Chapter 8

Elders Critical Teachings (ElderCrits): The Epistemic Gift for De/Anti-Colonial Turn in Teaching Africa

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Introduction

Let us prefix the chapter with a story: Not too long ago, one of the authors of this chapter had a conversation with a colleague at their workplace about wasteful spending amongst some politicians when it comes to using public funds. During the conversation, the colleague spoke about a bridge that has been constructed to a road that leads to nowhere: "the government is building a bridge that is taking us to Timbuktu!" It was the first time *Author Two* has heard Timbuktu being used as a metaphor, so he asked the colleague what they knew about Timbuktu. The response was surprising. The colleague explained that Timbuktu is a fictional place, and it is used metaphorically to imply things that do not exist. *Author Two* had to explain to the colleague that Timbuktu was actually a city in Mali Empire (Africa) in the fifteenth century, and it was the hub for Islamic intellectualism with its famous Sankore University and other Madrasa attracting scholars from all over the world especially

during the reign of Mansa Musa. The colleague was surprised by that information and wondered why they have not learned it in school. Such is the viciousness of Western education to take a notable accomplishment of Africa and make it a mockery in Europe and North America.

This story of treating Africa's accomplishments as mythical and fictional stories is consistent with how Europe and North America have historically constructed Africa. Africa is the cradle of civilisation where humans first evolved and has produced some of the great empires and kingdoms – Egypt, Abyssinia, Mali, Songhai, and Ghana to name few – whose accomplishments laid the foundation or contributed to human civilisations (Steel & Gardiner, 2025. Yet, Africa is talked about in Europe and North America as the "dark continent," where "crisis" exists in everything that happens in the continent. The misconstruction of Africa as a crisis continent not only erases Europe and North America's complicity but also successfully portrays Africa as a helpless continent without the 'imperial Western saviour's support'. Through this discourse, Africa is rendered impure in white Western gaze, and in the process, Africa's achievements and contributions to human civilisation and development are erased to serve the European agenda. Chabal (1996) laments about the 'politics of the mirror' and 'the tyranny of causalities' (Chabal, 1986) in the Euro-American education system, where Africa is being held up to be what it is not. We refer to Chabal (1986; 1996) because his conceptual analyses offer a critical lens about the structural implications of Eurocentric education, in particular, the mischaracterisation of Africa as a crisis continent and the power of such educational politics to constrain thought, imagination, and possibilities for Africa.

In contemporary times, many African scholars are retelling Africa's stories in its complete form, highlighting how Africa has contributed to events, ideas, and worldviews that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and development (see Adjei, 2014; Dei, 2011; 2004; Dei & Adjei, 2014; Mbembe, 1997; Nyamnjoh 2004; 2012; Parker & Rathbone, 2007). These scholars and many others not named are reclaiming Africans

Indigenous knowledges to inform and shape how we think, talk, and teach Africa. This chapter adds to the conversation by drawing on African Elders Critical Teachings (ElderCrits) to guide how we talk and teach Africa in the schooling and education in the Global North. *ElderCrits* are epistemologies of Indigenous Elders anchored in the shared voices, experiences, history, cultures, and viewpoints of Indigenous communities over generations because of sustained attachments and relationship to the land, culture, and nature (Adjei & Dei, 2024; Dei & Adjei, 2024; Dei et al., 2024). *ElderCrits* are traditional knowledges and cultural wisdoms treasured and held in highest esteem by Indigenous communities, and they often inform, shape, guide, organise, and regulate how Indigenous community members uphold to the promise of a better future. In Africa, *ElderCrits* are expressed in folklore, proverbs, symbols, artefacts, sculptures, artistic expressions, and storytelling and their formulations and uses represent an opportunity to talk and teach differently about Africa. The data for the chapter was collected amongst Indigenous Asante Elders of Ghana, leading scholars, and education practitioners from Ghana currently engaged in transformative educational work. The chapter concludes with important lessons on how educators can draw on African *ElderCrits* to impart invaluable lessons about Africa as seen through the eyes of Indigenous African Elders.

