

Chapter # 32

AN AFROCENTRIC APPROACH TO ANALYSING LITERARY TEXT THROUGH AFRICAN VALUES IN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Literature and culture have an interlinked relationship, and prescribed literature texts have a fundamental role in ensuring that these coexist harmoniously. Centralising African Values in prescribed literature should be prioritised in South African classrooms, to achieve the nationally aspired decolonised approach to education. This paper explores the teaching of these African Values in prescribed literature, particularly short stories. This qualitative study uses textual analysis to generate data with the Afrocentric paradigm as the conceptual underpinning for the study. Reviere's (2001) Afrocentric canons show how African values can be taught. The paper presents the context, methodology and doctrinal underpinning of Afrocentrism before using Afrocentrism as a tool to analyse a text. We also look at the functions of texts for young adults to distinguish ideological purpose and as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values. The paper recommends that teachers and learners be conscious of these Afrocentric values and their impact on literary analysis in South African classrooms.

Keywords: Afrocentrism, African values, literary analysis, Afrocentric paradigm.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context Background and Doctrinal Underpinning

For centuries, African literature, through stories and folktales, educated generations about culture and societal systems. Colonization silenced the African voice, replacing it with Eurocentric perspectives in formal education. This shift alienated African learners and denied them a culturally relevant educational experience. In South Africa, calls for decolonization have grown, particularly in education, with political unrest since 2014/15 highlighting the absence of Afrocentric approaches in Higher and Basic Education. English curricula often perpetuate Eurocentric ideologies (Zulu, 2006), neglecting authentic African values essential for cultural enrichment. Afrocentric pedagogy offers a means to restore cultural authenticity and decolonize education. Mugambiwa (2021) argues that Afrocentricity helps reclaim African lived experiences, while Omolewa (2007) emphasizes its role in preserving the past and ensuring a sustainable future.

This study demonstrates Afrocentric analysis of prescribed literary texts in South African classrooms, focusing on five Afrocentric values—Ukweli, Kujitoea, Utulivu, Ujamaa, and Uhaki. Through a detailed analysis of a short story, the study illustrates how these values uncover African cultural perspectives and enhance pedagogical relevance. The findings provide recommendations for integrating Afrocentric methodologies into teaching, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers committed to promoting cultural authenticity and decolonizing education.

1.2. Scientific Approach

Studies by Asante (1991) and Mazama (2001) define Afrocentrism, a concept that underpins this research. Scholars acknowledge Asante (1991) as the father of Afrocentrism, which he defined as a belief system wherein African experiences are interpreted from the perspective of African people (p.171). Mazama (2001) describes this research approach and paradigm as a disciplinary environment arising out of a particular philosophical belief system characterized by a specific theoretical framing, methodology and principles inspired and denoted from the truths and perspectives of African people (p. 394). This understanding of Afrocentrism is used in this study to form its paradigm, methodology, and critical concept for exploring prescribed literature.

This understanding of Afrocentrism revealed the need to question prescribed literature about its compliance with Afrocentric principles and education. A study by Giddings (2001) found that the missing Afrocentric approach in the American curriculum created many problems for African American learners, who experienced frustration because the curriculum content did not accommodate them. Amongst some of the goals for an infused Afrocentric curriculum, Giddings (2001) found that an Afrocentric curriculum provided students of African origin with educational instructions to build a positive self-image because it employed practices aligned with their learning styles and helped build a positive self-image. Asante (1990) found that when teachers used an Afrocentric approach, African students did not question their own dignity when their people's stories were not understood from their African perspectives. These students saw themselves portrayed as subjects having agency instead of being the object of education, especially in literary texts where African students come to see themselves as integral participants and not as foreign seekers of knowledge.

1.3. African Values

According to Asante (1991), Reviere (2001) and Van Wyk (2014), five values are identifiable in Afrocentrism, namely, *Ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa* and *kujitoa*. These will be used as a tool for inquiry in this research. The values derived from Swahili relate to an African method of enquiry. These values, called canons, appear in many African fields of inquiry and disciplines, such as psychology, agriculture, social work, and Indigenous Knowledge education. These canons require considering the traditional beliefs and intentions of the partisan, philosophical, and community and stakeholders. They focus on methods for disseminating knowledge and how such knowledge is structured and applied to enable understanding and cultural relevance. Florian and Hawkins (2011) posit that the canons seek out layers of cultural subtext beyond what the literature reveals.

