Abstract
The late iconic Ugandan poet and philosopher, Okot P’ Bitek, is generally regarded by many modern African literary critics and scholars as the pioneer poet of the Metaphysical tradition in East African poetry. Okot P’ Bitek (1974) expressed a strong affirmation of literary faith in literature as existing “first and foremost to be enjoyed”. This is the spring source of his voyage of definite influence into the Metaphysical tradition. He had, thus, arrived at an end and a destination in the business of poesy which every lover of poetry, in particular, and Art, in general, has, in one way or the other, in practice and in principle, come to accept unconditionally as his or her artistic destiny. This is the fundamental explanation one can give for the cesspool of hypnotic imagery that P’ Bitek turned his ‘Songs’ particularly the ‘Song of Lawino’ into. This paper is, therefore, primarily aimed at providing the general reader with another evergreen opportunity to enjoy the variegated buffet of artistic honey distilled from the nectar of Okot P’ Bitek’s uncommon search for intensity and association in the ‘Song of Lawino’. Any reader of this poem tries to appreciate the transfiguration and transplantation of words the writer uses for maximum artistic and utilitarian effect. The reader is equally being treated to a study in the creation of imagery for fundamentally satiric intent. These are what the present researcher tries to expose and therein lies the significance of this paper. “Song of Lawino” has become an immortal piece even when many literary critics have placed a very hypothetical verdict of thematic cliché on its content.

Keywords: Culture-conflict, Feminism, Imagery, Satiric Metaphor and Paradox

Introduction
Many critics of Modern East African Poetry in English have placed more emphasis on the form of East African poetry as a whole than on its overwhelming culture-conflict content and which emphasis has helped the literary globe to keep the artistic light of that poetry alive as it is constantly powered by breath-taking imagery. R.N. Egudu (1992) captured this unique creative mood of East African Poetry as follows: East African Poetry in general delights and pleases the readers not much because it has any extra-ordinary ideas to communicate as because of the strange kind of novelty it creates.

“Song of Lawino”, a remarkably long poem of about five thousand lines and originally written in Acholi language before it was translated to English, is a blossoming example of such East African poetry which flourishes in this creation of a ‘strange kind of novelty’ through concentrated breath-taking imagery. It was P’ Bitek’s premiere poem or ‘song’ as he preferred to call it. In this ‘Song’, P’ Bitek succeeds in carving a lasting path for African Cultural renaissance. Lawino chastises Ocol in sardonic tone full of imagery with strong foundation in Acholi traditional folklore. At times, the imagery in the ‘Song’ emerges from the novel and strange interlocking of simile and symbolism. For instance, when Lawino likens the powder on the face of the woman with whom she
shares her husband (Clementina) to ‘ash dirt’, she condemns Clementina to dust which is the seminal symbolic representation of inevitable mortality. Lawino diminishes Ocol’s disdain of her ‘timid’ cosmological existence with counterbalancing gripping imagery which ultimately affirms the prognosis of many literary critics that East African Poetry is more of an affair of aesthetics, form and style than of content and message. Even though the reader appreciates Lawino, Clementine and Ocol as the remnants of colonialism in Africa, the imagistic dramatization of their unique tragedies in “Song of Lawino” makes a timeless point on the bold emphasis on language and style in East African Poetry.

Literature Review
Critics such as R. N. Egudu and Gladys Nyaiburi Ogaro have analysed some East African poems similar, in form, to P’Bitek’s works. A ready illustration is Egudu’s analysis of John Mbiti’s “New York Sky scrappers” which reads as follows:

The weak scattered rays of yellow
Sun peeped through the hazy tissues
That blanketed them with transparent wax
And as the wrinkled rays closed the day
Smoky Chimneys of New York coughed
Looking down in bended towers
And vomited sad tears of dark smoke
(“East African poetry: The surprise of its calm” 1992:1)

According to Egudu (1992), though the subject matter of Mbiti’s poem is a commonplace one, there are certain images that cannot fail to awaken surprise in any reader. The yoking of ‘wrinkled’ with ‘rays’ and ‘vomited’ with ‘tears’ is beautifully exciting, but can be withstood. But when we imagine ‘Chimneys’ coughing, we definitely stagger. It is such images as these which border very much on the metaphysical conceit that constitute the spring source of the element of surprise in most of East African Poetry”. The shuddering images assembled by Egudu in his incisive analysis of Mbiti’s poem constitute an inter-mix of personification and metaphor.

