

A Cause for Redefining Coming of Age Stories in African Literature: Problems between Educational Aims and Social, Political, and Economic Values in African Societies

Sonja R. Darlington (darling@beloit.edu), Dept. of Education, [Beloit College](#)

African stories that might be described as "Adolescent or Young Adult Literature" by Western readers are far more accurately grouped as "Coming of Age" stories for other readers, like myself, who have read African works of fiction between 1954 and 1999. After examining more than thirty texts from this period, it seems inappropriate to use the term "Adolescent Literature" for any of these. First, the term "adolescence" has been, and continues to be, an ambiguous term which tries to identify an age-specific group according to its physical, psychological, social, economic, and political attributes. Second, as a category, Adolescent Literature is rejected by many literary theorists and librarians, and in its stead, they recommend calling the genre "Young Adult Literature." Or, some even lobby for more categorization to describe this elongated development period. In general, what distinguishes these stories from others is not the age of their characters or their narrator, but that they follow the lives of individuals who are in the process of becoming adults.

Third, and most importantly, Adolescent Literature does not describe the African experience told by authors writing between the 1950s to the 1990s, when numerous English speaking readers were first able to read literature from Africa. A poignant incident in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* hints at the gaping difference between Western views of adolescence and the complexity of coming of age in Africa. The narrator explains that his boyhood friend in Standard Five, whom he calls Aboliga the Frog for his large eyes, brought a book of "freaks and oddities" to school to show his friends his favorite among them. Curiously, what the boys saw was a picture of an old manchild. As Armah writes,

The picture Aboliga the Frog showed us was of the manchild in its gray old age, completely old in everything save the smallness of its size, a thing that deepened the element of the grotesque. The manchild looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly decayed, than any ordinary old man could ever have looked. . . It had been born with all the features of a human baby, but within seven years it had completed the cycle from babyhood to infancy to youth, to maturity and old age, and in its seventh year it had died a natural death. (63)

Here in this passage, according to Armah's sensibilities, childhood advances almost immediately into events associated with adulthood: loveless marriage, war, broken dreams, corrupt government, disease, and multiple deaths. While the "manchild" may be descriptive, it is also symbolic of the difference in perception for those who do not see this time as a separate stage with unique events; but rather, as a short, undifferentiated life cycle. On another symbolic level, the manchild, who begins and ends life in a brief seven years, represents countries like Ghana, which come of age in too short a time and destabilize.

Among the novels about coming of age a variety of tales emerge, but all of them to some degree present experiences of initiation, socialization, and education into adulthood. While they vary

widely in how these experiences are presented, they vary little in the overall project of explaining the complex process of moving from child to adult. A short list of these African literary texts might look as follows:

Abrahams, Peter	<u>Mine Boy</u> and <u>Tell Freedom</u>
Aidoo, Beverley	<u>Our Sister Killjoy</u> and <u>Changes</u>
Alkali, Zahnab	<u>The Stillborn</u>
Armah, Ayi Kwei	<u>The Beautiful Ones Not Yet Born</u>
Ba, Miriama Ba	<u>Scarlet Song</u>
Beti, Mongo	<u>The Poor Christ of Bomba</u> <u>Mission to Kala</u>
Brink, Andre	<u>Instant in the Wind</u>
Dangarembga, Tsitsi	<u>Nervous Conditions</u>
Djebar, Assia	<u>A sister to Scheherezade</u> <u>Fantasia: Algerian Cavalcade</u>
El Saadawi, Nawal	<u>Woman at Point Zero</u>
Emecheta, Buchi	<u>Slave Girl</u> <u>Bride Price</u> <u>Double Yoke</u>
Gordimer, Nadine	<u>My Son's Story</u>
Jordon, A.C.	<u>Wrath of the Ancestors</u>
Farah, Nuruddin	<u>Maps</u>
Head, Bessie Head	<u>When Rain Clouds Gather</u> <u>Maru</u>
Kane, Hamidou	<u>Ambiguous Adventures</u>
Karodia, Farida	<u>A Shattering of Silence</u>
Mathabane, Mark	<u>Kafir Boy</u>
Bloke Modisane's	<u>Blame Me On History</u>
Mofolo, Mark	<u>Chaka</u>
Mphahlele, Ezekiel	<u>Down Second Avenue</u>
Okri, Ben	<u>Famished Road</u> <u>Stars of the New Curfew</u>

