

# Burying the Kasuku Syndrome: Constructing inventive sites of knowledge

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## Keywords

*African Orature, Culture, Kasuku Syndrome, Pedagogy, Sites of Knowledge*

## **Point of Entry: Hodi! Hodi! (Knock! Knock!)**

Having come here to advocate the immediate burial of ‘kasuku culture,’ alias, ‘parrot culture,’ I had better initiate the process of grave-digging myself. As an African academician, poet, playwright, artist, cultural worker and activist, I have sought to do this in different ways. One such way has been using my intellectual work to affirm progressive indigenous African paradigms, including orature, which Pio Zirimu and Austin Bukenya once concisely defined as ‘verbal art.’<sup>1</sup> I will, therefore, use an African Orature

<sup>1</sup> Austin Bukenya and Pio Zirimu, ‘Oracy as a skill and as a tool for African development,’ paper originally presented at the Colloquium, Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), Lagos, Nigeria, 1977 and published as a chapter in Okpaku, Opubor & Oloruntimehia (eds) *The arts and civilizations of black and African peoples*, Volume 10.

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This paper is a lightly edited version of Chapter 13 of my book, *Writing and speaking from the heart of my mind*, African World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 2012. The original paper was first delivered as a keynote address at a Ford Foundation conference on the theme of ‘African Higher Education Initiative,’ held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2004. My audience largely consisted of senior higher education professionals, professors, and administrators (including Vice Chancellors). The paper was later published as a part of the conference proceedings: *Innovations in African Higher Education*. In “Introduction” to *Writing and Speaking from the Heart of My Mind*, I note: “Using African Orature as a style of composition and mode of presentation, the piece aims at providing a practical example and model paradigm that offers an inventive, alternative way of communicating intellectual, academic ideas. In general, it challenges members of the intelligentsia to invent diverse, alternative sites of knowledge in their various areas of specialization and expertise.” As I have consistently argued over the years, African indigenous knowledges constitute sites of knowledge that are gold mines still awaiting serious excavation by the academy.

style of delivery to hold this conversation with you. I cannot think of a more appropriate tool of competing with fatigue at the end of a long day, or of keeping a possible dozing audience alive, following such a challenging dinner.

My talk, or *palaver*, will be divided into movements or cycles, labelled *palaver one to ten*.

Inside each of these full stream palavers will be meandering tributaries of smaller, but related palavers. If the meanderings interfere with your focus, therefore, just find ways of tolerating them. For instance, treat them as the musings of an elder-in-the-making, borrowing a leaf from the *wazee wakumbuka* (elders recollect), an extremely popular *kipindi* (program) that used to air on Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) radio network sometime in the 1970s.

### **Palaver One: The conversational journey**

In African orature palaver, the speaker does not take members of their audience for granted. They seek to maintain contact with them by constantly calling upon them in an attempt to ensure that they remain with them as companion travellers along the conversational journey. They do this by deliberately eliciting their participation, thus transcending the crisis of the ‘banker’ in Paulo Freire’s discourse on ‘banking education’ as expounded in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.<sup>32</sup> In this narrative, the ‘banking’ educator, or lecturer, simply ‘deposits’ information into their students, treating them as empty ‘receptacles’ and never as ‘active participants.’ After the dumping process, the lecturer expects the students to memorise the ‘facts’ and then accurately regurgitate the information when prompted to do so. I am sure we do not have such educators in our midst at this gathering! Whatever the case, I will not turn you into my ‘receptacles.’

Travel with me, instead, as I take the African orature path, in an attempt to interrogate the *kasuku* way, taught to us in the colonial and neo-colonial classrooms. The format of African orature palaver is the antithesis of the ‘banking education’ model. It utilises a ‘call-response’ delivery style that insists on a partnership between the speaker and their audience. This format is widely used among people of African origin globally, be it in social/religious gatherings, public speeches or group discourses.

