# Moja

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*unity in diversity*

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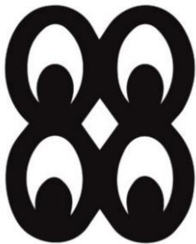

MATE MASIE

*wisdom and knowledge*

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Shawn Winebrenner

From Whence I Came: Totality

From Whence I Came: Mama Wa Wote

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**Get Over Yourself—**

**What's Non-native Won't Harm You**

Mildred K. Barya
*UNC Asheville*

It begins innocently

in the life of plants

so we don't notice

how or when it sneaks upon us.

Wounding words—

calling us pests, weeds, noxious

good-ugly poster people

scheming to wipe us

out of our newfound home.

In the woods I come across a call to preserve

*Our natural heritage against non-native invasive pest plants*

*taking over the native landscape.*

Taking over—as if by force. As if unnatural.

It gets worse: naming the plants Alien invaders

responsible for the murder of native plants.

Grandma used to say, Nature knows how to

take care of itself without human interference.

Makes me wonder who has appointed righteous

"natives" to uproot non-natives, the insatiable desire

to clean up, to preserve what's considered pure as if—

there's really such a thing.

It was like that in the Armenian genocide and

Turkey has yet to acknowledge its role in murder.

It was like that in the Jewish holocaust,

Rwandan genocide, Haiti-Dominican war,

and it is like that here when people pay

no mind but keep thinking or saying,

it ain't like that. Could never be like that. No!

Not in a civilized nation, among a civilized lot, like us.

And oh—

About plants, it's different.

For me, it's the same thing.

The plants are *bad* because they weren't born here,

*Bad* because they're determined to be,

*Bad* because they grow lavishly,

*Bad* because they refuse to be tamed—

they *rampage across native landscapes unchecked*.

Remember what happened to the wolves?

Those who couldn't be broken into docile canines

were shot. Don't you know your history?

Don't say, oh, it's all in the past now.

**Liberated**

Long before we knew,

Communal shame was our hair.

We can fix it, we said, with chemicals

Suppressing the kinky,

Creating an unknown, afraid head.

Remember, remember, dismembering the curls

But I'm not telling you what we did to skin then.

Time came to turn the collective disgrace into Grace

Black won the day but not the debate

We did not mind. We do mind.

Today we revel in the rhythms and temples of our

Beautiful bodies and knotty hair, black hair, hard hair

Twisted and tangled like roots of a baobab.

Roots we are, and branches connecting to

Motherland where we began,

Before we were formed in our mothers' wombs.

Today we confront cognitive deficiency,

Social class, racial profiles

And we do have a good laugh!

Today we say, Respect.

Speaking in codes and reminding ourselves to

Shine everywhere, elsewhere, beyond the standard.

Today, we speak all languages and we rule.

**Mildred K Barya** is a writer from Uganda and Assistant professor at UNC Asheville, where she teaches creative writing and world literature. Her publications include three poetry books as well as prose, poems or hybrids forthcoming or published in *African American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Ruminate Magazine, Tin House, Obsidian, poets.org, Poetry Quarterly, Asymptote Journal, Matters of Feminist Practice Anthology, Prairie Schooner, New Daughters of Africa International Anthology, Per Contra*, and *Northeast Review*. She's at work on a collection of nonfiction, and one of the essays—*Being Here in This Body*—won the 2020 Linda Flowers Literary Award, and is published in the North Carolina Literary Review, 2021. She received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Denver, MFA in creative writing from Syracuse University, and B.A. in Literature, Makerere University. She is a board member of the African Writers Trust and coordinates the Poetrio Reading Events at Malaprop's Independent Bookstore/Café in Asheville.
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# Abibifahodie!
# Language, Consciousness, and Decolonization[1]

Kamau Rashid
*Northeastern Illinois University*

Language, beyond its utility as a medium of communication, is also a signifier of political and economic power. It is also, perhaps most importantly, an expressive instrument of a people's worldview. Thus, as Africans have and continue to struggle for self-determination in the world, they are often beset by an on-going dependency on the very languages of those peoples who are the architects and stewards of the system opposed to such liberatory ends. This essay seeks to examine the intersections of language and decolonization with respect to African people. It offers a critical examination of several notable proposals and seeks to explicate the indispensability of language as a key element in the contested terrain of African consciousness.

**Keywords:** language, Pan-Africanism, decolonization, Swahili, revitalization

## Introduction

The liberation movements of the Twentieth Century have been highly effective at revealing the partiality of many conceptualizations of decolonization. While African independence movements succeeded in seizing the reigns of state power, they have generally failed at liberating the economic means that sustains the effective power of any state apparatus. As such, the promises of the independence movements generally remain unfulfilled, as African societies have transitioned from prostration before the old colonial masters to subservience before the lords of global capitalism.

Moreover, that the conceptualization of liberation has not sufficiently interrogated the need for both paradigms and process of re-Africanization is notable and problematic. Indeed, while liberation has often been limited to discourses pertaining to the state and the economy, the cultural matrix of a people necessarily dictates the trajectory of their movement and development.[2] Therefore, when Carruthers states that "The process of Africanization and transformation cannot be separated neatly into two stages—they overlap,"[3] he is referring to the necessity of an interweaving of the ostensibly political, economic, and conceptual. As the political and economic are expressions of culture, they too must reflect the concretization of a

[1] *Abibifahodie* is an Asante Twi term that translates to English as "Black liberation".

[2] Amílcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

[3] Jacob H. Carruthers, "Black Intellectuals and the Crisis in Black Education," in *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*, ed. by Mwalimu J. Shujaa, 37-55. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), 52.

people's worldview, that is, "the way a people conceive of the fundamental questions of existence and organization of the universe."[4] Thus, the liberation struggle is, inescapably, a cultural struggle.

Perhaps central in this ongoing cultural struggle has been the continued colonization of Africa's cultural sphere via European languages. The adoption of Kiswahili in East Africa notwithstanding, European languages—the languages of conquerors, enslavers, and destabilizers—remain the languages of governments and other major institutions such as schools at nearly every level.[5] While some would dismiss this as a triviality borne of the expediency of continued reliance on European languages given their global diffusion, degrees of technical development,[6] or their functioning as supposed bases of linguistic unity,[7] what must be considered is that this retention has not only constrained the full flowering of Africa's indigenous languages, but has also succeeded in sustaining the super-ordination of Europe and European culture within the lived realities of the supposedly decolonized.[8] As Mukoma Wa Ngugi notes, "decolonization in the language of the colonizer would be a contradiction,"[9] as it is a state of affairs that necessarily leaves intact fetters of domination.

Furthermore, this language problem exists not only in Africa, but also in the African Diaspora, where the primary languages of most Africans are the languages of their ancestors' captors and tormentors. This is notable, as even our discourse pertaining to liberation must be mediated in the languages of those historically opposed to those ends. Thus, begging the question of how the inescapable epistemological vectors of language determine the conceptualization of liberation as both an ontological and political quandary.[10]

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[4] Carruthers, "Black Intellectuals and the Crisis in Black Education," 53.

[5] It should be noted that Swahili is the national language of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and thus is used by an estimated 80 to 100 million speakers. See M.M. Mulokozi, "Kiswahili as a National and International Language." ed. by University of Dar es Salaam Institute of Kiswahili Research (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam, 2000), 1, 6.

[6] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987); Ayọ Bangbọṣe, *Language and Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

[7] Chinua Achebe has argued that the colonial languages provide a shared medium of communication, one that facilitates both national and international communication. See *Morning yet on Creation Day* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975).

[8] Ayi Kwei Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2010); Diop, *Black Africa*; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (Oxford England: James Currey, 1986); Rekhety Wimby, "The Unity of African Languages," in *Kemet and the African Worldview: Research, Rescue, and Restoration*, ed. by Maulana Karenga and Jacob H. Carruthers (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press 1986).

[9] Mukoma Wa Ngugi, The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 43.

[10] This point relates to several deeper queries. What are the implications of conceptualizing "freedom" or "liberation" in the language of your enemy? Can one truly express a notion of freedom delinked from an oppressor's culture when using the oppressor's language? On the ontological level does the Kiswahili term *uhuru* equate to the English term freedom? Does Asante Twi term *fahodie* equate to the English term liberation? Even if these equivalences exist, does our reliance on the English terms speak to a lingering dependency, an absence of the type of intellectual freedom that is an indispensable element in liberatory struggle?

Furthermore, we have always produced Black intellectuals who are deeply grounded in various western

While liberation is not merely a matter of language, language is linked to worldview, and this, ultimately, expresses a people's total way of seeing the world. Rkhty Amen (Wimby) states, "Since most of our conscious modes of conceptualizing, acting and moving about are conditioned in part by our language, to use the language of another culture is to use that culture's ideas; and to use another culture's ideas in place of one's own is to relegate the latter to a position of *de facto* inferiority."[11] Thus, language is linked to the conceptual, and its application indicative of the dynamics of power implicit in its operation. Therefore, one is either struggling within the conceptual strictures of alien paradigms, or working to effect liberation *literally* on African terms. In this vein, the call for "uhuru sasa" (which translates as "freedom now" in Kiswahili) during the Black Power era of the United States, was not merely an invocation of the right to self-determination by African people, it was simultaneously an invocation of the African *asili*,[12] a Kiswahili word meaning *essence*, whose eradication or subversion had been the goal of enslavers. As such, this call for freedom was simultaneously a call for social power and cultural reclamation. This illustrates that language is an indelible part of any struggle wherein culture, or rather the asili of the people, is marshalled as an instrument of political education and mobilization. Language serves to demarcate the varied frontiers of struggle, not simply the goal to "free the land" but also the goal to liberate the mind as a coterminous endeavor.

This essay seeks to explore the brief history of the Pan-African language proposals. It will investigate the proposal of Kiswahili as the principal Pan-African language, the proposal of joint, regional Pan-African languages—such as the adoption of both Kiswahili and Hausa for East and West Africa respectively, the proposals of constructed languages, and finally the proposed revitalization of the ancient Kemetic language—mdw nṯr (Medew Netcher).[13] This essay will consider not only these proposals in the abstract, but also their implications for the formulation of a "Grand Vision of The Future,"[14] that is, a vision of destiny for the African world beyond the myopia of the status quo, and beyond the conceptual frontiers of European languages and the epistemic constraints to which these consign us.

## Our Language Problem Revisited

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes, "The domination of a people's language by the languages of their colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized."[15] Thus, the colonization of the cultural sphere of African people has been sustained, in part, via the imposition of European languages. The problematic impact of linguistic colonization is a malaise that has been noted by a number of Pan-African thinkers. In this section I will offer a

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intellectual and critical traditions. Intellectuals whose mastery of European philosophies and theoretical discourses has been impressive. Have we been as adept at promulgating emancipatory discourses that come from our own indigenous cultural contexts? Is there a cost associated with our shortcomings in this regard? Ultimately, can we be free on the terms given to us by those from whom we are trying to liberate ourselves?

[11] Rekhety Wimby, "The Unity of African Languages", 162.

[12] Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994).

[13] All words from mdw nṯr are rendered initially in transliteration, followed by phonetic spellings in parenthesis. Subsequent references to these terms interchange the transliteration with the phonetic spelling.

[14] Anderson Thompson, *The African Principle Essay Series* (Chicago: African World Community Press, 1999), iv.

[15] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 16.

brief discussion of critical commentaries from Ayi Kwei Armah, Cheikh Anta Diop, Rkhty Amen, and Simba Tayari respectively, all of whom have sought to explicate the centrality of language to the struggle for liberation.

### ***Armah: Remembering the Dismembered***

In his essay *Solving Our Language Problem*, Ayi Kwei Armah discusses the dilemma facing African writers, that of dependency on foreign publishers and literary production (that is writing) primarily in European languages.[16] He argues that this problem is not merely one pertaining to the writer's craft or their ability to reach a populace not literate in the dominant foreign languages—though these are critical challenges. Dependency on European languages also exemplifies a cultural malaise, a static quality represented by the continuing institutionalization of foreign languages at the level of national and international bodies on the continent. He maintains that this regime has resulted in the continued devaluation of Africa's languages, which are generally relegated to use on the local or national stage as "lingua franca" for the masses of the people, but not as administrative, scientific, or artistic languages in many cases.

Some writers have argued for the embrace of Africa's various ethnic languages as mediums of literary communication. Ngũgĩ, for example, has linked the literary use of African languages to the on-going anti-imperialist struggle.[17] However, Armah contends that though these languages may suffice in terms of communicating with a smaller community of native speakers, they will invariably be constrained in their capacity to reach a wider audience for whom these languages are not common. Thus, the writer in an ethnic language, though capable of reaching those literate in the language, will also be limited in going beyond this initial audience.

Instead, Armah proposes that Africans follow the Soviet-model, wherein writers wrote in their various, local languages, and these works were subsequently translated into a major language (Russian in the case of the United Soviet Socialist Republic) capable of reaching a national and international audience, and finally translated from Russian into various other languages such as German, French, English and so on.[18] Applying this to the African context, African writers would create in their preferred local or ethnic language (i.e., Wolof, Kinyarwanda, Ndebele, and so on), and their written works would then be translated and published in a major (that is, transnational) African language. Then these works would be translated into other languages, African and foreign such as English, French, Portuguese, and so forth. Armah argued that this structure would, inevitably, allow African writers to reach the entirety of the African continent primarily via its indigenous languages.

The potential of this scheme notwithstanding, Armah notes that a continental Pan-African language has not yet been determined for Africa. Thus, he considers two separate proposals. First is the Kiswahili (or Swahili) language of East Africa. In discussing its capability, he writes that Kiswahili is the "one African language admirably suited to function as our common ancillary language" given its geographic dispersion and ability to absorb foreign influences.[19]

In addition to the former, Armah considers mdw nṯr, the language of kmt (Kemet or ancient Egypt). He states that its extensive development in antiquity has left it well suited for a range of practical applications in the present. He also argues that it is well served by its neutrality, for it

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[16] Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent,* 125.

[17] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 28.

[18] Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent*, 127-129.

[19] Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent*, 129.

is not the native language of any living African population, thus depriving any speech community of an inherent advantage due to their familiarity.

More recently, Armah seems to have moved away from both ideas, instead advocating the creation of an artificial language based on elements of a plethora of continental languages.[20] This is an approach that has been favored by others, and will be taken up later.

### *Diop: Language and a Pan-African Future*

Similar to Armah, Cheikh Anta Diop has approached this question, exploring African languages' overall significance to the ends of Pan-African unity. He notes that the embrace of African languages on the local and national level is a critical matter in avoiding the formation of highly stratified societies, wherein those not fluent in the colonial tongue are unable to participate in debate and discussion about the future of society through the holding of public office.[21] For Diop, the embrace of African languages on the national level satisfies the pragmatic issue of equity, that is the capacity of the society to fully engage the masses of the people, and in so doing, potentially marshal their capacity towards productive ends.

Secondly, he argues that the perceived limitations of African languages, that is in their present capacity to serve the ends of research, are not insurmountable challenges. He writes, "European languages must not be considered diamonds displayed under a glass bell, dazzling us with their brilliance. Our attention must be fixed on their historical development. Creatively, we discover that similar paths are open to all."[22] In this, Diop argues that European languages' technical utility are not intrinsic qualities of the languages themselves, but rather are the logical by-product of centuries of effort that has merely resulted in their present states, and that a similar process is practicable for African languages.

The latter point is important as Diop argues that the dependency on European languages was, in many respects, merely a signifier of a deeper and more problematic tether, one sufficient to sap Africa's intellectual and economic potential. He writes, "The influence of language is so great that the various European mother countries feel they can afford to withdraw politically from Africa without great loss as long as their (linguistic) presence remains in the economic, spiritual and cultural spheres."[23] Thus, Diop concludes that language is not merely a medium of communication, but a mooring of servility, a basis of slavish dependency that serves to reinforce the hierarchical relations between African and European nations. Mulokozi has also expressed this point, stating that "Certainly the French, Britons, and Portuguese will do everything in their power to ensure that their languages remain dominant, for language for them is a political, economic and strategic question."[24] In this way, both authors echo Carter G. Woodson's famous thesis that the duly mis-educated would actively participate in the maintenance of the oppressive order, that their educations served as a tether, reinforcing the bond of subordination and obfuscating viable pathways towards African self-sufficiency. Woodson writes:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door.

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[20] Morehouse College, "Global Conversations with Dr. Ayi Kwei Armah," Morehouse College, March 22, 2016, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpJD7UxSwPQ.

[21] Diop, *Black Africa*, 9.

[22] Diop, *Black Africa*, 12.

[23] Diop, *Black Africa*, 13.

[24] M.M. Mulokozi, "Kiswahili as a National and International Language," 10.

> He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.[25]

This is made more apparent in Diop's linking of the dominance of foreign languages with the reinforcement of alienation. He argued that while expediency often dictates the retention or adoption of European languages, that these are inherent signifiers and instruments of powerful "cultural interest[s]".[26]

***Rkhty Amen: Languages as a Source of Dependency***

Both Armah and Diop illustrate the importance of language, not merely as a tool of transmission, but also as an expression of political and economic interests. They have not been alone in this view as some African American scholars have also considered language's importance to the prospects for liberation.

For instance, Rkhty Amen has argued that language serves a basis of dependency, that the reliance of Africans upon European languages is not merely an indication of our failure to maximize the utility of our own languages. Such a pattern also betrays our belief in the willingness of the European world to carry African people into the future.[27] Having neither prepared ourselves for the possibility that we might be denied such passage, or that Europeans might seek to actualize a future that might be detrimental to African interests, we face a terrible malaise of needing to rely upon ourselves. *Kujitegemea*, a Kiswahili term meaning self-reliance, is not terrible in an absolute sense, but can loom ominously for those unprepared to actualize it. Therefore, she argues that our language priorities are inextricably linked to our notions of futurity.

***Simba Tayari: Lugha ni Utamaduni***

The motto of the Swahili Institute of Chicago, "Lugha ni utamaduni" is highly appropriate in explicating the deeper dimensions of the problems of language dependency, particularly among those most estranged from their ancestral traditions.[28] "Lugha ni utamaduni" translates from Kiswahili as "Language is Culture", and for Simba Tayari, the institute's founder, language is a bridge, connecting living Africans to their ancestral traditions. He argues that the *Maafa*—the Kiswahili term offered by Marimba Ani to describe the interrelated processes of slavery, colonialism, and their legacies—occasioned not merely the loss of language, but also the loss of culture, and with this the profound alienation characteristic of a condition of being unmoored from one's traditional values. Therefore, he argues that language reclamation represents not merely a process of acquiring novel means of communication, but the basic foundation for healing and transformation.

In this section, I have attempted to explore some of the critical discourses pertaining to language, particularly with regards to the retention of European languages among African people. Various scholars and advocates have noted that despite their technical utility, European languages serve as tethers, constraining the development of Africa, African people, and African languages. As the processes of colonialism and slavery have represented a disruption of African life, some have argued that African languages represent a potent means for its restoration. Thus, in the following section I will examine possible solutions to the language problem facing us.

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[25] Woodson, Carter G. *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton: Africa World Press 1990), xiii.

[26] Diop, *Black Africa*, 12

[27] Rkhty Amen, *Women's History Month Address: The Legitimacy of Mdw Ntr and the Legitimacy of Kemet for Resurrecting an African Worldview*, DVD.

[28] Simba Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya* (Chicago: Swahili Institute of Chicago, 1994), 6

**Our Language Solutions**

During his presidency, Kwame Nkrumah supported the use of Hausa, Kiswahili, and various local languages for state broadcasting services. He is also said to have considered the utility of the Hausa language as a regional language for West Africa.[29] These moves are notable, for they illustrate how Nkrumah, similar to Nyerere, viewed language as a tool in the formation of Pan-African nationalism.[30]

In this section I will explore various proposed solutions to our language problem. I will begin with the proposed adoption of Kiswahili as the principal Pan-African language. Next, I will consider a regional approach, that is, the adoption of various languages within specific regions of the African world. Third, I will examine the prospects of artificial languages such as El-Afrihili or Guosa. And finally, I will discuss the proposed revitalization and adoption of mdw nṯr as a Pan-African language.

***Sema Kiswahili: Lugha Yetu***[31]

The Kiswahili language has been a leading exemplar of the promise of Pan-African language. Its broad diffusion in the pre-colonial era, its appropriation by colonial authorities as an administrative language, its embrace by resistance movements in the region, its concurrent embrace by African Americans as a language of liberation, and its continued expansion on the African continent have made it an ideal candidate.[32] Historic factors have contributed to these advantages. The maritime orientation of the Swahili people, as well as the cosmopolitanism of Africa's eastern coast as early as around 1000 CE, have served to place the Swahili language and the Bantu peoples of East Africa at the crossroads of a trade that intersected Africa, Europe, and Asia.[33] It was this milieu that contributed overwhelmingly to the cultivation of a lingua franca or *lugha ya mawasiliano* [34] whose lexicon reflected the social intercourse of the region. As a result, the presence of words from sources such as Hindi, Farsi, Arabic, and Portuguese illustrate the malleability of the language, that is its ability to absorb foreign influences, and in so doing, adapt to change.

