# "A Little Book of Logic" – Reconstructing Colonial Arts of Suasion at Government College, Umuahia

Terri Ochiagha

**Abstract**: Memories of political pedagogies in the elite colonial classroom are typically fragmentary and constitute limited historical evidence. But when contextualized and used in combination with coetaneous sources, such as textbooks and lesson notes, they can be crucial in the reconstruction of the transmission of political knowledge, its classroom assimilation and postcolonial negotiation. This article pieces together a number of unconnected but mutually consistent epiphanic moments in the life-writing and interviews of writers Chinua Achebe and Chike Momah, tracing and identifying a mysterious textbook of logic – R.W. Jepson's *Clear Thinking* (1936) – and its use as a tool to rein in and redirect anti-colonial nationalist undercurrents at Government College, Umuahia, the elite colonial school famous for having produced eight renowned Nigerian writers.

**Résumé**: La mémoire des pédagogies politiques coloniales dans les écoles de l'élite sont généralement fragmentaires et ne représentent pas une preuve historique d'envergure. Cependant, mises en contexte et combinées avec des sources contemporaines, telles que les livres de texte et les notes des cours, elles peuvent se révéler cruciales dans la reconstruction de la transmission de la connaissance politique, de son assimilation en classe et de négociation postcoloniale. Cet article réunit différents moments épiphaniques sans interaction réciproque mais mutuellement cohérents

*History in Africa*, Volume 41 (2014), pp. 63–82

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doi:10.1017/hia.2014.1

de l'œuvre ("life-writing") et des interviews de Chinua Achebe et Chike Momah. Ainsi il trace et identifie un mystérieux manuel de logique, *Clear Thinking* de R.W. Jepson (1936), utilisé pour freiner et réorienter les courants nationalistes anticoloniaux sous-jacents au Government College, à Umuahia, l'école coloniale d'élite connue pour avoir produit huit célèbres écrivains nigérians.

## Introduction[1]

Government College, Umuahia was established in 1929, under the aegis of the colonial Education Department of Nigeria, in Umudike-Ibeku, four miles from the eastern Nigerian town of Umuahia. The school's government ownership and the involvement of prominent education officers in its creation accorded it a special status from the onset. Highly meritocratic, well-funded, and staffed mostly by Oxbridge graduates, Umuahia earned a reputation as one of the jewels on the Education Department's crown. For a decade, Government College was an "adaptationist" institution, "educating the African along his own lines" with an emphasis on vocational training and moral/religious instruction to prepare candidates for intermediate positions in the colonial civil service. In the early forties, responding to policy changes during the Second World War, Government College, Umuahia became a British public school-type institution tasked with the creation of intellectuals and future leaders. Through this transition, which roughly coincided with the principalship of William Simpson (1944–1951), Umuahia reached impressive academic heights. In later years, many of the school's alumni occupied prominent positions in the intellectual and political spheres. Umuahia's main singularity, however, is its literary pre–eminence: the writers Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Chike Momah, Chukwuemeka Ike, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, I.N.C. Aniebo, and Ken Saro-Wiwa were all products of the school, and the first five of this list coincided in the school during Simpson's tenure as principal of Government College.

As Adam Howard and Rubén A. Gaztambide remind us, elite education "has remained virtually unmapped terrain and remains largely outside the

[1] I wish to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of *History in Africa* for their feedback and suggestions, and Mrs. Elizabeth Smith for sending me the lesson notebook that led to my discovery of "the little book of logic." My deepest gratitude also goes to Chike Momah, Chukwuemeka Ike, and Kelsey Harrison for their always prompt replies to my questions on Government College. Earlier versions of sections of this article were presented at the African History and Politics Seminar, convened by Jan-Georg Deutsch at the University of Oxford in June 2012 and at the Postcolonial Theory and Writing Seminar, Wadham College, University of Oxford, convened by Elleke Boehmer and Ankhi Mukherjee in May 2013. I am grateful to the convenors and participants of these seminars for their helpful comments.

public and scholarly gaze."[2] This is particularly true of elite colonial education in British Africa and its proposed transformation of talented African youth into intellectually empowered, yet politically quiescent colonial replicas of English gentlemen. And while historians of colonial education have assiduously studied the implementation of educational policy and the racial images pervading the imperial curriculum,

> it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to assess the way in which the messages in school materials was transmitted by teachers, and how images of superiority and inferiority were reinforced by manner, word and action. The curriculum proposed is a long way from the curriculum implemented.[3]

Indeed, the implementation of political pedagogies in the elite colonial classroom – which in most cases constituted a "hidden curriculum" – remains the preserve of school stories and life-writing. These reminiscences of pedagogical praxis are typically fragmentary and thus, on their own, constitute limited historical evidence. And yet, as this article demonstrates, memories of the colonial classroom, when contextualized and used in combination with coetaneous sources, such as textbooks and lesson notes, can be crucial elements in the reconstruction of the classroom transmission of political knowledge, its assimilation and postcolonial negotiation. Here I present a concrete case involving a facet of Umuahian school life on which documentary sources remain remarkably silent: the school authorities' attempts to rein in and redirect anti-colonial nationalist undercurrents. By piecing together a number of apparently unconnected but mutually consistent epiphanic moments[4] in the life-writing and interviews of the writers Chinua Achebe and Chike Momah, it was possible to trace and identify a mysterious textbook of logic, R.W. Jepson's *Clear Thinking* (1936), as a vital component of the school's political-cum-humanistic instruction in the academic

[2] Adam Howard and Rubén A. Gaztambide Fernández, "Introduction: Why Study Up?," in: Adam Howard and Rubén A. Gaztambide Fernández (eds.), *Educating Elites: Class Privilege and Educational Advantage* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 1–13, 2.

