent of entertainment… Achebe's interest in anecdotes is such that he employs them not only in his fictional writings, but also in nonfictional works. (46-50)

In the referred personal essay, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, Achebe shares his personal experience of his first encounter with the stark reality of having his identity defined by the colonial master. This was on the occasion of his inaugural travel out of Nigeria to study at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) staff college: "For the first time, I needed and obtained a passport and saw myself defined therein as a "British-Protected Person"" (4). This personal story is an anecdote and it underlines Achebe's realisation that a new identity has been imposed on him by the colonial power, Britain. By exposing the pain of his erased identity, the writer is inserting a subversive logic into the imperial viewpoint that generally associated the

British identity with 'civilisation' and the African identity with backwardness. The anecdote underscores the colonial reality under which African identities were buried, and the roots of their cultural anchorage destabilised.

From the perspective of agile critical thinking, we can read the anecdotes as carefully selected evidence, which the essayist incorporates into the essay to fortify his argument. The anecdotes allow the reader to visualise multiple perspectives on the issue of dismembered African identities and cultures. We are also invited to the aesthetics of a cultivated writer weighing, assessing and distilling his evidence for its relevance to the argument. It can also be observed here that as an agile critical thinker, the essayist has purposively selected anecdotes that add significant weight to his argument. In the ensuing essay, the anecdotes serve as sources of additional information with which the essayist strengthens his argument. The essayist illuminates and exposes new revelations about his experience. We may also emphasise here that the referred anecdote is a subversive device: it decentres the mono-logic of colonial domination by allowing us to visualise how British 'protection' destabilises Achebe's sense of himself, of his well-being. We can discern agile thinking in Achebe's artistic deployment of anecdotes to destabilise the imposed colonial identity and in his struggle to re-write a new one for himself and for his people.

### *Hybridity and Subversion*

Achebe's subversive thrust is arguably an effort to claim agency for the (neo)colonised subject. In juxtaposing and weighing the Igbo identity with the one forcefully imposed on him by the colonial system, Achebe concedes that he is a hybrid. His condition is captured in the words of Gayatri Spivak, who argues that the West has inaugurated itself as the,

> Subject, narrativized by the totalising and essentialising law, political economy and ideology, to the exclusion of the Other. The West is engaged in epistemic violence, orchestrated as a project to constitute the colonial subject as Other, which results in the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other's precarious Subjectivity. (66).

The hybrid has been defined as: "a state of 'in-betweenness' and 'mixedness' of cultures, identities, ethnicities, races, nations, and borders. It denotes fluidity and flux and the forging of identities in the 'third space'" (Buchanan, 238). This much has been echoed by Homi K. Bhabha, who observes that the culture of the coloniser seeks to smother that of the colonised. The resultant cultural contest between the two different cultures creates an indeterminate "state

of flux through which a newness comes into the world, the unstable superfluidity, the in-between interstitial space" (*Location of Culture,* 228). He adds that the originals on both sides get infused with "foreignness, leading to fragmentation or movement of meaning, translation" (*Location of Culture,* 228).

We read Achebe's essays as rebuttals against the epistemic violence of the West against Africa. He is engaged in an epistemic overhaul of the dislocated and subjugated knowledge as well as the unacknowledged subjectivities of his people and himself. Achebe appears to be dramatizing a new identity and developing a new consciousness, one that does not entirely disavow the coloniser's influence. This unique sensibility is articulated as cosmopolitanism by Appiah, who advises that:

> People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life... There is a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge… And the one thought that cosmopolitans share is that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other… we need to develop habits of coexistence, of living together, of conversation. (xv)

It appears to us then, that as an agile critical thinker, Achebe is keenly aware of his fluid sense of place, hence, his essays contribute to the resistance against Western domination through reconfiguration of the two influential social-cultural realms that make claims on him. Achebe seems to have accepted that this task is a continuing process; that he is highly unlikely to claim either pure Igbo identity or a British one. The graphological hyphenation in "British–Protected Child," which appears on both the essay and book titles, is quite significant, for as well as inaugurating the power of the coloniser over Achebe, it also heightens our awareness of the lingering separation from the coloniser. The hyphen (–) also underscores the subordination or "Othering" of Achebe not only as a child but as something apart, to be distanced from the protector. Herein lies the irony of the colonial project – its racism and material exploitation defines its core relationship with the colonised, while exotic and fanciful identity markers like a "British-Protected Child" prove to be rather cosmetic. By artistically exposing these underlying tensions, Achebe helps to destabilise the hierarchical codes of colonial hegemony, thereby subversively creating conditions for heterogeneous cultural expression.

## Genre-Syncretism as Subversion

In all these essays, Achebe has selected and embedded Igbo idioms, African fables, proverbs and songs. This is part of the strategies of subverting the dominant language of the coloniser, the very instrument through which the coloniser (re)named Achebe. In the ensuing essay, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, Achebe makes reference to an Igbo nursery rhyme, which celebrates the middle ground; draws on an Igbo idiom that denigrates single minded-fanaticism and offers an Igbo proverb, "Where Something Stands, Something Else will Stand beside It" (*The Education,* 6), which falls within the conceptualisation of the personal god, *chi*, in Igbo cosmology. The recuperative act of mainstreaming *chi* antagonises the centrality of Christianity in Igbo philosophy of life. The proverb, "Where Something Stands, Something Else will Stand beside It," also emphasises the duality of human existence, the fact that human beings have one leg in the material world and another in the spiritual realm, therefore, emerging with a mixed idea of the self. We have noticed the deliberate capitalisation of every word in the proverb: it is a deliberate effort to stress the weight it brings into the argument. The proverb is augmented by another one in quick succession: "The judgement of Ogidi does not go against one side" (*The Education,* 6). Ogidi is Achebe's birth place in Eastern Nigeria; he tactfully foregrounds his cultural background to subtly displace foreignising influences that are single-track and tyrannical. Like the preceding one, this latter proverb reinforces the philosophy of dualism, of circumspection, of self-reflection, of the fluidity of human life and of the lack of certainty in human relations – in other words, the Igbo world view is juxtaposed with that of the hegemonic world view of the British.

This celebration of heterogeneity goes against the grain of the colonial hierarchy that elevates the West while degrading the "Other." The main thesis Achebe is offering here has been captured in his own words,

> In my view, it is a gross crime for anyone to impose himself on another, to seize his land and his history, and then to compound this by making out that the victim is some kind of ward or minor requiring protection. It is too disingenuous (*The Education,* 7).

If there is a place in the breadth and length of this book where Achebe articulates his core philosophy, and if there is to be found a page in this collection of essays which succinctly captures the gist of these essays – this is precisely it. The message is unadorned, it is succinct, it is pinpointed and it is subversive. We, therefore, read him as an agile critical thinker.

There is another striking use of the African archive in the essay *African Literature as Restoration of Celebration*. It is a Hausa fable in which a snake who owned a horse but did not know how to ride him, encounters a toad who offers to teach him the right way of going about it. Having observed the expertise of the toad in horse-riding, the snake laughs him off,

> Then, lowering his head and looking down at the toad on the roadside, he said: 'To know is very good, but to have is better. What good does superb horsemanship do to a man without a horse?' And he rode away (*The Education,* 122).

The fable above indicts the aristocratic class that owns wealth and conspicuously uses it arrogantly to deride the poor. It is a precolonial indigenous story with deep significance to the postcolonial material inequalities. Achebe seems to have selected it for inclusion in this essay, perhaps, to sound a warning about a possible revolution by the poor, the exploited and the marginalised, represented by the toad in the fable. It also prefigures the struggle between the West and Africa.

The fact that the fable is a digression from the main thrust of his essay, gives it a sense of freshness and adds to its aesthetic appeal besides reinforcing Achebe's message. Unlike the direct personal statements we read in the essay, the fable is an oblique commentary, covertly packing a revolutionary message. We are made aware of Achebe's borrowing from indigenous knowledge to re-imagine the destruction of the oppressive postcolonial socio-economic and cultural structures. This could suggest the triumph of African art over the dominant European forms. The notable genre syncretism evident in the essay above is in keeping with the fluid nature of the personal essay; it points to the instability of the postcolonial identities, cultures and social structures about which Achebe is writing; it also suggests some measure of ambivalence by the essayistic persona towards these issues, hence, shedding light on his hybrid identity.

### *Extended Metaphors and Subversion*

For all its destructive effects, one aspect of colonialism that created ambivalence in Igboland was Christianity. It divided Ogidi village between converts and traditionalists. Achebe observes that,

> Christianity divided the village into two – the people of the church and the people of the world – but the boundary between them had many crossings.

> The average Christian enjoyed the sights and sounds of traditional festivities. Non-Christians ... mimicked our singing (*The Education*, 12).

Here, Achebe has constructed an extended metaphor, which signifies beyond its denoted scope. Concerning the nature of the metaphor, Donald Davidson writes,

> A metaphor makes us attend to some surprising likeness, between two or more things. In metaphor, certain words take on new or 'extended' meanings, creating some kind of ambiguity. The words of the metaphor have, at once, a literal and figurative meaning" (*On Metaphor*, 31).

In the foregoing illustration from the village of Ogidi, the essayist allows us to experience the images of a colonised people with fluid identities. These indeterminate identities are the veritable legacy of colonisation. The metaphorical extension to this hybrid identity means that it can be writ-large to embrace the condition of Nigeria as a post colony. In the essay *My Dad and Me*, Achebe divulges that his father was a Christian church minister, working to evangelise fellow Igbos. At this point, we are alive to the fact that Achebe started feeling the weight of European religion right at home, that this is how Christianity became culpable for the distortion of his identity. From his uncle, Udoh Osinyi, he inherited the traditional ways of his people and from his father, Isaiah Ohafor, he adopted the Christian faith (*The Education*, 37). He, therefore, straddles two cultural frontiers, which he spells out in these terms,

> This middle ground is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of the future to head into and a past to fall back on; it is the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony" (*The Education*, 6).

To this end, the perspective of agile critical thinking allows us to visualize the entire scope of Achebe's struggles from the revelation of his identity as a "British-Protected Child" (*The Education* 4); to his efforts to attain self-agency; and as he counter-translates himself through a dynamic, dialogic model of self-re-examination and self-questioning. It can be argued that Achebe appears to have accepted the challenge brought onto his doorstep by this inevitable reality and he warms up to it with a unique vigour. What we get from the emerging picture above is that Achebe is hesitant to project an image of himself patched on a solid, immovable ground: he is, rather, aware of the shifting sand beneath his feet, hence, his continuous adjustment to this nebulous postcolonial reality. He offers us an image of an agile critical thinker who sensitively adjusts himself to the rigorous demands of the rapidly changing world.

Achebe's essay *Travelling White*, presents an anecdote through which he relays his encounter with direct discrimination by colonial establishments while on an eye-opening tour of East and Southern Africa courtesy of the Rockefeller Foundation. The immigration forms ranked people according to their races with Europeans at the top, followed by Asians and Arabs and lastly, came the place of the 'Other' where Africans are lumped (*The Education*, 48). From the postcolonial frame, we are drawn to the "Othering" of Achebe and by extension, his African race. Achebe also witnessed the open discrimination against the first president of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) by a white-controlled social club in Dar-es-salaam on account of his skin colour! He finally encountered the unnerving strict separation of blacks from whites on buses in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), which revolted him so much that he not only cut short his trip but also cancelled a planned journey to then apartheid South Africa (*The Education*, 48-53). It is against this "Othering," that we locate Achebe's appropriation of the Igbo *mbari* tradition as one of the key organizing principles in his artistic works. We, therefore, analyse *mbari* as an extended metaphor through which Achebe artistically recuperates the impugned agency of the Igbo in particular, and the African race in general.

The Igbo idiom in Achebe's personal essays is presented to the reader in translated form in much the same way that Achebe's identity has been translated from its original and thrust in a hybrid state. Achebe has not disavowed English but opted to appropriate it. This is the message he conveys in the essay *Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature*, in which he strongly attacks African writers who have accused him of duplicity and complicity in the imperial project. One such writer is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, against whom Achebe responds, thus: "the difference between Ngugi and myself on the issue of indigenous or European languages for African writers is that while Ngugi believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both*" (*The Education*, 104). By embracing English, a language of the erstwhile colonial master, Achebe is, in the words of Anthonia Kalu, showing his resourcefulness in "... claiming African literature for Africans ... by applying the technique of the oral narrative to assert and insert his Igbo society and its rhetorical practices" (53). We can safely claim that Achebe is engaged in "'cross-cultural' interactions, 'adapting' European forms, by remaking them to suit African specifications" (Barry, 194-6). The proverbs, fables, African setting/characterisation, and metaphors are some of the rhetorical strategies Achebe has used to give local flavour to the otherwise cold, rigid architecture of standard English. This is why we agree with Kalu's observation that what concerns the African writer is not,

> full entry into a contemporary reality but a conscious effort to increase the match between the oral tradition and Western script centric incursions into existing African temporal and spatial realities through arguments and postures that sustain African literature (56).

In our view, Achebe's posture in this argument about the place of European languages in African scholarship can as well be read as that of an agile thinker who fashions a solution to an issue by playing with fresh ideas from diverse frontiers.

The metaphorical imaginary in the foregoing question of the language of African literature partly resides in the fact that Achebe has not only embraced English but refashioned it anew to produce fresh settings, weaved in non-European characters, articulated African concerns, and animated it with rhetorical devices drawn from African languages. This appropriation of English language marks Achebe's literary style as a linguistic hybrid just as it produces a hybridised discourse and a hybrid identity. To put it more clearly, the duality of language and identity produces both a fresh language, which is slightly different from the standard English, as well as a writer whose identity is neither British nor Igbo. This fluidity of Achebe's identity and the indeterminacy of the kind of English he has created, combine to conjure new imaginaries – hybrids. In brief, the linguistic heteroglot and hybrid identity of the essayist are metaphorically prefigured by the act of appropriating standard English. This is why we are offering an argument here that the essay *Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature* could be Achebe's way of coming to terms with the loss or distortion of traditional Igbo culture. It is a recuperative act which, however, does not negate the imprint of colonial hegemony and Christianity on him and his people. Achebe's agility as a critical thinker is also implied in his ability to syncretise the two linguistic archives into a refreshing artistic discourse. This, in turn, subverts the purity of English language as well as the imposed identity of a helpless "British-Protected" child. Achebe outgrows the foreign 'childish' "British-protected" identity by inaugurating agency for himself and metaphorically, for the Igbo people and the rest of Africa.

### *The Child as Subversive Metaphor*

We have seen how Achebe berates Nigeria – for want of leadership, decadent morality, corruption, ethnicity, indiscipline and dearth of progress in human development. He has, both discursively and metaphorically, constructed Nigeria in the image of a child: this falls within the ambit of Emmanuel Yewah's argument that disillusioned African writers,

> have turned their creative endeavors into weapons to challenge and to deconstruct what Jean Franco has called 'any signified that could correspond to the nation'. These subversive activities of de-centering the nation, of questioning established national boundaries, have taken various forms (45).

In an essay, *What is Nigeria to Me?* Achebe traces the consciousness of his Nigerianness, beginning with his Igbo roots, and into his reluctant acceptance of this British colonial project that lumped together over 200 assorted ethnicities into a single political entity. But the inability of the post-independence African-led federal government of Nigeria, to protect the Igbo community against the genocide that followed the second military coup in 1966, spawns profound disappointment in him. He writes: "The final consequence of this failure of the state to fulfil its primary obligation to its citizens was the secession of Eastern Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra" (*The Education,* 44). Achebe admits renouncing Nigeria for thirty months during the Biafran war of secession. He justifies his renunciation of Nigeria not only on account of its bestiality towards the Igbo people during the civil war, but also on its failed leadership,

> Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly countries in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun... It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar (*The Trouble with Nigeria,* 9).

The tone of the essayist's anger is unmistakable. But after careful reflection, Achebe feels that he could not reject Nigeria entirely,

> I realised that I could not reject her [Nigeria]. It has occurred to me that Nigeria is neither my mother nor father. Nigeria is a child. I have said somewhere that in my next reincarnation I want to be a Nigerian again…Nigeria needs help. We are the *parents* of Nigeria, not vice versa. (*The Education,* 45).