In our palaver, the call-response will go something like this...I will call upon

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<sup>2</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 1983. The text was originally published in Portuguese, 1968 (first published in English (translation by Myra Ramos) Herder & Herder Publishing Company, 1970).

you as *abantu*, or as *wenzangu*, or even as plain ‘people!’ You will respond, *yũũ* or *wũũ!* You may also respond, *yebo* or *naam!* Even a plain *yes* will do! Use whichever comes more readily to you. After this I will ‘ask for the road,’ by posing any of the following questions: ‘Shall I continue?’ ‘Shall I speak?’ ‘Shall I proceed?’ You will ‘give me the road’ by replying, ‘Continue/go on!’ ‘Speak/speak on!’ ‘Proceed!’ Again, just use whatever comes most naturally to you. The only favour I ask for is this: when I go beyond the twenty minutes that the chairperson, Tade Aina, has allowed me and then ask, ‘Shall I continue?’ You must enthusiastically respond, ‘Continue/go on!’ Remember to make it extra loud as well.

## Palaver Two: Burying colonial kasuku consciousness

Once upon all times, there has always lived a bird known as *kasuku* or parrot. The creature is at once fascinating and at the same time pathetic. They are intriguing and fascinating because they excel in imitative skills—always able to reproduce the speaker’s word, using the originator’s exact pronunciation and even tone. Imitation and reproduction, or to use academic language, plagiarism, are perfected through sessions of attentive listening and repeating. However, the creature is also pathetic in the sense that they can never become the ‘owner’ of the source word. Thus, we can only call them a fascinating mimic, but never an intellectual thinker. The point is simple: serious intellectuals must transcend mindless repetition, mimicry and plagiarism. In this regard, forgive me if I observe that colonial and neo-colonial educational systems have produced too many intellectual thieves, other areas of thievery aside. These are the types that Vidiadhar Naipaul needed to viciously satirise in his fictional work, *Mimic men*.<sup>34</sup>

I wish to be even more provocative and suggest that the said colonial and neo-colonial classrooms did not just produce a huge contingent of intellectuals cum con-artists, but unwitting pathological creatures, badly inflicted by a chronic streak of the *kasuku* syndrome. We have among us ‘hypnotised parrots,’ ‘willing/professional parrots,’ ‘reluctant/involuntary parrots’ and lastly, ‘dissenting parrots.’ So, fellow parrots, of whichever inclination, let me call upon all of us to find a fast cure for this syndrome if we are to be agents of innovation in African higher education.

### (Call and Response)

If this cure eludes us, we might need to call upon our ancestral spirits to kill the *kasuku* in us – not us, oh! – as our people in West Africa would say. Following

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<sup>3</sup> Vidiadhar Naipaul, *Mimic men*, Heinemann, London, 1967.

the resulting burial ceremony, we will need to move on very rapidly with the business of creating our own authentic word. Here, again, I borrow from Freire. Accuse me of being a disciple, not a *kasuku*, and I will not deny it.

My fictional sister, Lawino, of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*<sup>4</sup> and *Song of Ocol*<sup>5</sup> has a whole lot to say on *kasukuism*. She was so passionately contemptuous of those who suffered from the syndrome that she once accused her husband of possessing no 'testicles' (her language not mine, oh!) According to her, Ocol's 'articles' had been 'smashed by huge books' in the colonial classroom. Lawino's sexist language notwithstanding, her accurate characterisation of the *kasuku* syndrome-stricken intellectual was visionary. I am not surprised that Ocol abandoned her in preference of red-lipped Clementina, a colonised African woman *kasuku*. The critical point is, despite this strong condemnation, Lawino seems to have relented somewhat, leaving a small window of hope by appealing for the emergence of a new Ocol. So, to living and potential Ocols, I say: creativity and inventiveness are still possibilities. However, these goals are challenging ones to all of us as survivors carrying those vitals that were smashed in the colonial, and by extension, the neo-colonial classroom.

