

Appropriation of Shakespeare's Plays in the Postcolonial World: The Case of Malawian Education

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ABSTRACT:

This paper seeks to examine why the postcolonial world perennially appropriates William Shakespeare's plays instead of decolonizing them as purveyors of British colonialism and possibly of British neocolonialism now. In this regard, the paper uses Malawi as a case study which is a landlocked country located in South Eastern Africa bordered by Tanzania to the North, Zambia to the North West, and Mozambique to the South East and West. In particular, the paper argues that the Malawian education system appropriates Shakespeare's plays because of their timeless and universal applicability. This appropriation is illustrated by the commanding presence of Shakespeare's plays in English syllabus at both secondary school and university levels. Thus, in order to account for this continued appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in Malawian English syllabus, more specifi-

cally the study of *Literature in English*, the paper employs neoclassical literary criticism with a leaning on Samuel Johnson's treatise on Shakespeare's universality and postcolonial justifications for such universality. The paper starts by foregrounding the colonial use of Shakespeare's plays and its attendant critique. The paper then explores neoclassical and postcolonial justifications for the universal appropriation of Shakespeare's plays before putting the Malawian English syllabus into context. Finally, the paper teases out socio-political ramifications of appropriating Shakespeare's plays in Malawian education since the attainment of independence in 1964.

Keywords: appropriation, William Shakespeare, decolonization, postcolonial world, universality

Introduction

This essay examines the appropriation of William Shakespeare's plays in the postcolonial world. Appropriation, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, "describes the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture...that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities" (15). Thus, the essay seeks to interrogate why postcolonial societies perennially appropriate Shakespeare's plays when these plays are not only anachronisms but also vestiges of British colonialism. The essay argues that postcolonial so-

cities perennially appropriate Shakespeare's plays because of their timeless and universal applicability, particularly in terms of themes and characters.

The significance of Shakespeare's plays is that they are not so much objects of popular culture as they constitute core texts in most postcolonial English syllabi. It is against this backdrop that this essay employs a case-study methodology which examines the continuous appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in Malawian English syllabus. To this end, the essay will examine pedagogical objectives behind the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays at secondary school level and university level. At secondary school level, the essay will examine the successive appropriations of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* while at university level the essay will examine the appropriation of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* in the Department of English at Chancellor College, the largest constituent college of the University of Malawi.

Shakespeare's Plays and British Colonialism

The perennial appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in the postcolonial world cannot be meaningfully examined outside the context of British colonialism because these plays and British colonialism emerged coincidentally. Indeed, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin reveal that "Shakespeare lived and

wrote at a time when English mercantile and colonial enterprises were just germinating” (1). Again, Michael Dobson reveals that after Shakespeare’s death in 1616, his promotion “as both symbol and exemplar of British national identity which began in earnest with the Patriots in the 1730s...reached its climax at Garrick’s¹ Jubilee in 1769” (185). This fateful intertwining of Shakespeare’s life and death with British national identity explains why the colonial machinery readily found his plays handy not only for economic profiteering but also for imposition of British culture on colonized subjects. In fact, Loomba and Orkin further reveal that “colonial masters imposed their value system through Shakespeare” (7). More importantly, Loomba and Orkin locate the imposition of colonial values through Shakespeare in education and administration as follows:

...colonial educationists and administrators used Shakespeare to reinforce cultural and racial hierarchies. Shakespeare was made to perform such ideological work both by interpreting his plays in highly conservative ways (so that they were seen as endorsing existing racial, gender and other hierarchies, never as questioning or destabilizing them) and by constructing him as one of the best, if not ‘the best’ writer in the whole world (1).