While the context of colonialism represented a potent challenge to African people, contributing to contradictory manifestations of the language's application as an instrument of European hegemony, its eventual emergence as a "Language of liberation"[35] is most revealing as numerous Pan-Africanists and nationalists embraced Kiswahili as an effective tool for communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The fact that it is presently spoken in various East and Central African countries by tens of millions and possibly even one hundred million people is indicative of its communicative facility and its acceptability by a range of speakers who see it as

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[29] Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics: An African-Centered Paradigm for the Second Phase of the African Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[30] John M. Mugane, *The Story of Swahili* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015).

[31] This statement translates into English from Kiswahili as "Speak Swahili: Our Language".

[32] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*; Mulokozi, "Kiswahili as a National and International Language"; Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*.

[33] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*.

[34] This term translates into English from Kiswahili as "a language of communication". See "lingua franca," TUKI English-Swahili Dictionary, accessed July 22, 2021, http://www.elimuyetu.co.tz/subjects/arts/eng-swa/l.html.

[35] Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*, 8.

an appropriate and practical auxiliary language. In this way, Kiswahili has also been a bridge for diverse peoples to adapt to their present.[36]

This language has also been a means whereby Africans, notably Africans in America, have endeavored to imagine the future. This is most clearly reflected in Kiswahili's popular embrace in the United States during the Black Power era.[37] Kiswahili's inclusion in the Pan-African holiday created by Maulana Karenga, *Kwanzaa*, its use in the names of various community institutions such as the *Shule ya Watoto* ("School for Children") in Chicago or *Uhuru Sasa Shule* ("Freedom Now School") in New York City, and the adoption of various Swahili names by numerous individuals such as Haki (truth), Safisha (pure), Jitu (giant), Malaika (angel), Tayari (ready), Maisha (life), Mwafrika (African), and so forth all underscore the depth of meaning that the Kiswahili language took on among African Americans desirous of a reclamation of an African identity. As such, the concurrent invocation of *umoja* ("unity"), *kujichagulia* ("self-determination"), *kujitegemea* ("self-reliance"), and *uhuru sasa* ("freedom now") in both Africa and the Americas also affirms the degree to which Kiswahili was the embodiment of Pan-African thought and practice during this time.

It should be noted that while the ancestry of African Americans can largely be traced to west and central Africa, the Kiswahili language, rather than being directly connected to this ancestral legacy, has served, in many respects, as a signifier of this African heritage in a general sense. Herein, the language's seeming ethnic neutrality has been seen as a virtue in light of the multiplicity of languages spoken by the ancestors of African Americans. As such, Kiswahili has served to embody both a critical African consciousness as well as a tradition of struggle for self-determination.[38]

In short, Kiswahili offers numerous advantages—it is already established as an international language, has numerous print and broadcast media, and has an extensive history of writing dating back to at least the Sixteenth Century via the use of Ajami script.[39] Kiswahili is taught in institutions of higher education in East Africa and beyond (both in other parts of Africa and around the world), and it is largely regarded as an ethnically neutral language—thus negating potential opposition to its adoption and expansion.[40]

However, the Kiswahili language, though expanding, is not firmly entrenched in West Africa. As such, concerted efforts would be needed to institutionalize it in such a geographically disparate context. Furthermore, while the embrace of Kiswahili by Africans in the United States has been notable, this has not occurred throughout in the African Diaspora. Thus, methods of popularization and diffusion for contexts such as Brazil, Columbia, Haiti, Jamaica, and so forth may have to be devised. It should be noted that the retention of traditional African cultures in other parts of the Americas may mean that other African languages may have greater degrees of traction in different areas, thus posing other complexities for Kiswahili advocates to traverse.

### *A Regional Approach to Language*

While many have embraced the viability of Kiswahili as a Pan-African language suitable for the

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[36] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*; Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*.

[37] Scot Brown, *Fighting for Us: Maulana Karenga, the Us Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*; Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*, 254-264;

[38] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*

[39] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*; Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*, 177-178.

[40] Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*; Mulokozi, "Kiswahili as a National and International Language"; Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*.

African world, others have instead offered it as one element in a regional approach to language policy wherein a regional language is designated for different parts of Africa—east, west, south, and north. This approach seeks to adopt African languages which have been well-established in their respective geographic milieus. In this configuration, Kiswahili is typically proposed for East and Central Africa, while Hausa and/or the Mandé languages might be suitable candidates for West Africa.[41] Still, others have proposed that Kiswahili be the default language of Africa's Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere.[42] Given the extent of Yorùbá cultural influence in the Americas, in addition to the notable and increasing presence of Yorùbá-based cultural practice (most notably Ifá and related spiritual traditions) among Africans in the U.S. since the 1950s, this is also an interesting Diasporan consideration.[43]

However, despite the flexibility and logic of the above approach, it is not without some criticism. For instance, some languages may incite resentment or resistance due to local or national histories of tensions between groups.[44] In other instances, some might insist that African languages are insufficiently *developed* to serve as mediums of written communication for a range of applications from the literary to the governmental to the scientific, thus necessitating varying degrees of augmentation and adjustment.[45] However, it should be noted that some scholars have problematized the notion of *development* as being inherently Eurocentric, thus ethnocentric and an instrument of neocolonialism.[46]

### *The Case for Constructed Languages*

Given the challenges associated with living languages—their grammatical complexity or their association with ethnic or national interests—some advocates have proposed the use of artificial languages as solutions to the African world's language problem. Both K. A. Kumi Attobrah and Alexander Igbinewka have offered proposals. Attobrah developed El-Afrihili in 1967 as a potential Pan-African language.[47] The lexicon of Attobrah's language drew from a plethora of African languages and employed a regular, systematic grammar. Similarly, Igbinewka's Guosa language has been offered as a language solution for West Africa for decades. His motto has

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[41] Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics*, 184; Edward L. Powe, e-mail message to author, February 10, 2016.

[42] Tayari, *Lugha Yetu: Mwanzo Mpya*.

[43] Kọ́lá Abímbọ́lá, *Yorùbá Culture: A Philosophical Account* (Birmingham, UK: Ìrókò Academic Publishers, 2006); Fëhìntọlá Mosádomo, *Yorùbá Yé Mi: A Beginning Yorùbá Textbook* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin Department of African and African Diaspora and the Warfield Center for African and African-American Studies, 2012).

[44] Ayọ Bangbọṣe, *Language and Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 14-16; René Dirven and Martin Pütz, "Language Conflict Seen from the Viewpoint of the Rationalistic and Romantic Models," in *Explorations in Language Use in Africa*, ed. by Augustin Simo Bobda (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2008).

[45] Diop, *Black Africa*, 9-12.

[46] Ama Mazama, "An Afrocentric Approach to Language Planning," Journal of Black Studies 25, no. 1 (1994): 3-19; Kamau Rashid. "Beyond the Fetters of Colonialism: Du Bois, Nkrumah, and a Pan-African Critical Theory," Equity & Excellence in Education (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1672593.

[47] K.A. Kumi Attobrah, *Ni Afrihili Oluga: The African Continental Language* (Akrokerri, Ghana: The Afrihili Center, 1970).

been “Swahili for the East. Guosa for the West.”[48] Similar to El-Afrihili, his language draws from a cross-section of languages, but primarily West African languages, especially those from his native Nigeria.[49] More recently, Ayi Kwei Armah has embraced the possibility of a constructed language,[50] and made such a project the central element of his novel *The Resolutionaries*. In it he advocates for the creation of a language that draws upon a plethora of living African languages, in addition to the language of ancient kmt—mdw nṯr.

While constructed languages are appealing in terms of their possible simplicity and modularity, they lack, as Edward L. Powe has noted, “a solid base from which to expand.”[51] Thus, while one can observe the expansion of Kiswahili from its coastal, East African base further inland via the vectors of trade, an artificial language would require a concerted effort in order to achieve significant propagation. Given the lack of historic precedent for such an endeavor, this is a doubtful prospect.[52]

### *mdw nṯr:* A Bridge to Both Our Past and Future?

The late Twentieth Century witnessed a surge in interest among Africans in America in the ancient Nile Valley. Far from being an anomaly, this attraction to African antiquity was anticipated by Martin Delany, the Nineteenth Century advocate of Black Nationalism, W.E.B. Du Bois, whose early Twentieth Century historical treatises contributed substantively to the formation of the African-centered philosophy of history,[53] and the entire generation of scholars whom Anderson Thompson refers to as the “Black Scrappers” including John G. Jackson, Josef

[48] “Home Page,” Guosa Educational, Scientific and Cultural Institute, Incorporated, retrieved on October 5, 2017, (http://www.guosa-language-tv.com/).

[49] Alex Ekhaguosa Igbineweka, *The Complete Dictionary of Guosa Language* (Richmond, CA: Guosa Educational, Scientific & Cultural Institute, Inc., and Guosa Publication Services, 2007).

[50] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Resolutionaries* (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2013); Ayi Kwei Armah, “Global Conversations with Dr. Ayi Kwei Armah,” Morehouse College, retrieved on March 17, 2016 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpJD7UxSwPQ).

[51] Edward L. Powe, e-mail message to author, February 10, 2016.

[52] It should be noted the constructed language that has experienced the most success to date has been Esperanto, which was created in 1887 by a Polish ophthalmologist named L.L. Zamenhof. He sought to create an international language that would address the social tensions that he believed were the result of the inability of different groups to communicate with one another, an observation informed by both his local milieu, in addition to the nationalism and warfare of late 19th and early 20th Century Europe. Despite some successes, Zamenhof’s language has not yet become an international language on the scale that was initially imagined by him and other Esperantists (exponents of Esperanto). However, his creation is the most widely spoken constructed language on Earth, with some estimates declaring 2,000,000 speakers. Esperanto’s relative success notwithstanding, constructed languages face formidable challenges. See Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010).

[53] Greg Kimathi Carr, "The African-Centered Philosophy of History: An Exploratory Essay on the Genealogy of Foundationalist Historical Thought and African Nationalist Identity Construction," in *The Preliminary Challenge*, ed. by Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris, 285-320 (Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997); Martin Delany, *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color with an Archaeological Compendium and Egyptian Civilization from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991).

Ben-Jochannan, and John Henrik Clarke.[54] The full flowering of this was to manifest itself in the final decades of the Twentieth Century, as evidenced by the scholarly productivity of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, the Kemetic Institute of Chicago, the Journal of African Civilizations, and other groups.

This attraction to Kemet was not based, as some have suggested, on an insufficient appreciation of the cultures and traditions most directly linked ancestrally to Diasporan Africans in the Americas, such as Kongo, Igbo, Yorùbá, Mandé, Akan, and so on. Rather it was informed by a reflection on the magnitude of Kemet's legacy and its anteriority to later African societies. Each of the latter points have been critical in the arguments of those who have advocated for the revitalization of Kemetic culture, including its language mdw nṯr, as indispensable elements in the process of re-Africanization and the affirmation of African self-determination.

In his book *Mdw Nṯr: Divine Speech*, Jacob H. Carruthers notes the perilous implications of mooring African thought to European epistemologies and ontologies, that is, of attempting to understand and articulate African paradigms within a European worldview.[55] Rather than engage in the laborious process of explaining the African worldview via European discourses, he instead argued that we must abandon them, that we "must break the chain that links African ideas to European ideas and listen to the voice of the ancestors without European interpreters."[56] This means that the tethers of intellectual bondage can be destroyed via a thorough engagement with African thought, and to do this, one must necessarily engage with African languages, including the language of classical African antiquity—mdw nṯr.[57]

This conceptual de-linking is potentially present within the ideational matrix of any African language, however, as Rkhty Amen contends, the depth of Kemetic thought, as reflected in its literature, provides a vast and unparalleled resource that might inform our reclamation of an African worldview.[58] She cautions however that "Because many of the features of Kemetic language and thought are foreign to Indo-European language systems, researchers need to be careful in their research, not to cloud their work with their modern, western interpretations, perspectives and linguistic rules and orientations. This surely cannot be a simple task."[59]

One small example of the dilemma that she explicates here pertains to the area of intellectual inquiry referred to by Europeans as *ethics*. Merriam Webster defines ethics as "a set of moral principles: a theory or system of moral values."[60] There is no word in mdw nṯr that means ethics per se. There is, however, the Kemetic concept of mꜣꜥt (Maat), which refers to correct thinking and action. Carruthers provides a more expansive explanation. He writes that the "Kemite

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[54] Anderson Thompson, "Developing an African Historiography," in *The Preliminary Challenge*, ed. by Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris, 9-30 (Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997).

[55] Jacob H. Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr: Divine Speech* (London: Karnak House, 1995).

[56] Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr*, xviii.

[57] Jacob H. Carruthers, "A Memorandum on an African World History Project," in *The Preliminary Challenge*, ed. by Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris, 356-61 (Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997).

[58] Rkhty Amen, n.d. *Women's History Month Address: The Legitimacy of Mdw Ntr and the Legitimacy of Kemet for Resurrecting an African Worldview*, DVD; Rkhty Amen, *The Writing System of Medu Neter* (The Institute of Kemetic Philology, 2010).

[59] Amen, *The Writing System of Medu Neter*, vii

[60] "Ethic," Merriam-Webster, accessed October 5, 2017, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethic.

principle of universal order is Maat."[61] According to Obenga, Maat "implies order, universal balance, cosmic regulation, justice, truth, truth-in-justice, rectitude and moral uprightness."[62] Thus, Maat is not equal to ethics. It explicates not merely a model of personal behavior, but is also a societal ideal with implications for the broader political-economy, in addition to articulating Kemetic beliefs about the nature and functioning of the universe itself. In this way, equating Maat merely with *ethics* constrains the depth of its meaning. De-linking Maat from the concept of *ethics* provides a much more expansive framework from which to understand the Kemetic worldview.

Therefore, the language of kmt enables one to, as Carruthers said, "listen to the voice of the ancestors."[63] The language links us to a body of deep thought that explicates the breadth and complexity of knowledge in African antiquity, and also informs our own efforts to revitalize the African world view in the present.[64] This is demonstrated in the works of various African scholars, who pose that Kemetic knowledge offers an abundant resource, capable of informing our lives and work in numerous ways. Furthermore, given Kemet's place in African antiquity, it also represents the legacy for all African peoples, a cultural exemplar which might serve to both unify and inspire.[65]

Furthermore, mdw nṯr provides a conceptual repertoire capable of enriching any extant African language.[66] The practice of borrowing words from Indo-European languages reinforces a corrosive cultural dependency and undermines efforts to augment our indigenous languages. Thus, Carruthers's statement, "Our terminology should be permeated with Kemetic phrases and words,"[67] captures the intelligence of utilizing the lexical inventory of mdw nṯr to augment our present-day communication, in addition to mdw nṯr's capacity to link living African languages to a shared past, while also reinforcing the logic and utility of finding African solutions to African problems. Finally, the efforts to devise scripts for extant African languages might also be satisfied by the use of mdw nṯr. Its development over thousands of years and varied forms demonstrates a high level of versatility, and also suggests that the script can be adapted to accommodate other African languages. In short, mdw nṯr's relevance as a Pan-African language, a language for all African people, is evident in its communicative capacity, in addition to its potential as a tool of cultural reorientation.

### Conclusion: Prospects And Possibilities

This essay seeks to understand the implications of language for African liberation. I have argued that language is not unmoored from the structural challenges of social transformation, rather that language is an inextricable element in the decolonization of the African mind, and as such provides the conceptual matrix for both reclaiming an African worldview and also establishing a basis of self-determination.

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[61] Carruthers, Jacob H, *Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies*, Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1984, 56.

[62] Theophile Obenga, *African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC* (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2004), 189.

[63] Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr*, xviii.

[64] Amen, *Women's History Month Address*.

[65] Diop, *Black Africa*.

[66] Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent*.

[67] Carruthers, A *Memorandum*, 360.

Also, I offered a brief and critical analysis of various language proposals. A regional language approach has the capacity to accord to existing linguistic realities. Constructed languages are able to achieve, by virtue of effective planning, a high degree of learnability. However, it should be noted that while the proposals for regional and constructed languages offer a number of benefits, each occasions its own challenges. Regional languages are vulnerable to ethnic-based political conflicts, while constructed languages will necessarily be constrained with respect to their establishment and expansion. The proposals for Kiswahili and mdw nṯr on the other hand, though still imperfect, offer a degree of flexibility and economy which is notable. Kiswahili's wide and growing diffusion, perceived ethnic-neutrality, and on-going development make it a viable consideration. mdw nṯr's historical significance, its manifestation as a conduit of African deep thought, and its script—which can conceivably be used to write any African language—also makes it a deeply compelling candidate. In fact, Carruthers articulates the utility of both considerations when he states that, "Medew Netcher (hieroglyphs) should be our classical scholarly language just as Ki-Swahili should probably be the contemporary universal black language."[68] However, it should be noted that the viability of institutionalizing Kiswahili in West Africa remains unproven. Furthermore, devising mechanisms to revitalize mdw nṯr as a "living language" will require a host of challenges beyond those of even a language like Kiswahili given its current status.

Beyond this brief essay, a number of important considerations remain such as devising mechanisms to maximize the diffusion of the selected language(s), including the creation of media, the establishment of speech communities, the integration of these languages within African institutions both on the continent and in the Diaspora, and so forth.

Additionally, we should consider what insights, if any, can be gleaned from current efforts by other peoples to revitalize their languages, such as those of the Maori, Native Hawaiians, Native American communities, and so forth. What dissemination strategies did they employ? Have their language campaigns resulted in other gains in areas pertaining to political education, economic development, etcetera?[69]

However, while this essay has largely concerned itself with Pan-African language proposals, and with this the politics of empowerment which undergirds them, there is another, albeit simpler path. Kwesi Kwaa Prah has noted that the idea that Africa is characterized by a multiplicity of unintelligible languages is problematic. He notes "that as first, second or third language speakers 80-85% of Africans speak no more than 15-17 of what can be described as 'core languages', these latter being language clusters which enjoy a high degree of mutual intelligibility which permits them to share the same set of spelling rules."[70] Based on this, Prah advocates for the harmonization of scripts across language clusters and the institutionalization of local languages within a broad range of contexts including schools. Thus, Prah's solution bypasses the need for a Pan-African language per se, and instead builds upon bases of unity implicit in Africa's core languages, while also empowering African cultures, and Africans themselves. Furthermore, his proposal holds interesting implications for Diasporan African

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[68] Carruthers, *A Memorandum*, 360.

[69] The Graduate Center, CUNY, "Inq13 | Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Eve Tuck – 'Decolonizing Methodologies'," April, 29 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIZXQC27tvg; Grubin, David, "Language Matters with Bob Holman," 120 minutes, Arlington, VA: PBS, 2014. DVD; Lorraine Boissoneault, "How to Resurrect a Lost Language," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 19, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/how-resurrect-lost-language-180962937/.

[70] Prah, Kwesi Kwaa, "Mother-Tongue Education in Africa for Emancipation and Development: Towards the Intellectualisation of African Languages," In *Languages and Education in Africa*, edited by Birgit Brock-Utne and Ingse Skattum, 83-104, Oxford, United Kingdom: Symposium Books, 2009, 101.

communities, who might also be empowered via the institutionalization of their languages in schools, the state apparatus, and so forth.

Finally, language is, as Simba Tayari writes, the essence of culture. It is not merely a communicative tool, but is also the embodiment of people's worldview and way of life. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes that "Language, any languages, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture."[71] Therefore, my position is not that language is merely facilitative of worldview, but that language is constitutive of it. Inherent within it are inevitable epistemological and ontological vectors. Those struggling to reclaim or safeguard their cultures should be mindful of this. This requires that language be given due consideration as a central and inescapable element in the process of liberation. It not only enables us to know and imagine our past, it also informs our vision of the future. It provides the conceptual framework via which we apprehend reality, and as such, is a matter of weighty potential.

[71] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 13.

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# The Strength of a Crocodile is Water: Thought in Tsonga Proverbs

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*Language carries culture and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world*

—Ngugi wa Thiong'o

This article discusses how Tsonga proverbs have engaged coloniality of knowledge—or the legacies and practices of the logic of colonialism in social sciences in Africa, particularly in Mozambique—to reassert African thought. Established after the Scramble for the continent as part and parcel of colonialism, the late eighteenth-to-mid-twentieth century anthropological discourse on the Tsonga ethnic group of Southern Mozambican has reproduced Tsonga thought and subjectivity as other, establishing new forms of knowledge and systems of knowing. However, a rereading of Tsonga proverbs through the lens of critical theory shows that these proverbs—literary records that distill Tsonga thought—have rationalized the environment on their own right and created ethical and metaphysical insights with which to order their society—before, during, and after colonialism. Such sayings as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] address universal questions of integration versus alienation, mastering nature, and living an ethical life by avoiding harm within a social community. Tsonga proverbs have continued to critique coloniality of knowledge—even long after being translated into Portuguese and intertextualized in other Mozambican languages—providing an alternative way of viewing and talking about the world and being human. Through critical theory, this argument rereads the Tsonga proverbs towards social transformation, particularly the eradication of African dehumanization.