Before elaborating on the subversive metaphor of the child, we draw attention to the essayistic stress on the noun *parents*. This stress is important because Achebe wishes to achieve two things: to demonstrate the gap between Nigeria and himself in matters relating to vision and maturity; and to show the inseparable link between the two entities. We need to remember that Nigeria is a creature of colonial expansionism and imperial exploitation: Achebe's ambivalent relationship to this colonial creation, therefore, rhymes with his postcolonial hybrid identity.

Going back to the metaphor, it is important to point out that Achebe's use of the noun phrase "Nigeria is a child" (*The Education,* 45), sits at the centre of this metaphorical construction.

We are drawn to the surprising re-imagination of Nigeria as a human child. We ordinarily conceive a nation-state or country as a collectivity of people governed by internationally recognisable institutions. But in his re-definition of Nigeria, Achebe brings together two divergent images – Nigeria and a child – into sharp relief. In this regard, we agree with Karsten Harries that "metaphor joins dissimilarities not so much to let us perceive in them some previously hidden similarity but to create something altogether new" (*On Metaphor*, 71). The idea here is that readers are forced to establish certain relationships between the nation-state known as Nigeria and a child. In so doing, we engage in the following interpretive process established by Ted Cohen: "(1) The speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgement of a community" (*On Metaphor*, 6). The relationship between the essayist and the reader can be interpreted as consisting of construction and construal, which brings intimacy, resulting from the cognitivity of the metaphor. The foregoing implied conversation between the writer and reader can also be read as constituting an agile critical thought process.

The community mentioned by Cohen may also be seen as an interpretive community from the reader-response perspective. We could read Achebe as a writer who strings his audience along into a zone of shared interpretive strategies, assumptions and interests, largely underpinned by the postcolonial condition. According to Stanley Fish, "interpreting selves are constituted by the ways of thinking and seeing that inhere in social organisations" (*Is There a Text in This Class?* 329). In the words of Jon Harned, "the world is made up of groups of people who see and read in profoundly different ways and who seek to make their way of seeing and reading prevail" (2). Since colonialism imposed the Western way of seeing on the "Other," Achebe's essays are, therefore, meant to contest the (de)construction of Africa in the European episteme or interpretive community. He carries out his resistance by inviting and persuading his implied audience to acquiesce in the hybridised space between the contending African and European sphere, thus, pointing towards the creation of a counter-veiling interpretive community.

Based on the foregoing insights, we hasten to add that a child is ordinarily associated with the attributes of weakness, inadequate knowledge, lack of agency, dependency, and small stature. The failure of Nigeria to demonstrate responsible leadership, protect human rights, and promote the economic advancement of all her citizens compels Achebe to metaphorically re-imagine this country as a child. Achebe feels that this failure of leadership is largely deliberate. The writer invites the reader to behold a new, if fresh, image of Nigeria, and it is not a

favourable one. His persuasive effort in the instant essay confirms that the essayistic persona is operating not just subversively but as an agile critical thinker.

Achebe also feels a sense of deep nostalgia for the leadership qualities that Nigeria lost in its formative years, displaying a regret that such rare opportunities to forge a cohesive republic were squandered. In the essay *The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen*, he pays tribute to Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first African Governor General of Nigeria, for his humanistic and democratic credentials (*The Education*, 25-34). When this essay is read against the background of the numerous crises that befell post-independence Nigeria, then one begins to understand the painful knot that Achebe is grappling with, and his obligation as an intellectual to respond and offer solutions as suggested by Edward Said:

> Intellectuals speak against power, question structures of coercion, injustice, and silencing, create alternative readings of history and culture … through the processes of demythologising and demystifying, by inventing new forms of reading non-Western [African] history and culture by demythologizing the illusions and myths of empire and other systems of silencing. ("Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" 193)

It is instructive that Achebe deconstructs the insidious ravages of the Empire through a metaphorical (re)construct. This powerful artistic rendition operates on the principle of contrast by reducing Nigeria, a creation of the British colonial adventurism, to the level of a child, while elevating its victims (Achebe and right-thinking Nigerian citizens), to the elevated height of parents. This metaphor subtly recuperates his African identity and agency, sullied, wounded, impugned, and erased by both British colonialism and by its surrogate post-independence regimes. In this creative way, the essayist as an agile critical thinker, who artistically subverts the hierarchical structures of the empire and its persisting vestiges.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the subversive voice of the agile critical thinker in Chinua Achebe's *The Education of a British-Protected Child* from the syncretised perspective that brings together the framework of agile critical thinking, the theory of the personal essay, reader-response theory and postcolonialism. We have explored the iterative function of the essayistic persona, the communication loops between the writer and the implied reader, and read the essays as persuasive arguments that seek to subvert the epistemic hierarchies constructed by colonial domination.

In reading the essayistic persona as a flexible interlocutor who establishes a cooperative pact with the implied reader, we have further revealed that the personal essayist also takes the implied reader into his confidence and engages in an open self-reexamination. The analytic symphony created by the foregoing interpretive frameworks has given us a glimpse into the essayistic persona as an agile rhetor.

Achebe's personal essays come out as artistic arguments, which seek to persuade the reader to agree with the position taken by the essayist – the reconstruction of deconstructed identity and the recuperation of erased agency.

His anecdotes serve the twin purpose of not only strengthening the aesthetics of the essays but also the evidentiary purpose of backing up his subversive message. We have observed that Achebe retrieves and appropriates traditional African songs, fables and proverbs in order to artistically displace the linguistic hegemony of standard English. In doing this, he inaugurates a new enriched hybridised English, which speaks to the new cosmopolitan identity that Achebe is exploring for the postcolonial subject.

A similar metaphor is seen in Achebe's (de)construction of Nigeria as a child: here, Achebe indicts the colonial project called Nigeria while exploring the possibility of new beginnings for his blighted country. We conclude by noting that Achebe artistically strings the implied reader into a carefully cultivated communication pact that also stages subversive messages – a feat characteristically associated with agile critical thinking.

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# THEATRE IN KENYA AND THE CONSTRUCT OF LEADERSHIP IN FRANCIS IMBUGA'S *AMINATA*

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## Abstract

*Theatre helps the reader/audience to enact and re-imagine the world through the possibilities of creative dissonance. This paper looks at theatre in Kenya in respect to the construct of leadership and the discourse around it. Based on Imbuga's play Aminata, it examines leadership and how tradition, the city, education and religion become important in its appropriation. It employs the sociological framework and feminist theory to analyse how leadership is portrayed. Gender roles, inheritance, wealth, wisdom and titular power are the basis of analysis. The paper infers that Imbuga does not try to prescribe or advocate for a totemic adulation of any form of leadership but rather exposes each for us to interrogate.*

***Key Words**: theatre, gender roles, construct of leadership.*

## Introduction

Drama appropriates the leadership space through the portrayal of characters and their power relations. It does so by interrogating the legitimacy or otherwise of a leader or power wielder faced with conflicts that test their qualities and whose reactions to those conflicts may trigger further conflicts that are internal, interpersonal or representational. Internal conflicts are the ones that happen within the person – a troubled conscience or a difficulty in making a choice. Interpersonal conflicts arise out of the relations between persons who hold different positions, ideals or beliefs. Representational conflicts are those that happen between a person and an idea, a belief, a custom, a natural occurrence or a moral standpoint. From either of these types of conflicts emerge actions that are either redemptive or condemnatory to the leadership quality of the character. Antigone, in Sophocles' play of the same name, is obviously the leader, both morally and otherwise, compared to her uncle Creon who is the titular ruler of Thebes. That she buries her betrothed and on being punished, takes her own life, is proof that she had the

mettle to stand up to authoritarianism. Her accusation of Creon was that it was against the laws of nature to leave the dead unburied – this principle is both cultural and moral, then and now.

Theatre in Kenya has dealt with the issue of leadership over time. This can be demonstrated with a few examples: Inspector Kiongo in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *This Time Tomorrow*, is a "leader" who grows from the slum and betrays his people when he gets a position of authority; Remi in Ngugi's *The Black Hermit* is annoyed that the "village leaders" are so blinded by tribalism that they cannot condemn corruption; David Mulwa's *Redemption* is a study of the failure of leadership, uniquely portrayed in the character of Bishop Muthemba; Wahome Mutahi's *Mugathe Mobogothi* is a satire on the failure of leadership; Theatre Workshop Production's *Drumbeats on Mount Kerenyaga* is a reorientation of a leadership lost, a replanting of the forgotten seeds.

Furthermore, we recognise here that there is a huge repertoire of drama that concerns itself with the interrogation of leadership in unpublished works written and performed in theatres across the country and those that are presented during the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, a festival that has been happening annually since 1959. For the purposes of this paper, we shall concentrate on Francis Imbuga's *Aminata* and how leadership is presented. The paper aims to study the portrayal of leadership through theatre. I investigate whether what this particular drama presents constitutes the playwright's "prescription" on how leadership should be conducted or a critique of existing paradigms in a fast-changing social milieu.

Francis Imbuga is famous for what John Ruganda calls the "Dialectics of Transparent Concealment" – the technique by which a serious indictment on society and some significant characters is diluted by linguistic infraction, setting, the "remove" of both characters and venue and the use of dramatic devices such as dance, wordplay and slapstick comic relief. Outa Odera (2001), in the same vein, argues that he creates comic characters and,

> … in this respect practices some kind of avoidance art, which enables him to preserve his art. He is the general who would like to live and fight again, rather than be killed at war! (356).

This explains why, for instance, he uses borderline characters or settings (such as a village) that are a microcosm of a larger society. Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City, Man of Kafira, The Successor, Game of Silence,* among others, deal with a dictatorship at various stages of disintegration – from brutality so as to hold onto power and amass wealth to a psychological

breakdown and psychosis. Writing about Imbuga and Ruganda, Joshua Kyalo in his thesis "A Comparative Study of the Visions and Styles of Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda" argues that their works are filled with nostalgic characters who treasure the tranquillity and predictability of the past,

> Faced with an unbearable present and an uncertain future, the characters constantly look back for spiritual regeneration. In exploiting the backward glance, the playwrights seem to adopt a comparative approach in their evaluation of the society. This comparison hinges on juxtaposition between the past and the present African society. The present is the express focus of their creative writing. Its contradictions are contrasted with the peace and harmony of the traditional African society. While theirs is not a drama of despair, and indeed points to the future, both Imbuga and Ruganda are totally dissatisfied with contemporary African leadership. (23)

As a critique of leadership, we expect that Imbuga would create characters and scenarios that are both generalizable and inimitable. The dissatisfaction portrayed in Imbuga's writing is by distancing and defamiliarising leadership. In our study, we shall interrogate how Imbuga's Aminata is a study of the various leadership styles evident in his society. In this paper, my hypothesis is that Imbuga, among other things, has employed instructive educational drama in *Aminata,* to caricature the efforts of the characters by creating singular narratives of their "mastery" of leadership. This way, he deconstructs preconceived notions and views on a number of leadership configurations. He invites us to see the underbellies of each leader, making us laugh and leaving us to ponder. He uses various styles of leadership as discussed below.

### *The Stool: Leadership or Rule*

In the play *Aminata*, perhaps the question we need to ask is: is there a leader? As the play opens it transpires that leadership is represented by the Membe stool of rule, and for now and the next two years, the stool is in the Nyarango family while Jumba is the headman. The initial conflict in the play is whether the grave of Rev Ngoya should be cemented or not. Both Ababio and Jumba believe that if it is cemented, Rev Ngoya will be contained in the grave and will not be able to roam around as a spirit. This argument causes the characters sleepless nights. Whereas this is an absurd belief, it is based on a well-known religious view. The reason Rev Ngoya's dying wish was that his grave should not be cemented is the same as that of Ababio and Jumba. However, the two of them want to prevent Ngoya from "resurrecting" in their dreams to offer

"living" evidence of the will that confers land to Aminata. They have disregarded the will and are determined to keep it that way. The country's law is seen as a distant thing that is "mouthed by women", and Aminata is the personification of that distance: a woman, married in another village, an educated person, and living in the city. Jumba is determined to enforce the traditions of Membe as its ruler. But is Jumba the leader of Membe village? Several arguments can be advanced to show that he is not.

Firstly, Jumba is consumed by hatred and a supercilious zeal to annihilate his dead brother, the Rev. Ngoya. He holds a grudge against him for bringing religion to the village and upsetting the age-old dynamics of power relations. His demonstrating that women can eat chicken and convincing men to go through vasectomy to help in family planning are some of the things he holds against Ngoya. He also believes that it was wrong for his late brother to have offered to the church a piece of land on which grew the tree under which it was believed the circumcision of Membe, the founder of the village had taken place and which had been regarded as a shrine. But since his brother is now dead, Jumba is determined to erase his memory. He is propping up Ababio to fight with his sister by perverting the cultural sense of manhood. He tells Ababio,

> Jumba: Oh, I don't even know why I am fighting on your side. There is no one to fight for. And that is Aminata's greatest score. You are not a man (p. 26)

But Jumba's own manhood has been questioned by no other than his wife, Mama Rosina. At the opening of Part 1, Rosina opines that Jumba is lacking in wisdom and is acting in haste (p 3). At the peak of their altercation, she equates him with the dead,

> Rosina: Poor you, perhaps you are already dead and gone. (p. 5)

Rosina's consternation is drawn from the realisation of Jumba's inability to understand that Ngoya's spirit and shadow cannot be imprisoned by cementing the grave because he was not a believer in the traditional religion. She also is clear that Jumba is fighting a meaningless war with innocent children. Jumba, all through, tries to defeat Rosina's logic by dismissing her as a woman and telling her to keep quiet. This is the expression of his power over women, but Rosina sees through the smokescreen: that his manhood is challenged and he is no longer behaving like a man. The irony of the manhood assertion is that he himself has gone through the second knife (vasectomy) and hence may not be able to sire. This, pitted against the death of his children through a strike of lightning, and the dumbness of Mbaluto who survived the tragedy, makes him a bitter man. His chagrin against Aminata is as a result of her surviving the

strike unscathed. He considers her the embodiment of evil and everything she does is a projection of the same evil,

> Jumba: … Aminata's so called good deeds are a mere cover up for the evil within. I have even been warned of it, in a dream. Your sister is evil, through and through. (p. 27)

So, Jumba is a ruler without the mettle to rule. He is not a leader because he is not a man. In Part 2 Scene 1, this imagery is completed when Rosina tries to get Ababio to "man up" and talk to the sister to little avail.

Secondly, Jumba is scheming against the Land Circle and the elders of Membe. He holds the view that land can only be inherited by the male child in a family. He makes Ababio swear by his father's grave, an ironical act, since they are trying to subvert Ngoya's own will. He wants to get the elders to support his idea of disinheriting Aminata. He lies to everyone that he talked to his brother two days before he died and that's how the cementing of the grave was agreed upon. Yet when accosted by Amata and Midambo in Part Two, Scene One, he concedes that when he was sent for by his brother, he did not go because he was unwell and "not himself" (p. 55).

Fortunately, the elders have their own mind. Nuhu and Ndururu are actually annoyed that Jumba tricked them to cement the grave. They clearly support Aminata and Jumba swears that if they do not take up the responsibility of shielding Membe, he would do it singlehandedly (p. 20). Also, the elders convened a meeting in his absence (owing to sickness) and transacted business. He is shocked that a meeting can be called without his authority which he has asserted from the beginning.

At this point we are sure Jumba has lost grip of the stool of rule. Several times in the play, he quips that the stool needs the support of the elders or it will be "spittle in the sand" (pp 7, 61) and like a "breastless woman" (p. 57). When this scheme falls apart, he plans to step down and have Rosina become the village head. According to him, this is how best to outfox the elders – by making Rosina the village head in revenge for their favouring the idea of giving Aminata the land. Little does he know that the elders already recognise Rosina as the power behind the stool of rule. Indeed, Mama Rosina has been portrayed in the play as level-headed and conciliatory. Everyone respects her and she holds no bitterness in her heart. We never get to experience her "formal" leadership because once she has been handed the official paraphernalia of the headship, she embarks on carrying out the first ceremony (to have Aminata receive the

soil as a symbolic inheritance of her father's land) but this cannot be completed because Ababio has committed suicide.

