

Re-Thinking Eco-Critical Ontology and Indigenous Pedagogical Discourse within the Paradigm of African Conduct Books

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Abstract

The narratives of African conduct books have pedagogically been associated within the realms of ethical morality, socio-cultural responsibility and strict disciplinary practices. However, a little research has been done regarding how African conduct books try to highlight eco-critical renderings within its deep narratorial structure. Thus, this article tries to deconstruct upon the ideas about how the instrumentality of eco-critical perspective on deep eco-criticism ontology works within the paradigm of indigenous (African) knowledge system and critical pedagogy that helps in understanding young adult audience to disentangled the relationship between human behaviour and ecological sustainability. Besides, this article also tries to navigate how colonial educational practices subjugate the age-old indigenous ecological ethics by forcefully implementing their own colonial-capitalist monopoly within African conduct books. And, this is highly reflected in the conduct book *The African Child* where the very colonial epistemology constructs the protagonist as an ideal African child who adheres to the strict discipline of European values and Christian monolithic spirit.

Keywords: ‘African conduct books’, ‘eco-critical renderings’, ‘indigenous (African) knowledge system’, ‘colonial-capitalist monopoly’, ‘European values’.

Introduction

The development of eco-critical ontology in African conduct books is an emerging research area that critically examines how moral induced texts, children's ethical narratives and didactic narratology present a relationship between humans, nature, animals and the spiritual environment. Unlike many Western conduct books that often privilege human-centric ethics, the African conduct books often reflect a relational ontology where humans are viewed as part of a

larger ecological community rather than acting as their masters. Further, from an ecological perspective, African conduct books often try to form a cultural synergy between humans, animals, forests, rivers and ancestral lands. So, rather than presenting the apocalypse of nature as a resource to be exploited, the African conduct books depict the eco-critical environment as a resource that has been traditionally exploited by British capitalist classes but, in contemporary times, serve as a living moral archive that deserves utmost respect and care. This relational eco-critical philosophy resonates through African conduct books as it explores the 'Ubuntu' philosophy where African moral-ethical conduct extends beyond human relationships to encompass the entire African ecological community.

Besides, a decolonial reading of African conduct books often challenges the environmental consequences of colonialism by preserving African indigenous ecological knowledge at large. Thus, this article tries to deconstruct how African conduct books construct deep ecological ethics through indigenous moral traditions. Alongside, this article also tries to navigate how the representation of environmental racism and colonial ecological exploitation has been significantly portrayed within the canonical narratives of African conduct books. But, before moving on to reflect upon the two aforementioned debates regarding the nexus between eco-critical ethics and African conduct books, it is at first pertinent to illuminate the very epistemological rise of African conduct books in global literary discourse — or, to be more specific, how African conduct books juxtapose the very indigenous socio-cultural scenario of the native African community against global capitalist narratorial discourses.

Role of Aesthetics in Developing African Conduct Books

The aesthetical rise of African conduct books highly reflects the rapid transformation of moral instruction from simple didactic manuals into a culturally rich literary text that integrates oral traditions, indigenous philosophy, visual storytelling discourse and contemporary social concerns. Rather than merely presenting morality through rigid narratorial frameworks, African conduct books also employ rich indigenous proverbs, folktales, animal allegories, songs, riddles and symbolic imagery to cultivate moral-ethical awareness. The story of African conduct books is often rooted within community-based storytelling narratives where the very concept of black beauty and indigenous morality remains entangled within its nature. Further, African conduct

books draw heavily from indigenous aesthetic traditions that emphasize deep harmony, communal responsibility, respect for elders and reciprocity with nature, foregrounding indigenous African aesthetic imagery. As for example, the African novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, which is apparently known as a traditional moral novel rather than as a sole African conduct book, presents the diabolical workings of moral-ethicality as rooted in Yoruba African traditions. Here, in the novel, the forest acts as a palimpsest of moral preaching, where the very protagonist's survival is rooted within nature's own spirits.

Another literary masterpiece, *The African Child*, which in conventional prose can be accurately defined as an African conduct book, promotes human-nature epistemological interdependency and illuminates the idea of sacred ecology, where Africa's natural world possesses a deep spiritual entanglement that encourages reverence to nature. What is unique in this conduct book is that it echoes the philosophical interpretation of indigenous Ubuntu environmental ethics, which emphasizes that the African indigenous community flourishes upon spatial relationships with both people and nature. So, by integrating indigenous African knowledge systems, communal values and reverence for the natural world, the author Camara Laye, in *The African Child*, presents morality as a conduit to deep environmental practice. And, this conduct book anticipates the logic of contemporary eco-critical ethical discourse by portraying African indigenous nature as a source of cultural identity, moral formation and deep eco-critical sustainable living.