Ogaro (2013) in her analysis of East African poetry through a detailed interpretative dissection of both the form and content of “Song of Malaya” isolated the paradox as the major source of the staggering imagery in much of East African poetry. According to her, “paradoxes of sexual power” dominate the entire ‘song’ and thus “sex and prostitution are paradoxical representations of the power of womanhood in general”. She illustrated her position with this extract from the ‘song’:

Indian vegetarian
Your wife breeding
Like a rat
Welcome to my table too.... (1971:129)

The subject of ‘Song of Lawino’
In Okot P’Bitek’s “Song of Lawino”, the intensity of this soul-searching surprise felt in modern East poetry and which according to Egudu (1992) border on the metaphysical conceit is vigorously consolidated. The subject of this song is “Deculturation”, particularly as defined by the South African Scholar Daniel P. Kunene. Kunene (1968) defined deculturation as “the process whereby, at the meeting of two cultures, one consciously dominates the other, and denies it the right to exist by both directly and indirectly questioning its validity, denigrating it, making its carriers objects of
ridicule, leading finally to the questioning by the people whom it has nurtured and given a positive being”. This brings to the fore the concept of contact literature. According to Ogaro (2013), “Okot’s poetic works fall under the category of ‘Contact Literature’ – a term used by Carter (1986) to refer to literatures written in European language from outside Europe. It is within the framework of this type of literature that most of the postcolonial writers belong as they display a postcolonial perspective of their present space or location”.

We are intentionally putting the reader on alert about this thematic dimension of the ‘‘Song of Lawino’’ because even though our present study is centrally stylistic, it does not denounce this essential thematic thrust of the song which helps to appreciate the song profoundly and better. In other words, as we steer the reader’s mental and emotional vehicle towards the route of the sumptuous dish of the black-white imagery and its corollary satiric metaphors in the ‘‘Song of Lawino’’, significant focus will also be placed on the message of Lawino’s disconsolate dirge.

The Black–White Imagery: the Satiric Metaphor in the ‘‘Song of Lawino’’

There are three ways of looking at the Black-white imagery in P’ Bitek’s ‘‘Song of Lawino’’. The first is to see the image of the Black culture or tradition as portrayed by Lawino and represented by her. The second is to see the White culture as Ocol in the ‘‘Song’’ struggles to represent it- he is black in colour and nationality, but white in his cultural orientations. The third is a hypothetical question: can the two cultures synthesize to produce a black-white harmony? - a kind of chemical synthesis. Imagery is used here to represent (symbolize) each of the two cultures in contact and as satire to symbolize the conflict thereby generated in the “song”.

“Song of Lawino” focuses attention on the two symbols of this unpatriotic behaviour (Ocol and Clementina). Lawino is a nationalist, a symbol of the African woman who stands for the cultural survival of her African tradition. She finds Ocol’s contrary stand repulsive and consequently attacks it. Her ‘‘Song’’ is unique in the artistic manner in which the poet expresses her traditional cultural stance. To highlight the idea which is lacking, Lawino is made to bewail Ocol’s loss of faith in his culture. Her song is, therefore, satiric. Contrast is an important stylistic device which P.Bitek uses to express this satire. Black and white culture and manners are juxtaposed with the clear objective of providing the superiority of black over white.

Lawino says:

My clansmen, I cry
Listen to my voice:
The insults of my man
Are painful beyond bearing

My husband, abuses me together
With my parents
He says terrible things about my mother
And I am so ashamed.

He abuses me in English
And he is so arrogant

He says I am rubbish
He no longer wants me
He says I am primitive
Because I cannot play the guitar
He says my eyes are dead
And I cannot read.
He says my ears are blocked
And I cannot hear a single foreign word
That I cannot count coins

He says my mother is a witch
That my clansmen are fools
Because they eat rats.

These are images of traditional culture seen negatively by Ocol and reported by Lawino. Here, P’Bitek uses sarcasm very effectively so show that Ocol, and not Lawino and her clansmen, is the foolish person. He presents Ocol’s argument in weak logic and subsequently brings him and his acquired Western education to ridicule. For example, does the inability to play the guitar determine not English or civilization? Does the inability to read the Whitman’s book and to speak his language make one blind and deaf? In a metaphorical sense, yes, though not necessarily so here. Ocol is portrayed as a snob, indeed an uncouth person. In spite of his Western education, he abuses his wife’s mother-in-law and his wife’s relations (the clansmen).

Lawino attacks Clementina also. She is Lawino’s co-wife. Ocol prefers her to Lawino. In the following lines, P’Bitek piles up negative similes to express Lawino’s disenchantment with Clementina’s cultural alienation:

Brother, when you see Clementina
The beautiful one aspires
To look like a white woman;
Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,

Her mouth is like raw yaws
It looks like an open ulcer,
Like the mouth of a friend,
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight dance
She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
And when little sweat
Begins to appear on her body
She looks like guinea fowl.
(Song 1966:22)

Clementina’s lipstick, ‘glowing charcoal’, ‘open ulcer’, and blood-mouthed ‘wild cat’ are visual images. The ‘glowing charcoal’ and the wizard who has rubbed the ‘ash-dirt’ are local
materials used by the poet to generate local colour. They are also visual images. The guinea fowl drenched in water is also a visual image.