By creating Jumba in this way, Imbuga is criticizing rulers and boldly saying that rulers are not necessarily leaders. Having the custody of the instruments of power does not make one a leader. It should not be lost to us that Jumba's adjudication of an issue is predicated on his being in power, even when it is clear he is wrong. This is symptomatic of the whole question of leadership in Africa. Mulemi, in what seems like an authorial commentary says,

> Mulemi: Your uncle is a perfect mockery of enlightened tribal leadership on the continent.

So Aminata's predicament is "continentalised" and effectively globalised. Her fight is not in her village of Membe but on a wider metaphoric level. When, in response to her husband, she downplays the symbolism of the reference to the continent, she basically reinforces it. She states that Jumba does not hate her, he fears her with "a strange kind of fear…like the fear of darkness, of the unknown". She avers that the predicament of the leadership in Africa is exposed as the fear of change, the fear that the social fabric has changed and the rulers are not prepared for it.

### *The Question of Wealth: Inheritance and Leadership*

Inheritance in the context of this paper is seen as a basis of entitlement. The access to wealth and influence because of cultural predisposition is interrogated. In common parlance, at least in Kenya, wealth is a function of leadership. The idiom in the street is that anyone who has wealth and money is the "boss" or "*mheshimiwa*". Such people get a following not because of any ideological clarity or persuasion, but because of the ability to do "disbursements". In the play, Aminata, a lawyer, has money and, therefore, easily brings piped water to the village, she gives Agege huge tips, she pays school fees for Ababio's children, she takes her father to hospital, she buys him a coffin upon death and she is invested in the dance troupe of the village. She has, therefore, endeared herself to the people and the troupe is rehearsing a song in her honour. Is she a leader? No, she has the ability to get a following because of the money she has been "disbursing".

At the centre of the conflict is the inheritance of land in the village. Aminata's late father bequeathed her a piece of land when he was on his death bed. From the play-in-a-play in Part 1, Scene 2, it is clear that she does not want to own any land in Membe. But her father insists and puts his wishes in his will before he dies. It is his dying gift to her for the care she has taken

of him. According to him, it is perfectly in order to consider her "his child", not "a woman". From the onset, therefore, leadership is provided by Ngoya on the matter of inheritance. He had, in his hay days, been providing leadership for women emancipation, education and transformational religious instruction. But Jumba has a different idea and a scheme: that tradition must be preserved and that a written will does not constitute evidence. The pursuit of the piece of land becomes a major trope in the play. All dramatic action is wound around it.

Jumba and Ababio want to disinherit Aminata so as to stem her influence in the village. Conversely, the matter has become a village issue: women are already talking to their husbands to defeat the push by Jumba. In their paper *Power and Gendered Identities: (Re) Configuring the Gendered Self in Kenyan Drama*, Charles Kebaya and Waveney Olembo contend that "drama as an art form bears the potential of perpetuating and re-creating the gendered identities in society" (97) and, therefore, in the case of Aminata, her assertion for her right to the inheritance is a humanising quest,

> In demanding to know from her uncle, Jumba, what is wrong with her inheriting property such as land, Aminata seems not only to speak for herself but also for her fellow women who are oppressed by the Manichean power structure in the society. Women are seen as victims of this oppressive structure and are in a constant struggle for self-expression. (100)

Aminata wants to know whether there is something wrong with her, something that her being a woman configures her as a lesser human. This, the elders are unable to articulate and, therefore, this becomes the dominant discourse in her quest. For all intends and purposes, Aminata has won the moral ownership and legally, she can pursue the matter in the courts and win. Both Joshua and her brother, who is abroad, have accepted the will and are able to give testimony. Ababio cannot see beyond his fixation with tradition and when he is floored by Aminata's argument he falls back on his drinking for reprieve. The sense of desperation we see in Jumba and Ababio is derived from the fact that Aminata's access to that land will elevate her from the status of a woman to a human being – and hence validate her leadership. This will have the effect of dislodging patriarchy (for Jumba) and annihilating manhood (for Ababio).

### *The Construct of Leadership as Wisdom*

Wisdom can be defined as the ability to think about something or to adjudicate a matter in a way that demonstrates thoughtfulness and maturity in considering the effects of a decision or action taken. As a social commentary, *Aminata* vilifies the titular construct of leadership, especially that which comes as a result of elections or selections. The portrayal of Jumba, the

occupier of the stool of rule in Membe, as a man who lacks wisdom, patience and good intentions – is a critique on formal leadership. On noticing the anger and rash actions of Jumba, Mama Rosina cautions him that "a wise man fills his ears before he empties his mouth" and further that "the tortoise maybe slow but he seldom fails" (pg 3). This annoys Jumba and he turns to his usual defence: querying her knowledge of sayings, falling back on the freshness of his brother's grave as an omen and calling her a woman (who was born elsewhere). By so doing he demonstrates that he is weak and injudicious. Later in the same scene, Jumba, accosted with the level-headedness of Nuhu and Ndururu, derides wisdom thus,

> Jumba: …What is wisdom, Ndururu? *(Pause.)* Tell me, have you ever seen a man die wisely?

His utterance could be adjudged as a philosophical standpoint if it were taken out of context. But the context here is such that he is determined to destroy Aminata and so it is satirical since he is talking about himself. He will "die" because of the lack of wisdom. But Nuhu is insistent and counsels him further, patiently, as if he was talking to a child,

> Nuhu: Caution is wisdom and wisdom, strength. Be strong headman, a lion does not challenge a mouse to a duel.

That he takes Nuhu's statement literally and plunges on to configure the duel (by naming Aminata the mouse and insisting that she is evil and a witch on frivolous grounds of pure luck and happenstance) is proof of his lack of wisdom. His hate and evil schemes consume him until he alienates himself from the community and from the elders. He pretends to be sick on two occasions: one so as not to visit his brother on his death bed and, two, to avoid convening the elders of the stool so as to stall a deliberation on the inheritance issue. What he does not seem to realise is that the matter is already in the public court and the tide has turned against him and Ababio. By the time he realises it, a verdict has already been reached and the elders have all but formally pronounced it. He has no option but to get out of the way. That he says he is willing to step down because he is the one to appoint his successor to the stool (even though for only two years) is a further indictment of his lack of wisdom and leadership.

The one individual who comes across as wise is the village idiot Agege. Agege makes six appearances in the play – at the grave scene; in the play in a play when Jumba and the elders reminisce over Rev Ngoya's chicken coup; in the scene where Aminata and Ababio battle; in the scene where Jumba has convinced Rosina to become village head; in the scene where he announces the abrasa; and finally, to announce the suicide by Ababio. As a borderline character, these are many appearances and, therefore, he is used by the playwright to create

cognitive dissonance. He is a character distant from the logic of those otherwise endowed with wisdom but in actual fact he is the one who embodies wisdom.

Agege sets the stage for the discussion of equality between persons when he confronts Jumba with Aminata's being "equal than Ababio"(p. 8). Agege is cast in the Boalian "joker" schemata. The joker in community theatre is used to subvert discourse and to confront what 'normal' people would find difficult to confront. Nuhu and Mama Rosina have in the same Act been unable to bring up this subject with the headman, but Agege does easily. Agege, with the knowledge that he is the village idiot, sets out to prove his "un-idiocy". He refuses to go back to the bar to call Ababio because he "has rights" not to be abused and sent (p. 8) and also because, in his opinion, Ababio should be the village idiot considering his drinking habits (p. 10). He also queries the tip he is given by Jumba and refuses to be sent to split wood by Rosina. He is a story maker and not a babbling fool. In the altercation between Aminata and Ababio, he is the agent provocateur who situates "change" in the discourse between tradition and modernity and finally, he is the conscience of the society – his entry at the time when Aminata is about to receive the soil scuttles the progression to new leadership. In the play, he is the only character who grows: from complaining about his assigned nomenclature of "village idiot" to inventing his own title – "information officer of village".

### *Feminism and Gender Dialectics: Aminata's Disempowerment of Women and the Fight for Equality*

This play was commissioned by the Steering Committee of the United Nations Decade for Women Conference (the Third World Conference on Women) held in Nairobi in 1985. As such, it is to be expected that it would imbue feminist principles, characterisation, etcetera to dispel myths about women that are perpetrated by patriarchy, but more importantly to facilitate a discussion on women in leadership. Feminist theories, as Fortier argues, are directly and predominantly political,

> Its purpose is to struggle against the oppression of women as women. This oppression, which is seen to be historically extremely common and widespread, is the result of patriarchy, the supremacy of the masculine power and authority most firmly entrenched in the figure of the father. (108)

Early in the play Jumba mourns the "death" of the construct of manhood in Membe. This "death" gives rise to "womanhood". After his altercation with Agege, he says to Nuhu the mason,

> Jumba: … Nuhu, what has become of Membe's sons? We once stood firm as men on our two feet, erect, our heads held high, sniffing proudly at the passing wind for enemy scent. What became of that blood of courage that once filled our veins?

There are three issues here. Apart for the misogynistic nuances and the phallic innuendo, Jumba firstly equates humanity to men. Earlier on, in the same utterance, he was complaining about how Aminata has weakened manhood in the village. Thirdly, he equates women to the enemy and invokes war on Aminata. This sets the stage for the interrogation of the gender construct. In the play, Imbuga presents us with a double vision – something akin to polyphony in narratology. Aunt Kezia is the exemplification of what the feminist scholar Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader* calls "immasculation of women" that is, creating women characters who see the world from the masculine perspective. She comes to her nephew Mulemi (Aminata's husband) and rebukes him for apparently letting Aminata grow and shine while he does not:

> Kezia: … Every time we switch on our wireless, it is Aminata's name we hear. What happened to yours? (p. 33)

That she has been sent by her brother, Mulemi's father, strengthens her "emasculation". She holds the view that Aminata has changed their son because she carries a curse, and that she wants to "sit on a man's stool with a woman's buttocks" (p. 31) by seeking to inherit the land. Her insistence that she has curtailed his "flourishing" as a man (ostensibly by having many children and not getting bored) is the epitome of her masculine orientation. She goes on to redact the womanhood of Aminata by claiming that she is the "husband of the house". (p. 33)

This is in keeping with Fortier's postulation that feminist theory is,

> profoundly concerned with the cultural representation of women sometimes as a strictly masculinist fantasy with no relation to real women, sometimes as the appropriation of women and women's bodies to masculine perspectives" (111).

Imbuga, through this character of Kezia, is advancing the stereotypical framing of male narratives of women. It is clear that Aunt Kezia is entrapped in the misogynous rupture so characteristic of patriarchy. She hates Aminata for "going through the knife" and for "being unable to multiply" the progeny of her brother. The two issues, plus the assertion that it's Aminata who wants to inherit her father's land, are clear falsehoods. It is clear that the author makes her such a disagreeable character on purpose. Secondly, he juxtaposes her visit to the entry of Aminata and the clear dispelling of the myths created. When Aminata comes in, she is presented as a woman, a loving wife and mother who has humane feelings. We get to learn

in the play in a play, that she actually had refused the land offer from her father. She wants to fight to the end because of her father, not because of herself. In the discussion with her husband, Aminata likens the fear of patriarchy to the diametrically opposed but untapped potential of Mbaluto and women,

> Aminata: Yes, now I understand why he resents Mbaluto. It's because he doesn't understand him. The power of silence, the power of the unknown. All the potential locked up in the silence of a historical tragedy. It's true of us women as well. All these years men have buried us with our potential. And that is what is tragic…" (p. 37)

This sounds like a lesson in feminism, an assertion of the chthonic essence of women and the feebleness of the oppressive male. It is critical for us to understand that Mbaluto and Aminata were together with the other children when the tragedy of lightening stuck them. The boy became dumb, but Aminata survived unscathed. This is an indictment of male agency as primarily a fear of the potential of a woman when not "put down" by patriarchy. Imbuga subverts masculinity by making the men emasculated (they have gone through the second knife) and Ababio a far cry from the Freudian Oedipal archetype: he is male without being a man in the social construct of Membe village. Aminata, as we shall argue below, is pitted against tradition and culture not against Ababio. Instead of the village transforming itself, it is pulling itself back, and Aminata with it. Ababio is just a product of a culture that has no redemptive mechanism. He is sick and he needs to be treated. Instead, Jumba takes advantage of him.

As a play, *Aminata* is actually interrogating the context of change and subverting the gender equality and equity question. My argument is that although Imbuga seems to be promoting gender equality, he, by design, deracinates the argument. I am persuaded that the development of two strong and seemingly flawless characters (Mama Rosina and Aminata), he is preparing us for their total annihilation by the actions of their parallels. Mama Rosina is developed as an ideal mother, one who even though she has lost her children and her husband has undergone vasectomy, bears no bile and becomes the rock or rather "lioness" behind the Membe stool of rule. Also, as Kebaya and Olembo argue,

> Aware of the resistance that she will receive from the patriarchs, Imbuga portrays Aminata as a highly educated, brilliant, aggressive and assertive lawyer with a mind of her own. Her knowledge, especially in law, plays a significant role in her battle for the land (p. 100)

This puts her at par, or above the folly of patriarchy as represented by Jumba. She even has the emotional intelligence to keep quiet when everybody expects a bitter exchange between her and Jumba during the elders meeting. But this is as far as the advance of equality and celebration of women goes.

Structurally, the play is clearly anti-feminist. Aminata is juxtaposed against a brother who has no courage to talk to her even when drunk and who is, in the apt description made by Jumba, a "crow" (pp 20, 63). A crow has two peculiar characteristics – it is black with a white collar mane. This contradiction is visited upon Ababio as being a man and not a man at the same time. His having a male organ is, in the cultural construct of village lore, the only manly thing about him. He has no education and no passion. Again, the crow feeds on carrion and is characteristically scared by immobile things shaped like human beings – hence the "scare-crow" phrase. Ababio is unable to survive the supposed inheritance of land by Aminata. This juxtaposition has the effect of making Aminata a runaway success because she has no credible opposite. In fact, Aminata is seen as fighting the formless and inarticulate phenomenon called tradition and Ababio is just a loser who dies as Aminata seems to be winning.

Mama Rosina, a woman of great wisdom and clarity of mind on issues, is pitted against her husband, an empty-headed man driven by revenge over something that can easily be attributed to nature. That his children were struck by lightning and died and another became dumb is the sole reason why Jumba attributes his loss to Rev Ngoya (and, therefore, Aminata). The wise elders can see that this is far-fetched and warn him against calling Aminata evil (p. 11), a witch who "knocks wedges between us and our womenfolk" (p.12). As if this is not enough, she becomes his guinea pig with the elders, part of his experiment on testing their manhood.

In fact, Jumba considers himself a heroic leader. He says he shall go down in history books as follows: "Jumba was the first headman of Membe to leave his stool to a woman of his choice" (p. 64). Further, when the proposal is made to the elders about her becoming the village head, the same disempowerment technique is employed by the author. Nuhu, in Part 2 Scene 2, argues that they thought it was a joke but now their hands are tied because they agreed (p. 69). This act subverts the fight for gender equity and equality. Mama Rosina becomes an accident as the village head. What is more stultifying is when we find out that the stool of rule is actually no longer important since there is a new church and government. Nuhu says, "So it is of no real consequence who sits on it." (p. 69). This means that Mama Rosina wields no power and what others may see as an achievement is actually meaningless; she is a leader of nothing. This is

further dramatized when, after taking over the stool of power, she is unable to perform an official function which is necessary for one to "mark possession of Membe's stool of rule" (p. 73). Jumba's words at the end of the book are, in my opinion an authorial commentary:

> Jumba: It is not yet too late to learn, yet what have we done? What have we done?

These lines are uttered after the container falls – when the soil has been scattered, Aminata has sunk to her knees and everybody else has frozen. They are a summary of the play's purpose: to demonstrate that women can fight, but it will only serve as a socially counterproductive exercise. This is the lowest point in the play.