The data for this chapter were taken from Memorial University's Vice President Research-funded study of 25 Asante Elders from Koforidua and Kumasi of Ghana. Four major questions guided the literature review, individual conversations with Asante Elders, and inquiry-based workshops: How does *ElderCrits* exist by way of literature in Africa, Australia, Europe, and North America's contexts (objective 01)? What are the ways and forms that Asante Elders (as cultural custodians and local educators) understand, interpret, reflect, and articulate *ElderCrits* in everyday social interaction (objective 02)? In what ways can this body of knowledge from Asante Elders be used to teach critical thinking education in Ghana and Canada (objectives 03-04)? We drew on Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous storywork* as a methodology to explore

African *ElderCrits* amongst the Asantes of Ghana. Archibald (2008:373) conceptualises storywork as "the process of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experiences". Karen Martin (2006:21) describes storywork as a "meta-process that enables the many smaller stories … to be woven together in the overall research process". Storytelling is an integral part of Asantes' daily realities, and it is a process through which Asantes share intergenerational knowledge, the history of the land, local experiences, and cultural worldviews to young ones. Cajete (1994) argues that storytelling in the form of image-making, ritual drama, proverbial sayings, riddles, artistic expression and others forms the basic foundation of Indigenous peoples' learning and teaching. By utilising Archibald's (2008) storywork, the research team employed research methodology consistent with Asantes' tradition of storytelling.

The methods honoured traditional oratory protocols of the spoken word to engage with the Elders and enstooled Asante Chiefs in traditional settings for the interviews. African Indigenous engagement protocols are varied and culturally bound depending on rank and leadership structure. Honouring the cultural protocols includes small token gifts, offering drinks for the pouring of libation, and hearing the responses from the traditional Chiefs using linguists who transmit using the power of oratory (i.e., riddles, proverbs, fables, and idioms), synthesising complex issues in simplistic and relatable ways. The conversations were around varied forms of *ElderCrits* relevant to Asantes, their meanings and uses in everyday conversations. All conversations were carried out in Twi to enable fluent and easy discussions. With the permission of Elders, each conversation was recorded. In addition, adequate notes were taken. Data analyses were performed throughout the phase of conversations with Elders to allow for modifications to questions asked as needed, as well as to allow room for clarifications from Elders. Two local research assistants helped with the transcription and translation of Elders' conversations. Elders were consulted to ensure that no meanings were lost in transcription and translations. In consultation and collaboration with Elders, we manually used open coding to acquire Elders' primary thoughts

and experiences. Our analyses were collaborative as we moved back-and-forth between transcripts, initial findings, existing literature, field notes, photographic images, and consultation with community leaders to identify themes and storylines. In our collaborative analyses, we identified multiple ways that Asante Elders' critical teachings are transmitted to learners. We reproduced samples of such teachings to show how one can think, talk, and teach Africa.

Teaching Africa through symbolism

African symbolism is an Indigenous mythopoetic tradition rooted in artistic creation to convey essential teachings, wisdom, values, experiences, and the interconnectedness of all things. African symbolisms are ideographic and pictographic writing systems that have existed in traditional African society for a long time (Adagbo, 2014; Adjei 2015; 2018; Seidu et al., 2022). They carry aphorisms, proverbs, and metaphors expressed through visual form, and they have capacity to safeguard cherished truths, spirituality, history, values and ethics of nature, culture, and community. Here are few examples of the symbols.

Symbol 8.1: Symbol of prudence and thoughtfulness. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

The symbol of prudence and thoughtfulness depicts three individuals in a seating position performing three different actions with their hands. One is covering both ears with both hands, the second is covering both eyes with both hands, and the last person is covering their mouth with both hands. The message in the actions is simple: *What I have not heard with my ears; what I have not seen with my eyes, my mouth will not speak*

about it. The symbol implies that one is not expected to attest to things not witnessed nor heard personally. The symbol carries the proverbial saying "*Sɛ ano patre a ɛyehu ɛkyɛn anamɔn*" which literally translates as, "A slipped tongue does more damages than a slipped foot." The proverb is a caution against those who are quick to speak of issues that they have limited knowledge and facts about. The Asante Elders use this image to teach the importance of being prudent and thoughtful in life. One must only speak of issues of which they have personal knowledge, and should not rely on rumours and hearsay to make judgement calls about situations and people.

Symbol 8.2: Mpuasa Ntiamoah – the metaphor of three mythical haircut. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

Mpuasa in the Twi language means three-hairlocks. Ntiamoah is an Asante name of a person. In a loose term, *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* means *the three-hairlocks of Ntiamoah*. *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* is a special haircut with three similarly shaped hairlocks with each strand of the hairlock strategically positioned on a cleanly shaved head. One hairlock is positioned at the front, the other hairlock at the back right and the last hairlock on the back left. Each strand of hairlock is coded with a special meaning. Together, the three mythical hairlocks convey wisdom and lessons about life. The first lock (in the front) carries the message "some secrets are not meant to be shared"; the second lock on the back right carries the message "blood is thicker than water" and the third lock on the back left means "a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful." There are several versions of the story behind the mystery haircut of *Mpuasa Ntiamoah*. This is a version shared by an Elder interviewed:

