

HIGH-STAKES STANDARDIZED TESTING IN NIGERIA AND
THE EROSION OF A CRITICAL AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

by

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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the practice of high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria. Examining its colonial histories, its philosophical incongruities with African indigenous education, and its neocolonial foundations, it argues that high-stakes testing in Nigeria facilitates the erosion of a critical African worldview. It demonstrates that through high-stakes testing's reproduction of social and regional inequalities, the unethicity of its systems and practices as well as its exemplification of Freire's concept of normative and non liberatory education as the "practice of domination"; high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria seamlessly fits into the neo-colonial and neoliberal logic of education as a site of psychological colonization and the material exploitation of the people by the ruling elite.

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Dedication

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Introduction
Charting Uncharted Waters:
The Importance of Studying Standardized Testing in the Nigerian Context

The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.

(Steve Biko, 1978, p. 92)

Given the abundance of literature on the controversial issue of high-stakes standardized testing one might wonder if there is space left for any original contribution to the literature. Certainly philosophers of education have exhaustively thought through the issue as to cast little doubt to its devastating consequences for the critical processes of education as well as its negative effects on the educational experiences of students, teachers, and democracy at large. For example, Carlo Ricci (2004) has argued in “The Case Against Standardized Testing and the Call for a Revitalization of Democracy” that standardized testing enables an undemocratic educational environment in which what is learnt in the classroom is predetermined by a “top down hierarchical power structure” (p. 342). For Ricci, these conditions not only disempower students and teachers but also make the ideals of democracy alien in the school environment; which has significant consequences for students as future democratic and political actors in society (Groves, 2004). And Paul Groves has similarly argued in “‘Doesn’t it feel morbid here?’ High-stakes Testing and the Widening of the Equity Gap” that standardized testing is inequitable and discriminatory due to its negative effects on racialized students from low-income neighborhoods. According to Groves, these effects occur because racialized students are usually victims of poor educational systems as well as standardized tests that disempower them from seeking higher education.

Groves and Ricci thus provide a snapshot of the substantive literature on the issue. What contribution does this thesis hope then to make to the scholarship? It endeavors to examine the neocolonial and discursive violence that characterizes the pervasive use of high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria. Illustrating its imperialistic foundations and its antagonistic relationship with indigenous educational practices, it proposes to argue that the current scheme of high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria facilitates the erosion of a critical African worldview. It argues that this state of affairs is operationalized through high-stakes testing's historical anti-African bias in language, content and practice; and its amplification of the social, political, economic, historical and cultural alienation that characterizes the educational experiences of Nigerian students.

That this endeavor would contribute immensely to broadening the philosophical investigation of high-stakes standardized testing as well as the literature on African education is clear given that no philosopher of education has taken on the practice of high-stakes testing in Nigeria in any substantive way. And although education and schooling has been shown to have a direct relationship in maintaining the oppressive conditions of dependency as well as the psychological relations of imperialism (Carnoy, 1974) that are necessary for the material exploitation of African peoples, no researcher has apprehended the very enabling role high-stakes standardized testing can have in facilitating this state of affairs.

Furthermore, this kind of philosophical inquiry is needed now more than ever because it is reflective of philosophy of education's need to attend both to the philosophical and moral questions constituted within education and also engage with "the

structural constraints on schools as social institutions, and the ideological, political, economic, and cultural forces that frequently influence them” (Beyer, 1997, p. 85). That there is currently within the field of philosophy of education, a crisis of legitimacy, due to its purported parochialism and pompousness, is now widely accepted (Bredo, 2002, Beyer, 1997, Burbules, 2002 & Kvernebekk, 2001). However, the research such as the one being undertaken in this thesis undermines such discourses by dealing philosophically with urgent and relevant educational issues of our time. Indeed, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that far from being insular, philosophy of education can actually help to uncover, problematize and propose solutions to imperialism, structural oppression and inequality in education towards the greater material transformation of the world’s oppressed (Beyer, 1997).

In this vein, this thesis can be seen to be contributing to the field of philosophy of education through its interrogation of the ethicality of standardized testing in Nigeria; an issue that has garnered little or no philosophical consideration. It also adds to the discourse on postcolonial education in Nigeria as well as to the body of knowledge dealing with philosophical inquiry on African indigenous education and African consciousness.

However before moving on to the next chapter, it is important to locate myself in this research enterprise in order to give the reader an understanding of my motivations and intentions in undertaking this study. Nigeria is the land of my birth and I migrated from that country while still a child. However, I have maintained connection to it through visits, being conversant with current political and economic events and engagement with research on different aspects of the country’s development. The field of education has

long interested me because I believe it is the instrument that is most able to provide Nigerians with the knowledge, skills and attitude to place the nation on a development path that may attend to the material needs of the people. It was my desire to contribute to the discourse on education in Nigeria and West Africa country that led me to pursue graduate studies in the field of philosophy of education.

During my undergraduate years, I increasingly developed an awareness of the link between the appropriate type of education and development in the global south. Since education was one of the instruments used by colonialism to shape the consciousness of the Nigeria to British cultural domination and the system has remained substantively loyal to the processes and structures of Eurocentric schooling, I problematized this alien, colonized way of imparting and developing knowledge. Based on my experience of schooling in Canada, I know that normative education in a white dominated society carries the cultural markers and material interests of the dominant cultural and racial group, which some of my racialized peers and I experienced as alienation in our engagement with the curriculum. The form of education that emerged from the global North and implanted in the colonized and racialized world could not avoid transferring the values, ethos, worldview and operational logic in a place such as Nigeria.

The cultural imperialism of Western education could not help but serve as a disruptive and destabilizing force within colonized and postcolonial societies:

Specialist in basic education for underdeveloped countries or technicians for the advancement of retarded societies would do well to understand the sterile and harmful character of any endeavor which illuminates preferentially a given element of the colonized society. Even with the framework of a newly independent nation, one cannot attack this or that segment of the cultural whole without endangering the work undertaken (leaving aside the question of the native's psychological balance. More,

precisely, the phenomena of counter-acculturation must be understood as the organic impossibility of a culture to modify any one of its custom without at the same time re-evaluating its deepest values, its most stable models. (Fanon, 1965, pp. 41-42)

The products of western school can only be irrelevant and vulgar caricatures of the colonizers' values and expectations and, consequently, of little use to the peculiarities and needs of a postcolonial society. Ironically, my participation in the Western academy provides me with the space and conceptual tools to critically examine and engage the legacy and continued practice of colonial education in postcolonial Nigeria.

I am not engaging this research like a disinterested observer who does not have the proverbial "horse in the race." It is my objective to see the unleashing of an educational project in Nigeria and other states in Africa that would be able to free the developmental potentiality of the people. Furthermore, this anticipated approach to schooling would provide students with a critical education that would allow them to become empowered participants in the historical drama of social reconstruction and participatory-democratic governance. I want this research to be one that is seen as privileging the worldview of Frantz Fanon's "wretched of the earth". One cannot be neutral in the face of injustice and ought to express solidarity with those who need justice and emancipation. I share Fanon's (1967) assertion on being an ally even when one is not immediately implicated or affected by an act of injustice:

Anti-Semitism hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white by an appalling battle, I am deprived of the possibility of being a man. I cannot disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother. Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man. (p. 89)

In other words I must be in solidarity with those who are socially exploited because my

own humanity is implicated or is at stake if I remain silent, especially in a situation where I am able to lend my voice in advancing equity, justice and the self-assertion of the damned.

In pursuing the above objectives, the thesis is comprised of five chapters. In the first chapter a general overview of the literature on standardized testing will be provided. An emphasis will be placed on texts that have dealt significantly with high-stakes testing's constitutive alienating element, its antidemocratic bias and its negative effects on the development of critical consciousness in education.

The second chapter will introduce the issue of standardized testing in Nigeria. A brief historiography of standardized testing in Nigeria will be presented to illustrate its colonizing foundations. The chapter will also demonstrate the elaborate way in which high-stakes testing has been interwoven into the formal educational system in Nigeria, first by colonial administrators and later by Nigeria's educated elite. It will also make evident the difficult task that the extrication of high-stakes standardized testing poses given the intricate way it has been historically embedded into the educational system.

The third chapter will engage with the incongruity of high-stakes standardized testing with the pedagogical, epistemological and philosophical approaches of African indigenous education. Emphasizing the concepts of holism, communalism and experiential learning, it will argue that high-stakes testing was disruptive to the societies privileged by indigenous conceptions of education.

The fourth chapter will discuss the emergent problems with high-stakes testing in Nigeria today. It will analyze the role of standardized testing in exacerbating the issues of

regional and gender inequalities as well as the urban/rural divide that characterizes the educational climate in Nigeria.

The fifth chapter will discuss the ways in which high-stakes standardized testing aids in the erosion of a critical African worldview. Using Paulo Freire's concept of banking education and its effect on the development of critical consciousness, it will examine the role of high-stakes testing in engendering an educational environment in which students are largely disempowered and are unable to critically interrogate the world around them.

The theoretical framework that will be used to resolve the issues considered in this thesis will be animated by post colonialism. Postcolonialist thought explores the effects of the West's colonial domination and exploitation of the lands and peoples in the global South as well as the continued impact of this relation of subordination, ideationally and materially, on a society such as Nigeria. As Stuart Hall puts it, postcolonialism is useful in that it enables the identification of "the new relations and dispositions of power" emergent in the new conjuncture of post-decolonization (Hall, 1996, p. 246). In other words, postcolonialism, as a discursive framework, allows us to excavate the intricacies of decolonization with its emergent neo-liberal and neo-colonial formations in order to apprehend the developmental stagnation and socioeconomic complexities of African societies post independence. Given such an insight, postcolonialism does not signify the denouement of colonisation as its name would suggest but rather refers to what Simon Gikandi has called the "code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation" (Gikandi, 1996, p. 14). And it is precisely this resonance or "after-effects" of colonialism (Hall,

1996, p. 248) with its continued stake in the educational imperatives of the Nigerian postcolonial state that the proposed thesis wishes to concern itself with.

If the structures, processes and contents of formal education in Africa serve as vehicles for the maintenance of Western hegemony and domestic elite control and power consolidated by colonisation, then postcolonial discourse can provide relevant concepts with which to explore the climate of postcolonial education in Nigeria. To this end, Stuart Hall's (1996) argument that postcolonialism is "characterised by the persistence of many of the effects of colonisation" even as these effects are displaced from "the coloniser/colonised axis to their internalisation within the decolonised society itself" (p. 248) provides an excellent entry point from which to look at the issue of high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria. This is because the current practice of high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria speaks not only to the reverberation of colonial educational practices in the trend du jour educational policies of postcolonial Nigeria but to the rejection of African indigenous educational practices and the inculcation of western conceptions of education.

Chapter One

The Issue of High-Stakes Testing in Education

This chapter will, through a review of the literature on standardized testing, elucidate the concept of standards in education. It will discuss the issue of standardized testing in education, engaging with texts that have dealt significantly with its constitutive socially alienating elements, its antidemocratic thrust and its stake in the neoliberal erosion of critical consciousness in education. Within the larger frame of the thesis, this chapter is instrumental in that it provides an overview of the conversations that philosophers of education have had on the controversial issue of high-stakes testing in education. It also establishes a justificatory impetus for the philosophical investigation of standardized testing in Nigeria.

Standards in Education

In recent years many philosophers of education have concerned themselves with the controversial issue of standards in education (Au, 2008; Covaleskie, 2002; Eisner, 2001; Graham & Neu, 2004; Lipman, 2004; Sacks, 1997). Approaching the issue from multi-directional perspectives, they have philosophized extensively on the ethicality of the educational dilemma with many arguing for the necessity and justness of the standards movement (Covaleskie, 2002; Moxley, 2005; Phelps, 2005; Visone, 2009). And others denigrating the push for standards as inherently neo-liberal and inimical to critical pedagogy and the educational enterprise (Hursh, 2000; Popham, 2001; Sattler, 2012). Indeed only a cursory analysis of the existing literature reveals the myriad ways with which philosophers of education have engaged the contentious issue. But before

demonstrating this dissonance in the literature, it is useful to begin by examining what is meant by “standards” in education and to locate the standards movement within its social, cultural, and historical manifestations. Doing this not only provides a much needed background to the emergent issue which this thesis purports to soon make evident but also operates to subvert any inclination to divorce this urgent philosophical issue from urgent material socioeconomic and political realities.

Generally speaking, to pursue any sort of education is to expect to learn something from that endeavor. The thing that ought to be learnt, or that one hopes to learn often becomes the grounds or criterion for determining the efficaciousness of the educational pursuit. Even in communities where education is learnt informally, members of that community are still socialized and or educated into a particular social standard, and are often measured against one another in the pursuit of that standard. So it is safe to say then that education always involves some sort of concrete discernable standard. Similarly, in educational philosophy, the concept of standards is often invoked to refer to accountability, established criteria and measurable outcomes in education. As Eisner (2001) puts it, educational standards “imply high expectations, rigor, things of substance” (p. 387). They also suggest a sort of “quality control” in education (Noddings, 2001, p. 399) in that they enable teachers to be held quantifiably accountable for their teaching, students for their learning and society, to a larger extent, for the broader cultural values, ideas and knowledge that are being transmitted.