## Conclusion

*Aminata* is a complex play that uses the stool of Membe as a fulcrum for the discussion of leadership, not just of men or women in the village, but as a metaphor for the evolving challenges of leadership in Africa: the democratic reversals and the intrigues of power. It debunks myths of the stool as a source and symbol of leadership, of men and their leadership, of technological and educational advancement as leadership and of wealth as a prerequisite to leadership. Its complexity, in our view, is enhanced by its dualism: with one hand it advances the leadership of women and with the other dismantles the championing of feminism.

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# A CRITICAL THINKING APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES: *KING LEAR* AND *ROMEO AND JULIET*

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## Introduction

William Shakespeare is famed for having written some of the most powerful plays that still resonate with us today despite having been written over four hundred years ago in Europe. I will attempt to examine two of the tragedies he wrote, namely. *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* and demonstrate the critical thinking skills of some of the characters through their thoughts and actions. Did lack of critical thinking skills lead to their tragic deaths? G. Lipson & S. Lipson (39) claimed,

> of the 37 plays written by William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* is the play that appeals most strongly to young people. Although it was written in the language of another century, the conflicts in this play are timeless. Both the consuming urgency of Romeo and Juliet's love and the ill-fated couple's defiance of their parents evoke a strong sense of identification from today's teenager.

On the other end of the spectrum, Mahbub-ul-Alam in *Amalgamation of Good and Evil Vision* notes that *King Lear* is exceptional in that it is Shakespeare's only play where the protagonist – Lear – is an old man nearing the end of his life (22).

### *The Socratic Questioning*

The intellectual roots of critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates more than 2,500 years ago. Socrates emphasised the importance of asking deep questions that probe profoundly into thinking before we accept ideas as worthy of belief (Paul, et al. 88). Socrates' method of questioning is now known as "Socratic Questioning" and is the best-known critical thinking teaching strategy in which he emphasises the importance of seeking evidence by deeply examining reasoning and assumptions and the implication of what is

said and done. Socrates' critical thinking, therefore, entails a search for clarity and logical consistency (Paul, et al, 89). To arrive at any truth, according to Socrates, one has to reflectively question common beliefs and explanations, carefully distinguishing those beliefs that are reasonable and logical from those that are not and not to accept beliefs just because they are pleasing to our ears, appeal to our vested interests and massage our egos.

### *Plato, Aristotle and the Greek Sceptics*

Other scholars such as Plato, Aristotle and the Greek sceptics also asserted that things are not always what they appear to be. To arrive at any truth, one must scratch below the surface and only a trained mind would be able to see the deeper realities of life (Paul, et al, 89).

From this ancient Greek tradition emerged the need, for anyone who aspired to understand the deeper realities, to think systematically, to trace implications broadly and deeply; for only thinking that is comprehensive, well-reasoned, and responsive to objections can take us beyond the surface.

### *Critical Thinking in Middle Ages Europe*

Similarly, in the Middle Ages critical thinking was embodied in the works of such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas (*Sumna Theologica*) who emphasized the need for reasoning to be systematically cultivated and cross-examined. For Aquinas those who think critically, do not always reject established beliefs but only those beliefs that lack reasonable foundations.

Shakespeare lived in the Renaissance period (the 15$^{th}$ and 16$^{th}$ centuries) when he and a flood of other scholars in Europe began to think critically about religion, art, society, human nature, law, and freedom. They proceeded with the assumption that most of the domains of human life were in need of searching investigation and analysis. Scholars such as Colet, Erasmus, and Moore in England followed up on the insights of their predecessors (Paul, et al. 90).

### *Modern Days Critical Thinking (Dewey)*

Critical thinkers have the dispositions and abilities that lead them to think critically when situations demand so. Dewey, an American philosopher, is credited with the use of the term 'critical thinking' to describe an educational goal back in 1910. More commonly, Dewey called critical thinking 'reflective thinking'. He defined it as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (7). Dewey gives several examples

to demonstrate critical thinking, and others to show lack of critical thinking. Here are two of them.

a) *Example 1: Displays Critical Thinking*

> Transit: "The other day, when I was down town on 16th Street, a clock caught my eye. I saw that the hands pointed to 12:20. This suggested that I had an engagement at 124th Street, at one o'clock. I reasoned that as it had taken me an hour to come down on a surface car, I should probably be twenty minutes late if I returned the same way. I might save twenty minutes by a subway express. But was there a station nearby? If not, I might lose more than twenty minutes in looking for one. Then I thought of the elevated, and I saw there was such a line within two blocks. But where was the station? If it were several blocks above or below the street I was on, I should lose time instead of gaining it. My mind went back to the subway express as quicker than the elevated; furthermore, I remembered that it went nearer than the elevated to the part of 124th Street I wished to reach, so that time would be saved at the end of the journey. I concluded in favour of the subway, and reached my destination by one o'clock." (Dewey: 68-69, 91-92)

In this case, a person not keen on exploring the possible ways to reach the destination by one o'clock could easily have cancelled the appointment to a later time or arrived late by 20 minutes. But the critical thinking skills employed enabled the traveller to reach on time.

b) *Example 2: Displays Lack of Critical Thinking*

Immediate acceptance of an idea that suggests itself as a solution to a problem (e.g., a possible explanation of an event or phenomenon, an action that seems likely to produce a desired result) is "uncritical thinking, the minimum of reflection" (Dewey 13). On-going suspension of judgment in the light of doubt about a possible solution is not critical thinking (Dewey 108).

Bailin et al. defines critical thinking as careful goal-directed thinking. The definition fits the examples above by Dewey. Lack of critical (reflective) thinking, therefore, is when someone jumps immediately into conclusions, suspending judgment, no matter how strong the evidence against, or reasons from an unquestioned ideological or religious perspective (47).

The process of thinking critically according to Dewey has the following steps:

1. Suggestions, in which the mind leaps forward to a possible solution;
2. An intellectualisation of the difficulty or perplexity into a problem to be solved, a question for which the answer must be sought;

3. The use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or hypothesis, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in the collection of factual material;
4. The mental elaboration of the idea or supposition as an idea or supposition (reasoning, in the sense of which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference); and
5. Testing the hypothesis by overt or imaginative action. (106–107)

There are many instances when we have applauded ourselves for being wise in the choices we have made as a result of sound critical thinking skills. On the other hand, it is also not uncommon to question the logic or rationality of some decisions long after we have made them when we realize our error in judgement.

In his book *Critical Thinking* Richard suggests,

> … critical thinking is disciplined; self-directed and it exemplifies the perfections - appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought. It comes in two forms. If disciplined to serve the interests of a particular individual or group, to the exclusion of other relevant persons and groups, it is sophistic or weak-sense critical thinking. If disciplined to take into account the interests of diverse persons or groups, it is fair-minded or strong-sense critical thinking (4).

Furthermore, Richard claims that,

> We use our command of the elements of thought to adjust our critical thinking to the logical demands of a type or mode of thought. As we come to habitually think critically in the strong sense, we develop special traits of mind: intellectual humility, intellectual courage, intellectual perseverance, intellectual integrity, and confidence in reason. A sophistic or weak sense critical thinker develops these traits only narrowly in accordance with egocentric and socio-centric commitments (5).

Richard further opines that someone with the ability to think will be able to do the following:

- ✓ understand the logical connections between ideas;
- ✓ identify, construct and evaluate arguments;
- ✓ detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning;
- ✓ solve problems systematically;
- ✓ identify the relevance and importance of ideas;
- ✓ reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values (5).

Engaging critically with a text implies not taking anything at face value; it means inferring the different meaning underlying a text. These critical thinking skills enable the student of literature not only to analyse but also to integrate knowledge by showing the interrelationship of various themes and motifs within the work.

# Analysis of Critical Thinking in *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*

In analysing critical thinking in the plays *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*, we find some of the rules set forth by Dewey have not been applied by the protagonists of the plays and their actions could be described as lacking in critical thinking.

## *Analysis of King Lear*

This paper looks at Shakespeare's *King Lear* from the critical thinking point of view and argues that the play is a reflection of the behaviour of human beings in our society even today despite the fact that it was written in the 16th century. King Lear mistakes the flattery of his two daughters – Regan and Goneril – as love for him and dismisses Cordelia as he believes she does not love him so he banishes her away. Instead of employing reflective thinking, he jumps into conclusions and this costs him dearly.

The storyline begins with King Lear deciding how best to divide his land between his three daughters. He proposes that each one of them, that is, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia should show how much they love him in order to help him make a decision. While the two older sisters, Goneril and Regan, play along with this request in flowery verse, Cordelia refuses to overstate her love, thus she loses her inheritance and is banished. In the character of king Lear's advisor, Gloucester, Shakespeare creates a second pair of a father and his children in a family crisis. Through clever tricks, based on Gloucester's own vanity, his legitimate son Edgar is undermined by the bastard Edmund. The play closely follows the political and social outcomes of family betrayal and ends in tragedy for all sides. Though in the end, Cordelia and Lear come to reconcile, he has gone mad in exile, expelled from his elder daughters' houses and his tragedy is inevitable.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare portrays two central ideas: first, greed for power as depicted by Goneril, Regan and Edmund and secondly, lack of self-knowledge and the dangers ensuing thereof as depicted by Cordelia and Lear respectively.

When evaluating the character of King Lear, we need to ask ourselves if he had critical thinking skills. To answer this question, we need to refer to some of his actions such as entrusting his kingdom to his two cunning daughters, misjudging his youngest daughter and consequently disowning her. All these portray him as irrational in making decisions and having poor judgment as he seems to lack the ability to think critically.

Wisdom is said to come with age but does this apply in the case of King Lear? Besides, one would expect him to know his daughters well by that age. He should not have needed to ask them to demonstrate their loyalty to him. As the Fool teases in the play, King Lear might have become old before becoming wise.

King Lear's actions resulted in dire repercussions. His two eldest daughters threw him out which eventually leads to his own death as well as to the death of his loving daughter, Cordelia. If Lear had exhibited sound critical thinking skills, he would have seen through his eldest daughters' flattery and would not have made the regrettable decision.

Being an old man and a king for that matter, we would expect that he would possess some wisdom to see beyond his own children's cunningness. Better still, being their father and having brought them up, he should have known each one of his daughter's character. Mahbub-ul-Alam argues that "the protagonist being an old man, it is expected he would have gained wisdom from his lifetime achievements" (56). But the opposite is the truth – the old king is entangled by the evil forces of his own daughters and falls for their mischief.

King Lear's lack of critical thinking skills further blinded him to the sincerity of the Earl of Kent who tries to defend Cordelia. Lear banishes him as well for daring to speak out. Without hesitation, he cuts off one of his most loyal people, without considering the consequences. The king fails to see the good virtues displayed by Cordelia and the Earl of Kent and instead falls for the flattery of his older daughters.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare portrays a king who cannot judge a situation rationally or think of the future implications. He believes in the flattery of his eldest daughters, and cannot read between their words. His inability to distinguish between empty flattery and truth depicts him as a king devoid of sound judgment, hence lacking critical thinking skills.

Goneril and Regan profess to have believed their father to be a silly old man and that their declarations of love were contrived. They see their father, Lear, more clearly than he sees himself when Goneril observes,

> You see how full of changes his age is. The observation we have made of it hath not been little. He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly. (I.i.)

In the play good and evil are projected through the characters. Cordelia, Edgar and Kent represent the good forces, while Regan, Goneril and Edmund are agents of evil. Mahbub-ul-Alam observes "that the evil agents are cunning, clever and shrewd characters; whereas

the good agents are honest and harmless characters who become the victims of the cunning attitude and clever acts of the evil characters" (50-58). The display of human cruelty is so real, making the play, though written in the Elizabethan era, depict similar situations in our society today.

It was his lack of critical thinking that led King Lear to the poor judgment when one of his truly honest daughters, Cordelia, spoke the truth sincerely and his decision to banish her. In a way, the play *King Lear* is a reflection of today's families where relationships are affected by similar problems of rivalry and dishonesty. In the play, we see the children (Regan, Goneril and Edmund) deceiving and turning against their parents (Lear and Gloucester). But not long after that, the children also turn against each other. Regan and Goneril are both engaged in extra-marital affairs with Edmund. They betray their parents and now betray each other as sisters as well as the men they are married to. Again, we question their critical thinking skills when they engage in that kind of betrayal.

Love and hate among siblings and between parents and children is a common phenomenon in our Kenyan context where we have seen a brother turning against a brother or a child against a parent and vice versa. There are instances where parents have turned against their children and even gone to the extent of killing them and vice versa. It is a matter of relationship in the family. But in all these actions questions have arisen on the critical thinking skills of those who have committed such heinous acts.

Similarly, just like Goneril and Regan, when our enemies discover that we do not have critical thinking skills, they will explore that weakness and manipulate us to their own gratification. For example, in today's political arena, young people are used by the political class to disrupt political gatherings but before they engage in that action they do not consider that some of them may get hurt, maimed or even killed in the process. Similarly, when the electorates sell their identification cards for a penny to their opponents and fail to vote, they do not consider that they will end up with greedy and self-centred leaders. Same is the case when we insult on social media our opponents because we differ ideologically, or when we vote along tribal lines without considering the repercussions. All these are examples that show we lack humane ways of reasoning and our critical thinking skills are in jeopardy.

However, Cordelia separates herself from that stance by displaying the rare virtues of truth and love instead of desire for ill-acquired power and wealth. When her father asks her how much she loves him, her reply is tempered, honest and reasonable,

> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
> According to my bond; nor more nor less (1:1:93-95).

Cordelia's words remind me about Professor Henry Indangasi's words. In his book, *Rethinking Literature*, Indangasi says the following about critical thinking,

> Critical thinking is not about being eccentric; it is not about saying things just in order to sound unique or different. The foundation of critical thinking is a strong moral conviction, unbending sense of what is right, a stubborn desire to discriminate between right and wrong. Critical thinking is about an abiding faith in the possibility of finding Truth with a capital T (13).

Even though before his death King Lear is reunited with his daughter Cordelia and is happy they are together, he fails to see they cannot be together all, the time. She is a wife and has a whole life ahead of her, while Lear is an aging old man nearing his death. But Cordelia sticks with him to her own tragic end.

By choosing to be truthful, Cordelia establishes herself as a repository of virtue, and the obvious sincerity of her love for Lear makes the extent of the king's error in banishing her even more obvious. She exhibits her ability to think critically by her decision to choose what is right: to be a patriot and truthful, very important virtues in critical thinking. I commend Shakespeare for creating Cordelia, the youngest of King Lear's daughters and a woman in the16th Century who was bold enough to speak up her mind regardless of whom it was going to offend, whether her father or the society around her. This is the true definition of critical thinking. It can thus be deduced that Shakespeare's plays, written back in the 16th century, emphasised the necessity to be wise and nurture the ability to critically think and evaluate our actions and their implications before committing them. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare warns us that if we do not exercise critical thinking skills, we will end up like King Lear or worse.

The parallel stories of Lear's and Gloucester's sufferings at the hands of their own children reflect anxieties that would have been close to Shakespeare's audience. King Lear demonstrates how vulnerable parents and noblemen were to the plunders of unscrupulous children and thus how fragile the fabric of Elizabethan society was.

Both Lear and Gloucester are fooled and manipulated by their own children who do not care the least bit about them and instead turn against their own fathers who truly stand for their good. Both fathers discover too late that they have been fooled by their own children.

Did these actions demonstrate just the flawed character of those two individuals or did Shakespeare intend to reveal the situation of the society as it was when he wrote his play? Just before Shakespeare wrote King Lear, there was a real case in which a daughter had gone to court seeking to have her father declared insane so that she could inherit his property. It took the intervention of the younger sister to save her father. Shakespeare may have been inspired by such incidents. This is not far removed from the times we live in. Those events transcend time and are still happening to this day.