The man called Ntiamoah was married to a single-mother with a-10-year-old child. Although hardworking, Ntiamoah was still poor. Due to his poor status, Ntiamoah was ill-treated at home and received little to no respect from his family. One day, Ntiamoah went to farm and discovered treasures of gold hidden in a secret cave. He brought the treasures home and revealed the source of the treasures only to his wife. They sold the treasures to change their fortunes. The treasures, however, belonged to the King who has hidden them at that secret place. When the king realized his treasures were gone, he offered a reward of unimaginable wealth to anyone who could help identify the persons who took them. Enticed by the promise of unimaginable wealth, Ntiamoah's wife went to the King and told him everything she knew about the treasure including his husband complicit role in the missing treasure.

The king ordered his executioners to arrest Ntiamoah. In the early morning, when the executioners went to pick Ntiamoah, he was wearing a piece of cloth belonging to the stepchild. The stepson, knowing Ntiamoah's impending execution, retrieve the piece of cloth living Ntiamoah naked. While waiting for the King's judgement, Ntiamoah was seen dozing off. The King asked Ntiamoah of his final wish before his execution. Ntiamoah requested a barber to give him a special haircut. Ntiamoah asked the barber to cleanly shave off his hair and leave three locks that sit apart from each other according to his direction: The first lock should be positioned at the front of his head, the second lock should be positioned at the left back of his head, and the last lock, should be positioned at the back right of his head. The haircut was unique and never seen before in the entire Land. When the King saw the haircut, he asked Ntiamoah to explain the meaning of the haircut. Ntiamoah explained that the first lock (in the front) means "some secrets are not meant to be shared"; the second lock on the right back means "blood is thicker than water" and the last lock means "a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful." The King, then asked

> Ntiamoah to explain the messages. Ntiamoah proceeded to explain that if he has not revealed the secret behind the treasure, his wife could never have betrayed him. Second, he is convinced his own biological child will treat him better than the way his stepchild did. Finally, in spite of his sorrowful state, he could not resist sleepiness. This means a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful. The King was impressed with the wisdom of Ntiamoah and ordered his immediate release.

This particular haircut has since been immortalised in the Asante Kingdom as *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* in honour of Ntiamoah. It is worn on special occasions by selected royal members to convey the lessons and wisdom of Ntiamoah. The symbol of *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* carries the wisdom that an enemy within can be more dangerous that those outside. More reasons in our daily dealings, that one must take precaution against not only those who can harm us from outside but also those who could harm us within. Trust is one of the most valuable gifts that one could ever have; therefore, one must be careful who one shares such a valuable gift with. Some secrets are better off kept to oneself than trusting others with them. Not that one should not open up to others with their secrets but one should always be advised that a secret shared by more than one person has a higher risk of being revealed to others.

Further, the symbol also cautions against those who act with selfish interest in mind. One Elder states this proverb to explain the last point, *sɛ obi bɛpoli wɔ wo mpoma akyi, n'amanebɔ mu no, wo din mpa mu da*. This literally translates to "when someone trips behind your house, do not expect your name to be left out in the incident report." The proverb suggests that one should be mindful of not being instrumental in situations which leads to negative consequences. As noted from the proverb, victims of mischievous acts will never forget those responsible for their harms. *Ntiamoah*'s wife and stepchild acted selfishly and their greediness and inconsiderate behaviours are always remembered whenever Elders talk about *Mpuasa Ntiamoah*.

Symbol 8.3: The Power of Unity: Together we are strong. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

The symbol of togetherness symbolises the power of unity and its strength to accomplish the unsurmountable tasks. As depicted in the image above, five individuals are joined together by the power of their hands. The symbol exists in multiple forms. In some images, there are three people in one; sometimes, there are seven people in one; nine people in one; eleven people in one, and thirteen people in one. Regardless of the number of people in the image, the craftspeople always use one tree trunk to craft it, further affirming the old saying "out of many are one body." The symbol is used to teach that though we may be different, when we are united by a common goal, nothing will stop us from accomplishing any task. The symbol of togetherness carries the proverbial saying, *dodoɔ ɛso a won berɛ*. This literally translates to when the crowd are carrying together, they are never tired. Asante Elders use this symbol to emphasise the importance of unity in building a society. The symbol also emphasises the essence of team work, mutual interdependence, co-operation, social responsibility, solidarity, collective existence and the traditions of mutuality. One's action reverberates not only on oneself but also on others. As one will notice from the symbol, each image in the symbol relies on each other to stand firmly despite leaning back. The insight is that when we trustfully rely on each other, even in our vulnerable state, we remain firm and strong. The sense of togetherness does not imply that differences do not exist but rather to emphasise the importance of focusing on shared goals and collective responsibilities. The symbol affirms our basic humanness as the ability to relate to rather than to dominate others.