Certainly, the question of standards in education can be said to be as old as educational philosophy itself. When European philosophers of education often discussed the nature and purpose of education, there was usually imbued within this discourse

thoughts and ideas about the criterion of a sound education. For instance, In *The Republic*, Plato (1992) can be seen as engaging in this discourse when he disparages the sophists for believing that the standard for a good education is the putting of “sight into blind eyes”, arguing that the measure of an education must be about redirecting the sight which already exists in every human soul, so that it looks “where it ought to look” (p. 190). Locke (1705) also contributed to this conversation. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* he puts forth the view that a quality education must be about reorienting the body and mind to pursue that which “may be suitable to the Dignity and Excellency of rational Creature” (p. 137). For Locke then, a good and proper education must be tangibly reflected in the ways and attitudes of the individual, so that it must be apparent in the “Manner and Abilities” of the person (p. 138). According to these philosophers then, the difference between an educated person and a non educated person must be perceptible so that for Plato, the educated person must be able to redirect their lens towards the places where they ought to look, places where the non educated person might not look; whereas for Locke, the educated person must be differentiated in their ability to discipline their body and mind.

Hence the concept of standards is embedded within the fabric of education itself. To be sure, it would be almost incomprehensible to imagine any kind of education or schooling without it (Eisner, 2001, p. 387). As such, the call for standards in education is tenable in so far as it demands that something intellectually discernable, material and or concrete be obtained from any educational pursuit. But if there has always been the question of standards in education, what then is the cause of the current intellectual schism amongst philosophers of education. What is so objectionable and different about

the current standards movement? And why is the movement seemingly on the verge of sweeping the entire world?

The answers to the preceding questions are complex and involve different responses depending on the geographical area and or sociohistorical context one chooses to look at. But many critiques of the standards movement would have us look primarily at the economic principle of neo-liberalization as a key factor informing their reservations. For these philosophers of education the current standards movement is not so much informed and concerned with the fact of education and learning as it is with the subjection of education to market forces in order to reproduce and facilitate “particular discourses, practices, and structures that enable neoliberalism to persist and prosper” (Hursh, 2007, pp. 115-116). They point to the fact that under neoliberalism, education in the west has ceased to be about the improvement of human capital and the greater social good but has rather been transformed into an object of economic productivity (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). And they argue further that this economic rationality informing neoliberalism has operatively turned education into something that can be bought and sold while relieving governments of their duty to invest in public education (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254).

Certainly for those against the standards movement, it is this neoliberal commodification of education, with its absolute negation of critical pedagogy and unquantifiable knowledge that sustains the standards movement. Everything, it appears, must be objectively measured, from the student, to the school, to the teacher to learning itself. Within this framework, education is reduced to “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” a state of affairs that Paulo

Freire (1970) refers to as the banking model of education (p. 72). And indeed, Freire use of banking is apt given the neoliberal transmutation of education and learning into money making enterprises, because although he was not directly describing the neoliberal situation, his conception of the banking model as a way in which students are formulated as “adaptable, manageable beings” (p. 73) is prescient. As he articulates it, the banking concept of education operates in such a way as to force “students to work at storing the deposits entrusted to them” which in turn causes a loss of critical consciousness and disables them from intervening “in the world as transformers of that world” (p. 73). It is this loss of critical consciousness as well as the impunity with which neo-liberalization seeks to engender an educational climate in which learning is objectified and experiential knowledge removed from schooling that those against the standards movement decry.

In North America and Europe the outcry against the neoliberal mantra of standardization has been quite significant. Philosophers as well as qualitative and quantitative researchers of education have taken on the standards movement examining its social, cultural, political and economic implications for citizens. One particular area of the standards movement that has received a significant amount of scholarly attention has been the question of high-stakes standardized testing.

High-Stakes Standardized Testing in Education

The question of high-stakes standardized testing in education has been analyzed and approached from different perspectives. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, some philosophers of education have taken on its neoliberal character, denigrating its marketization of schools as well as its production of education and learning as a space of

competition in which the instrumentally rational individual must compete (Hursh, 2001). Within this discourse the movement for standardized testing in schools, with its accompanying rhetoric of accountability, is often represented as part and parcel of the legitimation and entrenchment of neoliberalism. That is to say that neoliberalism sustains itself by enabling within schools a cultural atmosphere, powered through high-stakes standardized tests and standardized curricula, that falsely promises to present students with an equal and competitive chance at educational success and ultimately greater social success (Au, 2008). Yet such a representation is rather precarious at best, and as a review of the literature demonstrates, it distorts the ways in which high-stakes testing usually reduces student achievement to tests and measures their value in the educational marketplace according to test scores (Au, 2008). Indeed, what is left concealed underneath the educational technologies of neoliberalism, are the social, economic and political realities in which students are located. As Wayne Au puts it, high-stakes testing necessitates that “a universalized norm is imposed from above regarding what the products (student-commodities) need to be like, in the same stroke alienating students from the processes of their education” (p. 43).

The view expressed by Au (2008), is precisely why many philosophers of education have approached the issue of high-stakes testing by examining its sociopolitical and economic motivations, and implications. One thinker who has fearlessly tackled the issue has been Alfie Kohn. In one article audaciously titled, *High-stakes Testing and Educational Ethnic Cleansing*, Kohn (2000) reviews what he believes are “indisputable facts” on the issue. For Kohn, these include the fact that students are today being tested at unprecedented levels across America; the fact that affluent kids are more likely to do

better in standardized testing because their families, districts and schools have the social and economic capital to invest in better test preparations; and the fact that high-stakes testing inevitably ends up pushing and or cleansing working-class students of color out of schools because they are more likely to lack adequate preparations because of their poorer socioeconomic condition.

Substantiating Kohn's analysis is Judith Hansen's (2001) work "White Culture: African American Students and Standardized Testing" in which she analyses the nexuses of race, culture, and class and its implications for the test scores of African American students in the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP). Discussing the TASP, a college entrance exam which all students who wish to graduate from a Texas university must pass, Hansen argues that it alienates African American students by testing their reading and writing skills in the white majority standard English rather than Ebonics which is not only the distinctive language used by African Americans but is also "a potent marker of African American ethnic or cultural identity" (p. 203). For Hansen, success at the test which measures writing, reading and math skills requires that the African American student abandon the language and culture that is a part of their lived reality to embrace the dominant English that is a part of white culture.

This dissonance between the lived realities of students and high-stakes standardized testing has been a recurring theme in the works of educational thinkers against standardization (Lipman, 2004; Townsend, 2002; Walpole et al., 2005; Williams & Land, 2000). For their part, Williams and Land (2006) have problematized the ways in which educational policies that prioritize high-stakes testing often purport to be race neutral and color blind, but are actually racist in that they disavow the legitimacy of the

African American experience. The authors point to the ways in which standardized content often fail to account for the institutional and daily racism experienced by students of color, choosing instead to deny the ubiquity of race in determining the allocation of goods and services in America (Williams & Land, 2006).

Wayne Au (2009) has referred to the preceding state of affairs as the “triple bind”. Describing recent findings that demonstrate that educational districts with “high concentrations of low-income and non-white students” are more likely than their high-income, whiter counterparts to create “more restrictive, less enriching educational environments for their students, Au contends that this places already underprivileged students in a “triple bind” (p. 68). And by that, he means firstly, that at the same time that the curriculum becomes standardized and adapted to the content expectations of the tests, knowledge that recognizes the experiences as well as the cultural and historical locations of students are supplanted. Secondly, that the standardization of content, facilitated by high-stakes testing, not only prohibits a diverse curriculum in the classroom but works against the diverse ways in which students learn in the classroom. And thirdly, that as a “consequence of the disparate achievement in high-stakes testing environments, non-white students ultimately feel intense pressures to perform well- even as their curricular environments are becoming increasingly restricted and less rich” (p. 68).

Given then that high-stakes standardized testing suppress the diversification of content and the introduction of different learning styles into the classroom one wonders its implication for critical pedagogy. That is, if we accept Peter McLaren’s (2000) conception of critical pedagogy as pedagogy that promotes the negotiation and transformation of “the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of

knowledge, institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state,” (p. 35) then it is clear that the values of critical pedagogy are inconsistent with the goals of high-stakes testing. This is because under the demands of high-stakes testing, teachers are not only pressured to be accountable for their students through test scores but are subjected to an increasingly centralized power structure, that leaves them disempowered, and restricted simply as conveyors of information (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008, p. 205). Hilliard (2000), has discussed the conflicting relationship that teachers often have with high-stakes testing, noting that the pressure to generate high test scores often force many teachers to compromise excellence in education as they feel more and more threatened and terrorized by the “mindless demands for inappropriate standardization not only testing but in teaching as well” (p. 302).

More significant, though, are the larger implications of standardized testing for democracy. In view of the above reviewed literature, it is evident that high-stakes standardized testing does nothing to promote democratic values in education or society at large. As teaching becomes more and more about the transferring of knowledge, students are represented as empty unknowing subjects, which the knowing teacher must transfer knowledge to, thereby fortifying the hierarchy that exists between a teacher and student in the classroom (Freire, 1998). Yet within such a schooling environment, teachers are also subject to authority from educational administrators, supervisors and school boards, all of which produces an anti-democratic curriculum that teaches students and teachers “how to think and act in the world” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 74). As such, high-stakes testing privileging of a central authority apart from the classroom denies students and teachers

the opportunity to participate in their own education, which goes against the principle of participation and active citizenship necessary for a vibrant democracy. Indeed as students are rendered passive in the classroom, the spirit of agitation and resistance and inquiry necessary for a vibrant democracy are discouraged and this manifests itself as they become adult citizens. Moreover, high-stakes standardized testing contradicts the democratic principles of diversity and inclusivity in its promotion of the educational advancement of economically privileged students over those of racialized students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion: High-Stakes Standardized Testing in Nigeria

Given the above review of the literature on high-stakes standardized testing, it is clear that its negative effects on education have been the topic of much philosophical considerations among academics in the West. Yet in Nigeria, as in many African countries, where high-stakes testing is more vulgarly infused into all aspects of education, the silence is deafening.

In Nigeria, the literature on education has tended to focus on such issues as the high illiteracy rates; corruption; high dropout rates; under funding; poor planning; and so on. As such, the issue of high-stakes testing has been met with a resounding silence. This state of affairs persists even though high-stakes testing, as will be argued in the thesis, has had an enabling role in many of the issues facing Nigeria's educational system. For instance, with regards to the issue of corruption, high-stakes testing exacerbates this practice because underprepared students, which comprise a significant number of students due to the pervasive issues of under qualified teachers, improper implementation

of the curriculum and lack of funding, are forced to resort to any means necessary to perform well on these examinations.

Moreover, the literature has also neglected to apprehend the incongruity of high-stakes testing with the national strategy of education. Indeed, despite the national plan for education as a catalyst for the development of national consciousness (Uko-Aviomoh et al., 2007), high-stakes testing arguably enforces an authoritarian educational environment where the critical consciousness needed to be politically conscious is not engendered. Furthermore, in spite of the policy's prioritization of education as a catalyst for national integration, standardized testing in Nigeria arguably aids in the reproduction of regional and social inequalities in education. And although Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy underscores the intimate relationship that education has with national development, high-stakes testing has only facilitated an unstable educational environment in which most students are unsuccessful at public examinations. And are thus unable to procure the necessary certificates needed to further their educational goals; a situation which is completely at odds with UBE's emphasis on the need for every Nigerian to acquire sufficient education necessarily to contribute to the country's social and economic development.

This thesis thus aspires to make up for the lack of academic discourse on the topic and will engage concretely with the practice of high-stakes testing in Nigeria in subsequent chapters. In the next chapter, a historical overview of high-stakes testing in Nigeria will be provided in order to demonstrate its colonial foundations; this will then set the stage for consequent chapters in which the incongruity of high-stakes testing with indigenous conceptions of Education in Nigeria is discussed.

Chapter Two

The Development of Standardized Testing in Nigeria

In “Philosophy and History of Education: Time to bridge the gap?” Marc Depaepe (2007) proposes that, in the wake of the uncertainty which threatens to send the philosophical and historical study of education into academic oblivion, it might be useful to imagine history and philosophy as “allies ... or as counterweights, ... in the development of independent critical thought” (p. 34). For Depaepe, this enables philosophers and historians of education to guard against “myopic research into petty detail”, an offense that they are often accused of (p. 34). It is in this intellectual spirit that I embark on this chapter. Weaving educational philosophy with history, I elucidate the historical intricacies of the development of standardized testing in Nigeria and the philosophical considerations they inspired.