1.3.1. *Ukweli*

uKweli translates to “the truth or fact, that which is authentic to the people”. This is evidence that literary processes and practices are rooted in the knowledge of the community they serve. Van Wyk (2014) believes that engagement with the community is the sole determinant of what is learned from literature and how literature is mediated (p. 293). This means that the real-life experiences of the community members, which are real and true to them, become the standard for determining the literary needs of the community. *UKweli* raises the issue of the partisan nature of what truth is (Van Wyk, 2014). Afrocentrism does not advocate that the ‘truth’, as experienced by one member, has more validity than that experienced by another.

1.3.2. *Kujitoa*

Kujitoa, which is the harnessing of devotion and commitment, requires that literature prioritize how knowledge is organized and generated instead of emphasizing the need for dispassion (Van Wyk, 2014). She posits that this will reveal the hidden assumption in literature (p.293) and address how knowledge is structured and used.

1.3.3. *Utulivu*

Utulivu derives from the spirit of serenity, tranquillity, and harmony, values that have always been treasured and are functional in African societies (Reviere, 2001). In literary analysis, *Utulivu* requires that literature consciously avoid generating, amplifying or sustaining community disunity. Literature should aim to create and foster harmony and peaceful relations among community members. This value is embedded in a fundamental principle summarising the African view of humanity, namely Ubuntu, which is the acceptance that “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1979, p. 141). Kunene (1982) affirms that social cohesion is fundamental to African society and believes the earliest manifestation of civilization was establishing a supportive community collaborating with each other. *Utulivu* scrutinizes literature for its role in providing peaceful resolutions and advocating positive resolution of problems encountered. Historical and contemporary Eurocentric trends in literature have often cited literary creativity as the reason for leaving resolutions unattended with little consideration for communal problem-solving methods.

1.3.4. *Ujamaa*

Ujamaa translates to the disposition of brotherhood and collective advancement (Reviere, 2001). It gained popularity in Tanzania as a socio-economic policy after independence from Britain. In literature, it deals with the rejection of separating the generation of knowledge from its communal owners and literature creators. As Van Wyk (2014) believes, it presumes that literature is the well from which knowledge springs.

1.3.5. *Uhaki*

Uhaki entails that literature be fair, mindful and empathetic to the community it serves. *Uhaki* entails the process of literary justice, which suggests that literature should not discount the past and collective experience in its interpretation and response to the community it serves (Reviere, 2001). It also requires that the literature is not contributory to the detriment of any of its stakeholders (Van Wyk, 2014).

2. AFROCENTRISM AND THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

2.1. Cultural Values

Teaching literature can contribute positively to understanding the culture where the literature originates. Bredella and Haack (1988) believe that when one wants to understand a culture, one must adopt the ontological assumptions of the community and use their epistemology to understand what they believe and consider important. The encounter with an unknown culture can be a liberating experience, providing a new perspective for understanding oneself and one's community (Bredella & Haack, 1988, p. 4).

As Syndram (1991) asserts, literature is an aesthetically expressive medium with persuasive power to transmit cultural values and ideals. Bredella and Haack (1988) assert

that the study of literature entails investigating the basic values and beliefs of culture from different perspectives, and studying the narratology exposes the reader to other worlds and cultures, which will be experienced from alternative viewpoints.

2.2. Why we teach Literature

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the use of prescribed youth texts taught at the secondary school level to sensitize learners to Afrocentric values embedded in texts. Therefore, it is prudent to understand the functions of youth literary texts and why the study of literature is included in the curriculum.

Ghesquiere (1993) identifies three primary functions of the literary texts. There is a psychological function where the reader gains insight into his emotions and experiences. While appreciating the aesthetics of the literary work, the reader will also acquire language skills and develop his cognitive abilities. Of interest to this paper is the social function arising from engagement with the literary text. When we introduce the reader to the community that produces the text, we teach them socialization skills. Socialization occurs when the reader learns about the community's values, norms and prejudices portrayed in the text. The reading of literature transmits culture when the reader becomes aware of his rights, obligations and freedom in the context in which he exists. Therefore, an Afrocentric analysis of texts will transmit the African values mentioned above.

2.3. Afrocentrism and the Decolonizing of Literary Texts

Afrocentrism, an interdisciplinary approach, should be integrated into teaching, including literature (Oliver, 1998). Eurocentric paradigms have often misinterpreted Africana cultural realities, viewing them as deficient in culture, politics, and economics (Pellerin, 2012). Asante's (2009) concept of Afrocentrism offers an alternative framework for analyzing literature, positioning Africana people at the center of their historical and socio-political narratives. This perspective has gained traction in regions like America, the Caribbean, and Africa as a tool for addressing historical injustices and redefining African identity (Mkhabela, 2005). Colonized nations, including South Africa, have inadequately addressed the impacts of Western influence on education, particularly in literature. As advocated by Diop (1974) and Asante (2007), Afrocentric methodologies promote African agency by rewriting diaspora histories and rejecting Eurocentric hierarchies. Reviere (2001) asserts that Afrocentricity fosters liberating and rewarding interpretations for African people. This approach emphasizes "epistemological centeredness," where Africans become agents rather than objects of inquiry (Mazama, 2001, p.542). Afrocentrism organizes African experiences through shared cultural perceptions and rejects dogmatic distinctions, encouraging the integration of material and spiritual realities (Semmes, 1981).