While Shakespeare reveals negative traits in the characters of Regan, Goneril and Edmund as agents of evil, he has contrasted them with the characters of Cordelia and Edgar, displaying their sound critical thinking skills. Even after her father has banished her with no inheritance, Cordelia still helps the old man when he gets into trouble with his cruel daughters. Cordelia does not seek revenge, instead she steps in to help her father. That is truly a good virtue and she displays clear thinking by her actions. She understands her sisters very well and knows their father was a victim of evil forces. Of what use then would it be to take revenge on an elderly man, especially when he happens to be her own father?

Similarly, the King of France displays sound critical thinking skills by marrying Cordelia, knowing very well that she has been disinherited by her father, King Lear. Life is not all about money and property, and what impresses him is the virtue of his dear wife Cordelia and not the greed of his sisters-in-law. Edgar, too, acts much like Cordelia when he helps his blind father Gloucester. Edgar understands that the suffering he went through instigated by his own father was as a result of the machinations of his half-brother Edmund. He does not take revenge and does not abandon his father when in danger. In helping his father, Edgar emerges as a character who employs rational thinking.

The play ends with dead bodies on stage most of whom being the forces of evil, perhaps as an assurance that evil gets punished while goodness is rewarded.

## *Analysis of Romeo and Juliet*

Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* is the love story of two young people whose love ends tragically because of the hatred existing between their two families. The play is set in Verona, a city in Italy. Two families – the Capulets and the Montagues – have lived as neighbours but the enmity between them has existed for as long as anyone can remember.

As fate would have it, Romeo, a Montague, sneaks into a Capulet's party where he meets Juliet for the first time and the two fall in love at first sight. However, Juliet's father has already

chosen a suitor for his daughter – Paris, the Prince's kinsman. We see Capulet urging Paris to woo his daughter Juliet and even invites the young man to a party he is hosting for his guests that night,

> And too soon marr'd are those so early made.
> The earth hath swallow'd all my hopes but she,
> She is the hopeful lady of my earth:
> But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
> My will to her consent is but a part;
> An she agree, within her scope of choice
> Lies my consent and fair according voice.
> This night I hold an old accustom'd feast,
> Whereto I have invited many a guest,
> Such as I love; and you, among the store,
> One more, most welcome, makes my number more. (1.1)

Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother, goes on to broach the subject of marriage to Juliet. But Juliet replies it is an honour she does not dream of. Her mother even goes on to say Paris, who would be attending their feast that night, was interested in marrying her,

> Well, think of marriage now; younger
> than you,
> Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,
> Are made already mothers: by my count,
> I was your mother much upon these years
> That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief:
> The valiant Paris seeks you for his love. (1.3)

But instead of Paris, it is Romeo who catches the attention of Juliet and she asks Nurse to go and find out who he is and if he is married. When Nurse reports that his name is Romeo, a Montague, and the only son of an enemy, Juliet retorts,

> My only love sprung from my only hate!
> Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
> Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
> That I must love a loathed enemy. (1.4)

Similarly, as soon as he sets his eyes on Juliet when he sneaks in at the Capulet's party, Romeo immediately forgets Rosaline whom he had so desperately wooed but who had not reciprocated his love. Upon seeing Juliet Romeo asks a servant who the lady is,

> *ROMEO: [To a Serving man]* What lady is that, which
> doth enrich the hand
> Of yonder knight?

*SERVANT:* I know not, sir.
*ROMEO:* O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night. (I.5.40-53)

Tybalt discovers that a Montague is at the party and wants to confront him but is stopped by Capulet whose remarks show that he respects Romeo. Capulet says Romeo should not be fought at the party,

Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone;
He bears him like a portly gentleman;
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth:
I would not for the wealth of all the town
Here in my house do him disparagement:
Therefore be patient, take no note of him:
(1.4)

Capulet manages to calm Tybalt but Tybalt says he will revenge later.

When Romeo seeks the assistance of Friar Lawrence to marry him and Juliet, the priest is shocked that Romeo's decision has changed so fast from Rosaline to Juliet. He declares that young men love with their eyes and not their hearts. But hoping that the marriage of Romeo and Juliet would end the enmity between their families, the Friar agrees to Romeo's request to marry them immediately.

While returning from his wedding, Romeo is confronted by Tybalt, Juliet's relative. Out of respect for his new kinsman, Romeo refuses to fight but his friend Mercutio cannot hold his temper and gets killed in the fight with Tybalt. Romeo avenges Mercutio by killing Tybalt, and is banished by the Prince.

Despite the fact that Juliet loves Romeo, her father insists on marrying her to Paris. Friar Lawrence gets wind of it and gives Juliet a drug that will make her appear dead for 42 hours. Meanwhile he sends for Romeo to rescue her. However, before that message reaches him, Romeo gets a message that Juliet is dead and plans to end his own life.

Paris mourns the "death" of the girl he was meant to marry. He tries to stop Romeo from breaking into Juliet's tomb, and is killed. Romeo then poisons himself. Sadly, upon waking up after 42 hours have lapsed, Juliet finds her love dead, and stabs herself with his dagger – the sad ending of two lovebirds.

This tragic ending of the protagonists can be blamed on the blind and unexplained hatred that existed between the Capulets and the Montagues. These are families that failed to think rationally and end their enmity before their children met their tragic deaths.

Even though the two families reconciled in the end, but at what cost? A whole generation was lost. The play, though written in the 16th century, mirrors what sometimes happens in our society today. Because of the hatred and stubbornness of the two families, two young people cannot love and marry naturally. Critical thinking on the part of Juliet's father – Capulet – is lacking when he is determined to marry his daughter off to a man she is not in love with. Is marriage likely to survive without love?

*Romeo and Juliet* is a play that may have been written centuries ago, but which readers can relate to in our times. The story still applies to many young people in love today but whose heart's desires are not respected by their parents and relatives. What immediately comes to mind are the early forced marriages we witness in some parts of Kenya that are often made in exchange for goats and cows.

According to Katawazai in *A Critical Analysis of William Shakespeare's: Romeo and Juliet*, the play is "an enjoyable piece of literature that gives the audience/readers real-life feelings of happiness and sadness at the same time. They make you laugh and cry" (285). The themes of love and hate permeate the entire play. While two families, the Montagues and Capulets are sworn enemies, their children – Romeo and Juliet – ignore this enmity and fall in love at first sight. The feud between the two families had existed for as long as anyone could remember. Yet this did not deter Romeo and Juliet from falling in love.

As Morris notes, "it is only after the death of their children that the Montagues and the Capulets reconcile but it serves no purpose" (22). It did not have to cost them the death of two young people who were not allowed to express their feelings and love each other. We can question the two families' critical thinking skills. Their lack of logical reasoning prevented Romeo and Juliet from marrying and having a good life ahead. It is meaningless to grieve over their deaths when they were the contributors to their own misery for lacking critical thinking skills.

Similarly, we can question the way Romeo and Juliet's fell in love at first sight. To the surprise of even Friar Laurence when Romeo seeks his help to get married to Juliet, the Friar remarks that young men love with their eyes and not hearts. Friar Laurence is shocked at how fast Romeo's love has shifted from Rosaline to Juliet – love at first sight. What are the chances that such love will last long?

Romeo's actions on several occasions can also be said to be lacking in critical thinking. When Tybalt provokes him for attending the Capulet's party and after getting married to Juliet, Romeo is reluctant to fight back because he now considers Tybalt his kinsman. But Romeo's friend, Mercutio, is incensed and engages in a fight with Tybalt who, unfortunately, kills him. Immediately Romeo loses control and forgets his love for Juliet and avenges his friend's death by killing Tybalt. His loyalty for his friend Mercutio makes him forget about Juliet and her kinsman. Romeo, therefore, fails to make good judgement of the situation and restrain himself from carrying out the revenge. After that action, Romeo is no longer the comical character who makes us laugh for his actions as a young man who feels he is in love. He now becomes a tragic character whom we start to pity.

When the Prince banishes Romeo for killing Tybalt, Romeo again acts childishly in his emotional state and attempts to commit suicide before Friar Laurence manages to calm him down by assuring him things would be fine. He tells him to remember he is married to Juliet and he should think about their love instead of trying to commit suicide.

It may be fate, but the two love-birds' impulsive behaviour inhibits their ability to think clearly through the circumstances they find themselves in.

Friar Laurence married Juliet and Romeo when he was fully aware the two had fallen in love at first sight. Though his intentions were sincere – that he wanted to reconcile the two feuding families through the union of their children, he failed to see through the situation and did not anticipate the turn of events. The unfolding events may have come as a surprise to the Friar because he had only looked at one side of things. Friar Laurence did not take into consideration that his message to Romeo through Friar John might fail to be delivered. It is because Romeo got first the wrong message from his servant, Balthasar, that he decided to kill himself. That was not something that Friar Laurence had anticipated. In critical thinking, according to Dewey, "all sides of the coin must be considered, all facts must be examined and the evidence used to make judgments".

## Conclusion

Critical thinking guides us in our decision-making process. We always have a number of choices before we commit ourselves to a final decision. When we weigh the pros and cons to make a decision, we are engaged in critical thinking. Therefore, everyone should aspire to acquire the skill of critical thinking. It applies everywhere, every time. For one to make the right choice whether in deciding on a course of study, life partner, marriage, business, parenting or career, critical thinking skills are a must. In Shakespeare's plays *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*, we have questioned the critical thinking skills of some of the characters as well as applauded those characters who exhibit critical thinking skills. We need to evaluate our actions, our decision and even our utterances before we regret later after our failure to critically think and make the right choices.

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# CRITICAL THINKING, MORAL INTEGRITY, AND CITIZENSHIP: LESSONS FROM W.E.B. DU BOIS' ACADEMIC CAREER AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH AFRICA

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## *Abstract*

In his seminal article, *Critical Thinking, Moral Integrity, and Citizenship,* Richard Paul argues that most curricula focus on getting students to absorb as much material as possible, and leave little room for reflection and critical thinking. He proposes that curricula should be re-oriented so that there is more focus on, "…depth of understanding, on foundational ideas and, on intellectual synthesis..." W.E.B. Du Bois was an American scholar, civil rights activist, and writer. In 1895 he became the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard University. He often went against the grain of the conventional wisdom of his time and was vocal in advocating for civil rights for the community.

In 1961 Du Bois and his wife Shirley Graham immigrated to Ghana at the invitation of President Kwame Nkrumah. In 1963, when the United States refused to renew his passport, he became a citizen of Ghana.

In this paper I will review a few works written on critical thinking, moral integrity, and citizenship with emphasis on their place in the education system.. Subsequently, I will study the academic career of W.E.B. Du Bois by reviewing a number of his most important academic works as well as his autobiography. Of particular interest will be how he integrated his convictions on racial equality and the role of education in the liberation of African Americans into his research and writings. Finally I will study how his education and early work influenced his relationship with Africa, which culminated in him becoming a citizen of Ghana.

## Introduction

Over the last thirty years or so, a number of scholars have made strong arguments for the inclusion of critical thinking in teaching curricula. The most well-known of these is Richard Paul who, in his seminal article, *Critical Thinking, Moral Integrity, and Citizenship*, argues that there are few, "…curricula and teaching strategies that genuinely foster basic intellectual

and moral development." (1993) Instead, he says that most curricula focus on getting students to absorb as much material as possible, and leave little room for reflection and critical thinking. He proposes that curricula should be re-oriented so that there is more focus on, "…depth of understanding, on foundational ideas and, on intellectual synthesis..."

The core of Paul's argument is that education should foster, through critical thinking, what he calls, "Intellectual Virtues". He lists these as, "…intellectual empathy, intellectual perseverance, intellectual confidence in reason, and an intellectual sense of justice (fair mindedness)". Since curricula at the time of his writing were based on the need for students to master as much material as possible, which would then be regurgitated in exams, Paul argues that for critical thinking to be effectively taught in institutions of learning, there was need for,

> …cutting back on coverage to focus on depth of understanding, on foundational ideas, on intellectual synthesis, and on intellectual experiences that develop and deepen the most basic intellectual skills, abilities, concepts, and virtues.

For the purposes of this paper, I shall take the meaning of critical thinking to be that one developed by the APA Delphi Report: *Critical Thinking,*

> *A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction*, "Purposeful, reflective judgement which manifests itself in reasoned consideration of evidence, context, methods, standards, and conceptualizations in deciding what to believe or what to do." (Facione, *The Delphi Report, 2*).

The Report goes on to describe an ideal critical thinker as,

> …habitually inquisitive, well informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgement, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. (2).

Peter Facione in his article, *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts* argues that critical thinking cannot be restricted to a classroom as it existed even before the advent of formal education, and it, "…lies at the very roots of civilization." (11).

Ab Kadir argues that critical thinking is key in developing students who are, "reflective, active and informed citizens" (8). He goes on to study how critical thinking is the anchor of the part of the Australian curriculum that focuses on Civics and Citizenship.

Frey and Fisher in their article, *The Role of Critical Literacy in Citizenship*, argue that it is important for students to be exposed to and discuss readings that, "…address social, political, and cultural issues." Such students, "…examine the beliefs and values that underpin texts, question the purpose and message, take a stance on issues and formulate action steps when needed." They go on to discuss why this form of literacy leads to students understanding historical events such as slavery and social injustices such as racism. As a result, such students become more active citizens in their communities and are more likely to become registered voters.

Given that these academic discourses were taking place towards the end of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty first, it is remarkable that W.E.B. Du Bois was an outstanding example of critical thinking, almost a century before. I will now focus on four aspects of his life: his doctoral studies at Harvard University; his academic work at Atlanta University; his book *The Souls of Black Folk*; and his reflections on Africa in his autobiography and other works.

## Harvard University

William Edward Burghart Du Bois, commonly known as W.E.B. Du Bois, was the first African American to graduate with a doctoral degree from Harvard University in 1895. His journey to graduation was a long one, having joined Harvard in 1888. This was primarily because Harvard required African American students to repeat their last two years of undergraduate studies so that they could earn a Harvard undergraduate degree, before proceeding with their graduate studies.

Francis Broderick in his article, *The Academic Training of W.E.B. Du Bois* chronicles the various subjects that Du Bois studied in his early years in Harvard. This included Chemistry, Qualitative Analysis, Geology, Philosophy, English, Economics, and Politics. (Broderick, 13). He graduated with a "…bachelor's degree from Harvard cum laude in Philosophy." (Du Bois, *Autobiography*, 146).

It is my proposition that W.E.B. Du Bois developed into the renowned scholar we know him to be because the foundational studies that he carried out at Fisk and Harvard universities helped him develop his communication, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Moreover, his study of politics and economics increased his awareness of the world around him and lay the foundation for his future involvement in the civil rights movement.

Although Du Bois was initially drawn to philosophy, he eventually shifted to Political Economy and to History in his graduate studies. He received his master's degree from Harvard in 1891. As he began his doctoral studies at Harvard, Du Bois became an academic trendsetter.

As a result of his intense research and critical thinking, he was drawn to a field of study that was not yet recognized at Harvard. In his autobiography he states,

> I knew by this time that practically my sole chance of earning a livelihood combined with study was to teach, and after my work with Hart in United States history, I conceived the idea of applying philosophy to an historical interpretation of race relations. In other words, I was trying to take my first steps toward sociology as the science of human action. It goes without saying that no such field of study was recognized at Harvard or came to be recognized for 20 years after." (148).

The title of Du Bois' doctoral thesis was, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*. Broderick reports that Du Bois carried out slow, intense and meticulous research, and that he "…combed the statutes of the United States, colonial and state laws, the *Congressional Records*, executive documents, and contemporary sources for material on the African slave trade." (14).This was another indicator of Du Bois' application of critical thinking. His academic work was focused and involved the deep reading of a broad range of sources for information.

In 1892, Du Bois went to the University of Berlin for a Fellowship that allowed him to continue research for his doctoral studies. While in Berlin, he studied politics; Prussian state reform, theoretical political economy, industrialism and society Prussian constitutional history and economic history. One of his professors in Berlin, Gustav von Schmoller

> …taught him that from a careful collection of historical and factual material would emerge the science of economics which would supply the basis for national policy. First, the facts; then a program based on those facts. (Broderick, 16)

This approach would influence Du Bois' future work as an academic. Du Bois returned to Harvard in 1894 and received his Ph.D. the following year. During his doctoral studies, Du Bois found his vocation. Although he had toyed with the idea of becoming a church minister,

he eventually settled on the academy. Using critical thinking as his base, he was going to research and teach. He says,

> I determined to put science into sociology through a study of the conditions and problems of my own group. I was going to study the facts, and all facts, concerning the American Negro and his plight, and by measurement and comparison and research, work up to any valid generalization which I could. I entered this primarily with the utilitarian object of reform and uplift; but nevertheless, I wanted to do the work with scientific accuracy." (Du Bois, *Autobiography,* 148).