This revelation highlights the deliberate abuse of Shakespeare’s plays on the one hand and the sub-

terfuge of dominating colonized peoples through an opportunistic valorization of Shakespeare's genius on the other hand. However, by using Shakespeare's plays and his lionized renown to impose colonial culture over colonized cultures, the British establishment exhibited what Jacques Derrida describes as logocentrism and metaphysics of presence which denote "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for a [transcendental] signified" (49). In other words, the reinforcement of cultural and racial hierarchies through Shakespeare's plays manifested a systematic and irrepressible desire to subsume colonized cultures under British culture which supposedly dwarfed and surpassed them all as illustrated in the violent hierarchy of British culture over colonized cultures.

In the introduction to *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*, Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia give credence to such damning revelations of Shakespeare's colonial abuse. In it, Dionne and Kapadia acknowledge that Shakespeare "was ceremoniously installed by Garrick in 1769 as the national poet of England and his work...taught and performed thereafter in England and her colonies as the unifying art of a civilizing culture" (2). However, that British colonialism was a civilizing mission in disguise is an unpalatable yet inescapable truism since the use of Shakespeare's plays as cover-ups only exposed the entire colonial sleight of hand. Revealingly therefore, John Elsom acknowledges that "Shakespeare

is home to those who want to sink their teeth into the very meat of British culture” (2). That is to say, apart from other purveyors of British colonialism, Shakespeare’s plays most efficaciously facilitated the internalization of British culture to its core.

At any rate, the colonial abuse of Shakespeare’s plays complicates their appropriation. This is because the process of appropriation itself is deceptively double-edged. Thomas Cartelli affirms that appropriation “is not the one-way street some might like it to be; even self-constituted...linguistic or cultural usurpation may be sucked into the vortex of Shakespearean unconscious and made subject to a colonization of the mind” (17). In other words, the appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays is by no means a seamless process as it is fraught with the veiled risk of having the appropriator’s mind subliminally colonized or neo-colonized. That is to say, without realizing it, the appropriator of Shakespeare’s plays runs the risk of perpetuating British neocolonialism as an offshoot of British colonialism.

African Critique of Shakespeare’s Plays as Purveyors of British Colonialism

The enduring potential of abusing Shakespeare’s plays for British hegemonic ends continues to attract appropriation debates across intellectual echelons. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia confirm that “There has been, in the last 10 years, an explo-

sion of critical interest in the way Shakespeare has been made to accommodate local cultures across the globe” (5). In Africa, particularly, this explosion of critical interest focuses on the promulgation of British culture through Shakespeare’s centrality in colonial education.

Perhaps the most tenacious African critics of the promulgation of British culture through Shakespeare’s centrality in colonial education are the Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah. In his book entitled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi posits that Shakespeare’s “greatness was presented as one more English gift to the world alongside the *Bible* and... had brought light to darkest Africa” (91). In other words, British colonialists sought to convince colonized Africans that the imposition of Shakespeare and the *Bible* on their cultures was a philanthropic favor. This process of trying to dominate others through their consent is called hegemony which according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin involves “the power of the ruling classes to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” (106). Suffice it to say that the imposition of Shakespeare and the *Holy Bible* on African cultures was a hegemonic attempt whose success depended on exacting consent thereof.

Needless to say, the success of colonial hegemony found expression in the consent of Africans to

adopt British syllabus in which Shakespeare held sway. Ngugi points out that “English studies in schools and higher institutions of learning became systematized after the Second World War... and with very few variations they offered what also obtained in London” (90). In principle, the systematization of English studies and its eventual institutionalization across the British colonial empire illustrates the consent of colonized peoples to be dominated culturally. It is not surprising therefore that Ngugi elaborates that “The syllabus of the English Department...meant a study of the history of English literature from Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton to James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and the inevitable F. R. Leavis” (90). In short, the consent of Africans to study the history of English Literature rather than to study the history of their own indigenous literatures perpetuated cultural brainwashing which was at the heart of British colonialism.