As both a paradigm and methodology, Afrocentrism uncovers African values and scholarship in literature, offering a transformative lens for analyzing texts and promoting an authentic cultural identity.

3. EXAMPLE OF ANALYZING A TEXT FROM AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

The study employs Van's (2009) 4 elements of textual analysis to decipher the short story, which include plot, setting, character and themes. The plot was understood as a planned, logical series of events with a beginning, middle, and end. Usually, a short story has one plot, so it can be read in one sitting. The plot was studied in order to understand how the

author arranges events to develop the basic idea. The setting was understood as the Time and Location of the short story. When the study examined how the setting contributed to the short stories, it considered the geographical location, historical period, weather conditions, social conditions and the author's attempt at accurately recording the emotive atmosphere of the time. The characters were understood to be the beings that lived and thought in the short story to keep the action going. The study looked at who these characters were, their relationship and connection to each other, their worldviews, their ideas about themselves and others, and how they grew, changed and developed to influence the story. The study also focused on the story's central message and moral to understand the themes. This was done to understand the author's views on human nature.

To conduct an Afrocentric analysis of the short story, Van (2009) 4 elements of textual analysis integrated with Reviere's (2001) Afrocentric canons. The table below illustrates the intersectionality of both lenses in analyzing a short story:

Table 1.
Summary of the Afrocentric analysis lens applied in the short story.

	<i>uKweli</i>	<i>Kujitoea & Utulivu</i>	<i>uJamaa</i>	<i>uHaki</i>
Plot	Did the events in the plot offer the characters enough space to experience a truthful reality?	Was the rising conflict resolved in a manner that promoted harmony in the represented community?	Do the events in the story consider the aspired interest of the community?	Do the events in the story actively represent a search for justice? Does that particular justice serve the interest of the community?
Setting	What are the dimensions of the setting? Is this true for the community that is being represented in the story?	Was there any harmony during the time in which the story was set? How is this displayed?	Does the setting accurately portray the identity of the community in the short story?	Does the setting take into consideration the injustices and oppression of the community?
Characterisation	How true are the characters representation regarding the community they are in? How is this truth validated in the characters representation?	Did the characters actions towards themselves and the people around them create harmony in the community they are represented in?	What are the characters affiliation to the community they are represented in?	Does the character's growth and development highlight the search for communal justice?
Theme	Was the theme truthful to the setting? Was the theme explored an accurate depiction of what the community holds as truth?	What are the hidden inaccurate assumptions that present the community in a false inharmonious manner?	Does the theme represent the current social issues facing the community?	Do the themes in the short story prioritize the search for justice and fairness in the African community?

3.1.1. Summary of the Short Story

Sophia Zikode, the protagonist, faces misfortune with dark magic after migrating to Johannesburg for work. She falls for a married man, Elias, who leaves her, and later for Jonas, a foreigner. Insecure, she seeks help from a traditional doctor, receiving a potion that turns into a fortune snake. Advised to pass it to an unsuspecting person, Sophia eventually transfers it to Elias's mother at a train station. She then leaves for Malawi with Jonas, while Elias inherits the curse.

3.1.2. African Values and their Representation in the Short Story

All the Afrocentric canons were studied in this short story in each of the 4 elements to find the African Values present in the story and how they were represented. The following themes are a few examples that were noted:

a) *Ukweli*

Characterization

Sophia's characterization embodies Ukweli, or truth, as a naïve rural girl navigating urban life. Her lack of romantic experience reflects the cultural norms of her rural upbringing, where structured practices guide relationships. This truthful depiction highlights the emotional servitude common among women in such settings, authentically portraying Sophia's reality.

Before coming to work in the golden city, Sophia had never had a steady boyfriend. But one man remained her lover for longer than the others. His name was Elias Malina from Ermelo. He was the first man she met in Johannesburg and the only man she truly loved. So besotted was she with this man that she readily discarded any possessions or habits that Elias disliked.