## Atlanta University

After attaining his doctoral degree, Du Bois taught briefly at Wilberforce University in Ohio, and the University of Pennsylvania before moving to the historically black Atlanta University in Georgia. Here, he spent thirteen years and carried out what is most arguably his most significant academic work. In his words,

> The main significance of my work at Atlanta University the years 1897 to 1910 was the development at an American institution of learning, of a program of study on the problems affecting the American Negroes, covering a progressively widening and deepening effort designed to stretch over the span of a century. (Du Bois, *Autobiography*, 213).

In 1899, he published his first major academic work, *The Philadelphia Negro*. The book was a result of fieldwork that he had carried out in 1896-1897. It was a detailed sociological study of African Americans in Philadelphia the intent of which was to identify social problems in the African American community.

It is important to note that *The Philadelphia Negro* was one of the first sociological studies of a black community in the United States. Once again, Du Bois was leading the way by using critical thinking to guide his research and academic pursuits. Michael Kurtz and Thomas J. Surgrue give details on how Du Bois conducted the research,

> In his methodically innovative and empirically rich study, Du Bois carefully mapped every black residence, church, and business in the city's Seventh Ward; pored through censuses to paint a detailed picture of black Philadelphia's occupational and family structure; interviewed employers and black workers; and chronicled extensive workplace discrimination. From personal observations and city records, he unblinkingly told the story of crime and violence among the city's poorest residents. (Preface, vii)

One of the other significant achievements while at Atlanta University was Du Bois' hosting of the annual Atlanta Conference of Negro Problems. The first two conferences, in 1896 and 1897, were organized by George C. Bradford. Du Bois took over the leadership of the Conference organization in 1898 until 1914. In his autobiography, Du Bois discusses the range of topics that the Conferences tackled. These included: Morality among Negroes; Social and Physical Condition of Negroes; The Negro in Business; The College Bred Negro; The Negro Church; and Notes on Negro Crime (215). These conferences were an indication that Du Bois took his role as a teacher and citizen seriously. To him, America as a country could not develop wholly if it continually ignored the state of the African Americans.

## The Souls of Black Folks

In 1903 Du Bois published his most well-known work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was a collection of essays. At the beginning of the book, Du Bois presents the central thesis of his reflections: "…the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line."(v). Du Bois conceptualized his opposition to institutionalized racism in the United States and other parts of the world as a moral issue. He argues that slavery was the real cause of the Civil War, but that even after Emancipation, "…the Negro is not free" because the socio-economic system that existed before the Civil War had not really changed (24). In the first essay, he goes on to introduce a new concept — double consciousness of African Americans — being a black person in America. He goes on to say,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels hi two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2)

In the fifth essay, he introduces another new concept — that of the Talented Tenth, society's elite class. He argues that this class among the African American community would be the bedrock of any development of the race. He, therefore, argues that universities, and by extension, critical thinking, play an important role in social, economic, and political development. In his words,

> The function of the university is not simply to teach breadwinning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be the centre of polite society; it is above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the

> growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. (52).

Whereas the concepts mentioned above drew the attention of readers, it was the third essay titled, *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others* that made *Souls* have far-reaching effects. In it, Du Bois made a scathing and candid attack on Washington's, "… programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights." (25). Whereas he acknowledges Washington as "…the most distinguished Southerner since Jefferson Davis", he criticizes him for hushing honest criticism; advocating submission and inferiority of African Americans; and being a propagandist.

This criticism of Booker T. Washington was stunning. Washington was the foremost African American leader in the country at the time, and was easily considered the principal spokesman for his race. He was the founder and leader of the Tuskegee Institute, which was regarded highly by all sections of American society for the role it was playing in providing industrial education to African Americans. Washington was regularly consulted by leading American political, religions, and business leaders across racial divide. In 1901, Washington published his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, and it was a national bestseller. Later that year, Washington was invited by President Theodore Roosevelt to dine with him and his family at the White House, the first African American to receive such an honour. Taking on Washington was a bold thing for Du Bois to do. But he made it clear that his opposition to Washington was an issue of moral uprightness. In particular, he found it difficult to understand how anyone could condone the continued oppression of African Americans, especially in the areas of voting, civic equality and education. (32) Nevertheless, according to Du Bois' biographer David Levering Lewis, this criticism led to bitter personal differences, suspicions, and mistrust between the two men for the rest of their lives. (199) He also informs that *Souls* polarized African American leaders of the time into two groups: the conservative followers of Washington, and the more radical ones who agreed with Du Bois' methodology of aggressive protest.

## Africa

W.E.B Du Bois wrote extensively about Africa throughout his career, beginning with his doctoral thesis which was on the African slave trade. He held the conviction that all people of African origin, whether in Africa, the United States, or the Caribbean basically faced one singular enemy: racism. This may have been manifested through colonization in Africa or Jim Crow laws in America, but the basis of the problem was basically the same. He, therefore,

dedicated the later part of his career in the struggle against racial oppression. In America, he was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). In Africa he was one of the leaders of the Pan-Africanist movement. Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. and Edmund Abaka have edited an excellent collection titled, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Africa.* In its introduction, they state,

> W.E.B Du Bois stands as the pre-eminent Africanist and Pan-Africanist of the twentieth century. His remarkable insight and foresight regarding Africa and African-American issues are unparalled in articulation and direction…His mission was to lead the fight to free Black people from oppression (including colonial oppression) and racism…African history and culture constitute a major theme in his work. (II)

Du Bois' reflections on Africa toward the end of his life were telling and almost prophetic. In his autobiography, he encouraged the leaders of the new African states to unite so as to create an economy and cultural centre that could counter Europe and Asia (400). Later he warns that newly African independent states risk being controlled by America and their former colonial powers. He then advises them to turn East and look to China for lessons on how to develop and rise. (406-7).

Towards the end of his life Du Bois, together with his wife, Shirley Graham, emigrated to Ghana where they were granted, and took up, Ghanaian citizenship. Du Bois passed away peacefully in his sleep in Accra, Ghana on 27th August 1963, aged ninety-five. He was given a State Funeral and buried at the then seat of Government in Accra. I believe that this was a fitting end for a man who had written and fought so hard for the liberation of Africa and African Americans.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that it is clear from these reflections that W.E.B. Du Bois, through his academic work and later life as a civil rights advocate, exemplified a life of critical thinking, moral thinking, and citizenship. His doctoral thesis, academic work at Atlanta University, *The Soul of Black Folk*, and his writings on Africa present a man who worked tirelessly to methodically study and critically analyse the condition of people of African origin, as well as propose solutions to the socio-economic and political ills that they faced.

W.E.B. Du Bois' life provides important lessons for us. Firstly, that our reading and writing endeavours should always be grounded on critical thinking. This way, the focus of our teaching will be to train our students to embrace deep learning of the material they encounter, and not

just the passing of exams. More importantly, Du Bois provided a fine example on the role of academics in society. Our academic pursuits should, as a result of critical thinking, lead us to speak truth to power and speak out against injustice. We should not be restrained to the Ivory Towers of our institutions of higher learning. At the beginning of the 20th century, the world was recovering from almost three centuries of slavery and people of colour faced racial inequality as well as colonization. Du Bois played his part in the Civil Rights Movement and the Pan African Movement which sought to oppose these ills. In our time, the challenges may be different but our responses should be similar.

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# THE FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY: REPRESENTATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN IGONI BARRETT'S *BLACKASS*

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## *Abstract*

*Individuals have often been assigned identities based on how they look, especially on the colour of their skin which leads us to take it for granted who they are and what position they may hold in the society. There is, however, more to a person than the colour of their skin. The concern of this paper are the assumptions that people make regarding identity based on skin colour. The paper proposes that before we place someone into the box of identity, we need to think critically of how the different facets of human existence intertwine to create the whole.*

*Scholars have written on racism as experienced in the African-American society, the Caribbean islands, and other parts of the African Diaspora. Most narratives were based on the experiences of slavery, colonialism and Apartheid. This paper aims to investigate how Nigeria's Igoni Barrett uses the medium of fictional writing in his novel Blackass to take us into the racism practised in post-colonial Nigeria by probing into the intersectionality between the different strands of identity. I will also look into the different fallacies attached to various identities and how Barrett both complies to and subverts these beliefs to show the subtle nuances of inferiority in the African subject vis-à-vis the superiority of the "white" protagonist.*

***Keywords:*** *intersectionality, fluidity, racism*

## Introduction

As young girls growing up in the village, one of the most important English phrases we armed ourselves with was, *"Msungu hawayu?"* It was unconsciously passed down from generation to generation as the only phrase we could use to address white people. Members of the Luo community have trouble pronouncing the /z/ sound hence the Swahili word "*mzungu*" becomes "*msungu*". *Mzungu* is the word that most Swahili speakers use to refer to white people. While the "*hawayu"* is the mispronunciation of "how are you?". Despite its corruption, this was a phrase that we uttered with pride, the pride of knowing a foreign tongue. It is the same words that echo in my mind as I read *Blackass* as it reminds me of the reaction that as young children

in my community we had at the sight of white people: awe, fear, wonder, laughter, tears. It is this reaction to whiteness in a "black nation" that is the interest of this paper.

## Intersectionality and Fluidity of Identities

Intersectionality is a term that has been used to imply the notion that subjectivity is constituted by the mutually reinforcing facets of race, gender, class and sexual orientation. Jennifer C. Nash (2008) traces the origin of the term to the 1980s and 1990s. She argues that the term was coined by legal scholar, Kimberle' Crenshaw. Intersectionality studies aim at subverting various fallacies and the binaries associated with race and gender. It attempts to delve into the complexities of identity. To understand the complexity of identity, Nash quotes Mari Matsuda who suggests that individuals should always raise "the other question." She states,

> when I see something that looks racist, I ask, where is the patriarchy in this? When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, where is the heterosexism on this? When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, where is the class interest in this? (12)

It is these kinds of questions that I attempt to ask in my study of Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass* (2015). This is Igoni Barrett's debut novel. The work could be considered a Nigerian version of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915). While Gregor wakes up a bug, Furo Wariboko, Barrett's protagonist, wakes up to a white skin on the day of his interview. Told from the third person narrative voice, the narrator takes us for a walk with the protagonist right from the moment he wakes up white to the end of the narrative. The narrator reveals to us every step the character takes, the people he interacts with and how these interactions expound on the different forms of identity. The author takes us through his protagonist's life as he tries to grapple with his metamorphosis. Through the protagonist, I will delve into the intersection of the different facets of identity and the connotations attached to them in postcolonial Nigeria. The paper will focus mainly on the concept of whiteness both as an ideology and an identity. Set in a free state of Nigeria, the novel highlights the legacy of white superiority through the interactions that the protagonist has with the other characters.

Matthew Hughey in *Hegemonic Whiteness: From Structure and Agency to Identity Allegiance* (2016) looks at the different phases that white studies have undergone. He quotes France Twine and Charles Gallagher who argue that white scholarship has undergone three waves. The first wave focuses on the power and privilege that comes with white racial identity vis-à-vis the marginalized position of people of colour. The second wave centres on the argument and observation that most white people are unaware or have a lower degree of awareness

concerning their racial identity as compared to other races. Hughey notes that most white correspondents that were asked about their views concerning their whiteness responded that it was something they never really thought about. The third wave focuses on the ever-changing nature and fluidity of white racial identities and how whiteness intersects with other facets of identity such as gender, class, sexuality and nationality (212).

My paper focuses mostly on the third wave of white scholarship. It, however, has to be noted that most scholarship on whiteness has always been based on the experience of whiteness in otherwise white settings/geographies and/or the interaction of whiteness with other races under historically suppressing situations such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid. I will, however, bring white studies into the African continent at an era when the continent is considered free. This is a time where Africans (Nigerians) are portrayed to have taken back the mantle of control from the colonizers but, ironically, we see the power that the white man still has, not only through the protagonist but also through the growing number of white immigrants and interracial couples in Nigeria's posh estates. Igoni Barrett playfully deconstructs the ideals that have been held concerning different forms of identity, including race, sexuality, gender, class. He presents us with characters and situations that portray identity as fluid, thus breaking the myth of binaries. As readers we recognize the kind of liminal space that the characters inhabit, therefore, neither being this or that, nor here or there. Just as Amanda Lewis expounds on whiteness as something that works in distinct ways and is embodied differently, depending on individuals such as " homeless white men, golf-club-membership-owning executives, suburban soccer moms….and/or union-card-carrying factory workers…." (213) . We realize that an individual's identity cannot fit firmly in a box and that different factors come into play to make a whole.

## White Skins, Black Masks

We could argue that Igoni Barrett attempts a subversion of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1986), while at the same time asserting Fanon's argument. While Fanon focuses on ways that both black men and women imitate whiteness, Barrett, through fiction, puts a black body into a white skin. He plays around with the concept of "skin" and the "mask" by giving us a character who acquires a white skin but is black by birth, the black ass at first being inconsequential as it is a part hidden from the public. In Furo's case therefore, it is the white skin that is visible while underneath the white skin lies the mask of a black body, soul, heritage and language. We could, however, argue that through this narrative, Barrett tries to show the

inner desire of the black man to be white just as posed by Frantz Fanon. Another argument espoused by Fanon was that the black man was faced with a kind of self-division or dualism. The first dimension is how the black man interacts with fellow black men while the other is how the same man conducts himself while interacting with white men. This dualism comes from years of subjugation that forces the black man to learn a script of how to perform in the different contexts. We see this kind of performativity in Furo's first interaction (as a white man) with a black man. When he meets the Adamawa man who collects garbage, Furo greets the man as he has usually done but instead of getting a response, the garbage man abandons his cart in the middle of the road and stands a few paces away from Furo. We could argue that the man was shocked at being greeted by a 'strange' white man considering that he did not know that Furo is the same black man they have always exchanged greetings with but this could also assert Fanon's argument that the black man behaves differently towards white men as compared to fellow black men.

The second person that Furo meets is the Buka woman. It's however, the reaction of the Buka woman's child that is notable. The child howls in fear and when the woman realizes what has scared the child, she says, "no fear, no cry again, my pikin. No be ojuju, nah oyibo man" (13). The mother assures the child that she needed not to fear as Furo was not some kind of masquerade or ghost but rather a white man. This shows the scarcity of white people in this space that Furo occupies and it is the lack of familiarity that makes the child scared. The words of the woman assure the child that Furo is not strange as in a ghost but rather his strangeness is in the whiteness. There is a kind of hyperbole when Barrett describes the attention that Furo attracted that morning. He says,

> And so, it went: stares followed him everywhere. Pedestrians stopped and stared, or stared as they walked. Motorists slowed their cars and stared, and on occasion honked their horns to draw his face so they could stare into it. School-bound children hushed their mates and poked their fingers in his direction, wrapper-clad women paused in their front-yard duties and gazed after him, and stick-chewing men leaned over balcony railings to peer down at him. (13)

This, however, does not mean that there are no white people in Nigeria. It, rather, shows that despite their existence, there are specific spaces that they are expected to occupy, thus raising the question of intersectionality. What does it mean to be a young, white male, especially in an African country? The author himself confirms that white people in Nigeria occupied posh areas such as Lekki, Victoria Island and Ikoyi. It takes us back to the 'other question' as espoused

by Mari Matsuda. While we notice the racism that Furo undergoes, the other question is "where is the class issue in this?". For the protagonist, he has the predicament of being white and poor in a space where whiteness is associated with affluence. The black characters he interacts with are, therefore, shocked to see a white face in an area which is predominantly occupied by the 'poor' (blacks). This is made worse by the fact that, instead of driving his car like other white people, the protagonist is seen walking. This makes Furo a 'white nigger', a term used by Jean Rhys in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1992*)* to refer to poor white people. This shows that poverty is for black people as affluence is for whites.