### (Call and Response)

Fellow survivors, let me draw your attention to another exponent of the *kasuku* syndrome so that you can truly appreciate the urgency of burying it. In *The wretched of the earth*, Franz Fanon refers to *kasuku*-like intellectuals as 'those walking lies,' who had nothing to say of themselves outside what 'master' had schooled them to mimic.<sup>6</sup> Now, you and I have encountered these fakes, 'walking in the air,' as the saying goes; feeling so 'hot' that they heat up the very air we breathe. Whether as Achebean 'been-tos' or as domestic misfits from Cairo, Fort Hare, Ibadan, Nairobi, or whatever local university, those who became 'walking lies' behaved the same way. They tried to outdo those whom they imitated at their own game, in the fashion of grand *kasukus*. Some of them even developed self-willed amnesia and could no longer remember their villagers or fellow villagers. As Aimée Césaire has observed in *Discourse on colonialism*, they became schizophrenic towards themselves and their people.<sup>7</sup> Nay, they turned into zombies, losing the creator and inventor in them. But why do I speak in the past tense? These schizophrenics and zombies are still with us today and have multiplied under

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<sup>4</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Ocol*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963 (originally published in 1961 by Francois Maspero).

<sup>7</sup> Aimée Césaire, *Discourse on colonialism*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1955.

neo-colonialism. Yes, Carter Woodson's thesis on the *Miseducation of the negro*<sup>8</sup> still holds true in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

(Call and Response)

Fortunately, we also know that there have been survivors and that they, along with the new visionaries, are going to become composers of the type of narrative that Carole Boyce-Davis would call an 'uprising discourse.'<sup>9</sup> So, let us leave the court poets alone, singing praise poems inside or outside the gates of statehouses. Let us remember that there were always at least three types of intellectuals: dinosaur conservatives, chameleon liberals and dissident progressives. We, of the intellectual community, are a happy mixed-grill and never a homogeneous collective. Whatever our designation, I see a lot of work ahead of us if we are to breathe new life into our institutions of higher learning. So, for those who would be authors of 'uprising discourses,' may the spirit of creativity possess our imaginative faculties and set them on fire, releasing unstoppable energy that bursts into flowering dreams and eternal visions.

(Call and Response)

As our dialogical journey touches palaver three, we specifically turn to the question of curriculum in the new university of our dream. There is no denying it: throughout history, knowledge has always been one of the most contested sites of human achievement. This is to say that the classroom and the curriculum are critical aspects of whatever visions we emerge with in imagining the universities of our dreams.

### **Palaver Three: Deconstruction/reconstruction of knowledge**

The construction of a compulsory course for deprogramming the mind of every university student must be a high priority, preferably during the first year of admission. Such a course should aim at interrogating the dimensions, dangers and cost of the *kasuku* syndrome, while seriously searching for alternative and lasting solutions. Whether titled, 'Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Knowledge,' or 'Knowledge as Power,' the aim of the course should be to bury, once and

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<sup>8</sup> Carter Woodson, *Miseducation of the Negro*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1990 (originally published in 1933 by Carter G. Woodson).

<sup>9</sup> Carole Boyce Davies is currently the Frank H.T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters in the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Africana Studies and English at Cornell University.

for all, the *kasuku syndrome* at the undergraduate level. Only after that will the learners' minds open up to pursue creative ventures, ultimately emerging with empowering paradigms. Once this kind of self-empowerment is achieved, it will turn our students into authentic agents capable of production and dissemination of knowledge. It will also hasten the end of the pertaining equation of knowledge, development and civilisation with Western cultures, which is but a dangerous myth.

(Call and Response)

### **Palaver Four: Engendering knowledge**

Having deconstructed knowledge and embraced it as a universal human gift rather than a handover from the West, we will be duty-bound to engender it as well. For, throughout history, knowledge has come to be associated with males. Women who have dared to enter this world have encountered all types of resistance: physical and psychological intimidation; misrepresentation; stereotyping; discrimination; abuse and much more. I remember how in my mother's days, educated women, or rather, women who dared pursue an intellectual path, were depicted as 'loose,' (*malaya*), or as 'wild.' In my time, I can provide two revealing illustrations of stereotyping, both insulting, but, ironically, meant as benign by the unwitting perpetrators.

A male colleague who was acquainted with my writing and who had looked forward to meeting me at a conference, for the first time, walked up to me and greeted me. He then told me that he was surprised to see what I looked like in person because from my ideas, he had expected to meet a 'masculine' looking woman. At first, I was lost for words and then, a devilish idea flashed through my mind. 'Well,' I quipped, 'you were not wrong.' He looked puzzled. I kept up the suspense. Then, with a wicked smile I said, 'You see, I actually only shaved my beard this morning!' That took care of that one.

