Beyond Barriers: Fostering Cross-Cultural in *The Kaya-Girl* by Mamle Wolo

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Abstract
In the connections between different cultures, this study aims at engaging in-depth investigations of the role *The Kaya-Girl* by Mamle Wolo can play to promote a culture of peace and social cohesion in a globalized world fraught with so many tensions and intersecting forms of violence, stereotypes and discriminations. The purpose is to analyse how cross-cultural bonds embodying the basic values of human dignity is meant to enhance dialogue, mutual understanding, tolerance and inclusion. It aims at studying and articulating true friendship as an asset that fosters interculturality by foregrounding the new trends that focus on the human-being as far as that issue is concerned. This leads to wonder how the tenets of this cross-culturality can be fruitful in a globalized era facing conflicts and experiencing the emergence of fundamentalism, integrism or social and religious radicalism.
Keywords: cross-cultural, culture, friendship, peace, stereotypes, values.

Résumé
En ce qui concerne les liens entre les différentes cultures, ce projet vise à des recherches approfondies sur le rôle que *The Kaya-Girl* de Mamle Wolo peut jouer pour promouvoir une culture de la paix et de la cohésion sociale dans un monde globalisé, marqué par tant de tensions et de formes de violence, de préjugés et de discriminations. Le but de cette étude est d'analyser comment les liens interculturels incarnant les valeurs fondamentales de la dignité humaine peuvent être des moyens de promouvoir le dialogue, la compréhension mutuelle, la tolérance et l'inclusion. Il vise à étudier et à articuler la vraie amitié comme un atout qui favorise l'interculturalité en mettant en avant les nouvelles tendances qui placent l'humain au cœur de cette problématique. Cela amène à se demander comment les principes de cette interculturalité peuvent être féconds dans une ère mondialisée face aux conflits et à l'émergence du fondamentalisme, de l'intégrisme ou du radicalisme social et religieux.
Mots-clés : amitié, culture, interculturel, paix, préjugés, valeurs.

Introduction

Mamle Wolo is a Ghanaian author. She graduated from Cambridge University and Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. She is also a Fellow in Writing of Iowa University in the United States of America. Her novel, *The Kaya-Girl* (2012) has been awarded the first prize called Burt Award for African Literature in Ghana. Additionally, Wolo recently published another novel entitled *Flying through Water* (2024) which is recognized by Howard University's Center for African Studies. A part from novels, she is interested in short-stories. Important topics can still be explored in *The Kaya-Girl*. Scholars like Pr. Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom has written a useful entitled "Negotiating a Breathing Room from the

Intersections of Mother-Daughter In-Law Relationships, Othering and Sexuality". In his research article, Babou Ngom underscores how sisterhood helps women combat female subjugation. He analyses the novel through a gender perspective, and shows how women have recourse to de-subordination as a strategy to liberate themselves from male domination and claim their human rights. Few studies have been conducted about Wolo's novels. Important topics can still be explored in *The Kaya-Girl*.

In the current context of cultural diversity and cross-fertilization, this our research article, Beyond Barriers: Fostering Cross-cultural bonds for human dignity, probes how trustworthy friendship can contribute to the development of interculturality. The questions raised are the followings:

-Can intercultural tenets be transmitted through friendship?

-Nowadays, what can be done to contribute to the preservation of human values and the promotion of intercultural communication with regards to education?

-Can our globalized world empower cross-cultural bonds? What may be the prospects and the challenges?

-Beyond the transmission of the cultural heritage/traditional legacies, is not there a great challenge to foster interculturality given the plurality of our societies.

-What can be the input of the new emerging voices of African Literature to whom Mamle Wolo, the author of *The Kaya-Girl* belong, in this endeavour?

One hypothesis is that sincere friendship could be a source of discovering otherness and prejudice hidden in our societies. Interculturality attempts to understand differences beyond cultural barriers and stereotypes. It emphasises diversity and differences while fostering mutual understanding and tolerance. In this respect, people will be less prone to exhibit stereotypical behaviours and prioritize what they share such as human values. Today, we are living in a intercultural world informed by mobility, displacement and hybridity. Indeed, it is important to learn about the gist of cultures so that diversity can be more considered as a richness rather than an impediment to humankind. The *ubuntu* philosphy which is embedded in the core of African oral traditions conveys this value of acknowledging and caring one another as humans regardless of differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, social strata classes, economic conditions or religion. As Abena and Faiza testify in *The Kaya-Girl*, no matter how the differences, communities can harmoniously live together, collaborate or rally together to achieve their goals.