[3] James A. Mangan, "Images for Confident Control: Stereotypes in Imperial Discourse," in: James A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6–22, 18.

[4] In literary contexts, epiphanies are special moments of sudden insight on the part of characters or the autobiographical self, frequently triggered by seemingly trivial stimuli. For an overview of the phenomenon, which is usually associated with James Joyce, see: Wim Tigges (ed.), *Moments of Moment: Aspects of Literary Epiphany* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

year 1944–1945.[5] On its own, the textbook sheds little light into the school's pedagogical culture, hinting only at its elite British identity and wholesale appropriation of metropolitan textbooks. But by locating in the book a series of openings into which the psycho-political preoccupations of the Umuahians of this period can be slotted, thereafter re-reading the dispersed records and memories of the book's classroom use, it is possible to reconstruct the discursive mechanisms for political control deployed at Government College.[6] This is important because it allows us to locate, in part, the possible origins of Achebe's revisionist historical and literary poetics, the pioneering use of which triggered the rise of Nigerian first-generation writing, Chinua Achebe's seminal position in African literary history, and ultimately Umuahia's claim to worldwide fame – providing further insights into the ambivalent relationship between nationalism, elite colonial schooling, and mental decolonization.

## Context

From all accounts, the Second World War and the rise of Nnamdi Azikiwe as bête noire of the colonial order were the two principal influences under which Nigerian children awakened to the political realities of the period. Like every other sector of society, children experienced or witnessed such manifestations of "war imperialism" as food rationing, forced conscriptions, and the barrage of official propaganda to promote wartime production of raw materials.[7] Picking palm kernels for the war effort, singing pro-British songs such as *Rule Britannia!*, and marching in front of the white Resident on Empire Day all fostered a sense of imperial belonging. On the other

[5] The reasons for my focus on this very restricted period are threefold. First, it was a period of adaptation to the school's newly-acquired British public school ethos; second, it coincided with such historical events as the end of the Second World War, a decisive anti-colonial incident at King's College, Lagos, and the height of colonial aversion to the nationalist press; and last, because there is no evidence that such tangible circumstances as the ones I describe here ever recurred in subsequent years.

[6] Here I adapt and appropriate Stephanie Newell's approach to retrieving historical readerships in the absence of interview material from the archives. Her strategy – to reread Marie Corelli's novel, *The Sorrows of Satan*, and locate a series of openings into which the aesthetic debates and social questions of the colonial period can be slotted – is a highly illuminating exercise in inferential criticism. Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: How to Play the Game of Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 105.

[7] See: Emmanuel Nwafor Mordi, "Wartime Propaganda, Devious Officialdom, and the Challenge of Nationalism during the Second World War in Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 13 (2009), 235–257; Gabriel O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939–1953* (London: Evans, 1973).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hand, the quasi-antithetical figure of Nnamdi Azikiwe[8] – popularly known as Zik of Africa – "bestrode the world" of these children "like a colossus."[9] The story of Azikiwe's rise to fame was well known among the masses. After concluding his secondary education in Nigeria, Azikiwe had moved on to the US for his university education, gaining degrees from Lincoln University, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. During his American sojourns, he experienced extreme forms of racial discrimination and came under the influence of Garveysim, Communism, Pan-Africanism and the Harlem Renaissance. He returned to Nigeria in 1934, but moved over to the Gold Coast after his failed application for a teaching position at King's College, Lagos. In his new station, he founded the *African Morning Post*. In 1937, he was convicted for publishing a seditious article, but won the case on appeal. Determined to make his voice heard in his fatherland by all means, he founded the polemical anti–colonialist newspaper *West African Pilot* (1937) upon his return to Lagos and amplified his journalistic enterprise with provincial papers in Kano, Warri, Ibadan, Onitsha and Port Harcourt. Zik's gadfly papers were characterized by their light style, banner headlines, blend of radical nationalism and gossip, and a belligerence that sometimes veered into "malice" and "irresponsible name calling."[10] Azikiwe's defense of workers' rights and improvement unions, confrontational attack on white racism and the British colonial government won him a large following.[11] While Zik's newspapers – "the principal source of his fame and power, and the most crucial single precipitant of the Nigerian awakening"[12] – fulfilled, to a large extent, their mandate to 'show the light" to adults, children absorbed the "headiness, even [the] slight intoxication"[13] of Zik's legend through oral lore.