Elders Critical Teaching through Linguistic Staffs

The Linguist (Okyeame) is the spokesperson of the King or a chief. Within Asante culture, the words of the king or a chief are deemed to carry the powers of the Ancestors and the deities. Therefore, the King or a chief cannot address his people directly but rather uses a low tone in his message for the Linguist to amplify them to the hearing of the people. Even if someone was standing near and actually overheard what the King or a chief said, they will ignore what they overheard and only trust what was heard from the Linguist's mouth. The responsibility of a Linguist is to listen to the what the King or a chief is saying and reword them appropriately and pleasantly to the people. Thus, if the Linguist fails to reconstruct a message of the King or a chief before speaking out, and chaos arises because of the message, then the blame will be on the Linguist and not the King or a chief. A Linguist must have the gift of oratory. In fact, a common sign that one is an excellent candidate to be a Linguist is the ability to exercise control over words and particularly to know public speaking. A nineteenth-century explorer, Freeman (1958) observes that the art of oratory amongstt the Asantes carried a remarkable pitch of perfection. At the public palavers, each Linguist stands up in turn and pours forth a flood of speech the readiness and exuberance of which strikes the stranger with amazement. These oratorical displays appear to afford a great pleasure to the audience. It seems that for every African native, there is a born orator and connoisseur of oratory. "I have seen little boys of eight and ten years hold forth to the court with complete self-possession and with an ease of diction that would have struck envy unto the heart of an English member of parliament" (Freeman, 1958:13).

Symbol 8.4: Description. Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

Each Linguist carries a staff (*Okyeame poma*), which is a badge of office. The Linguist staffs are carried in public processions and official businesses. Each staff has specific meaning and is at intentionally selected events and occasions for the coded messages it delivers to the King, a chief, and the audience. In the image above, there are three Linguist staffs with each carrying a unique message. In the first image on the left, two heads are joined together. The symbol carries the message *Eti koro nko agyina,* which loosely translates to, "Consultation requires more than a single head." An important aspect of African democracy is to seek full citizenship participation in governance and decision-making processes that affect ordinary lives. The approach to traditional governance starts with a 'bottom up' and emergent process that allows ordinary citizens to access discussions on matters and making informed decisions. In such deliberations, minority voices are given due consideration and the objective of seeking consensus is to ensure that no one is left out in whatever decision is arrived at in the community. The practice is not to impose a course of action but to collectively arrive at a decision. This symbol stresses the essence of community-building, solidarity and belonging. This particular staff is held up during arbitration at the King or a chief's palace. The linguist holds this staff to remind the King or a chief of the danger of acting arbitrarily. A true King or a chief must be willing to consult with the council of Elders in decision-making. The staff also communicates to the King or a chief that wisdom does not reside in the mind of one person but through consultation and brainstorming, one would be able to arrive at richer and deeply reflected outcomes.

In the second (middle) image above, two people are sitting by a big earthenware bowl. Only one person's hand is in the bowl while the other is watching with interest. The symbol carries the message *nea ade wɔ no na odi, nyɛ nea kɔm de no*, which loosely translates to, "Inheritance can only be passed onto the one entitled to receive and not necessarily those who desire it." This particular staff is used during enstoolment of a chief or when there is an arbitration over inheritance. The staff is a reminder that inheritance must go to the rightful heir and not to people who think they are better suited for it. However, in a broader sense, the staff cautions against people who court things that do not belong to them.

The last staff (third from the left), is an image of a person climbing a tree while another is pushing the person up. The image of the staff carries the message, "*Woforo dua pa ɛna yɛpia wo*", which loosely translates to, "One who climbs a good tree deserves a push." This particular staff is used for events such as project commission or a situation where an individual is being celebrated or honoured for a good deed or an accomplishment. The staff makes a distinction between people who have risen with the community and whose accomplishments have helped the community to improve and progress, and the individuals whose accomplishments have come at the huge physical, ecological, and economic cost to the community. The former is celebrated and the latter is shunned by the community. The image of the staff sends a message to the people that society will always support good initiatives and honour people's accomplishments.