Oyono, Mongo	<u>Houseboy</u>
Salih, Tayeb	<u>Season of Migration to the North</u>
	<u>A Grain of Wheat</u>
Ngugi wa Thiongo	<u>Matigari</u>
	<u>The River Between</u>
	<u>Weep, Not, Child</u>
Saro-Wiwa, Ken	<u>Sozaboy</u>
Soyinka, Wole	<u>Ake</u>
Warner-Vieryra, M.	<u>Juletane</u>
Yacine, Kateb	<u>Nedjema</u>
Zezeza, Tiyambe	<u>Smouldering Charcoal</u>

Whether the young protagonist is the central character in these texts, whether the narrator speaks from a young person's point of view, or whether the process from childhood to adulthood is embedded into an adult's perspective does, indeed, challenge the extent to which these novels can be considered coming of age stories. But, this discussion is better left to another paper. The purpose here is to argue that these stories describe a prominent set of experiences, which can be explored through the conflicts between educational aims and the social, cultural, political, and economic values of African societies. Book after book, story upon story, evokes the tensions felt within and among young people who come of age through deeply conflicting educational experiences. Kenyan born writer, Atsango Chesoni, identifies these tensions in a poem entitled "A Coming of Age Poem, a Story Untold" about Sophia a girlchild whose dreams for an education are dashed by a schoolmaster. Her grave error, he claims, is that she wants to become a butterfly before a cocoon (202).

Davies' Transnational Paradigm

Taken as a whole, these experiences can be examined through what Carole Boyce Davies calls a transnational paradigm, which "pursue[s] and account[s] for a range of relations of African peoples internationally as they interact with a variety of cultural spaces" (106). Davies supports looking at literature using a polycentric perspective that does not emanate from a single center nor function to privilege some experience and marginalize others. She opposes unicentricity, for its essentializing characteristics as in Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism, and also in buzz words such as multiculturalism, diversity and pluralism. The strength of her paradigm lies in its assertion of "transcultural black presences" that are located in multiple locations and can be attached to a variety of other cultural identities and not fixed with any single center (105). By using her construct with coming of age novels, she helps readers identify the same arguments in fiction as those presented by social, cultural, political, and economic theorists who challenge particular essentializing positions that undercut the ability for African peoples to define themselves and their society.

In this paper, attention will be given to how African literary texts about and for young people can

be read to decenter unicentricity. And can, as Davies demands, "speak to. . . the consistent reproduction of different modes of being in the world. Rather than a giant, monolithic, traditional African culture, then we can assert multiple, transcultural presences within and without Africa. Thus, crosscultural, transnational discourses are also 'transformational' . . . [and] central to Diaspora" (106). Specifically, then, the discourse among the social scientists, such as Catherine Odora; literary critics, such as Pauline Ada Uwakwek; physicists such as Vandana Shiva; and, grassroots activists, such as Gustava Esteva, strengthen the possibility for multiple modes of being and becoming. And, their discourse becomes the means by which to challenge the dominant, unicentric view that western educational goals are synonymous with the goals of various transnational black presences. That the place of conflict should be focused on African coming of age stories seems particularly appropriate, given that so many African writers struggle with the so-called benefits of western education.

A Critique of Education: Dangarembga and Emecheta

At issue for the theorists and activists Davies, Uwakwek, Odora, Shiva, and Esteva, as well as the coming of age novelists Armah, Dangarembga, Emecheta, Laye, and Nwapa is the conflict between western theories and practices in education and various African traditions and cultures. For example, in examining the Bildungsroman, Pauline Ada Uwakwek, in "Carving a Niche: Visions of Gendered Childhood", makes the point that central to the Bildungsroman is the quest for education which for African females has emerged only since the 70s, due to an influx of women's writing. Until then, she maintains, men wrote about explorations from their perspective and females were relegated to tangential roles in the private and domestic sphere. Her article focuses on gender-identity issues in novels such as Emecheta's The Bride Price and Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and suggests that the ultimate goal of both novels is to describe the onset of womanhood first through menstruation and then socialization into marriage. However, in addition to her gender analysis, Uwakwek's critique of women's rites of passage, underscores how African women learn to believe that education helps them challenge patriarchy, improves their status (but not necessarily locally), and releases them from certain traditional restrictions.