**Keywords:** proverbs, knowledge, anthropology, critical theory, tradition, modernity, Tsonga, Mozambique, Africa

## Introduction

African civilizations have long developed proverbs that provide metaphysical propositions about God, nature, and ethics, even if European colonialism has reported the contrary. In Southern Mozambique, the proverbs of the Tsonga society exemplify how Africans have always made sense of reality—before, throughout, and after colonialism. Since European colonization of Africa, African systems of knowing have engaged "coloniality of power" or the logic of colonialism, its legacies and practices, including the control of knowledge and subjectivity, using race as the organizing principle (Quijano & Ennis, 2000, pp. 533-535; Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, pp. 22-32; Mignolo, 2011, pp. 8-9). The coloniality of power in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatseni, 2013), particularly the colonial production of Mozambique's knowledge and subjectivity as other, is reflected in the anthropological study of the Tsonga "social" and "psychic" lives in *The Life of a South African Tribe I and II* (1912) by Swiss missionary and anthropologist Henri-Alexandre Junod, who lived with them from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. It is Junod who compiled such proverbs as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 157-158). Undertaking an extensive study of Tsonga aesthetics, Junod's work, nevertheless, diminishes them as folkloric, obscure, and enigmatic (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 157-158). His consistent Eurocentric perspective throughout his work leads him to conclude that the Tsonga must be submitted to the hammer and anvil of the civilizing mission, and, in fact, he uses his work with the Tsonga to advocate for just that—the Tsonga's total submission to European colonization. This article critiques Junod's coloniality of knowledge and subjectivity towards Tsonga, their aesthetics, unveiling their ethical and metaphysical insights reflecting the human "spirit" or the desire for God and "character" or the will for good as to avoid evil (Bell, 1997, p. 202) to make sense of the environment in which one lives. While Junod can only—indeed, conveniently for the colonizers—envision the Tsonga's engagement with religion, which permeates every sphere of social life, as mystification (i.e., African thought and practices as mysterious without reason, logic, and/or rationale); a critical reading of Tsonga knowledge production reveals quite the contrary. This rereading finds Tsonga proverbs to engage in human spirit and character to master the environment, addressing humanistic issues related to integration as opposed to alienation, knowing nature, and practicing an ethical life. Placed against the history of the Scramble for Africa (and Portuguese colonialism), which corresponds with the time of Junod's work in Mozambique, Tsonga proverbs critique coloniality of knowledge, providing an alternative way of viewing this world and being human.

## On Coloniality of Knowledge in Africa

The coloniality of knowledge in Africa can be traced as far back as the fifteenth century with the Doctrine of Discovery, a Euro-Christendom socio-political paradigm that granted Euro-Christian kingdoms the right to conquer Indigenous lands and people presumed "pagans. . . and . . . reduce their persons to perpetual slavery" (Davenport,

1917, p. 23; Mudimbe, 1988, p. 58). In fact, late fifteenth-century Euro-Christian theology deployed the production of new types of knowledge and subjectivity about Africa and Africans founded on Euro-Christian cosmology. As Achille Mbembé (2002) puts it, the Euro-"Christian narrative of Africa is dominated by the motif of darkness. . . Africa is the metaphor par excellence of the human fall into a state of sin. . . seen to live at a distance from the divine. Indeed, this is the essence of paganism" (p. 633). The endarkening and paganistic logic of the Doctrine of Discovery codifies African humanism and knowledge as the most corrupt, negative, and undesirable versions of the European; a theology that has sanctioned one of the most violent history against humanity: the enslavement of the African from late fifteenth through late nineteenth century.

This "epistemic violence" or constitution of colonial subject and knowledge as other (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988, p. 24) was in fact consolidated by the European Scramble for Africa from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Propelled by a colonialist ideology and global capitalism, the partition of Africa was unquestionably informed by the Doctrine of Discovery and post-enlightenment reason, particularly the Hegelian historicism, which had declared Africa a place with no God, law, history, and morality (Hegel, 2007, p. 91). This othering compels Europeans to engage in the myth of the civilizing mission to supposedly bring Africa and Africans from objecthood, an enterprise that still raises unresolved ethical questions. As V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* (1988) puts it, the Scramble for Africa "is still charged and controversial, since, to say the least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures" (p. 14). These new forms of knowledge production about Africa would be characterized by diverse and competing perspectives namely colonial, post-colonial, and decolonial. The colonial view of Africa, as mentioned above, would be Eurocentric, in which Africans and their knowledge are viewed as "primitive." The post-colonial would critique Eurocentrism, transforming its epistemic violence into a tool for epistemic revolt and reclamation of universal humanism. Like post-colonialism, the decolonial thinking would question the legacies and practices of colonialism in Africa, however, disobeying the concept of European ideals of universal humanism, search for alternative ways of being and talking about the human founded on "indigenous" knowledge.

The foundations of modern knowledge and subjectivity in Africa are, indeed, mediated through social sciences, particularly classical anthropology whose rigor, as mentioned above, is compromised by its colonial project. Claude Ake (1982) critiques this imperialist logic of Western social science in studying African societies, systems, and institutions whose truth value is subordinated to domination (xiv) even if the study genuinely has strived for objectivity. Examples, other than the Swiss Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1912), include the Belgian Father Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* (1945), a study of the Baluba, an ethnic group of Zaire, and their thought; the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotommeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (1948), a study of the Mali's Dogon's cosmogony and cosmology. These anthropologists, despite their Eurocentric tendencies, established the language, content, and methodology through which African epistemology would be practiced. Due to space constraint, the elaboration on Tempels' and Griaule's work is not part of the scope of this paper, as the focus, here, is on the cultural production of the Tsonga people of Southern Mozambique as documented by Junod.

Swiss missionaries in Africa, from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, played a vital role in translating and explaining African social reality particularly to the western world (Harris, 2007). Junod is exemplar in this regard, whose *The Life of a South African Tribe*, first published in 1912, inaugurates the history of social science, particularly, anthropology in Southern Mozambique and in parts of Northeastern South Africa. The two-volume manuscript sought to help missionaries, native commissioners, and other white settlers in the conversion and governing of the Tsonga (1912, Vol I, pp. 8-9). That is why Junod's thesis finds the unfolding triumph of the civilizing mission to be inevitable, where, in his words, "the only salvation for the South African tribe is a regeneration achieved by Christianity, Education providing, at the same time, the enlightenment of the mind" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 542). His racism and "epistemic fundamentalism" or the hegemony of one philosophical tradition as the only one and most legitimate and superior by inferiorizing others (Grosfoguel, 2010), characteristic of Eurocentrism, are unmistakable. In his own words, not only "[t]he great bulk of the tribe is still absolutely savage . . . heathen," but also the civilizing mission is underway as the Tsonga "now stand at a certain distance from their old life" (Junod, 2012, Vol I, p. 3). Throughout *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Junod describes the Tsonga and their knowledge in ironic and ambiguous terms. According to him, "[t]he *facility of elocution*, amongst the Tsongas, is very great," however it "does not always show much reflection, or many ideas . . . This would require proportion, measure, forethought, and all these virtues rather belong to the arithmetical sense which is so sadly deficient in the Bantu mind" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 153-154). However, he expresses no skepticism in his own biases against the Tsonga, as informed by the logic of ethnocentrism, Euro-Christian fundamentalism, and the unquestioning devotion to a supposed civilizing mission.

What he presumes to be a deficit of "the Bantu mind" is unquestionably rooted on ontology, the racist assumption characteristic of Eurocentrism and colonialism, which presumes the Black mind and body to be irrational, corrupt, a fall away from white. As Junod (1912) puts it, "*The Life of a South African Tribe* is a collection of biological phenomena which must be described objectively and which are of great interest, representing, as they do, a certain stage in human development. These biological phenomena are sometimes at first of a repulsive character" (Vol I, p. 7). This anthropological discourse is, of course, representative of the logic of the "colonial world" and its Manichean logic (Fanon, 2004, pp. 3-7). As Fanon (2004) puts it, the "[c]olonized society is . . . portrayed as a society without values . . . never possessed any. The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values" (p. 6). Racism, epistemic fundamentalism embodied by the civilizing mission, is what makes Junod reproduce the Tsonga as a society with no "values," based on the presumption of a "sadly deficient . . . Bantu mind." Meanwhile, one of the greatest ironies is that Junod (1912) produced over a thousand-page social-science thesis based on the Tsonga social and psychic life—their economic, political, and knowledge institutions—describing the informants as "faithful collaborators" to whom he owes most of his knowledge (Vol I, p. 3). His inconsistencies reveal the very contradictions of colonial social science, in which the "native informant" (Spivak, 1999) is both taken as the translator of his own knowledge and the radical other of it and subjectivity. In its obstinate search for the "savage" and the "primitive," using race as the guiding principle, classical anthropology is a double social science: On one hand, it has a colonial intention to constitute the colonizer's knowledge and subjectivity through othering the colonized in order to rationalize, moralize, and altogether conspire with the

otherwise obviously sinister and dehumanizing nature of the colonizing mission. On the other hand, its racist, savageist, and primitivist worldview reproduce a decolonizing impact. Indeed, within the very interstices of *The Life of a South African Tribe*'s inconsistencies—the coloniality of knowledge vis-à-vis the material force of decolonization—Tsonga proverbs shine with humanistic character and spirit that even the lasting works of coloniality cannot eclipse.

## Towards an African Critical Theory

The study of human character and spirit in Tsonga proverbs cannot absolutely be dissociated from the history of anthropological discourse in the foundation of African subjectivity, knowledge, and knowledge production. This does not mean to blindly accept the Eurocentric anthropological view on African traditional thought, but rather to look at it from a critical approach. Recognizing the heavy influence of coloniality of knowledge on African thought often supported by the Western metaphysical tradition provides a decolonizing option. Decolonization, here, should be taken from a Fanonian (2004) viewpoint, particularly the epistemic, as in the crucial importance of tracing and rationalizing the hitherto intentionally concealed and disregarded Indigenous past and praxis (p. 148). This is to make a slight difference with the Fanonian (2004) political decolonization or violence and its physical role in confronting colonialism (p. 1-3). Decolonizing the anthropological discourse in African traditional thought demands the approach of subject matter from and through the prism of critical theory. As elaborated by Max Horkheimer (2002) and as placed by Angela Davis specifically within the tradition of Black thought, critical theory envisions a dynamic relationship between humanities (philosophy, cultural studies, etc.) and social sciences (sociology, anthropology, etc.) as a means to social transformation, particularly the reduction of Black dehumanization (Yancy, 1998, p. 22). It is through critical theory that this argument rereads the Tsonga proverbs towards social transformation, particularly the eradication of African dehumanization.

First and foremost, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.] epitomizes how the Tsonga use language in the creation of an aesthetic expression that both mirrors their own environment and conveys universal value systems. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986) observes, "[l]anguage carries culture and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (pp. 15-16). *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is one of the finest expressions of Tsonga orature, an active metaphor carrying a whole set of values with which the Tsonga see themselves as humans in the world. Although Junod seems to recognize the aesthetic universality of this particular proverb—as "[w]hen you are in your own domain you can succeed; do not try to fight outside it. You would be like 'a fish out of water'" (Junod, 2012, Vol II, p. 158)—he insists on the difference (as opposed to sameness) between the African and European proverbs. He states:

> The enigmas certainly furnish us with a very precious meaning of gaining insight into the secret workings of the Native mind, as they form doubtless the quaintest part of their literature, and that which bears the least resemblance to any portion of our own . . . the obscurity of these sayings has been sufficiently obvious. Without special explanation it would be difficult indeed to discover their meaning (Vol II, pp. 157-158).

In other words, Junod interprets the Tsonga proverbs as merely enigmatic, obscure, quaint, even "precious," and fails to "discover their meaning." His irony, coloniality of knowledge, and intended audience are clear and consistent in his description of Tsonga aesthetics as less resemblant to "our" European literature, and his role in providing a "special explanation" to white settlers, missionaries, and native commissioners. He has no interest whatsoever in—and, indeed, has not been commissioned for—the task of reading Tsonga proverbs within their own cultural and environmental context—and much less to find any universal value. As contemporary philosopher Richard H. Bell (1997) suggests, although it is natural to be skeptical towards cultures that are "alien to us," a way to particularly understand African thought from a non-African viewpoint is to engage in cross-cultural exercise, that is, connect "differences with something familiar" (p. 198). On the contrary, informed by and conspiring with the coloniality of knowledge promoted by classical anthropology, Junod does not only deny the relation between *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* and the European proverb *One feels like a fish out of water*, he also refuses to draw a possibility of common humanity in rationality. Called by his sense of racial supremacy, epistemic fundamentalism, and the civilizing mission, Junod insists in what Mudimbe (1988) calls "mystification" (p. 50) of Tsonga proverbs, seeing them as "folklore," "enigmas" and "obscurities" to which he then, himself, as the social scientist, reauthorizes a "special explanation," furnishing himself "with a very precious meaning of gaining insight into the secret workings of the Native mind." Mystification of the African is, of course, part and parcel of what Mudimbe (1988) calls "African genesis," in which the social sciences displace Africa and Africans, renaming them "primitive," as a way to justify conquest, exploitation, and development (pp. 29-33).

Nevertheless, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* has all along been a metaphor for socio-cultural, political, and economic "practices" as the Tsonga conceive them. The *mati*, or water—in this case, the rivers and lakes in which the crocodile lives—among the Tsonga, is of a cosmological significance, as it is seen as the space of origins, where the first humans (one man and one woman) came out from marshlands of reeds (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 326) growing in these bodies of water. Although Junod has recorded this Tsonga story of creation, he fails to make the connection between this proverb and the traditional genesis story of all Tsonga life coming from *mati,* water. Furthermore, the cultural and proverbial significance of the crocodile, *ngwenya*, whose source of power, according to the Tsonga saying, comes from water—just as human life itself does for the Tsonga—seems to also be lost upon Junod, despite his own detailed account of the crocodile's various economic and political functions, in fact, more than any other river animals, including the hippopotamus: "the crocodile. . . must. . . be opened by the man of the Court. . . . because it contains many things such as marvelous stones used in magic, and bracelets of the women it devoured. The chief appropriates what he pleases amongst those objects" (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 379). The socio-cultural-political-and-economic capital attributed to the crocodile is amplified by its symbolic value as a motif of strength in such ceremonies as rites of passage and aesthetics (songs, riddles, and stories). *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is a linguistic and cultural artifact that conveys a whole set of views and values through which the Tsonga view life in relation to the natural world.

Moreover, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* reflects the very human tendency to rationalize the surrounding environment as well as to both master and transmit knowledge about nature. As Ludwig Wittgenstein observes, "a man's shadows . . . the rain, the

thunderstorms, the phases of the moon . . . the ways in which animals are similar to and different from one another and in relation to man . . . everything we observe around us year in and year out, interconnected in so many ways, will play a part in his thinking (his philosophy) and in his practices" (Wittgenstein, 1993, pp.127-128). In observing the flora and fauna around them (i.e., the crocodile, its natural adaptation to the rivers and lakes, and the survival advantages that its *mati* habitat provides), the Tsonga clearly derive their "thinking (. . . philosophy) from this everyday experience." The Tsongas' observations of the crocodile, while mixed with their religious views (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 72) show signs of natural philosophy and traditional biology's study of living organisms. Upon Junod's arrival in particular and European colonialism's, in general, the Tsonga had not only already named the reptile *ngwenya;* they had, in fact, already developed their own zoological nomenclature for the animal world in their surrounding environment as well as their own analysis of animal behavior and their own study of animal anatomy. The saying that "*Mashindla bya ndjako*, the beast which must be opened from behind" (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 87) indicates both skill and knowledge in dissecting and butchering the animals familiar to the Tsonga. Although Junod (1912) observes the Tsonga dissecting the reptile (Vol I, p. 87), he does not inquire about how the Tsonga address biological questions, such as what they call the different parts of the beast and what they think their function is. Instead, he shows a preoccupation with mystifying Tsonga interactions with animals, describing as follows: "It is said that crocodiles, when cut open, are found to contain a certain number of stones, as they are supposed to eat one each year, when the rainy season comes on. One of them is chosen and smeared with special medicines and swallowed by the chief" (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 365). This emphasis on Tsonga spiritual dissection of the crocodile is, of course, convenient as it justifies Junod's civilizing mission. He does not link the Tsonga's knowledge of the crocodile's anatomy to what he (1912) confesses that the Tsonga know of human anatomy. "I can bear testimony that they have [*Indigenous*] names for most bones of the [*human*] skeleton" (Vol II, p. 332; *my emphasis*), he confides. Then, if they already had names for "most bones of the human skeleton," wouldn't the Tsonga have knowledge, too, about the anatomy of other animals, such as the crocodile, coexisting in their environment? Although the Tsonga did not have the anatomical depth that Junod expected to see, the Tsonga did have nomenclature of human and animal body parts (pp. 307-333) in their own language. In addition, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* might, as well, have raised questions related to environmental determinism in Tsonga thought as they compare themselves to the crocodile's strength and existence as predetermined by water, "[w]hen speaking his own tongue, the Native is a crocodile in water. He is strong, he is eloquent, he is somebody" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 272). For the Tsonga, the human success or failure are determined by the physical environment that surrounds them just like the strength of the crocodile is predetermined by water.

*Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is a classic metaphor for humanism, particularly the concept of individual's integration versus alienation within a particular social environment and their consequences. In fact, as Lewis Gordon (2008) puts it, "[i]f we define humanism as a value system that places priority on the welfare, worth, and dignity of human beings its presence in precolonial African religious and philosophical thought can easily be found" (p. 186). By saying that *the strength of a crocodile is water*, the Tsonga know that a human being is centered and secure and enjoys humanism when properly placed within a social community. As mentioned, "[w]hen speaking his own tongue, the Native is a crocodile in water. He is strong, he is eloquent, he is somebody." Meanwhile, the lack of humanism and/or dehumanization leads to alienation, which, for

the Tsonga, and the Mozambican in general, became a metaphysical issue with the Scramble for Africa. The anthropologist's coloniality of knowledge in tandem with Portuguese colonialism brought new forms of social alienation in Mozambique, both in knowledge and subjectivity founded on racism as the organizing principle. After the Scramble for Africa and Portuguese effective occupation of Mozambique, the social pyramid, to match the concept of the colonizer versus the colonized, became vertically and hierarchically organized among whites (born in the metropolis, those born in the colony), *mestizos*, *assimilados*, and the Indigenous, even though the Portuguese "law never recognized a color bar" (Newitt, 1995, p. 477). There was, however, a popular saying common throughout the Portuguese colonial empire, *cada macaco no seu galho* [each monkey on its own branch], meaning each individual ought to know their own place.

Although the Portuguese racial hierarchies did not have the overtly racist signs or plaques that South African apartheid (or North American Jim Crow) did to divide the colonial society, the realities of everyday inequality and discrimination reinforced a social code in which whites, Blacks, and *mestizos* were expected to know their own spheres. The unwritten racial classification was also an economic, political, knowledge, and subjectivity stratification determining one's humanism and access within and/or exclusion from the colonial society. Whites inherently had the right of way; *mestizos* had limited access through their white father; minority Black access was also highly regulated through the myth of assimilation, whereas the Black Indigenous majority, occupying the lowest stratum of colonial society, was excluded, relegated to performing *xibalo* or forced labor. While the myth of assimilation was the hammer and anvil through which the Tsonga new humanism would be authorized, this humanism was not guaranteed, as "restrictions of all kinds had been placed in the way of Africans and *mestizos*" (Newitt, 1995, p. 477). These "restrictions," of course, are founded on racism and the ironies of assimilation and the civilizing mission. Besides being barred from colonial institutions, Black Africans "[w]hen speaking a foreign [European] language. . . are [seen as] caricatures" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 272). With the civilizing mission at work in Mozambique, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati*, in hindsight, implied that the Tsonga lose their "strength," "eloquence," and "somebodiness" when the "water" or the environment in which they live has been polluted by the toxicity of European coloniality of power, both represented by Junod and Portuguese colonialism.

But *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* does not stand alone in the collection of Tsonga proverbs, whose didactic and moralistic nature, views and values intend to exhort the human to cultivate character so that one lives a "good or just" or righteous life that avoids evil, harm, and/or "sinister" consequences. Another example is *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], a humanistic warning to neither spoil or destroy nor withhold from others that which is essential for life or life-giving. But Tsonga proverbial lessons are not naive; they recognize the human nature's inclination towards risk, danger, and harm (including self-harm), as reflected in the saying, *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat]. This is another humanistic piece of advice, meaning those who engage in dangerous activities do so at their own risk. Furthermore, resembling the European proverb that warns against publicly *airing dirty laundry*, the Tsonga say *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.], also signaling that there are matters that cannot be discussed, disclosed,

or practiced among those who are not the most intimate of confidants. In this way, these proverbs (and their people), hitherto devalued by social science, point to a humanistic value system with which the Tsonga have long organized society, worthy of further critical study.