In effect, Ngugi draws on his own secondary school experience in Kenya and on Malawian pedagogical policy soon after independence as microcosms of British hegemony. With the wisdom of hindsight, Ngugi recalls that “in Alliance High School, which I attended, Shakespeare, like the Speech Day, was an annual event” (38). Admittedly, the equating of the Speech Day with the staging of a Shakespeare’s play as annual events implies that British politics and education were two sides of the same hegemonic coin. The overall effect of conflating

politics with Shakespeare's plays was an insidious erosion of Kenyan traditional values from the vulnerable minds of future native intellectuals.

Ngugi perceives a similar tendency in Malawian education under the first president, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who, incidentally, was a British-trained medical doctor. Ngugi notes that "in Malawi, Banda has erected his own monument by way of an institution, The Kamuzu Academy, designed to aid the brightest pupils of Malawi in their mastery of English" (19). Like the Kenyan scenario, the real motive behind the mastery of English was to inculcate British values in Malawian future leaders at the expense of their indigenous values. As if the erection of Kamuzu Academy was not treacherous enough, Dr. Banda proceeded to propagate inferiority complex among Malawians as Ngugi (1986) further notes that "For good measure no Malawian is allowed to teach at the academy – none is good enough – and all the teaching staff has been recruited from Britain" (19). At any rate, Ngugi's critique of British colonial education hinges on the accusation that it induced alienation from and inferiority complex in African indigenous values which rendered colonial subjects servile and hence ripe for political and economic exploitation.

Like Ngugi, Ayi Kwei Armah problematizes the degrading effects of British colonial education on African indigenous values by making recourse to his secondary school days at Achimota. In his memoirs

called *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Armah recalls that “When I got to secondary school...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” (41). Armah’s recollection encapsulates that colonial education was quintessentially tailored to entrench Eurocentric worldviews by systematically repressing African worldviews. No wonder, Armah discloses that “The educational policies they instituted were in keeping with...socialis[ing] generations of African children [to] identify with European values, in the practical sense of seeing philosophy as European philosophy, history as European history, literature as European literature” (44). It is against this background of westernizing Africans through colonial education that Shakespeare was abused as a conduit for Eurocentric values.

Nevertheless, the iconoclasm against Eurocentric values as demonstrated by Ngugi and Armah points to decolonization efforts being made in Africa. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define decolonization as “the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms...includ[ing] hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved” (56). It follows that Ngugi and Armah epitomize the revolutionary crusade of revealing

and dismantling British hegemony through education via Shakespeare's plays as institutional and cultural forces that still remain in African postcolonial societies.

Justification for Apolitical Universality of Shakespeare's Plays

The perennial appropriation of Shakespeare in African postcolonial societies makes one wonder as to what is in the Bard's plays for these societies to compromise decolonization efforts. Indeed, what is so special about Shakespeare's plays that the entire postcolonial world naturally relates to them in spite of their British hegemonic repute?

The quest for the apolitical relevance of Shakespeare's plays began in the neoclassical period. According to M.A.R. Habib, Samuel Johnson stands out as a neoclassical critic whose "famous preface to, and edition of, Shakespeare's plays played a large part in establishing Shakespeare's reputation" (302). That is to say, for one to understand why the African postcolonial community relates to Shakespeare's plays at the apolitical level, one has to start the search for definitive answers in Samuel Johnson's preface as a bastion of Shakespeare's reputation.

For Johnson, Shakespeare appeals to humanity beyond any racial creed and strictures because his plays convey universal themes, events and char-

acters. In fact, Johnson holds that Shakespeare is “the poet of nature: the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life” (305). What Johnson implies is that by faithfully reflecting the fundamentals of human nature, Shakespeare transcends racial boundaries and is therefore rightfully rendered universal. Moreover, Johnson adds that Shakespeare’s characters are “the genuine progeny of common humanity [who] act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated” (305). Thus, Shakespeare’s works form a universal nexus of humanity that withstands the test of time from generation to generation.