The tables are turned when Ekemini, a black woman, is the one who gives Furo a thousand Naira. This subverts the stereotype of the African woman as a helpless victim of patriarchy. Furo however, performs the script of whiteness by lying that he had been robbed of his car, wallet and phone. He is, therefore, trying to say that "I am not a poor white man, just a victim of crime"; yet, as readers, we know the irony in this. Barrett hereby uplifts the African woman from the stereotypes of identity, not just through Ekemini but also through Syreeta. Furo ends up being a kept man: he is housed, fed and clothed by Syreeta. The author later reveals the twist of the situation as Syreeta is also a kept woman. The relationship, therefore, is like a food chain with Bola being responsible for Syreeta's wellbeing while Syreeta, on the other hand, caters for Furo. It is this relationship that completely subverts the fallacies and stereotypes associated with identity. In this instance, Bola, a wealthy black man acts as the foundation that holds the house together. Furo recognizes his place in this chain when he says,

> This much was clear: Bola was Syreeta's sugar daddy, her lover and benefactor, her man. Furo had always suspected how Syreeta afforded her lifestyle, but now he knew it was to Bola as much as her that he owed his gratitude for the comfort he was provided. The roof over his head, the bed he slept in, the twenty thousand for his passport, the food he ate and the fruit juices he drank, he knew from whose pocket everything came. If Syreeta was the breast at which he sucked for favour, then Bola, though unknowing, was the father figure.(123)

At the beginning, as readers, we do not understand Syreeta's interest in Furo. However, when we are introduced to her group of interracially married friends, we understand what she intends to get from this relationship. She hides Furo's misfortune of being a poor white man but, in return, she gets a sense of belonging with her wealthy friends who have all married white men. Here we meet the stereotypical white men who own private jets and the narrator admits that the Lagos that Furo knew was far from this place occupied by Syreeta's friends and that his

eyesight was blurred from the monotony of affluence. This expounds on the argument by Amanda Lewis that whiteness was also fluid and varied from the golf-club-membership-owning executives down to the homeless white man which in this instance is Furo.

The subversion of the stereotypical images of African women in fiction is also visible in the character of Furo's mother. She is portrayed as a financially independent woman who gives up her position as a housewife for a banking job. Unlike most female characters in African novels, Furo's mother is portrayed as a woman who earns four times more than her husband; pays the children's school fees; takes care of all the family needs, in addition to buying her husband a car to run family errands. When Igoni (the character) visits Furo's family, he juxtaposes the character of Furo's father vis-à-vis that of the mother. Monima Wariboko, Furo's father, despite being a big-boned man is depicted as broken and tying his wife's wrapper. Barrett twists the stereotypical gender roles by presenting us with a "male housewife" and the wife's wrapper around his waist could be a metaphor of the changed, roles thus emasculating Monima. The man is depicted as the one who stays at home while the wife goes out to fend for the family. The author does the same with Tekena, Furo's sister. She is represented as a child who could fight her own battles and even assist her elder brother, Furo, to fight his battles. She had even learnt to whistle before Furo. Whistling is usually associated with men as it is a language that they learn to use while hunting, herding, passing coded messages and even wooing women. It is, therefore, ironical that Tekena should learn this art first. She is also portrayed as more intelligent and technologically literate, traits that make her brother envious of her. She takes away the sense of responsibility and intelligence usually associated with firstborns (especially male). We could, therefore, argue that by presenting us with these images of "female husband, male wife, female son" he attempts to subverts stereotypes attached to identity, thus showing it as something fluid that is always in the process of becoming.

The merging of white and black gives rise to a third identity. It is this group of individuals that further complicate the concept of identity. Up to this point we have been looking at identity from the perspective of black/white binaries. Syreeta's friends are however, raising a group which has always been forgotten in most race studies. This group belongs to what Richard Schechner refers to as the liminal space. The children portrayed here occupy an in-between space of being neither here nor there. They are neither white nor black. While history has always promoted stereotypical binaries of white, wealthy, intelligent, civilized versus black, poor, ignorant, and uncivilized, Igoni Barrett poses a question to the readers: where does the

interracial individual belong? It is the plight and place of this group that writers like Alex La Guma and Athol Fugard have attempted to venture into.

In the foreword to *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-racial Society* (2018), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown asserts that privilege is never consciously recognized or defined. It is something that is normalized and maintained throughout time. She also confirms the existence of racial privilege in post-independence Africa using an example of East Africa and the dominance of Indians who usually feel that they are better than the black lot (xiii). It is this kind of unwritten codes of privilege that we witness when Furo goes for the interview. While he had gone there for the salesperson position, he is offered the position of a Marketing Executive, a position that did not exist before and despite not having any extraordinary qualities as compared to the other applicants apart from his whiteness. This is because until his interaction with Furo, Abu Arinze, the boss of Haba, had not even gone through the applicant's file. Arinze does not even question Furo concerning the mismatch between the photo of the black Furo Wariboko who applied for the job and the white Furo that shows up for the interview.

## Self-Division and Commodification

While Achille Mbembe in *African Modes of Self-Writing* (2002) argues that the African subject due to the experiences of slavery, colonization and apartheid finds him/herself undergoing a sort of self-division that leads to the loss of familiarity with the self which in addition reduces the self to a lifeless form of identity (objecthood) (2); *Blackass* presents us with a situation where the tables are turned, leading to the objectification of whiteness. Furo, as a white subject in post-independence Nigeria, is portrayed as a victim of commodification of whiteness. From his first job, there are insinuations that his image (as white) would be good for the company. But the author takes us from subtle insinuations to instances of overt objectification of Furo's whiteness. The character finds himself in interaction with wealthy, black men who openly put a price tag on his white body. The first price offered on Furo was eighty thousand Naira by Arinze, a price that leads Syreeta to admit that Furo's *oyiboness* (whiteness) had been taken advantage of. The second price is offered by Umukoro, Arinze's client, who offers him three hundred thousand Naira. Umukoro's argument is that he works with multinationals and that white people like working with those of their kind. He goes further to admit that most of their local branches were headed by foreigners. This shows the use of foreigners as figureheads whose sole role is to portray a certain image of the companies that they work for at a price. Furo's commodification does not end there, as he is later offered the post of directorship by

Kasumu who runs a Non-Governmental Organization. He promises to give Furo a better pay as long as he is able to attract foreign donations. Even though Furo turns down all these offers, we later learn of the worth of his *oyiboness* when he accepts the six hundred-thousand-naira job offered by Alhaji Yuguda. Unlike blacks who were unwillingly sold as beasts of burden, Igoni Barrett presents us with a modern type of commodification even though the white subject is given the opportunity to name his price. What the author is saying is that objectification surpasses race and that anyone could unknowingly be objectified.

The narrative gets twisted when we learn about Furo's 'imperfect whiteness' which is discovered by Syreeta. The burden of his black ass fills him with doubts, and he begins seeing himself as an impostor. The protagonist finds himself with a precarious identity and it is this doubt and the fear of being caught that leads him to bleach his black ass. This raises the question of being and becoming. To wake up white is different from being born white. The concept of change is not only through the character of Furo but also through Igoni. While Furo's metamorphosis is from black to white; from Furo Wariboko to Frank Whyte, Igoni changes from a man to a woman, from Igoni to Morpheus. The author, however, gives the two characters precarious identities - Furo's whiteness comes with the taint of a black ass which makes him doubt the authenticity of his whiteness. He contemplates, "no one asks to be born, to be black or white or any colour in between, and yet the identity a person is born into becomes the hardest to explain to the world." (95) The character is, therefore, unsure whether the blackness of his ass could engulf his whole body taking him back to the original self. When Syreeta reveals that she is expecting Furo's child, as readers we wonder if her dream of joining the interracial children's club has been fulfilled. Unaware of Furo's black origin, she believes that Furo's black behind is a birthmark, but it is this child in Syreeta's womb that further complicates the concept of identity. What identity does a child born of a black woman and a black man who wakes up white with a black ass possess? Will the child inherit the father's white skin or the black mask?

## *The Significance of a Name*

The idea of change is not only signified by the skin but also the change of name. When the protagonist discards his Kalabari name, Furo Wariboko, he cuts ties not only with his place of origin, the Niger Delta, but also with his family. As Adele Reinhartz (1998) argues, a proper name always carries in itself a meaning, a name acts as a peg on which other traits of the character may hang, a proper name is a convenient way of referring to a character and finally it distinguishes one character from another. By changing his name, the character denies his

Nigerian/African origin and begins to embrace the phony identity of Frank Whyte, an American, a country he has never been to. The name that he acquires lacks the meaning that his original name has: Furo Wariboko is a name that places him in space and time -- it defines him as African, Nigerian and Kalabari. This is an identity that can be traced and authenticated.

## The Significance of Race and Gender

While the metamorphosis in the novel focuses on the protagonist, he is not the only character who undergoes change. Igoni Barrett, through the character, presents us with the burden of deconstructing our perception on the world's greatest facets of identity -- race and gender. While the other instances were on change of gender roles, the character who shares a name with the author undergoes the transformation from manhood to womanhood. The character takes the power upon himself to define who and what he becomes. The concept of bodies in doubt has been a major topic of discussion in gender and sexual orientation studies. Igoni's identity is portrayed as a body in doubt. While he is first portrayed as a man, later he begins to embrace womanhood and changes his name from Igoni to Morpheus – a Greek word that means form or shape and is also used to refer to the Greek god associated with sleep and dreams. Somehow it alludes to Igoni's change of form and also to the desires that dreams portray. Igoni as a "former man" is amazed at the plight of women to be subordinate, experience uninvited sexual attention from men and to be stereotyped

as the weaker sex that needs the protection of a man. As readers, we find the irony humorous as the characters are not aware of Igoni's former self. The acquired identity, however, teaches him a lesson. As a woman, she was now a victim of a crime he (as a man) was perpetrating. It is even more ironical that Tekena, a woman, is the one who defends Morpheus from the male harassment. All in all, Igoni believes that every man should explore the woman he could have been. Like Furo, Igoni also has the burden of a "blackass". S/he says,

> I was finding out that appearances would always be a point of conflict. Male or female, black or white, the eye of the beholder and the fashion sense of the beholden, all of these feed into our desire to classify by sight. The woman and the man: stuck together in a species and yet divided by a gendered history going back to the womb. But in this war of the selves, I had switched sides. Despite the snake of maleness that still tethered me to the past, I was more than man, interrupted. I was whoever I wanted me to be." (140)

Igoni's black ass is the "snake of maleness". Despite performing womanhood, he still had that one thing that would taint his womanhood. All in all, she was not letting the world define who she was as she had fashioned herself to be what she desired.

## Conclusion

I have focused on issues of identity by narrowing down on the fluidity of identity or precariousness of the same. While the world holds different stereotypes that are associated to different identities, we acknowledge that intersectionality plays a big role and whereas we may assume that one facet of identity blends neatly with another. Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass*, proves that identity is like a river that keeps flowing. That one can be white, male, poor or black, female, rich. That a woman can be intelligent, a man can be kept by a woman and a white man is not always white. The novel pushes us to think critically about humanity and identity by acknowledging that things may not always be what they seem to be. It also takes away the power of self-definition from the public to the self by showing the readers that the individual also has the power to name and make themselves. We, however, cannot ignore the biggest question that this novel raises -- why does the black subject still feel inferior even after freeing him/herself from the claws of white rule? Will the African inferiority complex ever be healed?

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# LITERARY PRAXIS IN THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY TRADITION

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## Introduction

In *The Souls of Black Folk,* African-American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois writes,

> The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a center of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. (60)

I will argue here that Du Bois's "fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life" helps articulate a strong case for the value of literary studies, especially when framed using the concept of "literary praxis." 'Literary praxis' is widely applicable, though I will attempt to explore this concept through a reading of an American anti-slavery poem.

## Characteristics of Critical Thinking in Literature

In my teaching, the cultivation of critical thinking skills primarily comes down to the questions I ask my students. And this is where the concept of literary praxis is useful as a template from which truly challenging questions can be drawn. I define literary praxis through the following six characteristics:

1) Texts are motivated by historically-relevant change, which is to say that they are concerned with forms of social organization, understood within a totalized view of human history.
2) The orientation of this historical change is toward freedom, defined, following Sartre, as freedom both from the constraints of material scarcity as well as the creative freedom enabled by and through forms of collectivity.
3) The telos of freedom is not, however, just an endpoint, but rather a principle guiding an ongoing process; as Danko Grlić writes,

> practice will never completely satisfy 'true' human nature, and the belief in such concrete, wholly unalienated nature is itself a sort of mythological alienation. Therefore, practice is a negation of that eschatological view,

> which believes in the end of the world, the end of history, and the end of the possibility of the 'eternal' development of human nature… (51)

4) They cannot be classified as "essentially literary or essentially non-literary" (Holstun, 7). They draw on the genres and conventions of a literary tradition, but are not primarily oriented toward that tradition.
5) There is a dialectical relationship between the textual and the practical, by which "text becomes practices…and these practices in turn become texts" (Holstun, 7). As Carla Peterson writes of 19th century African-American female writers, "speaking and writing constituted a form of doing, of social action continuous with their social, political, and cultural work."[1]
6) Literary praxis thus requires the ongoing dialectical negotiation between empirical facts and totalization, between events and a theory of history. As Sartre writes,

> Since the ruling principle of the inquiry is the search for the synthetic ensemble, each fact, once established, is questioned and interpreted as part of a whole. It is on the basis of the fact, through the study of its lacks and its 'over-significations,' that one determines, by virtue of a hypothesis, the totality at the heart of which the fact will recover its truth" (25-26).

7) Writers engaging in literary praxis use literature as a mode of investigation between empirical facts and totalization, that "fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life."[2]

Investigating literary praxis requires asking a number of questions, both inside and outside of the text. It can be evaluated by looking at the text's publication and dissemination, and the actions and forms of organization practiced by its author and readers, in other words, using the tools of a historian. But its orientation to historical change and its definition of freedom must also be revealed using the tools of traditional literary analysis, including analysis of character, narrative, style, genre, etc.

## Literature in the World-Historical Struggle for Freedom

To put what I have stated above very plainly, I am interested in literature that aims to do something in the world, specifically that aims to engage in the world-historical struggle for

[1] As Sartre writes, "ideas do not change men. Knowing the cause of a passion is not enough to overcome it; one must live it, one must oppose other passions to it, one must combat it tenaciously, in short one must 'work oneself over'" (12-13).

[2] Literary praxis is thus a description of the relationship between texts and their historical circumstances, as well as a metric for the evaluation of texts, as well as a clarification of why we are reading literature in the first place.

freedom. The interpretive framework I have laid out is generic enough that almost any text could be examined. In particular, some anti-colonial and post-colonial literatures seem uniquely suited to this analysis because of their orientation to freedom and their sophisticated examination of historical change. It is no coincidence that Sartre develops the notion of freedom cited above in the same period when his writing is focused primarily on ongoing de-colonial struggles, particularly around the Algerian War of Independence.[3] But to draw on my own area of expertise, I would like to make the case in the remainder of this paper that the American anti-slavery tradition, especially anti-slavery poetry, provides a rich field for the study of "literary praxis."

## American Anti-Slavery Poetry

The American anti-slavery movement comprised a small but highly influential coalition of political radicals. Pro-slavery political theorist John C. Calhoun estimated in 1847 that only 5% of the population of the northern states supported abolition (Foner 308); during the American Civil War, fewer than 10% of soldiers saw slavery as the primary purpose for fighting (McPherson 117). So, opposition to slavery as such—even as thousands of men were dying over the status of the institution—was a minority position. But for those involved in the movement, abolition was a vocation and life's work. For poets like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, James Monroe Whitfield, and John Greenleaf Whittier, editing anti-slavery newspapers, publishing anti-slavery poetry, lecturing at anti-slavery rallies, and working with other anti-slavery activists and politicians was their full-time job and spiritual calling. These activities were also densely intertwined with one another.