## Conclusion

By addressing issues related to ethics, knowledge, and subjectivity, Tsonga proverbs are part and parcel of human character, spirit, and capacity to rationalize the environment, creating universal metaphysical propositions from their particular context—far too long veiled by the assumptions and ulterior motives held by coloniality of knowledge in Mozambique about African thought. As shown above, Junod's colonialist and imperialist anthropological project—to uphold the civilizing mission through social science—reproduces African knowledge and subjectivity as other and different, creating metaphysical confusion and controversy. His use of race as the organizing principle of knowledge, knowing, and knowledge production—privileging ontology versus metaphysics—has excluded Africans from the capacity to produce knowledge and participate in common humanity. In fact, this continues to raise ethical questions about the rigor presumed by colonial social sciences and the very modern production of knowledge and subjectivity—not only their failure to provide objective truths about other humans, but their outright conspiracy to support a dehumanizing project. Such sayings as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] are metaphysical insights showing a universal human capacity to rationalize the environment, master nature, and produce moral principles with which to guide humanity. Meanwhile, these proverbs continue to circulate through social transactions translated into Portuguese and other Mozambican languages, providing an alternative way of viewing and knowing this world beyond that instituted by the coloniality of knowledge in Africa.

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# Ideological Dissonance in J.P. Clark's *The Raft* and Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*: a Postcolonial Perspective

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The paper is a comparative and inter-textual study of J.P. Clark's *The Raft* and Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*. The paper interrogates the thematic and ideological positions of both literary giants and situates the critical analysis of their plays in their proper historical perspectives. The theoretical framework of the paper is based on the postcolonial theory that addresses the impact of colonialism on the people and the society generally. The paper notes the centrality of both texts as well as the areas of convergence and divergence. It is noted that while the two playwrights address the post-independent challenges confronting Nigeria using the raft as the symbol of the distressed situation in the nation, J.P. Clark addresses the teething problems confronting the newly independent country and his submissions appear pessimistic while Osofisan in his text acknowledges the enormity of the challenges bedeviling the post-independent nation as common developmental challenges. However, in line with his Marxist ideological leaning, he believes that the challenges are surmountable. The paper countenances the various challenges confronting Nigeria as identified in the texts such as corruption, ethnicity, betrayal, slavery, oppression, disillusionment, and neo-colonialism among others as manifestations of the long years of colonialism in the hands of the slave masters and colonialists. It also addresses the inevitability of cooperation, solidarity, and the inculcation of the spirit of nationhood, brotherhood, and Pan-Africanism by Africans and all the Blacks in diaspora to prevent the nation from drifting to a halt as signified in Osofisan's *Another Raft*.

**Keywords:** Drama, Comparative Literature, *The Raft, Another Raft*.

## Introduction

Marxist and sociological critics are, understandably, passionate about the impact of art on the society. Literature is viewed as one of the most dynamic tools that artists deploy to create a lasting impact on the society. Literature has become a thermometer, and an indispensable instrument for archiving the societal events and also for gauging the depth of societal malaise with a view to raising the consciousness of the people. The Elizabethan drama and the Apartheid plays, like all other literatures, testify to these roles. That is why the artist must have a good sense of history and also a good sense of judgment. Understandably therefore, some artists who are genuinely concerned about their societies reflect as much as they can a number of historical events in the most

profound dramatic and literary ways to make them different from the works of historians who are chroniclers and raconteurs of historical events.

In other words, artists explore societal burning issues from historical perspectives to give vent to their dramaturgy. This is a common phenomenon in literary works of all ages. For instance, Robert Bolt's A Man of all Seasons according to Long (1968) dramatizes "the internal politics of England, diplomatic fencing between England and Spain and the conflicts between corrupt and reformatory factions within the Church", while Peter Shaffer's The Royal Hunt of the Sun portrays the face of Catholicism in England. John Osborne's A Patriot for Me captures the moral issues of betrayals, military and the pre-1914 Austro-Hungarian Empire, while Luther (1961) by Osborne reveals in a most dramatic way Martin Luther and the Monastic authority.

Also in African drama, Abraham Hussein's Kinjeketile is a historical description of the various liberation struggles by the Tanzanians under the German imperialism. Gibson Kente's Too Late (1981), Shezi's Shanti and Workshop '71's Survival dramatize the heinous crimes committed by the whites against the non-whites in apartheid South Africa, while John Kani's Nothing but the Truth and Athol Fugard's Valley Song countenance the post-apartheid challenges confronting South Africa. Artists, world over, are usually conversant with the events around them and thus fictionalize them according to their literary orientations and perspectives.

It is against this background that this study is undertaken to relate J.P. Clark's The Raft with Femi Osofisan's Another Raft who both use Nigeria as their historical background and dramatic settings. While J.P. Clark in The Raft captures the early traumatic events that characterized the newly independent Nigeria, Femi Osofisan's Another Raft depicts the later events in the post-independent nation, that appear to the playwright as signs of nation building rather than pejorative signals.

## Postcolonial Theory

One of the fundamental preoccupations of postcolonial critics is a call for the reexamination and reevaluation of the history of imperialism from the perspective of the colonized with a view to determining the socio-political, economic, and cultural impacts of the long years of colonialism on both the colonized and the imperial powers. The import of this is to create opportunities for liberation struggles that will ultimately lead to the eradication of all forms of imperialism, socio-cultural, economic, and socio-political hegemonies put in place to oppress the people (Young, 2001).

According to Habib (2011), postcolonial studies also address all forms of "internal colonization" as attended to by scholars focusing on minority studies like the African-American, Caribbean, and women's studies (272). This view is also supported by Abrams and Harpham (2012) when they say that postcolonial discourse is not essentially concerned with Western imperialism, it also studies "the domination of some southern-hemisphere groups or nations by other southern-hemisphere groups or nations" (307-308). This is why according to Abrams and Harpham (2012), the critical analysis of the literature and the socio-cultural history of the former colonies of England like Nigeria is important to enable us to access the impact of colonialism on the socio-political development on the colonized nations vis a vis the imperialistic tendencies in the colonized to continue to oppress and dominate one another. It is the belief of

postcolonial critics that colonialism has entrenched the spirit of imperialism in the colonized, and that is why even after independence, internal colonialism continues to be almost a permanent idiosyncratic feature of postcolonial nations. Part of the agenda of postcolonial scholarship, apart from calling for the disestablishment of Eurocentric literary canons, is to examine the causes of instability, insurrection, and other post-independence challenges that are threatening the existence of nationhood with a view to tackling them headlong. It is against this background that this paper is foregrounded on the postcolonial theory to enable us to analyze the postcolonial subject of drifting that both Clark and Osofisan address in their texts as a postcolonial phenomenon.

**Textual Analysis**

Both texts are compared and analyzed under the plot structure, structural pattern, stagecraft/theatricality, thematic thrust, and other relevant dramatic elements.

**Plot Structure**

Clark's *The Raft* begins with four disillusioned lumbermen sitting on the raft on a creek in the Niger Delta. The four lumbermen—Olotu, Kengide, Ogro, and Ibobo—are set to bring logs to be sold to one rich man downstream in Warri. They are all asleep. In fact, Ogro is already snoring heavily. Their despair arises because they have lost their boat, and are now using the raft instead. They also discover that the moorings are now totally loose. They are now adrift. They attribute their drifting to a river god called Osikoboro. Now, they cannot tell which direction to follow.

As they are about to set the raft on course again, it breaks into two. One part of the raft takes Olotu away, the other three lumbermen, Kengide, Ibobo, and Ogro, remain in the second part of the broken raft. All attempts to save Olotu prove abortive. Eventually, only Kengide and Ibobo survive the ordeals. Even as the two are getting close to safety, they are also caught in a fog. Finally, they are drifted away.

Osofisan's *Another Raft* begins, as we find in *The Raft*, with the discovery made by Oge and Waje that their raft has been cut adrift. They attribute this to the anger of the river goddess. Meanwhile, before they set out on the journey, there has been a great flooding of the land like we find in *No More the Wasted Breed*. An attempt to offer a virgin as a carrier to placate the Yemosa fails. This is because they soon discover that the girl is in actual fact a man, a soldier and brother to the girl who has now been cut off the moorings. This sets the raft adrift.

Even though Clark's play is set in the Niger Delta, and Osofisan's version is set in Aiyedade in Yorubaland, south west of Nigeria, both texts share the same plot. For instance, both plays begin with boatmen whose raft is drifting and both Ogro in *The Raft* and Oge in *Another Raft* are snoring to support the position of both playwrights on the frustrations and the despair that the boatmen have found themselves. The difference between Ogro and Oge in meaning is r. This is to show how imitative Osofisan is in his version. This is apart from the fact that both plays take place at the riverine areas to further establish the justification for a comparative analysis of both texts.

In addition, both texts begin in the night to depict the adversity that is set to befall the boatmen. While Clark in *The Raft* attributes the lumbermen's predicament and the drifting of their raft to Osikoboro, the river goddess, in Osofisan's *Another Raft,*

Yemosa, the water goddess of Osa River is also accused as the cause of the flood in Aiyedade. Both playwrights attribute the predicaments of the boatmen to river goddesses. The deliberate deployment of the river goddess in Osofisan's text as a causative agent just as Clark does in his text is a foreshadow of Osofisan's ideological position in the text which shall be revealed later on in this paper. Osofisan wants us to know that both Osikoboro and Yemosa are equal in their supernatural endowments to interrupt human activities; Osofisan is of the view that there is nothing new in the drifting of man. The causes of the man's drifting are common, and they are also surmountable or else Osofisan would have attributed the predicament of the people of Aiyedade either to a lesser or a higher cause to justify his ideological position. After all, logical deductions can only be based on rational premises. It is the view of postcolonial critics, therefore, that neocolonialism is conquerable.

**Structural Pattern**

Clark's *The Raft* is structured into four parts namely Tide-Wash, Wind-Lash, Iron-Fire and Call of Land. Clark employs an episodic structural pattern where we have a series of loosely related events tied together by the same characters and subject matter. Clark appears to be concerned majorly with exploration of the existence of his characters rather than with the depth of characterization that is common in most dramatic works. Izevbaye (1975) describes Clark's *The Raft as* "a series of anecdotes and local gossip strung together" (30). Also, Smith (2017) supports the position of Izevbaye when he says that "the play seems episodic, a common thread runs through the apparently unconnected anecdotes in the play to form the synthesizing element piecing all the bits together" (5). The episodic nature of Clark's play further underscores the play's absurdist tradition which makes it comparable with the structural patterns of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Harold Pinter's *Birthday Party*. Clark is essentially concerned with the futility of life and not with the blown episodes to support the spirit of imperialism and its consequences on man.

On the other hand, Osofisan structures *Another Raft* into seven scenes and uses the conventional presentational dramatic mode. Right from the beginning of the play, we are told that it is all make-believe. There is no disguise of any sort as we find in Clark's *The Raft* as Yemosa One tells us: "Nothing you see will be real, or pretend to be. Nothing you hear will be true. All is fiction, the story is false, the characters do not exist. We are in a theatre, as you well know, and we see no need to hide it" (3).

**Stagecraft/Theatricality**

The beauty of a written drama text is its ability to be staged for the audience in a theatre. Femi Osofisan in an interview with Tunde Awosanmi (2013) says that "I will normally prefer to direct the premiere of my plays, but this is because, for me, a play is not really finished until it has been put on the stage" (57). Corroborating this view, Emasealu (2010) says that "plays should be subjected to performance" (13). Clark's *The Raft* does not appear to have been written for the theatrical performance unlike Osofisan's *Another Raft*. In *The Raft,* dialogues are terse and mind-numbing, conflicts are tangential unexciting and dreary; they are devoid of the usual tension and strain that the audience goes through in classical and contemporary dramatic works. For instance, the disagreement between Olotu and Kengide in One: Tide-Wash is not as dramatic and intense as the conflict between Lanusen and Ekuroola in *Another Raft* in scene three of the play.

Besides, in *Another Raft,* the Yemosas act as the narrators as they introduce the audience to the theatre, unlike in *The Raft*. The narrators expose the play and introduce the audience to the ensuing conflict that is centered on the consequences of the rampaging flood in Aiyedade. *Another Raft* begins with an opening song to introduce the play

> We have come tonight
> With an entertaining tale
> Let all eyes watch, all ears listen
> Everyone stop and hear our tale
> Wagging tongues for once be still
> When the moonlight glows like this
> To tell a story
> Sing along! (9)

The play is interspersed with a lot of songs and dirges accompanied with gong and *sekere* (castanet) in Yoruba and translated in English to entertain the audience and also to enhance the beauty of the play. The play also ends with a song:

> Oge: “1-2-3: push!
> 1-2-3: push!
> Again and again: push!
>
> “1-2-3: push!
> Bend to it: push!
> Again and again: push!
>
> “1-2-3: push!
> Fight the waves: push!
> Again and again: push!
>
> “1-2-3: push!
> 1-2-3: push!
> Strive to win: push!
> Again and again push! (101)

While the opening song serves as the prologue, the closing song serves as the epilogue. The repetition of the words “push” and “again” in the last song is to rekindle the fire of courage, resilience, and hope in the masses and urge them not to give up in their struggles against the oppressors. The action words like “bend,” “fight,” and “strive” in the song are rhetorical devices to arouse the radical consciousness in the masses. The introduction of songs intermittently is a reflection of the spirit of epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht which is to bring theatre to the doorstep of the masses. In line with the spirit of postcolonial criticism, the theatre of Osofisan will provoke the desired revolutionary consciousness in the people that will enable them to revolt against neocolonialism. Clark’s *The Raft* begins with the sleeping and snoring of the lumbermen, while the play ends with the shout of “We are adrift, adrift and lost! Ee-ee-eee” (133) by Ibobo and

Kengide. Although there are occasional songs in *The Raft* like the songs rendered by Ogro, such songs are tantamount to lamentations.

Clark's *The Raft* will be challenging for play directors as a live performance because it is stripped of its theatrical ornaments and made bare while Osofisan's *Another Raft* is adequately adorned with dramatic ornaments and directing aesthetics such as stage directions, lighting, props, prologue, play-within-a-play, flashback, music, songs, suspense, rhythm, planes, levels, spectacles, sound, pantomimic blocking, choreographic directing, and mime, among others, which Fasoranti (2018) and Fasoranti (2019) describe as indisputable tools that play directors need to bring vivacity and vibrancy to a live performance. There are no dirges and incantations in Clark's *The Raft*, whereas in *Another Raft,* there are incantations, flashbacks, and chants to reflect the local color and make the text accessible to a wider audience. In addition, Osofisan provides stage instructions for the director, unlike Clark. For instance, Osofisan in *Another Raft* says, "It is suggested that, in production, the reading should stop here" (10), "The song should appear, all the same, to come from all directions to the men on the raft" (28), "Lights should begin to change, softly and unobtrusively, to create an appropriate context for the flashback, as the song snaps off" (64), "The first flash of lightning comes, followed by a peal of thunder," "The lightning is more intermittent now" (76). The only justification for the lack of stage craft in Clark's text may be his deliberate attempt to write a play that countenances the spirit of absurdity. This view is also in tandem with the position of Smith (2017) on Clark's *The Raft* when he says that

> There are no conflicts, no intrigues and no twists in fortune – just one straight course. The characters have too little action and the raft too much. In addition, there are the technical difficulties of staging involved: one is how the drifting raft with its crew will be represented and how its movement and statism could be suggested. Not surprisingly then, it has remained for long unstaged.

Besides, according to the *The Raft Encyclopedia.com* (2020), "*The Raft* is often regarded by critics as the least solid of the plays in the trilogy… It is not often performed because of the difficulties in staging it. One of the more prominent reasons is that much of the action takes place at night in the dark on a river." Izevbaye in *The Raft Encyclopedia.com* (2020) expresses a similar view when he says that "Clark's problems as a dramatist arises mainly from his lack of interest in, or experience of, the stage." Also, Banham in *The Raft Encyclopedia.com* (2020) says that:

> As a playwright, Clark has seemed to suffer from a lack of familiarity with the demands of the theatre, and his plays have never fitted as comfortably on to the stage as have Soyinka's. The latter's craftsmanship stems from a close practical knowledge of the theatre as a director and actor, whereas Clark has no comparable experience. One result is that Clark's characters tend to talk where they might act, to recite where they should converse, and to remain static where they should move.

**Thematic Thrust**
Clark, in *The Raft*, demonstrates the helplessness of man's existence. He compares man with a reed in the tide which has no direction and whose fate is determined by the uncontrollable wind. Clark thus dramatizes the absurdity of man's existence. Man, according to Clark, is at the mercy of gods. He can be easily manipulated by them for their ulterior motives.

Osofisan in *Another Raft* responds in a most revolutionary way to J.P. Clark's *The Raft* (1964). In the Programme Notes of the Playwright, Osofisan, through Yemosa One, tells us the need for the play:

> In 1964, the Nigerian playwright, J.P. Clark, now known as Clark-Bekederemo, wrote the play, *The Raft*, which came to symbolize the troubled situation of our newly-independent country. So many events have occurred since then to take the nation many times just on the brink of sinking, but miraculously, we have kept afloat. Nevertheless, even as the decades drifted past, the storms have not ceased, nor have we been able to steer ourselves out of the fog of those initial errors. More and more obvious, as the '80s roll to a close, the need seems to have become truly desperate for – ANOTHER RAFT. (5)

Osofisan employs myth in *Another Raft* to comment on the post-independence historical curses that have been plaguing Nigeria since its independence in October 1960. One of these is the oppression of the poor, owing to bad leadership and the colonial legacies. Ekuroola, a corrupt business tycoon, has no qualms in giving and taking of bribes. Money is everything to him. He represents the class of exploiters. He is the direct reaper of the blossoming farmlands in Aiyedade.

Reore, who is adjudged the best farmer of the year, reaps nothing from the farm. The gains of the farm go to oppressors like Ekuroola. Reore laments this situation when he cries out:

> We toil and toil, nursing Eledumare's precious earth tenderly. And then one man we never see, who wines, and dines in the soft fairly land of that Lagos city we hear so much about, he just sends his agents down to collect our harvest, leaving us the chaff… They said I was the best farmer of the season. I had the biggest yams, even though they were going into his stores, I had raised the fattest yams, and they clapped for me, and sent me along to placate a goddess I had never offended. Oh God. I could die! (He cries, freely) (27-28).

With people like the corrupt Ekuroola in power, the poor have no hope. Agunrin, a member of the oppressed class, confronts Ekuroola and accuses him of being responsible for the predicaments of the poor in the society due to his excessive and

uncontrollable craze for money and unnecessary imposition of unjust taxes:

> The poor people are dirty, isn't it? Their bodies stink, their feet are eaten by jiggers', perhaps if they earned more money for their labour, perhaps they would have the leisure to pause and take care of themselves? Perhaps they would be able to look up from their drudgery, to question those who control their lives? No, they continue to smell, because people like you are in charge. (Lightning and thunder). Because you'll never have enough, however much you steal! So go on, have a taste! Go and lick it, and find out what their feet smell like! (61)

In spite of all these, the religious leaders like Orousi, the Chief Priest of Ifa, and Omitogun, a priest of Yemosa who are supposed to raise and protect the moral standards of the society collaborate with the oppressors to perpetrate evils and oppress the people. For instance, Lanusen accuses Orousi of betrayal and of double standard:

> Only a year ago? When you and I, when we set the police and the army against the farmers? Were you not there, on television, on radio, in the newspapers even! Divining for them, telling them Ifa was against their struggle? Asking them to surrender, encouraging the government troops to shoot them! So what are you saying! (47)

Both Clark and Osofisan address corruption and exploitation as post-independence challenges confronting Nigeria. The parable of five fingers in Clark's *The Raft* is a metaphor for the prevalence and extensiveness of corruption in the young independent Nigeria. While the four fingers are corrupt, only the thumb has the temerity and audacity to speak out against corruption. According to Kengide, "the thumb says 'Count me out!' And that's why even now you see him standing apart from the group." This is indicative of the fact that only a few in the newly independent nation are bold to stand up in defense of truth. Besides, Clark shows us here that majority of Nigerians are not socially and politically committed to the wellbeing of the nation but in its looting. We recall also the capitalistic, oppressive, and materialistic nature of the timber merchant in the play who the four lumbermen want to satisfy at their peril. This is a reflection of the imperialistic nature of African leaders who use their wealth to oppress the proletariat.

Besides, Clark depicts Nigerian leaders as oppressive, insensitive, and irresponsible. In the play, Kengide yields to family pressures and joins the workers' strike as a protest against government exploitation and oppression. The long years of service with a foreign firm do not improve the lot of Kengide and his family. The people expect government to take sides with the masses and better their lots. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the strike is an increase in taxes and the prices of goods and service go up. The masses, in the play, are pawns in the hands of the politicians. After they have been used for electioneering purposes, they are soon discarded. Hence, they resort to vandalization and destruction of oil pipes. Clark, obviously, captures the postcolonial concerns in his text.