Now, coming back to the discussion regarding how eco-critical ontology within African conduct books re-examines the relationships between human beings, nature, animals, ancestors and the spiritual world — African conduct books, apart from preaching moral-ethical values, also re-look at traditional practices highly concerned with sacred forests, seasonal cycles, wildlife protection and sustainable resource usage. Besides, contemporary African children's conduct literature also increasingly addresses issues related to pollution, deforestation, climate change and extractive industrial wastage. As regards eco-critical ethics, African conduct books largely explore how these texts cultivate moral responsibility towards the natural environment alongside maintaining ethical behaviour towards society.

Human–Nature Interdependency and Ubuntu Environmental Ethics

Unlike Western conduct books that primarily focus upon individual moral virtues, African conduct books often present the metaphysics of ethicality as an inseparable component of ecological subjectivity, communal life and respect for the more-than-human world. Further, as regards human-nature interdependency, African conduct books often portray humans as part of an interconnected ecological community. Rivers, forests, mountains and animals are treated as living entities that highly deserve respect rather than merely acting as objects for exploitation. So, the role of moral conduct books is to protect such natural systems against capitalist-class exploitation. African conduct books also play a pivotal role in forming African environmental knowledge and consciousness by including sustainable farming practices, conservation of water resources, protection of wildlife and eco-critical resource management. What is also pertinent to note is that animals act as ethical guides or moral agents in African conduct books. Animal characters such as the hare, tortoise, elephant or even spider demonstrate both virtues and vices, which teaches young and adult audiences alike to learn life lessons about greed, moral wisdom and ecological harmony.

Another important aspect of African conduct books concerns the role Ubuntu environmental ethics plays within their deep narratorial discourse. Ubuntu-environmental ethics provides a valuable framework for understanding the ecological values embedded within African conduct books. Its literary motto, 'A person is a person through other persons,' often emphasizes that the characteristics of personhood are highly achieved through cordial human relationships. Contemporary African philosophers often extend this principle by including deep relationships with nature, which otherwise suggests that indigenous African community flourishes when people exclusively lead a harmony with animals, water, plants and the land. So, in the context of African conduct books, the Ubuntu philosophy promotes human-animal interdependency, respect for mother nature, deep communal stewardship and environmental sustainability, where natural resources should be used in such a way as to preserve ecological balance for future generations.

As for example, in *The African Child* by Camara Laye, we witness the communal upbringing where elders and children of African heritage live in harmonious co-existence with nature. Here, in this conduct book, the protagonist's moral education occurs through deep familial traditions, agricultural life and through reinforcing collective rituals rather than through mere formal instruction. In another African conduct book, *Chaka* by Thomas Mofolo, we witness

a contrasting Ubuntu-based leadership set against the destructive consequences of ambition, violence and the rejection of communal ethics. So, the Ubuntu philosophy expands beyond human relationships to include indigenous environmental precarity at large.

Thus, the aesthetical rise of African conduct books marks a significant transformation in the relationship between literature, morality, culture and indigenous educational practices. Rather than merely functioning as manuals of daily ethical responsibility, these African conduct books increasingly employ distinct narrative strategies, visuality, symbolism related to African folkloric elements, vernacular proverbs and indigenous philosophies to construct an ethical imagination rooted within African cultural experience. Furthermore, what is relevant to note is that their aesthetic dimension never becomes completely isolated from the pedagogicality of African conduct books. As different critiques view this slow transformation as highly indebted to 'Ubuntu' philosophy, the individual African folk is thoroughly understood through their ephemeral relationship with community, environment and other modes of life. So, in this regard, African conduct books can consequently be detected as sites where ethical subjectivity is constantly produced through the principles of gender reciprocity, care, solidarity, respect and communal responsibility. However, such an approach deeply challenges the colonial pedagogical models which historically privileged European standards of civility and discipline.

