Revitalising Literary Education and Reconsidering Cultural Authority in the Context of East African Reforms

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Africanisation made the authority to define and represent collective cultural life contestable within literary education. It focuses on the 1968 Nairobi memorandum, Okot p'Bitek's criticism of Makerere, and the disagreement between Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o over language and literary representation. Existing scholarship has identified continuities between African cultural nationalism and inherited conceptions of literature as an expression of a people's life. I ask what those continuities explain about the distribution of literary authority: who could select, create, interpret and judge literature in the name of the people literary education claimed to serve? Using qualitative documentary analysis and comparative close reading, the article examines a departmental memorandum, published essays, retrospective commentary and criticism transmitted through secondary sources. I argue that Africanisation generated competing arrangements of cultural authority within a continuing commitment to literature's public significance. Nairobi's reformers shifted the basis of literary comparison and reconsidered the role of oral forms and languages. Okot made students' creative development a criterion for judging literary education. Achebe defended the transformation of English through African experience and its potential national reach, whereas Ngũgĩ questioned the educational and social conditions governing participation in that literary public. These disagreements distinguish the people invoked as the cultural basis of literature from those able to participate in its production and judgment. From this tension, I develop cultural accountability as an evaluative criterion: people whose languages, experiences and practices legitimate literary authority should be able to question the judgments exercised in their name. The documents establish the intellectual disputes from which this criterion emerges; its institutional realisation requires further research into curricula, teaching, assessment and cultural participation.

Key words: Africanisation; literary education; cultural authority; literary public; decolonisation.

INTRODUCTION

On 20 September 1968, James Stewart, then head of the English Department at Nairobi, presented development proposals to the Arts Faculty Board. He proposed broadening the syllabus to include American, Caribbean, African, and other Commonwealth writing, as well as continental European literature for comparative study. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Stewart grounded the department's intellectual value in the study of the "historic continuity of a single culture" as the modern West emerged. He intended the expansion to remain within a discipline historically organised around the English literary tradition (p. 89). His proposal broadened the range of literature taught while retaining the English literary tradition as the framework for that expansion.

In response to Stewart's proposals, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong submitted a memorandum on 24 October 1968, calling for the abolition of the English Department and the establishment of a Department of African Literature and Languages. They challenged the authority accorded to the English tradition as the principal reference for African cultural consciousness and proposed placing "Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, p. 146). African oral and written traditions would serve as the point of departure for the study of other literatures. European works would remain in the curriculum, but their relevance would be assessed by their contribution to understanding students' own historical and cultural situation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, pp. 145-148).

The disagreement concerned the principle by which curricular reform would organise relationships among literary traditions. Stewart proposed a broader field within the inherited historical orientation of English studies. The memorandum gave African experience the authority to determine the curriculum's starting point and the relevance of the materials it included. This relocation of the centre also placed substantial interpretive responsibility on the proposed department. Its members would decide which experiences, languages and artistic practices represented the cultural life that literary education professed to serve. The dispute therefore raised a question within Africanisation itself: what relationship would exist between the people invoked as the source of literary value and those authorised to define that value?

The problem is central to Gikandi's interpretation of the Nairobi intervention. Gikandi (1996, p. xx) identifies a continuity with Leavis in the belief that literature expresses a people's cultural life and that literary education can discern and cultivate it. His comparison highlights a representative claim that endures even after the curriculum's cultural centre is relocated. An African orientation could displace English cultural primacy and retain the department's authority to determine which works express the collective life it claims to serve.

Amoko locates this representative authority within the institutional practices that produce literary competence. His distinction between school and national cultures shows how judgements formed through specialised academic training and credentials may acquire legitimacy as accounts of a much wider cultural community (Amoko, 2001, pp. 20–23, 26–27). The problem is therefore broader than the nationality of prescribed authors. It concerns the conditions under which the university claims the authority to speak for a people.

Other interventions in the Africanisation debate challenged that authority from different directions. At Makerere, Okot p'Bitek criticised teaching that, in his view, privileged English and American literary prestige and inhibited students' creativity. His complaint made learners' capacities as cultural producers central to the legitimacy of literary education (p'Bitek, as cited in Lindfors, 2011, p. 115). Achebe (1965) defended the writer's capacity to reshape English through African experience and to address an actual or potential national audience. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) questioned the linguistic and class conditions under which an educated literary public acquired the authority to represent African society. These interventions brought curricular orientation, creative participation, linguistic access and the social composition of literary publics into the evaluation of literature's collective purpose.