### *Whittier's Poem Ichabod*

Whittier sent nearly all of the poems he wrote to newspapers where he served as an editor; Harper would weave her poems into her lectures, which were her primary source of income. They wrote poems that were directly responsive to political developments. Perhaps the most iconic example is Whittier's poem, *Ichabod.* Whittier, a white Massachusetts Quaker and the most well-known abolitionist poet in America, published this poem two months after Senator Daniel Webster, who Whittier had previously admired, gave a Senate speech urging moderation on the slavery question, and supporting the Fugitive Slave Act, which denied the rights of northern states to harbor escaped slaves. Whittier never mentions Webster's name in his poem. But this only further illustrates his literary praxis. Published, as the poem was, in the

[3] See Dan La Botz's review, "Sartre and the Idea of Freedom in the Anti-Colonial Struggle" (2011).

anti-slavery newspaper Whittier edited, *The National Era*, in the months after Webster's speech, which was seen as a betrayal by abolitionists broadly, Whittier did not have to name the senator for his readers to understand of whom he wrote. And, indeed, part of the poem's power arises from this omission. The poem begins:

> So, fallen! so lost! the light withdrawn
> Which once he wore!
> The glory from his gray hairs gone
> Forevermore!

These opening lines—echoing Milton's description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*—eulogize Webster as a fallen hero as though he has died. But he is not dead; rather, Whittier casts his betrayal as a kind of social death, a total alienation from the community of activists, so that one cannot even utter his name.

Whittier has given him a new name: "Ichabod"—the name given to the son born after the Philistines have captured the Ark of the Covenant from the Israelites. The name means, "There is no glory" or "Glory has been exiled from Israel." Nineteenth-century Americans sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, would have been immediately familiar with the reference to the Bible, a text used as the primary source for anti-slavery arguments. The poem closes,

> All else is gone; from those great eyes
> The soul has fled:
> When faith is lost, when honor dies,
> The man is dead!
> Then, pay the reverence of old days
> To his dead fame;
> Walk backward, with averted gaze,
> And hide the shame!

Just as Whittier refuses to name Webster, he refuses even to look him in the eye; the emotional intensity of the poem comes from this tense suppression of emotion, the closing down of the small intimacies that confirm our humanity. Even if Whittier were to look Webster in the eyes, the "soul has fled"; his support of slavery has extinguished the life inside of him; the light in his eye is gone. This final gesture also contains a subtle allusion to the story of Noah's inebriation in *Genesis*, from which his sons walk backward in shame. This has unique resonance in political debates of the moment, since pro-slavery apologists often argued that blacks were descendants of Ham, and thus ought to suffer the curse inflicted on him after he

sees Noah inebriated and naked. But in Whittier's formulation of the analogy, Webster is Noah, who has betrayed the slaves as Noah betrayed his sons; the reader is Ham.

These allusions lend universal moral significance to Whittier's condemnation. As Wayne Kime writes, the allusion to *Paradise Lost* suggests,

> the cosmic significance of the values at stake in the struggle between the forces for and against slavery, prophesies by implication that the Abolitionist forces, like those of God in *Paradise Lost*, will finally prevail over those of slavery…

But the power of this declaration of Webster's loss of glory is only legible in its historical and political context. Without understanding Whittier's commitment, Webster's betrayal, and the whole trajectory of the anti-slavery movement in America, the poem is simply a terse, generic condemnation, which does not even name its target. Once we come to appreciate, however, to whom and for what the poem was written, or, in other words, the dialectical relationship between poetry and politics, the literary and the non-literary, that animated Whittier's work in this period, the poem's true strength is revealed.

Poetry was a potent genre for the anti-slavery movement because short poems like *Ichabod* could be written and reproduced quickly and easily, set between newspaper columns often reporting on the same events on which the poems themselves were written.[4] Poems were read aloud at small meetings or large rallies, or set to music to be sung and performed; their strong symbols and imagery offered coherence for political organization.

## Whittier's Long Poem, The Panorama

Poems, especially longer poems and sequences, were also used as vehicles for more elaborate theorization of the goals and purposes of movements, for honing and clarifying ideology. In my dissertation, I write extensively about Whittier's long poem, *The Panorama*, which offers an extended contrast between northern free society and southern slave society as a frame for an elaborate critique of northern liberal elites and their complicity in the perpetuation of the institution of slavery. The poem is a sophisticated diagnosis of Northern ideology, published at the moment when the Republican Party, which would ultimately nominate and elect Abraham Lincoln (and spark the Civil War), was initially being formed. Such more rigorous theoretical work is part of the dialectic of literary praxis: literature is used, on the one hand, to

[4] "Ichabod," for example, is printed in *The National Era* between two articles on the Compromise of 1850, which Webster's speech had supported.

provide coherence and symbolic resonance in the work of political organization, and, on the other, to work through the contradictions and nuances of the developing historical situation.

To focus on literary praxis, therefore, is to focus on the work that a text asks us to do, the ways in which it asks us to work ourselves over, and what it asks of readers in the world outside of the text. It involves an investigation into the author's life, her own relationship between thought and action, and between the knowledge of the world presented by the text and the real world in which she lived; thus in direct opposition to the New Critic's "intentional fallacy," it matters tremendously what the author is doing in, with, and outside of the text, not so that interpretation descends into the reporting of biography, but instead so that interpretive questions can open constantly toward the text's relationship to history, that is, to "the unified life of man…a unified history of the way man has changed the world and created new historical structures" (Vranicki). 'Literary praxis' helps us clarify how literature has changed the world, and we can infer from the concept a set of questions that stimulate and frame critical thinking, inviting students to consider what they themselves will go on to do.

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# STATISTICS AS A TOOL FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND VALUE CREATION

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## Introduction

Statistics is the science of learning from data. It is a branch of mathematics that deals with collection, analysis and interpretation of data. It is important to mention that all global aspects of life, whether natural or anthropogenic, have a statistical facet because they invoke measurement. Measurement is necessary because it facilitates comparisons in terms of dimensions, assessments, judgments as well as making decisions for the present and future of any activity. Data are factual figures or numbers which are used in the practice of statistics. Data are not just numbers but numbers with a context. For example, "walking 100" does not make sense at all but "walking 100 kilometres" makes sense because it has the context of distance. The context engages background knowledge and invokes critical thinking on whether it is healthy to walk that distance. The "practice" of statistics is important in critical thinking due to its three parts of: *data production*, *data analysis* and *statistical inference*. Data production is the provision of relevant data or information that may help in answering specific question(s). It may also involve basic concepts on how to select samples, design experiments or conduct fieldwork. Data analysis is mainly concerned with methods and ideas for organizing and describing data, using graphs, numerical summaries such as the mean, mode or median. It may also involve elaborate mathematical descriptions. We should not forget that there are computer based statistical packages such as SPSS, Unista, Stata, S-PLUS and many others. Lastly, statistical inference may be applied once data analysis has been done. It goes beyond the data that was analysed to draw conclusions about some wider universe (entire population). Statistical inference does not only make conclusions bluntly but it accompanies them with a statement on how trustworthy the findings are. This answers the question of reliability of the outcome. In any activity that involves critical thinking, there is the aspect of conceptualization, analysis and synthesis of information gathered from observation or experience. The end result will be to reason out and make favourable (beneficial) conclusions that are sustainable. The

whole exercise is to improve the process of thinking critically about interpretation of statistical findings by asking relevant questions on why the outcome is the way it is.

## Importance of Statistics

Statistical literacy is important because it involves learning from numerical information. Statistical data are, therefore, raw materials for the creation of knowledge. This literacy mainly focuses on making decisions by using statistics as evidence to solve a specific problem. It offers essential insight in using reliable and relevant data (information). It enables one to make accurate and trustworthy conclusions and declarations. Today's world can also be addressed as "information world" where data use is paramount in all aspects of life. This information is churned out statistically. Statistics helps in determining issues such as global/national/local population growth rates, schooling trends, unemployment, mortality, medical care and many others. It is imperative to say that statistics holds a central position in almost every field of life, including economics, psychology, astronomy, chemistry, literature and all the other disciplines.

## Users of Statistics

The users of statistics include individuals, societies, learners, researchers, planners, journalists and media, businesses, central and local governments. The central and local county governments are the prime utilisers of statistics for population censuses, budgetary allocations, planning and other needs that require data and predictions. Research and educational institutions, businesses, media and the general public are also enlisted as consumers of statistical information.

# Necessary Statistics Topics Useful in Critical Thinking

Some of the important sub-topics in statistics that are applicable in critical thinking and value creation include measurement, probability and sampling, data analysis and statistical inference. I will now discuss each one of them.

### *Measurement*

Measurement is defined as the conversion of some characteristics of a phenomenon into symbols (mostly numbers). Some examples of measurement are: distance, age, time, weight and so on. A variable is any characteristic (attribute) of an element that can be observed and measured in some form. For example, one person has variables such as age, year of birth, height, weight and others.

There are four levels (scales) of measurement which are determined by the existence or non-existence of three properties which are:

a) magnitude which enables comparison of different amounts or intensities in order to assess differences or similarities.

b) Equal intervals allow magnitude to be expressed by a certain number of units on a scale where all the units on the scale are equal by definition. Take the case of hours in a day. It is clear that one day means 24hours. There is not a single day with either 18 hours or 26 hours.

c) Absolute zero is a value which indicates that when a value does not exist, measurement cannot be undertaken.

The four levels (scales) of measurement are: Nominal, Ordinal, Interval and Ratio.

Measurement contributes to critical thinking and making informed decisions, based on comparisons, assessments, judgments and resolutions for present and future events.

### *Probability and Sampling*

Most human activities rely heavily on probability. Probability is the chance/likelihood of occurrence or non-occurrence of an event/activity. Making decisions on the course of action to take relies on probability which can be looked at as either success or failure. Take an example of an aspiring parliamentary candidate. The concerned candidate will weigh the likelihood of success or failure after several campaigns, then assess voter response and will critically examine the possible end result. This may help the candidate decide on whether to proceed or abandon the exercise. The candidate's decision is anchored on probability. Probability is a numerical measure with a value between 0 and 1. If the probability of occurrence is 0, then it implies that the event cannot occur. If it is 1, it means that occurrence of such an event is certain. The probability theory, therefore, provides a mechanism for measuring and analysing uncertainties associated with future events.

On the other hand, sampling in statistics is a process of selecting a smaller portion of a population for purposes of collecting data from it and eventually, after the analysis, the results will be generalized to the entire population. This generalization is referred to as statistical inference. The selected sample is deemed to be representative of the entire population in terms of the characteristic(s) that is/are under investigation. This ensures that there are minimal

discrepancies in the inferential process. Sampling is, in fact, critical thinking and has several advantages but only a few main ones will be mentioned here. These include:

1. Lower expenses in that it will be more cost-effective to handle a portion of the entire population in data acquisition process rather than doing a census.

2. The time for data collection will be reduced due to the smaller number of subjects that will be dealt with in terms of data collection.

3. Reducing respondent burden in that less people will be inconvenienced in cases where data collection involves interviews, and

4. Accuracy of data will be high due to extensive follow-ups because of the smaller scale of operations in data collection.

Sampling has several disadvantages but the most glaring one is the introduction of bias in data acquisition. This occurs when some elements of the population have higher/lower probability (chance) of being selected than the others. Results obtained after analysis of biased data may be spurious. Sampling theory is, therefore, the scientific foundation of everyday practice. It is a technical accounting device which rationalizes the collection of information. There are two major types of sampling, namely probability and nonprobability methods. The probability sampling method gives each element (member) of the population an equal chance of selection in the sample by randomization. The non-probability sampling, on the other hand, is used where selection may be purposive or convenient. It is not a recommended method of sampling because it erodes the essence of critical thinking.

### *Data Analysis and Statistical Inference*

Data analysis is the process of evaluating data using either analytical or statistical tools to extract useful information that will help in decision-making (Agresti, 2011). It summarizes the collected data by organization, classification and interpretation of the obtained data by use of analytical and logical reasoning in order to determine patterns, relationships or trends (Glenberg & Andrzejewski, 2003 and Treiman, 2009).

There are two main types of data. Any data set will either be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative data analysis involves identification of common patters within responses and critically analysing them. Quantitative data analysis involves critical evaluation and interpretation of figures and numbers as an attempt to find the rationale behind the emergence

of such findings. Data analysis is divided in to two broad categories and these are either descriptive or inferential:

Descriptive statistics as the word says, is to describe and summarize the data. It displays patterns, trends and fluctuations over a period of time. An appropriate example would be the establishment of annual rainfall pattern of an area by using monthly totals. From this information it will be easy to identify the pattern of wet and dry months and may be establish the wet seasons of an area. This information can be presented in form of tables or graphs.

It is imperative that descriptive statistics will also use statistical summary measures to describe data by use of measures of central tendency such as the mean, mode and medium. These measures are complemented by other measures of variability and the most commonly applied measure is called the standard deviation. In descriptive statistics, utilization of frequency distributions is paramount in describing patterns and the nature of variability of the variable under investigation.

When a sample has been taken and the researcher wants to analyse and generalize the results obtained after analysing the sample to the entire population, this process is called inference. This is the practice of forming judgements about population parameters from sample statistics. For inference to be valid, there is a requirement that the results obtained from the sample are transferable to the entire population with minimum discrepancies. Statistics also investigates issues of "cause-and-effect" relationships between/among variables. Before this is done a distinction is made between independent and dependent variables to clarify the variable that has an influence on the other, otherwise known as the independent variable (X) and the cause will occur on the dependent variable (Y) ( Freedman, 2005). Some of the statistical techniques applied in statistical inference include correlation and regression analyses, ANOVA. The main concern in statistical inference is the testing of formulated hypotheses. This begs for what is called statistical significance which can be plainly stated, that the results obtained after analysing the sample characteristics of interest will be applicable to the population. Put in another way, the results obtained could not have been occasioned by chance. Some of the tests of significance used depending on the level (scale) of measurement mentioned earlier are Student's t, Chi-Square, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskall-Wallis H, Simple Runs and many others (Saleemi, 2012).

## Use of Statistics in Decision-Making

There are many situations in real life that require the determination of informed and objective decision. Data driven Policy making is needed to achieve issue recognition, evaluate the future, monitor policy implementation and make public choices, amongst many others. Take the example of corruption in Kenya and the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission (EACC) whose task it is to curtail corruption. The Commission uses statistics to assist both the central and he local governments in assessing quality of governance, service delivery and impact of corruption in Kenya (EACC, Survey 2017).

The World Bank used the "World Development Indicators " in the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Global Targets for International Development on the economic well-being and social development of all nations. Here, in Kenya, we have the "Vision 2030" which very much relies on statistics for projections and predictions of how things should be by that time (SID, 2010)

## Misuse and Abuse of Statistics

Despite the importance of statistical literacy in numerous functions, there are several cases where misuse and abuse are common practice, some of them are itemized below.

i) Using biased methods of sampling with the aim of achieving the desired results. This yields unreliable results that are not consistent with reliability and, as such, they are utopian (Fayoyin and Ngwainmbi, 2014)

ii) Shifting definitions of statistical terms that are not synonymous as being the same. A suitable example is using the term arithmetic "mean" to replace the "mode." We know that these are measures of central tendency which are quite different in their applications.

iii) Taking small or inadequate sample size to represent a large population. The results obtained from the sample will yield glaring discrepancies with the population characteristics which makes statistical inference unrealistic in such a case. A good example is the poll opinions in a country's post-election analysis. These results often give erroneous conclusions (Makulilo, 2013)

iv) Cheating with statistical data. This is common in sales advertisements where concerned companies lure potential customers into having confidence in their products. They use catchy slogans and unique taglines most of the time with unproven data.

v) Manipulation of scales to magnify results by use of percentages or ratios to encourage or dissuade people from some activities such as a statement that "2 smokers in every 5 die of lung cancer" which can also be translated to "40% of smokers die of lung cancer". Statistical manipulation has been made easy because of poor level of public literacy. It may lead to endangering the public and can be a hindrance to the population well-being as well as to national development (Olugu *et al*, 2018).

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