In *The Kaya-Girl*, two young girls who originate from different areas, have different backgrounds, are united by friendship. Beyond friendship, many other important aspects need to be analysed. Abena and Faiza are both 14 years old. They share experiences. They respectively belong to two diverse social classes/strata (wealthy and poor one), two areas (urban and rural). However, despite those gaps, they succeeded in breaking barriers (linguistic, social, economic, religious) and build a strong, sincere and trustworthy friendship. It is during her stay for summer holidays at her aunt, Auntie Lydia who owns a frabic shop in Accra's big market (Makola Market) that Abena befriended Faiza. Their social status is quite different but they develop reciprocal respect and live as sisters. In this framework, Abena argues:

It was certainly odd for a girl like me- a doctor's daughter, a pupil of the American School-to be sriking up a friendship with a kayayoo in Makola Market. Was was really a friendship

through, I asked myself, half of me shaking my head quickly-of course not-and the other nodding slowly-yes, of course. I knew I could never describe it as such to my mother and my friends at school. A word like 'acquaintance' seemed more apt when I thought of ever discussing it with people. But in my heart I knew it was a friendship-had known it from that first smile we exchanged. And it was not just any firendship either. Faiza seemed to know what I was thinking before I said it. We hardly needed language to communicate (p.12).

In this study, first and foremost, emphasis will be on literary theories like psychoanalysis focuses to better deal with behaviors, feelings, and emotions related to friendship as well as some concepts such as the superioty complex. "Psychoanalyzing the behavior of literary characters is probably the best way to learn how to use the theory. When we psychoanalyze literary characters, we are not suggesting that they are real people but that they represent the psychological experience of human beings in general" Tyson Lois (2006, p.35). In other words, psychoanalytical approach will allow us to identify the essence of human friendship which overcomes complex challenges in *The Kaya Girl*. Based on theoretical framework, it would be interesting also to shed light on deconstruction embedded in the postcolonial theory. Such a methodology will guide this study to better grasp the key aspects of cross-culturality. Postcolonial theory is relevant examine how characters strive to debunk stereotypes and restore friendship in spite of their differences.

In fact, the current context informs about the ongoing and future trends of our globalized world which is becoming more and more ethnocentric, zenophobic, demanding, conflictual and nurtured by revolutionary ideologies. These issues require to make important investigations in order to find out resources and values that are conducive to the development of humanities and human bonding. The expansion of cultural, ideological, racial, religious, and even political misunderstandings and mistinterpretations, give impetus to intercultural studies. Therefore, it would be interesting to critically examine the above mentioned questions by carrying out concise, precise and relevant research that prompts innovative and novel responses to these concerns.

Before going further, it is necessary to define basic terms. The notion of stereotypes is mainly used in psychology, sociology, philosophy, to quote but some domains. In the words of Zuliani and Pujiyanti,

> A stereotype is a fixed idea or image that many people have a particular type of person, thing, or event, but sometimes it is not true in reality. Generalization and categories are necessary, but when they are too rigid they can be a barrier to the effective interpretation of a situation, Pujiyanti and Rhina Zuliani (2014, p.60).

A stereotype is perceived as an element which can affect the relationships within communities and between individuals. For example, some stereotypes led people to believe they are superior to others. The latter are regarded as even savage, barbarian and uncivilized. That was the case for example, for the colonialist literature/ Non-African Writers who wrote negatively about Africa. To better figure out stereotypes, one can read this quotation:

The colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; native peoples were considered "other," different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human. This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called *othering*, and it divides the world between "us" (the"civilized") and "them" (the "others" or "savages"). The "savage" is usually considered evil as well as inferior (the *demonic other*) Tyson Lois (2006, p. 420).