From 1954 to 1999, many African women novelists describe the inability for women to become educated and develop their potential (social/cultural) beyond the primary grades. One of the main reasons these writers give for this predicament, is the tradition within families to promote education for males and to discourage equivalent educational opportunities for females. The 1988 text by the Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga, examines the difficulties Tambudzai, the female protagonist, has in comparison to her older brother, Nhamo, who revels in his privileged position over the rest of his family. The novel opens with the very startling sentiment by Tambudzai, who says, "I was not sorry when my brother died." In the second and third sentences of the book, she notes that she will not apologize for her callousness or for her lack of feeling. This inequity in education, over which she is very angry and, therefore, refuses to grieve when her brother dies, is as her father tells her, "the same everywhere." The depths of Tambudzai's resentment for her brother is difficult to understand, given the prominence relationships assume within the structure of many African societies. Yet, the author, Dangarembga, begins her novel with this unusually venomous tone from a young thirteen year-old girl.

Other main characters in Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions do not develop their potential (social/cultural capital), despite the fact that they have become educated. One, is Nyasha, Tambuzai's best friend, who has been educated in England and clashes with her father over the freedoms she has experienced while abroad. Her struggle to convince her father of the right to her own choices eventually leads her to feeling suffocated and trapped between European and African worldviews. As she wrestles with conflicting perspectives, Nyasha becomes physically and spiritually ill. She is on the brink of death at the conclusion of the story. The other educated, yet, disempowered female is Maiguru who acquiesces to her husband on every occasion. She appears as a powerless victim when she interacts with her husband, Babamukuru, and his family. Seen through Nyasha's eyes, her mother lives in a kind of servitude, which is unbecoming to a woman of her status and education. As a text which deals explicitly with women's potential (social/cultural capital), Nervous Conditions represents the complex struggle between the aims of education, as seen through the dominant western perspective, and power derived-including that of the patriarchy--from indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions in the "communal lands that surround Umtali" (2).

Emechta's The Bride Price, written eleven years earlier, in 1976, deals even more critically with women's issues of potentiality. Akunna the thirteen year-old protagonist learns very early about the struggle between education and her life in Lagos and Iboza. For example, she realizes that questions are unbecoming for a young girl (27), girls are supposed to demonstrate more emotions than men (30), rich traders keep mistresses (61), educated girls fetch more of a bride price (75), a girl who has had sexual adventures is never respected in the home (84), a woman who menstruates cannot go to the stream nor go to the house of a man with the title of "Eze" or "Alo" (93), young women are often married off to men who could be their fathers (97), and a girl from a good family cannot marry the descendant of a slave or she will die in childbirth (110). As Akunna's story unfolds, she decides that in addition to all the indignities that girls endure, one also has to speak one's mind. Following her near rape by Okoboshi, Akunna stands up for herself and fights for her honor. "This [is] going to be the deciding moment of her existence" (136). By lying and arguing that she is not a virgin, Akunna tricks her would-be rapist and is returned to her future husband, Chike. However, even this well-intentioned youth assumes, after several unsuccessful attempts at lovemaking, that he is not Akunna's first sexual encounter. Poignantly, the belief that if a woman's bride price is not paid, she will die at childbirth, is reinforced by Akunna's death when baby "Joy" is born.

Even though Akunna has some very harsh lessons to learn in her transition to womanhood, she also learns to appreciate aspects of her cultural heritage. For example, some of Akunna's earliest childhood memories include her parents telling stories with philosophy lessons and call-and-response songs about Iboza. She is captivated by the life of her ancestors and learns about them eagerly. In her husband, Chike, she uncovers a teacher who, like her is an outcast. His ancestors are slaves and despite the prosperity of his family, according to the Iboza tradition, he cannot become a chief. Chike teaches Akunna that this culture seem[s] to be gaining ground, so if you do not want trouble for yourself or your family, you abided by the laws of the white man." (87). Yet, despite the white man's seemingly tight rule over Nigeria, as a fatherless girl from a good family within the Iboza tradition, marrying "a descendant of a slave [is] an abomination, ife, alu" (111). All these intricate cultural beliefs and stories, some of which absolutely delight her, are foregrounded by the writer, Emechta.