After its closure for use as a prisoner of war camp from 1939 to 1942, the Umuahia Government College re-emerged as a visiting institution King's College, Lagos. Despite its status as the premier and most prestigious colonial government college, the name of King's was often mentioned

[8] Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), 123; Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 222. Nigerian nationalists, fearing the potential outcomes of Nazi domination and expecting political change at the end of the war, supported the British effort. This contradictory stance infuriated the colonial government.

[9] Chinua Achebe, "The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen," *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 23–34, 28.

[10] Gunilla L. Faringer, *Press Freedom in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 25; Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nations* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 51.

[11] James Smoot Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1971), 220–224.

[12] Coleman, *Nigeria*, 233.

[13] Achebe, "Zik's Kitchen," 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in connection to Nigeria's nationalist movement. In 1934, Azikiwe was denied an appointment at the college on the grounds of his "unsuitable" American education. That year marked the creation of the Lagos Youth Movement, comprised mostly of King's College students and alumni; and in the late 1930s, the school's students became active in the Youth Study Circles convened by alumnus and leading nationalist H.O. Davies for the discussion of Nigeria's colonial problems and their possible solutions.[14] In March 1944, three months into Achebe and Momah's entry into Umuahia, King's College, Lagos grabbed the national headlines for a notorious student strike. Like the Government College school compound, the student dormitories of King's College had been requisitioned and turned over to the army, and students were obliged to take unpleasant and highly inconvenient accommodation in town. They wrote a petition protesting "the physical hardships and study problems created by congestion, filth, and factors of a degenerating moral character,"[15] but their appeal went unheeded. The ensuing strike culminated in the detention, trial and expulsion of seventy-five senior boarders and the conscription of the eight ring-leaders, one of whom died in custody.[16] The incident provoked national outrage and reinvigorated the nationalist cause. The Nigeria Union of Students (NUS) convened a mass meeting on 10 June 1944 to discuss the strike, raise funds for a national school and form a representative student committee, which became the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1945. At Umuahia, the school authorities ardently hoped that the school's location "far from the madding crowd" of such places as Lagos and other major townships"[17] would efficiently shield students from the seditious tendencies that came to be associated with such centrally-located institutions as King's College, Lagos. But the news of the King's College incidents found their way into the Umuahia Government College, like everywhere else, and its bewildered students took in the merits and demerits of the *non serviam* of their revolutionary peers on the other side of the Niger, the students of King's College, Lagos.[18]

[14] Coleman, *Nigeria*, 460.

[15] Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 56.

[16] For more on the King's College incidents, see: Anonymous, *75 Years of King's College Lagos* (Lagos: King's College Old Boys' Association, 1987). In 1948, King's College students staged yet another strike, and its authorities responded by expelling the entire senior class.

[17] Chike Momah (personal communication, 29 February 2008); Chukwuemeka Ike (personal communication, 26 March 2013).

[18] See: Chike Momah, *The Shining Ones: the Umuahia Schooldays of Obinna Okoye* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2003), 93–96; Wole Soyinka, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: A Memoir 1946–65* (London: Methuen, 1994), 144; Wole Soyinka, "The Precursors of Boko Haram: Text of a Lecture by Wole Soyinka at King's College, Lagos," <http://nigeriatelecomawards.com/The%precursors%20of%Boko%20Haram.htm> (accessed 13 May 2013).

## Keeping Seditious Fumes at Bay

Sam Anthony K. Epelle, a student known to have participated in anti-war revolts at King's College during the Umuahian exile,[19] culled news stories from the old radio set in the assembly hall and posted them up anonymously on the notice board. These reports were not always complimentary to the powers that be, and when Epelle's identity was discovered the Principal saw him "as something of a political renegade."[20] Luckily for Epelle, Simpson did not believe in radical solutions. He had been on the staff of King's College, and knew the likely results of punitive intervention in politically sensitive affairs. Simpson was keen to have his students capitalize on their talents,[21] and had been secretly impressed with Epelle's journalistic gifts. What he did was divert these talents to a more "conductive" end by "asking" the unruly student to limit the scope of his reports to the progress of the Allied Forces.[22] But the principal did not entirely succeed in containing Epelle's rebellious streak. The young political renegade is credited with being the first student to sneak copies of *The West African Pilot*, *The Nigerian Statesman*, and Nnamdi Azikiwe's *Renascent Africa* into the school.[23] It was thus that "the sweet aroma of Zik's kitchen" began to waft, alluringly, at the Umuahia Government College. But what to the students was a sweet aroma, was more of a deadly stench to the European masters "and perhaps one or two of the Africans."[24] Around this time, Zik's two Lagos dailies were banned for purportedly misrepresenting the facts of the general strike of 1945. There was also the scandal surrounding his denunciation of an alleged government plot to assassinate him.[25] These incidents brought Zik's popularity to fever pitch, but also hardened the already infuriated and alienated

[19] Obi Nwakanma, *Thirsting for Sunlight: Christopher Okigbo 1930–1967* (Oxford: James Currey, 2010), 44.

[20] Chike Momah, "Reminiscences of Government College, Umuahia in the Forties," in: Chinua Achebe (ed.), *The Umuahian: A Golden Jubilee Publication* (Umuahia: Government College Umuahia Old Boys' Association, 1979), 14–24, 18.