I argue that Africanisation rendered the distribution of literary authority contestable while maintaining a continuing commitment to literature's public significance. Reformers disputed who could organise literary comparison, recognise legitimate forms of expression and define the public that literature should address. Their proposals also authorised departments, teachers, writers and cultural interpreters to make new judgments about relevant knowledge. Drawing on Gikandi's account of representative continuity and Amoko's analysis of institutional privilege, this article examines how these competing projects linked the people invoked as literature's cultural foundation with those enabled to participate in its production and judgement.

The reformers' criticisms also invite scrutiny of their own representative claims. Existing arrangements were criticised for failing the people for whom the literature was expected to serve. I extend this demand for justification to the authority exercised through Africanisation itself. From that extension, I develop cultural accountability as an evaluative criterion: people whose languages, experiences and practices legitimate literary authority should be able to question the selections, interpretations and judgments made in their name. The distinction between being represented and participating in judgement is therefore central to the argument developed below.

The article employs qualitative documentary analysis and comparative close reading of published reform proposals, literary essays and retrospective commentary. Nairobi and Makerere serve as the principal institutional points of reference, while Achebe's Nigerian intervention extends the comparison through the language debate. The analysis reconstructs competing intellectual projects and the relationships they proposed among literary institutions, writers, learners and their publics. Questions about how these projects were implemented require additional curricular, archival and classroom evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Selecting works as expressions of a people's cultural life gives prominence to particular experiences and authorises particular interpretations. Eagleton (2008) describes the canon as a "construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time" (p. 10). His account of English studies links literary judgement to moral formation, national cohesion and the authority of a cultivated minority (pp. 20–38). The significance of a canon therefore lies partly in the practices through which particular works become valuable, teachable and representative. Once incorporated into a curriculum, these judgements acquire institutional force. Viswanathan (1989) defines curriculum as "one of the mechanisms through which knowledge is socially distributed and culturally validated" (p. 3). Her history of English literary education in colonial India links curricular prescription to the authority of those who select, organise and validate knowledge. This distinction is important for analysing Africanisation, because changing prescribed works does not, by itself, indicate how the authority to select and interpret them has changed. Curricular reform must also be examined through the relationships through which knowledge is taught and judged.

This issue becomes particularly significant when literary education claims to represent a people's cultural life. Gikandi (1996, p. xx) identifies a shared premise between Leavis and the Nairobi reformers: literature expresses a collective cultural character, and literary education can discern and cultivate it. His argument reveals a consequential continuity in the public justification of literary study. The proposed African centre could displace English cultural primacy while sustaining the department's claim to determine which works represented the collective it professed to serve.

Amoko places this representative claim within the institutional conditions that produce recognised literary competence. His distinction between school culture and national culture shows how judgments formed through specialised academic training and credentials can gain legitimacy as representations of a much wider cultural community (Amoko, 2001, pp. 20–23, 26–27). The university can therefore invoke African or national culture as the source of its public legitimacy while concentrating the authority to define that culture within a restricted academic community.

I take Gikandi's identification of representative continuity as the starting point of the analysis and use Amoko and Viswanathan to locate that continuity within the institutional practices by which universities select, validate and teach literary knowledge. Their arguments enable a distinction between the cultural community invoked by literary education and the academic practices through which that community is represented.

The Nairobi proposals also require attention to what changed within that continuing representative claim. Helgesson (2022, p. 150) emphasises the memorandum's cosmopolitan, multilingual and multimodal ambitions, including the relationships it envisaged among oral performance, written literature and international comparison. His reading prevents the Nairobi intervention from being reduced to the substitution of African works for English ones. Recentring altered the objects, languages and comparative relationships through which literary study was to proceed. The analytical issue is how those changes affected the distribution of authority by which literary value was established.

That issue becomes clearer when attention shifts to the people that literary education claims to serve. They may appear as subjects represented in literary works, as readers and listeners, as producers of artistic forms, or as participants in judgments about literary value. These positions are related but not equivalent. A community may supply the cultural practices incorporated into a curriculum without gaining comparable authority over their interpretation. A writer may claim to represent a national public whose access to the literary language remains uneven.