The trap within which the lovers, Chike and Akunna, find themselves is strewn with many significant paradoxes. First, they are able to marry, because the law in Ibuza is based on English justice and the Ofulues who represent their adversaries, and a would-be husband, loose their case. However, traditional Ibuza tradition ultimately prevails when, as forecast, Akunna dies in childbirth. Second, another paradox lies in the Chieke's accepting a position with an oil company in Ughelli which draws him further away from his sense of place and tradition. Third, the greatest paradox is revealed to readers when they finally know all of the injustices against women, such as the frequent beatings of Ibuza women by their husbands, and they realize that that Chike, who seems beyond these kinds of actions, still wrestles with his belief that Akunna is not a virgin. And, Akunna still sees the purpose of sexuality as a means resides in these various paradoxes, because they bring together what Davies calls "a range of relations in a variety of cultural spaces." Through a reliable narrator, who is also omniscient, Emecheta tells the story of Akunna's bride price from a variety of perspectives without being drawn into the essentializing position, which tries to control everything. Rather, power, as seen through the characters' social exchanges, economic positions, political roles, and cultural experiences is dispersed into many different places.

At the conclusion of the story, readers may agree with Uwakwek that Akunna's tragic dilemma is her socialization into marriage, but they also have to contend with the Ibuza prophecy, which has come true. And, although Akunna suffers a great deal through her uncle's refusal to pay her bride price, she is also indebted to the richness of her birthright within the Ibuza tradition. As such, readers are confronted with a beautifully textured story, which teaches about Ibuza traditions: marriage, funerals, political roles, eating habits, menstrual rites, and storytelling, etc. This local knowledge presents a powerful contrast to English culture, which often relegates this local knowledge to the level of superstition, primitivism, and barbarism. On the one hand, even Emecheta adds to this perspective by presenting Akunna's position so artfully that many readers are caught bemoaning Akunna's death at the expense of valuing the traditions and various knowledges that her people, the Ibuza are not able to maintain. On the other hand, these same readers do not realize that Emecheta has destroyed a myth about western education that as Uwakwek argues, encourages African women to believe in education as a cure for the cruelties of patriarchy, low social status, and unfair traditions.

A critique of African women and education, parallel to the coming of age stories by Dangarembga and Emecheta can be found in Catherine Odora's Master Paper, "Educating African Girls in a Context of Patriarchy and Transformation." According to Odora, social and cultural issues related to education pose a danger for non-western cultural and knowledge constructs. Her study suggests five areas of concern: 1). the extension of western domination over others; 2). the institutionalization of the malaise of xenophilia; 3). the distortion of the socializing role of mother; 4). the perversion of the social control of reality for non-westerners; and 5). the subjugation of indigenous knowledge, indigenous learning styles, and indigenous environmental knowledge. In her study, Odora suggests that the starting point for disentangling these issues in education begins with "the centrality of human agency, intellectual and moral reform, as well as reconstitution and insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (ii). Her concerns, regarding education from a social science perspective, can be easily upheld as significant areas of inquiry for literature in as much as the five areas of concern are deeply embedded into the coming of age stories in the five decades being examined in this paper.

An Alternative Education: Indigenous Knowledge in Laye's Dark Child

For example, a text often critiqued for its idyllic childhood perspective and its structural deficiencies is Camara Laye's *The Dark Child*. Like G.N. Marete, some critics argue that Laye's weakness lies in the non-confrontational development from child to adult within the text, so that its narrative appears to be a presentation of nostalgia. As Marete notes "characters (except for the narrator), landscape and the entire world of the novel remain almost static" (95). Yet, from another perspective, such as Odora's, Laye's novel confronts many of her concerns and addresses how to reconstitute subjugated knowledge. In Chapter One, Laye explains the spiritual power to which his ancestors and his father subscribe. In Chapter Two, Laye describes in lyrical detail the craft of goldsmithing practiced by the father. In Chapter Three, Laye playfully elaborates on the games young adults engage in the tiny village of Tindican, French Guinea. In Chapter Four Laye portrays the working traditions during rice harvest in his community. In Chapter Five, Laye examines the magician-like gifts of his mother. In Chapter Six, Laye elaborates on his French schooling. In Chapter Seven, he tells about the magnificent ceremony of lions, a coming of age ritual for young men. In Chapter Eight, he gives details of the circumcision rite, which as he says in the first sentence is "a really dangerous ordeal, and not game" (111).

In Chapters Nine through Twelve, only one-third of the book, Laye proceeds to move away from the indigenous knowledges he describes to the confrontation of western ways which threaten the survival of this knowledge and way of life. With Odora's conclusions in mind, his text stands as one of the few early texts in African Literature which values indigenous knowledge enough so that it becomes immortalized in a non-oral tradition. Laye's school years at a technical college, known as Ecole George Poiret, are peppered with insights into his own conflict between education and his earliest experiences. He misses his little hut, his family and friends; he develops an ulcer at school and endures the school year as it "passed slowly, very slowly" (155). For the whole three years of school, time away from Kouroussa was an exile. Following the exams at Conakry, Laye is invited to go to France to finish his studies. His father's attitudes and feelings, which suggest that he is in favor of this new development, are contrasted with his mother's who resists this new educational opportunity and weeps at the loss of her son. As Laye writes, "All the time she had been talking and fighting against them she must have been watching the wheels going round and round . . ." (186). These wheels she imagines turning are the forward momentum of another culture. She angrily describes their menacing ways, "Those people are never satisfied. They want to have everything. As soon as they set eyes on something they want it for themselves" (186).

Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Economic Power: Nwapa's Efurú

Among the well-known critiques of lost knowledge, is Vandana Shiva's Monocultures of the Mind. Her 1993 text on the risks of biotechnology for the Third World is a classic among many environmentalists and educational leaders alike. Her theoretical background as a physicist has allowed her to become a foremost critic on environmental dangers to local knowledge systems. She is adamantly against societies, which are not "being modeled on the forest as is the case of forest cultures," and model themselves after the assembly lines in the factory (19). Her stance evokes memories of more organic, cultural and bio diverse communities within the Western Hemisphere in earlier times and evokes strong passions among those individuals who still try to maintain their diversity in the Eastern Hemisphere. Shiva's argument runs as follows: first, local

knowledge is made to disappear by negating it; second, the dominant systems of knowledge argue their superiority over localized traditions; and third, local knowledge is delegitimized through low status adjectives such as primitive and unscientific. Environmentally, monocultures replace diverse agricultures and biotechnology replaces local traditions of growing foods.

Many African novels offer excellent investigations into the power of indigenous knowledge, such as two, coming of age novels I will teach this fall Ngugi's *The River Between* and Weep Not, Child. However, in this paper I will use Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* as my example. In this story, Efuru's power as a female resides in three sources: her ability to trade, her faith in the river goddess, and her respect for societal rules. Among the three sources, Efuru's ability to trade is crucial to her remaining faithful to her belief in the river goddess and equally as important for her to remain respectful towards societal rules. While she is born into a high ranking social family, which provides her with immediate social value, her story is about keeping her social capital through her own economic success. Rather than marrying a man to retain her social claims, Efuru prefers to demonstrate her skill in trading to prove her societal worth.

Throughout the story, Efuru insists upon her ability to trade. Within the first four pages of the text, the reader learns that Efuru has refused to go with her new husband to the farm and proclaims that she is not cut out for farm work. She states emphatically that "I am going to trade." (10). In Chapter two, Efuru and her husband have already made a huge profit: first in yams, then in crayfish. Despite the travails of thievery, rough waters, and a risky profit margin, which other local people encounter, Efuru navigates successfully through these obstacles. Over time, she returns to her trade when her husband fails at farming and her child turns three years old. After she has been deserted by him, she returns to her father's house and wants to continue her trade. Eventually, she becomes so renowned for her business savvy that she is sought out by suitors, like Eneberi, for her prowess. As one of the married men notes, "Her hands are made of money. If she sells pepper in the market, she will make money out of it. If in salt, money will flow in" (125). She is able to make money out of anything just like her mother.

Arguably, Efuru's economic successes, along with her self-confidence, allow her to make substantial choices about her life. For example, when she chooses her first husband, a man without the means for a dowry, Efuru decides to marry him anyway and, notably, without her father's approval. When villagers gossip about her willfulness, she decides that they are not important to her future and ignores their foreboding threats. Although Efuru is immensely successful financially, she decides with whom she will be generous. She gives abundantly to the Nwosu family and decides not to hound them about their debt. Yet, her sister-in-law tries to insist that she collect money from her debtors. Adizua begins to miss meals at home and Efuru decides that she will not cook for him. Even as a young girl, Efuru wants to get an education and she decides that she will go to school with a friend who is able to send her. Following, Efuru's second marriage, she decides to leave Eneberi, because he unjustly accuses her of adultery.

In each of these examples, Efuru makes decisions for herself, even when she receives advice to the contrary. She is a woman who, regardless of the changes around her, still retains her identity and knows her mind (see Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's poem "for Miriam"). Her economic power provides her with an independence that makes it possible for her to act on her own desires and impulses. And, when she is pushed too far, as is the case when her first husband has not slept with her for six months, she states, "there is a limit to human endurance. I am a human being

"(53). She points out that her husband has treated her unjustifiably like a slave. In time, she decides to leave him and return to her father's house. Like the character Mustafa in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, who rejects his western education and uses his London economics degree to develop a suitable market in his hometown, Efuru follows her instincts for economic success and ultimately is able to extend her sense of agency into tangible acts of independence. Also, like Mustafa, she chooses to cultivate her indigenous knowledge in order to sustain herself and the members in her community.