Teaching Africa through Proverbs

Proverbs give a deeper meaning to sentences and make sentences complete and interesting to hear. They offer a brevity of thought in ways that cannot be fully produced even in long speeches. Bonsu (1994) defines proverbs as a compressed wise saying or a figure of speech which has been deduced from several experiences and observation of events in life. Proverbs are normally short and pithy sayings to capture metaphorically certain general truths about life. They are a very effective mode

of communication, and their persuasive and correct use in speech is always taken as a sign of sound education, maturity, cultural sophistication, and wisdom amongst Asantes. Appiah et al. (2008) argue that no individuals could appreciate the philosophy and beliefs of the Akans of Ghana without studying their proverbs. Here are some of the few proverbs shared by Asante Elders in our conversations (also see Dei et al., 2018):

> *Kyemfere se ɔdaa hɔ akyɛ, na onipa a ɔnwenee no nso nka sɛn:* "If the potsherd claims it is old, what should we say about the potter who moulded it."

Potsherd is a broken pottery fragment that has archaeological value. Potsherd is very common in traditional Asante communities because they rely so much on pottery products. In the past, archaeologists have relied on the potsherd to determine the history of a place and the people who have ever lived in such a place. Whereas potsherd can be useful in dating a community, it could be misleading if archaeologists rely solely on it to date the timeline of community existence because potsherd cannot outgrow the potter who moulded it.

Metaphorically, the proverb is used to teach the importance of humility and graciousness in everything that we do. Like the potsherd which becomes the centre of archaeological inquiry, and in the process the potter who moulded it is forgotten, so it is that individual accomplishments can overshadow those behind the scene whose efforts paved the way for the individual's successes. The proverb reminds us that individuals, regardless of their accomplishments, are nothing without the community behind them. No one is an island onto oneself. Community helps to create an individual's success; thus, while we should celebrate individuals for their accomplishments we should also not forget those who contributed to the success.

> *Kwaemu anomaa na ɔka sɛ ɔnnnim sɛ ɛmo yɛ aduane a, yɛbɛ tease, ɛnyɛ ɛserɛmu anomaa:* "Only forest birds, and not savanna birds, are forgiven if they do not know rice is edible"

Rice is the most popular edible food for birds that live in Savanna areas in Ghana. In the forest where rice cannot be cultivated, birds rely on other plants and fruits as their main sources of food. Thus, it is understandable when a bird hatched and raised in the forest area insists that it does not know that rice is edible because it has not seen rice before. However, the same excuse cannot be extended to a bird hatched and raised in grassland (Savanna area), which is a rice-cultivating area. The proverb is a caution to those who wilfully break societal laws, norms, values, and worldview, reminding them there is a limit to societal leniency especially for people who chose wilful ignorance over their decision to act right. Claiming ignorance of one's own culture, values, norms, and worldviews is not an acceptable excuse in Asante communities.

> *Nsuo a yɛde gye nkwa no, yɛn nsoma abrewa:* "We do not send an old woman to fetch water when we need it to save life"

Normally, an aged person may be limited in the ability to move faster compared to a younger person. Thus, when a task requires an urgency of response, it is important to assign such a task to the person capable of completing the task in time. The proverb stresses the importance of separating "pressing matters" from "trivial things." It teaches us to be guided by priorities, and things important cannot be left to linger longer while inconsequential matters take up attention. Further, when we decide to act on an urgent situation, we should be guided by the task at hand and who is capable of completing it on time. The proverb is used to remind the younger generation about the need to set one's priority to avoid doing what is expedience over what is right.

African *ElderCrits* as Epistemic Gift for Teaching Africa

Within the Asante culture, there is a method of telling a riddle. The process begins with the riddle-teller stating "Agya rekɔ, ɔgyaa me adiɛ bi,", meaning "When my father was leaving, he left me something." The audience immediately respond with

the question "*ɔgyaa wo adiɛ bɛn;* meaning, "what exactly did he leave you?" At that point, the riddle-teller can start giving clues to help the audience to determine the item left behind. Although the use of a fatherly figure in the riddle, in a matriarchal society that inheritance passes through a mother's blood line is another subject for conversation. The import of the riddle is that a departing father left a secret present, and the speaker is indulging the audience in a guessing-game to identify the present.