Gikandi's reflections on the circulation of African literature make the separation between representation and participation particularly evident. In his interview with Jefferess, he discusses the distance between African fictional subjects and North American readers and links literary interpretation to the institutions through which texts circulate (Jefferess & Gikandi, 2006). His account also distinguishes changes in cultural expression from the persistence of inherited institutional structures. The people represented in literature, the readers able to encounter it, and the institutions authorised to interpret it may therefore occupy different positions.

The problem consequently extends beyond representation to the authority to contest those terms. Asad's discussion of cultural boundaries directs attention to "what gets included and what excluded (how and by whom)" within fields of legitimate cultural and political participation (1993, p. 305). Applied to literary education, this raises questions about who can name a national literature, classify a language, establish cultural relevance, or judge a student's work. The authority to define cultural boundaries must therefore be examined alongside the capacity to challenge them.

These explanations lead to the question that structures this article: what authority did the people invoked as the cultural basis of reform acquire in the production and judgement of literary knowledge? Gikandi identifies the persistence of the representative claim; Amoko and Viswanathan locate its institutional basis; Asad clarifies the problem of contestability. The East African debates allow us to examine how these relations were contested through concrete proposals on curriculum, creativity, and language.

Africanisation, in this context, refers to projects that grant African histories, languages and cultural practices greater authority within literary education. Decolonisation names the contested ambition to overcome relations of cultural subordination. Cultural authority denotes the power to select works, define relevance, authorise interpretations and establish criteria for judgement. The term *literary public* refers to the people whom writers and institutions address, claim to represent, or enable to participate in literary production and judgement.

From the relationship among representation, participation and judgement, I develop **cultural accountability** as the article's analytical intervention. A commitment to serving a people entails an obligation to justify the judgements exercised in their name. Cultural accountability therefore asks whether the people whose languages, experiences and practices legitimate literary authority can question the selections, interpretations and standards through which that authority is exercised. This criterion enables assessment of Africanisation by examining the relationship between a changed cultural centre and the distribution of authority within the institutions that claim to represent it.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative documentary analysis and comparative close reading to examine published interventions in literary education, language and cultural authority. The corpus is purposively selected around the article's central problem: how reformers and writers defined the purposes of literary study, the people it was expected to serve, and the authority to select, create, interpret and judge literature.

The principal documentary materials are the 1968 Nairobi memorandum, reprinted in *Homecoming* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, pp. 145–150); Achebe's "English and the African Writer" (1965); Ngũgĩ's retrospective reflections in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986); and Okot p'Bitek's criticism of Makerere as reproduced by Lindfors (2011, p. 115). Okot's conception of culture is further examined through authorised excerpts from *Artist, the Ruler* presented by Goshadze (2025, pp. 127–132). Nairobi and Makerere provide the principal institutional settings, while Achebe's Nigerian intervention extends the comparison through the language debate.

The analysis proceeds through four related questions: what problem does each intervention identify; which people does it claim literary education should serve; who is authorised to select, create, interpret or judge literary work; and what conditions of access and recognition accompany that authority? Close reading of classifications, examples and proposed arrangements reconstructs how each intervention connects literary purpose with particular social and institutional relationships. Comparison then establishes where these projects converge and where they distribute cultural authority differently.

The sources are read according to their different evidentiary status. The Nairobi memorandum articulates a proposed curricular order. Achebe's essay advances a literary and linguistic position. Ngũgĩ's later reflections reassess earlier debates from the standpoint of a participant. Okot's criticism of Makerere, encountered here through Lindfors, offers a polemical assessment of literary teaching, while his cultural essays elaborate a conception of artistic and communal participation. A proposal, retrospective account or criticism therefore provides evidence of an intellectual position without, by itself, establishing how that position was implemented institutionally.

The article consequently makes claims about competing arguments, proposed relationships and forms of cultural authority. It does not reconstruct classroom practice, student experience or the full institutional histories of Nairobi and Makerere. Questions concerning implementation require additional archival, curricular and classroom evidence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The African centre and the authority to define it

The Acting Head's defence of English literary studies at Nairobi invoked "the historic continuity of a single culture" as the basis for organising the discipline (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, p. 145). A particular cultural tradition provided its coherence, and other literatures were positioned in relation to it. The reformers challenged the authority of this organising centre. Their proposal placed "Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre" and judged other materials by their contribution to understanding that situation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, p. 146).