Similarly, Osofisan in *Another Raft* indicts the military leadership in the play of exploitation, corruption, and extravagant spending. This is revealed in the accusation made by Gbebe against Agunrin. Agunrin in the play represents the military ruling leadership.

| | |
|---|---|
| GBEBE | You're a soldier. You accuse the politicians and the chiefs of exploiting the people, and leading us to damnation. But what of you, sir? What else do you do except milk the land? |
| AGUNRIN: | I see! I see now! You envy our lives in the barracks. But you don't talk of our putting our lives at stake. And all of you! |
| GBEBE | For what war, tell me? Is it the war for which we have waited for so long that our best generals grow bored and retire in their prime, to live lavishly on maize farms? (63) |

The same issues of corruption and bad leadership that Clark addresses are also tackled by Osofisan in this play and also in plays like *The Inspector and the Hero, Fires Burn and Die Hard, Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen, Many Colours Make the Thunder-King,* and others. For instance, Osofisan exposes the corruption of leaders like Alhaja Olowoseun in *Fires Burn and Die Hard,* the corruption and the squandermania of the local government officials in *Who's Afraid of Solarin,* the exploitation and the oppression of the masses by Lawal in *The Atine's Wrath,* the licentiousness of Prof. Juokwu, a Professor of Medicine in *The Album of the Midnight Blackout,* etc.

The play is also reminiscent of the pessimism, hopelessness and despair that we find in *The Raft* although not in the sense that Clark projects them. Osofisan indicts the black race of wickedness and cannibalism. He gives us a bizarre picture of the stark reality of the personality of the black race with an insatiable delight in oppressing one another.

As long as this continues, there is no hope at all for the entire continent. As the carrier is thrown into a trance, Gbebe shouts:

> But I… I can tell you why, yes!… It's because we must eat one another. Can't you see?… Men have always eaten other men of course. Look at history, so many cannibal suppers. And the screams of humanity, out of the throats of victims and revelers, bind the rafts on which our corpses float… We are the only race of animals with an insatiable appetite for the children of our own flesh. Black men killing black, feeding on black. Forever and ever, black men always slaughtering other black men… I ask you, isn't that the meaning of our journey to a faded goddess? What else is our continent, but the black man's graveyard?… Let us prepare all to die, without fear… Well, there's nothing left for me to do on the raft. My duty is ended, which was to lead you through the hidden channel in

> the waves of history to the turning edge of knowledge… Each of you is a nation of Africa, each of you is the black race, each is the son of a Shark, to be eaten by other sharks. Our future is… death. Go on, wait no longer, embrace one another, say your adieus (54, 69).

We also find the theme of man's inhumanity to man in Clark's *The Raft* when the captain of a ship fails to rescue the lumbermen when their raft is adrift. When Ogro tries to link up with the ship for assistance, he is stoned with coals, and his hands are beaten off with bars of iron. Eventually, Ogro slumps back into the deep where he, according to Kengide, "is caught in the mortal arms of the stern-wheeling engine." According to Smith (2017)

> This seems a far cry from the communal spirit of the traditional world. Thus the direction the modern world has taken is towards doom or nemesis as even within the raft itself the lumbermen are all cut in various forms of differences including those of opinion and ethnic origin.

However, Osofisan does not want to end the play on a pessimistic note. He uses the story of the king and his three favorite sons to drive at unity as the only weapon men have to wipe out oppression. In this story, the king wants to abdicate the throne and he also wants one of his three sons to succeed him. He has a problem in determining which of the sons deserves the crown. The first son is called "See Far," the second son is called "Fly Fast," and the third is "Heal-At-Once."

The three sons possess different but indispensable supernatural abilities which are meant to complement one another's. Each of the sons needs each other to succeed. This is similar to the story of Song, Drum, and Dance in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. Reore provides an answer to the riddle of the Yemosas and says, "All of us is the answer" (82). Each of the three sons represents each of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. All of them should have equal access to the leadership of the country. Therefore, they must work together in unity; only then can the problem of drifting end. In this play, the problem of drifting is overcome only when the boatmen resolve to work together.

Osofisan in this play portrays man as the architect of his fate. As long as man is willing to struggle and liberate himself, there is no goddess that can stop him. What is needful is simply this, "There is no goddess but our muscles! The strength of our forces combined! Rowing together, working together!" (85). That is more powerful than the power of the oppressors. Even the goddesses acknowledge this when they say:

> YEMOSA THREE: But all such powers as we have are made only by your will. Our force is your fear for like hyacinths, we are capable of endless benefits for the use of man, but only as long as you yourselves give the command!

YEMOSA ONE: But if you abandon yourselves recklessly to our caprice as most of you insist on doing we have no power anymore except to drift with the current of your cowardly surrendering and choke up the fresh springs, and the waterways of your lives. (83)

Man is his own god. His god is his arms. His strength is his muscles. His destiny is his own making. Postcolonial critics also frown at all forms of man's inhumanity to man which is seen as a form of internal colonization. To overcome this, the unity of the masses and good governance are indispensable.

Commenting on Clark's *The Raft*, Ashaolu (1978) is of the view that the play

> Dramatizes the helplessness of men, drifting on a ship of destiny, floundering under known and inexplicable forces. It is man's ignorance of these forces, and his incapability to effectively solve those problems that beset him on his journey throughout life that make his world miserable. He merely drifts along helplessly. He has been destined to end that way (193).

But man in *Another Raft* is his god and the determiner of his fate. You are oppressed if you choose to be oppressed. You are drifted if you choose to be drifted. The oppressions, the exploitations, the injustice, and the inequalities in the society can be overcome if the people will be united to resist them to the end. Only then can sanity and justice return to the nation. This is *Another Raft* of hope, presented in an allegorical manner and imbued with music, songs, and incantations for theatrical and revolutionary purposes in line with the Marxist ideology.

## Conclusion

Both texts address the challenges confronting Nigeria as a post-independent nation. Clark's text tackles the problems faced by the newly independent nation and submits that we are fated for calamity without any message of hope. The play ends with an engulfing fog and the wailing of Ibobo and Kengide with a lot of regret and lamentation and thus adding credence to the tragic essence of the play which is symbolic of the tragic end of Nigeria. Clark attributes the cause of the drifting to some supernatural forces. That is why Ibobo answers Ogro when they are stuck that "We are in the hands of Osikoboro" (109), the river goddess. Osofisan does not believe in the inviolability of the gods. In Awodiya (1993), Osofisan says "all these gods and their pretended inviolability… one is tired of them" (20). That is why Osofisan says that man is the sole determiner of his fate. Osofisan rules out the interference of the gods in the post-independence challenges confronting Nigeria and attributes such challenges as manmade which can be challenged and overcome, but Clark surrenders to fate.

However, both playwrights agree that the nation is drifting but they disagree on the cause of the drifting, although the country symbolized by Osofisan's raft is more rickety than Clark's raft. We must not forget that Olotu's drifting and loss may suggest secession which some ethnic groups and individuals in Nigeria are championing now in the face of

recurrent marginalization, nepotism, human trafficking, kidnapping, involuntary servitude, forced labour, imposition of cattle colonies, migration through the Mediterranean for greener pastures, religious, ethnic, ritual, and political killings, and violence which are clear evidence of bad leadership, internal colonization and neocolonialism. Clark's text cannot, therefore, be dismissed on the grounds of irrelevance to the present-day societal realities, as insinuated by Osofisan's version.

Since the nation is still battling with the issue of drifting that Clark raises in his text fifty-eight years after independence, whether our problems are manmade as indicated by Osofisan or demon made as suggested by Clark, the ends therefore justifies the means. A Yoruba adage says, "*Bi a ba fogun odun pile were, igba wo lo maa to bugije"* (If it takes two decades to go crackers, how long would it take to be at the maddest?). Another adage says, "*Bi a ba fogun odun jija kan, ojo wo la fe jija miran"* (If we fight a battle for twenty years, when are we going to fight another one?). Clark has spoken prophetically through *The Raft,* and Osofisan has judged the prophecy and dismissed it with *Another Raft* that he considers intellectually more edifying. Both playwrights must be commended for their brilliant diagnosis of the nation's problems, and their human efforts at tackling them. As long as the nation exists, we should certainly expect more rafts that will be more dramatic, revolutionary, and insightful.

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# Marvelous Math Club as a Catalyst for Asset- and Justice-based Thinking and Practices

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Marvelous Math Club is an afterschool club initiated through requests from an Asheville Housing Authority community. Asheville City Schools, the University of North Carolina Asheville, and Asheville Housing Authority partnered to make Marvelous Math Club a reality. The Club uses a unique model that integrates math and psychology, centers the experiences of the students, parents, and guardians in this predominantly Black community, and celebrates its elementary-age students (Math Leaders). The Club creates a space where Math Leaders feel safe physically and emotionally. Leaders and community members partner in this evolving strategy of asset- and justice-based thinking and practices. The approach is supported by sociological ideas: labeling theory, the long-term impact of building self-integrity, and creating culturally responsive spaces for learning.

**Keywords:** STEM education, afterschool, Public housing, elementary education, early childhood education, math, labeling theory, racial equity, the achievement gap.

## Starting Marvelous Math Club

Asheville is a small city of 90,000 in western North Carolina, nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. The population is about 11% Black and 6% Latine. The Asheville City School (ACS) system has the fifth largest racial academic gap in the United States (Reardon et al., 2017). The Asheville Housing Authority oversees eight rental assistance properties, including Pisgah View Apartments (PVA).

The seeds for Marvelous Math Club (MMC) were planted in the late fall of 2015 when several parents at PVA asked Dr. Kaplan for a math presence to support the children living there. Dr. Kaplan, a faculty member in the Department of Math and Statistics at the University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA), tapped into funds set aside for math outreach. Two undergraduates provided “free math help” at the PVA Community Center. Both undergraduates were veteran tutors for the Math Lab, a drop-in math support center at UNCA.

Meanwhile, Ms. Alcalá-Williams, who, at that time, served as the ACS Parent/Family Engagement Coordinator, polled parents across PVA to gauge interest in math support. The poll identified which student age-range residents wanted support to prioritize and determined the preferred day and time for that support. There was high interest among parents for math support with a focus on elementary students. Monday afternoons, right after school, were chosen because students came home Mondays with a homework packet for the whole week.

Starting in late January 2016, on Monday afternoons, a large sign went up in front of the PVA Community Center: Free Help with Math Homework.

### Integrating Math and Psychology

For the first few months of the experiment in math support, each Monday, a few students would drop in, complete their homework, and then leave. They might ask a few questions if they got stuck. In total, two to five students dropped in each week and twenty different students came to free math help at least once by the end of the academic year.

These numbers fell far short of the level of interest indicated by the community poll. Ms. Alcalá-Williams called a session with the undergraduates and Dr. Kaplan to inquire how the effort was being run. One of her first questions asked was: how was it being advertised? Free math help, she pointed out, was a great way to attract undergraduates who have little money to spare and may be experiencing challenges in a math class. However, she continued, if you are a Black elementary school student, and have internalized a narrative that says "You *are the gap,* you are the problem" then the phrase "Free Math Help" sounds like more of the same deficit message.

Who wants to be the gap? Who wants to be the problem?

So the team brainstormed: How can we inspire students to want to be there every week? How can we get beyond the harmful narrative of who "needs help" because they are the "gap"? The team reasoned that if children are members of a club, then they attend the regular club meetings. There was a community request to focus on math, so it had to be a "math club." The team explored many modifiers for this math club and settled on Marvelous Math Club.

When we started Marvelous Math Club, our intention, in addition to supporting math education, was to transform narratives around race, academic success, identity, and cultural awareness. While our efforts were not a direct response to the seminal work of Dr. Ladson-Billings on teaching Black children, we were influenced by the same questions of authenticity, culturally responsive ways of engaging, and moving away from systems of hierarchy and power that perpetuate a narrative of Black children as the "problem" in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009). We also began to consciously address the narratives of who does math, who is good at math, and where math learning takes place. Marvelous Math Club became a healthy partnership of math and psychology with a racial equity lens.

We intentionally chose names rooted in positive self-identity for various club roles. Members of MMC were not called "members" or "students" or "kids," but *Math Leaders*. And the adults were not called "staff" or "volunteers" or "tutors," but *Math Champions*. The focus of MMC was not remediation, but building community, making friends, and celebrating math.

### What Developed

In the fall of 2016, Marvelous Math Club began anew, this time with its new name. We handed out fliers on school busses and went door-to-door around PVA. Close to Halloween (with a promise of candy and showing off costumes), we started to get a small but regular group of six Math Leaders. We also had three undergraduates and the authors attending every week as Math Champions.

There was no fee to join, no requirement to attend every week, no paperwork to sign. Math Champions were not in the role of *in loco parentis*[72]; Asheville Housing Authority made space at PVA for MMC, so residents could come and go at will, including children and family members. Math Leaders could head home early if they desired. That said, adults did accompany younger ones home. Math Leaders who attended usually stayed the entire meeting. Because MMC was held at PVA where the Math Leaders lived, we, the Math Champions, were guests of the residents of the community.

At the end of every session was a Sharing Circle, where Math Leaders and Math Champions sat in a together to talk about the day. Math Leaders, one at a time, shared how they demonstrated leadership that day. Others were invited to add instances of how that Math Leader demonstrated leadership, as well. Then, everyone clapped for that Math Leader. Once all the Math Leaders had shared and been celebrated, they packed up and headed home.

When the Math Leaders were safely home, the Math Champions made a new circle and reviewed the day, asking both what went well and where there were opportunities for growth. This process of weekly reflection and brainstorming invited innovation and evolution. Math Champions then reviewed what each Math Leader did that day. This included homework, math games, and enrichment activities. The information was then communicated with each Math Leader's teacher by email. Teachers sometimes replied with confirmation of our observations and feedback related to how time at Marvelous Math Club had positively impacted a Math Leader in the class. The debrief was instrumental to the development of MMC and continues to be our practice.

Over time, we added principles of self-care, because we believe leaders learn to care for themselves in order to stay effective. For example, asking the Math Leader if they are ready to engage in math and, if the Leader wants to run, sing, draw, etc. before engaging with math and homework completion, we honor their choice to do so. If a Math Leader is exhausted and requires rest, we encourage them to go home and nap and return later if they feel ready to engage in math play. At times, self-care might look like a Math Leader coming by the Community Center for a hello, a hug, and a promise to see us next Monday—they're going out to dinner with grandma. We, as Math Champions, welcomed all the different ways that a Math Leader chooses to express self-care. And as Math Champions, we modeled that self-care as well.[73]

Over the first year of MMC, more and more Math Leaders joined. By the second year, we had to start recruiting and training additional Math Champions. Our numbers continued to grow. Just before the pandemic sent everyone to stay at home, we regularly had thirty-five to forty Math Leaders get off the school bus and walk to the Community Center to celebrate math for two hours. They would be met at the Community Center by fifteen to twenty Math Champions who were excited to be there. Math Champions include UNCA students, community college students,

[72] Latin for "in place of parents," the principal of *in loco parentis* means a person or organization taking on the legal role or responsibility for the safety of a child.

[73] The authors are amazed that after we began to use the term "self-care" with so much intention around honoring our bodies and emotions, that the term has blossomed in main-stream culture with a 30% increase in use in books and more than doubling its presence on the internet since 2015 (Google, 2021). However, to the authors, with alarming frequency, the term is now used to perpetuate harm, replacing the goal of numbing ourselves rather than seeking well-being. The authors have also observed managers who now advise self-care to workers to obviate their own guilt for assigning impossible workloads.

high school students, residents of PVA, retirees, professionals from the community, and middle school students who had once been Math Leaders.

**No One Gets Kicked Out of Marvelous Math Club**

Once of our founding maxims was that “no one gets kicked out of MMC.” This was the opposite of the experiences of the Math Leaders at school (where there were special rooms for students who had been kicked out of class) and the opposite of after-school programs, even other ones at PVA, that did kick students out for “bad behavior.” The concept that no one gets kicked out meant that if there was friction between Math Leaders, we had to pause and practice communicating and working through conflict with care and inquiry.

Communicating emotions and learning to diffuse a volatile situation are important skills to develop at this age. When friction does arise and one Math Leader engages in — not the most beautiful way — with another Math Leader, we respond with dialogue like, “Whoa, whoa! What's going on? Let's talk this out. One at a time. Because you both matter, we want to hear both sides of the story. Take a couple of deep breaths, and together we will figure out a positive outcome. That is what we do as a Marvelous Math Club family. And it is important for us to understand how to work things out for a positive outcome in order for us not to be seen as `the troublemakers.’”

Once Math Leaders learned to diffuse conflict and negotiate solutions, visits to the office became less frequent. It has been beautiful to witness Math Leaders create responses like “That hurt my feelings. I didn't like the way that you spoke to me. Could you please speak to me differently?”

Addressing conflicts as they arise, rather than simply banning conflict, allows us to reframe conflict as a learning experience. In addition, repressing negative emotions from a difficult day at school makes it challenging for Math Leaders to focus on learning. In our experience, for a Math Leader to fully engage with math, we must first validate any Math Leader who is experiencing frustration, anger, sadness, or exhaustion.

**Welcome to a Marvelous Math Club Meeting**

The following scenario is typical of what a Marvelous Math Club meeting looks like from the perspective of a Math Leader. The interactions depicted reflect actual events, though not all from the same meeting or the same Math Leader. Rather, the goal is to display to the reader how the various facets and goals of MMC link and overlap.

Scene: PVA Community Center

Persons: Math Champion-Mr. Jones. Math Leader-Lachelle. Sharing Circle Leader-Ms. Yaz. Math Leader-Raymond.

[Math Leaders get off the school bus at PVA and enter the Community Center. Math Champions are standing at the door, ready to greet them. High energy music is playing. In the foyer are photographs of Math Leaders smiling, holding up awards, and posing with Math Champions.]

ASIDE: It is important to create a welcoming space with people, images, and music that say, “you belong.” We also immediately set the tone for what we do at MMC.

> *Mr. Jones: So great to see you! Are you ready to do some math today?*
>
> *Lachelle: Yes.*
>
> *[High five.]*

*Mr. Jones: Sign in. Get your name tag. Go to Janelle and get a snack.*

*[Lachelle does so and takes her snack to a table in the main room of the Community Center. There are tubs with markers, blocks, dice, paper, books, and blank cards on each table.]*

*Mr. Jones: Do you have homework today?*

*Lachelle: [pausing from snack] Yes. But I don't want to do homework first.*

*Mr. Jones: What would you like to do instead?*

*Lachelle: I'd like to make a card for my mom.*

*Mr. Jones: Great! Let's check in in about five or ten minutes; you can show me the card. I'd love to see what you make for your mom. And then we can get going on homework. Does that sound okay?*

*Lachelle: [nods and eats.]*

*Mr. Jones: How was school today? Did anything happen that was not so good?*

*Lachelle: I was a little sad because I wanted to get this book at the library. But I had been talking too much in the classroom so I didn't get a pass to go get it.*

*Mr. Jones: That sounds pretty sad. I'm glad that you still chose to come to MMC today. And did anything good happen today?*

*Lachelle: Yes, I was so excited to bring a new friend to MMC because she didn't know anything about it. And so I brought her and she's going to come in soon. She's on bus 137.*

> *ASIDE: Simply asking about something negative and then something positive from the Math Leader's day is an easy way to check in with the emotional state of the Math Leader. It is not our job as Math Champions to "fix" a situation. Rather, we validate the Math Leader and what they are feeling. Most of the time, this exercise is enough for a Math Leader to be able to focus on homework later.*

*Mr. Jones: We will be on the lookout for your friend when she comes in. Maybe you can support her with signing in and showing her the ropes of getting her snack. If she keeps attending, we'll get her a name tag ordered.*

*Lachelle: And does that earn me a T-shirt? Do I get a prize?*

> *ASIDE: When a Math Leader brings a guest or exhibits exceptional leadership, they get a sticker on a wall chart. Five stickers earn a prize such as a book, game, puzzle, T-shirt, etc.*

*Mr. Jones: Yes, that's another sticker on the leadership chart! Once you have five stickers, you get a prize. You can choose a T-shirt as your prize if you like.*

*[Mr. Jones leaves to welcome other Math Leaders. He returns a few minutes later.]*

*Lachelle: Ok, Mr. Jones, I'm done with my card. I guess it's time for homework now.*

*Mr. Jones: Great! And I love the card! Your mom will be really pleased. Who would you like to be your Math Champion today?*

*Lachelle: I pick you, Mr. Jones.*

*Mr. Jones: Let's go then. Bring your work. Let's sit down here.*

*[They move to a smaller study room inside the Community Center. Lachelle takes out her worksheet. There are pencils, paper, a small marker board, and markers in the middle of the desk.]*

*Lachelle: So I think I know how to do it by myself. But there are two parts that I don't really understand. And I don't think the teacher explained it well. So could you tell me how to do those two?*

*Mr. Jones: Well, why don't we go through it? Have you done something like this before?*

> *ASIDE: Math Champions are trained to invite Math Leaders into conversation about their thinking process rather than answering a question or giving a demonstration. Inviting the Math Leader to acknowledge what they understand and consider how to apply previous experience enhances the development of executive function. (Roditi & Steinberg, 2011)*