[21] Robert Wren, *Those Magical Years: The Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan: 1948–1966* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1990), 79; Kelsey Harrison, *An Arduous Climb: From the Creeks of the Niger Delta to Leading Obstetrician and University Vice Chancellor* (London: Adonis and Abbey, 2010), 47.

[22] John O. Onwuka, "General Notes," *Government College Umuahia Magazine* 2 (1948–1949), 5; Momah, "Reminiscences," 18. As the Principal had hoped, Epelle fulfilled his potential. Immediately after his graduation from Government College, he was employed as Assistant Publicity Officer in the Public Relations Office, Lagos, and many years later culminated a brilliant career in journalism as Federal Director of Information.

[23] Sam Onyewuenyi quoted in: Obi Nwakanma, *Thirsting for Sunlight*, 45.

[24] Momah, "Reminiscences," 18.

[25] Coleman, *Nigeria*, 285–288; Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 226.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

British officials.[26] And while the nationalist press was never explicitly banned at Government College, Principal Simpson's handling of the "Epelle Affair" epitomized the standard for future interventions: the use of subtle arts of suasion to keep seditious fumes at bay.

## "Not Fitting Works of the Intellect"

The favored approach at Government College was to drive home the fact that nationalist writings were "not fitting works of the intellect"[27] and thus not worthy of the attention of cultivated gentlemen. But as the underground readers of *Renascent Africa* soon noticed, the kind of education promulgated in Zik's manifesto, inclusive of contributions to precolonial African history[28] was not entirely at odds with the kind of historical instruction proffered at Government College. There was the fact that the history master, Martin Ogle, highlighted the ancient African kingdoms in his 1943/1944 classes;[29] furthermore, Principal Simpson "often sang [the] praises"[30] of Edward Harland Duckworth, the Inspector of Education and Editor of the magazine *Nigeria*, whose counter-hegemonic cultural militancy from within the ranks of the colonial hierarchy and symbiotic relationship with the nationalist press had raised so many eyebrows at the Education Department.[31] But there were occasional lapses:

> There was a white teacher who had come to Umuahia from King's College, Lagos, and was said to have been beaten up (or nearly so) in Lagos. This teacher had a habit – perhaps excusable in those colonial days – of making the occasional ill-considered remark about Africa and especially her politicians. (…) As little black colonial boys, we thoroughly disapproved of, but could do little about the teacher already referred to above, who now and again reminded us that he was "sick and tired of this African stupidity." He was always derisively referring to our Renascent Africa![32]

[26] Coleman, *Nigeria*, 287.

[27] Sam Onyewuenyi quoted in: Nwakanma, *Thirsting for Sunlight*, 42.

[28] Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (London: Cass, 1968), 10.

[29] Momah, "Reminiscences," 15.

[30] Kelsey Harrison (personal communication, 4 March 2012). Harrison's reference to Principal Simpson's amity towards Duckworth did not come up as a result of any directed questioning on my part, but in a conversation on the recovery of Umuahian archival material amongst Duckworth's papers at Rhodes House Library.

[31] RHLGB0162MSSAfr.s.1451 Box6/2, "A Survey by Edward Harland Duckworth of the Development of Science Education, of Certain Experiments in Education, of the Development of *Nigeria*, of the Fight for the Recognition of Nigerian Arts and Crafts, for the Establishment of Museums, for the Preservation of Antiquities and for a Wider Conception of Education," 22 August 1945.

[32] Chike Momah, "Reminiscences," 17–18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Momah first revealed the above in "Reminiscences of Government College, Umuahia in the Forties," published in the Golden Jubilee edition of the school magazine. He was careful not to disclose the identity of the teacher in question, despite the fact that he would be instantly recognizable to the editor of the volume, his classmate and friend Chinua Achebe, and other contemporaries. He also tried to defuse the explosive nature of the master's statements by highlighting the colonial context in which they took place. Ezenwa-Ohaeto finally identified the instructor as Adrian P.L. Slater in his 1997 biography of Chinua Achebe.[33] This information is somewhat sensitive, but by revealing the teacher's identity, it is possible to examine his words within the context of his broader pedagogical practice and its overall impact on the students' subconscious. Taken on their own, Slater's allusions to "African stupidity" and "Renascent Africa" reek of colonial prejudice. However, they speak to something more, and reading them against his experimental pedagogy makes the casting of blame more problematic.

