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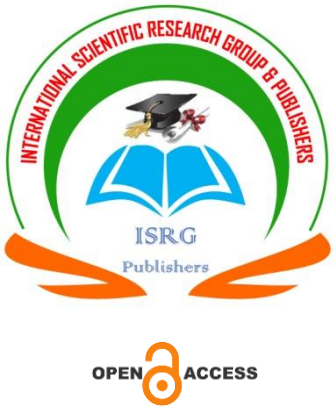

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The Educational cognizance of Postcolonial Literature: A case of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between (1965)*

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Abstract

Thiong'o, is a great mind, a leading novelist in the African literary landscape and literary luminary from Kenya and East Africa. From this perspective, The River Between became the first salvo in what would evolve into a lifetime preoccupation by Thiong'o in challenging Western injustices. The paper not only highlights the complexities and nuances of African ways of life before the advent of colonial adventure, but also critics Western education and western culture as disruptive and a vehicle of perpetuating injustices. The paper interrogates the educational cognizance of postcolonial literary writers in English in Thiong'o's The River Between. The paper validates that, Western and African forms of education had values as well as shortcomings. The article defines a value as a principle of behavior whose central element is equity and inclusivity and possess the degree of usefulness to a person's immediate environment. For that reason, any authentic schooling must uphold to values of critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving. The article employed qualitative research paradigm. The method guided the researcher to seek interest in the way people create significance and logic of their lives, involvements and their structures in the world in which The River Between is of great interest to the researcher. The qualitative method empowered the researcher to make known paradoxes viewed as contrary ways Western and African forms of education operate in the context of The River Between. This was done artistically in analysis of Thiong'o's prose as the main source of data of the research. Consequently, the research revealed that educational awareness in Thiong'o The River Between exposes an existing crisis of the supposition of Western education as the cradle for educational values the world over. The paper therefore, concludes that, education is a carrier of moral values. And consequential value acquaintance should be germane to people and their environment. The study attempts to fill the Lacuna existing in educational appreciation of postcolonial prose by validating that the text can be interpreted outside the contradiction of blame game.

Keywords: *African form of education, Western form of education. Educational values, Theorization of education. Theme, Educational aspects, Manipulation, shortcomings.*

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Introduction

Some critics have characterised early African creative writers as champions of colonial education through their imaginative works. These critics advance the view that attainment of Western education leads to western assimilation and neglect of African traditions by educated Africans (Mazengwe, 2019). Critical studies on education have underscored the interrogation of a twofold integration for both native and Western forms of education. The two systems have been deliberated as if they operate in comparable ways. These critics instead of using literature to critically think and conceptualize they fell under the spell of unstated gimmicks. These studies have been substantial in relating education to pursuit of knowledge, popularity and fulfilment of jobs. Undeniably, education is not all about realization of Jobs and skills. There are a lot of amoral high profiling people in this world in spite of being well-informed. Accordingly, without any attempt to provide a critical rationale, subscribers to this crude view of education have tended to confirm and not question the founding prejudices of Western education such as one exemplified by Thiong'o.

This paper employed a novel to explore educational cognizance of postcolonial African Literary writers in English. Critiques posit that a novel is of certain length and the term cannot be granted to a tail of forty to fifty pages. Arguably fiction narrative can be found as far back as we have written records but most of them lack many of the characteristics that these critiques associate with the novel. Parrinder (2016) notes that 'the novel was associated with aristocracy but also with the rising of the middle class in the 18th century' (p.50). This infers there is a recognizable erudition in the novel which reminds us of the expatriates. Nevertheless, African scholars have defined the genre novel as 'a work of art that is unique and develops an idea dealing with life' (Abiola and Gikandi 2004: p.386). It is from a novel that we realize human nature doesn't change despite technology. Consequently, it is the only genre of literature that has power to transmit ugliness to beauty and vice versa.

Methodology, Literature Review, and theoretical framework

The study was informed by postcolonial literary theory. Postcolonial proponents contend that the clarifying prospective of postcolonial literary theory is ideal in exploring fiction for the theory focuses on:

> creative works are examined for reflection of dominant values and oppressive believe systems. In addition, it explores how images and cultural identity review essential edifices through which society made meaning as well as how these structures must change if cultural sanction of oppression is to end. (Bhabha 1994: p. 98)

The above perception is useful in critiquing educational cognizance of postcolonial African literary writers in English in Thiong'o's *The River Between*.Therefore, the investigated text came under new scrutiny for the ways in which the portrayal of the systems of education led to a yearning by Africans to return to their roots and shun oppression. The novel depicts this achievable through embrace of inclusivity, equity, self-worth and dignity for universal human being. Spivak (1999) approves this assessment by stipulating that variances in skin complexion and linguistic societies partake to entitle clusters of 'us' greater besides 'them' lesser. Indeed, this highpoint the obliviousness that topographical and dialectology classes can cost us.