Having provided a literature review on high-stakes standardized testing in the preceding chapter and exposed some of the attendant philosophical questions that it elicits about the purpose and value of education, I shall be concerned in this chapter with providing a historiography of standardized testing in the Nigerian context. This endeavor is critical because it will demonstrate the intricate way in which high-stakes testing has been interwoven into the fabric of formal education in Nigeria, first by colonial educational administrators and later by Nigeria’s educated elite. It will also make evident the arduous task that the extrication of high-stakes standardized testing poses in the Nigerian context given the elaborate way it has been historically embedded into the educational system. This chapter is also significant because it will show that education in Nigeria has almost since its introduction by the British in 1842 (Imam, 2012), been

reducible to test scores and socioeconomic mobility. These narrow conception of education and knowledge as limited to testing marshaled by western conceptions of social and racial progress, will prove integral to the theses as I move on in subsequent chapters to discuss the anti-African nature of high-stakes standardized testing; its oppositional relationship with indigenous educational practices and social outlook; and its antagonistic relationship with the formation of a critical African worldview.

Displacing the Community and Manufacturing Individualism: Mission Schools and the Beginnings of Standardized Testing in Nigeria

To put it mildly, scholarship on high-stakes testing in Africa has been sparse at best, as historians and philosophers of education have prioritized other aspects of research including mission schools¹, African indigenous education, African epistemologies and theories of education and contemporary issues in African education. Only few researchers (Dillard, 2001, 2003; Namie, 1989; Omolewa, 1978, 1980, 1982, 2006) have ascertained the importance of the topic, and even then the scholarship has tended to focus more on its historical features and less on its persistent encroachment on the development of critical pedagogy, and emancipatory consciousness in Africa. Notwithstanding this reality, Mary E. Dillard (2003, p. 417) has pointed out that “in addition to studying educational content, curriculum, and the structures of schooling in West Africa, devoting closer attention to the instruments of measurement can help us to understand how educational systems ... developed in the way they did from the colonial period to the present”. And to that I would add that scholarship on testing regimens and its evolutions in African countries combined with the philosophical discourse that

¹ Mission schools were schools established by Christian missions in Africa. They were the first schools established in Nigeria (Imam, 2012).

accompany them can reveal a great deal not only about the development of educational and knowledge production in a country but also about the type of worldview it propagates. Certainly, this is the claim that this thesis hopes to soon make evident.

In tracing the historical development of examinations in British West Africa, Dillard (2001) makes the argument that external examinations, that is testing conducted by a board or council apart from the candidate's school, developed apart from mission schools. As she contends, this was the reality because the practice of external examinations had yet to gain popular acceptance in Britain and only did so at the second half of the 19th century. Yet it is possible to argue that mission schools were instrumental in enabling an educational climate in which high-stakes examination practices could flourish. They achieved this through the strident devaluation of all things native, including indigenous religious and educational practices in addition to the African "collective epistemological understanding and rationalizations of community" (Zulu, 2006). Indeed through an emphasis on strong individualism, in which the new convert was praised and awarded special social distinction, missions propagated an educational environment that was often at odds with African indigenous principles of social cohesion and community (Dougall, 1939). It was at the mission schools, that the western notion of testing as a marker of an individual's intellectual aptitude was introduced. Omolewa (1982) has demonstrated how Christian Missions were the first to import the principles and practice of knowledge and intellectual assessment. He argues that assessment and inspection of student knowledge and aptitude was an integral part of missionary efforts. The result of such conventions was that mission schools actively manufactured an educational atmosphere, in which foreign conceptions of individual progress and success,

foundations on which standardized testing thrives, could find fertile ground. And as the regime of standardized testing became established under official British colonial policy, and test scores came to represent the African's proximity to Whiteness, this state of affairs became even more entrenched and education became synonymous with socioeconomic mobility and prestige.

Establishing Educational Dominance:

Standardized Testing and Colonial Examination Bodies

If mission schools dominated the earliest educational initiatives in Africa, it was only because the British colonial government had not yet apprehended the material benefits of a colonially educated African population. Had they understood that the colonial enterprise would be more effectively managed by inculcating into the African the belief in his or her own natural and cultural inferiority, a situation that could only be brought about through the colonial educational doctrine of White superiority, they might have articulated a more expansive educational policy beforehand. Nonetheless once colonial officials understood that the elevation of a few educated Africans, separate from the masses, who would enjoy the unprecedented material and social rewards of colonization, was consistent with British policy of indirect rule, a broader system of education was introduced in 1952 (Odi, 1983). As Omolewa (2006) argues, once colonial officials appreciated that the administration and control of West Africa necessitated African clerks, messengers, interpreters, and other formally educated personnel to assist in maintaining effective control of the region they were quick to join missionary organizations in the establishment of secondary schools. To this end, King's College was founded in Lagos as the first model secondary school. Established by colonial

administrators, King's College represented the first official endeavor to provide general education in Nigeria and was followed soon after by the expansion of secondary school education throughout the colonies (Omolewa, 2006).

The proliferation of secondary schools in British West Africa necessarily accompanied a quality control procedure to ensure that candidates met with British Standards of education. As such, the development of secondary school education by colonial administrators was accompanied by official invitation to British examinations board to verify the literary proficiency of the graduates and measure the quality of the secondary school system (Omolewa, 2006). This need to measure the intellectual capacity of students resulted in the introduction of the University of London Colonial Examinations in 1887 which also represented the first opportunity that residents in Nigeria had to obtain university degree; the University of Cambridge Local Examinations in 1910; followed by the Oxford University Delegacy of Local Examinations in British West Africa, examination bodies which came to measure the quality of education and ultimately determined the content of the education being transmitted.

Colonizing the Mind:

The Consequences of the African Preoccupation with Examination Certificates

Although it is important to note that the London University directed the Matriculation, Intermediate and Degree examinations, while Oxford and Cambridge Universities conducted the Preliminary, Junior and Senior School Certificate Examinations, which was to be taken after year 2, year 4 and year 6 of secondary school (Omolewa, 1982), this thesis is not so much concerned with the bureaucratic operations and organizational features of these examination bodies. It is rather interested in the

underlying philosophical and ideological consequences that they had for the development of education in Africa. As such, I turn now to the significance and impact they had on the Nigerian educational climate and the mental subjugation and inferiority complex, which they activated in the African psyche. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) so eloquently put it, while the

real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth ... its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (p. 16)

From the beginning, the certificates and the socioeconomic mobility, which these examination bodies conferred, were a marker of pride and prestige, especially since they were internationally recognized (Dillard, 2001). In addition to bestowing the individual with material success they served to distinguish and raise his or her stock above that of the other members of the community. To put it in the manner of Frantz Fanon (1967) success at these examinations elevated the individual above his or her 'jungle status' (1967). Differently stated, imbibing the principles of western education and culture meant that the African "becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (p. 18). And this was crucial given Hegel's (1956, p. 99) conception of Africa as "unhistorical and undeveloped" as well as the currency of colonial narratives, justified by anthropological and scientific racism which represented the African as savage and unknowing, it is no wonder that Africans were eager to climb up the ladder of racial hierarchy. Hence the passage of these examinations signified a passage from savagery to civilization. This transition was also harmonious with British policy on education, which as articulated by Frederick Lugard (1925), was "to enable the African ... to emerge from the habit of mind

which has through centuries marked him out as a slave of other races” (p. A2). And significantly related to the psychological uplifting which test scores represented was the procurement of a colonial profession and material advantages that it made possible. As such, the exigency with which many Africans renounced and denounced their jungle status and conformed to European cultural standards were astronomical. Describing the certificate hysteria in Tanzania, Julius Nyerere famously wrote, that the kind of education propagated under the testing rubric inevitably produced the African “as a commodity, whose value is determined by certificates, degrees, or other professional qualifications” (Nyerere, 1975, p. 7). Chief J. A. O. Odebiyi also expressed similar sentiments, when at independence he accused Nigerian secondary school graduates of being mercenaries who were “materialistic and complacent ... and tended to think that possession of a Cambridge ... certificate entitled them to believe that the world owes them a living” (Omolewa, 2006, p. 275). Thus the commoditization of education in Africa and its linkages with the western identity and material rewards rather than for the purpose of transformation and liberation are intricately embedded with the historical development of education in Africa. In Nigeria, Omolewa (1982) has studied how recruitment for clerical and government positions involved “the use of the Western model of selection, certification and examinations” (p. 121). In fact the esteem, which the certificates accorded was so high that many Africans who had dropped out of school for various reasons, often expressed the ambition to “return to the certificate race” through out-of-school learning programmes and remedial education” (p. 121). Under these new conditions, success at manual and agricultural work which had hitherto, been the basis for the individual’s social esteem in African society, became diminished in value. The goal

of every child henceforth was to be the “procurement of white collar employment and of escape” from indigenous African pursuits (Kitchen, 1962, p. 369).

Given the preceding state of affairs, and the psychological and material benefits of Western education, it stands to reason that competition amongst, students, schools and teachers would be a general consequence of the colonial standardization scheme. Indeed, this situation was to be found at all levels of education. It generally began at the primary level due to the immense demand for secondary school education and shortage of available spots (Kitchen, 1962). According to one observer, “the anxiety of the children who reached the short-list and interview stage had to be seen to be believed” education had become “confused in the greater majority of minds with certificates” (Kitchen, 1962, p. 369). And the British welcomed this unhealthy learning and schooling environment because it promoted “democratization and competition” which was a pivotal part of the standardization policy (Omolewa, 1982, p. 120). However the nature of the democracy it promoted is questionable given that the colonial enterprise itself was anything but democratic. And while it did breed competition amongst schools and students, the competition was largely due to the paucity of available spots, as there were still thousands of students vying for less than a 100 spots in each school. The result of these stringent educational circumstances was that few Nigerians gained access to school, and when those individuals began to experience the rewards of their privileges, there developed a schism between them and the uneducated masses, that is, the still barbaric Africans. Moreover, the competitive situation drove many students to resort to bribery, fraud and corruption in order to meet up with the certificate requirements (Omolewa, 1982).

The condition of alienation and indifference exhibited by Africa's educated elite was made manifest due to another important aspect of the colonial standardization movement and that was the mental colonization of Africans vis-à-vis the kind of educational content, material and curriculum being disseminated. As Dillard (2001) observes, "the proliferation of all these examinations insured that the type of education provided to students ... in Nigeria remained ... geared towards a school curriculum developed in Britain" (p. 66). In fact, members of Africa's educated elite, students and their parents championed the strict adherence to British content and curriculum because it placed the African student on the same moral and intellectual level as the European student (Peshkin, 1965). For proponents of this discourse, African success at these exams represented a rupture of the European's claim to intellectual superiority. To this end, those who had performed well at the exams and attended university away from home exhorted the exams and in their correspondence with family, friends and colleagues encouraged other Nigerians to follow their footsteps (Omolewa, 1980). Robert Wellesley Cole, remembering his early school days in Sierra Leone described how members of his community distrusted and suspected any education that "had not the stamp of England" (Cole, 1960, p. 212).

For Julius Nyerere (1968), the jealous way in which African educated elites guarded the British content of formal schooling was a reflection of their alienation from indigenous African culture and values. Hence the jubilation that the elite conveyed at having 'conquered' Western education and climbed the racial ladder was an experience of false consciousness because at the same time that they celebrated their conquest of Western educational values, they were signaling their mental enslavement and a

disavowal of their African identity. While they envisaged themselves as victorious, many of them were actually advancing the cause of colonization and were evidence of the psychological damages wrought on the African through education. To the extent that colonial education rarely transmitted the values and knowledge of the indigenous society, the would be victors, must be seen as “part of a deliberate attempt to change” African values and “to replace traditional knowledge with the knowledge of a different society (Nyerere, 1968, p. 417). As Nyerere (1968) asserts, the education provided by colonial powers was thus not “relevant for the purposes of a free people committed to the principle of equality” freedom and liberation (p. 417).

However not all graduates of the colonial educational system were parrots for that system. Many were discontented with the educational system and criticized the European content of the curriculum as “ill-suited and irrelevant to African needs” and many complained that “in the process, the indigenous values of love, community relationships, and profound spirituality were being lost” (Omolewa, 2006, p. 269). Some even denigrated the “values of intolerance hatred, ... disharmony, pride, arrogance, covetousness, and even cheating” which the new system encouraged (p. 269). And many used their education to interrogate colonial rule. In this vein, Benjamin N. Azikiwe (1931), who was to become Nigeria’s first president, argued in “Ethics of Colonial Imperialism” that “if the natives will eventually become a dominant factor in the administration of their own native-land, and ... colonial rulers are really honest ..., their material and moral advancement must be fostered by positive measures, constructive educational policies ... by actual appointment to the higher divisions of the various bureaus of the civil service of these colonies” (p. 302). Yet at the same time that Azikiwe

interrogated the ethics of British imperialism, he often displays his own colonial mentality. This is evident when he suggests that the educational success of Africans meant that they had challenged the European dogma of racial superiority because they had become Europeanized having been exposed to similar educational content (p. 303). What Azikiwe failed to realize was that the axis of equivalence on which he sought to place the European and African, was one that had been constructed, produced and determined by the European. But Azikiwe's ideas are significant because his call for the appointment of Africans into "higher divisions" of colonial service represented the mentality of the African bourgeoisie, which saw Africanization not as a return to indigenous educational practices but as a call for the replacement of colonial administrators by educated Africans. As Fanon (1963) puts it "For the bourgeoisie, nationalization signifies very precisely the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period" (p. 100).