With these satiric images, Lawino shows how Clementina voluntarily undresses herself of the local cosmetics in order to wear a foreign look. In this regard, Clementina reminds the reader of the “Luo belle” from ‘Victoria Nyanza’ in Jared Angira’s “The undressing” in which the Luo belle, in a nostalgic flashback, paints a picture of her physiognomy and dress which marked her out as a Luo and which appealed to the aesthetic perception of an African. She refers to her attributes such as:

- Oily face
- Reflecting the lake shore sun
- Rainbow waist beads
- Ankles
- Wrist’s bangles
- Mango breasts left
- Staring at the beauty
- Of Victoria Nyanza

(Jared Angira, 1970:26)

When she gets to the city of Kisumu, she is literally undressed. All the African traditional cosmetics and values are condemned. She is, rather, given these:

- A soft towel
- A shining nightie
- A hot steel comb

(1970:26)

She becomes uneasy with the de-Africanizing transformation she goes through. Clementina would have been comfortable with these foreign paints, for she is the opposite of the Luo belle. Whereas the Luo belle refuses to accept that she advances socially and culturally by losing her traditional identity, Tina readily accepts the reverse.

If Clementina continues with her hankering after these foreign agents of “beauty” she ends up a child of no specific culture-area, inhabiting an eternal cultural limbo which suggests a perpetual state of uncertainty. This is why Lawino advises her:

Ostrich plumes differ
From chicken feathers,
A monkey’s tail
Is different from that of the giraffe,
The crocodile’s skin
Is not like the guinea fowl’s
And the hippo is naked and hairless.
The long-necked and graceful
Giraffe cannot become a monkey
No leopard
Would change into a hyena

(1966:53)

The dominant image here is visual. Each animal has its own identification mark, its uniqueness, its pride. Okot P’Bitek makes use of animal imagery, a kind of allegory popular in African vernacular poetry, to portray a conflict between two cultures in which human beings and not animals are the actors. That is to say that these animals (the ostrich, the monkey, the hippo, the
leopard and the giraffe) are metaphors for Africans who do not realize that there are unique features of their physiognomy, religion and other cultural artifacts which can never be bartered for foreign ones. For Clementina, there is the futility of trying to be a white woman in a black skin. Her colour and culture are the result of a divine order which she cannot change.

Lawino Ocol, my old friend.
The ways of your ancestors
Are good.
Their customs are solid,
And not hollow,
They are not thin, not easily breakable
They cannot be blown away
By the winds
Because their roots reach deep into the soil
(1966:29)

The dominant device here is metaphor resulting in a visual image. The significance of this image is that it emphasizes Lawino’s strength in her cultural identity. Lawino’s address to Ocol as an old friend is sarcastic underscoring of the crack in the marriage of Lawino and Ocol. That is to say that Ocol’s alienation brings disunity into his home and cancels the harmony and friendship that should characterize a marriage. Hence, Lawino thinks that she has lost him. She has also lost his affection for her. He is at present what a husband should not be. His love for Western culture makes him heap abuses on his wife and culture.

The picture of Ocol as a husband and now as a friend create some kind of irony. This is because a husband is much more than a friend to his wife. Thus, P’Bitek uses this irony to show that Ocol has abandoned his family responsibility. This evokes the image of a diminished love between husband (Ocol) and wife (Lawino). Ocol must come back to his root and be not just a friend but a husband to his wife, Lawino counsels. This is where that hypothetical question – Can there be a synthesis of black and white in one character (Ocol)? – is relevant. According to Lawino, Ocol may have been lost to foreign and Western values, but he can be redeemed. There can be an admixture of black and white in him.

Lawino exposes further the effects of Ocol’s acquired foreign culture on him;
And the reading (Of Whitman’s book)
Has killed my man,
In the ways of his people
He has become
A stump
(1966:200)

‘Stump’ is here a metaphor for lifelessness. Ocol cannot enhance his people’s culture by his Western education. So, he is sterile here. His ‘loss of manhood’ may mean that he is sexually non-performing (impotent) or that he has become too servile to Western ideas to be able to develop his own. Thus, Western education has a paradoxical result in him. That is, Western education which the new African acquires and is generally expected to bring positive benefits to him and his community turns out to be a negative, if not a dangerous, undertaking.