More importantly, different scholars across generations agree with Johnson’s seminal justification for Shakespeare’s universality. For example, in a book called *Is Shakespeare Still our Contemporary?* John Elsom answers the title question by referring to “German critics [who] had talked about the immortality of Shakespeare, his eloquent handling of fundamental human themes which are supposed to change little from age to age” (1). In other words, the fact that themes in Shakespeare’s plays have remained relevant to humanity over the ages proves that the Bard is still our contemporary — in keeping with Friedrich Nietzsche’s prophetic opinion that “Some are born posthumously” (3). As such, the immortality of Shakespeare’s genius suggests that his plays can be appropriated to cast light on human vicissitudes through time and space.

Even postcolonial critics acknowledge the immortality of Shakespeare's relevance to the human condition. Like John Elsom, Ania Loomba underscores the fact that Shakespeare's plays stand the test of time because they address issues that span human history. In an introduction to the book called *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Loomba argues that Shakespeare's plays "form a bridge between the past and us: even as we read in them stories of a bygone world, we also continually re-interpret these stories to make sense of our own worlds" (4-5). In other words, the fact that Shakespeare's plays connect the past and the present of human existence demonstrates that they are universally relevant to the understanding of the human condition across time and space.

It is this universal relevance of Shakespeare to the human condition that cues in the global appropriation of his plays. To this end, Dionne and Kapadia insist that "Shakespeare's plays are the perfect texts for...appropriation since his works...have been historically constructed as the author of pluralism, and not only as the icon of British hegemony or the poet of a fading traditionalism" (2). That is to say, notwithstanding their unwitting alignment with British hegemony or their anachronistic status, Shakespeare's plays are perfect for appropriation essentially because they embody common contours of human coexistence.

Likewise, Thomas Cartelli exonerates Shakespeare's plays from the incriminating association with British hegemony by emphasizing the bard's universality. In his book called *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations*, Cartelli underlines that "A decolonized or decommissioned Shakespeare, freed from his service to imperial interests...could presumably be remobilized to address ancillary concerns about social...redefinition" (170). In other words, the decolonization of Shakespeare guarantees the utilization of his plays as global properties for social redefinition rather than private properties for hegemonic machinations.

Generally, the abuse of Shakespeare's plays for hegemonic machinations prompted three major responses from colonial subjects and, by extension, from postcolonial subjects. Loomba and Orkin observe that,

Intellectuals and artists from the colonized world responded to such a Shakespeare in a variety of ways: sometimes they mimicked their colonial masters and echoed their praise of Shakespeare; at other times they challenged the cultural authority of both Shakespeare and colonial regimes by turning to their own bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty. In yet other instances, they appropriated Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his works (2).

This observation intimates the fact that Shakespeare has been a vortex of cultural contention between British culture and colonized cultures. Apart from blind mimicking of Shakespeare's valorization, the last two responses complement each other to form the bedrock of resistance against British hegemony. That is, by turning to indigenous bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty, the second response undermines the strategic valorization of Shakespeare as the alpha male of literature across the world. On the other hand, by adapting Shakespeare as a vehicle for counteracting colonial values, the second response exposes the tactical abuse of Shakespeare and hence affirms the universal nature of the bard's plays. On the whole, then, both responses depict Shakespeare as a unifying figure whose plays resonate with the world at large and not as a divisive figure as constructed by colonial masters and a coterie of their successors.

The universal resonance of Shakespeare's plays demonstrates why they are appropriated to refute British hegemony even in the present neocolonial era. Dionne and Kapadia affirm that,

Today, reconstructions and revisions of Shakespeare's works continue as the plays are co-opted by postcolonial and minority cultures, further shattering the notion of the universalist interpretation that privileges Western experience as primary. As such, Shakespeare's plays

can no longer signify an exclusively British, or even Western, identity; instead, they function as sites of contest reflecting a manifold of cultures (6).