The Contradictions and Complexities of Africanizing Colonially Imposed Standardized Examinations

Given the perilous educational climate described above, and the dominant African conception of Western education as a mechanism for upward socioeconomic mobility as well as the racial prestige which certificates conferred, one should not be surprised at the distrustful ways in which Africans regarded Africanisation². Indeed Africanisation brought forth a wealth of complex feelings amongst Africans and their colonizers, and the ambiguity, which the term connoted, was unhelpful. First, there was the question of how to Africanize an educational system that was inherently inimical to African indigenous

² Africanisation in the context of this thesis refers to African centered education as opposed to the European centered education privileged by British colonial administrators.

educational practices and approaches to life. Had not Frederick Lugard (1925), member of the colonial committee on education in British tropical Africa, postulated that the object of African education was to introduce the African to “a new way of life” (p. A2)? What were then the possibilities of Africanisation within this new way of life? To what extent could African epistemologies of education and pedagogy be infused into a Eurocentric curriculum? Should not Africanisation also extend to the Africanisation of administrators and policy makers of education (Dillard, 2001)? Would Africanisation, devalue the international legitimacy which foreign certificates conferred (Omolewa, 1982)? And was Africanisation a colonial scheme to perpetuate the myth of African inferiority (Dillard, 2001; Peshkin, 1965). And if standardized testing is an imported British educational tool, should external certificate examinations be altogether rescinded?

Most Africans, who called for Africanisation, were members of the elite who saw Africanisation as a platform with which to procure positions in the colonial government. Interestingly, it was often colonial officials, or those sympathetic to the colonial enterprise that saw the inconsistencies of standardized examinations with authentic learning and consequently called for the Africanisation of content. While most of these voices tended to reproduce the colonial discourse of western superiority and White supremacy, they also ascertained the negative effects that exams, coupled with its influence on curriculum, had for the educational experience of Africans (Dillard, 2001). In this paternalistic manner, William Ormsby-Gore (1937), who was secretary of State for the colonies, called attention to the problem of external examinations in the colonies, arguing that the exams “have always tended to influence curricula, and have not always helped the true course of good education” in the continent (p. 165). And Lugard (1925),

who was the governor-general of the colony and protectorate of Nigeria, wrote of abandoning the examinations and the “fetish of the Oxford and Cambridge Locals” (p. 13). As he stated further “grants to mission schools must be based ... on a truer test of the benefit which education should bring than a knowledge of the Wars of the roses or the way in which Cromwell dealt with the Long Parliament” (p. 13). For Lugard, the schools who effectively transmitted the benefits of good citizenship and public service, deserved more funding from the State than those who “obtained the greatest number of passes in external examination papers” (p. 13). Indeed from the perspective of those who supported colonization, testing Africans on historical events and mathematical formulas that had no immediate value for their lives seemed fruitless. And perhaps more importantly, the curriculum which emphasized British knowledge and Eurocentric knowledge production were beginning to produce disgruntled Africans who were beginning to demand more autonomy from colonial rule. In Lugard’s words, the African educated class was “out of touch with the people” and “imbued with theories of self-determination and half understood catch-words of the political hustling, acutely sensitive to any fancied racial discrimination” (p. A4). Increasingly, colonial administrators found this state of affairs was simply not acceptable.

Both Lugard and Orsmby-Gore were directly influenced by the adaptation thesis put forth by the Phelps-Stokes Report. Published in 1922, the report criticized the transfer of European epistemologies and discourses from the metropole to the colony, arguing that education must be adapted to the demands and needs of the individual and the community. It suggested that education in the colonies should privilege “the genuine appreciation of the importance of rural life in the general development of Africa” over

and above the inculcation of Western education (p. 29). Additionally, it opined that the education of the individual must be inseparable from the activities of the school, the home, the community and the broader development of Africa. The report ultimately found its way into the official guidelines of British colonial policy on education (Bude, 1983). Consequently, it influenced the Advisory Committee Reports on British Tropical Africa which emphasized the virtues of adapting education “to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their ” (Omolewa, 2006, p. 270).

The infusion of the adaptation thesis with colonial educational policies was met with suspicion. Most Africans felt that the adaptation thesis was very much in line with the movement for Africanization “designed to keep them in a subordinate position in relation to whites” (Dillard, 2003, p. 421). Moreover, there was also a sense that adaptation was concocted to undermine growing African political resistance and anger at colonial occupation and control of the labor market. Thus when the British government began the process of adaptation by establishing the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, which awarded prizes for the best works of literature written in African languages, few celebrated (Omolewa, 2006). And when they began to implement curricular changes such as offering Hausa and Yoruba as optional languages for the University of London’s university entrance qualifying examinations and called for the substitution of European plants with local flora and fauna in botany examinations, they had few African supporters. In Ghana, indigenous rulers and the Western educated intelligentsia rejected adaptation and similar sentiments were expressed throughout Africa, including Nigeria (Bude, 1983).

Nevertheless, despite their enthusiasm for adaptation, the British government encountered numerous difficulties with its implementation. The most challenging of which was the problem of adapting African knowledges into a colonially imported style of education. As Omolewa (2006) discusses, it was difficult for the examination bodies to adapt subjects like arithmetic, geometry and algebra to the African context and so the content of those examination remained the same across the colonies and in Britain. History was also a difficult subject to Africanize, given Africa's oral culture, the colonizer's denial of Africa's histories and the lack of textbooks and written materials with which to draw from. Hence the examinations tested African students on the history of the British exploration of Africa and the expansion of the British Empire. However, the biggest issue facing the British policy of adaptation was growing African resentment at the unwillingness of the colonial government to adapt the governance and administration of native land to cater to the increasing number of competent Africans with the requisite knowledge and who had passed the mandated external examination (Dillard, 2001; Omolewa, 2006). In the end, it was this frustration experienced by African elites that stoked the fires of nationalism and the resistance to colonial rule.

The West African Examination Council

It was within this precarious context that the British government, under pressure from growing nationalist sentiments and the failed adaptation strategy, commissioned Dr. George Barker Jeffery, to investigate the possibilities of a West African Examination council. Dillard (2001) details how Jeffery, who was an expert on external examinations and a former director of the University of London's Institute of Education, advised colonial administrators that a West African Examination Council (WAEC) should be

instituted and external exams made its primary jurisdiction. Jeffery also emphatically endorsed external examinations as an avenue to build up strong secondary school education in West Africa and recommended that WAEC's syllabuses be adapted to the African context, a proposal that raised suspicion amongst African elites due to its alignment with the push for Africanisation of the curriculum. However and notwithstanding the suspicion of African elites, the ordinance establishing the Council, emphasized that the certificates conferred by WAEC must be of the same standard as other examination bodies in Britain (Ademola, 1992).

Formally instituted in 1952, WAEC began the process of transferring the administration of African education into African hands. A regional corporate body, it originally included Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, with Liberia joining the council in 1974. Although the initial members of its leadership were expatriates, the Council's by-laws, which required that 16 of the Council members were to be appointed by the local communities from each WAEC member colony, guaranteed that Africans would eventually assume leadership of the council (Dillard, 2001). And perhaps reflective of the African preoccupation with white-collar jobs and status acquisition, WAEC was concerned first with how to Africanize the leadership and its staff and only later with curriculum. To this end, training programs were developed to teach African educators about the methods for developing, distributing and marking examinations (Dillard, 2001). When the process of Africanizing the curriculum did occur, WAEC faced the same problems that the British examinations bodies had faced during the quest for adaptation. For instance, attempts to produce a syllabus on African history were made difficult by the lack of written texts and materials on the histories of African peoples

(Dillard, 2001). Furthermore, WAEC's emphasis on maintaining equivalent educational standards with England impeded any radical transformation of African education. Hence, even in the midst of nationalist calls for African Independence, the British standard of education remained the African standard, in all its un-African ramifications. Dillard (2001) has argued that, WAEC often set educational standards that were even higher than Britain's, no doubt because of the African desire to claim intellectual equivalence with Europeans. What is more, the Africanisation of the curriculum was fraught with contradictions, because as Dillard also notes, the methods used in the examination including the technical skills and mechanized scoring were all imported from Britain or the United. However in spite of these numerous challenges WAEC forged ahead, and upon independence from colonial rule and the institution of Universal Primary School (UPE) education in Ghana and Nigeria, it consolidated and expanded its role in the administration of examinations in its member countries. In subsequent chapters, the role of WAEC and other examining bodies in Nigeria will be examined in order to discuss the ways in which their emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing and its influence on curriculum has eroded the development of a critical worldview and a democratic consciousness. But first, it is important to demonstrate the inherently anti-African bias of standardized testing through an examination of African indigenous education practices. This will be the objective of the third chapter.

Chapter Three

Oil and Water:

The Incongruity of African Indigenous Education and Standardized Testing

Describing his schooling experience in colonial Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) in the seminal post-colonial text *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, notes that under colonial education the “language of ... education was no longer the language of my culture” (p. 11). According to Wa Thiong'o, this erasure was significant because the colonial displacement of the Gĩkũyũ language from schooling signaled the vitiation of indigenous Gĩkũyũ culture. For the reason that language serves as a carrier of culture, the expunction of Gĩkũyũ meant that the histories and the “moral, ethical and aesthetic values” embodied within it would be replaced. As such, the imposition of English as the language of education meant that it was English, not Gĩkũyũ, that would become the referent point in the “people’s definition of themselves” (p. 4).

Wa Thiong'o's (1986) insights are an important frame of reference with which to begin this chapter because they speak to the inherently alienating nature of colonial education. In privileging English as the language of formal education, colonial administrators undermined the power of indigenous languages and their central importance in socializing children through the transmission of cultural values and ideologies; processes of which education was a part.

As I examine the tensions between high-stakes standardized testing and African indigenous education in this chapter, these ideas will prove significant in showing that standardized testing was not only alien and incongruent with the epistemologies and

pedagogical approaches of African education but also disruptive to the kind of societies its educational systems traditionally privileged.

However before I begin, it is important to note that Africa is a continent filled with diverse groups of peoples, yet despite this heterogeneousness, scholars have discerned common interconnected features which link its educational systems (Lamle, 1996; Moumouni, 1968; Tedla, 1995). These salient characteristics include an emphasis on experiential learning, a commitment to the harmonious relationship between theory and practice, the insistence on sound physiological development, communalism, and holism. Although this chapter focuses primarily on communalism, holism and experiential learning, the other features are often drawn upon in the chapter to substantiate these three aspects.

Experiential Learning

A significant divergence between African indigenous education and standardized testing is the former's emphasis on experiential learning. While pre-colonial African youths 'lived' their education in indigenous societies, standardized testing privileged an educational environment in which the lived realities of students were rendered invisible. This distinguishing feature of standardized testing is an issue that contemporary critics of standardized testing have overwhelmingly denounced. As Peter Sacks (1997) argues, the standardized culture enforces passive and superficial learning, as facts, formulas and ideas are extricated from social, political and economic realities and compartmentalized (Sacks, 1997). Within the standardized testing schema, the social and intellectual development of students are impeded as learning is reduced to testable content (Allison et

al., 1998). What is valued then, is not the students' engagement with the world or their symbiotic relationship with the community, but their ability to regurgitate and recall specified knowledge, a situation that elevates the importance of tests, as a marker of knowledge, above the authentic learning of the student.

In colonial West Africa, this compartmentalization of learning occasioned by the stringent testing regime was made worse by the fact that the knowledges being tested were primarily Eurocentric in nature. Not only was testing alienating in terms of practice, but also with regards to content³. Thus, African students faced a hostile environment, in which the experiential learning characteristics of indigenous education were being undermined simultaneously with indigenous knowledges. As the great African author, Ayi Kwei Armah (2006) noted, while describing his secondary school days in colonial Ghana,

I entered a learning world in which practically everything I did in the classroom was planned to pull my mind steadily away from the narratives and realities I knew from home toward a different kind of narrative made in Europe. (p. 41)

This state of affairs promoted by standardized testing differs drastically from the educational culture of Indigenous African societies in which education was inseparable from the learner's life. As Moumouni (1968) and Boateng (1983) maintain, the effectiveness of indigenous African education lay primarily in its close relationship with day-to-day living. As such, "instead of learning in circumstances determined in advance as to place and time, outside of the productive and social world," the student was truly in the 'school of life,' in the most concrete and real sense" (Moumouni, 1968, p. 29).

³ This claim is evident in Lugard's "Education in Tropical Africa" in which he discusses how examinations often tested African children on information such as "snow" and "forest" which he felt were useless to students in the tropics (1925, p. A14).