(Call and Response)

On another occasion, a male colleague and friend of mine came forward to congratulate me at the end of a speech I had given. Shaking my hand vigorously he told me, 'You did us proud! You spoke like a man!' Just imagine. Inherent in this harmless sounding comment is the notion that men have a monopoly of intellectual power.

(Call and Response)

Therefore, in our innovative educational curriculum, we must introduce another course named, ‘Gender Education,’ or ‘Engendering Education,’ or whatever. It must be so introduced that all departments across the university incorporate it into their schedules. This will not do as an affair based in Women’s Studies alone. Moreover, in our innovative paradigms, affirmative action must be extended to women students and other peripheralised groups. This will go some way towards providing equity in the face of years of systemic gendered discrimination and exclusion, while privileging males.

At the administrative level, we must include more women in high-ranking positions, sufficiently well placed to advocate, as well as implement, this type of revolutionary change in the curriculum. I say, the administrative structures of our universities are too male-centred at the senior level, be it in the departments, the faculties, or the non-teaching sectors. Consequently, the curriculum remains very patriarchal. So, in our envisioned new universities, gender tokenism must cease. The pattern of a rare woman vice-chancellor here, a deputy vice-chancellor there and a registrar someplace else, will not do.

(Call and Response)

However, even as education and administrative powers cease to be perceived as prerogatives of males, in our dream universities women who enter these male terrains must be trained to rid themselves of patriarchal socialisation. If this does not happen, we will have a scenario in which a male concedes monopolised space only to be replaced by another male-like occupier, who only happens to carry a woman’s body.

(Call and Response)

### **Palaver Five: Indigenous knowledge**

Innovative higher education will need to confront another very damaging myth: the conceptualisation of knowledge as Western (even white) and therefore, an importation to Africa. The internalisation of this myth has had a devastatingly negative influence on our psyches. The irony is that in antiquity and medieval times, Africa was one of the most vibrant sites of knowledge. To understand

how mistaken this notion is, just take time to read Cheikh Anta Diop,<sup>10</sup> Ivan van Sertima,<sup>11</sup> Martin Bernal,<sup>12</sup> Frank Snowden Jr,<sup>13</sup> Chancellor Williams<sup>14</sup> and others. I want to suggest that to date Africa still offers very rich sites of knowledge. All they await is rediscovery, research, systematisation and technological updating by innovative scholars.

In a meandering manner, what I am suggesting is the addition of another course on the core curriculum, entitled, 'Indigenous Knowledges.' If possible, all disciplines should be made to include it as a core, or to incorporate aspects of it. We need to urgently turn to our own world and rediscover, if not re-invent it.

### (Call and Response)

As things stand now, *jua kali* practitioners, most of who hardly have any formal western education to speak of, are emerging with more inventions than the 'mimic men and women' that are being churned out of our universities. Perhaps it is time we brought these inventive artisans onto our campuses to conduct workshops and give us tips on creativity. Alternatively, what is wrong with apprenticing our students to them? The Ford Foundation asked me to deliver an inspirational address that was daring and provocative: to dare dream wild dreams. Well, I am daring to dream them.

### (Call and Response)

As for all those griots, gurus, musicians, artists, medicine persons and learned male/female elders in our communities, why can't we bring them up to the ivory tower more often than just once in a while? We mostly seem to go down to them, armed with tape recorders and other intimidating pieces of equipment that mesmerise them into quickly surrendering their information to us. Believe me, many of us academicians and researchers are nothing less than 'brain harvesters.' I am arguing that we must find ways of forming intellectual partnerships with our communities so that ordinary people become participants

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<sup>10</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African origin of civilization*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> Ivan van Sertima, *They came before Columbus*, Penguin Random House, New York, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of classical civilization*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Snowden Jr, *Blacks in antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970.

<sup>14</sup> Chancellor Williams, *The destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4,500 BC to 2000 AD* Third World Press, Chicago, 1971.



and generators in knowledge production.