This affirmation shows that Shakespeare's plays form a liminal or interstitial or in-between space between postcolonial cultures and Western cultures. Such space, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is a "transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (117). This transcultural flux explains why Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin underscore that "identification is never simply a movement from one identity to another, it is a constant process of engagement, contestation and appropriation" (117). In other words, identification is inherently fluid in that different cultures constantly borrow from each other thereby engaging in cultural contests, so to speak. To this effect, Homi Bhabha further affirms that "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). It is within this possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy that the constant appropriation of Shakespeare's plays can be located.

However, the constant appropriation of Shakespeare's plays for hegemonic purposes continues to render them into ideological battlefields between the Western world and the postcolonial world. Indeed, Ato Quayson concedes that Shakespeare is "appropriated to bolster up ideological positions on both the right and the left and provided means of self-identification in both the West and the postcolonial world" (158). Thus, the Western world appropriates Shakespeare's plays to dominate the postcolonial world while the postcolonial world appropriate Shakespeare's plays to undermine Western domination and assert their cultural difference. Dionne and Kapadia empathize with the postcolonial position that "For those who live the effects of British colonialism, what better to steal than the very words, figures, and plots of the bard?" (3). Put succinctly, this rhetorical question captures the use of Shakespeare as an antidote to British hegemony which the bard has posthumously been forced to bear.

Similarly, Loomba and Orkin view Shakespeare's plays more as contested loci of cultural hybridity than carriers of hegemony. Actually, Loomba and Orkin elucidate that "Shakespeare's plays overlap with post-colonial concerns...[and] provid[e] the language for expressing racial difference and human sameness as well as colonial hybridities" (10). In other words, by providing the language for expressing racial difference and as well as human sameness, Shakespeare's plays act as a nexus of

cultural coexistence that is rooted in common hybridity. Unsurprisingly, Loomba and Orkin maintain that,

The study of Shakespeare made [the colonized] hybrid subjects [and] many post-colonial critics regard the hybridity of colonial and postcolonial subjects as a potentially radical state, one that enables such subjects to elude, or even subvert the binaries, oppositions and rigid demarcations imposed by colonial discourses (7).

Clearly, the hybridity of colonial and postcolonial subjects emanating from the study of Shakespeare's plays underpins their efforts to subvert colonial discourses which are essentially vectors of British hegemony. Michel Foucault defines discourse as "a group of statements ...belong[ing] to the same discursive formation...for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (131). What Foucault means is that to set up a group of statements and a group of conditions for their existence is to possess the power to determine truth and falsity within a specific discursive context. As such, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin add that discourse becomes "a system of statements...by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges... and values upon dominated groups" (37). It stands to reason that in the colonial set-up, British colonialists formed the dominant group which tried to

impose its values on the colonized as the dominant group through opportunistic interpretation of Shakespeare's plays.

However, the pedagogical appropriation of Shakespeare's plays by colonial and postcolonial subjects do not so much subvert hegemonic discourse as manifest the Bard's universality. In a chapter aptly called "Parables from the Canon: Postcolonizing Shakespeare" from his book entitled *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Ato Quayson acknowledges that "Through educational curricula all over the world, Shakespeare has demonstrably become international cultural property without equal. Individuals everywhere turn to Shakespeare for images by which to interpret personal and social realities" (159). In other words, education has been the channel through which postcolonial subjects appropriate Shakespeare's universality to interpret their personal and social realities.

Appropriation of Shakespeare's Plays in Malawian English Syllabus

According to Thomas Cartelli, there are five ways of appropriating Shakespeare's plays namely: satiric, confrontational, transpositional, proprietary, and dialogic. Specifically, Cartelli claims that satiric appropriation "tend[s] deliberately to fracture and fragment an array of Shakespearean texts, unmooring them from their established contexts and reassembling them in ways that render them