*Lachelle: I don't think so.*

*Mr. Jones: Can you read it to me? [Lachelle reads the question.] Oh, I haven't ever seen something quite like that. Can you explain it to me?*

*Lachelle: Yeah. Yeah. Well, he says something like, when you put this number [pointing], you put it at the bottom. I'm not sure.*

*Mr. Jones: Let's see if it makes more sense when we get to that one. Why don't we start with something on this first page that you really know how to do well.*

*[Mr. Jones and Lachelle continue working. Then she gets to the question that she first asked about.]*

*Lachelle: Oh, it's like a different way to do number two.*

*Mr. Jones: Yes, that's clever of you. Do you want to try it?*

*[Lachelle rewrites the question and finishes it.]*

*Mr. Jones: That is excellent! Can you explain to me how to do it? This whole idea was new to me when we first sat down.*

*Lachelle: So what I didn't know is because the question had words in it... and I guess a story, that it was still saying that I needed to add seven plus three. Right?*

*Mr. Jones: Right. [He and Lachelle give each other a high five.]*

*Lachelle: And the first questions on the worksheet just had the two numbers, and one number was on top of the other, and then for other ones the numbers were side by side. And I know how to do both of those. And then the one we just did had the number line and it had the words and I didn't know if it was asking me to add or subtract.*

*Mr. Jones: And how did you decide?*

*Lachelle: Because this is there [pointing to the text], and then you got three more. Okay. And that sounds like getting more means that you're adding.*

*Mr. Jones: Cool. I liked your explanation. Do you want to explain it again, but this time, we could make it a little video and send it to your teacher? Would that be comfortable for you? High five!*

> *ASIDE: Allowing Math Leaders to choose their own Math Champion and give consent to do things like record a video strengthens their sense of self, autonomy, and self-responsibility, as well as enhancing mutual respect with Math Champions.*

*[They make a one-minute video which Mr. Jones texts to the teacher.]*

*Mr. Jones: What else would you like to do?*

*Lachelle: Play. Maybe listen to music on YouTube...*

*Mr. Jones: Well, you may watch videos. And could you still engage in some mathematics?*

*Lachelle: Oh, yes. I'll play a math game on iReady.*

> *ASIDE: iReady is an ACS site that allows teachers to post assignments and link to games in any subject.*

*Mr. Jones: Do you want your headphones so you can listen without disrupting what anybody else is doing?*

*[Thirty minutes before the end of the meeting, all of the Math Leaders and Math Champions gather in the main room of the Community Center and get in a large circle. Math Leaders share, one at a time, how they demonstrated leadership that day. There are a few parents and grandparents are in the main room during Sharing. They are there to pick up their loved ones, but they also get to hear how peers and adults in the room hold that child in high esteem. Then it is Lachelle's turn. She moves and sits in the chair at the center of the circle.]*

*Ms. Yaz: Lachelle, how did you demonstrate leadership today?*

*Lachelle: I demonstrated leadership today because I came straight from the bus to Marvelous Math Club and I was ready to do math. And I got my name tag and I got my snacks and I sat at a table. And I wasn't ready to do homework right there and then, and I wanted to make a card for my mom. So I did that. And then I chose Mr. Jones to be my Math Champion. And I showed him a card I made for my mom. And then we did some math. And I didn't understand all of the math. But then when we were working together, I was able to do it. And then I got to explain it to Mr. Jones and even he did not know how to do it at first. And then I finished everything. And I put all my stuff away. Oh, and I invited a friend to come to Marvelous Math Club. So I believe that gives me a sticker and gets me closer to a T-shirt. I get a sticker because of demonstrating leadership.*

*Mr. Jones: You demonstrated leadership today, Lachelle. When you arrived at Marvelous Math Club, you noticed how you were feeling and that you really wanted to*

*do something special for your mom. And you took care of that first. Then you could focus on doing some of your math work. You had some questions about how to do some of the worksheets. And by focusing on things you knew how to do first, by the time you got to the question, you suddenly understood how to do it. That persistence is amazing! You didn't give up right away. You said hey, let me do what I can do. And then when you were done, and there was still time, you really wanted to listen to music. Now, you could be in your room in your home just listening to music. You don't have to be here. And because you are here you were listening to music and doing some math games on iReady.*

*Ms. Yaz: Whoo everybody! Can we give her some snaps? Yesss!*

*Mr. Jones: And you are so excited about sharing Marvelous Math Club that you brought a friend. When she arrived, you made sure she got a snack and a Math Champion of her own. We will hear from her later about how her day went. What a good friend you are!*

*Ms. Yaz: Who else saw Lachelle demonstrating leadership?*

*[Raymond, a Math Leader, raises his hand. Ms. Yaz calls on him.]*

*Raymond: I really appreciated it when you shared some markers with me. And you made a flower for me like the one you drew on your mom's card. That was so nice of you to share. What a good friend.*

*[Several Math Leaders and Math Champions make additional comments.]*

*Ms. Yaz: Alright! Great work, Lachelle! Such leadership! Let's all clap!*

*[Everyone claps! Lachelle moves from the center of the circle back to her seat. Another Math Leader takes her place in the center and we start again.]*

### The Debrief

After the Sharing Circle, we say our goodbyes and "see you next Monday," and the Math Leaders return home. Math Champions escort little ones home. The rest of us organize and clean the room and make the circle a little smaller since there are just the Math Champions, now.

We discuss what went really well today. Where did we bring in our magic? What were some beautiful moments? Then we talk about growth. Where do we see areas of growth for ourselves, both individually and as a club? We invite other Math Champions to support us with their own insight. Maybe someone can offer an idea or experience that we have not yet considered. Are there changes in process or language that can make Marvelous Math Club even more special, add new magic? Then, the Math Champions head out. From the time they arrive until the time they finish with the debrief, Math Champions have spent three to five hours with Marvelous Math Club that day.

### Between Meetings

After the debrief, Marvelous Math Club staff take note of what each Math Leader accomplished during the meeting, of new ideas from the debrief, and check inventory of materials. Between meetings, they are responsible for contacting each Math Leader's teacher with a report, possibly accompanied by a photograph or video of the Math Leader. They contact all of the Math Champions, summarizing ideas we will try out at the next meeting. They make sure

arrangements are in place for materials and food for the next week's meeting. Finally, they send out summaries of activity to stakeholders at the partnering organizations, Asheville Housing Authority, ACS, and UNCA.

### Magic

At MMC, we use the word "magic" as shorthand for the personal and community growth that occurs through communication, persistence, imagination, and love. The reason we know MMC is magical is that Math Leaders do not have to sign up. They are not required to attend by a teacher or parent. A child chooses to become a Math Leader, not as a consequence of remediation or struggling with math, but because they want to be a part of something really beautiful and special.

Part of the magic is that MMC is set up to eliminate barriers—barriers of transportation, barriers of money, barriers of paperwork. By having MMC at the PVA Community Center, we meet where the Math Leaders live. The non-resident Math Champions are guests of the community. Math Champions are not there to "fix" the children or "remediate" or even "teach." Math Champions and Math Leaders learn together and make magic happen all the time.

### Qualitative Impact

At the beginning, Dr. Kaplan was uncertain how this new model would affect students. He was familiar only with math support in a professor's office, one-on-one tutoring, or the UNCA drop-in tutoring center. However, he trusted Ms. Alcalá-Williams. She anticipated that creating a safe space that centers Black students, fosters leadership, uses asset-based (positive) language, provides hands-on engagement, and celebrates math and learning would change everything. The connection of a positive academic impact from learning in a safe space has been supported in the research literature (Cohen, 2006; Noguera, 2008).

Within a few weeks of starting, teachers began telling Ms. Alcalá-Williams stories about Math Leaders. How one Math Leader no longer hid under the desk when it was time for math. Another Leader approached his teacher in his button up shirt and asked if he looked like a leader. She responded, "yes, you do." He said, "Great, because I'm a Leader at Marvelous Math Club, and I want to be one here, too!"

A teacher told Ms. Alcalá-Williams about a Math Leader quietly encouraging another Leader who had given up on a math worksheet. The teacher was astonished that the student who had given up resumed work and finished the task. When asked about the incident by Ms. Alcalá-Williams, the first Leader said, "Duh Miss Marta, I pay attention. At Marvelous Math Club, we support each other!"

In addition to dozens of stories of how MMC impacted the Math Leaders, we learned that some teachers began shifting how they saw their own students. For example, one teacher, upon seeing a video of one of their students supporting a younger Math Leader with homework, said aloud, "I never knew _____ was even interested in learning!"

Math Champions were also impacted by the approach of MMC. Some had never even thought about self-care and realized they, too, could benefit from tending to their physical and emotional health. Two-thirds of our Champions live in White bodies. For some of them, it was the first time they had proximity to Black communities or anyone experiencing poverty. Most expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be in this "magical" space, and the transformation they experienced in witnessing the support that MMC offers to prepare them to be a valuable Math

Champion. The famous lawyer and racial equity activist, Bryan Stevenson says that the first step to making change is proximity (2019, p.17).

### Math and Emotion

Math is often taught as if, through appropriate demonstration, a student will acquire an understanding of the material. Even with additional pedagogical depth, one aspect of learning often ignored is the emotional connection or response to material. Research on the emotional context of learning, especially in math, is still somewhat nascent. However, the limbic system of the brain picks up emotional cues and non-verbal expectations of a teacher. If a teacher is not excited about math or does not believe a certain student can learn, that context impacts the student's ability to develop and embody class content (Hinton et al., 2008).

By celebrating math at MMC, the Math Leaders associate math with fun, friendship, and community. Math Leaders practice supporting one another. This creates an expectation that the Math Leaders can seek support if they are challenges barriers with math and provide support to others who are experiencing difficulty in understanding material.

Practicing math skills for MMC is not limited to worksheets or doing two-digit multiplication at a chalkboard. Infusing math into every activity at MMC often requires creativity. For example, on the playground, a Leader doing hand-over-hand on the monkey bars can be asked to count the bars by twos or threes. Skip counting is a useful precursor to multiplication skills. On the basketball court, with a little sidewalk chalk, Leaders write numbers and put a circle around each of them. A shot made from a circle would earn that many points for a player. Depending on the age of the Leader, they could add or multiply their scores for a total. Students practicing keyboard skills (which some grades require), keep track of their speed over time. Two Leaders might go around the building with a survey question and interview other Math Leaders about their favorite ice cream, for example. They collect the data on a large marker board and then make a pie chart or bar graph to share the results. We might have a group of students assemble a large floor puzzle and time them from start to completion. Then try again and see if they can be faster—and if so, how much faster? We have found that math can be added to any activity. We also invite the Math Leaders to share other ways we could enhance any activity with even more math skills and math questions.

### Labeling Theory

Since the inception of MMC, we have consistently explored language, focusing on how the language we practice builds deep relationships of reciprocity and mutuality between Math Leaders and Math Champions. We listen to PVA community members about what they associate with certain words. Terms like "project," "program," and "help" carry a negative connotation in the PVA community that a non-resident might not have predicted. Labeling theory—the idea that when a label is used for an individual repeatedly, that person then chooses behaviors that reinforce the label—supports our practice of identifying terms with a harmful context in the community and replacing them with terms that carry the potential for growth in being seen, recognized, honored, and valued.

Historically, labeling theory research focuses on negative, demeaning labels and how children and adults will sometimes change behavior in order to fit the (negative) labels assigned to them by authority figures (Matza, 1969). We practice using labels focused on actions that motivate Math Leaders to move forward in positive ways. By calling members of MMC "Math Leaders," we open the door for children to see themselves as leaders. During the Sharing Circle, we ask them directly how they have demonstrated leadership, inviting them to reflect on their own choices. This is in contrast to "what did you do well" or "how were you a 'bad student' today."

And during the Sharing Circle, when we ask everyone else how a certain Math Leader demonstrated leadership, we are practicing looking for leadership qualities in others.

The term Math Champion, initially, was conceived in contrast to Math Leader and to indicate someone who excelled in math (although this is not a requirement to be a Math Champion). Over time, the actions of the Math Champions included a second meaning of champion, showing up as celebrants for the Math Leaders in the community and in school.

### Asset- and Justice-Based Thinking and Practices

The attention to language led to a long list of word substitutes, from deficit-based thinking that highlights a problem, to asset- and justice-based thinking that amplifies strengths and addresses language that perpetuates injustice. For example, "help" elicits a sense of inadequacy, while "support" offers extra effort to add to what is already being exerted. "Can I support you with homework?" has a very different connotation than "Let me help you." In the former case, the Math Leader is assumed to be capable of homework and responsible for its completion. Support is offered, but not required. And if support is desired, the Math Leader is in a position to dictate what support they want. The latter case assumes that the Math Leader is unable to do the homework without the Champion; that extra help is necessary for them to be okay.

Words like "project" and "program" are unwelcome to many in the PVA community. Public housing is often referred to as "the projects," referencing the project of providing temporary inexpensive housing for families to move into the middle class. Yet many residents have been living there since the early '60s. PVA also has a history of being a site for one non-profit program after another that was supposed to "fix" something in the community. After a year or two, such "projects" or "programs" took some feel-good photos, spent grant money on its own staff (with little to no money going into the community), and then disappeared from PVA. The last thing families at PVA wanted was another "program."

Although we generated many meaningful substitutions to shift our own vocabulary to an asset-based word list, we quickly learned that just saying new words while continuing the same attitudes also continued to cause harm. We even observed that some teachers had weaponized the terms from MMC to shame or punish students. Ms. Alcalá-Williams heard phrases such as, "I thought you were supposed to be a leader! What's wrong with you?"

In an effort to extend beyond a vocabulary list, we learned to emphasize to Math Champions how important it is to *embody* asset-based language. We now talk about asset and justice-based *thinking and practices*. The "thinking" invites us to reflect on the words we say before we say them. Does a certain word cause harm or does it support growth? If a word has a negative connotation, the invitation is to reflect on: *What are we really trying to say? What words express our intention to be in relationship with one another, to bring out the best in one another?* The "practice" is the work of shifting our habits towards ones that ignite the brilliance in others.

An important development during the 2020-2021 academic year was the creation of learning pods for students attending virtual classes at ACS, including one pod at PVA. With the financial support of Dogwood Health Trust, author Marta Alcalá-Williams, along with local educator Ashley Cooper, high school student Miranda Williams, and UNCA Professor Dr. Tiece Ruffin wrote a booklet, *REGAL: Relevant Education Grows All Learners*. *REGAL* is a resource for educators to create a positive learning environment in a pod or classroom. It incorporates asset and justice-based thinking and practices developed at Marvelous Math Club (Ruffin et al., 2020).

## Next Steps

Next, we will work with the PVA community to restart MMC soon after school begins in the fall semester of 2021. Dr. Ruffin, drawing on her deep well of knowledge and on her passion for excellence in Black education, worked with the authors to develop a plan for a qualitative assessment of the impact of the Club on Math Leaders, their families, their teachers, and Math Champions. A mix of methods inspired by portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002), including photovoice, interviews, intentional reflection, and document analysis, will allow us more insight on social mechanisms involved in MMC and where there is opportunity to strengthen the positive impacts of MMC in years to come.

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**Appendix A**

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REGAL: Relevant Education Grows All Learners.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n8QFURWqrfnfYyNx5PKzty-1m4H7LOyh/view?usp=sharing

Video of Dr. Tiece Ruffin addressing asset-based language on CreativeMornings videocast.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQrxSHQvzJU&t=1569s

Video of Math Leaders playing with math flash cards. https://youtu.be/5LVkT7nWmvo

**Appendix B**

Asset-based language card.

**ASSET + JUSTICE-BASED THINKING AND PRACTICES**

| **Deficit-based** | **Asset-based** |
|---|---|
| Help/ Helpful | Support, Encourage, Beneficial |
| Need(s) | Priorities, Interests |
| Fix | Validate, Honor |
| Diverse Students | People/Person of Color, Multiracial |
| Tutor | Homework Support, Champion, Guide, |
| Being Good | Demonstrating Leadership |
| Improve | Grow, Enhance |
| Structure | Flow, Foundation, Framework, Design |
| Program | Club, Initiative |
| Empower | Ignite, Connect, Bridge to Resources, Share Tools, Inspire |
| Project | Design, Practice, Model |
| Remedial | Working to Grow/Growing |

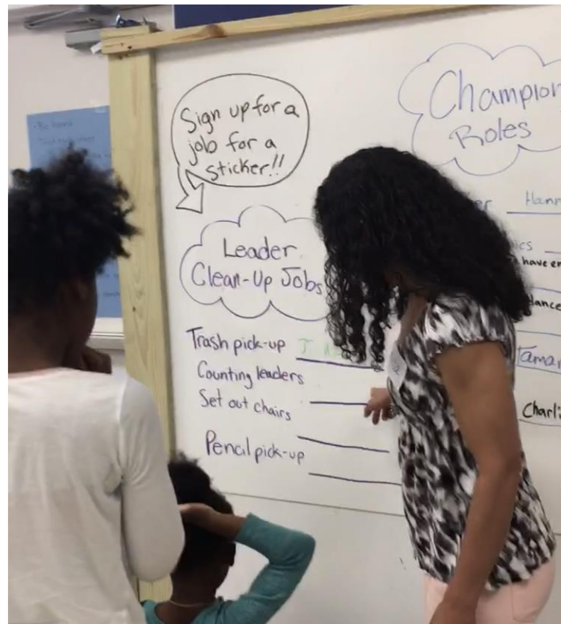
| At-risk Youth | At-risk of what? White supremacy culture? |
|---|---|
| Math or Word Problem(s) | Question(s), Exercise, Challenge, Story, Equation |
| Marginalized/ Underserved | Communities with less access or pushed to the margins |
| "Needs Assessment" | Power-analysis |
| Behavior | Expression, Style, Way of showing up |
| Manage, Boss | Lead/Leader |
| 'Kids in poverty"/ low-income | Experiencing poverty |
| Minority | POC minor means less than and ity -a state of being. Who wants to be less than always? |

Compiled by Marta Alcalá-Williams in collaboration with leaders of Pisgah View Apartments.

**Appendix C**

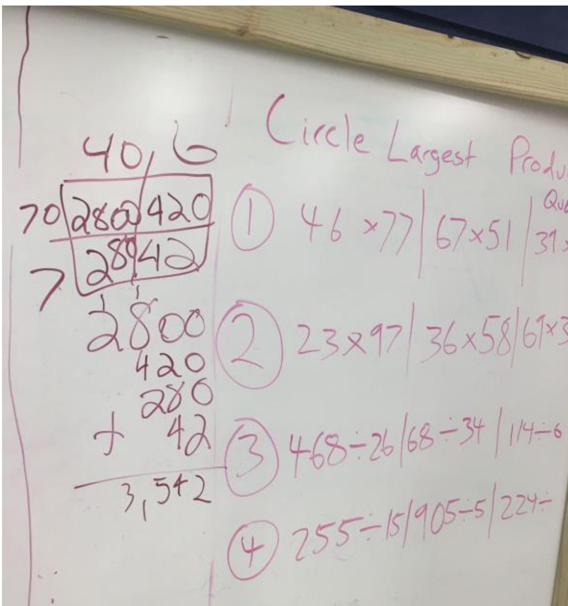
Images

Checking in at snack time



Earning stickers

Playing math games.




Working it out on a board

Sharing circle

**Marta Alcalá-Williams** is a Latina woman who has lived, worked, and invested in the Asheville community for the last 30 years. She is committed to facilitating deep relationships centered on revolutionary love and collective liberation. Marta's work in the school system and community is rooted in engaging the community to achieve a clearer understanding and shared analysis of racial equity and to create equitable and just practices. Marta is known for her work with asset and justice-based thinking and practices. In addition to co-founding Marvelous Math Club, Marta started a Mothoread group seven years ago which has created an amazingly powerful group of black, brown, and white women who uplift one another and are charting new territory on building true multiracial communities. Marta currently serves as the Executive Director of Equity and Community Engagement for Asheville City Schools.
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**Dr. Kaplan** has a life-long commitment to celebrating and popularizing mathematics. In addition to co-founding Marvelous Math Club, he has organized four Math Literacy Summits in Asheville from 2001 to 2008 to highlight community priorities and resources around mathematics. Dr. Kaplan has been recognized for his teaching with a UNC System Board of Governors Award, a UNC Asheville Teaching Excellence Award in the Natural Sciences, and a Distinguished Teaching Award from the Southeast Section of the Mathematical Association of America.
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**Philosophy for Children: A potential pedagogy for transformative education in Zimbabwean resettlement primary schools**

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Zimbabwe is currently experiencing high activity and spending on education as the country updates its primary and secondary school curricula. However, only a few rigorous studies have evaluated innovative approaches that can help transform the curriculum by integrating indigenous languages as intangible cultural heritage and promote educational transformation. This article provides reflections on findings of the larger study to which it contributes, as well as making recommendations for curriculum developers and teachers who may be developing pedagogical approaches without the benefit of an evidence-based implementation of a context-based P4C. The article proposes, based on data from the formative intervention study, that implementing a context-based P4C is effective in strengthening strong community relationships, instilling pride in local heritage, and in advancing curriculum transformation.