Post-colonialists' centres on state plus local bequests of expansionism as well as colonization. They challenge domination grounded on ethnic individuality. African literary texts are concerned with the neutralization of colonized identity. This is significant since westerners have portrayed African personality as inferior and their values as barren. Nevertheless, the 'Thiong'o writes to proliferate the beauty and the authenticity of African identity' (Ebiwajuwa 1996: p.93). Thiong'o explicitly illustrates both systems of schooling values and virtues as well as the shortcomings. I argue that it is vital to cherish what encourages inclusivity and equity for the continuity of a dependable future generation.

Critics assert that African authors engage in initial eras of white man authority and describes the interruption of black people customs which were authentic (Mudimbe,1994). The paper affirms the African selected novelist still represent expatriate education in the same version. These views relate to this article in as much as they discuss the plight of the African people during colonialism. I employed the above insight in redefining a value. This article sightsees both African and Western forms of schooling in plot development and character construction.

Thiong'o is a categorical defender of black man uniqueness and ethos. He advocates for the liberation of reason starting with 'smidgeons of subservience and reliance that whack of the white man's supremacy in extents of beliefs and political dominance' (Mamdani 2001: p.659). This denotes that some Africans are on the other side of the colonizer. Overdependence is a habit which has rendered Africans education elites and leaders deny themselves the credit they deserve. Africans cannot keep their identity unless they refrain from over dependent on the westerners. These views formed the basis of this article which appreciates both forms of schooling values and highpoints their short comings. Consequently, advocates for relishing traits collective to human kind.

Scholars assert that Thiong'o is a figure of boldness in embracing black people traditional custom which remains desirably magnificent. Black people culture is crowned with creativity and liveliness. Nevertheless, the African educational values continue to be a paragon principally unexplored (Busia 1954). This infers that African values are treasure which reliable dynamic society can invest in. He advocates for treasure of dignity and integrity. These propositions form the foundation of this paper. A reading which examines the influence of colonial education on African form of education in narrative and character construction in the novel under investigation.

The study employed textual analysis of Thiong'o's *The River Between (1965)*. The researcher employed a qualitative method. Bryman (2006) speculates that qualitative research method gratifies the principle of exactness and transferability once the conclusions appropriate perspectives separate from the study condition. The results obtained were open ended and were analysed using non statistical methods of summarising. The results are valid in the sense that I assumed an active participation in critical and creative reading and interpretation of the novel before analysis. I acknowledged every source which gave insight to the article and collected data from published resources. I deduced Thiong'o's contrast of indigenous and Western educational aspects evidenced in *The River Between*, interpreted and enwrapped the relevancy of the novel to digital society.

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Depiction of African form of Education in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965)

Education is more than the transfer of knowledge; it is the shaping of character. Without ethics, learning risks becoming a tool of exploitation rather than a path to enlightenment. In a world driven by innovation and completion, the marriage between education and ethics is not optional-it is the compass that ensures knowledge serves humanity rather than undermines it. Indeed, to assume that Africa is a lawless society and that Africans are a group of primitive and barbaric people governed by barren cultures is not only misleading but also a denigration aimed at crown of Africans barbaric. In order for the colonizer to start and to effect such an influence on Africans, the westerners deployed underhand instruments of indoctrination and assimilation of western culture. The core business of the colonizer being to manipulate Africans morally and intellectually. Consequently, this has led to a persistent labelling of Africa as a dark continent and Africans as primitive beings close to nature. Gates and Henry (1992) echoes and affirms similar views in a rather sceptical mode that 'for the oppressor, mankind refers to the white man only, and that Africans are things' (p.1). Thiong'o presents an objective appraisal of an African education bountiful of educational values properly established and passed through orality. Indeed, Thiong'o demonstrates adequately that African schooling had knowledge system to preserve facts and wisdom and to discern truth and fallacy:

> A man rose in Makuyu, claimed that Gikuyu and Mumbi sojourned there with Murungu. On their way to Mukuru wa Gathanga, he said leadership had been left to Makuyu. Nobody believed him for it had been rumoured that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno. A small hill had grown out of soil on which they stood south of Kameno.(Thiong'o 1965: 1)

The above occurrence teaches the young generation that leaders are God chosen and should practice dignity and integrity. Consequently, it discouraged foul play and upheavals during and after governance succession among members of the society.