## "A Little Book of Elementary Logic"

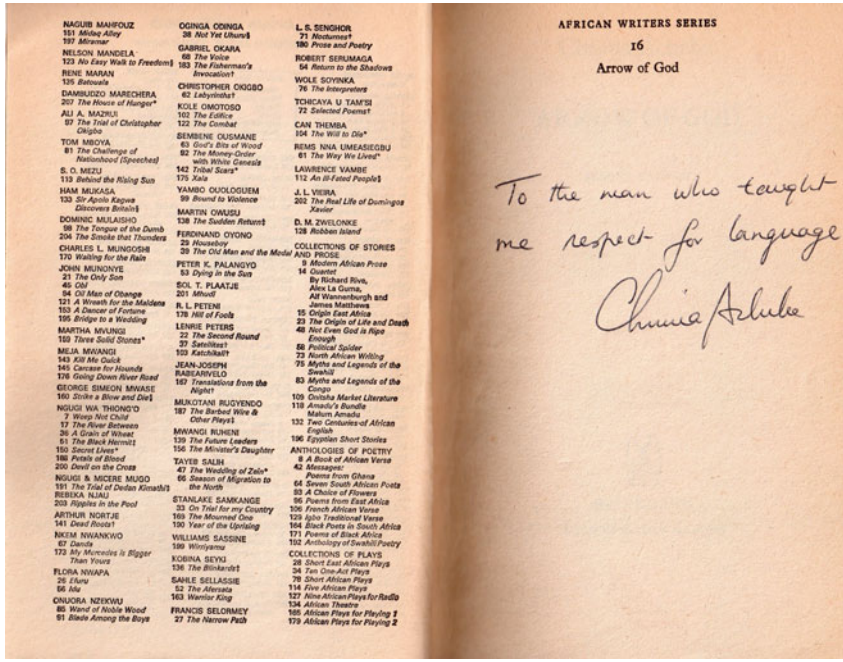
Adrian Slater's teaching methods were distinctive, and he forged for himself a reputation as one of Umuahia's most demanding masters. His punitive methods, rigid marking scheme, astounding amount of homework, and extensive list of recommended readings are among the most remembered facets of the man credited with impressing Achebe and Momah "respect for language."[34] But there was something else: a "little book of elementary logic," mentioned cursorily in Robert Wren's interviews with Achebe and Slater in *Those Magical Years: The Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan: 1948–1966*. During the course of my research on the influence of Government College, Umuahia on Nigerian first-generation writing, I found the use of such a book at the school intriguing, but the title of the book remained elusive to me until I read Slater's lesson notebook in 2010. While the lesson notes were sketchy and disordered, it was possible to glean timetables, lesson topics, titles of recommended texts and assigned essays, as well as references to favored teaching approaches. Scrawled in pencil near references to propaganda, the popular press, and nationalist newspapers was the title: *Clear Thinking: An Elementary Course of Preparation for Citizenship* (1936). A reading of this tome confirmed that Jepson's book was the mysterious book of logic. The volume, fashioned "to help the reader to cultivate habits of clear thinking so that he may acquire the power to detect his own

[33] Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 27.

[34] Roland W. Jepson, *Clear Thinking: An Elementary Course of Preparation for Citizenship* (London: Longmans Green, 1936), 130. Note the allusion to this very phrase in Achebe's dedication to Slater of a copy of his novel *Arrow of God*: "To the man who taught me respect for language." See figure 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

**Figure 1. Achebe's dedication to Slater of a copy of his novel *Arrow of God:* "To the man who taught me respect for language." Photo provided by and used with permission of Elizabeth Smith.**




and other people's prejudices"[35] was the outcome of R.W. Jepson's own UK-based experiment with boys in their late teens, who had just passed the School Certificate Examination, and was intended primarily for use in the upper forms of *British* secondary schools. That Slater chose to use this particular book with Form I students at Umuahia aged anything between eleven and fourteen years, is the first inconsistency with his complaints on "African stupidity."

Textbooks have been summarily dismissed as objects of study due to their purported low cultural worth and association with a passive learning style.[36] And yet, as John Issit underlines "when the research focus is on the construction, manipulation and reproduction of power and ideology, textbooks offer rich picking."[37] If, as in the present case, the textbook alerts its colonized readers to the manipulative nature of political discourse, the importance of its analysis is trebled.

[35] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 130.

[36] John Issit, "Reflections on the Study of Textbooks," *History of Education* 33 (2004), 683–696, 683.

[37] Issit, "Reflections," 688; Mangan, "Images," 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The political agenda of *Clear Thinking* is evident throughout the book, particularly in the three chapters that Slater signaled out for attention in class: "Language," "The Popular Press," and "Propaganda." On account of the war campaign and the authorities' aversion to the nationalist press, these themes would invariably appeal to Umuahian readers. As Jepson indicates in the introduction:

> If we can succeed in warning our pupils of the errors in reasoning they are likely to make themselves, in training them to detect sophistry in other people's arguments, and in making them aware of, and thus able to resist their natural susceptibility to suggestions, we shall be contributing more to the making of citizens than by merely imparting knowledge of our central and local government.[38]

Jepson's aim is a lofty one, and his prescription for the solution of "the political, social and economic problems" of society – adopting a critical and unprejudiced attitude and expressing the results of purposive thought in clearer and unequivocal speech and writing[39] – of crucial importance in alerting students to the snares of both colonial and anti-colonial discursive manipulation. To help students attain the desired outlook, Jepson draws from psychology and formal logic to exemplify instances of muddled thinking so as to enable students detect the ways in which they can get "flattered, cajoled, bullied, stampeded or drugged into ways of thought."[40] Jepson recommended that the book be used primarily to prepare students for the oral discussion of texts and exercises in class, but it also featured essay topics and written tasks. As his lesson notes show, Slater followed the book's prescriptions to the letter. In between his official English and History classes, he slotted periods for "General Knowledge," which he devoted to Jepson's particular brand of "clear thinking." In these classes, Slater led discussions on such topics as the rulers of Oyo, the 1930 Economic Regression, and the cause of the two World Wars. He also analyzed popular newspapers to exemplify prejudice and its manipulations. The contents and premises of *Clear Thinking* also formed the basis of the essays he assigned and his expectations of written work.[41]