Problematizing the *Bildungsroman* as a Coming of Age Story about Education

In examining these various coming of age stories, it has been useful to take a critical look at how education affects the lives of young people. In the end, it is not a universal certainty that education is good, either in the sense of providing the means for a good life or in the sense of improving the human condition. From the perspective of the well-known Kenyan writer, scholar, and teacher, Mecere Mugo, education includes political activism to keep the human mind awake (see "The South End of a North-South Writers' Dialogue: Two Letters from a Postcolonial Feminist "Exmatriate"). In the 1998 text, *Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures*, Madhu Prakash and Gustavo Esteva argue from another perspective. The authors make a case against education as a human right and promote ways of escaping education. As they write, their book "celebrates well-being: still enjoyed in the commons and cultures of peoples living and learning at the grassroots" (xi). Like the examples Prakash and Esteva present in their book, these coming of age stories appear to wrestle with the conflicts which education brings into the relations of African people as they interact with a variety of spaces. Among the many texts on the list presented earlier, it takes readers but a brief moment to identify educational issues. From Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the passage about Aboliga the Frog and the manchild describes to the brief cycle between childhood and adulthood. As Armah suggests to his readers, the manchild represents the short life of his native Ghana, a concern he combines in the book with aspects of education and corruption. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Emechta's *The Bride Price* criticism is directed toward the trade-offs for women who become educated in the western tradition. Education often means loss in social capital, a loss which researchers, such as Basil Bernstein, find more devastating for third world countries than the loss of economic capital.

In Laye's *The Dark Child*, the protagonist cannot come to terms with the loss of his traditional African education. The final third of the book highlights the difficulty in separating learning within the village of Koroussa, French Guinea, from the education in Conakry and France. In strong affective terms, Laye writes,

And so one day I took a plane for France. Oh! It was a terrible parting! I do not like to think of it. I can still hear my mother wailing. I can still see my father, unable to hide his tears. I can still see my sister, my brothers. . . No, I do like to remember that parting. It was if I were torn apart."
(186-7)

Laye's description speaks about the act of tearing apart in language that incorporates all the five senses. So here, there is a potential educational gain in terms of western perspectives, but, simultaneously, Laye reminds readers of the emotional cost, a cost too great for an individual with a firmly rooted, local, community perspective.

In Nwapa's *Efuru*, Efuru's self-knowledge is the kind of education that is not gained necessarily in schools. She learns from her own acts of independence and as she has experiences, particularly in the market place, she learns to trust in her ability to act responsibly. However, for Efuru the challenge lies in her learning to live independently without a man and also without the status of motherhood. As a result, Efuru remains a symbol of successful matriarchal power, but her life without a husband and children also suggests to readers that she does so at some cost to her in terms of other traditional values. While Nwapa makes little of Efuru's education within the home of a woman who herself goes to school when only a few women were allowed to attend, an alert reader can make connections between Efuru's intellectual power and the education in this home. Was it this education which enabled Efuru to become economically successful, and was this ability at issue, when she loses her two husbands and her only three year-old child?

In concluding this paper on coming of age stories in African Literature, I have argued that coming of age stories, as a group, demonstrate the problems between educational aims and the social, cultural, political, and economic values of African societies. In these books, which have been mentioned, individuals mature to adulthood via deeply conflicting educational experiences. What Davies provides is a transnational paradigm to focus on black presences, located in various locations and attached to a variety of cultural identities. The explanatory power of her paradigm, as applied to literature, relates directly to the theories promoted by Uwakwek in literary criticism, Odora in the social sciences, and Shiva and Esteva in environmental education. These researchers have found methods to challenge unicentricity and to investigate ways in which local, indigenous knowledge is part of education. More particularly, they examine ideas, which help scholars to contest unicentric assumptions behind the Bildungsroman, a genre that has little to do with investigating the subjugation of indigenous knowledge, indigenous learning styles, and indigenous environmental knowledge. As a result, their research bears heavily on redefining coming of age stories in African Literature, in order to consider the symbolic significance of literature which speaks of the "(wo)manchild." The boy, Aboliga the Frog, is on to something far more contentious than he ever imagined and far more significant than what his Standard Five friends considered the "freaks and oddities."

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