Due to negative stereotypes, authors like Joseph Conrad in his book *Heart of Darkness* (1910) and Cary Joyce, in *Mister Johnshon* (1939), described Africa as a land deprived of civilizations and inhabited by unhuman people. They denied the cultures and civilisations of the continent. In fact, stereotypes differ and are various. For instance, racial, gender, cultural, economic and political stereotypes exist within sociteies.

Interculturality attempts to understand differences beyond cultural barriers and stereotypes. It emphasises diversity and differences while fostering mutual understanding and tolerance. In this respect, people will be less prone to exhibit stereotypical behaviours and prioritize what they share such as human values. Today, we are living in an intercultural world informed by mobility, displacement and hybridity. Moreover, our study problematises some legacies of humanity. It broadly encompasses several points:

-The respect of human dignity as a Heritage and its cross-cultural stage of globalization.

-The multidimensional elements to put forward for the welfare of human beings.

A major item is to study how to better convey vital values. A pluridisciplinary insight is necessary to explore how friendship breaks stereotypes and encounters the emerging interculturality in *The Kaya-Girl.* Does the posthuman interculturality convey the main cultural features?

In this context, Human values face the challenges brought by globalization. The human is weakened in this era of Posthumanism (Peter Boxall's *Science, Technology and Posthuman*, 2015). Hence, it is crucial to investigate human values anchored in *The Kaya-Girl* to make our global world more equitable, harmonious and peaceful.

1-Discovering the *alter-ego*: Friendship as an asset to cross-cultural connections

Nowadays, promoting, advocating and encouraging a culture of mutual understanding, social cohesion, tolerance and peace-building are of paramount importance. With regards to aforementioned key elements, this article can be of great help in a globalized world of integrism, fundamentalism, radicalism. Beyond Barriers: Fostering Cross-cultural bonds for human dignity allow to discover the '*alter ego'*, the otherness and live harmoniously together as human-beings. The subject matter lays the stress particularly on two major characters (Faiza, the Kaya-girl and Abena), their relatives and acquaintances. It would be necessary to have an overview of two major characters to better figure out how their cross-cultural bonds face the stereotypes but successfully resist.

Abena, as a protagonist and Narrator, is also Mrs. Fosu or Roberta, Mike's wife and a doctor's daughter. She speaks Twi and English. Additionally, she graduated with a BA in English and aims at studying Journalism. Faiza, the misfortunate *Kaya-Girl or Kayayoo* speaks Dagbanli language. She is from the Northern Region (rural area: Tolon). In the novel, Faiza explains: 'Kaya' meant 'load' or goods' in Hausa and 'yo' meant girl or 'woman' *(*p.14). She

became a Doctor and was part of the medical team who supported Abena when she was giving birth to a daughter at hospital. The term *Kayayoo* therefore means a 'female porter common in large city markets' (p. 164). As Faiza points out: 'I am not the only *kayayoo* from my village. Every year many of the young girls leave for the markets of Kumasi and Accra' (p.22). Faiza is depicted as a kaya-girl who comes to Makola Market to earn her life in dignity like many other *kayayei* girls in the markets of Kumasi and Accra.

The following words full of empathy and compassion are reminiscient of a friendship that challenges barriers: "Well, you can never replace a dear person in your life but the pain of losing them can diminish when other dear ones come into your life" (pp.64-65). This is mainly a reciprocal discovery of another human being created by God, who may be different from me but with whom I share some common values within mankind. Meeting another person and exchanging with him/her is worthy and beneficial in intercultural relations. In this regard, a profound and mutual understanding of close relations can be fruitful. This is a cross-cultural encounter enabling to get rid of stereotypes. It also gives a new impetus to peace-building and the lessening of conflicts based on the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of others' cultures. This study for intercultural connections can be regarded as a model of peacemaking that fights against dehumanization in a virtual world where online relations are somehow prioritized to the detriment of concrete in-person connections.

In *The Kaya-Girl*, Abena understands that no matter how the differences may get, they (She and Faiza) both have human nature. People are citizens of a common homeland: the Earth. Strong, sincere relationships could be built to overcome the misunderstandings, the stereotypes. Abena confesses:

> My school friends and I met on the internet chat and exchanged phone calls and text messages even after we had spent the whole day of the next day together. But here I was, faced with a friend who could not even write me a letter with a pen and paper or have a P.O. Box to which I could send her one. How could we live in such different worlds inside the same country, I wondered (p.65).