The sequence spanned several levels of affiliation. Kenya provided an immediate location, East Africa a regional relationship, and Africa a broader historical and cultural horizon. European literature remained part of the proposed field, including traditions such as the nineteenth-century Russian novel (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, p. 148). The difference lay in the standpoint from which its relevance would now be assessed.

This reorganisation shifted the authority to formulate literary relationships. African intellectuals in Nairobi would determine which questions made other traditions relevant to their historical situation. The change also placed substantial interpretive responsibility on the department. Someone would have to decide which experiences defined the African situation, which works illuminated it, and which comparisons mattered. The claim to orient the curriculum therefore contained a further claim to represent the cultural life from which that orientation derived.

Gikandi's comparison with Leavis gains force precisely at this point. The memorandum's undertaking to "illuminate the spirit animating a people" gives literary study the capacity to disclose a collective cultural character (Gikandi, 1996, p. xx). The department claims legitimacy through its capacity to discern that character in particular works. Gikandi thus identifies a representative premise that survives the proposed relocation of the cultural centre. Its significance concerns who can determine what counts as an expression of the people.

The memorandum's treatment of oral traditions complicates any judgement based solely on this continuity. Contemporary songs and performances enter its account of literary knowledge, bringing words into relation with music, movement and other artistic practices. Its proposals reconsider inherited hierarchies of literary form and link artistic excellence to social purpose. They also give Swahili, English and French a central place, with provision for other languages where feasible (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o et al., 1972, pp. 147–149). These changes concern the objects and methods of literary study as well as its cultural orientation.

Oral performance, in particular, brings relationships into literary analysis that extend beyond the printed text. Meaning depends on performers, occasions and audiences. Its inclusion could therefore alter what counted as literary evidence and whose knowledge mattered in interpretation. The memorandum did not simply replace one canon with another; it proposed a wider reorganisation of the field, through which African experience would become intelligible.

Amoko's discussion of oral literature clarifies the significance of this expansion. He recognises its capacity to unsettle assumptions about authorship and the privilege of writing, but questions its use to prescribe ethnic or national identification (Amoko, 2001, p. 38). His criticism distinguishes the intellectual consequences of admitting oral forms from the cultural identities students may be expected to affirm through their study. The curriculum can therefore expand the field of recognised knowledge while retaining the power to determine what that knowledge means.

The question of authority remains embedded within the reform's substantive ambitions. Previously marginalised forms can acquire curricular recognition while academic interpreters retain the right to determine their cultural significance. The importance of incorporating oral traditions therefore depends partly on the relationship established among practitioners, students and those authorised to assess them. Inclusion alone cannot establish that relationship.

The documentary record also reveals tensions between curricular orientation and the language of study. A note accompanying the memorandum reports the establishment of separate departments of Languages and Literature, with African languages and literatures at their core (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1972, p. 150, n. 1). Ngũgĩ's retrospective account describes the organising principle as accepted after debate, but characterises the 1968–69 syllabus as a compromise mediated through English. He records another revision in 1973 (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 95).

Ngũgĩ later acknowledged that the debate had articulated its national relevance more clearly than its class and philosophical premises. He also distinguished the selection of curricular materials from the critical attitude with which they were taught (1986, pp. 104–105). His retrospective account therefore makes interpretive authority part of the reform's own unfinished problem.

An African centre could give African experience greater curricular prominence, even as participation in its authorised interpretation remains unevenly distributed. The persistence of English as a mediating language makes that possibility concrete. Okot's criticism of Makerere brings a related question into sharper focus by asking what capacities literary education actually develops in the learners it claims to serve.

African teachers and creative learners

Okot's criticism begins with a discrepancy between the nationality of the teaching staff and the educational relationships sustained by the department. In the account reproduced by Lindfors, he describes a department staffed by Ugandans whose syllabus, in his judgment, continues to elevate English and American literary prestige and to discourage students' creativity (p'Bitek, as cited in Lindfors, 2011, p. 115). The presence of African teachers is therefore insufficient evidence of an altered educational relationship. His assessment turns on what students are enabled to do.