African indigenous proverbs, oral traditions, communal narratives and representations of everyday African life often promote the authority of local epistemologies and transform conduct books into a never-ending space of cultural memory. The aesthetic function of conduct books often performs a decolonial functionality: by representing African children's books not as a testimony of Western-imported moral codes, they structurally act as an active subject within their own cultural world. Besides, conduct books also work as contested representational sites which otherwise reproduce colonial hierarchies of ethical and moral education at large. And, at last, these literary and visual forms of African conduct books enable African identity to flourish through its indigenous roots, deeply rooted through communal relationships, ecological histories, and African cultural ethics and modes of knowledge production.

Deconstructing the Decolonial Approach of African Conduct Books

The methodology of decolonialism provides a productive framework for analyzing African conduct books as moral-ethical texts that surreptitiously negotiate the legacy of colonial ideology, cultural domination and Eurocentric constructions of morality. Rather than simply treating conduct books as a paradigm emphasizing how to behave properly through instructional texts, a decolonial inquiry examines how conduct books construct African subjectivity through the ethos of indigenous ethics, communal responsibility, cultural memory and resistance to colonial epistemologies. History witnessed how the colonial education system often positioned European knowledge systems, manners, language, religion and social behaviour as universal standards of civilization. African conduct literature also tries to decipher the contested pedagogical spaces in which questions arise about the true heir of indigenous knowledge and what constitutes a truly desirable subject. In this regard, the critical relevance of Frantz Fanon is truly interesting, where the very epistemology of colonialism does not predate any distinct institutional structure. But it helps in producing psychological and cultural hierarchies in which the colonized subject itself becomes marginalized against an all-powerful and omnipotent colonial structure.

However, a decolonial reinterpretation of African conduct books often resists itself within the subjectivity of coloniality. This also creates a sense of ambivalence, where indigenous conduct books can simultaneously reproduce colonial norms while also recovering indigenous modes of ethical formation. As highlighted earlier, the narratives of African conduct books serve as a literary object where the very process of decolonization helps concurrently deconstruct the subjectivity of political independence. This involves transforming the very structures that have forcefully produced colonial consciousness. So, by applying Fanon's argument, African conduct books can become a highly significant place where true African languages, communal ethics, indigenous knowledge systems and cultural memory find a distinct African mode of personhood.

African conduct books can also be re-read as decolonial pedagogical texts because they skilfully navigate the deep-rooted questions of identity, morality, community, language, authority and cultural memory in the aftermath of colonial practices. What is also unique to note is that, rather than treating conduct books as merely a genre of moral instruction, the decolonial approach to these texts often negotiates the moral or ethical values which have been thoroughly taught and whose knowledge is deeply legitimized. Colonial education often frequently

attempted to replace indigenous systems of knowledge with Eurocentric models of civility, Christianity and social hierarchy. Besides, African conduct books also become valuable literary sites where the objectivity of morality is often reproduced, negotiated or strictly resisted. So, a decolonial analysis can contrast how European notions of the disciplined individual are countered by African relational ethics such as 'Ubuntu,' where the very epistemology of personhood is constituted through its relationship with others. In fact, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument is extremely relevant in this regard, as it concerns the colonization of the mind, particularly relevant in analyzing Ubuntu philosophical discourse within the paradigm of African conduct books.

Taking clues from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument, African conduct books are often written exclusively through hegemonic colonial languages that otherwise continue the epistemic structure of colonial ideology. In fact, African Ubuntu philosophy acts as a decolonial ethic that challenges the capitalist model of colonial modernity. Besides, conduct books also function as a pedagogical technology where theorizing indigenous African education becomes a symbol of both counter-power and knowledge for the generation. In general terms, African conduct books operate as a contested pedagogical space where colonial regimes of disciplinarity often encounter indigenous African ethical epistemology. So, through language, storytelling and communal morality, African conduct books act as a nexus between human-environment relations and largely participate in the process of decolonization, where recovering forms of African personhood — historically marginalized by colonial education — find intimate expression within this paradox.

Re-Igniting the Ideology of Environmental Racism in African Conduct Books

The term environmental racism often refers to the unequal exposure of racialized or marginalized communities to environmental destruction, pollution, displacement and resource exploitation. In African conduct books, everyday instructions related to land, water, animals, communal responsibility, cleanliness or resource conservation can be interpreted both racially and through the lens of white-supremacist ideology. As regards the critical interpretation of conduct books, it becomes an active pedagogical space where children learn that environmental responsibility does not restrict itself to any distinct individual virtue but largely requires

collective ethical obligation. African conduct books often emphasize communal relationships rather than merely restricting themselves within an individualistic conception of morality. The figure of the African child is especially significant when analyzing the narratives of African conduct books. In this sense, African conduct books can be re-interpreted as a decolonial pedagogical text that reignites the spirit of environmental memory by transforming moral instruction into a critique of colonial extraction, racialized ecological vulnerability and the capitalist commodification of African landscapes.