Friendship is a basic and an appropriate asset to intercultural relations. This idea put forward echoes the 'Ubuntu' philosophy that values unity, peace-building, socio-cultural cohesion for the welfare of communities within our societies which are becoming more and more individualist. This paper lays the stress on positive connections human-beings have closely in common. Furthermore, the human values depicted through the characters of Faiza, the Kaya-girl, Abena (Mrs. Fosu or Alberta), Abena's father, to name but a few examples, have a didactic mission as they bridge the gaps and tie the uppermost bonds that link people all over the world. Humanity is therefore shared. No matter how the differences may appear, it is to bear in mind that strenghtening human bonds in our humanity is beneficial to all societies. This is an asset for human welfare in the quest for a world centered in the human rather than materialism. In this perspective, the speech made by Abena'speech while giving a psychological portrayal of Faiza is meaningful:

> Faiza is a female Arabic name meaning 'winner', 'successful woman' and 'victorious', I read out under my breath. Yes. I cheered, feeling elated. Faiza might be a poor Kayayoo but there was nothing poor about her spirit. She was strong, plucky and ready to fight for what she wanted she considered right. She had once told me that the thing that stopped most people in this world

> from doing what they really want was fear. Finding out what her name meant had only strengthened my faith in her (pp.94-95).

The more they discover each other, the more Faiza and Abena are united, cooperative and become supportive, inclusive. On the one hand, the fact that Abena strives to initiative Faiza in writing and reading remains a case in point of solidarity: "I had tried to teach Faiza some reading and writing and she had done well but we had not much time and we were still at the early stages. It would take many more lessons for her to be able to write a letter" (p.64). For her, friendship should be useful and helpful with actions. She has counter-discourses against differences based on social classes, religion, ideology, position, ethnic group, etc. Hence, mainly for Abena, working for the restauration of human dignity is essential: "I loved you as a friend and even a sister. And I am a stronger person for knowing you" (p.129). On the other hand, Faiza is grateful to Abena: "Well, from the first time you smiled at me and help me lift my bowl, I felt at home in this great, big, scary Makola Market" (p.64). Both characters are reciprocally expressing each other heartfelt gratitude, mutual support. Even at hospital, during hardship, their friendship is nurtured with gratitude. Faiza gives uppermost assistance to Abena. Resilient, Faiza epitomizes her name 'Victorious', 'Successful' 'woman, Winner' and holds a position of Doctor: "My main job is at Korle-Bu hospital" (p.144). Moreover, Abena demonstrates her dedication to Faiza by naming her daughter Faiza: "It was the only name for a little girl who had been delivered by such a woman and whose mother wished her to emulate those qualities" (p.144). She adds : "My most enduring image of that charmed eveving is of my two Faizas, one in the other's arms, both wreathed in smiles" (p.148).

Peace is precious and remains essential to strongly build our societies and encourage people to put forward the sense of living-together. The latter is a spiritual legacy for African cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. Another major aspect is to fight against intolerance. One viaticum of our world should be the promotion of tolerance in order to build a world that would be a haven of peace. Our world is mainly intercultural and differences are really enriching if people understand that. Intolerance is a virus in our revolutionary world. It undermines social harmony, the good coexistence of communities. It is quite possible to be rooted in one's beliefs and meanwhile respect those who don't share the common ones. Our world can be more human if we focus on what unites us rather than what differentiates us.

In this perspective, intercultural connections build up linkages which have become a multicultural crossroad beyond geographical environments. A case in point is Kishan's message:

> The prerequisite to cultivating cross-cultural skills is to develop an understanding of the other culture, through a study of its history, its value system and all the other specific factors that identify and differentiate it. Regardless of pride in one's own heritage, notions of superiority and rejection of the other have to be put aside. Rana Kishan (2002, p.202).

All things considered, those highlighted values can be conveniently conveyed through education. The latter is perceived through the endeavors of Abena's father.