Setting

Set in apartheid-era Johannesburg, the story reflects the reality of many Black South African women, like Sophia, who left rural homes to work as domestic workers for white families. During this period, 18% of women were in domestic work, with 80% being poorly educated Black South Africans (Dinkelman & Ranchod, 2012). Sophia's isolation represents this common experience, as her family is notably absent.

She worked in a Johannesburg suburb and lived in the servant's quarters attached to the white family's house. Before coming to work in the golden city, Sophia had never had a steady boyfriend.

Plot

The first conflict arises when Elias ends his relationship with Sophia, leaving her desperate and heartbroken. Isolated as a rural immigrant, Sophia's naivety and inexperience with love keep her fixated on Elias, whom she believes is her only chance at love. Meanwhile, Elias, familiar with urban life, easily moves on, knowing he has family support and other opportunities. This dynamic reflects Ukweli by truthfully depicting their contrasting backgrounds and reactions to the breakup. Studies have noted that rural-to-urban migration often exacerbates vulnerability in relationships, particularly for women, due to unfamiliar social norms and limited support systems (Posel & Casale, 2003).

One day, Sophia and Elias had a quarrel. Elias got up and walked out on her. A few days went by. A week. Sophia could bear it no longer. She phoned his place of employment and

asked to speak to him. A friend came to the phone and told the distraught woman that Elias had had enough of her. She never heard from him again.

Theme

A key theme reflecting Ukweli in the short story is the belief in the supernatural and its impact, as seen in Sophia and Jonas's unquestioning acceptance of the fortune snake's power. This reflects a truthful depiction of African communities, where spirituality, benefiting the collective, is distinct from dark magic, often associated with individualistic harm. Such cultural frameworks highlight the communal understanding of supernatural forces in African societies (Mbiti, 1979).

b) Kujitoo & Utulivu

Characterization

Sheila, a supportive neighbour, embodies the African values of Kujitoo and Utulivu by fostering harmony and Ubuntu. When Sophia and Jonas encounter the fortune snake, Sheila offers refuge and comfort, continuously supporting Sophia in resolving the issue. Her actions underscore how African communities rely on collective support during crises, reflecting the spirit of Ubuntu as described by Mangena (2016).

They ran to a neighbour's house and knocked on the door of the servant's compound. Sophia's friend Sheila opened up. Quickly, they told Sheila what had happened. She gave them both some clothes for the sake of warmth and decency. Sheila's own boyfriend had left a coat in her room, and she gave it to Jonas. Then, the threesome went back to Sophia's room.

Sophia and Jonas decided to visit a traditional doctor for advice. They chose a man who lived a few streets away. Sheila accompanied them...

Setting

Sophia's encounter with the police highlights a lack of Kujitoo and Utulivu, reflecting the disharmony of apartheid suburbia. African people were restricted from being in suburban areas at night without permits, limiting their freedom and enforcing segregation. This systemic control, aimed at minimizing contact with white communities, underscored the oppressive disharmony of the setting (Dubow, 1995).

A few police cars patrolled the affluent suburb. Probably because of the high rate of 'housebreaking,' she thought to herself. There were two policemen in the van. 'What are you doing here?' he demanded. 'I'm waiting for a taxi,' said Sophia. 'I'm going to the station'. She was surprised that her voice sounded so steady. 'We don't want to find you here when we come back,' warned the policeman, eyeing the suitcase. The van pulled away slowly.

Plot

Sophia's interaction with the taxi driver highlights a lack of harmony, as he persistently questions her suitcase's contents, follows her, and publicly humiliates her. This contrasts with the African cultural value of supporting women in distress. Understanding such dynamics requires recognizing cultural practices that privilege empathy and support for vulnerable women (Maposa, Muriuki, Moss, & Kpebo, 2016).

'Hey, you girl! Where do you think you are going?' it was the voice of the taxi driver. She stopped dead in her tracks but did not turn around. She felt a lump in her throat, and tears

began to roll down her cheeks. She shook with anger. Suddenly she turned around and screamed at the man. 'What do you want from me!' 'You are running away from something, and you are trying to cover your tracks,' said the taxi driver smugly.

Theme

The values of Kujitoa and Utulivu are reflected in the theme of harmony for some characters. Sophia's journey, marked by struggles with love, loss, and the fortune snake, concludes with her finding peace. She comes to terms with her past, let's go of Elias, and starts a harmonious new life in Malawi, free from the curse of the Mamlambo snake.