absurd” (17). Satiric appropriation bears strong resemblance to confrontational appropriation because the latter “contests the ascribed meaning or prevailing function of a Shakespearean text in the interests of an opposing or alternative social or political agenda” (17). As for transpositional appropriation, Cartelli opines that it “isolates a specific theme, plot or argument in its appropriative objective and brings it into its own, arguably analogous, interpretive field to underwrite or enrich a presumably related thesis or argument” (17). Similar to transpositional appropriation is proprietary appropriation which as Cartelli puts it, “involves the application and elaboration of an avowed friendly or reverential reading of appropriated material” (18). Finally, Cartelli describes dialogic appropriation as “the careful integration into a work of allusions, identifications, and quotations that complicate, thicken and qualify that work’s primary narrative line to the extent that each partner to the transaction may be said to enter into the other’s frame of reference” (18).

In the Malawian context, the education system has been employing transpositional and proprietary appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays. As Cartelli observes it, “appropriation, particularly in its proprietary mode, has been the favored practice of parties devoted to the nationalization, domestication, naturalization, and institutionalization of Shakespeare” (18). Thus, the Malawi Government, through the Ministry of Education, Science

and Technology has since independence not only isolated analogous themes, plots or arguments of Shakespeare's plays to enrich axiological sensibility of Malawians but has also reverentially applied Shakespeare's plays to local socio-political realities as illustrated by English syllabi at both secondary school and tertiary levels.

At secondary school level, the appropriation leans towards Shakespeare's tragedies save for *The Merchant of Venice* which was the first to be incorporated into the secondary school syllabus. However, one could surmise that *The Merchant of Venice* was appropriated to foreground themes of race, religion and commerce. Ania Loomba asserts that *The Merchant of Venice* "offers yet another perspective on race, being the only play in which Shakespeare brings together issues of commerce with those of race, and also the only play in which he focuses on the Jewish difference" (20). Unsurprisingly, *The Merchant of Venice* was thematically apt considering that Malawi had just won independence from Britain in 1964 and was in the process of building its national image in terms of racial, commercial and religious relations with fellow African countries and the rest of the world.

After *The Merchant of Venice*, however, The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has been rotating Shakespeare's tragedies in the English syllabus for secondary education after a specific number of years. The first tragedy to be

appropriated was apparently *Macbeth* which was followed by *The Merchant of Venice*, then *Macbeth* again, then *Julius Caesar* and now *Romeo and Juliet*. This chronology shows that while other Malawian and European literary texts come and go in and out of the secondary school English syllabus, Shakespeare's plays have remained the core texts over the years and will probably remain so in years to come.

Likewise, at the tertiary level, Shakespeare's plays form core texts in faculties of Humanities; instructively so in the English Department at University of Malawi, Chancellor College. The major difference between Shakespeare's tragedies at secondary school level and university level is that at university level there is not only a wide coverage of Shakespeare's tragedies but also advanced analysis. For example, at Chancellor College, Shakespeare's tragedies (*Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) are covered under the core course eponymously called Shakespeare (ENG 411). Interestingly, this course is offered at fourth year and is compulsory for both English majors and minors and strategically tailored for students who are currently trained to teach *Romeo and Juliet* at secondary school after completing their university education.

The question, however, is why are Shakespeare's tragedies accorded core status when other Malawian and European texts are accorded optional status

to the effect that they can be opted in and out of the English syllabus at both secondary and university levels? The first reason as earlier noted is that the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays represents the institutionalization of the British education legacy. Dionne and Kapadia emphasize that "As privileged texts that were taught as models of British history and experience, Shakespeare's plays appeared in many native translations, adaptations, and performance contexts" (6). It is not surprising therefore that Malawi as a former colony of the British Empire appropriates the canon in the spirit of preserving the colonial education tradition.