Consequently, the learning that the child undergoes is contextualized within the community's experiences, and the child experiences and lives out the practical and social effects and results of his or her education. In this way, Julius K. Nyerere (1968) describes education in pre-colonial Africa, as learning by "living and doing" (p. 415). Education was thus infused into all aspects of life, as children learnt the history of their group through folklores and songs, and about agriculture by joining the elders in farm work. The importance of learning through observation, imitation and participation are illustrated amongst the Tarok people of central Nigeria where children learnt about medicine, hunting, and the law by working intimately with adult members of their community (Lamle, 1996). Similarly, boys went about with their fathers to learn about animals and agriculture amongst the Kikuyus of East Africa (McGlashan, 1964). And in Southeastern Nigeria, the Igbos ensured the community's survival by ensuring that children learnt about specialized tasks such as blacksmithing and woodworking by working closely and daily with experienced members of the society (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1964).

Education was thus very functional and utilitarian (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). Yet it is important to note that the functionalism of indigenous African education was vastly different from the functionalism of neoliberalism. In the former context, education was functional to the extent that it propagated the community's social and economic wellbeing, and the individual was being educated for the purposes of the community. And in the latter context, education is a commodity and only functional to the extent that it benefits the individual and neoliberal market forces at the expense of the greater communal wellbeing. Indeed within the context of indigenous African education, the

student was educated and prepared to be active and benevolent members of the community and was always called upon to assist the community through the course of his or her educational journey. As such the student was largely productive even as he or she learned and was often made physiologically and intellectually stronger as a result. This is, of course, a huge contrast from the educational system facilitated by standardized testing, where the student is rarely called upon to engage him or herself physiologically and productively with his or her community; a situation that separates the mind and the body and breeds individualism and alienation from the larger society (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). In “Education for Liberation in Africa” Nyerere (1975) described this educational situation as the “inability or unwillingness to ... integrate education and life, and education and production” (p. 10).

Communalism

The African educational systems also stressed the indivisibility of education with communal learning because African societies were such that stressed communal survival over and above individual success and wealth accumulation. As Elleni Tedla states, African societies gave “precedence ... to the reality of the communal world over the reality of individual life histories” (1995, p. 31). Amongst the Igbos of Nigeria, this way of life was exemplified by the emphasis placed on the distribution of wealth rather than personal influence or wealth (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1964). Within the indigenous educational framework, knowledge was collectively owned, hence what the individual comes to learn through the course of their life long education, were knowledges and epistemologies that had been handed down from generation to generation (Moumouni, 1968). Learners were thereby called upon to reflect about the histories of cultural

practices, their relationship with past generations, and the future applicability of the knowledges and practices (Omolewa, 2007). And while they were often adults with specialized knowledges and experiences, the education of the young was broadly conceptualized as the duty of all members of the community. In this vein, education fostered intergenerational communication between different age groups and ensured that children learnt about the proper roles of the different age groups in the community (Boateng, 1983). As Ellen Tedla (1995) so aptly captures it,

indigenous education aims at teaching everyone the essentiality of the community for one's own survival and the formation of one's identity as a person... . Through indigenous learning practices African people come to understand that it is only through communal life that they know and experience the bondedness of life. (p. 113)

This is exemplified within the context of Igbo indigenous communities, where the child learns early on the importance of consensus and unanimity that the society relies not on individual actions but on communal consensus to settle disputes and concerns (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1964). And likewise amongst the Akan of Ghana, were folktales are employed to illustrate the wisdom of collective decision-making so that children could understand the “unity of the clan and the value of cooperative efforts” (Boateng, 1983, p. 325).

The age-group system so commonplace in African societies was also a site where the spirit of mutual cooperation is concretely established. The system not only brought members of the same age group together but encouraged them to work together through sharing responsibilities and work that might be too difficult to perform individually (Omolewa, 2007). Within a particular age grade, physical tasks such as farming were learnt and performed collectively in order to assist each other with arduous work

(Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). The age-group system was also where the African child learnt the importance of social solidarity, or *Ummunna bu ike*, as it was referred to by the Igbo. Kingsley Okoro (2010) has highlighted the special place *Ummunna bu ike* had in the indigenous Igbo society, noting that it was an instrument whereby the rights of the individual were protected through mutual cooperation and the collaborative deployment of community resources. Similar to the Igbo understanding of *Ummunna bu ike* was the South African notion of *Ubuntu* which saw the individual as existing only through the existence of others and as a result of his or her coexistence with the group (Van der Walt, 2010). An instrumental value system in South African indigenous education, *Ubuntu*, centered the community's interconnectedness and common humanity, and called upon the individual to fulfill his or her responsibilities to community members as a result of that unity (Letseka, 2012).

Ubuntu and *Ummunna bu ike* thus serve as example of the African commitment to communal solidarity, which were intrinsically centered in the education of all members of society. It was through the course of his or her lifelong education that Africans came to see themselves as morally and spiritually implicated in the survival of the community.

Antithetical to the communal ethos of Indigenous African education was the individualism propagated by the advent of formal education with its measuring tools of standardized testing. As discussed in the second chapter, the certificates conferred through the standardized British examinations ruptured the communal thrust of indigenous education through its devaluation of indigenous education and its representation of the individual as a holder of knowledge. If in the indigenous setting, knowledge was possessed in common and passed on from generation to generation,

standardized testing with its testing of the individual's intelligence, produced knowledge as something that could be individually possessed and appropriated apart from the community. This conceptual departure became even more significant given colonial narratives of formal education as a passage from savagery to civilization, in addition to the material rewards and advantages that it bestowed on the individual.

In his philosophical treatises on education, Julius Nyerere apprehended the consequences that this educational shift to individualism had for the futures of African societies. Dealing extensively with the issue in "Education for Self Reliance" and "Education for Liberation in Africa" Nyerere (1968) discusses how the "ability to pass exams" had come not only to undermine the power and validity of indigenous knowledges but also to degrade knowledges possessed by the collective. Nyerere saw this state of affairs as a threat to the intergenerational spirit of African indigenous education. As he argues, the educational systems in Africa headlined by standardized examinations and certificates, made "pupils to despise even their own parents because they are old-fashioned and ignorant" indeed there was nothing which suggested to the student that he or she could learn important and practical things from his elders or society at large (p. 424). In short, with the onslaught of the examinations hysteria, the role indigenous knowledges had played in the survival of African communities ceased to matter, and if it mattered, it was only amongst the uneducated and the "uncivilized"; those people that reminded the elite and educated of their vulgar African selves. For Nyerere the situation was inevitable because the "values and knowledges" of African societies were no longer being transmitted from one generation to the next due largely to the "deliberate attempt to change those values and to replace traditional knowledge" with the knowledges and

values of the colonial power so that African peoples could be more effectively managed (p. 417).

Moreover, with the material advantages and status that success at these examinations conferred, individuals began to see themselves less and less as being educated for the common good. Education came to represent an opportunity with which to differentiate oneself from the community. And whereas the indigenous learning environment valued communal learning and cooperation vis-à-vis age groups, the modern classroom often brought individuals of the same age together but emphasized competition amongst them. The value of individual lay no longer in what he or she could contribute to the community but what they could demand from the community because of their education and credentials. As Nyerere (1975) frames it, such an education teaches the individual to see himself or herself as “a commodity, whose value is determined by certificates, degrees, or other professional qualifications” (p. 7). And with such an orientation, the person inevitably “sucks from the community to the maximum” which they are capable and contributes the barest minimum.

Holisticism

A third feature of African indigenous education was its holistic and multifaceted nature; a principle that differs from the atomistic conception of education propagated under the colonial testing regime. Broadly speaking, African indigenous education enabled young members of the community to learn a wide array of tasks and knowledges ensuring the maximum productivity of all individuals. And it was “intimately integrated with the social, cultural, political, occupational, artistic, religious, and recreational life of

the people” (Omolewa, 2007, p. 595). In this vein, *eko*, the Yoruba word for education conveys the multifarious nature of indigenous education because it not only communicated the knowledge of agriculture, crafts and physical strength but also signified the development of one’s spirituality, intellect and moral character (Tedla, 1995, p. 114). According to Tedla the African holistic approach to education was evident in the “interdisciplinarity of the subjects as well as in the various methods that was employed in teaching and learning” (p. 115). For example, among the Acholi of what is now Uganda, boys were taught to construct houses at the same time that they were taught about geography, various sources of water, geology and the location of neighboring villages (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). Furthermore, children who were destined to become fishermen were taught not only how to fish but also how to make and mend nets and construct canoes (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). To this end, children were supported “to take initiative” in order to form their own working and play groups in achieving various endeavors (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1964, p. 32). And they were also encouraged to engage in self-directed learning that promoted self-fulfillment and self-discipline (Omolewa, 2007).

An attribute of the African holistic approach was the abundant pedagogical strategies employed throughout the course of the individual’s life long education. From the arts, to sports, to storytelling and to the use of proverbs, African children were educated about different occupations and skills using a variety of means. Often times, the transmission of knowledges about the fauna and flora of the region as well as information about mnemonics for counting, and moral instruction” were disseminated using these divergent pedagogical approaches. Moumouni (1968) has noted how these various

pedagogical tools were usually adapted to the “physical and psychological potential of the child” (p. 29) so that where one approach failed the child could find other educational space in which to succeed. Thus in addition to formal and informal types of instruction, African children learnt about their societies through arts based approaches. For example, amongst the Ashanti and the Baganda, children learnt about the genealogies of the families and the clans in addition to the history of the groups, through praise songs and legends told in gatherings by the elders of their communities (Read, 1955). Fables were also a way in which social values and mores were passed on to children; and amongst the Ashanti, fables were significantly used to teach about issues of social justice and morality. (Boateng, 1983). Similarly, “proverbs were rich sources of African wisdom and philosophy” and were employed as pedagogical devices to teach children about acceptable social behavior as well as the experiences and histories of the group. Proverbs were especially significant amongst the Igbos who often utilized them in all aspects of life particularly in communal gatherings where they were often deployed to legitimize the social or political event. According to Boateng (1983), the “educative and communicative power of proverbs in traditional Africa” lay in the way in which they were employed to validate and legitimize traditional procedures, beliefs and customary laws (p. 331). And in addition to the educational rewards that these pedagogical strategies provided to young people, they also effectively facilitated a mechanism for intergenerational communication, an aspect of African indigenous life that was eroded with western education and the abrogation of indigenous knowledges carried by elders (Boateng, 1983).

By now, it should go without saying that with the introduction of western education, the various teaching and learning devices discussed above were virtually ignored by the colonizing powers in their formulation of educational policies. Moreover, with the rise of examinations and school certificates, these indigenous approaches were further undermined as education became more rigid and bureaucratized. In their investigation of the psychological impacts on the Igbos conception of education effected with the advent of British certification examinations, Ottenberg and Ottenberg (1964) note that as a result of the strict regimentation of the modern educational environment and the eminence of exams, Igbo students were often reluctant to learn knowledges that would not be tested in the examination hall. As they observed further, in preparation for exams, students often placed “great reliance on ... books as the legitimate source of knowledge” (p. 53). They found that instead of stress on analysis and understanding, a mechanical attempt was “made to transfer knowledge whole, in its original form, by memorization, from the book to the mind of the student to the examination paper” (p. 53). They also found that the spontaneity characteristic of indigenous education, which encouraged youths to take initiative, was gone and replaced by the “ritual quality” of exam preparations (p. 53).

And if in indigenous educational environment, the African child had various ways through which he or she could become a productive and active member of society, the emphasis on examination marks narrowed those opportunities through its glorification of western school certificates. The only skill that seemed to matter was the cognitive skills one exhibited in his or her examination performance. Gone was the arts-based and practical education that was so much a part of indigenous life. This meant that the

knowledges possessed by elders were disregarded, as it had no influence on the procurement of certificates. As such, the examinations craze wreaked havoc on the system of intergenerational communication enabled by indigenous approaches to education. Moreover, the special status that elders had held in the indigenous educational context as persons responsible for the dissemination of knowledges and the advancement of the group was rendered inconsequential. As their expertise had no immediate effect on examinations and certificates, they were perceived as worthless. In fact, due to the social prestige that western education conferred, the wise men were now the youths (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1964, p. 51).

Another key issue caused by the departure from the African holistic approach to education was the disintegration of the socioeconomic and political concerns of the group that were dynamically intertwined with all aspects of indigenous education. In the indigenous educational environment, the interdependence of education with the social, political and economic issues of the society were stressed because the education of all members of the group was believed to be integral to the group's material survival. But within the context of western education, this dynamism was abandoned as individual survival came to supersede group survival. Even though, western certificates did not automatically mean the procurement of western jobs and wealth acquisition, the possibility that it provided for the individual to leave his or her "backward" and "tribal" life behind, as well as the social distinction it conferred, ruptured the African conception of education as materially related to the social, economic and political life of the group. This change of events was significant because it fertilized the ground for the neo-colonization of Africa. If the newly educated African bourgeoisie could no longer

associate their education with the material and social survival of the group, they had to look elsewhere for material survival.