Jepson's engagement with race and Empire exemplifies the unbiased, detached outlook he promulgates throughout the book. However, the book's projected readership was comprised of *democratic* citizens. The chapter on

[38] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, vii.
[39] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 4.
[40] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 134.
[41] Adrian P.L. Slater, "Notes of Lessons: King's College Lagos, September 1943–March 1944; Government College, Umuahia January 1945–April 1946," (Lagos, unpublished notebook, 1943–1946).

the popular press highlights the prerogative of a democratic government to abet "freedom of expression, freedom of discussion, freedom to criticize, and full knowledge of the facts."[42] Jepson qualified that "in times of stress or crisis, on the ground of self-preservation (…) we are not unwilling to forgo some of our liberties in order that we may ultimately retain all of them."[43] Thus, Jepson provided space into which to slot the colonial difference, which precluded the extension of these universal rights to the colonies.[44] The school authorities could also grab on to Jepson's belief that the popular press was as dangerous and tyrannical as state journalistic monopoly to justify their own strategic maneuver of weaning students away from the burgeoning nationalist papers. However, the emphasis of *Clear Thinking* on mediatic manipulation also provided students with ideological ammunition with which to question the school's pretentions to persuasive control. Hence, attentive students – and "the students were a captive audience, intelligent and able students," as Slater himself recalled in an interview[45] – must have extrapolated Jepson's exhortations against "the tendency to accept without question whatever one sees in print, or in the expressed opinions of so-called authorities"[46] to their own British history books, literary works, official information channels, and the school's implicit endorsement of British cultural superiority. Autobiographical and imaginative recreations of life at the Government College of those years reflect subjective processes of interrogation, revelation and subdued integration of politically-sensitive knowledge in the configuration of non-servile selfhood. It is not hard to find traces of Jepson's quasi-scientific approach in these colonial schoolboy subjects' individual quests for truth.[47]

[42] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 97.

[43] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 98.

[44] Ann L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 97.

[45] Slater quoted in: Phaneuel Akubueze Egejuru, *Chinua Achebe: Pure and Simple. An Oral Biography* (Ikeja: Malthouse, 1997), 24.

[46] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 98.

[47] See: Momah, *The Shining Ones*; Chukwuemeka Ike, *The Bottled Leopard* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1985); Christopher Okigbo, *Heavensgate* (Ibadan: Mbari, 1962). Such revelations were not unusual in elite colonial schooling. Writing on the impact of British educational institutions on Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's intellectual development, Carol Sicherman affirms that "with individual variants what happened to Ngugi [his simultaneous processes of mental colonization and decolonization at elite colonial institutions] happened to many other African intellectuals who grew up in late-colonial Africa." Certainly, Ngugi's secondary education at Alliance High School, the leading elite school for African children in Kenya, bears interesting parallels with the Umuahian education of Achebe and Momah. Ngugi's admission to Alliance similarly coincided with a period of political unrest: the Mau Mau uprising and the British government's declaration of a state of emergency in 1952. Ngugi, like some other Alliance students, found himself

The Zik group of newspapers typified the features that Jepson reviled in the popular press, including the "catchphrases of the politician, the 'slogans' and axe-grinding propaganda."[48] While Achebe never referred to Slater's explicit admonitions in any of his interviews and autobiographical essays, he did capture an instance of the master's use of the nationalist press in the classroom in the essay "The Sweet Aroma of Zik's Kitchen:"

> Many school authorities banned Zik's newspapers from their institutions, which only made them doubly attractive. I went to a more enlightened school, where the teachers did not talk of banning but showed you how badly the articles were written, which was not surprising in view of the low standard of American education. I remember my English teacher in my second year setting an exam for us in which we were expected to explain such incredible words as "gubernatorial" and "eschatological." We all scored zero in that number, whereupon he revealed to us that he had taken the words straight out of a recent issue of one of Zik's papers. I suppose it was a way of telling us what a sticky end we would all come to if we followed Zik's bombastic example. It turned out, instead, to have been a very effective way of learning new English words and remembering them forever afterwards.[49]

Achebe's quotation also reflects colonial aversion to African-American revolutionary ideas, which were absorbed and reproduced in the nationalist press.

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torn between his family's nationalist sympathies – his brother Good Wallace fought with the Mau Mau guerillas – and Alliance and its British educational values. Alliance, like the famous Achimota College in Ghana and other elite colonial schools featured extracurricular activities which "hinted at a postcolonial future – an intertribal society, short plays written and produced in Kiswahili, a history society devoted to subjects excluded from the Alliance High School Curriculum and a Debating Society" in which Ngugi defended that "Western education had done more harm than good in Kenya." But Alliance students were brought up to be "strong to serve," as the school motto proclaimed. The principal, Carey Francis, warned Ngugi against becoming a "political agitator," and his submission to the school magazine, "My Childhood" was conveniently edited and re-entitled "I Try Witchcraft;" alerting Ngugi to the discursive manipulations of colonial discourse. See: Carol Sicherman, "Ngugi's Colonial Education: 'The Subversion . . . of the African Mind,'" *African Studies Review* 38 (1995), 11–41, 12, 14; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (London: Harvil Secker, 2012), 27, 118–119, 166–177.