The second reason can be attributed to the universality of Shakespeare's themes, characters and plots. Thus, the Malawian education system is obliged to appropriate Shakespeare's plays because their themes, characters and plots can be related to the indigenous milieu. For example, political themes conveyed by plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* at the secondary school level correspond to the second national goal of education in the Malawi Senior Secondary Teaching Syllabus for Literature in English which first aims to "inculcate acceptable moral and ethical behavior" (iv) under the key theme of "good governance and democracy, human rights, politics" (ix). In fact, Tracy Irish accounts for this enduring transpositional and proprietary appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in English syllabi across the globe by stating that:

...while knowledge of Shakespeare may well have roots in our colonial past, the level of adoption, adaptation and interrogation of Shakespeare in performance in almost every world language seems to owe more to his ability to raise questions about human ideas, beliefs and social regimes common to us all (5).

In other words, Irish suggests that the fact that Shakespeare's plays strike a chord with human ideas, beliefs and social regimes beyond racial boundaries exonerates his plays from their unwarranted complicity with colonial hegemony. Indeed, for Irish, the level of transpositional and proprietary appropriation, adaptation and interrogation of Shakespeare's plays far outweighs their dabbling in British colonial hegemony.

The final reason for the continued appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in the Malawian English syllabuses is again intimated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in the Senior Secondary Teaching Syllabus for Literature in English. The second aim of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology under the second national goal of education is to "develop in the learner an appreciation of one's culture and respect for other people's cultures" (iv). To this end, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology recommends the use of "African and the world plays and a collection of Malawian plays (where possible, priority should be given to Ma-

lawian works)” (ix). Thus, by recommending the concurrent learning of African, global and Malawian plays, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology hopes to cultivate a global image in the learner. As the Principal Secretary Responsible for Basic and Secondary Education, Anjimile Mtila Oponyo, reiterates, “secondary education is critical as it provides additional knowledge, skills, values and attitudes crucial for enabling Malawians to cope with the complex and sophisticated socio-economic and political environment of the global village to which Malawi belongs” (v). In other words, by studying Shakespeare, Malawians access universal values that are indispensable to meaningful participation in globalization.

However, although this trio of reasons justifies why it has been necessary for Malawian education system to appropriate Shakespeare’s plays, it does not escape the pitfalls of appropriation.

Indeed, the appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays in Malawian education can be viewed as a catalyst for British neocolonial hegemony based on two side effects. The first side effect is the marginalization of local playwrights in the English syllabus especially at secondary school level. Of course, Chancellor College offers Malawian Literature which covers some Malawian playwrights but the fact that Malawian plays are not given priority as stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology makes Shakespeare eclipse local play-

wrights, thereby steadily encouraging an insidious erosion of intellectual respect for local literature altogether.

The second side effect is the fomentation of identity crisis which directly follows from years of English conditioning. As Loomba and Orkin state that Shakespeare “became, during the colonial period the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity itself. Thus the meanings of Shakespeare’s plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority” (1). Given that colonial authority has given way to neocolonial authority, it is little wonder that the corollary of insidiously imposing Shakespeare as the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity today is the subtle entrenchment of inferiority complex in generations of Malawian students who unsuspectingly view themselves in the eyes of Englishness as illustrated by the nation-wide aping of anything Western.

Conclusion

The undeniable fact that we are living in a global village – with all its contradictions and imperfections – renders the advancement of universal values not only necessary but also inevitable. Thus, what is universally beneficial to human coexistence must be shared beyond superficial differences of race and creed. Thus, although Shakespeare is British by nationality and that he was variously

exploited by British colonialism, his plays belong to the world at large because they inherently and apolitically deal with global values and education, especially since the study of literature, is the most effective way of inculcating these global values across different generations. Even though there are still potential neo-colonial pitfalls into which the study of Shakespeare may tumble, there are enough alternate avenues which his texts illuminatingly explore. It is this inexhaustible plurality that perhaps still ensures his popularity. Indeed, it is not surprising that even after his death in 1616 Shakespeare's plays still hold sway over the world today as a befitting global cultural property.

Notes

1. David Garrick was an English actor and theatre manager who was the foremost Shakespearean of his day who lived between 1717 and 1779.

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