The learner enters this argument as a potential maker of literature. A department may claim to advance cultural life while organising its teaching in ways that weaken students' confidence in their expressive capacities. Okot makes this possibility consequential for the legitimacy of literary education. The authority to teach literature must therefore be considered alongside the opportunities teaching creates for writing, interpretation and artistic judgement. His criticism sets the terms of this assessment; evaluating its accuracy would require evidence of classroom practice and student work.

Okot's conception of culture explains why creative activity carries such weight. He defines culture as "philosophy as lived and celebrated in a society" and locates cultural understanding within the practices through which people make and use artistic forms (p'Bitek, 1986, as cited in Goshadze, 2025, pp. 128–131). Cultural knowledge develops through participation in a way of life. Consequently, literary education acquires value through its relationship to ongoing cultural activity.

This gives Africanisation a pedagogical dimension. The Nairobi memorandum asks how the field of literary study should be oriented; Okot asks what that field enables a learner to become. The first concerns the authority to organise literary knowledge, while the second makes the capacities developed through teaching a criterion of cultural legitimacy. Their connection lies in the institution's claim to serve collective cultural life.

Participation, however, does not settle the question of authority. Okot also grants cultural insiders a privileged relationship to artistic meaning and ties the artist's responsibilities to the community's philosophy (p'Bitek, 1986, as cited in Goshadze, 2025, pp. 130–131). Shared practices become a source of interpretive knowledge, but the definition of the community's philosophy becomes consequential when its participants disagree.

The problem is therefore who can define legitimate cultural competence. Asad's question—"what gets included and what excluded (how and by whom)"—makes the authority that governs cultural boundaries visible (1993, p. 305). Applied to Okot's position, it concerns who can determine a community's philosophy and how that determination can be challenged. Participation in shared cultural practices can confer knowledge without deciding who may speak authoritatively on behalf of everyone involved.

Creative participation and authority over recognition must be distinguished. Students may be encouraged to write yet still encounter a prescribed account of what constitutes legitimate cultural expression. Cultural insiders may receive interpretive recognition yet face limits on the interpretations accepted as valid. Okot's criticism makes creative capacity part of the assessment of Africanisation; the question developed here concerns whether those who participate can also question the standards by which their creativity is judged.

National literature and its readers

Achebe's "English and the African Writer" examines literary representation by grappling with the difficulty of defining African literature. Reflecting on the 1962 Makerere conference, he rejects the assumption that the continent constitutes a homogeneous literary unit. His distinction between national and ethnic literatures assigns English a national function in Nigeria and situates literatures in Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and other languages within particular linguistic communities. In his formulation, national literature addresses an actual or potential audience across the territory of the state (Achebe, 1965, p. 27).

The character of this audience is important. Achebe attributes to English the capacity to sustain communication across linguistic differences. His encounters with other African writers make that claim practical: English gives him access to Joseph Kariuki's poetry, whereas his inability to read Kiswahili limits his engagement with Shabaan Robert's work (Achebe, 1965, p. 28). Literary exchange depends on linguistic competence, and a shared language can create relationships among writers and readers who otherwise inhabit different linguistic communities.

Achebe also grounds his defence of English in the writer's capacity to transform it. His comparison of a passage from *Arrow of God* with a paraphrase of its informational content shows how literary meaning depends on voice and imagery. The chief priest expresses his judgement through images of watching, bringing home a share, and moving around a dancing mask. The alternative formulation conveys the broad strategic reasoning but alters the character of the experience. Achebe judges the two versions by their adequacy to the speaker and the world being represented (1965, pp. 29–30).

The example places creative authority in the work of composition. English becomes material that can be reshaped through another history of speech and social experience. Its cultural significance emerges from decisions about imagery, rhythm and address. Achebe's proposed "new English" retains the possibility of international communication while gaining expressive capacity through African use (1965, p. 30). An inherited language can therefore become the medium of an African literary practice.

The national function assigned to this practice introduces another relationship. Achebe describes indigenous languages as "tributaries" feeding a language of national currency (1965, p. 28). Their cultural resources can enter the national field through English, whose wider circulation confers a privileged position. Achebe recognises the colonial formation of this arrangement and allows that political action could alter it. His argument, however, proceeds from the communicative possibilities available within its existing form.

Ngũgĩ's retrospective account of the 1962 conference questions the institutional terms through which a national literary public was constituted. A conference organised around English expression invoked African literature while excluding major African-language traditions from its defining terms (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 5–8). The cultural range implied by the category exceeded the languages admitted to represent it. Ngũgĩ's criticism therefore concerns the authority of literary institutions to set the qualifications for participation in a field defined as African.