The plane took off, and the crowds waved cheerfully. Sophia felt it was taking her away from the monster that had terrified her a few weeks ago...

c) uJamaa

Characterization

Sophia's character reflects uJamaa, emphasizing community participation and Ubuntu, though it also highlights cultural contradictions. Traditionally, African women are not obligated to submit to unmarried men, as marriage formalizes male leadership in households. Sophia's submission to Elias, a married man, deviates from cultural norms, illustrating the dissonance between rural values and urban relationships. Such cultural clashes often lead to unfavourable outcomes (Varga, 1997)

So besotted was she with this man that she readily discarded any possessions or habits that Elias disliked

Setting

The lack of uJamaa is evident in the short story's focus on the fortune snake, a practice taboo in African culture. Dark magic, often associated with selfish motives, contrasts with communal African values. The rise of practices like fortune snakes emerged during colonization, as segregation and poverty led some to seek quick wealth through harmful means. Witchcraft, distinct from sorcery, often exploited cultural vulnerabilities in urban settings (Middleton & Winter, 1963; Harwood, 1970)

Mamlambo is a kind of snake that brings fortune to anyone who accommodates it. One's money multiplies incredibly. This snake is available from traditional doctors who provide instructions regarding its exploitation. Certain necessities are to be sacrificed in order to maintain it. Sometimes, you may have to sacrifice your own children or go without a car or clothes. It all depends on the instructions of the doctor concerned

Plot

The plot highlights uJamaa through the concept of a community tribunal, where conflicts are judged collectively by elders. Such systems aim to resolve disputes harmoniously, reflecting African values of communal justice. However, in the story, the taxi driver wrongly involves the community, and the tribunal fails, necessitating police intervention. This underscores the erosion of traditional conflict resolution practices, as Kariuki (2015) noted, who emphasizes elders' enduring role in African societies for conflict prevention and resolution.

'Off you go then, before I arrest you for public disturbance'. He waved the man off. Then he turned to Sophia. 'My child,' the policeman said kindly, 'go where you are going. This rascal has no business to interfere in your affairs'. Relieved, Sophia picked up her suitcase and thanked the policeman.

Theme

A key theme in the short story is how characters' actions influence each other and the community. The value of uJamaa is evident as characters face challenges and strive to correct mistakes impacting the community. Their consequences highlight the importance of practicing Ubuntu and adhering to communal aspirations, as deviations result in significant repercussions.

d) uHaki

Characterization

The value of uhaki, or justice, highlights the lack of communal justice in the story, as seen in the characters' European names. During apartheid, African workers were stripped of their names and identities to suit white employers. Many named their children European names to secure future employment, erasing cultural connections. This historical injustice profoundly impacted African identity, reflecting the psychological toll of colonial oppression (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Sophia, Elias, Jonas, Sheila

Setting

Most of the African characters in the short story are represented as rural immigrants who came to Johannesburg to find work. This shows the value of uHaki because it shows past injustices. The Apartheid system made it impossible for African men to feed their families while still living in rural areas. When the government confiscated their livestock and commodities, it forced African men to relocate to the city and provide cheap labour to mines and homes of white people.

*Before coming to work in the golden city, Sophia had never...
His name was Elias Malina from Ermelo..*

Plot

Sophia shows a lack of uHaki in her conduct. The traditional doctor advised her to give the snake to any unsuspecting person she would meet. Old people are placed on a high pedestal in the African community. The community works to preserve, nurture, protect and care for the elders. Therefore, Sophia should not have given the snake to the old lady because this is taking advantage of her elderly, caring nature.

The conversation was very easy with this friendly old lady. As they spoke, more and more people spilled on the platform. Then Sophia made her decision. 'Gogo, will you look after my suitcase while I go to the shop?' 'I won't be long'

Theme

The short story takes us through how fortune favours the brave. Nonetheless, uHaki is shown in the theme of the Short in the conclusion of every character. Throughout the story, the characters do different things for themselves and the community. Uhaki is seen in how destiny and karma play out for each character. Justice is served for all the work that each character does.

4. CONCLUSION

This study employed Reviere's (2001) Afrocentric canons—Ukweli, uHaki, uJamaa, Kujitoea, and utulivu—to explore African values within the literature. While these principles have been applied in various disciplines, their use in literary analysis remains rare. The findings reveal that African values are deeply embedded in the story analysed, highlighting their significance in literature and daily life. However, fully harnessing these values requires deliberate pedagogical strategies and resources.

The study recommends prioritizing Afrocentric approaches in literature education, including curriculum reforms and developing teaching methods emphasizing African values. Future research should focus on integrating these values into classroom practices and revising educational policies to support an Afrocentric agenda. Addressing this gap is essential for fostering a more inclusive and culturally reflective approach to literature studies.

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An Afrocentric Approach to Analysing Literary Text Through African Values in English First
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