Conclusion

In looking ahead to the next chapter, where the socioeconomic conditions under which high-stakes testing takes place in Nigeria, it is important to reiterate what has been determined by the investigation of African educational practices in this chapter. The first was that standardized testing proved injurious to the indigenous African emphasis on experiential learning by severing the relationship learning had with the practice of everyday living. Under the testing regime, the colonized subject was called upon to detach social, economic, and political realities from his or her education. Secondly, the primacy of standardized testing in colonial education introduced competition and individualism as part and parcel of one's education, in contrast to the communalism fostered by indigenous educational practices. If in the indigenous context, the community as a whole was regarded as the gatekeeper of knowledges learnt from ancestors to be passed on to future generations, the individual in the colonial environment was encouraged to divorce his learning from the community as a whole. The knowledge that the individual acquired was his or her own, separate and distinct from the community. Lastly, standardized testing also threatened the holism integral to indigenous educational practices by promoting books as the only source of valid knowledge and delegitimizing communal knowledges gathered and collected over time. It also sabotaged the various pedagogical devices employed in indigenous education by privileging the classroom space as the only authentic space for learning. The fusion of education with the sociopolitical and economic life of the community were also abandoned as African

children were encouraged to learn about European culture and ways of life at the expense of their own.

Indeed with indigenous knowledges undermined, and its pedagogical practices dismantled, the new educational environment had devastating consequences for the development of education in post-colonial Africa. This was especially the case in Nigeria where the practice of high-stakes standardized testing seemed to take a life of its own.

Chapter Four
Things Fall Apart:
High-Stakes Testing in Nigeria Today

Scholarly analyses of the contemporary state of education in Nigeria usually hold the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) responsible for retarding the effective development of a public and comprehensively funded educational system in the country (Babalola et al., 1999; Geo-Jaja & Mangum, 2003; Obasi, 1997; Tikly, 1999). Such discussions often paint a fanciful picture of the pre-adjustment era as the “calm” before the adjustment storm. An example of this type of discourse being Macleans A. Geo-Jaja and Garth Mangum’s (2003) journal article, “Economic Adjustment, Education And Human Resource Development In Africa: The Case Of Nigeria” in which they maintain that prior to adjustment, which began in Nigeria in 1986, education “empowered citizens with arithmetic and language skills, character building, life and work experience, and attitudes and skills that were in demand” towards socioeconomic development (p. 304). Yet as the previous chapters of this thesis would indicate, the reality of the pre-adjustment era, that is the period from the 1830s to 1986, was not quite as idealistic as is often represented. Rather, there were already within the system, numerous cracks, such as the inability of the educational system to meet the demands of the rapidly urbanizing population as well as the predominantly European content of Nigeria’s curriculum, of which adjustment policies further exacerbated. Indeed, it is arguable that it was precisely because of these cracks and shortcomings that adjustment stagnated Nigeria’s educational system in the crippling

way that it did as the government invested less and less money into educational institutions as a result of the IMF and World Bank's neoliberal policies.

Hence arguments such as those propounded by Geo-Jaja and Mangum (2003) miss a very significant point. And that is about the nature of the educational system itself. What type of society and citizen was it propagating? Was it the type of empowerment gained by learning complex "arithmetic and language skills" as opined by Geo-jaja and Mangum, or was it an empowerment that interested itself in the psychological and socioeconomic liberation of all citizens? Was it an empowerment that moved Nigerians towards the path of "self-reliance" by emphasizing authentic social, political, economic and cultural liberation? Or was it one that would find its citizens unable (and unwilling) to resist the sophisticated shackles of neo-colonization?

Indeed in the years following Nigeria's independence in 1960, educational administrators had yet to address the ideological issues that plagued it. Decolonization had only meant Africanization of the administration and not of education itself. A primary reason for this state of affairs was the Nigerian commitment to maintaining the same educational standards with Britain, even if it was at the expense of formulating an African centered curriculum (Dillard, 2001). Again to Africanize the curriculum tended to be regarded by African elites as synonymous with reducing the standards of education, no doubt an offshoot of their colonial enslavement. As such high-stakes standardized testing remained a dominant feature of Nigeria's educational system. Even with the introduction of continuous assessment in 1977 which aimed at bridging the gap between standardized testing and the assessment performed by teachers in the school year, the marks obtained at the conclusion of these exams still largely determined the students

ability to procure a secondary school certificate as well as his or her ability to secure entrance into the tertiary institutions. And most importantly it continued to have great social prestige associated with it.

In this chapter, I engage with the practice of standardized testing in Nigeria today. I explore its features and its consequences for educational development in Nigeria. I argue that high-stakes standardized testing does little to address the regional, ethnic, and gendered inequalities that not only characterize Nigerian society but the educational experiences of students by upholding standards that are unattainable for most students. I argue that this authoritarian and antidemocratic system of education functions to enforce the one-dimensional goal of educational and economic mobility, thereby reinforcing “the unspoken and unwritten limits of vertical mobility set by the dominant group in society” (Mbabuike, 2001).

Standardized Testing in the Current Educational Context

Having gone through several reincarnations, the current educational system in Nigeria, known as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, currently involves 9 years of basic education, which includes 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school, as well as 3 years of senior secondary school; and 4 years of tertiary education. After the first 9 years of uninterrupted schooling, students are required to take the junior secondary certificate examination (JSCE) which qualifies them for entrance into senior secondary school or for technical and vocational education. Those who continue onto senior secondary school are then mandated to take the senior secondary certificate examinations (SSCE) issued by the West African Examinations Council and or

the National Examinations Council (NECO) in order to be awarded the Senior Secondary Certificate (SSC). For those who wish to be eligible for university education, the Unified Tertiary Matriculations Examinations (UTME) directed by the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) must also be taken, in addition to the different screening examinations conducted by each university the student applies to.

The SSCE and the UTME are immensely competitive, due largely to the high examination fees (Gbagolo, 2011), the difficulties of the exams, the limited number of spaces available at the federal and state universities, and the exorbitant tuition costs of private universities. For a student to successfully procure the SSC, they must register to be examined for no more than 9 courses and no less than 7 courses. And must achieve a credit level score in English as well as four other courses relevant to the discipline he or she wishes to undertake in university. After the SSCE, the student who wishes to advance further must also take the UTME, which comes with its own set of challenges. And that is that in addition to obtaining the minimum UTME mark of 200, which is compulsory to be considered meritorious for university, each student must also endeavor to meet the UTME cut off mark of the university he or she wishes to attend. This state of affairs is made worse by the inadequate number of universities in the country, in 2005 there were only 75 universities for Nigeria's 140 million people (Okoroma, 2008). And although an average of 1.5 million students take the UTME every year, the universities have only the enrollment capacity of less than 40 percent of these students (Onyukwu, 2011). In 2011, for instance, the University of Lagos had a total of 99, 195 applicants vying for 6,106 available spaces. And in 2003, Saint, Hartnett, and Strassner (2003) reported that

university enrollment ratio in Nigeria was a shocking 340 spaces for every 100,000 persons.

In recent years, Nigerian students have experienced limited success at the exams conducted by JAMB and WAEC. In 2011, for instance, examination results released by JAMB indicated that out of the 1,493,000 candidates who partook in the exam, 842,941 scored below the pass mark (Chidiogo, 2011). While results for WAEC show that out of the 1.5 million candidates who sat for the May/June exams, only a mere 31% of the candidates were able to procure a minimum of the required five credits including English and mathematics (Ogunesan & Ige, 2011). Also noteworthy is the number of students whose results were dismissed due to examination misconducts. In 2010, the figure was 72,714, a figure that represented over 5% of the total applicants, and in 2011, 50,826 students were caught cheating, representing over 4% of applicants.

The Socioeconomic Context of High-Stakes Standardized Testing in Nigeria

While the foregoing paragraph has served to demonstrate the dominant position that high-stakes standardized testing continues to occupy within the Nigerian educational system, an analysis of the Nigerian social and economic context is needed in order to understand the devastating effects that standardized testing arguably has on the educational system and Nigeria as a whole. As was discussed in the first chapter, the socioeconomic context in which standardized testing takes place are strong indicators of test scores and student achievement. Indeed educational researchers have found an indelible relationship between a student's performance on standardized tests and his or her race and socioeconomic status (Au, 2008, 2009; Kohn, 2000; Nezavdal, 2003). In the

United States, Canada and Great Britain, for instance, this has meant that white students from affluent neighborhoods are more likely than their poorer and racialized counterparts to perform well on high-stakes standardized tests (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Kearns, 2011). Interestingly Nigerian educational researchers have rarely drawn a link between Nigeria's socioeconomic situation, its apparent developmental stagnation and the practice of standardized testing; nor have they investigated the relationship between a student's socioeconomic background and test scores. Rather, much attention has been paid to the cheating culture engendered by high-stakes testing as well as the unreliability of Nigerian certificates, moral education and the predictive validity of high-stakes testing for student's performances in tertiary education (Gbagolo, 2011; Georgewill, 1990; Iheoma, 1985; Ofoegbu, 2009; Salau, 2007). While some of these issues will be analyzed later in the chapter, it is critical to begin with a look at Nigeria's socioeconomic situation.

Such an endeavor compels one to ask why standardized testing persists as a distinct feature of the Nigerian educational system given the deplorable socioeconomic conditions upon which it is operationalized. As philosophers of education have problematized the supremacy of standardized testing in the American system despite its proven discriminatory consequences for poor students from racialized communities and its enfeebling effects on the educational experiences of students. One is similarly moved to question the primacy of high-stakes testing in Nigeria's educational system given its capacity to exacerbate the country's manifold socioeconomic issues and its incongruity with the national emphasis on education as a catalyst for national development and integration. It becomes possible then to ask why Nigeria's federal government insists on

an educational policy that produces and promotes inequality when 100 million of the country's 160 million people live on less than one dollar a day, and with the gap between the rich and the poor continuing to rise despite reports of a growing economy (Brock, 2012)? What does high-stakes testing mean for 40% of Nigeria's children who lack access to basic education (Abayomi & Arenyeka, 2012) in spite of the government's mandate of providing free, and compulsory basic education for all children?

Regional Inequalities

Furthermore, does the policy take into consideration the incessant regional and ethnic inequalities that have plagued Nigeria since independence? Keeping in mind the aggravating effects that high-stakes testing can have on poor and marginalized communities, it is important to take the following into account. Firstly, compared to poverty levels of 59.1% in the South West of Nigeria, the North-East and North-West of the country currently experience poverty levels of 77%. Secondly, the North-East and the North-West, which comprises mostly of the Hausa-Fulani's, are also the most educationally disadvantaged region in the country and this is reflected by the fact they have the lowest literacy rates in the world (Edet, 2011) as well as the lowest rates of educational enrollment in the country (Ukiwo, 2007). That this lack of educational development is reflective of the regions poverty level is clear given the established relationship that economic and educational development have in the country (Mustapha, 2009).

Moreover, the perilous state of education in the north is further demonstrated by 2012 data from the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), which show that the northern states recorded the least number of university applicants (Nnabugwu, 2012).

While northern states like Sokoto could only manage 5,664 applicants, southern states like Imo churned out 123, 865 candidates (Nnabugwu, 2012), even though the northern regions are more populous. And while a total of 4.7% of North-West students and 3.9% of North-East students gained admission into university in 2003, the number was 39.4% in the South-East and 17.4% in the South-West (Mustapha, 2009). A state of affairs which indicates that after years of educational disenfranchisement dating back to colonial days, the federal government's quota system which purports to ensure fair representation of states and ethnic groups in schools (Okoroma, 2008) has not had the desired result of transforming the educational and economic situation in the northern states.

Add also the fact that educational attainment in Nigeria has been linked to an individual's income earning capacity (Ukiwo, 2007), it becomes safe to argue that the north can only expect to remain educationally and economically disadvantaged given poor enrollment figures. And since socioeconomic variables such as the educational background of parents as well as poverty rates has been shown to account for test scores elsewhere in the world (Kohn, 2000), it is not unreasonable then to suggest that the policy of high-stakes testing in Nigeria would likely lend itself to the reproduction of regional inequalities in the country. A state of affairs that should be undesirable and fatal for Nigeria's national development given that northern Nigeria remains the most populous region in the country.

The Urban/Rural Divide

There is also the matter of the urban/rural divide in the country. Students in rural Nigeria are disproportionately poorer than their rural counterparts, and according to the

International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), these conditions have progressively gotten worse. In 1980, rural poverty in Nigeria was 28.3% compared to 63.8% in 2004 while urban poverty increased from 17.2% in 1980 to 43.1% in 2004 (Omonona, 2010). Indeed with high-stakes testing linked to increased drop out rates for marginalized students (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2006), which in Africa usually refers to poor women living in rural communities (UNESCO, 2008), it is important to question the role that standardized testing can play in reproducing and or deteriorating existing inequalities in Nigeria? That is, how can students in rural communities be expected to equip themselves with the appropriate school equipment and textbooks needed to compete at the SSCE and UTME given the 2004 IFPRI data, which indicates that 44.4% of households in rural communities were unable to meet their basic food requirements (Omonona, 2010).