(Call and Response)

Researching and writing a book on Field Marshal Mũthoni wa Kĩrĩma, a former Mau Mau freedom fighter, I have learnt so much that I am amazed at how much untapped knowledge is sitting out in the villages, towns and cities of our respective nations. I now know what Amilcar Cabral meant when he is purported to have said that with every African elder that passes away we lose a walking library. Mau Mau freedom fighters had come up with incredible discoveries in an effort to survive in the forests of Kirinyaga and Nyandarua. They could break wood without making noise; walk without leaving tracks behind; light fire without matches; carry live charcoal in bags for weeks; preserve food to last months; tame wild animals; perform operations; make guns from pipes, etc. Today, all these skills could be refined and improved using current technological know-how such that they become transformed into extraordinary inventions.

(Call and Response)

This reminds me: there used to be a man in Kenya, by the name of Gacamba, who was said to have made an airplane that could actually fly – well, let us say, at least take off! Whatever happened to Gacamba? What did our engineers do with his talent? Today in Rwanda and Burundi *jua kali* practitioners are making wooden bicycles that seem to perform wonders even on bumpy roads. In fact, they operate as *matatus* between markets, shopping venues and the hirers' destinations. The only problem is that they seem to use a lot of human fuel and quite frankly, I am not sure that I would be courageous enough to take a ride on one of them, especially down a slope. Nonetheless, I stand in complete awe of this ingenious invention. What are we as intellectuals doing to match or improve on such efforts?

(Call and Response)

Our dream universities of the future must find ways of accessing and harnessing all these and other knowledges, with a view to advancing them. Ordinary Africans have become very inventive. They only require the backing of the intelligentsia in order to consummate and technologise their skills. If this knowledge remains untapped, or the skills frustrated, they are very likely to be misapplied. For instance, I understand that in Zambia, *wananchi* have found ways

of ‘liberating’ copper from telephone wires and that, consequently, the bulk of landlines are non-operational as we speak. Apparently, those who do not own cellular telephones are in trouble coping with distance communication.

‘Let me tell you something for nothing,’ to borrow an expression from one, Mr Sando, a Zimbabwean musician. Unless we become inventors and come up with products that are uniquely African to take to the international conference tables, the rest of the world will never respect or take us seriously. In other words, we will remain consumers and copycats and lest we forget it, however well we copy, ours will always be a carbon copy – never the real thing.

### (Call and Response)

An old adage counsels that need is the mother of invention. I want to think that all the pain that Africa is going through; all the crying needs that are forever screaming in our sore ears; all the deaths we are witnessing daily, mostly caused by poverty and, unfortunately, wanton war-mongering, etc, will yield lessons. One lesson had better be that sheer need ought to force us to probe deep into ourselves and learn to answer the vocation of all human beings: to struggle to reach the height of our potential. This can only happen when we dare to be ‘audacious and inventive’ to borrow from Maya Angelou advocating the need for women writers to be more assertive, daring and ingenious during a discussion with other Black women writers in a documentary by Phil Donahue.<sup>15</sup> I say: all the tragedies around us ought to make us wake up. If we don’t wake up this century and invent with a vengeance, we deserve to sleep forever – in pieces!

### (Call and Response)

## **Palaver Six: Connecting with our communities**

This is a tributary of some of the forerunning streams of major palavers above. The simple issue is that our intellectual work should aim at resolving the practical problems facing our people and our societies. The cult of intellectuals who are so removed from their people that they live on islands of seclusion and privilege, only driving into the landmasses of dispossession to look at inhabitants through tinted glass windows, has to end. African intellectuals have to stop acting like ‘pouting children,’ to echo Okelo Oculi who maintained that these academic

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<sup>15</sup> Phil Donahue, *Black women writers*, Films for the Humanities and Sciences series, Princeton, New Jersey, 2005.

tourists only go back to their villages to eat the last egg or hen from their mothers' and even grandmothers' chicken runs. This is of course in the face of hungry *kwashiorkor*-stricken children looking on with salivating mouths. Our dream universities will have to produce better graduates than these 'pouting' adolescents: mature people who are ready to serve and sacrifice for their nations.