Schooling is central to his explanation of how those qualifications acquired force. Ngũgĩ describes English examination performance as decisive for educational advancement, even when achievement in other subjects could not compensate for failure in English. Literary education reinforced the prestige of a language that already regulated access to further study (1986, pp. 11–12). The public able to participate in recognised literary exchange was therefore shaped by educational selection.

This history sharpens the disagreement with Achebe. Achebe emphasises a shared language's communicative capacity and the writer's ability to transform it. Ngũgĩ examines the social conditions under which that language acquires representative authority. He associates the European-language literary field with the social position of the petty bourgeoisie and questions the elevation of an educated minority's cultural circumstances to an account of African society (1986, pp. 20–22). The disagreement concerns the relationship between the public literature claims to represent and the people equipped to enter its institutions.

Achebe's reference to a potential audience leaves room for a distinction between imagined reach and existing readership. Ngũgĩ makes the production of that distinction a central object of criticism. Their disagreement therefore requires attention to both expressive transformation and access. A literary work may powerfully convey African experience in an inherited language while remaining accessible to a socially restricted public.

Ngũgĩ's own distinctions prevent language from being treated as a fixed carrier of cultural identity. He separates language as communication from language as a bearer of particular cultural histories, using examples such as English among Scandinavians and Kiswahili across East and Central Africa (1986, p. 13). He also recognises how workers and peasants transform imposed languages into forms such as Krio and Nigerian Pidgin (1986, p. 23). Linguistic creativity, therefore, appears in his account through the social practices of those who use and remake languages.

The different meanings attached to the term *national* further distinguish Achebe and Ngũgĩ. Achebe gives English a national role in Nigeria and classifies indigenous-language literatures as ethnic. Ngũgĩ identifies Kiswahili as an all-Kenya language and the languages of Kenya's nationalities as national languages, alongside other African and foreign languages (1986, pp. 28–29). Their positions arise from different linguistic and historical circumstances, including Kiswahili's regional role. The comparison concerns the cultural authority assigned through these classifications rather than the assumption that equivalent linguistic options existed in both countries.

Communication among differently situated publics would also depend on translation, teaching, publishing and the cultivation of readerships. Ngũgĩ explicitly proposes translating into African languages as a means of bringing other literatures and fields of knowledge into them (1986, p. 8). Recognition of several languages therefore establishes only part of the relationship. Communication practices would determine who could encounter, produce and evaluate literary work across linguistic boundaries.

Ngũgĩ further links literary emancipation to political purpose. African languages can carry the authority of missionaries and rulers, and his account of cultural renewal ties writing to struggles against exploitation (1986, pp. 26, 29–30). Linguistic access is therefore accompanied by judgments about the social interests a literary work should serve. This assigns writers responsibilities towards workers and peasants and raises another question: who determines the terms of those responsibilities?

A writer may use accessible language and still prescribe the political commitments through which literature should acquire value. The audience addressed would then encounter judgments about their interests as well as representations of their experience. Ngũgĩ's critique of elite representation consequently provides grounds for examining the authority exercised within the alternative literary project itself.

Achebe's defence of artistic invention and Ngũgĩ's scrutiny of linguistic and social access therefore set out connected demands on literary authority. Writers make decisions about expression, audience and responsibility. The legitimacy of their representative claims also depends on the relationships that enable readers and other cultural participants to respond. Their disagreement makes those relationships central to assessing Africanisation.

Reflection of Accountability and Representation

The preceding debates reveal that the people invoked by Africanisation occupy different positions within literary authority. At Nairobi, African experience provides the cultural centre, but the department selects the works through which that experience becomes academically intelligible. Okot places the learner at the centre of cultural production but leaves open the standards by which creative work is recognised. Achebe gives the writer authority to reshape language and imagine a national public, while Ngũgĩ exposes the unequal educational and social conditions that govern access to that public.

These differences matter because representation, participation and judgement are not interchangeable. A people may be represented in a curriculum without participating in its interpretation. Learners may become producers without gaining authority over the criteria used to evaluate their work. Wider linguistic access may expand participation even as a writer or institution continues to prescribe what counts as politically or culturally valuable.