[48] Interestingly, Nigeria's colonial government praised the independent but conservative *Nigerian Eastern Mail* in analogous terms for "refusing to be coerced into the parrot like repetition of empty slogans, and in attempting always balanced, reasoned and progressive comment on matters of public interest" – C.J. Mayne, quoted in: David Pratten, *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 172.

[49] Achebe, "Zik's Kitchen," 30.

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These contrary ideas also had to be contained, hence the need to signal them out for attention in Umuahia's particular campaign against nationalist leaders:

> Americans, when they were featured at all [in class discussion] were dismissed summarily by our British administrators as loud and vulgar. Their universities which taught such subjects as dish-washing naturally produced the half-baked noisy political agitators, some of which were now running up and down the country because they had acquired no proper skills.[50]

Apart from Jepson-inflected discussions of the nationalist press and Nigerian current affairs, life at Umuahia was rarely punctuated by political distractions. Indeed, there was a "monotonous sameness of outlook and behavior pattern among the boys" when it came to political matters.[51] This serene temperament was apparently imbibed to such an extent that even the less conforming students learned to restrain their impulses. One day, after Slater had "probably over-stepped the mark" with his comments:

> An Abiriba boy, reflecting more of the fierce and warlike temper of his forebears than the phlegmatism of the typical Umuahia Government College boy decided single-handedly to teach him a lesson. Tucking his loin-cloth in bellicose fashion between his spindly legs, he set out for the white teacher's house. He came back ten minutes later, mission unaccomplished. Apparently in mid-stream, he had thought better of it and changed his mind.[52]

A close-reading of this passage yields interesting insights. Note the way in which the Abiriba boy visually divests himself of the symbol of identity imposed by the college – the all-white school uniform – sartorially asserting his indigenousness before taking on this independent, albeit inconclusive, act of insurgency. Also note that the student "thought better" of the planned retaliation before reaching the teacher's premises. Did it dawn on him that such "exaggerated and intemperate language accounts for many misunderstandings and misjudgments, and not only because it may arouse our worst passions and prejudices, but also because we often discount it, as it were in advance,"[53] as "the little book" established? Or did he merely choose to safeguard his place in the college, knowing the fate of the mutinous students of King's? Both options need not be mutually exclusive.

[50] Chinua Achebe, "Postscript: James Baldwin (1924–1972)," in: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor, 1990), 171–177, 172.

[51] Momah, "Reminiscences," 18.

[52] Momah, "Reminiscences," 20.

[53] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 130.

What matters is that the student's proud assertion of selfhood evinces an ongoing process of mental decolonization that was not necessarily disrupted by his conformist decision. I will return to this matter presently.

But back to Slater's polemical statements. Were the references to "African stupidity" and "Renascent Africa" a roundabout way to demonstrate the correlation between emotional involvement and impaired/muddled thinking? Or was this simply a case of "true colors" showing through in unguarded moments? The allusion to *Renascent Africa* can either be interpreted as a slight to African collective pride and uplift, or as a metonymic evocation of Zik, the epitome of everything the school authorities, not just Slater, held contrary to their educational principles. The reference to "African stupidity" is even more ambiguous. Jepson devoted much of the chapter "How Judgments are Made II" to the flawed reasoning involved in this type of national typecasting, categorically affirming that in times of crisis "sweeping generalizations about people arouse the worst barbaric passions. (…) The habit of attributing qualities to nations as a whole instead of to individuals is a dangerous one and a serious obstacle to international understanding."[54] To test students' comprehension of the bad logic involved in the common retort "the exception proves the rule" when instances are quoted against a generalization, Jepson set the following example:

Comment on the course of this argument:

A. "Negroes are incapable of intellectual development."
B. "But what about Booker Washington and Paul Robeson?"
A. "Yes, but they are the exceptions that prove the rule!"[55]

Such questions and the provocative essay title that Slater once assigned in class, "The Effect of Climate on Man's Work or Character"[56] allowed for a logical interrogation of racist tropes and must have impressed valuable lessons on the construction of stereotypes and the politics of representation. However, it was one thing for "little black colonial boys"[57] to read and apply such lessons in the controlled environment of the classroom, and another to hear a severe *European* master, and an annoyed one to boot, rehash such stereotypes. According to Ann Stoler, this unsettling gap between rhetoric and practice was frequent in colonial situations: "Sometimes political grammars constrained what colonial agents thought, sometimes those grammars delimited the political idioms in which people talked, indicating not what they thought, but only what they said."[58] The less flattering

[54] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 25.
[55] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 33.
[56] Slater, "Notes of Lessons."
[57] Momah, "Reminiscences," 18.
[58] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 233. See also: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2004), 132–145.