In the article *What is Hospitality in the Academy? Epistemic Ignorance and the (Im)possible Gift*, Kuokkanen (2008) notes that Indigenous epistemologies are gifts to the academy. Using gift-giving practices amongst the Sami people of Norway and Sweden, Kuokkanen (2008) notes that gift-giving is an active relationship between human and natural worlds based on a close interaction of sustaining and renewing the balance between them. As common amongst Indigenous communities across the globe, there are intimate and interrelated relationship between the Dead, the Living, and the Unborn. The survival and continuity of life is contingent on reciprocal and cyclical relationship amongst the Tri-spheres (the Unborn, the Living, and the Dead). The twin notions of 'life after death' and 'life before birth' - the continuation of the world of living and the world of the dead. The spiritually held belief that the dead does not leave the living alone but closely monitor, supervise, and interface with the living (Mazrui, 1983; Okwu, 1979; Onyewuenyi, 1982). The complex but cyclical relationship between the Dead, the Living, and the Unborn requires new and different ways that gifts are conceptualised and operationalised within Indigenous system of thoughts. The reciprocal relations in gift-giving are not so much about the expectations that receivers will also counter-gift to givers in later dates, but rather that the receivers will actively appreciate and respect the coexisting relationships between themselves and the givers. As the custodian of cultural knowledge and the conduit between the Dead and the Unborn, Indigenous African Elders offer a discursive prism through which the Living can make sense of their complex cyclical relationships with the Dead and the

Unborn. So, when the Asantes begin a riddle by acknowledging the source of the gift as the "departed father" (implies the Dead), the riddle-teller in a way is inviting the audience to help to decipher the puzzles leading to what the father bequeathed. However, once a gift is received, it may not anymore be a gift but becomes an obligation, a response-ability to honour the words of departed father - what Jacques Derrida refers to as the "impossibility of a gift" (Derrida, 1992:7). We argue that African *ElderCrits* are epistemic gifts to the academy, but as Kuokkanen (2008:66) suggests, these epistemic gifts should be looked at differently. They require a certain level of responsibility.

We argue that the first responsibility of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to centre African voices in retelling the history of Africa. Chinua Achebe, in the *Tale of Fiction*, recalled his early education and how he became interested in writing stories. Achebe spoke about stories that he read in which European invaders were depicted as saviours, excellent, and fine people while the Africans were portrayed as savages, stupid and ugly. As he grew older, it became clearer that in these adventurous stories, he (Achebe) cannot be on the side of European invaders but must rather empathise with the savage Africans. Achebe (1994) concludes with an African proverb, "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." In a racist and colonial education system that continues to glorify European invaders, counter-narratives are needed to also reflect the agony, the bravery, agency and resistance of the lion. As it has become a pattern, wherever Eurocentric education exists, be it North America, Africa, Asia, or Europe, the European invaders are celebrated as heroes and heroines while the Indigenous Africans who stood up and resisted colonialism, or who were murdered in many of the genocides, are forgotten or pushed to the outskirts of dominant history. Therefore, the history of Africa needs to be taught from local people's perspective as a necessary anti-colonial intellectual exercise. African Elders can be used to retell Africa's history from the vantage point of local people.

In Seixas's (2002) thought-provoking essay, he argues that the historically marginalised voices are re-telling their histories from different vantage points. This has resulted in re-examination of stories of the past in particular those histories that positioned European invaders as heroes and heroines. Teaching Africa is, therefore, about envisioning a different understanding of Africa while challenging how Africa has traditionally been constructed to reinforce the colonial and racist agenda of the West. We cannot teach Africa for the sake of teaching. In developing curriculum, what processes are used to consult with community leaders and Elders to ensure a holistic understanding of history as the totality of a people's lived experiences? How can official procedures engage community-based approaches to teaching and learning whereby educational policies acknowledge the relevance of African history for transforming schooling and educational outcomes? The teaching of Africa's history must continually search for ways, both in pursuit and practice of education, to contest the Western hegemony of history. African Elders' critical teachings offer counter-narratives to the Eurocentric version of history.

The second responsiability of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to teach what values are important for the survival of society. African *ElderCrits* are knowledge associated with long-term attachment and nurtured relationship to a place that allows a people to reference their own established cultural knowledges as a way of resisting imposition of 'external' ideas, values, and worldviews. They are cultural metaphors that immortalise the wisdom, values, worldviews, philosophies, and cultural norms to help develop learners' reasoning, power and skill. When used strategically, they become an important knowledge base from which educators can teach differently about Africa. African Elders' critical teachings focus on communal values and norms through storytelling, proverbs, idioms, fables, myths, symbols, legends, riddles and others. The strength of African *ElderCrits* lie in their application to the lived realities of people. They are knowledges that address the practical and mundane issues of social existence. In the face of entrenched hegemonic relations and