(Call and Response)

### **Palaver Seven: Focus on the youth**

There is a story, true or fictional, one never knows, of an Anglican bishop and a Roman Catholic cardinal. The former had a dwindling congregation, while the latter's church was bursting to the seams with worshippers. One day, after watching this development with a mixture of envy and perplexity, the Anglican gathered enough courage and approached his Catholic counterpart. 'Cardinal,' he said, 'how do you manage to retain and attract so many followers?' The cardinal drew closer and in a conspiratorial whisper told the bishop, 'Aaah! The secret is: we catch them when they are young!'

Inventive higher educational institutions must find means of 'capturing' the youth early enough. All sorts of ventures can be dreamt up, ranging from institutionalisation of mentorship programs in schools; formation of 'big sisters' and 'big brothers' clubs whereby university students 'adopt' high school pupils and groom them for high achievement, etc. In this connection, universities must dream up non-punitive youth service projects to replace most of the current ones that are based on a disciplinary or punitive model. Instead of drilling students, calling them names and trying to 'break' them through harsh discipline and hard labour as happens, or has happened in many youth-service programs, let us tap their creativity. Let us send them out to the villages, towns and cities on literacy and 'numeracy' campaigns. I am sure that a lot of philanthropic foundations would only be too happy to fund such campaigns.

Walter Rodney<sup>1716</sup> reminded us that the most precious resource is the human being. The youth of Africa constitute the bulk of Africa's population and our neo-colonial systems seem to have thrust them into a cruel world, mortgaging their lives before the young people have a chance to take their place in the world. Our innovative institutions of higher learning must find ways to restore the robbed dreams to Africa's youth.

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle L'Ouverture, London, 1972.

(Call and Response)

### **Palaver Eight: Democratisation of corridors of power**

University classrooms and administrative structures must become more democratised, more gendered and more liberated from the ‘big boss’ mentality. At one stage, especially in the mid-1980s, it was assumed that placing academicians in high administrative positions would bring the academic and administrative arms of academia closer. Unfortunately, although we seem to have succeeded in a few cases, we have failed miserably in terms of the majority. The administrative arm has tended to act as an agent of the state. I am familiar with the scenario of the proverbial piper’s payer calling the tune, but surely, the university top brass is supposed to be a collection of more than mere ‘pipers!’

Even worse is the inaccessibility of the ‘big bosses’ and their offices. The spaces they occupy are so forbidding and so intimidating that they have become frontiers of terror. I say, such an undemocratic environment is no soil in which to sow seeds of creativity and visionary innovativeness. People cannot think when their minds are frozen by fear and/or lives stifled by emotionally/psychologically harrowing existence.

(Call and Response)

### **Palaver Nine: Networking, collaboration and exchange**

Without networking, collaboration and exchange, we will remain islands of self-isolation and however innovative we think we are, we will never realise our full potential. We will be wasting resources that could stretch much further if we pooled them together. In responding to this challenge, we must not only focus on overseas connections and networks: our primary targets should be our continental partners. It is paramount that we accelerate these linkages.

(Call and Response)

## Palaver Ten: Pending palavers in point form

- Focus on distance education
- Promotion of cultural activities such as community theatre to reach the people
- Confronting and preventing the nightmare of brain drainage
- Initiating and supporting efforts in economic, political and state democratisation as these are critical bases for either blocking or promoting innovations in higher education.

## Point of Exit and closure

Poem: 'Intellectuals or Imposters?'

*Refrain: Aba! Intellectuals of imposters?<sup>17</sup>*

When problems

translate into  
deep seas

deep seas  
daring

philosophical diving

deep seas  
daring

skills in  
floating  
swimming  
surfacing

show me those  
who emerge

treading water  
walking the shores  
breathing courage  
and conviction  
scanning the horizon

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<sup>17</sup> Micere Githae Mũgo, *My mother's poem and other songs*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1994, 20-28.

a horizon extended  
unto eternity  
an eternity  
of enquiry.  
Show me those  
who cast  
a penetrating eye  
disentangling  
a maze of problems  
defying all solutions.