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explanation for Slater's words is that he actually thought what he said, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support it. But if we choose to read his declarations through the prism of *How to Think Clearly*, it seems reasonable to realize, as Slater probably wished his students would, "how often differences arise merely through the misunderstandings of words and phrases! How easy to be misled by ambiguities! (…) *Words, too, can be used to conceal or disguise thought, not to elucidate it* (emphasis added)."[59]

In private, the English and History master always told his family of his students' potential, the high expectations he had of them and disclosed his objection to "many aspects of the colonial education service and the attitude of the British Government and many Europeans he came across."[60] In public, he only had praise for their remarkable intelligence:

> I don't think I appreciated what a lot they were. At the time I thought, "Okay, I'll try this. Oh? They can do that! Very well, I'll try *that*. Oh, they can do *that*!" Now, I can look back and say, "for goodness sake, you had the *nerve* to ask them to see parallels – or differences – looking at say, the Chartists in England, or the federation of modern States into Modern Germany, on the other hand, and the civil disturbances, and the multi–national issues in Nigeria. But I did, you know – I was asking for perspectives on enormous issues. Achebe told me, "I remember you using a book on logic" and he was fourteen! I said "so I did." I've got the book upstairs. I, now, I wouldn't *dare* use it – not even in my good classes. (…) I could do it with these kids – they weren't even Europeans. It was all outside their experience, and yet they took it.[61]

Slater made the above reflections in an interview with Robert Wren forty years after his time at Umuahia, and the element of hindsight is hard to obviate. His statements neither refer to nor explain possible lapses in his relationship with the students, but incur in a retrospective evaluation of a quality he did not consciously recognize, *but took for granted* – his students' intellectual acumen.[62] I concur with the historian of colonial education Clive Whitehead that:

> It is surely the task of the historian to endeavour to empathize with, or to understand, the people and the issues of the period under study and to judge their acts not with the superior knowledge of hindsight but in the

[59] Jepson, *Clear Thinking*, 8–9.

[60] Elizabeth Smith (née Slater) (personal communication, 29 May 2010). This information was volunteered in the course of our interaction on the book of lesson notes. I did not bring up the issue of Slater's infamous references in the course of this initial exchange.

[61] Slater quoted in: Wren, *Those Magical Years*, 54.

[62] Also see Slater quoted in: Egejuru, *Chinua Achebe*, 23.

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light of the conditions prevailing at the time and what seemed then to be a viable option.[63]

The conditions affecting colonial education in the years 1944–1945 were more complicated than might appear at first sight and it is important "to see that form of multiple and contradictory belief that emerges as an effect of the ambivalent, deferred address of colonialist governance," as postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has written.[64] My use of pedagogical material to illuminate personal testimony, inferential as it may seem to be, coalesces and complicates the political, institutional, and psychological registers that affected the students of Government College, Umuahia, and it is in this "admittedly colonized – but also confused – space" to borrow Philip Zachernuk's words, that "we must look for what could not have been simple imperial success and African loss but was rather imperial negation operating among many contending forces."[65]

## Conclusion

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, English public schools prepared their students for careers as colonial administrators through the games ethic, the cult of imperial Englishness and the fagging and prefectorial systems. And while the Colonial Office would sometimes "arrange for an occasional lecture on the colonial service as a career to be given to schools, often by a district officer on leave," public schools – at least the Clarendon nine on which most elite colonial secondary schools were based – did not devote specific subjects or class periods to leadership/political instruction.[66] After the Second World War, elite colonial schools in Africa also became wellsprings of future leaders. These leaders, however, were expected to sympathize with British colonial interests. The element of subservience in such expectations, and the psycho-political conflicts ensuing from the necessarily partial permutation of elite English education in the colonies is apparent in postcolonial life-writing. And where the imperial curriculum, shaped in this era to fulfill the requirements of the Cambridge School Certificate Examination rather than leadership training, did not

[63] Clive Whitehead, "Education for Subordination? Some Reflections on Kilemi Mwiria's Account of African Education in Colonial Kenya," *History of Education* 22 (1993), 85–93, 86.

[64] Bhabha, *The Location of Knowledge,* 136.

[65] Philip S. Zachernuk, "African History and Imperial Culture in Colonial Nigerian Schools," *Africa* 68 (1998), 488–505, 486.

[66] Anthony Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

effectively shut out anti-colonial intrusions, educators had to find additional ways to secure the affect of the colonial student subject. Colonial school walls, however, were obstinately permeable to the realities beyond, and constrictive pedagogies sometimes turned out to be the most liberating.

In this article, I have detailed how by following the pointers of an unidentified "little book of logic," it was possible to place other memories of Umuahian school life in their proper perspective, and educe some of the ways in which students became aware of the political power of language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's affirmation that his own pathways to mental emancipation at Alliance High School were filled with "passing comments and fleeting images, often outside the formal classroom,"[67] is particularly relevant here. For it is to such passing comments and fleeting images, recalled in adult years, that we must turn to study the underpinnings of the invisible colonial curriculum and the multiple and often ambiguous processes of cultural colonization and decolonization, which often functioned simultaneously "in different ways and different times, and indeed sometimes (…) without effect."[68]

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[67] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *In the House of the Interpreter*, 27.

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