2-Education: a mighty weapon against stereotypes

Concerning education, we refer to the studies of Kimmel who, based on etymology, concludes that from the Latin *"*educare", it can be summed up in three verbs "raise, teach, train" (my translation) Alain Kimmel (2002, p.24). Based on this assumption, we can say that education requires a synergy of complementary skills. However, the family contribute to

children's development in all aspects of their lives. This perception of education corroborates that of the sociologist Emile Durkheim. The Durkheimian approach examines education from four angles: intellectual, moral, aesthetic and political. It should be pointed out that we found this to be stimulating in order to better understand how Abena's education provided by her father plays an inescapable role in the fight against stereotypes as far as her friendship with Faiza, the *Kaya-girl* is concerned.

Indeed, thanks to education, Abena gets rid of stereotypes. Considering this place devoted to education, it should be mentioned that family education remains an outcome conducive to mental awareness. Through this perception, it is worth emphasizing that Abena's father helps her discern and understand that her noble and imperative duty is faithfulness. Once she explains her father that she befriended a *kayayoo*, Abena thought her father would disapprove that relationship. Surprisingly, the father told his story as a man who grew up in a village as well as someone who lived there as a Doctor:

> It was a long time ago, before you were born. I was a new doctor and I was posted to the Tamale General Hospital for a couple of years. But I really enjoyed living there. Although it was hard in many ways it was also very interesting to observe totally different cultures and lifestyles from ours and I found people so warm and hospitable and I loved their food. I made friends at work and they took me to their homes at the weekends and their mothers and wives cooked for me and I loved it, especially the TZ, you know, two zaafi (p.82).

The use of education highlights the fight against alienation. For example, Abena doesn't accept the superiority complex that many wealthy people feel towards poor ones like Faiza. A form of consciousness is born through what Frantz Fanon calls the notion of collective catharsis, Frantz Fanon (1952, p.118). According to Fanon, the degree of psychological oppression of colonialism on African peoples is so high that it is urgent to draw attention and reposition strategies to liberate the people and decolonize the minds. This notion is appropriated in our study not to keep on focusing on the colonial past. In this regard, Dominique Rankin argues: "Accepting the past does not mean living with it all the time. It is necessary to have within oneself the strength to change one's life, to give it another direction*"* (my translation), Rankin (2016, p.15).

Faiza's father is of great help to the struggle against stereotypes. He has contributed to dismantle, deconstruct the ethnocentric discourse, protest, fight against stereotypes, offer a counter-discourse against the the odds, try to correct and restore the truth. His commitment for the restoration of truth can be better grasped through his storytelling. He reminds Faiza his historical background as a man who grew up in a village but also served as a Doctor in a rural area. To succeed in that mission, education is considered as an efficient weapon. An awakening of awareness became a turning positive point which has strengthened the friendship between Abena and Faiza. The Doctor in tropical medecine (Abena's father) exposes the evil deeds of the bad education, the role played by his education during childhood. As a Doctor, his words are psychologically therapetic as Biko argues: "the most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" Steve Biko (1972, p.92). He denounces the burden of stereotypes that hinders human. He feels being invested with a mission. Like Ngugi wa Thiong'o who ″used the pen in the service of truth" Ngugi wa Thiongo'o (1983, p.69), education become a weapon to "tell the missing story" to papraphrase Chinua Achebe.

In *The Kaya-Girl*, the major concern of Abena's father is to emphasize an education that raises awareness among children in order to live harmoniously their true humanity. He deems aquate that Abena must be rooted in the values of active solidarity which do not expect anything in exchange from Faiza but to understant that it is her noble responsibility imbued with a sense of human dignity. He pinpoints:"You know Abena, I'm proud of you. A lot of children in your shoes would think they were too good to be friends with a kayayoo" (p.81).

Our world is intercultural and differences are enriching. Social harmony and a good coexistence of communities should be favoured. What matters is to preserve positive values conveyed from one generation to another. For instance, to educate in African traditional societies, wise elders used tales to socialise and educate the youth. Orature is full of moral lessons, as Obiechina states:

> The folktale is designated to instruct as well as entertain; hence the need to draw or imply the moral end. Furthermore, it is an essential way of introducing young people to the customs of their people, their beliefs and prohibitions, their positive values, their ideas, ideals and everything that constitutes their moral and ethical view of the world. Emmanuel Obiechina (1972, pp. 103-104).