African schooling propagated values of kinship ties and friendship. This in turn brought harmonious coexistence in their day-to-day interaction. Thiong'o illustrates such values by use of boys symbolically representing the future. Thiong'o presents us with young Waiyaki prudently stopping a fight between his fellow herd boys:

> " Kamau and Kinuthia were now wrestling. "Cow" cried Kinuthia in pain. "Hyena!" cried Kamau. "Please stop this, Kamau". "Didn't we swear that we of the hills were comrades?" "Kamau?" He quickly looked up and met the burning eyes of Waiyaki gazing at him, meekly he obeyed the unspoken command." (Thiong'o 1965: 4)

This episode depicts when young generation are reminded of comradeship values they obey without coercion and peace is achieved. To borrow from Blandier (1970), Thiong'o provides a 'platform for an incisive exploration of African schooling richness in values' (p.23). Thiong'o's choice of young boys, and their isolation from parents but acting responsibly is meant to heighten the value of brotherhood. This implies that if all human societies conduct themselves with integrity, brotherly love and amicable ways of problem-solving will be arrived at while chaos and unrests will extinct. Indeed, African schooling values have been highlighted as propagating a harmonious co-existence, respect for agreements and brotherhood.

The text validates that African form of schooling imparted integrity to its trainees. It trained young people not to give information to an outsider since that might benefit the enemy and use it against them. This value was meant to safeguard their security and peace in their territories. Thiong'o affirms this when he asserts that "The ancient hills and ridges were the heart and soul of the land. They kept the tribe's magic and rituals, pure and intact. Sometimes they fought. But that was amongst themselves and no outsider need ever know. To the stranger, they kept dumb" (p.3). The reservation protected them from tribal clashes for it blocked leeway which could enable their foes to manoeuvre and harm them. The young generation were taught through orality, 'values of hard work and virtues of responsible behaviour and adulthood' (Busia 1954: p.196). Personal responsibility, dignity, and integrity of every member of society and respect and equity were valued. Thiong'o employs an oral narrative to teach the children and stress on the above values:

> Demi na Mathathi were giants of the tribe. They had lived a long way back, at the beginning of time. They cut down trees and cleared the dense forest for cultivation. They owned many cattle, sheep and goats. One day a boy from Koina told Waiyaki he could not be Demi because was not circumcised. But he proved it, see if I don't cut down that tree. He began to cut it with his strength and the stick of the axe fell into pieces. Other boys following his example went on cutting down trees and clearing forest ready for cultivation just like Demi na Mathathi. (Thiong'o 1965:10).

This episode depicts title acquisition by hard work and merit and not by favouritism or imposition as opposed to western educated elites' practices which has bend values of education. Indeed, majority of the so called educated elites acquire titles and high ranks depending on one's social networking regardless of competence provided one gives kickbacks. The right that people ought to deliver in their areas of work has been substituted with the privileges of battering the recruiter's hands or having tall relatives and godfathers as mediators.

African schooling propagated for values of faith. They embraced African traditional faith. This faith equipped its trainees with morals. Respect for elders, parents, family members and above all integrity for human beings. Nevertheless, when westerners established their schools they fabricated African true faith and taught African educated elites against it. They attributed Black people's faith with paganism, idolatry, barrenness and preached passionately against it. Seemingly, some educated elites assimilated Western schooling Christianity but abused it to serve their purpose.

African schooling had shortcomings such as initiation practices which varied from one tribe and locality to another. Thiong'o has depicted female genital mutilation as one of the inadequacies of this schooling. This cultural practice though founded with the motive of countering a problem was obnoxious. Kulet (2008) agrees with the above assertions when she points that 'it was the shame and anger, lewd teasing and provocative posturing by Ilarinkoi warriors that made African women initiate female genital mutilation to curtail the worthless predators who targeted to prey upon them' (p.90). Definitely, women themselves invented female genital mutilation. However, it was with the motive of the

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betterment and welfare of themselves and humanity. Nevertheless, Thiong'o does not forgive such women and society by extension for their limited exposure and ignorance of repercussions of such practices. He vehemently, condemns and presents such practices as dangerous and demeaning to women. Judged by the standards of modernity, it is a violation of human rights. I agree with Bewaji's (2004) preposition that 'human society ought to be dynamic and not static' hence, culture can always be revised depending on the need of the consumer (p.400). Thiong'o by exploring of his character Muthoni's succumb to death after initiation, explicitly underscores the danger of such practices as not only deadly but disgrace to any civilized society.