Show me these  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

Show me those  
who walk the shore  
firming the earth  
on which  
we stand  
shaping up visions

visions that  
clearly define  
who they are  
whom we are  
where we are  
when we are  
how we are  
how to be.

Yes, show me these  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Show me those  
who cross

engulfing seas  
seas of confusion  
those who build  
connecting bridges  
bridges of understanding  
those who traverse  
dividing gorges  
gorges of alienation.  
Show me those  
who leap-frog  
with human grace  
hurdles of  
ego-tripping.  
Friend, show me these  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Show me those  
who break  
icicles  
of silence  
those who untie  
stammering tongues  
those who teach  
articulation  
articulation of  
the authentic word.  
Show me these  
and I will tell you  
who are the intellectuals  
and who are the imposters.

*Refrain*

Tell me too  
tell me  
where they stand  
whether on the soil

of liberating knowledge  
or upon the sands  
of unfounded learning.

Tell me

tell me whether

they fan the furnace  
of living wisdom  
that generates the heat  
of probing dialogue  
and teasing ideas.

Tell me this

and I will tell you

how I know them  
how I see them  
where I place them.

*Refrain*

Tell me

tell me

whether they stand  
to the north  
to the south  
to the west  
or to the east

of the compass

of our people's lives.

Tell me this

and I will tell you

where they are  
coming from  
and where they may be  
headed to.

Yes, tell me this

and I will tell you

whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.



*Refrain*

Draw me

the circumference  
of the circle  
that surrounds them

Show me

where they have  
positioned  
themselves  
whether they be  
at the center  
or on the periphery

of pro-people

human rights debate.

Draw me

this circle

and I will tell you

whether they truly stand  
or decorate the fence  
of abdicating neutrality.

Friend, tell me this

and I will tell you

whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Capture me

capture me

the podium

the podium

from which

they deliver  
their treatises  
of academia  
whether they deposit  
engulfing piles

of alienating information  
or micro-examine facts  
through the mirror  
of reflected  
and tested reality.

Yes, capture me  
the scene  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Capture me  
capture me  
this grandiose scene  
of academia  
with its dons  
and their wisdom

Capture me  
the scene  
and I will tell you  
whether the missiles  
of their ideas  
hit the target  
or bounce back  
on an overlooking  
blank stone wall  
of incomprehension

Friend, capture me  
the scene  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Tell me  
tell me

whether they are  
perched  
statue-like  
on the high chairs  
of bureaucratic  
stuffiness  
pushing heaps  
of reluctant paperwork  
heaps that solidify  
into immovable boulders  
sitting on forbidding  
mountains  
of accumulated  
red tape

Tell me this  
and I will tell you  
why they bake  
themselves  
in stuffy Anglo-American  
and Franco-German suits  
in the heat  
of Africa's problems.

Yes, I will tell you  
why the madams  
choke themselves  
with chains of gold  
around sagging necks  
while our children  
writhe with the agony  
of crippling hunger  
and the diarrhea  
of malnutrition.

Friend, tell me this  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

Tell me whether  
they penetrate

the forests of intrigue  
and the bushes of lies  
planted by  
stampeding elephants  
and buffaloes  
who mercilessly crush  
our people's lives under their hooves  
making minced meat  
of their lives

Yes, tell me whether  
the reels of theories  
they abstractly kite-fly  
remain suspended in the sky  
or make a landing  
on people's earth

whether they sit  
solitary confined  
inside the cells  
of incarcerating  
academia  
or whether they flower  
like ripened plants  
bearing the seeds  
of education for living.

Yes, tell me this  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*

Tell me  
tell me whether  
their theories  
are active volcanoes  
erupting with  
fertilizing lava  
on which to plant  
seeds that will  
germinate

with self-knowledge  
seeds that will  
cross-fertilize  
into collective being  
Knowledge become  
actioned theory  
Knowledge become  
living testimony  
of our people's  
affirmative history  
liberated herstory  
Actioned theory  
inscribed as  
a protest  
manifesto  
re-aligning our people's  
averted humanity  
Yes, tell me this  
and I will tell you  
whether they are  
intellectuals  
or imposters.

*Refrain*