Through indigenous ethics such as 'Ubuntu,' African conduct books often reconstruct environmental responsibility as a deep, collective relationship formed among humans, land, animals and community. Contemporary indigenous environmentalist critique often deciphers the ontology of African conduct books as a dynamic literary space where the political pedagogy of environmental justice can be strictly concerned within the metaphysics of African manners, morality, discipline and social behaviour.

Environmental racism, as an eco-critical orientation, can be widely useful because the very narratives of ecological destruction in the African context cannot always be isolated from the histories of racial domination. The colonial regime often reorganized African colonial landscapes through mining extraction, deforestation and black labour exploitation. As a result, the indigenous landscape of Africa underwent a tectonic shift towards white capitalist greed, contributing to colonial systems at large.

So, environmental racism in African conduct books can be interpreted as more than a representation of ecological destruction. It serves as a critique of the historical structure through which colonialism, capitalism, racial hierarchy and environmental exploitation become mutually reinforcing in nature. These texts often reveal how African bodies, communities and indigenous landscapes have disproportionately borne the consequences of resource exploitation, pollution, displacement and climate vulnerability. African conduct books are also prevalent because they often emphasize ethical behaviour, communal responsibility, discipline and social relations, where environmental questions are skilfully navigated through both moral and political conduct. From an anti-racism perspective, African conduct books often challenge white supremacy between human society and nature. Their ethical emphasis also frequently resonates with

indigenous and communal philosophies where land, water, animals, ancestors and human communities actively participate in an interconnected ecological order.

What is also pertinent to note is that African conduct books do not merely document the ontology of environmental racism, but they didactically reimagine ecological responsibility as a form of decolonial resistance. By foregrounding communal ethics, indigenous ecological knowledge, reciprocity and responsibility towards future generations, these texts often challenge the racialized politics of environmental exploitation. One thing to also signify is that African conduct books also try to reignite environmental justice by reconnecting human moral conduct with deep ecological responsibility. Further, the ethical narratives of African conduct books move beyond condemning environmental destruction and highly propose a restorative vision in which community, land and non-human life co-exist through reciprocal relationships. And, African conduct books also become a medium through which the politics of colonialism, capitalism, ecological inequality and decolonial resistance can be thoroughly re-examined and restructured for global audiences at large.

Conclusion

Thus, the indigenous pedagogical discourse in African conduct books refers to the traditional approaches to knowledge acquisition and deep moral formation embedded in African oral and written literature. Rather than solely relying on knowledge epistemology, African conduct books often transmit ethical values, communal responsibilities, environmental stewardship and cultural identity through a panoramic vision of proverbs, storytelling devices, folktales, songs and elderly wisdom. Besides preaching moral values, conduct books also function as educational tools that try to preserve indigenous African knowledge across generations.

So, the main research argument of this article centres upon how African conduct books do not merely act as moral manuals or ethical repository guides, but skillfully integrate ecological consciousness and communal values, offering alternatives to colonial educational models. Besides, reading African conduct books through indigenous pedagogical lenses often reveals how they help cultivate responsible citizenship and indigenous cultural continuity while resisting colonial epistemologies.

Further, African conduct books can also be re-explored through the critical inquiry of environmental racism to understand how white-capitalist environmental injustice shapes indigenous moral life, social identity and relationships with African land. As history has witnessed, there exist numerous classical African conduct books which, though predating the epistemology of environmental racism, often reveal moral-ethical systems that otherwise challenge unequal access to natural resources at large. So, this approach of promoting interdisciplinary research related to indigenous African literary studies, eco-criticism, the environmental justice movement, decolonial theory and conduct memorabilia offers a varied spectrum to the rich field of cultural studies. And, in this sense, as rightly pointed out by the post-colonial critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who proclaimed that white colonial culture alienated the indigenous African community from their native languages, cultures, books and environment — African conduct books can serve as a testimony to preserve indigenous African ecological knowledge.

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