global economic and ecological threats, knowledge is relevant only if it strengthens learners' capacity to live well. They can be useful to teaching issues of respect, responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, empathy, justice, fairness, civic participation or service, kindness, integrity, work ethic, and caring social skills as central to building a positive society. Here is an example of using the *Symbol of Prudence and thoughtfulness* to teach character education in the class: 1) The educator can introduce the symbol to students and invite students to discuss amongst themselves what they make of the symbol; 2) Open the discussion to the broader classroom – the discussion can cover the name of the symbol, where it comes from, and the meaning that students make out of the symbol; 3) The educator should share the context and the meaning of the symbol to the class; 4) Invite students to discuss what values they derive from the shared context and meaning in the symbol; 5) Invite students to discuss the virtues of 'prudence and thoughtfulness'; 6) Assign students the task of researching into their own cultural and communal backgrounds, symbols and stories that also address the virtues of prudence and thoughtfulness; 7) The students' assignment can be discussed in the next classroom lesson. African *ElderCrits* are therefore cultural resources and visionaries, offering insights into what are pedagogically possible if Indigenous African Elders are allowed to play significant roles in education about Africa.

The third responsibility of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to bridge the gaps between Africans in Diaspora and those living in the continent. Western education must not trivialise nor unduly criticise attempts to draw connections between Africa and Diasporic Africans, as bridging the connection is fundamental to the survival of Africa and Africans in Diaspora. Issues affecting Diasporic Africans are inextricably linked to the issues affecting the continent of Africa. For example, we cannot separate the racist discourse of mischaracterising Africa as a crisis continent from the racist mistreatment of Diasporic Africans in the Global North. The statement "go back to Africa if you do not like it here" are often thrown at Diasporic Africans whenever we demand fair

and equitable treatment in the Global North. If Africa is viewed in positive light in the Global North, the descents of Africa will receive respectful treatment in Europe and North America. Therefore, the teaching of Africa must make the connection between similar struggles over social injustice, colonialism, re-colonisation and imperialism in the Global North and the Global South. These movements must find workable grounds to address common problems.

Further, teaching Africa must revive the memories of Diasporic Africans. The Late American literacy writer James Baldwin observes, "to be an African American is to be an African without any memory and an American without any privilege." James Badwin's comments suggest that many African Americans, and one can include Diasporic Africans in Europe, Caribbean, Canada, and elsewhere, struggle to connect to Africa because official national memories have erased Africa's connections. The crisis of black peoples in North America and Europe is the crisis of memory against forgetfulness. This mental crisis is the consequences of transatlantic enslavement when the enslaved Africans were stripped of anything African when they arrived in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. One of the traumas of transatlantic enslavement was the efforts of Europeans to render the enslaved Africans timeless and spaceless - people with no history or places of origin. Yet, Diasporic Africans should not have to live in North America or Europe without a memory. The Yorubas of Nigeria have a proverb, "The she-goat does not suffer the pain of parturition when an Elder is at home." The proverb emphasises the responsibilities of Elders to help community members in periods of crisis. As custodians of tradition, history, wisdom, and cultural memories of communities, the present and future generations of Africans living at home and the Diaspora must never suffer the frustration of understanding who they are in relation to Africa if African Elders are available. Teaching Africa, therefore, must help Diasporic learners to reinvent their Africanness. There is a complex tapestry of Blackness and Africanness that our Elders teach us. It is multidimensional, expansive and malleable. Blackness is Africanness and vice

versa! Yet we know not all 'claims of Blackness and Africanness' is authentic; meaning the kind of claim rooted and grounded in African ancestral heritage and spiritual memories. Blackness and Africanness are non-negotiable. We must continually embody it. It is also important to understand black and African responsibility - as beyond mentorship to include working with humility, generosity, healing and appreciation of sacrifices of Diasporic and home-grown African Elders along the way. Our Elders teach us to be proud to claim Blackness and Africanness, to honour our Blackness and Africanness by embracing our cultural traditions, ancestral wisdoms, and spiritual ontologies. African *ElderCrits* are about developing the consciousness of black people's existence (individual, social and collective). Through African *ElderCrits,* we know that Africa does not leave the body even with a re-location to diaspora or obtaining citizenship on another continent, but rather, it remains in the blood memory and can be summoned upon any time to deal with pressing issues in a different time and space (Adjei & Dei, 2024; Dei & Adjei, 2024). African *ElderCrits* can be used as cultural resources to offer educational consciousness of one's embodied existence as Africans rooted in self-definition, self-pride, self-dependence, and the shared bonds with Africans in the continent and in Diaspora.