**Keywords:** Transformative education, Philosophy for Children, Heritage language, Critical reflexivity

## Introduction

Postcolonial governments have been castigated for their failure to decolonize the curriculum, which has been interpreted as a re-inscription of Eurocentric values and knowledges (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013; Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017). Following this, there have been calls to decolonize education, one alternative being to include heritage knowledges, worldviews, and languages. Similarly, arguments for and examples of how to implement context-based philosophy for children (P4C) have reinforced calls for educational decolonization (Reed-Sandoval, 2018; Bhurekeni, 2021). Again, various measures, such as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032), announced in February 2019 on the occasion of the end of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL 2019) in Mexico City, have been established in response to the growing need to preserve, revitalise, and promote heritage languages and knowledges (UNESCO, 2020).

Globally, significant progress has recently been made in some postcolonial nations in terms of incorporating heritage languages and language-related knowledges into

educational policy and practice. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government launched a National Indigenous Languages Policy in 2009 to address the conundrum of language loss in indigenous communities. According to McCarthy and May (2017), the policy's implication has been a growing awareness that languages are a valuable national resource, which has led to an increase in the study of languages other than English. In Canada the governament made an effort to atone for its historical legacies by pledging to assist in the revitalization of the learners' heritage languages, and this has influenced development of coherent links between English, heritage language teaching, and other global language policies (McIvor & Ball, 2019). Comparable reforms were carried out in Africa, for example, apart from Tanzania, which imposed Swahili as a national language and language of education immediately after independence (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). In Kenya, 'the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya' (Koech Commission, 1999) recommended that the medium of instruction, particularly in lower primary, be the learners' mother tongue (Republic of Kenya (GOK), 1999).

Zimbabwe is no exception as the country has also embarked on similar initiatives through implementing the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2014). This policy document noted the need for heritage languages and language-related knowledges inclusion into the curriculum with an emphasis that the learners' heritage langauage be the medium of instruction, especially at the lower primary school level (MoPSE, 2014). MoPSE (2014), like the Koech Commission (1999), remarked that the use of the learners' heritage language would enhance concept formation and articulation in linguistic communication. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of heritage languages and knowledges has remained a topical issue in postcolonial nations' post-development discourse. This is because, despite numerous recommendations for their inclusion, particularly in education, heritage languages continue to be relegated to an inferior position (see, Shizha, 2010; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). McIvor and Ball (2019), for instance, observe that in Canada "Schools and early childhood programs with indigenous languages as media of instruction are independent and remain marginalized within the larger education system" (McIvor & Ball, p. 15). The same could be said about Africa where research (Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019) concurs that there is an ostensible disconnection between the education curriculum and the continent's heritage languages and other locally situated knowledges and practices.

It has been noted that while indigenous people are perceived as custodians of these heritage languages and knowledges and have since been invited to play a proactive role in initiating and developing appropriate measures for their promotion in development discourse, education systems often do not include curricula and teaching methods that recognize their communities' histories, cultures, and pedagogies (Wodon & Consentino, 2019). Thus, there is a need for a more participatory-oriented and context-sensitive approach to curricula reform to avoid romanticism in developing transformative educational policies. This article provides insights into how I used the philosophy for children approach as a pedagogy for transformative education that values heritage languages and knowledges extant in resettlement primary schools in Zimbabwe.

### Brief context of resettlement schools.

The majority of Zimbabwe's resettlement/satellite schools were founded between 2000 and 2005, shortly after the country's compulsory land reform, and are still not formally

registered as schools with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE] (Bhurekeni, 2021). According to government figures, there were 1093 resettlement primary schools last year (Mujuru, 2020). Jenjekwa (2013) and Mujuru (2020) both agree that the schools were established in order to serve resettled farmers in need of basic services such as education and health care. According to Moyo (2017), when the resettled farmers moved on to the farms, there were no schools for their children, so the government set up makeshift schools. The literature is replete with evidence that the learning environment in these schools is depressing (Jenjekwa, 2013; Moyo, 2017; Mujuru, 2020; Bhurekeni, 2021). This is due to the fact that some children in resettlement schools attend classes in abandoned farmhouses, old tobacco barns, and thatched mud huts (Jenjekwa, 2013; Mwinde & Muzingili, 2020). One of the resettlement schools involved in the broader study, to which this article contributes, for example, uses rooms from an old delapidated farm house as classrooms, whereas the other two are struggling to finish construction of classroom blocks left unfinished by a foreign donor organization, with some of the children learning under a tree.

## Context and the problem statement

Engaging learners in philosophical dialogue and critical reflexive thinking is a challenge in today's educational systems because of enduring coloniality that continues to shape the world (see Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Gregory, Haynes, & Murris, 2017). However, as I have noted elsewhere in a study (Bhurekeni, 2021), this is only one of the quality educational provision challenges that are endemic in 'resettlement primary schools' in the country (Jenjekwa, 2013; MoPSE, 2014). To be engaged, it turned out that there had to be a strong interlinking between the school curriculum and the learner's life-world (Bhurekeni, 2020). Moreover, classroom pedagogy should strengthen learner agency by enabling them to establish resilient connections with the sociocultural tools and signs that support their cultural heritage (Shizha, 2010). However, in Southern Africa contexts, the tools and signs that support many cultures are not always available in formal educational settings (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). This problem has largely been attributed to the persistence of coloniality in the region, using cultural technologies of domination (Terreblanche, 2014), as is the case in most postcolonial countries. For example, due to coloniality, "teaching and learning reinforce hegemonic and oppressive paradigms which allocate differential social locations to Western and indigenous knowledges and languages" (Shizha, 2010, p. 116). Zimbabwe is currently spending more money on education, as the country continues to upgrade its primary and secondary schools' curricula (MoPSE, 2014).

Considering these continuities of coloniality, I implemented a P4C formative intervention in Sebakwe resettlement schools in Zimbabwe. The formative intervention to which this article contributes builds on the work of Lipman (1991) and Vygotsky (1962), both of whom were interested in the relationship between thinking and its social context. According to Daniel and Auriac (2008), though their approaches were different, they both advocate for the development of critical/higher order thinking skills through peer verbal exchange. Vygotsky (1978) notes that children gain tools for thinking as they acquire a language, as it is that which they use to solve practical problems. This chimes

in well with Lipman (2003) whose work tracks and theorizes as to how learners can learn together via the medium of community of inquiry as a pedagogy. The formative intervention had antecedents towards an Afrophilic[74] and sociocultural underpinning and is aimed at enabling learners to construct different models of reasonable experiences or truth.

The vantage point of an Afrophilic deliberative heritage-based learning is in the development of socially situated critical thinking skills which translate into improved learner agency via utilization of heritage language and language-related knowledges. Learner agency refers to learners' developing ability to use their heritage languages to express themselves and depict the world around them. Thus, it was hoped as I implemented the intervention that it would cleanse the education system of the colonial antecedents that continue to determine curriculum (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013; Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017), and inform the development of a curriculum that is sensitive to indigenous cultural heritage and languages.

The Afrophilic philosophy for children's formative intervention was implemented in line with Shizha (2010) and Siyakwazi and Siyakwazi (2013), who observe that recent developments in education (Zimbabwe included) have heightened the need to enact a culturally sensitive and contextual pedagogy. However, when it comes to basic education, the Zimbabwean government is giving textbooks and other financial grants such as the Schools Improvement Grants (SIG) to speed up educational transformation. A paradox has emerged in which teachers and parents from other parts of the country criticize the textbooks distributed by the government in schools, claiming that the textbooks (particularly the Heritage and LOP- Social Studies), contain inaccurate information about their culture and heritage. According to Gory, Bhatia, and Reddy (2021), "not all teachers and parents were satisfied with the reform" (p. 153), necessitating a need for a shift from content knowledge mastery to higher-order thinking skils and competences (Reimers, 2021). I then implemented a P4C formative intervention in Sebakwe resettlement primary schools to strengthen the curriculum by cultivating critical reflexive thinking skills and a culture of learning (Bhurekeni, 2021). It has been noted elsewhere that the 'context-based P4C' that I used has the capacity to use the learner's cultural history of practice and thus enhance learner agency (Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014; Reed-Sandoval, 2018).

Despite the remarkable awareness in Zimbabwe of the importance of P4C and implementation of a heritage (both language and practice) sensitive curriculum (Ndofirepi, 2011; Dube, 2020), there have been few rigorous studies that evaluate how P4C as a pedagogical approach in Zimbabwe can help strengthen curriculum transformation by incorporating heritage languages and other intangible cultural heritage. As a result, lack of practical implementation examples of context-based P4C in Zimbabwe has resulted in the MoPSE's slow-pace towards curriculum decolonization, trapping the schools' curriculum in a muddle and always in a state of opacity (Chung, 1996). As a result of the lack of practical implementation examples of context-based P4C

[74] The Afrophilia lens utilized as start-up capital in this study includes storytelling, proverbs, traditional music, pictures, and metaphors

in Zimbabwe, the approach has become less known and excluded from policy planning and implementation, despite its remarked capacity to sustain locally oriented curriculum reforms (Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014).

Aware of this, I conducted a micro-literary review of how philosophy for children has evolved in Africa, with a particular focus on how it relates to the use of heritage language and indigenous knowledges and practices, and discovered that the approach has gone through notions of hybridization, with an emphasis on sensitizing the practice to the learner's life-world (Ndofirepi, 2011). Then I examined the findings from the broader P4C formative intervention in order to unpack the potential of P4C in transforming learning at the primary school level in Zimbabwe.

## Methodology

Here I offer a critical reflection or reflexivity of the P4C Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention through utilizing data gathering approaches of analyzing documents, observing, questioning, and seeking a diversity of opinion through reflective interviews that allow for an openness to change. Jan Fook (2011) defines critical reflection "as a way of learning from and reworking experience" (p. 56). Thus, the methodology is anchored on day-to day existence and has antecedents toward critical pedagogy (Mortari, 2015). Critical reflection helped me gain a better understanding of the P4C formative intervention as it enabled me to pay attention to the appropriateness of its intentions and take a closer look at the effects it yields when implemented under conditions extant in the Sebakwe resettlement area. Henceforth, critical reflection in this study signifies the act of giving myself time to think about the meaning and purpose of the formative intervention research that I occupied myself with in the past three years. Mortari (2015) reasons that deep understanding of these issues provides the basis for recommendations concerning continuous adjustments or refinement of the intervention. In light of this one may surmise that critical reflexivity leads to new conclusions, possible changes, and new ideas to inform future planning and actions.

The methodology employed in this study takes one beyond their own understandings and knowledge (Mortari, 2015). In the context of my research, it enabled me and the participants, who included purposively selected 15 parents, 12 teachers, 3 education inspectors, and 15 learners, to integrate our fragmented experiences into a coherent whole (Bhurekeni, 2021). Adult participants were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide rich data sets on the use of the Afrophilia lens in learning spaces. The children were chosen based on the fact that they were in the same grade at one of the schools involved and had signed consent (along with their parents) to participate in the study. Formative intervention workshop notes and audio recordings were collected from participants, as were video recorded P4C lessons with children and lesson observation notes, and audio or video recorded face-to-face reflexive interviews (see Bhurekeni, 2021 for a discussion on this).

All workshops, P4C lessons, and reflexive interviews were conducted in Shona, the heritage language of both participants and the researcher. During translation, the meaning of the word was determined by how language users use them at any given time.

Furthermore, the target audience influenced the decision on which English words to use to represent the original words in the data sets. The goal was to translate the transcripts into English so that they could be communicated effectively to the widest possible audience of English readers.

Most generally critical reflexivity in this research allowed me to expose the power dynamics operational within the classroom in particular and within the Zimbabwean education system in general. As seen from practice, this methodology within an educational context allows insider formative intervention researchers to place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and their practice in general. To improve validity, I used both the informant triangulation and the time triangulation (Denscombe, 2010) because I utilized a multi-voiced approach in data collection and collected data from multiple sources at different times. Figure 1.0 shows a mind map of the critical reflective cycle within the P4C formative intervention.

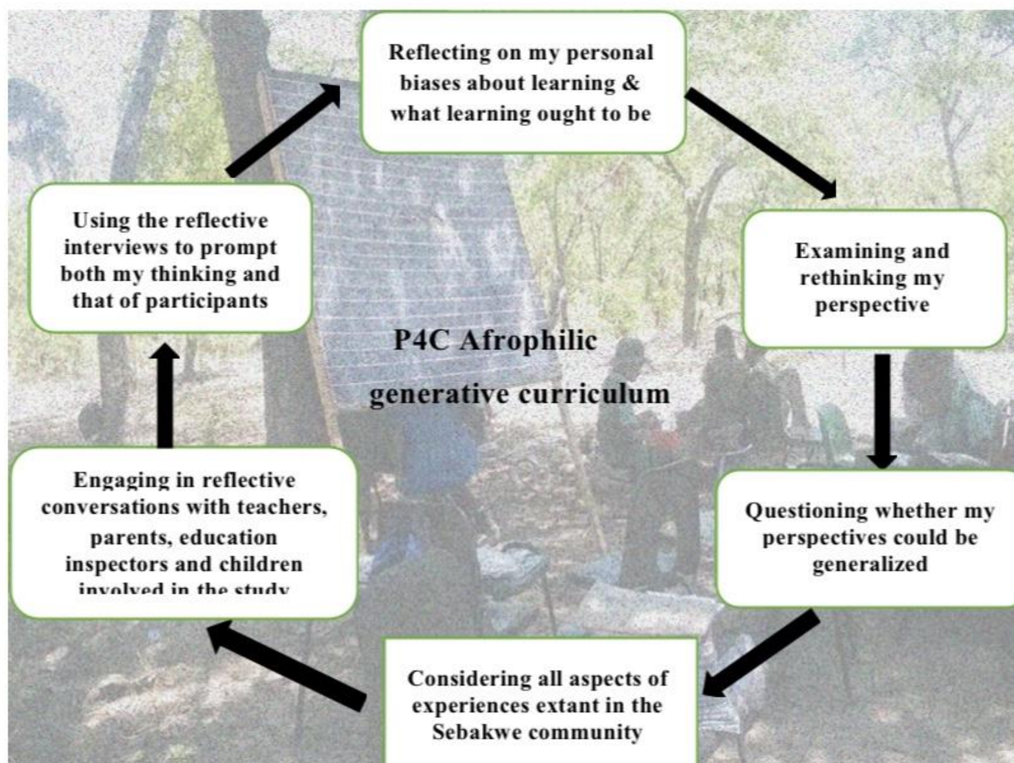


Figure 1.0 *mind map of the critical reflective cycle with Afrophilic formative intervention*

The potential validity problem for this study was the impact of 'The Hawthorne effect' (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001), which occurs when participants change their behaviour because of being part of a research study. This is possible because the participants participated in three formative intervention workshops to select Afrophilia learning artifacts and were aware that they were part of a formative intervention study during face-to-face reflexive interviews, which may have changed their general behaviour or responses to questions. To ensure that this does not have an impact on the reliability of

my data, I made the purpose of the study known. Furthermore, because I was an ”‘insider formative interventionist” (Bhurekeni, 2021), the time I spent with the participants allowed them to become accustomed to being observed and begin to behave naturally. Also, because I used critical reflexivity to solve such problems, especially during the coding and transcribing of the audio and video recorded data sets, my awareness may have reduced its impact (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001). I understood that the answers I sought in my study could not be discerned without the context of the participants with whom I worked, so I paid close attention to context. Thus, I was alert to the problems embedded in generalized ethical frameworks and their implications for ethical practice[75] within the context of resettlement schools.

To make the study more context-sensitive, data that was elicited was analyzed using the postcolonial discourse analysis approach. The approach is unique in that apart from using it to analyze the linguistic type of discourse, one may opt to focus on the macro elements of discourse and the politics of discourse (Sawyer, 2012). In this article I focused on the macro approach to discourse as it allowed me to reflect on representation, identity and agency, the nature and role of language in society, and the wish for decolonial studies to give voice to disadvantaged and silenced groups such as the resettlement schools that I worked with. I was able to generate the themes that I used in data presentation and analysis by using postcolonial discourse analysis. Again, the research questions aimed at identifying historical and contemporary barriers to effective learning in the resettlement areas involved, as well as how P4C as a potential transformative pedagogy could address the challenges, influenced the themes.

## How P4C has evolved in Southern Africa

P4C, founded as a pedagogical approach by Matthew Lipman, originated in the United States of America. The approach, established in the 1970s, focuses on teaching thinking skills through philosophical dialogue and has since become a world-wide approach (Gorard, Siddiqui, & Huat See, 2015). This global acceptance of the approach depends largely on its ability to help children develop complex cognitive skills and predispostions related to critical reflexive thinking such as: to evaluate, ask questions, criticize, be thorough, and build congenial and collaborative relationships (Daniel & Auriac, 2008). Thus, unlike the discipline-specific philosophy that is much aligned to the teaching “of formal logic stripped of experiential anchors” (Daniel & Auriac, 2008, p. 4), philosophy for children promises to cultivate skills and predispositions that could be located outside the academy. Furthermore, recent research has shown how P4C can be utilized as a decolonial approach in colonial-weighted educational settings (Bhurekeni, 2021). The prospects of this liberatory potential have attracted scholars in southern Africa, as the

[75] The Philosophy for Children Afrophilia project was conducted in accordance with Rhodes University’s ethics clearance committee code of practice (ethical approval tracking number for the research is 2017.12.08.04), and was approved by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe (MoPSE, letter dated 09 May 2017).

region has for long been under the burden of cultural technologies of domination (Terreblanche, 2014).

Turning now to a nuanced critical reflection on the practice of P4C, we find out that it has emerged as a pedagogical advancement in southern Africa. Discussions of P4C by scholars located in this region are connected by a common foundation, specifically their adoption of the definition of philosophy as a method of thinking even without having to explicitly say it. According to Daniel and Auriac (2008), philosophy as a way of thinking has its roots in Socratic questioning and in pragmatism and its goal is the construction of truth through the 'sociality of thought', whereby knowledge and meaning-making are related to immediate context (Derry, 2013).

Now, given the uniqueness of the P4C pedagogical approach and how it promotes development of rational, open-minded thinking in children (Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015), this approach is attracting the attention of various researchers in the region (see Haynes & Murris, 2009; Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014). Factors influencing this attention have been explored in several studies. For instance, Ndofirepi (2011) mentions the crisis situation in Africa as one of the reasons for situating philosophy for children within the region. As an 'edifying philosopher,' Ndofirepi (2011) cites the superimposition of the colonialist cultural political system on indigenous communities and contends that philosophy for children ought to consider being sensitive to the African child's life-world. Here, sensitivity to context implies the privileging of contextualized forms of representation through which events and objects are presented in terms of their concrete particularity and inline with the heritage language that embodies their real meaning (Derry, 2013). This falls in line with Lipman's (1996) emphasis on children's ability to draw on their own cultural experience and to think abstractly. However, it must be noted that simply including the cultural aspects of the learners is not sufficient, as learners and teachers are encouraged to engage with the culture in a way that reflects epistemological and critical depth (Giddy, 2012).

While Ndofirepi (2011) made recommendations to situating P4C within the African milieu, Murris (2000) came up with a more applied approach to the practice of philosophy for children. For Murris (2000), P4C could be done through applying a range of philosophical stimuli that is not solely text. For instance, P4C facilitators/teachers can use picture books, play a piece of music, or show a documentary film. Murris (2000) concurs with Ndofirepi (2011), Letseka (2013), Ndondo and Mhlanga (2014), and Bhurekeni (2021) that the development of philosophy for children in Africa and the world over has shifted the role of the teacher. Children are now to be seen as co-inquirers in the learning process and the teacher must not "stamp in knowledge" (Green, 2017, p. 38); his/her main focus should be on ensuring that learners are exposed to a conducive but all the same suitably challenging learning environment.

Scholars in P4C (including those from the global south) are constantly looking for the best way to activate the transformative potential of philosophical practice in schools. As a result, P4C has found a place in educational debates centered on the democratic conception of education and the improvement of literacy and learning (Gregory, Haynes, & Murris, 2017). According to Ndofirepi and Cross (2015), philosophical

practice in schools is a participatory initiative that requires educators to consider learners' interest and create space for them to voice their opinions as contributing agents to knowledge creation. As a result, in addition to advocating for a more localized approach to the practice of philosophy for children, the P4C program in Africa has evolved in a more similar fashion to that of other continents, where it is expected to help children become more reasonable, participative, and critically thinking citizens.

## A pedagogy for transformation

As seen in the preceding section, P4C has been introduced in education to provide alternative ways of looking at education and society itself, specifically using the ideas of P4C to see the world from the perspectives of children (Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015). Children, particulary in societies characterized by gerontological thinking, tend to rely on adults to speak for them, and when there are no adults to speak for them, they remain silent, and no one appears to be concerned about their perspetives on the world in which they live. Through the practice of community of inquiry, P4C connects adults with the special capacities present in childhood such as wonder, curiosity, and imagination (Mohr Lone, 2012). The practice of community of inquiry in philosophy for children, in which children's voices are prioritized, necessitates the transformation of the teacher's role in order to transform the classroom into an influential discursive space that can be part of the process of dialogue, social transformation, and engaged citizenship (Murris, 2000; Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015). Thus, philosophy for chidren extends the process of dialogue and philosophical engagement to all citizens as the foundation of transformational pedagogy.