Representation of Western form of Education in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965)

Education equips individuals with knowledge, but values gives that knowledge direction. The true test of any education system is not just what people know, but how they choose to use it**.** Thiong'o challenges Western schooling placement of bond of contention on the only negative aspects of African schooling. It is significant to give credit where it deserves and to criticize where necessary. Westerners directed their attention to the flaws of African schooling with an aim of exploitation. The author shifts our attention to the indigenous education being challenged by the invasion of the colonizer. The westerners had their schooling which was complex though good but they manipulated it to exploit Africans. Indeed, they came clothed with 'enlightenment and civilization of Africans technologically and scientifically' (Harrow 1994: p. 20). Conversely, this was a guise to enable them to build a rapport with the locals. To the hospitable natives' dismay, it was only after the westerners settled down when they removed the sheep veneers and showed their true colours of enslaving and exploiting indigenes. Education leitmotif in the succeeding episodes is enunciated about the 'concept that the black people leaders find themselves in a sociological and pecuniary condition not of their own instructive creation factually' (Blandier 1970: p. 8). As per most of the black people white man's schooling implied an education of material plenary, joblessness, besides an obstructed ambition predominantly for unschooled Africans.

Thiong'o presents the intruder's continued moral, physical, religious and intellectual abuse in the guise of evolution education. The author presents Western schooling as an intrinsic extension of British imperialism with an aim of oppressing and morally corrupting Kenyans. African Leaders whose peace and serenity of the community is bestowed on by the ancestors sought for a solution to restore the peace. However, Africans did not mean to abandon their schooling values. Makombe in Ranger (1985) noted that 'I will be pleased to have good infrastructures like good roads and railways but I will remain the Makombe my fathers have been' (p.55). This denotes that Africans were not after western integration but rather after knowledge and economic expansion. They sought to broaden their intellectual capacity to view the world from the westerners' perspective. However, Thiong'o presents westerners exploiting the natives' fertile land for their plantations. "Chege had told the people of the ridges what had happened in Murang'a. He told them of the tumu tumu, Gikuyu, Limuru and Kijabe butterflies. "They are there, beyond the ridges, putting up many houses and some taking land" (p.7). Arguably, Westerners' grabbed natives land, forced them to work on the settlers' plantations but paid them wages.

Thiong'o further exemplifies the manipulations and guise of the trainers of Western schooling. Reverend Livingstone enticed and indoctrinated Joshua to preach against African religion and threatened the unconverted Africans about fire and hell in Kameno and Makuyu. Thus, he became his mediator between hypothetical ideal values of Western schooling and the supposed atheists, (Africans). That way he dismissed them as pagans and threatened them about hell and fire. Seemingly, Joshua is a demi-god of Reverend Livingstone' devious schooling traits. He is like the proverbial stupid pig which is fried using its own fat. The same mechanism of employing Africans as middlemen necessitated white man to collect taxes and to capture slaves for manpower overseas in Kenya. West (1992) rebounds the same when he affirms that 'a text reveals struggles and believes that persist to this day' (p.703). Subsequently, the novel depicts Africans as antagonized with the stalemate of which way to choose. I believe that Africans, send their sons' to the white man's schools to liberate their societies from oppression. "When the time came Waiyaki vanished without the knowledge of any but his father" (p.21). The content of the plot justifies this desire of Waiyaki to exercise his own choice in what initiates rescuing his people from the westerners' abuse.

Western education was discriminative of knowledge impartation. Thiong'o presents us with Waiyaki not reporting back to Siriana school due to his ailing father. However, he hoped for his recovery and re-join as soon as his father's condition stabilized. Unluckily, his dream of acquisition of the white man's education was short lived. Reverend Livingstone gets disconcerted by the reality that African students were not getting brainwashed at the rate he had expected which meant dream differed. Accordingly, he surrendered expelled hem from school. Thiong'o ridicules him for lack of ethics in dismissing African students from his school in the basis of their cultural practices yet is an educationist:

> It was while he was there that he heard the news. The children of those who defiled the laws of the church and continued with tribal customs would have to leave Siriana. And no child of a pagan would again be allowed into school unless the child was a refugee. Even then the child would have to renounce circumcision. (Thiong'o 1965: 58)

This affirmation from a westerner's educator is despicable. There is no correlation between equipping a person with scientific skills and their belief or even rites of passage. This pronouncement makes it vivid that Western education was manipulated to implement Africans' ethical, bodily and intelligent abuse. Chandler (2014) makes this position indisputable but contemptuously when she affirms that "an essential facet of annexation be it national or conventional is dehumanization of the people so that the latter's domination is readily conceivable' (p.11). This implies that Europeans abused Africans' cordiality who hailed them in their Africa continent as brothers. I believe a society that invests in education without grounding it in ethics risks producing clever minds but empty hearts. Knowledge without moral responsibility is a dangerous weapon.