What is more, while 70% of Nigerians reside in rural areas (Aderonmu, 2010), the curriculum and textbooks for primary and secondary studies remain mostly urban based and detached from the concerns of rural communities (Adelabu, 2008). A situation, that helps to explain a 2008 UNESCO data, which demonstrates that primary school students in urban areas had a net attendance rate of 70% in contrast with their rural counterparts who had a net attendance rate of 56% (Kazeem, Jensen, & Stokes, 2010). Yet apart from the issues of irregular attendance, students in rural areas also face a barrage of other obstacles such as the lack of adequate class room spaces; the absence of textbooks, laboratories, libraries and furniture, the lack of electricity and water, and significantly under-qualified teachers; difficulties that students in urban areas still experience but at a lesser degree. Moreover, while students in rural centers generally have access to one or

two schools, students in urban centers have access to more schools since they have more transportation options (Kazeem et al., 2010), thereby allowing them to choose from more and better schools. However, notwithstanding these rural/urban disparities as well as the alienating content of the curriculum and the failures of the government to provide adequate resources for learning, rural students are still expected to partake in the same Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and the same Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) as their urban counterparts.

Gender Inequalities

Another factor that must be interrogated when discussing the role that high-stakes testing may play in deepening the pervasive inequality that characterizes the Nigerian educational context is the issue of gender. While women lead the educational surge in the western world and are more likely than their male counterparts to graduate from high school and enroll in higher institutions (Pollard, 2011), the reverse is true for Nigeria's women. In fact, in Nigeria, the gender disparity in education begins with basic literacy and all of the socioeconomic statistics are evidentiary of a significant gender gap.

For instance, the 2003 literacy rate for males aged 15-19 was 82.6% while the literacy rate for females in the same age bracket was significantly lower at 67.9% (UNESCO, 2008). And for ages 20-24 the rate was 79.7% for males and 56.5% for females (UNESCO, 2008). In 2010, the literacy rate for males was 72.1 while the rate for women was 50.4% (CIA, 2012). These numbers are also reflected on the net school attendance rates for both urban and rural areas; while boys had a net attendance rate of 64%, the net attendance rate for girls was 56% (Kazeem et al., 2010). The gender

disparity was also manifested in the number of applications' to higher education; while 44% of females took the Unified Tertiary and Matriculation Examinations; the number was 55.78% for males (Nnabugwu, 2012). And while the number of females who gained admission into university has been on the rise from 26.22% in 1988/1989 to 32.94% in 1995/1996 (Adeyemi & Akpotu, 2004), progress has been slow. Women were also surpassed in enrollment into polytechnic and technical institutions and were only more successful in enrollment into colleges of education; a not so surprising statistics given the feminization of the teaching profession.

Indeed, the barriers to quality education for girls and women in Nigeria are many and include poverty, early marriage, teenage pregnancies and cultural ideologies that privilege the education of the male child. Other issues also include the great graduate unemployment rate, a factor that often discourages parents from sending their daughters to school (Adeyemi & Akpotu, 2004). Not to mention religious ideologies, which discourage sending women into public spaces; a factor that is more dominant in the northern part of the country where western education is often conceived as hostile to Islamic beliefs (UNICEF, 2007). Worse still, is what happens when these barriers against women's education intersect with regional and ethnic inequalities or the urban/rural divide. The numbers become even more staggering. For instance in the rural northeast 64% of women were illiterate while 71% were illiterate in the rural North-West (Erulkar & Bello, 2007). This is in contrast to the South-East region where 78% of girls were able to attend secondary school and or higher education (Erulkar & Bello, 2007).

As such, gender inequality continues to be the elephant in the room with respect to Nigeria's system of education. It is also telling, that despite the government's

willingness to take regional inequalities into account through the quota system for admission into university education, the government's has been largely reluctant to emphasize gender equity in the national policy on education. As such, gender inequalities in education are likely to persist, particularly as high-stakes testing continues to claim to test all of Nigerian students equally despite very unequal socioeconomic realities.

Conclusion

In concluding this fifth chapter it is important to note that in spite of the lack of conversation in Nigeria regarding high-stakes testing, its pernicious effects on education as well as its capacity to reproduce existing social inequalities has been long documented (Au, 2008; Boaler, 2003; Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008). In the Nigerian situation, it has been demonstrated that high-stakes testing is implicated in the issues of regional and gender inequalities as well as the rural/urban divide threatening the development of a fair and equitable education system in the country.

In the sixth chapter, I argue that based on the above indicators, high-stakes testing aids in the erosion of a critical African worldview.

Chapter Five
Which Way Nigeria?
High-Stakes Testing and the Erosion of a Critical African Worldview

Introduction

One aspect of high-stakes testing that has produced substantive literature in Nigeria has been the cheating culture that it engenders. Involving violations such as leaking examinations before the test dates, impersonation, cheating during examinations, bribery, exam swapping, conspiracy, and so on (Emiloju, 2012; Gbagolo, 2011; Ofoegbu, 2009), examination malpractices or “expo” as its more popularly called by Nigerians has a history as long as high-stakes testing in Nigeria. From the 9th of January, 1912, when questions from the Senior Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate were leaked, to the rampant violations in the contemporary context, public examinations in Nigeria has always been plagued by all sorts of misconducts. And despite the governments establishment of legal statutes which carry prison penalties and enormous fines, examination misconducts has become such a pervasive feature of the Nigerian testing system that it has come to be accepted as a salient, albeit problematic, feature of external examinations in the country. The statistics, certainly demonstrate the reasons for such a widespread perception. In 2011, out of the 1,160,561 candidates who took the Secondary School Certification Examination (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) the results of 102,138 candidates were withheld, while only 31% of the remaining applicants recorded a passing grade (Chidiogo, 2011). In 2010, out of the 1,160,561 students who took the two core subjects of Mathematics and English language in the SSCE, 76% failed English and 89% failed mathematics (Oyinlola & Ofoelue,

2011). What was however more striking was the number of applicants whose papers were seized as a result of cheating! In Mathematics, the number was 50,826, accounting for 4.27% of all applicants; while 51,312 papers were seized in the English language, accounting for 4.31% of all applicants (Oyinlola & Ofoelue, 2011). There were also similar results in the 2012 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations held by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board. Indeed in the March 24th, 2012 examinations 27,266 candidates in 52 of the 3001 centers used for the examinations had their results withheld by JAMB due to examination misconducts (Abayomi et al., 2012).

Moreover, from 2007 to 2010, the Federal Ministry of Education excluded 324 secondary schools as examination centers due to the prevalence of examination violations in those schools (Gbagolo, 2011). And out of those 324 schools, 116 were in the South-South, 86 was in the South-West, 48 in the South-East, while only 8 were in the North-East, 12 in the North-West and 54 in the North-Central part of the country (Gbagolo, 2011). Numbers, which demonstrate that the incidence of examination misconduct were generally higher in the most educated and economically developed regions of the country. A state of affairs that might be explained by the greater emphasis placed on education and credentials in the South-East and South-West, as well as the greater unemployment rate and competition into tertiary institutions in the regions.

Interestingly, the literature investigating the widespread practice of examination malpractice in Nigeria, has tended to find everyone and everything culpable but the system of high-stakes testing itself. The evidence is available in Henry Gbagolo's (2011) review of the literature in which he identifies immorality in the wider society, poor teaching, absence of guidance and counseling, high enrollment fees, corrupt WAEC and

JAMB officials, and inadequate supervision of teachers by inspectors, as the major reasons for the issue. As well as Felicia Ofoegbu's (2009) *Students Perception of the Role of Parents in Academia and Continued Examination Malpractice*, in which she argues that parental connivance and corrupt teachers, are largely to blame for the pervasiveness of the issue. And in Arijesuyo Emiloju and C.A. Adeyoju's (2012) *The Challenges of Maintaining the Public Integrity of Public Examinations in Nigeria: The Ethical Issues*, in which he maintains that "misplaced moral values and negative attitudes amongst Nigerian youths" are primarily responsible for the preponderance of examination misconducts.

All the authors disregard the role that the pressures of high-stakes examinations may play in enabling the situation, its debilitating consequences for learning, as well as its authoritarian and antidemocratic impetus to propose what can only be regarded as band-aid solutions to the problem. As he is concerned primarily with the efficient and proper administration of the exams, Gbagolo (2011) simply calls on the examination bodies to be more conscientious and "alive to their responsibility through effective management" (p. 41). And in line with this, Emiloju and Adeyoju (2012) call for the creation of a bureaucracy that would oversee all matters related to the promotion and management of examination ethics in the country.

What is glaringly missing in the above discussions is of course the biggest issue of all, and that is the high-stakes examination culture in Nigeria. Rather than interrogating high-stakes testing as a system that discourages authentic learning through the emphasis that it places on certification and exam scores, the literature holds Nigeria's students responsible for failing to meet up to the examination standards. Rather than questioning

the kind of consciousness that is engendered from testing that amplifies the student's social, political and cultural alienation, through its total disregard for the pervasive inequalities that characterize the educational experiences of students. Unfortunately, the literature heralds the creation of bureaucracies to better discipline "immoral" and "unethical" students (Akininowor, 1997; Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012; Gbagolo, 2011) And rather than to conceptualize high-stakes testing as implicated in the maintenance of neo-colonial systems of cultural and socioeconomic domination through its emphasis on a colonially imposed banking system of education, rather than education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), the literature spouts neo-liberal conceptions of meritocracy and democracy (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012; Jimoh, 2009; Ofoegbu 2009).

The rest of the chapter will analyze the significance that Freire's conception of critical consciousness has for the practice of high-stakes testing in Nigeria. It will discuss the learning and certification culture that high-stakes testing propagates in Nigeria. It will then discuss how high-stakes testing entrenches the alienation that Nigeria's students experience in education through its reproduction of social political and cultural alienation. And it will demonstrate how high-stakes testing is antithetical to the development of a critical African worldview that is necessary for the mental and political emancipation of Nigerians.

From "Living" One's Education To "Banking" One's Education

In chapter two of the thesis, it was asserted that one of the most significant features of African indigenous education was the emphasis that it placed on experiential learning; as education was infused into every aspect of the child's life. An educative

process that Nyerere (1968) referred to as learning by “living and doing”. This was contrasted with the nature and quality of high-stakes testing including its compartmentalization of knowledge and its extrication of knowledge from the social, political and economic realities in which the student is located (Sacks, 1997). An “educational” process in which the student’s learning is removed from “living and doing”. And in chapter four, it was argued that high-stakes testing in Nigeria does little to address the world outside the test, nor the systemic inequalities which students experience in their daily lives and that through its pretensions of equality and fairness actually reproduces social inequities. So that by making believe that all students have a competitive chance towards educational success, despite the gender chasm, the great urban/rural divide, the enormous poverty rate and the deep regional inequalities, the educational system, under the direction of the West African Examination Council (WAEC), the National Examinations Council (NECO) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), does three things. It produces exams that claim to test student’s ability accurately and equally, thereby allowing them to blame individual students for failing to succeed rather than to see the issue as a collective problem. It reproduces social inequalities through its negation of existing inequalities thus upholding neo liberal conceptions of social mobility and meritocracy, even as the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen in the country (Brock, 2011). And most importantly, it engenders an educational system in which the knowledge that one gathers from school has little applicability in real life, and the educational process is viewed as apart from the realities of life. A situation that differs significantly from indigenous educational practices in which educational pursuits were only relevant to the extent that they had

practical applicability with real life concerns and could ensure the broader community's social, political and economic survival.

Nigerians are no longer “living” their education. The evidence is abundant. There is the urban-based curriculum, which continues despite a rural based majority (Adelabu, 2008). An example of which was on display in the 2011 NECO examination where almost all the questions asked in the “Government” portion of the exams were virtually unrelated with local (rural) government concerns. As well as the “Literature in English” segment, which was dominated with questions from the canons of western literature. There is the senselessness of classroom lessons without textbooks, and computer classes without computers, an obstacle that clearly impedes the student's ability to learn by doing. And there is the shortage of qualified teachers; and the problem of over crowded classrooms (Adeyemi, 2009; Nwokeoma, 2010). A barrier, which not only hinders the student's ability to participate fully in the educational process, but also “disempowers the teacher” (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008, p. 205) reducing their ability to include broader social and political concerns into lesson plans. There is also the madness of students being abandoned in classrooms, while teachers go in search of other ways to make money due to irregular payment (Bello, 2012) of already low salaries. Indeed the list goes on, but the primary purpose here is not to name them all, but to think through the consequences it has for the development of critical consciousness vis-à-vis education in Nigeria. Given the miserable state of education in Nigeria, students have few options but to forgo authentic learning. In order to obtain secondary school certificate and seek admission into tertiary institutions they must do their very best to memorize and regurgitate as much as

possible during examinations; signifying a movement from “living” one’s education to “banking” one’s education, à la Paulo Freire (1970).