Gikandi's account of representative continuity explains why these distinctions remain consequential. Changing the cultural centre does not necessarily remove the institution's privilege to determine which works disclose the life of a people (1996, p. xx). Amoko's distinction between school culture and national culture shows that such judgments cannot automatically be treated as the voice of the wider community (2001, pp. 20–23). The reforms therefore need to be assessed by examining the relationships that connect public claims to institutional powers.

The interventions examined here also provide a basis for such an assessment. Okot challenges teaching by its effects on learners' creative capacities. Ngũgĩ challenges a literary field whose linguistic requirements restrict participation. Achebe demonstrates that judgments based solely on a language's colonial history can overlook the artistic transformations writers produce within it. Each criticism makes the legitimacy of literary authority contingent on the relationship between its claims and the cultural life it professes to serve. The same demand reaches the reformers themselves. An African orientation, an indigenous language, or a claim to popular commitment may provide grounds for cultural legitimacy, but none settles who should determine the meaning of that legitimacy. Departments and writers continue to exercise judgement. The people invoked in support of those judgements therefore require a position from which to question their adequacy.

I use cultural accountability to describe this relationship. It refers to the capacity of people whose languages, experiences and practices legitimate literary authority to question the selections, interpretations and standards applied in their name. Accountability concerns participation in the power to define value. Opportunities to read, write, perform or publish matter, but so do opportunities to contest the criteria by which those activities are recognised. The people involved are themselves differentiated by language, class, location and cultural practice. Cultural accountability therefore cannot mean the discovery of a single authentic public voice. It concerns the conditions under which disagreement can enter literary judgement. A representative claim becomes accountable when those it concerns can question the identities, interests and values attributed to them.

The documents analysed here reveal disagreement among intellectuals about these relationships. They do not demonstrate that students, performers, workers or readers acquired institutional power to contest authoritative judgements. Cultural accountability is therefore an evaluative criterion arising from the debates, not an institutional outcome established by the evidence. Further historical research would need to link these proposals to successive syllabuses, reading lists, language requirements, examination papers and student work. Evidence on performance, translation, publishing and creative writing could clarify how participation was organised and whose judgements carried institutional weight. Such research would allow an assessment of how far Africanisation redistributed authority within literary education.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the public commitments to Africanisation provide grounds for assessing the authority exercised in its name. Representation does not, in itself, establish participation, and participation does not necessarily confer authority over judgement. Cultural accountability adds the requirement that those invoked as the basis of literary legitimacy should be able to question the selections, identities and standards attributed to them. The article therefore extends explanations of Africanisation beyond the opposition between inherited

Englishness and an African cultural centre. The central issue is how reform reorganises the relationships through which literary knowledge is produced, validated and contested.

The present documentary analysis identifies the intellectual disagreements that make this problem visible but cannot determine how far cultural accountability was realised institutionally. Future empirical research should reconstruct those relationships through successive course outlines, departmental and faculty committee minutes, examination papers, marking criteria, student essays and creative writing, literary magazines, student newspapers, records of public performances, translation projects and publishing activities. These materials would make it possible to ask whether students and other cultural participants merely entered the curriculum as objects of representation or acquired opportunities to influence the selection, interpretation and evaluation of literary knowledge. Comparative research across periods could further establish whether changes in language requirements, assessment practices, creative-writing provision and relationships with performers, publishers and reading publics redistributed the authority to define literary value.

Cultural accountability also offers a basis for comparison beyond the East African history examined here. Contemporary curriculum-decolonisation debates in universities across Africa, Europe, North America and other postcolonial and settler-colonial settings frequently concern diversifying reading lists, recognising marginalised intellectual traditions and revising inherited disciplinary canons. The criterion developed here directs attention to a further question: whether the communities, languages and intellectual traditions invoked to legitimate curricular reform gain meaningful opportunities to contest how they are represented and judged. Comparative studies could therefore examine not only which texts and traditions enter redesigned curricula, but also who participates in curriculum committees, how knowledge is assessed, whose interpretive authority is recognised, and through what institutional procedures disagreements over representation can alter curricular decisions. In this sense, cultural accountability provides an empirically testable way of evaluating whether curricular decolonisation redistributes cultural authority as well as revising curricular content.

Data Availability

All materials analysed in this article are published sources identified in the reference list. No new empirical dataset was generated.

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