However, despite of the many flaws of the Western schooling and its negative impacts on Africans, it had values. It introduced Africans to 'literacy which enabled Africans to learn the history of other continents and their revolution' (Abiola and Gikandi 2004: p. 381). This understanding awakened them and catalysed strive for freedom. Through the formal learning in the white man schools,

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Africans attained international exposure. This in turn widened their scope and perspective of understanding the world around them. It thus brought diversity in knowledge and approach to issues. Professor Lambo, a psychiatrist and a medic agrees with these affirmations when he attests that a customary psychotherapy as adept on the black people continent offers noteworthy outcomes. Considerably, under no circumstances he censures the western education psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, his work at the World Health Organization recognized that a dualistic arrangement of therapeutic might supplement one another to benefit the patient (Department of Health,2008). Seemingly Africa owns an antique history of science and technology. Great philosophers studied in Africa, Egypt, Timbuktu and Ethiopia. I argue that African system of education greatly acclaims knowledge whether applied or pragmatic. In addition, Africans have contested favourably in the innovative sector. For instance, the Mpesa application that efficiently serves many organizations was invented by a Kenyan African university student.

Western schooling brought international language. African scholars read the world history of other continents which awakened them politically. This nous enabled Africans to communicate without limit. Accordingly, they wrote to tell their story. This awakening not just meant for Africans but all human being by extension that educated elites ought to shun prejudices. Thiong'o invites the same arousal to our societies. This implies prejudices should not divide educated elites, regardless of skin complexion which is the creator's divine will. Thiong'o proves the will to change fertile when his character Nyambura choose Waiyaki over her father due to his sincerity and broadness. "She held Waiyaki's hand and said what no other girl at that time would have dared to say. You are brave and I love you" (p.132). The novelist depicts Waiyaki and Nyambura's union as a bridge to social differences created by predispositions and stereotypes.

Conclusion

The River Between (1965) depicts the indulgence of social truth and therefore, constructs education differently. It demonstrates that knowledge and truth are based on social, historical or political facts which are contextual and constructed to varying degrees. Therefore, education is a carrier of moral values. Additionally, consequential value acquaintance should be germane to people and in their environment. The text demonstrates that any critique concerned with the subject of education cannot avoid the ordeal and tragedy that complemented the attainment of white man's education and the nuisance of European rule on the African continent. The text has validated that it can be reconnoitred outside the contradiction of blame game. The novel reveals significant variation in the two systems of education. It emphasizes that, African form of education had been produced outside the institutions of colonialism as evidenced by the existence of oral literature in the novel and had values.

Thiong'o illustrates that African schooling had authentic values of language, brotherhood, integrity, hospitality, respect for elders and unity of purpose. He also depicts that this schooling had its own flaws such as female genital mutilation. Fascinatingly, the version demonstrates the notion of depicting Western schooling as dominant for educational values the world over as depended upon influence. However, this does not mean that Western schooling did not have values. Though African continent is a cradle for formal learning and scientific invention from Timbuktu, Ethiopia and Egypt, Westerners scientific knowledge, literacy, alternative religion and medicine are values of Western schooling which cannot be overlooked. However, this does not make Africans forget the injustices their brothers' westerners subjected them to. Undeniably, Overt exploitation, slavery, oppression not to mention the inequality and classism, westerners propagated and elevated in African states. This inequality has remained concepts which Africans have continued to be defined with even up to the present. It has been retained through cultural, ethical, logical and personality venality. Hereafter, this makes discrimination of Africans a very operational tool. This has been camouflaged to the extent that Africans continue to believe what others define them instead of striving for their narrative. Consequently, the text demonstrates that Western education has misinformed Africans and has been employed as a means of white man's unrelenting domination and manipulation even up to date. I therefore, suggest that Africans should adapt revolution education which must be based on education pillars such as critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving. Accordingly, values obtained from educational knowledge must prepare education elites for a productive life in the future society. Indeed, should train them to avoid over dependency on westerners which attracts a disgrace to a rich continent like Africa. Africans should consider Net food importing card which fosters comparative advantage. This could rescue them from undesirable kickbacks which accompany donations, the worst of them being neo-colonialization. I believe that African leaders and educated elites who propagates the oppressor's orthodox ways must change their behaviour as well.

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