The Loss of a Critical African Worldview

Given the shift from living one’s education to banking one’s education occasioned by the move from indigenous systems of education to the authoritarian system of high-stakes testing, it is the contention of this thesis, that the resultant consequence for Nigeria’s students has been the loss of a critical African worldview. And in the context of this thesis, the loss of a critical African worldview refers to two very related things. Firstly, there is the absence of a critical consciousness that results from the deprivation of “education as the practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). Secondly, there is the absence of a critical understanding of Nigeria’s — and to a larger extent Africa’s — ongoing political, economic, social, and cultural struggles with neoliberal and neo-colonial forces, enabled by this lack of critical consciousness.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) puts forth the idea that the banking concept of education conceptualizes students as “adaptable, manageable beings” (p. 73), and constructs knowledge as deposits, hindering the student’s ability to think creatively and transformatively. He holds that within such a system, the “more the student works at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (p. 73). If unable to thrive within the confines of the system, they are pathologized and condemned as incompetent and lazy, for its not the system that fails them, but they, that fail the system. As such they must be re-made “healthy” and

“reintegrated” into the oppressive status quo (p. 74). Healthy, in this context referring to the state of mind that results when one has been successfully disciplined and “indoctrinated” into the dominant and oppressive system in such a way as to lose one’s critical consciousness, or what Freire refers to as “conscientização” (p. 74). Furthermore, Freire draws a distinction between the banking concept of education and problem-solving education. He contends that while the former “stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent ... of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression”; a process he refers to as education for domination. The latter, which he calls education as the “practice of freedom”, rejects the dichomization of human beings with the world, and repudiates any separation of individuals from the realities of the world (p. 81).

Within the context of Nigeria’s high-stakes testing regime, the emergence of “conscientização” is demonstrably outside the logic of the educational system. This is because the development of conscientização threatens the individualism on which the system rests. As conscientização means to think transformatively about changing the conditions of one’s oppression, it means also to think with the collective in mind and to see oneself as implicated in the struggles of the collectives. Since Nigeria’s high-stakes system enforces an educational space in which students are forever in competition with one another and the odds are against them, it arguably orients individuals towards their own material struggle, which is a significant departure from the collectivistic outlook of indigenous education in Africa. In such a tense and restrictive educational climate, the potentialities of knowledge become confined and limited because far from being considered liberatory, knowledge is conceived as a tool which one attains only to differentiate themselves from the collective and to move materially forward in society.

Hence, in facilitating an educational atmosphere in which one acts by and for themselves and “not with the world or with others” (Freire, 1970, p. 75) high-stakes standardized testing infinitely reflects the banking model of education with its intrinsic unethical qualities.

Further evidence of the above assertion can be found in the discourse surrounding high-stakes testing in the country, an exercise in which two dominant themes ultimately emerge. The first theme being that teachers are to blame for the rampancy of examination misconducts and the mass failures of students; and the second theme being that the students themselves are to blame for their own lack of success. The implication of course being that the system of high-stakes testing is only a natural extension of education and that its current lack of success in the Nigerian system is not so much about the failures of the system as it is the students and teachers who have overwhelmingly failed to adapt themselves to it. Thus standardized testing is discursively stripped of its colonial histories as well as its social, political and economic context. Presented as a naturalistic element of education, it enables the pathologization of students and teachers, but not of the system. As Freire (1970) puts it, within the banking model of education, the oppressed are turned into “the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality” (p. 74).

A recent speech by Mustapha Abdullahi, an official of the National Examination Council (NECO) is illustrative of the above discourse. In the speech, given at a workshop on how to enhance the performance of students at external examinations, Abdullahi ignores the social, economic and political contexts of Nigeria’s struggling education system to descend on Nigeria’s teachers (“Teachers not”, 2012). Claiming that teachers

lack an understanding of the basic concepts of teaching, he argued that their deficiencies were having significant consequences for the development of human capital needed to drive the country economically forward. Abdullahi also counseled them against emphasizing testing in their teaching plans despite the educational system's stringent emphasis on public examinations ("Teachers not", 2012). Having been successfully indoctrinated into the system himself, Abdullahi espouses the logic of the system and seeks only to perpetuate it. He envisages teachers as passive objects who must follow the dictates of the system towards Nigeria's economic prosperity rather than active subjects who can play transformative roles in the elimination of the social political and economic inequalities plaguing Nigerian society. For Abdullahi then, it is the consciousness of Nigeria's teachers that must change, and not the system which oppresses them, because the more they can adapt to the status quo, the more easily the system can better propagate itself and the more they can be mentally subjugated (Freire, 1970, p. 74).

Also engaging in the same rhetoric was Nyesom Wike, Nigeria's minister of State for Education. Discussing the 2011 WAEC results, in which a majority of Nigeria's students performed poorly, Wike lamented the state of public examinations in the country. And in what could only be considered a rewriting of history, he also blamed students for deviating from the reading culture passed on by their predecessors, claiming that previous generations of students had been able to successfully challenge the colonial masters due to an expansive reading culture that had equipped them with the requisite knowledge to do so. A convenient and ambitious interpretation of history, given that only a superficial independence had been won; and that the African bourgeoisie of which he speaks of, only Africanized the upper class of Nigerian society and continued the anti-

African bias of western education at the expense of the authentic psychological, social, economic and political emancipation of the people.

However Wike's misdiagnosis of the issue provides an excellent entry point with which to understand the second aspect of what this thesis means by the loss of a critical African worldview. As was previously stated, the loss of a critical African worldview involves firstly the absence of a critical consciousness and secondly, the inability and difficulties involved in developing a critical understanding of Nigeria, and Africa's, innumerable social, economic and political problems engendered by this lack of critical consciousness. A state of affairs which Wike markedly demonstrates with his uncritical analysis of Nigeria's educational issues. Whereas he sees the issue as simply correctible through an emphasis on reading, he is incapable or unwilling to observe that despite the African bourgeoisie's feverous accumulation of western education and knowledge during the pre-independence era, they had been largely unwilling or unable to challenge, strongly, the white supremacist forces of imperialism or their own internalized oppression. And that it was indeed the consequences of their inability to articulate an oppositional and liberatory consciousness at the crucial moment of independence (Fanon, 1963), that was still reverberating in the current educational context. Moreover, Wike's misreading and or misrepresentation of Nigeria's educational reality also indicates his deficient understanding of the social, economic and political climate in which the educational system operates therefore enabling him to reduce the issue to the lack of reading culture. And so he argues that if only the students would read more, then all the structural issues pervading Nigeria's educational system would be automatically corrected.

This muddled conception of reality has also been regurgitated by Dr. Iyi Uwadiae, registrar of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) who seems to have absolved WAEC of any responsibility with respect to the persistent failures of Nigeria's students ("Don't Blame WAEC, 2012). In a speech given to the press during WAEC's release of the 2012 May/ June results, Uwadie argued that WAEC's role was simply to ensure that there was zero malpractice in its examinations arguing that students and parents were solely to blame for exam results. But while Uwadie's statements are interesting particularly in light of WAEC's historical imperative to ensure that their certificates were not of a lower standard than western certificates (Awomolo, 1992), it is his indifference to the problems that Nigeria's educational failures pose for the country's social, economic and political development and the systems of domination that threatens it, that is of utmost significance. This is because the situation ultimately illustrates the way in which the West African Examination's Council (WAEC) perpetuates the development of an uncritical African worldview in the way it administers and produces its exams. We see evidence of this in the Council's emphasis on Africanization of the Council over the curriculum (Dillard, 2001), and in its insistence on neutrality and objectivity. But most of all, we see this in the way it purports to conduct examinations that have "a unifying effect on the educational policies, systems and curricula" (Awolomo, 1992, p. 2) of its member countries, while passing up the opportunity to engender the development of a regional and or pan African and emancipatory consciousness through its syllabuses. Having chosen to conceptualize itself as a neutral body outside the imperialism, neoliberalism, and other forms of oppression experienced by Nigeria and other West African societies, WAEC has come only to emphasize regional educational standards in Africa. Standards,

which only prepare West Africans to operate within the system at the non-intellectual (Mbabuike, 2001) and non-emancipatory level while having no apparent consequence other than the ability of West Africans to possess similar educational certificates

Conclusion

This thesis has identified high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria, as a philosophical and ideological issue that facilitates the erosion of an emancipatory, liberatory and critical African worldview.

In engaging with this philosophical issue, I began in the first chapter by discussing the practice of standardized testing in the Western context in order to expose some of the philosophical questions that it has engendered amongst philosophers of education. The relationship of standardized testing with neoliberalism was discussed including its commoditization of education and its production of students as objects rather than subjects. Its compromising effects on the development of critical pedagogy as teachers are forced to teach to the test; and experiential learning, as students are compelled to divorce their lived experiences from their education; as well as its tendency to reproduce social inequities in the educational space were also discussed.

This led to my conclusion in the second chapter that given the urgency with which philosophers of education have interrogated the issue of high-stakes testing in the west, the ethical and moral questions that it propagates and its debilitating effects for the processes of education, the scholarly silence on the issue of high-stakes testing in Nigeria was alarming. This apprehension provided the impetus with which to investigate high-stakes testing in the Nigerian context. Hence in the second chapter I discussed the

development of standardized testing in Nigeria paying particular attention to its colonial beginnings and its devastating impact on the development of formal education in the country and the role of the earliest examination bodies in the country. The chapter also engaged with the role that high-stakes standardized testing's played in the invention of individualism and the displacement of communal values that had hitherto governed indigenous educational practices. Furthermore, its production of colonial education and certification as markers of social prestige over and above indigenous ways of conferring prestige were also addressed. It also traced the historical development of the West African Examination Council, discussing the tensions that the council faced with the Africanisation of the curriculum.

The third chapter then dealt substantively with the differences and incongruities between the ideals and values of education propagated under the colonially imposed standardized testing and indigenous educational practices. Dealing significantly with the values such as communalism, experiential learning and holism, I argued that high-stakes testing undermined indigenous African values that had been so integral to pre-colonial education in Nigeria. With regards to communalism, the thesis demonstrated that high-stakes standardized testing served to produce the individual as the owner of knowledge rather than the community as the gatekeeper of knowledges learnt and kept for generations. In its discussion of holism, it was established that high-stakes standardized testing promoted textbooks and western knowledge as the only valid and authentic knowledge thereby delegitimizing indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Lastly it argued that while indigenous education privileged experiential learning while

high-stakes testing denied the relevance of the learner's lived experience in the classroom.

Having established the above incongruities, I turned to the fourth chapter where I discussed the practice of high-stakes standardized testing in the contemporary context. I explored the incessant testing of students in public examinations, arguing that even though Nigerian officials apprehend the significant relationship that education has with development, their emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing in the Nigerian educational context do not reflect that understanding. Through an analysis of regional inequalities, gender inequalities as well as the rural and urban divide in the country, I expounded that high-stakes testing is implicated in the exacerbation of these inequities and that this state of affairs cannot facilitate the development of a fair, equitable, and accessible educational system in Nigeria. A system, that is infinitely necessary for the country's plans for economic and social development.

In the final chapter I discussed the ways in which high-stakes standardized testing facilitates the erosion of a critical African worldview. Employing a Freirian concept of the banking model of education, I argued that high-stakes testing in Nigeria exemplifies the banking concept of education through its production of students as objects rather than subjects and its emphasis on neoliberal principles of excessive individualism and competition. Furthermore, I asserted that high-stakes testing in Nigeria engenders an educational environment in which the possibilities for the growth of an emancipatory and critical consciousness are discouraged through the pathologization of students and the unethical way in which public examinations are operationalized in the country. I also put forth the view that through its privileging of an educational system that disavows existing

social, political and economic inequities in the country, the practice of high-stakes testing promotes the reproduction of an unequal status quo that are advantageous to Nigeria's ruling elite and neo-colonial forces.

What is the significance of this thesis? And what are its contributions to the scholarly enterprise? With regards to the field of philosophy of education in which this thesis is located, this thesis disrupts the parochialism and insularity which the academic discipline is oft accused of to deal with an urgent educational issue that is implicated in the psychological emancipation of Nigerians, their liberation from neo-colonialism and the oppressive logic of neoliberalism and the social and economic development of the country. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature on standardized testing by engaging substantively with high-stakes standardized testing in Nigeria; a philosophical issue that has hitherto been neglected. Indeed while philosophers of education in the west have certainly engaged with the ethicality and justness of standardized testing, the issue has received little scholarly attention in the African context and this thesis has paved the way for future analyses and considerations of the issue. What is more, it has also contributed to the literature on education as a tool of cultural imperialism by demonstrating how high-stakes testing continues the colonial tradition of shaping the consciousness of Africans towards Western cultural domination and local elite control. And lastly it contributes to the literature on African indigenous education through its exposition of the differences between the pedagogical and educational tools valued in traditional African societies and those emphasized in the high-stakes testing context under formal education.

Future areas of research can deal more concretely with the ethics of continued high-stakes standardized testing in Africa; students experiences with high-stakes in

Nigeria and other African countries; and its oppositional relationship with decolonization efforts. Researchers and philosophers of education consider how the use of indigenous languages as the language of communication in the secondary and tertiary levels of education in Nigeria can be an effective tool in the decolonization of the African mind or consciousness.

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