Moving to a more practical analysis and considering what philosophy for children might look like, especially in resettlement schools that lack teaching and learning materials (Jenjekwa, 2013), reflects the natural progression of the discussion into transformative approaches to education. Typically, philosophy for children in any learning situation, regardless of the learners' background, supports the notion that both learners and the teacher are creative and autonomus co-inquirers (Gregory, Haynes, & Murris, 2017). This is consistent with the ideas of Shor and Freire (1987), who believe that knowledge is created and re-created in the classrooms through dialogue beween students and teachers. Gregory, Haynes, and Murris (2017) provide a more profound idea of philosophy for children, arguing that it is a "framework for collaborative exploration of significant questions, for freedom of thought and speech, for participatory dialogue, and for collaborative self-governance" (p. 1). To explore this point further, Echeverria and Hannam (2017) support the position that community of inquiry in philosophy for children is a model of educational praxis, hence it can enable conditions necessary for transformation to exist. Therefore, philosophy for children is noted as an approach that aims to bring about transformation or to motivate collective action to achieve educational transformation by investing in the endeavour to teach children to be reflective critical thinkers in order to question and challenge orthodox educational practices that sustain reproduction of the status quo.

## Findings from the formative intervention study

The information presented here is derived from document analysis processes, observations, and the author's own reflective interviews with participants. While the interviews covered a wide range of topics related to the study, I have chosen to narrow my focus on the use of heritage languages and language-related knowledges as these are more relevant for this paper.

## Historical antecedents continue to determine the curriculum

On June 26, 2018, I had my first reflective interview with Mbuya VaChihera (81 years old), my study guardian. Mbuya VaChihera explained that colonial formal education was introduced in the area when she was a girl of almost six years old, so she was thought to be too young to go to school. As a result, her parents would hide her in the granary whenever a teacher arrived in search of school-age children. Her interview is presented here to offer the historical context of the education system.

> **Researcher:** *So, when you were older, did you get a chance to go to school?*
>
> **Mbuya VaChihera:** *Yes, when I was a little older, the teacher came and wrote our names, and our first class was held under a tree.*
>
> **Researcher:** *Can you say that your learning experiences were the same as before you enrolled for formal schooling?*
>
> **Mbuya VaChihera:** *It was different because we had been taught to count "motsi, piri, tatu, china, chishanu, tanhatu, tanhatu, chinomwe, rusere, pfumbamwe, gumi) at home, but now in school we would sing "one stone in a line if I add one they add up to two, two stones in a line if I add one they add up to three," until you reach ten. We couldn't understand because we were now using a different language, 'English,' and we couldn't tell what a line was because all we did was sing, so you see my son, language was our main challenge… Even when our parents were instructed to help us, they would do so little guidance because it was not our language.*

Mbuya VaChihera could not walk to school to join others in observing the philosophy for children lessons, so there was nothing else she could say about the philosophy for children pedagogical intervention. She did, however, emphasize that learning about one's culture broadens one's understanding and competitiveness. Her narrative above shows how the dawn of imperial British colonial government in Zimbabwe (around 1890s) was marked by a direct replica of the British system of governance and as a result the education system that was instituted in colonial Zimbabwe followed suit (Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training [CIET], 1999; Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). Literacy was the main emphasis within this system of education even though the only available literature was in English (CIET, 1999). During my interview with Mbuya VaChihera, she reiterates that,

*"... they (missionaries) wanted us to learn to read and write. We were told that if we go to school, we would be able to write letters for our parents and read the bible, reading and writing were so important to them."*

Subsequently, English has always had a privileged status above African indigenous languages such as ChiShona and IsiNdebele. Hence, it became a language of governance and the main medium of instruction in schools. Of this downgrading of African languages and a blind clinging to the language of imperial British colonial masters, we have a remarkable illustration in the writings of (CIET, 1999).

> *Colonial governments had allowed the teaching of the major languages, ChiShona and IsiNdebele from grade 1 to University level as subjects. The languages were not used as media of instruction and their status was regarded as inferior to English. English thus remained the official language, medium of instruction in schools, a compulsory subject, and a requirement in all school certificates. Time allocations for ChiShona and IsiNdebele at the University, teachers, and lecturers of ChiShona and IsiNdebele and authors of literary works in indigenous languages were relegated to a lower status compared to their English counterparts (CIET, 1999, pgs. 157-158).*

Clearly it is evident that English did not only become a medium of instruction in schools and universities, but it literally became a language of power as it was authoritatively observed as the language of commerce, administration, and international relations (CIET, 1999; Zimbabwe Education Act, 1987). This however created learning barriers especially given the fact that the medium for transmission of most Afrophilia knowledges has largely remained preliterate. The shift to literacy and use of English as medium of instruction led to the abstraction of curriculum from the life experiences of the learners (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o illustrates Mbuya Va Chihera's views when he asserts that the colonial education and the hierarchies of languages that it created brought about a new meaning of education as:

> *It makes them [the colonized children] see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own (wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 3).*

Little has changed in the postcolonial period (1980-2020) as English has practically remained the language of instruction in schools even after the educational reforms that have seen Zimbabwe taking a heritage-based turn in education (MoPSE, 2014; Bhurekeni, 2020). Rather than repudiate this colonial legacy, as argued in literature, the postcolonial Zimbabwean government embraced English, indicating the endurance of coloniality within the curriculum.

## Curriculum withholds the minority at the periphery

The grade 7 timetable uncovers that the subordination of other African languages, such as those excluded from the timetable, had practically morphed into the axiomatic. Even some of the African languages that are represented on the timetable, their time allocation is in the afternoon when children had already written other examinations. The situation is worse in resettlement schools where very few speakers of these minority languages are enrolled and consequently end up being co-opted into registering for one of the dominant languages. It would be interesting for readers to note that this is not the same for other languages such as English, ChiShona, and IsiNdebele. Teachers affirmed that while there is a legislature in which at least 15 indigenous languages are accepted for use in formal education, this recognition is often expressed only in word because English continues to dominate as the language of instruction in schools (Kembo, 2000).

Figure 1.1: 2020 Grade Seven Timetable

**ZIMBABWE SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL**

**2020 GRADE SEVEN EXAMINATION TIME-TABLE**

| EXAMINATION DATE | MORNING SESSION | SUBJECT/PAPER | AFTERNOON SESSION | SUBJECT/PAPER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thursday, 3 December | 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs) | 0001/1 English 1 | 2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins) | 0008/1 Nambya 1 |
| Friday, 4 December | 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs) | 0002/1 Mathematics 1 | 2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins) | 0010/1 Xichangana 1 |
| Monday, 7 December | 9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins) | 0004/1 Shona 1<br>0006/1 Ndebele 1 | 2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins) | 0007/1 Tonga 1 |
| Tuesday, 8 December | 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs) | 0005/1 General Paper 1 | 2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins | 0009/1 Tshivenda 1 ^ |
| Wednesday, 9 December | 9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins) | 0003/1 Agriculture 1 | 2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins) | 0011/1 Kalanga 1 |
| Thursday, 10 December | 9.00 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. (1hr 45mins) | 0004/2 Shona 2<br>0006/2 Ndebele 2 ^ | 2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins) | 0007/2 Tonga 2 |
| Friday, 11 December | 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs) | 0002/2 Mathematics 2 | 2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins | 0008/2 Nambya 2 |
| Monday, 14 December | 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs) | 0003/2 Agriculture 2 | 2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins) | 0010/2 Xichangana 2 |
| Tuesday, 15 December | 9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins) | 0001/2 English 2 | 2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins) | 0011/2 Kalanga 2 |
| Wednesday, 16 December | 9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins) | 0005/2 General Paper 2 | 2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 30mins | 0012/1 Sesotho 1 |
| Thursday, 17 December | 1hr 45 mins | 0009/2 Tshivenda 2 ^ | 1hr 45 mins | 0012/2 Sesotho 2 |

Literature is replete with examples of how minority societies are often subjected to such forms of education or how power can be used to deprive learners of languages and knowledges related to their cultural history of practice in favour of the dominant group (Ndhlovu, 2011). Dube (2020) is critical of how state hegemony has affected postcolonial Zimbabwe's language policy at the expense of minority languages.

According to Chabata (2007), the reality in schools did not align with the expectations of the National Constitution that indigenous languages be taught at least up to the first three grades of elementary education. This is mainly because teachers would be preparing learners for examinations which are mainly written in English. From my many years of teaching in primary school, I have also realized that children are more comfortable with reading and writing in a language that they understand, while they find it difficult to read or write in the second language. However as reflected on the examination timetable, four out of the five subjects that are written for the grade seven national examinations are written in the learners' second language. The language barrier is fragmented, and learner agency improved only when the centrality of heritage languages and local heritage knowledges is re-asserted in schools. This is because learning will be a continuation of what learners learn at home.

### There is a need to pay attention to the decolonial conflicts on curriculum reform

On July 3, 2018, I interviewed Mr. Kandimire, who had observed the first two sessions of the pedagogical intervention.

> **Researcher:** … *Let us reflect on use of indigenous languages in school, what is your take on this issue?*
>
> **Mr. Kandimire**: *Using the vernacular as a teaching method has great benefits for the learner because it is easier to understand and to relate to than foreign languages. Moreover, the language associated with the learner's life experience makes it more realistic for the learner to express themselves in relation to their environment and worldview. Learners take long to grasp concept and to complete grades because of using a foreign language.*
>
> **Researcher:** *According to your own observation, what do you think is the reason for this easy learning?*
>
> **Mr. Kandimire:** *Such an education creates a bridge between the home and school, also take note that everyone needs to be given the opportunity to speak and to be listened to, this is what I noticed during your lessons. Again, it is sensitive to the dynamics of power between the learners and the teacher.*

Mrs. Musaengana and Ms. Madimbe were interviewed next on July 5, 2018, and their views on use of heritage languages and language-related knowledges were similar to Mr. Kandimire's. Mrs. Musaengana, on the other hand, emphasized that while it is important for schools to use heritage languages as medium of instruction, English should not be abandoned because children will need it when they travel to other areas where they will be unable to use their heritage languages. While Mr. Sibanda, whom I interviewed on April 4, 2019, appears to agree with Mrs. Musaengana, he contends that "English should not be taken as a measure of intelligence," a point of view that was also expressed during a formative intervention workshop with teachers held on June 21,

2018. Mr. Sibanda went on to endorse the philosophy for children pedagogical intervention, saying:

> *Our education had an antecedent toward Western culture hence our children are copying other people's cultures. This has an effect on our culture as it has been obliterated, soon we will lose it all, say for example our nutritional foods, some children no longer value them, or they totally don't know some of our small grains. So this initiative of teaching our indigenous cultural heritage builds in our children the Zimbabwean identity… Our cultural experiences also help our children to develop critical thinking skills. Take for example mahumbwe, children would learn a lot of problem solving skills from the child's play, even ngano "folk story", there is so much that our children can learn from the stories… Lessons derived from these activities based on our cultural heritage are what taught us to "vanhu vane hunhu" (good nurtured people).*

Ms. Mubaiwa (interviewed on July 17, 2019) believes that it is appropriate for an educational program to draw its content and activities from the learners' cultural heritage in order to reduce foreign cultural influence on the learners. She did, however, advise that the philosophy for children program be sensitive to technology as an emerging aspect of the curriculum.

All interviewees in this section have shown the paradoxes that arise in postcolonial education reforms. The substance of the above findings is that, while reforms have been made to detach the education system from its colonial antecedent, coloniality remains and it continues to influence what goes into the curriculum and the influence that it has on the learner (CIET, 1999). Over the many decades of colonialism, Western logic has been entrenched in the country to an extent that the so-called Western standards are still inadvertently underpinning the education system in Zimbabwe and these undermine efforts that the country has made in attempting to detach from these colonial antecedents. Moreover, from the time of Zimbabwe's political independence, several ideologies about the cultural and historical homogeneity of pre-colonial Zimbabwe were used to legitimize the curriculum standardization and confirmation of a homogenous culture (see CIET, 1999; MoPSE, 2014). I consider the remarks made by the interviewees pertinent for two reasons. To begin with, if what Mr. Sibanda has said is cogent, then it makes this formative intervention an exigency in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Again, the remarks made with concern to English prompts one to infer that language still has a critical role to play in influencing identity; whose language does one need to be identified with on the international, regional, and local arena? Here I argue, as most decolonial scholars have done, that the language one uses does not have to be a reflection of a foreign culture but should be reflecting indigenous human experiences.

## P4C inspires inquiring minds and normalizes questioning

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the impact of the formative intervention, two grade 5 learners were interviewed separately on January 29, 2020, both of whom did

not give me consent to use their names for the interviews, so they are coded as janLC2020 and janLC29 in the study.

**Researcher:** *Good morning, janLC2020. You are one of the learners in the philosophy for children class; how old are you?*

**janLC2020:** *Good morning, how are you? I'm ten years old.*

**Researcher:** *How many philosophy for children sessions have you done so far?*

**janLC2020:** *We've had five sessions so far, and I trust we'll have another one this afternoon.*

**Researcher:** *You seem so excited. How are the philosophy for children sessions going?*

**janLC2020:** *Aah, the philosophy for children sessions are so exciting because we will have the opportunity to dialogue and ask each other questions, and we will be speaking in Shona, as opposed to other lessons where we are told to use English. Remember Mr. Sibanda's folk story (ngano)? Everyone can now tell the story, even those who are not in our class, and people are still discussing some of the issues raised that day.*

**Researcher:** *So that's why you are so excited about today's session. What else can you tell me?*

**janLC2020:** *Yes, because Shona makes it easier for us to talk about what we want, and because during the sessions we learn about things we don't usually talk about. Even at home, we no longer have time for story telling because we'll be doing homework, so the sessions give us a chance to thinking and talk about other things that are relevant to our lives. They don't keep us occupied with book work.*

**Researcher:** *So you say they're important in your life, but how? What makes them so?*

**janLC2020:** *Um, let's say that when we engage in dialogue during the sessions, you learn something and realise its implications for your life. Some stories and proverbs discourage bad behaviour by demonstrating how those who misbehave are treated. As a result, you will easily understand their true meaning in life. Even expressing ourselves is something that we learn through philosophical dialogues.*

**Researcher:** *Okay, thank you very much for your time. I hope we can meet again after the impending sessions.*

**janLC2020:** *Thank you.*

According to janLC29, the sessions have augmented her Shona vocabulary, *"now I can use some proverbs (tsumo) on my own because I was able to grasp their true meaning during the philosophy sessions."* Based on these findings, it is evident that the practice of philosophy for children is fundamental in transferring values such as an inclination to

be critical of the information that one is exposed to and giving reasons in support of or against certain points of view (Haynes & Murris, 2009). This shows that language in philosophy for children is more than just a means of communication; it also shapes the people's way of thinking. According to Lipman (1992), "…nothing teaches children reasoning better than the close and careful examination of the multiform uses of language itself and their consequent discussion of their own observations and inferences" (p.6).

The emphasis in this paper is on how the learners' heritage language influences the development of deep conceptual meaning shaped by cultural heritage knowledge and the effective application of the concepts in real life situations (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Lipman drew inspiration from Vygotsky, a sociocultural theorist who believed that language is a linguistic tool that humans inherit from their culture, and it objectifies one's private ideas in ways that make them accessible to the whole community. According to Chung (2002), nations rely on education as a mechanism to accomplish national goals. The philosophy for children formative intervention has given pointers that if scaled up it can abet promotion of heritage languages in schools. Hence, I argue that national schools or public education are ubiquitous as an important way to accomplish the goals of the international decade of indigenous languages. This is because the practice of philosophy for children abets cultural transmission and, as evidenced by the interviews, it makes learners more participative and reasonable. Active participation situates the learner as a co-inquirer rather than a passive inheritor of pre-existing knowledge. In light of this, I contend that cultural representation in schools is more realistic when pedagogical interventions such as philosophy for children support and embed learners' cultural histories.

## Implications of the findings for policy planning and implementation

From the data presented above it could be noticed that the pedagogical challenges obscuring the Zimbabwean education system are deeply cultural. Henceforth, the need to focus on liberatory pedagogical approaches, and inclusion of contextualized forms of knowledge representation in the curriculum. The integration of philosophy for children with indigenous languages as was done in my study seem to have potential to link curricula to community building and local heritage. Thus, to promote and preserve indigenous languages there is need to ensure implementation of the Education for All policy. Nation-states must therefore aim to enact educational reforms that contribute to the shaping of both the individual and the society; in this way contemporary education would come close to being "a common good" (Lotz-Sisitka, 2017, p. 63). Ensuring the public good status means first enacting a curriculum and pedagogy that reflect socio-cultural bonds between the school and the society (UNSECO, 1996).

Use of heritage languages as a medium of instruction is helpful in ensuring the "development of conceptual vocabulary in these languages to cope with modern technology, the sciences and the arts" (wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. xiv). Thus heritage languages as medium of instruction is a decolonial turn that will help many people realize that the West is not the sole progenitor of formal learning practice. Again,

affording learners of African descent an opportunity to use their indigenous languages in schools is a move towards granting them a hybrid-middle-space from which to assume the "right to name the world for themselves" (wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. 21). This is because philosophical dialogue within the community of inquiry draws from the learners' personal experience, and through collaboration and feedback from others, critically generates new thinking and learning.

## An emerging problem of policy abstraction

The problem of policy abstraction emerged as I was scoping out the implications of the Philosophy for Children Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention on policy planning and implementation. Reasons that lead to policy abstraction, as discussed before, include the non-conducive nature of the current education system. This is because educational policies in Zimbabwe tend to characterize the Zimbabwean community as undifferentiated and homogenous. In my earlier publication I cautioned that this leads to the paradox of superficial interpretation of unhu/ubuntu philosophy of education and advanced a need for deeper analysis of the present reality (Bhurekeni, 2020). The other reason that leads to policy abstraction is that of low stakeholder engagement (including teachers) which offers a poor perception on public opinion, making policies ignore the plurality of contexts and diversity of the communities' cultural histories of practice. This shapes many policy frameworks in the interest of one group while segregating other groups. As a result, what will be witnessed (as is the case for the Zimbabwean education system) is an insufficient focus on implementation and an absence of a coherent implementation strategy, especially for those groups that were earlier not included. According to Shizha and Makuvaza (2017), government policies in Sub-Sahara Africa are shaped and influenced by a neoliberal anti-people approach. As a result, governments (including Zimbabwe) have imposed policy frameworks on the people without their consent.

## Towards a harmonization of theory and praxis

Drawing from the practical implementation of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention it could be surmised that education policy implementation is an evolving process that involves many stakeholders. Thus, as Chimhundu (1997) observes, high quality public policymaking is transparent and open to broad societal participation. By so doing, the implemented program will be able to addresses societal problems timely and with a minimum waste of available resources. Those in leading positions should not show pessimism and cynical approaches to the inclusion of heritage languages and language related knowledges. It was emphasised that, if education is to play a decisive role in reducing exclusion of individuals who are marginalized in today's formal schooling due to ethnic or linguistic grounds, it must play an even greater role in integrating intangible cultural heritage and the heritage languages through which they are transmitted into curricula. This emphasis is consistent with Eze (2008) and Hountondji (1996, 1997) who saw an urgent need to live and practice the indigenous cultural heritage in its diversity rather than assume it to be

homogenous. Again in this paper I am aware of the asymetrical cultural and linguistic relation that was established in the country by the education system, as it dislodged indigenous heritage practices and languages from minority groups to the periphery (Ndhlovu, 2011). In spite of this, caution should be exercised as the MoPSE integrates indigenous heritage and languages into the curriculum, so that other global knowledges are not outrightly rejected. This is because, as stated in the UNESCO report of the International Commission on Education for Twenty-first Century, "…the values needed for twenty-first century … are rooted in local, national, and global cultures" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 216). Taking cognizance of this, especially considering the international decade of indigenous languages, will ensure effective involvement and participation of all citizens.

## Conclusion

The methodology section describes the critical reflection or reflexivity of philosophy for children. My intent in carrying out the critical reflexive work was to find out how the Philosophy for Children Afrophilia curriculum intervention can enable educational transformation. This paper has demonstrated how philosophy for children could be an alternative approach in effecting educational transformation. For institutions and educators working with the heritage languages and language related knowledges, it is encouraged that these local heritage knowledges should not become discursive strategies that give the appearance of change, while at the same time promoting interests that further fragment, co-opt, and defy ancestral collectivities, knowledges, territories, and sensibilities, in the name of transformation, progress, and development. Future research should focus on developing teacher training manuals or booklets for effective and coherent introduction of the philosophy for children program and potential scaling up to other schools and provinces.

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