Ocol’s home is described as a “mighty forest of books”. This is hyperbole. The poet uses this poetic device to show the immensity of the books. Elaborating on this hyperbole, the poet says through Lawino:
The papers on my husband’s desk
Coil threateningly
Like the giant forest Climbers
Like the kitube free
That squeezes other trees to death
Some stand up
Others lie on their back
They are interlocked
Like the legs of the planks
Of the goggo fence
They are tightly interlocked
Like the legs of the giant forest climbers
In the impenetrable forest
(1966:201-202)

To the simple-minded Lawino, Ocol’s literacy calls up a large number of images that decree disorder. These images expressed in similes reflect the disorder and the cultural disorientation which Ocol is suffering from. In her view, Ocol is a confused person. His mind is as suffocated and disoriented as the books are disarranged. Though the books are large in number, they are not neatly arranged. The pile-up of similes in the above stanza emphasizes this. “Papers” “coil threatening”, “stand up”, “lie on their backs (as if human). They are also interlocked like the “legs of youths” and “legs of plank”.

These are examples of oblique personification. These books cannot attack Ocol physically as they cannot prevent his movement or cause a physical illness. They can, however, affect his mind by teaching him foreign values. This is why the picture of the “Kituba tree” suffocating the trees around it in order to maintain its own breath provides extra-illumination in the culture conflict theme of Lawino’s ‘Song’. The kituba tree is, therefore, a metaphor for the acquired foreign manners and like the papers that ‘coil threatening”, a symbol of Ocol’s detachment from his people.

Part of the insult from Ocol, which Lawino has to bear, is his charge and constant ranting that she cannot tell the “English clock” in order to ascertain the time of the day. Lawino’s management of this insult is artistically edifying. She dismisses the “English clock” as consisting of minute-counting element that looks:
Like a large single testicle
that
dangles below
like a sausage fruit
In a windy storm
(1966, 86)

The dominant image is visual. Simile is a part of this visual image. It is used here to express the poet’s preference for the African traditional form of telling the time of the day. The African method is based on a close study of the sun. P’Bitek, therefore, satirizes the English method by means of simile.

It is surprising that an African village woman (Lawino) mentions “testicles” so readily bearing in mind that sexual discussion in the open is almost a taboo even among African men. It is an
erotic image. It is, also, a form of female boldness (feminism), a fairly new phenomenon in African literature.

Conclusion
P’Bitek makes use of imagery to show that African’s contact with foreign culture does more harm than good especially to that African who is very easily converted to the new ways of life introduced by the colonizers. Ocol and Clementina are the examples of that kind of African. Their opposite character is the patriotic Lawino, through whom P’Bitek piles up images to satirize the unpatriotic pursuit of Western cultural values by both Ocol and Clementina who are black in colour, but white in mind and cultural orientation. Lawino’s ‘fight’ to heal her wounded identity is comforting. She challenges actively the foreign values. The result is a conflict. William Empson (1949) tells us that “good poetry is usually written from a background of conflict”. P’Bitek’s “Song of Lawino” is, therefore, good poetry not only because of the conflict of two cultures (black and white) it presents, but also, and more importantly, because of the artistic way the poet shows that the contact of African and Western culture is indeed a paradox – a paradox of culture contact turned into culture conflict.

Recommendation
The very intense battle for identity which Lawino confronts in ‘Song of Lawino’ is an existential reality for many of us especially those in the rural areas who at one time or the other cannot escape the disparaging attitudes of their educated and class-conscious relations. The paradox of culture conflict x-rayed in this paper has continued to raise genuine threats to our respective convictions about which way to go – remain steadfast to our African cultural identity or give it up to welcome the foreign ways of living. As a result, some of us have become victims of depressive dilemma. We sit on the fence rather than take an active positive step to create a meeting point. Our findings in this paper have shown that Lawino is absolutely and uncompromisingly opposed to everything foreign and has in her raging mood thrown all manner of memorable aspersions to it.

But will the world be better if in the 21st century, we join Lawino in her overwhelming profanation of foreign and western values? The answer is in the negative. At least, we can rely on the positive evidence of the successful; translation of Lawino’s ‘song’ from Acholi language to the imperial English language in order to provoke wider global appreciation of this ‘song’ to compel a shift from the rigid stance of Lawino. That is to say that Ocol’s obsession with his ‘forest of books’ is not totally a liability for the African in particular and the world in general. This is because this sort of obsession with scholarship, though mocked with grand humour by Lawino in her ‘song’, is a veritable weapon for the limitless expansion of our frontiers of progress as a nation and a continent.

This paper, therefore, enjoins, by way of recommendation, all scholars, irrespective of their unique specializations, to see ‘Song of Lawino’, despite its heavy downpour of battering and biting satiric images on Ocol and Clementina, as a literary provocation of the real need for all scholars to stimulate and entrench among humanity the strong values of religious and social tolerance despite our diverse cultural, ethnic and intellectual orientations. In sum, ‘Song of Lawino’ is somewhat of an affirmation of positivity through denial.
References