As a matter of fact, cultural bonds are enhanced, mutual understanding, religious tolerance, peace-keeping and conflict resolution are highly promoted. As such, a certain form of interculturality is born and breaks the racial, ethnic, community, national, ideological, regional, religious and political barriers. This can help discern the evil deeds that hinder good interpersonal relations in human societies.

Education paves the way to liberation. It is a sword whose purpose is to lay stones to support children, in short, the disadvantaged people. It sows the seeds from which can sprout roots of blossoming. It is not enough to simply educate oneself but to take into account the important human values. Thus, Pilon emphasizes "the importance of education as a key factor for change in all areas" (my translation) Marc Pilon (2006, p. 09). From that angle of analysis, one can note the efforts Abena's father made to sensitize her regarding human fraternity. That father strongly believes that downtrodden people are not bad and being poor is not a scourge. He considers that it is pivotal to enhance human relationships, get rid of awful discriminatory acts and other practices which remain a timeless classic in customs. In his views, the above mentioned facts prevent people from enjoying their basic rights. He pleads as a spokesperson of the marginalized people. His denunciation of the treatments inflicted on the poor class shows a determination to fight against subjugation and all the shackles that try to main in bondage a certain stratum of the society. By way of illustration, he observes: "You know, Abena, people make all sorts of assumptions about people. Sometimes it's almost as if they see them as a different species"(p.84). Those assumptions weaken the poor masses and are evocative of the urgent need to alter things to challenge and smash stereotypes. After meditating her father's words, Father is eager to act as a psychologically strong person. She becomes more aware and more resilient:

> I knew my father had relatives in the village but I had never realized he was born and raised there himself and in poverty too. He just seemed so polished and cosmopolitan, it was hard to believe. And, especially for someone like me who was born right into the fruits of his labor, it was difficult to imagine the courage and spirit that had led him to transition between the two worlds. But then, I knew someone else with such a spirit (p.85).

The above words illustrate the value of education in Abena's personal development. Since he learnt her father's rural background and stay, Abena is mentally equipped with a postive mindset in her everlasting quest of empowering her friendship with Faiza. She more is courageous after realizing how her father's lived in a village. Even if she knew that story later, as the saying goes, 'better late than never'. Her father's storytelling has enlightened her spirit to an extend that she comprehends that she needs to brainwash any negative thoughts. In a society where poverty is a distinctive criterion of curse, Abena stands firmly and continues her path with her best friend, the *Kaya-girl*. A case in point is her statement: "But, the thing was that Faiza, even after ten years of absence, was still the closest thing I had to a Sister. The one I never had" (p.110).

Today, the issue of education addressed in this study should help to further diagnose our societies. Beyond instruction, we could insist on civic education, family education, drawing its nourishing sap from the traditions, cultures and civilizations of Africa serving children. This option is not synonymous with self-confinement. Far from being a rejection of universality, it transcends spatial representations and positively re-orients future relations across our world of diversity.

Conclusion

In engaging in this research article, we have wondered how to foster Cross-cultural bonds by breaking social, cultural, economic barriers that are hindrances to the blossoming of human dignity. Our primary source has been *The Kaya-Girl* by Mamle Wolo in order to examine the way friendship is incorporated as a bridge that connects human-beings as explored in the cases of Abena and Faiza, the Kaya-Girl. In her commitment for a society of social justice, Wolo exposes the stereotypes that affect humanity in general. Such facts are depicted with realism.

In the overall exploration, it has been shown that Abena's father played a vital role in upholding the friendship between the two young girls (Faiza and Abena). From that angle, he calls Abena for awareness. He resorts to education to sustain the heroic and human friendship that links her daughter to Faiza. He valorises human qualities. It is worth noticing that social injustices are still prevailing in our societies due to stereotypes. Mamle Wolo speaks to the dominated, exploited, oprressed, subjugated people and challenges all discourses which intend to support the inhuman treatments inflicted to the misfortunate/disavantaged/downtrodden social strata. In short, our study reveals that it urgent to fight for human welfare and understant that "The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honor human brotherhood, liberty and peace" Nelson Mandela (1990, p.120).

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