There are however challenges of teaching African *ElderCrits* in Western academy. First, we admit to the difficulties of translating from local cultural contexts and the dangers of situating African *ElderCrits* in Western context wholesale, given the local contexts that these words of wisdom are evoked. Further, culture and language are very central to Indigenous African society and without them, African *ElderCrits* are meaningless. All African *ElderCrits* are embedded with cultural meanings, and one cannot say them without first understanding their Indigenous context. As Purcell (1998:260) rightly notes, there is a culture of science that is arguably unique to Western societies. Such a culture of science is too abstracted from any specific cultural genesis to be considered 'Indigenous' today. There are perils of reformulating Indigenous African *ElderCrits* using Eurocentric scholarly theoretical frameworks

and assumptions which become the defining grid to evaluate Indigenous knowledges. Much of on-going intellectual discussion on education in the Global North is located in the dominant culture of science. This makes alternative worldviews such as Indigenous African *ElderCrits* difficult to engage in the Eurocentric learning environment. In fact, a major contemporary challenge that we face in teaching African *ElderCrits* in the Western academy is to address the trivialisation and devaluation of Indigenous African knowledges. Thus, critical educators must address the problem of bringing Indigenous African *ElderCrits* from their appropriate contexts into Western education. Perhaps, the starting point is for educators to identify the lessons contained in the *ElderCrits* and offer interpretations in the wider sense to teach Africa.

Second, African *ElderCrits* are conveyed in local languages. Therefore, to fully understand and appreciate the wisdom and values in African *ElderCrits*, one must first understand the local language used to convey them. There are limitations of teachings such cultural knowings using the dominant language. Further, learners not conversant with the local language used to carry *ElderCrits* cannot in effect appreciate their full meaning and social context within which they are evoked. The temptation of educators is to simply engage in a broad translation of African *ElderCrits* from the local language to English language but such efforts run the risk of having the social context lost in translation. The best approach therefore is for educators to first evoke the *ElderCrits* in the local language before adding the English language translation. Such approach not only offers the social and cultural contexts of the *ElderCrits* but also can be seen as a form of resistance to English language dominance in the academy.

Third, amongst the challenges of drawing on African *ElderCrits* to teach Africa are the issues of documentation and intellectual property rights (IPR). Most African ElderCrits exist in orality and symbolism and transmitted through modelling, practice and animation rather than through written words (see Battiste, 2002). There is a need to critically examine the processes through which African *ElderCrits* in their oral forms

survive the transition into a written literate and corporeal forms. For example, IPR is normally viewed as cultural and group rights. Using this particular notion of collective rights, Indigenous groups across the globe have had some form of control over their knowledge systems (Shiva, 1997; Brush & Stabinsky, 1996). This is important given that African *ElderCrits* as they exist in varied forms such as healing, medicine, cosmetics, plants, foods, folklore, stories, arts, crafts, songs, dances, and rituals have highly commercial value, which throughout history have been misappropriated, misused and patented by people with no embody connection without the consent of appropriate Indigenous authorities. Thus, when African *ElderCrits* are brought into the Western academy, the issue of IPR cannot be ignored. A critical discussion of African *ElderCrits* in the academy must also maintain ownership status to Indigenous Africans.

Conclusion

Africa has always been an important source of rich information for knowledge production. There has always been a curiosity about Africa that has served different imaginations and interests. How we teach and talk about Africa matters if learners are to appreciate Africa's rich cultural knowledges, complexity history, and promising futures. The chapter provided pertinent issues confronting education about Africa and the implications for Africans in Diasporic schools. The chapter also demonstrated the educative opportunities of drawing on African Elders' Critical Teachings to rethink different ways to teach and talk about Africa in the education system. As embodiment of local cultural knowledges and wisdom, African Elders offer learners poignant cues to problem solving, conceptual thinking, and practical wisdom to navigate the complexities and nuances of every world. African Elders' rich cultural knowledges are yet to gain the attention that they deserve in the education system in the Global North. Education is about empowerment of people. Therefore, teaching Africa should help to create and strengthen Africa's image in Europe and North America. The teaching of Africa must empower learners with functional educational

skills and tools to challenge Western hegemonic knowledge about Africa.

The concerns raised are not the basis to abandoning the whole projects of using African *ElderCrit* to teach Africa in the Global North. If anything, they are an invitation to think critically about decolonising academy, as Dei (2004:294) argues elsewhere, "We owe it to our children and the future generations to ensure that we have in place an education system that can equip all learners with the tools and resources required to be responsible members and participants of society". As African educators, we carry what Kobena Mercer (1990:61) calls "the burden of representation" and we must never shy away from the responsibilities of carrying the voices of our African Elders. The late Maya Angelou talks about how we Africans bear the gifts of our Ancestors. Our thoughts, words, knowledges, and values are gifts passed down by them through their teachings to our generation and beyond. We honour their memories by using their teachings to create a better view of Africa.

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